"Then Peter opened his mouth and said."

Acts 10:34

With acknowledgment of my debt to Winston Churchill, I am calling the subject of this address "Our Finest Hour". I have chosen this text because it is a past record of a victorious service. Those privileged to be present on that eventful day had an experience that they could never forget. That hour of worship was one of those high hours of the soul from which all other hours took on new meaning, new purpose and new power. Something took place in this service that was so transforming that they simply could not forget it. Now, the wonder of it is that a service of this kind that they learned and took otherwise do not, in fact, does not belong to one single generation, but to every generation. It has been said that the greatest event that took place was no more at home in the first century than it ought to be in the twentieth century. It did not fit into the private residence of Cornelius any better than it would fit into our sanctuary. Nor was it more needed in that distant day than it is needed in this day. Here then is a victorious service such as we ought to have in our own churches Sunday by Sunday.

Now, in calling that hour in which we as ministers are privileged to lead in the public worship of God our finest hour, I realize that I am making a high adventure of faith. Of course, we are aware that the hour of public worship is not always our finest hour. Sometimes it seems the very opposite. Sometimes it seems nothing more than a dreary trudge through the Valley of Humiliation, or a pathetic and futile effort to climb the Hill Difficulty. Sometimes our agony is so excruciating that we cry with Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Sometimes we finish the meal with the thought that we would like to press a button and slip out of sight. We should like to go as wounded King Arthur to some Vale of Avalon for rest and healing.
But in spite of all this failure, I confess that I can never come to the hour in which I lead in public worship without a thrill. I can never come to it as something that is altogether commonplace. Unless I am very low indeed, I can never look upon it as just another service. It is something so unique that it quickens my pulse beat. After preaching for more than forty years, I am still as I face each service a bit like the war horse "that smelleth the battle from afar". I am convinced that to preach with the consciousness of the fact that the blessed Holy Spirit is taking the message and sealing it to the hearts of the congregation is about the most thrilling experience that any man may know this side the gates that are of pearl. How, then, are we to make the hour of public worship to be our finest hour?

The first essential, it seems to me, if we are to make the hour of public worship a high experience, is for the minister to realize who he is and what he is there to do. As a minister of Jesus Christ you are there as God's ambassador. The pew spoke out to the pulpit, in the scene of which our text is a part. Acts: "Now, therefore, are we all here present in the sight of God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

"That is," said Cornelius, to Peter, "we take it that you are here as God's called man. We take it that you have taken time to listen to God that you are bringing us a message that is at once yours and his. We take it, therefore, that you have a right to begin your sermon by saying, "Thus saith the Lord."

1. This sense of mission will save us from wasting the time of our
people are constitutionally behind time. There is never a day that they cannot find some traffic jam or some other cause for delaying the meeting of which they are a part. They seem never to realize that in wasting the time of others, they are wasting the lives of others. Every minister ought to be sensitive to the other man's time.

To be late, therefore, at any sort of meeting is a great discourtesy. It is also to cheat people out of the stuff of which life is made. But to be late at a worship service for which you are responsible is worse still. For it is an affront to God and man. The tardy minister is little likely to impress his people that he is an intense and ardent crusader. He rather gives the impression that he is a kind of ecclesiastical vagrant who is constantly late in every place where he goes. No wonder that the King's pennies must bugle so loud, and say to himself, "Well, it's about time to begin the service. We don't expect anything of it, but we might just as well drift on into it." No wonder I have heard him say, "I have written the services, others have a right to waste both time and influence by being late.

2. If we are possessed by a sense of mission, we shall not waste the time of our people by making needless announcements. Most churches today publish a bulletin, and most congregations can read. It is a futile thing, therefore, for a minister to make the usual announcements when they are already printed. If an announcement is usual, it is not interesting in any way. Folks are only interested in the unusual. Yet I have known ministers to read the bulletin through to their people from beginning to end, and then say, "Now, that is the bill of fare for the week." In my opinion, that is just a painful way of wasting time. Making routine announcements, generally speaking, is a bit like the ticking of a clock. We do not notice the ticking of a clock while it is ticking. We only notice it when it stops. Do not, therefore, allow yourself or your people to turn you into a bulletin board.
3. If we come to our pulpit with a sense of mission, it will save us from talking too much about ourselves. Now, there is a type of personal experience that is always in order. Many a time what we say about ourselves, especially if we are bearing witness to the saving and guiding power of God in our own lives, will be at once the most interesting and the most helpful part of our sermon. Therefore, we never apologize for such testimony. Would it not have been ridiculous had Paul said, "Pardon me for this personal reference, my brethren, but I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." There are times, therefore, when personal references are altogether right and helpful.

But the talking about one's self to which I refer is the prefacing of our sermon by telling either the tragedies or the triumphs of the previous week. Sometimes we parade our tragedies. We have been having a hard time and we are eager for our congregation to know it. Recently we had to sit up with a man who was dying, or we ourselves or some member of our family has been ill. Therefore, we have come to the pulpit without proper preparation and with an all-round sense of inadequacy. Hence we feel called upon to make excuses.

Such a course in my opinion is a mistake. It is my own personal conviction that we ought always to trust God and do our very best without mentioning this in the least fear or fear of two wrongs.

we thus offer alibis, we do two things; first, we cater for sympathy. We say to our people, "Pity me, I am in a bad fix." Second, we are thus likely to kill whatever expectancy our congregation may have brought to the service.

"You may have come to church today expecting little, we say. Well, you need not expect anything." Therefore, since excuse making is at once an appeal for pity and a foe of expectancy, let me urge that you never begin your service with an "alibi."
Then, we are tempted to parade our triumphs. We have had a busy week. We have seen very important people. We have gone to great cities and addressed important meetings. In fact, we have done so much that the wonder is that we have been able to live through it all.

But our people are justified in our boasting when they hear us say, "We are like singing, "And are we yet alive and see each other's face?". But if we bear in mind our mission, we shall be saved from trivial talk about ourselves, and go at once to the business of the day - the leading of our congregation in worship of God.

II

How shall we lead?

1. Music. Since music ought to be a helpful part of every service, happy is the minister who keeps on good terms and in touch with his choir leader and with his choir. If this is not the case, sometimes the selection of the choir will flatly contradict what the minister has to say, or there will be a sole that has no meaning at all. I have heard soloists who had power to lift the heavers into the very presence of God. But I have heard yet more soloists who had to be endured rather than to be enjoyed. At least I knew how to sympathize with the woman who had suffered many things of many physicians, and was nothing better but had rather grown worse. Even so have I suffered from the decisions of the minister, inspired from certain soloists.

Not only should the minister consult with the choir, but generally speaking, he should select his hymns, and unless there is a reason, participate in the singing. There are some ministers who remind me of the old time member of a troupe who had been a circus man who stood in the ring and popped his whip and all the animals and horse. Then, there is a greeting from a singing together, all the people went through their acts, while he was simply an onlooker. Perhaps the greatest difference between our Sundays and a Sunday minister ought to be more than a director of worship. He ought so far as possible to participate in every part of it.

by refusing to sing together
THE PREPARATION AND DELIVERY OF A SERMONS

I.

In speaking of the preparation and delivery of sermons, the first step is deciding the kind of sermon that ought to be prepared. To the man who does not know his goal every path is uncertain. "To the ship bound for no harbor, no wind is favorable." Not as one who has attained, but as a fellow-student with you, what kind of sermon ought the minister prepare to preach to the modern audience.

1. The first and fundamental need of a modern sermon is that it should be interesting. To this some will not agree. To some this will seem to put the accent on the wrong syllable. There are other characteristics that will seem far more important. Yet, I maintain that to be interesting is the first and supreme necessity. This is the case for the simple reason that though our sermon may be as fundamental as the Decalogue and as true as the Sermon on the Mount, if nobody is listening, we are wasting our own time as well as that of our hearers. To speak when nobody is listening is to do positive harm.

Now to win and hold attention is not easy. We are speaking today to the most difficult audience that the world has ever known. Our congregations are movie educated. They are accustomed to receive with a minimum of effort. Their emotions have been played upon. They have had all the thrills. They, therefore, come to the church often times with no better qualifications for hearing a sermon than tired bodies, frayed nerves, crowded minds, and worried hearts. If we hold their attention we must be interesting. It is needless to argue that our congregations ought not to be as they are. But they are that way none the
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2. If we are to preach to the modern man we must be simple. Our congregations are the most cultivated that the world has ever known. Therefore, they appreciate, as no others, the fine art of simplicity. There is nothing that is more certain than this. No large number of people are going to come to church Sunday after Sunday to puzzle their minds over what under the sun we are talking about. I know that we sometimes refer to a minister as a deep preacher. But the deep preacher usually has a shallow audience. We who preach today must preach not so the wise can understand, but so a fool can't help but understand. Sometimes a friend said to me with considerable satisfaction, "My message is to the intellectually elite." I knew at once that he had a small audience.

Now we ought to have something to say to the intellectually elite. We also ought to have something to say to the mentally unfurnished. In fact, no minister has a right to preach in such a fashion that the humblest man that comes into his congregation, hungry for the Bread of Life, cannot find that Bread. We read of the preaching of the Master, that the mass of people heard him gladly. There is one type of sermon that appeals to the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the educated and the uneducated, that is a simple gospel sermon. It has that same universal appeal that Jesus had. Therefore, I say to my own heart as to yours, cultivate simplicity.

3. He who preaches today should preach constructively and positively. The minds of the people that hear you and me are full of questions. But we cannot answer all these questions, we cannot pluck up by the roots the evils that disturb them. Tare-pulling is very exciting, but we can pull all the
tares in the world without guaranteeing to ourselves one grain of golden wheat.

I heard a very cultivated minister teach a series of Bible lessons. He was thoroughly disappointing for the simple reason that he spent most of his time telling what he did not believe, and what was not true, instead of telling what he did believe, and what was true. Pointing out errors is like adding ciphers. You might add a row of ciphers as high as from here to Mars, but all it would amount to would be one cipher.

Had I gone out with Paul in the first century to preach in cities like Ephesus and Corinth I might have spent a whole year denouncing false gods. One night I might have spent on Zeus, another on Mars, another I might have discussed Diana, showing that she was not half so chased as she had a reputation for being. But this would have got me nowhere. Paul went out to declare Jesus Christ. When they saw him as the fairest of ten thousand and the One altogether lovely, they threw their gods away at once.

There is something fascinating about breaking the other man's idle. But really it takes less brains and less heart to destroy than to do almost anything else in the world. There are some perpetual sophomores who love to startle folks. They sound a trumpet before them to announce that they are heralds of a new truth. I used to know one such. He would say, "Now this is going to offend you;" then he would give some platitude that his congregation would never have thought of disputing if he had not urged them to do so. Such a minister seems to me to be trying to impress his congregation with his up-to-dateness rather than with the Truth he is sent to teach. We are to preach positively and constructively.

4. The modern preacher needs to be a minister of encouragement and comfort. This does not mean that we are to ignore the grim facts of life. This does not mean that we are to shut our eyes to the evil in the hearts of individuals, in society, and in the world. But we are to confront these evils always in the
presence of God. We are to confront them in the realization that no picture is really true when it is painted entirely in black. However unfriendly some soil may be, there is always some good soil.

The best English teacher I ever had could tear my themes into shreds till I wondered why I ever wrote such utter nonsense. But always before the conversation was closed he would manage to find something to commend. He would say, "While this and this and this is bad, yet, your thought is good. You are far from arriving, but you can do something with your writing if you are just willing to pay the price." We need to be thus wise in dealing with our congregations. We must always keep open a door of hope. Men are saying to us today what was said to Paul and Barnabas years ago. "Brethren, if you have anything encouraging to say, say it." God bless the man who today can put hope into hopeless hearts. That is part of our business.

b. Finally, we are to speak with authority. Not with authority that is traditional, but with authority that is born of experience. What a privilege to speak a truth that we know in our hearts is eternal. I love to preach a sermon that I know is so true that if I take it and stand it by the First National Bank building I can be sure that when that building is dust, this sermon will be living with the dew of the morning upon it. It is our privilege, as it was that of our Master to speak with authority and not merely as the Scribes.

II.

How do I set about preparing a sermon of this kind?

1. I find the text. This I do through the devotional reading of the Bible. When I read this Book, because I have personal needs of my own, when I find a text that fits into my need I have faith to believe that it might fit into the needs of those who hear me. I am indebted for help in preparing sermons to the Bible
more than to all other books combined.

Now, I am aware that there are good preachers for whom this is not the case. There are those who first prepare their sermons and then find a text. But that is not my way, and certainly I am sure it is not the easiest way.

In a conversation with Dr. Lucock, he was kind enough to say, "One secret of the effectiveness of your preaching is that it is Bible-centered." "Subjects," he went on to say, "are very limited, but texts are as numberless as the stars in the sky."

There are advantages, of course, in preaching series of sermons. They may lack the inspiration of an isolated text, but they also have two positive advantages. First, it saves a lot of lost motion. Happy the preacher who knows exactly where he is going when he gets up on Sunday morning. A second benefit of a series is that it will cultivate thoughts that you would not otherwise discuss. It will save him from riding a hobby. For instance, I am quite sure I should never preach on, "Give Us This Day our Daily Bread," if I had not been preaching a series of sermons on the Lord's Prayer.

2. Having found my text I read and re-read the context. I try to open every window of my soul toward it. I then read what I can think of that bears on the subject. Above all else I try to recall all that I have read or experienced that bears on the subject. It is my conviction that almost everything the minister knows can be made to pay tribute to his sermon.

3. I then make an outline. To me mind the outline is the most fundamental thing in the preparation of a sermon. Given a good outline everything else will fall into its place. But without an outline the sermon is likely to be a few pages of confusion. A sermon ought to begin, travel, and arrive. Then it arrives it ought to quit. This is possible if we have an outline. Then an outline makes it easy for the minister to preach without being handicapped by a
manuscript. A simple outline is not only easy to remember, but often times impossible to forget.

4. Having made the outline, I walk the floor like a lila man and preach it. Then I have it well in hand, when I can see through it from one end to the other like a man looking down a hallway, then I dictate it. In my younger days I used to ject it out myself on an Oliver Typewriter. That was a form of dependence somewhat like wearing an arrow shirt. Having written the sermon I sometimes read it before preaching, sometimes I do not.

III.

Having my sermon well in hand, how shall I deliver it?

1. I must bear in my mind the reason for being in the pulpit. I am here as God's spokesman.

To keep this in mind will save me from endless errors into which we ministers are prone to fall. I have seen ministers come into the pulpit with the impression that they are vagrants rather than crusaders. The realization that I am on an errand for my Lord will save me from trifling.

2. Such a conviction will save me from talking too much about myself. It will save me from peddling out pathetic alibis. I will not tell my congregation that the baby kept me awake, or that I had a bad headache, or that I was so busy going here and there that I did not have time to prepare my sermon. If I am sick I will do my dead level best to preach in such a fashion as that none may suspect it. If I can get through by the grace of God with a handicap such as that I will feel that I have won a real victory.

3. Finally, being here on business for my kind I shall preach for a verdict. Since some hundreds of people have given me thirty minutes in which to display my wares, I shall give them a chance for an order if they so desire. It has been
my custom through the years to do this. Sometimes no one responds. But in the vast majority of cases, there have been those that have responded. There have been those who have given me reason to believe that, as the publican of old, "having opened their hearts to the message they have gone down into their homes and into their tomorrows justified." It is worth one man's life to have preached a single sermon on this order.
The book of Joshua continues the history of the nation that was begun back in Genesis. So far has told of the emancipation of the children of Israel and of the coming to the border of the land of their hopes where they hesitated. Failing to go forward, they went backward. They became a lost generation. God had to wait to move forward until another generation came on the scene. However, great our failures, this is our abiding hope:—Ever so often God sweeps the world clean and makes a new beginning on the feet of little children.

This book has three natural and well defined divisions. Chapter 1 to 12 inclusive tells of the story of the conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Chapters 13 to 22 inclusive tells how he divided the land to the various tribes of Israel. The final divisions, chapters 23 and 24 gives the parting words of Joshua and a brief story of his death. The book is written in a vigorous style. It has some of the fine prophetic touches that characterize the book of Deuteronomy. The first chapter is especially rich. It is one of the courage passages of the Bible. Every Bible lover, I suppose has some choice passages to which she or he turns when they grow weak-kneed and fearful. This is one to which personally I turn again and again.

I.

The book opens with the tragic announcement "Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spoke unto the sons of Nun saying, Moses, my servant is dead. Now, therefore rise and go over this Jordan." Would you notice the heavy calamity that is being announced? It is the death of Moses. There could be no greater loss in the opinion of these Israelites than the loss of Moses. He had meant everything to them. He had begun the enterprise of
emancipation. He had born with them in the wilderness for forty long years. He had stood for them in the praise of God. "When he was gone, God was gone. "Up, make for God to go before us, they said on one occasion." "For this Moses, we know not what has become of him."

But now they know, he is dead. The one upon whom they had leaned. The one who had been their strength and stay in time of trouble. The one who had been their pin cushion to receive all the whines and gibes. Moses is dead. That to their minds is the supreme calamity.

Now what are they to do about the appalling tragedy? Moses, my servant is dead. Nothing now therefore to do but quit is the usual answer. If Moses could not get them across. What hopes can they have in this younger and less able man Joshua? Moses was far more popular than Joshua. But Moses failed. What then can Joshua do? It has been my good fortune or either misfortune to follow some of the most popular preachers in our pulpit today. Someday I should like to see how it would seem to follow a preacher who had made himself of the most repulsive. But most of them, the pastor's whose place I took would put Santa Claus in almost total eclipse. That has its advantages, but it has its disadvantages also.

The first year I was in the ministry I followed a man of this type. I soon felt the results. The first Sunday I was in my pulpit two sisters looked up at me just as I was beginning to preach and burst into tears. I knew positively they were not weeping over anything that I had said. I had a strong supposition that they might be weeping over something that I had failed to say. So when the benediction was pronounced they informed me that their reason for weeping was that they simply could not bear to see me in the place of their former pastor. What they meant was Moses my servant is dead. Therefore there is nothing to do about it but to burst into tears and quit.

But, that, I am happy to say was not the call that came as a result of the passing of this popular Moses. The call was just the opposite, Moses is dead. Now therefore rise. The implication is this- if you were needed when Moses was alive,
the need of you will be far greater now that he is dead. The call of need has often just the opposite effect. The fact that you are needed runs some of you off. It makes you take to your heels. The same fact makes others of you come the closer. You are eager to get under the load. You count it a privilege to serve. Some folks are no good at all except when their side is winning and everybody is shouting for victory. But there are others whose real worth we never know until we see them standing by when weaker souls have given up the fight up and left the field. Moses is dead. An hour of crisis has struck. You are confronted with a great need. Now therefore rise!

Not only was this an hour of need, but it was an hour of great opportunity. This author puts the call in an almost shocking form. Moses my servant is dead, now therefore rise. It would seem as if he were saying "Now that Moses is out of the way you can really do something." Up to this time you were trusting in Moses, instead of trusting in God. Now that you can look on the source of power instead of upon the instrument you ought to be able to accomplish what you could not in other days. I used to have a man in my church who was so big that he dwarfed his fellows. He bore so much of the load himself that those about him were often weakened rather than strengthened. It might have been so in the case of Moses.

II.

Now Joshua quite naturally needed to be encouragement to undertake this difficult task. What encouragement was given him?

1. He discovered that God did not die when Moses died. That sounds trite, I know, but we have to be reminded of this truth again and again. God is contemporary. He is still present. He is the same yesterday today and forever.

2. Not only is God still living, but he is still speaking. That he spoke to Moses, every Israelite believed. Had you told them that God had never spoken to Moses, they would have been indignant. But they were not so sure that he was
speaking to Joshua. There are multitudes who believe that God spoke to the writers of the Old Testament and to the writers of the New, but they believe he lapsed into silence when the last page of the New Testament was written. Now if I believed that the Lord did not speak any longer I should have my serious doubts as to him ever doing so. Our God is a living God. Just as he spoke in the long ago, so he speaks to every listening soul today.

3. This living God who is still speaking and guiding will not leave off the enterprise that he has begun. The fact that one generation failed him does not mean that all has failed. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged." Our God has set himself to the task of building his kingdom in this world. He is undertaking that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord in Christ Jesus. You and I hinder that consummation or we may forward it, but we cannot finally defeat it. However diasterously we may fail it - God is marching on to victory.

4. This God who is to be finally victorious promises to be all to Joshua that he has been to Moses "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee." So God speaks to every generation and to every individual who will hear him. God is willing to be all to you that he was to Moses or to Paul or to John Wesley or to D. L. Moody. Our Lord does not play favorites. His eyes go to and fro through the whole earth to show himself strong. To those whose hearts are perfect toward Him. Since God is with us, we cannot fail. Such was his promise to Joshua "There shall not be any man to stand before thee all the days of thy life."

But, with these encouragements, there was this warning. If God is to be to Joshua what he was to Moses, Joshua is to make that possible by being obedient as Moses was obedient. God is eager to walk with everyone of us. He is eager to make us channels to which his might and healing power may flow out to the world. But for this to be the case, we must be obedient. We cannot walk together except they be agreed. If we are to have God's presence, we are to make his aims our aims, his purposes our purposes.
Thus encouraged, Joshua undertook the task. He led the children of Israel across the Jordan to begin at once the work of conquest. The first city to be captured was the fortified city of Jericho. "By faith," says the writer to the Hebrews, "the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been compassed about for seven days." This may seem a queer story, but the walls of opposition are constantly toppling before the feet of any faith. Walls that to those without faith would be impregnable.

But having won at Jericho in the face of impossibilities, they failed miserably before Ai where success seemed dead easy. What had happened? When Jericho was captured all the silver and gold was to be devoted. None of it was to be claimed by any individual. But a man named Achan was brought under the spell of a certain Babylonish god and a golden wedge. He took them for himself. He buried them safely in his tent, so that none but himself knew his guilty secret. It was this, says the author, that caused the once victorious army to fall back in utter defeat. Not only so, but it caused Achan and his family to be put to death.

It seems cruelly unjust that Achan's innocent children would have to suffer with him for this sin. When this was written, the truth of our individual responsibility had not been clearly discovered. Men had not come to see that truth to which Ezekiel gives emphasis, that a man's sin is his very own. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But this author would know what we see today, and that is that sin is anti-social. While it is an individual matter, it never stops with the individual. The sins of the fathers are visited upon their children. Your sins are visited on me and my sins on you. I may sin as secretly as did Achan, but I have cheated my family and my friends and others because having sinned, I am less strong and helpful than I otherwise would have been. Having put away sin they went on with the work of conquest and the distributing of the land to the people.
IV.

The last divisions of the book gives the parting charge of Joshua. He calls the people together and makes it into a bit of a testimony meeting. He reminds his people of the tremendous promises that God had made to him long years before. Those promises sounded then a bit strange. He promised to be with him as he was with Moses and promised to lead them to victory. But now as he look back across his yesterdays he bears this fine testimony. "Of all that God promised me—not one thing has failed." He has been with me. He has given me victory.

Then he sounds a note that jars us somewhat, yet it is sorely needed in our day. While praising God for his goodness he never thinks of him as goody-goody. If God is our father, he is not our grandfather. Therefore, he declares that since God is to be taken seriously when he promises, he is also to be taken seriously when he warns. If obedience brings the promise, then disobedience will bring the promise to evil. That is not true because God is vindictive. It is true in the nature of things. It operates as surely and as inevitably as the law of gravitation. Obedience makes the blessing of God possible just as disobedience makes it impossible. Therefore, if God is to be taken seriously when he promises, he is also when he warns.

Finally this old hero reaffirms his faith. Facing the fact that every man is going to have some kind of God he calls on them to make their choice. You can choose The God of the people whose leadership you have taken, he says with fine sarcasm. But as their God did not do anything for them, they are not likely to be any great help to you. But, be that as it may, you make up your minds. "Chose you this day whom you will serve." Then speaking for himself and those that he loved, he declares "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," Thus he stood as a strong tower in his day and the people remained true to God the story says, so long as they felt the grip of his influence.

V.
There are two outstanding lessons in this book.

1. God is pictured thus as a man of war. When Joshua was walking about the walls of Jericho, he encountered a man with a drawn sword, not knowing whether this man was friend or foe, he approached him asking him on whose side he is going to fight. "I am come as the leader of the hosts of Israel" is the answer. At that Joshua falls at his feet and commits the leadership of the force to Him. Now we are not thrilled with the old Hebrew idea of Jehovah as a man of war. He was certainly not a warrior in the sense that they believed. But there is this abiding truth in their conception. God is a fighter. The fact that he does not use weapons of force does not mean that he is not the most dauntless fighter of the ages. This is certainly the case if God is like the Jesus of history. There is nothing more evident than that the greatest fighter that this world has ever known was Jesus.

When, for instance, he walked among men, he fought everything that was a foe to him personally. He fought hurtful customs. He fought hurtful laws. He fought greed injustice. He fought every form of sin. He is doing so still. He is fighting sin in your life and mine. He is fighting sin in the church. He is fighting sin in the city and in the state. Our Lord is a relentless foe of all wrong and he is going to continue to fight until every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed.

2. Those who fight in his army will have more faith. This faith is a faith that obeys. Every failure of these Israelites grew out of their lack of faith. Our failures spring from the same cause. This story emphasizes a truth that was stated by the prophet Habakkuk. It was also reaffirmed by some of the keenest writers of the New Testament. "The just shall live by His faith." Given a vigorous faith, we fight in the fellowship of our Lord in the assurance that at last the kingdom of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ.
This book is a continuation of the story that we began in Genesis. The family that God has chosen has become a nation. He has led them to the borders of their land, but through lack of faith they have failed to enter in to possess the country. God does not try to force them to take what they do not want. He does all that he can do. He raises up another generation to do what they have refused to do.

This is ever our hope. There is so much that is depressin in the life of the world to-day. Where is our hope? Largely it is in our children. We will never do very much with an adult generation. They have passed the period of the plastic. But we can do with the children what we will. Every thirty years God sweeps the world clean and begins again. What an opportunity it is to capture the Canaan that our fathers refused to capture.

There are twenty-four chapters in this book. The first twelve are devoted to the conquest. The next ten to the division of the land and the last two to the farewell addresses of the great leader, Joshua. What, now, is the message of this stirring book? It makes very interesting reading. But I am frank to say that there is much in it that offends unless we read with understanding.

The heart of the message, I think, is this. It reveals to us a picture of God as a man of war. When Joshua had come over by the city of Jericho he saw a man before him with a drawn sword. He asked him on whose side he was and this was the amazing answer. "As the captain of the Lord's host am I come."

God with a sword in his hand, is that a true picture of God? I know it one that the modern world does not like. I know, too, that it is one that has been grossly abused and misunderstood. Some have been privileged because of it to the wet the world with blood. But after all is this picture of an armed God one that is true to the facts of revelation? I must confess that is.

Where are we reading this? Answer. In the old Bible. But when we turn to the New, do we find an altogether different idea of God? In some measure, yes. We come to know God as a father. We enter into the secret of his tenderness and his compassion as never before. But the idea of him as a fighter is not changed. Jesus is the revelation of God. And is He a weak and submissive man? No, He is a fighter. There was never one so bold and so persistent. He never let up for an hour till he had died on the cross.

But God is love, you say. Yes, that is true. That is the reason that he is the supreme fighter. That is the reason why we see the face of Jesus aflame with anger. He loves the man with the withered hand. That is the reason why his soul leaps to its feet when he was treated with indifference. He loves little children, that is the reason that he fed them in with these terrible words: "It is better to have a millstone put about your neck and be drowned in the midst of the sea than to offend one of these little ones.

Indifference has no trouble staying in a good humor. But love can blaze with anger. The two greatest lovers of the
Bible are Moses and Paul. Yet it is Moses we find actually putting some offenders to the sword. We hear Paul wishing that certain trouble were cut off. Hard and harsh language. Yet these same men are willing to have their very names blotted out for the sake of their brethren. He anger is born of their love.

Yes, the God of that far off day was a fighter. He is the same to-day. But that against which he fights is not man. He is ever the lover of man. He one foe of God is sin. God never fights against man save as it is necessary in order for him to drive out sin. In this story God is the foe of the Canaanites. He is not their foe, however, because God has his favorites. He is their foe because of their sin. They had become rotten. They had become so rotten as to become hopeless, so rotten that the story says that the land vomited them out. The very earth upon which the walked had become sick of them.

And mark you this idea is not antagonistic to that of the New Testament. "Wheresoever the carcass is there shall the eagles be gathered together." That is what Jesus says. Wherever there is a world, a state, a society that is rotten, there one day shall come the vultures of the Most High. That procedure has been true throughtout all the centuries. It is true still. Look at the nations of the past. Why are they dead today? There is but one answer, sin killed them. When they became too rotten to live God wiped them from the earth.

This story is a picture of a bit of the divine surgery. This nation had become so corrupt as to become a menace. It was necessary to cut them off in order to save the rest of the world. So God threw out this filth and replaced them with a sounder and purer people. He replaced them with a people that with all their faults have become an everlasting benediction to all the nations.

But this story makes it very clear that the driving out of one nation and the putting of another in its place was not a mere piece of favoritism. God hates sin in the chosen people just as much as he hates it in others. He warns them that if they sin they will suffer just as the others. He does not only warn, but he makes good his warning. In the taking of Jericho a certain soldier, Achan laid hold on what was forbidden. He hid what he had stolen. But God knew... And what was the result? The army lost its power. The moral cancer had to be cut out. Later the nation became corrupt and God displaced them and scattered them over the face of the earth.

And, heart, God is still fighting against. He will never cease till it has been overcome forever. He is fighting against it in your life and mine. That is a blessed fact. God loves me so well that he will never rest and will never let me rest till he has enabled me to rout my one big foe. Why can you not be content in your neglect of duty? Why cannot you find rest in wrong doing? This is the reason. God is fighting within you for yourself. He is striving with you to bring you to the large and roomy place of holiness and purity.

He is the foe of sin in society. Whatever is rotten in the social fabric, that is the object of the keen antagonism of the Almighty. He is fighting against sin the state and in the world. He is against the squandering of men and money for the end of hate. He is against the building of great fleets and armies for ends of unbrotherliness. Wherever there is sin and selfishness and hate there is the eternal God fighting against it.
And sooner or later God is going to conquer. He has mighty resources. He has an effective army. However, it is not as effective as it will be, for all of it is not yet fully subject to his will. This is not true of the physical forces. They are completely his. And these he uses at times. He did so here. The Israelites did not shake down the walls of the great city that they captured. God did that. And there have been many times in the course of history that God has used the physical forces of nature for the carrying out of his judgments.

It was so when he destroyed the world by the flood. It was so when Sodom was overthrown. It was true when that army of 100,000 Assyrians were destroyed. God so acted when he took a flake of snow and a drop of water and a ditch and an onion and destroyed Napoleon. We read that the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. That is when a man is going wrong everything in God's universe is fighting against him.

But God's chief asset is men and women. He uses folks. The forces of nature are largely negative. They destroy. He uses folks to save. He had in mind in the conquest of Canaan, not simply the driving out of a civilization that had become corrupt. He was seeking to establish a new civilization that would be sound and wholesome, or the bring about of that high end He had to have folks.

Now what kind of soldiers can God use? There is only one answer to that question and it is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. He uses the men and women who have faith. His land was not conquered by force. No land is ever so conquered. It conquered by faith. That is the reason that the writer to the Hebrews say, "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down." There was not a soldier in that whole army that believed that they fell of them selves. Nor did one believe that he himself had shaken them down. Nor did one believe that their blowing of the rams horns had blown them down. They knew that the secret of their failing in themselves, but in God.

But what sort of faith is it that conquers? First, it is a faith that obeys God however foolish obedience may seem. I know of few things that required a greater faith than was required for what these men did. To have occupied their time making battering rams would have been easy. But to do nothing but march and sin, that seemed utterly useless and ridiculous. "I never saw a city taken in that way," any soldier would have said. Maybe not, but you have seen thousands of conquests made by people who had the good sense and the grace and above all the faith to obey God.

Then they had a faith the accepted God's standard of holiness. It spoke of marvellous consecration on the part of these soldiers that all the army only one of them failed. But they could win no more till that one exception had paid the penalty. When Achan was no more then the army marched again to victory. It is the same story that we find all through the New Testament. "This is the victory that overcometh the world." What is? Not our wisdom nor our arms, but our faith. But it must be a faith that follows God's leadership and accepts God's standard of holiness.

It is such faith as this that makes men strong. It is this faith before which walls of opposition have always crumbled and will continue to do so as long as God sits on his throne. This is true because all unbelief means sin and sin means weakness.
righteousness that is born of faith is the one strong thing in
the world. It has in its gripping hands the very might of God.

Let this thought fill us with hope as we face the grim
fact of sin to-night. God is against sin. He is its eternal
antagonist. He is making war upon it in the nation, in the city,
in our own hearts. In the big world he is going to win, soon or
late. He may also win in your heart and mine if we will put
our wills on his side.

Then we need realize, too, that there are many Canaans
yet unconquered. One of them is the Canaan of your own heart.
They are all about you. God needs men of faith. He needs men
who will be men of faith. He needs men who till that
faith that dares to obey however foolish obedience might look
in the eyes of the world. He needs men who will by faith accept
God's high standard of holiness by which alone men become
conquerers.
THE BOOK OF JOSHUA—The Call of Need

The Book of Joshua is well named. Joshua himself is its outstanding hero. The whole story centers round his vigorous and vital personality. In this book God's promise to Abraham comes in some measure to realization. Long centuries before God had said, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation." Abraham had the faith to obey. But he found no permanent home in this land. He only found a place to pitch his tent, and when he died his dreams had not come true. But here at last the little handful of strangers has become a multitude. The homeless wanderers find a permanent abiding place, and God's seemingly reckless and forgotten promise at last comes true. The book may roughly be divided into three parts: Joshua's call and encouragement (chapter 1), the conquest and division of the land (chapter 2 - 22), and Joshua's parting charge (chapter 23 - 24).

I

Joshua's call came through the consciousness of a great loss and a consequent realization of a great need. "It came to pass after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spake unto Joshua, Moses' minister, saying, 'Moses my servant is dead.'" Moses is dead! That was heavy news. That was the very climax of calamity. Everybody felt that no loss could be more disastrous. They were sure they could have better spared
any hundred, any thousand men than Moses. But now he is dead and they hear the news with breaking hearts. As the realization of their terrible loss grips them, their faces go white and their eyes fill with tears. For Moses was far the biggest man among them. He towered above his fellows as a mountain towers above an ant hill. Then they had been so dependent upon him. It was he who had begun the enterprise of setting them free and making them into a nation. It was he who had dared to march upon Egypt with nothing but a staff in his hand and God in his heart. It was he who had borne them upon his broad shoulders for almost half a century.

To realize something of how large a place he filled in their lives it is only necessary to read that wonderful complement they paid him when he remained too long, as they felt, in the mountain with God. This complement is all the more wonderful when we realize that it was not meant for a compliment at all. "Up, up," they said to Aaron, "make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, we know not what is become of him." That is, Moses was not only to them a great human leader, but he was in a sense their god. Therefore, when the news passed from tent to tent that he was dead, their hopes all but died too. No doubt they felt that there was now nothing better for them to do than to trek back to Egypt and stick their necks once more in the yoke.

But God's call to Joshua through this great loss was not to give up the fight. He called his attention to the going of Moses only to impress upon him the necessity of responding to the need that had become so much the more pressing by the
homegoing of this great leader. Joshua was needed when Moses was alive. He was needed when the people were looking forward with confident expectation of entering the land of their dreams. But if he was needed then, how much more sorely is he needed now that Moses is gone and that there is "a lonesome place against the sky" at which they gaze with much sorrow, but with little courage and little hope.

A great need is a tremendous test of character. The greater the need the more unwilling the coward is to have anything to do with the enterprise. There are some folks who will not fight except when the enemy is on the run. You will remember that dark period during the reign of Saul when Israel was shamefully defeated and the vast majority of her army was hiding in the dens and caves of the earth. Jonathan dared to take an aggressive stand against their foes. The result was that he put them to utter rout. When those shirkers who were hiding in the caves saw the enemy running, the story says they too pursued hard after them to battle. But they were not needed then. They were needed at the beginning.

Then there are those like Joshua to whom a need makes a tremendous appeal. They are not afraid of difficulties. They are thrilled at the prospect of a hard fight. The greater the need, the greater the zest with which they throw themselves into the conflict. Paul was such a man. How courageously his words ring across the centuries. "I will tarry here for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." The appeal of a pressing need, then, often sends timid souls running for safety while it lures the courageous into the thick of the fight.
The task to which Joshua was called was the most difficult imaginable. "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan." God was actually calling on Joshua to do what Moses himself had been unable to do. How some who knew Joshua must have sneered when they learned of his daring purpose. How they must have laughed. "You can outdo Moses, can you? You can lead a discouraged and bewildered people to accomplish an enterprise when Moses could not do it, even though he had their full confidence." But in spite of the absurdity of it, the call kept ringing in the deeps of his soul: "Arise and go over this Jordan."

II

What encouragement did God give Joshua to strengthen him for this great undertaking?

1. He gave him the encouragement that comes from the realization that the task he is undertaking is at the command of God. "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage." There is always immeasurable strength in the consciousness that we have back of us the authority of Almighty God. "I am not undertaking this enterprise," said Joshua, "because I am a stronger man than was Moses. He was infinitely bigger than I. I am undertaking it because of the call of Him who is the God of Moses and who is my God."

But some solicitous friend might have broken in on him and said, "Be reasonable. If Moses failed, how can you expect to succeed?" He might have answered, "It is not my business to succeed. It is not my business to be as popular as Moses. It is
not my business to be as wise as Moses. It is not my business to
be a second Moses. If God had needed a Moses at this time He
might have kept the one He had. It is my business to do what I
am told. My one task is to obey God." That is the case with you.
That is the case with me. We are not called either to be like or
to do like any other human soul. We are called to do the will of
God as He gives us to see that will.

2. Not only was God sending him, but He was going with
him. "As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee." How rich is
that promise. God talked with Moses face to face. So long did
this great man live in the presence of God that his face became
transfigured with a strange spiritual beauty. Yet Moses had no
corner on the Divine Friendship. It was Joshua's privilege to
be just as intimate with God as was Moses. And it is your privi­
lege and mine to be just as intimate as either of them. This
is God's will for everyone of us. It is His will for those who
are in places of leadership and responsibility. It is no less
His will for those who with empty pockets are out, even now, in
search of a job. How Jesus emphasized God's infinite approach­
ableness! Any poor, worthless, nameless nobody could get close
to Jesus. And He tells us that God is just like Himself, that He
offers His friendship to everyone who will claim it. And we
claim it by obedience. As we go on His errands we never have
to go alone. "Go ye - and lo, I am with you."

3. Not only did God promise His companionship, but as
a natural consequence of that companionship, He promised victory.
"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the
days of thy life." This does not mean of course, that any man
can accomplish any task that he might choose. It does mean that he can accomplish any task to which God calls him. The very weakest of us can realize God's dream for us. We may not succeed in every task to which we set our hands. But if we live in His friendship, the promise of the first Psalm will be realized by us: "Whatsoever he doeth, he shall prosper."

III

What response did Joshua make to this call from God? As he faced this heavy loss and this tragic need that seemed too great for his strength, he did not rebel. He did not grow bitter that God had taken the noble leader that he loved. No more did he lose heart, turn coward and forsake the enterprise altogether. On the contrary, though conscious of the fact that he was a far lesser man than Moses, he set his hand to the undertaking. He threw himself into the impossible enterprise. And what happened? He himself gives us the answer in his valedictory address. He is now an old man. The sun's rays are in his face. He is looking back over the way along which God has led him. He is telling his experience, and what a testimony it is!

Listen to it: "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you." Those were tremendous promises that God made years ago. He promised that he would be with him as He was with Moses. That He would never fail him or forsake him. That there should not a man be able to stand before him all the days of his life. And now as he comes to the end of the journey he declares that God has never once let him
down, that He has never failed in one single instance, that He has always shown Himself amply able to make good every single promise. So says Joshua. So says every loyal soul that has walked with Him through the years. All else may fail, but He never fails.

Then he utters a word that is greatly needed in our soft days. He declares that just as God keeps all His promises to the obedient, so He will keep all His warnings to the disobedient. We have forgotten that side of the Divine Character. We are ready to claim, many of us, the gracious and tender promises of our Lord, but at the same time we wholly disregard His warnings. Such a position is unreasonable. If I am to believe Jesus as he speaks of the House of Many Mansions, I must believe that He means something when He declares that there are certain ones to whom He is going to have to say at the last, "Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity." If I believe in Heaven I must in the very nature of things believe in some kind of hell.

Then this sturdy old hero makes this final appeal; "Since God is Faithful, since He is so infinitely dependable, I call upon you to reaffirm and reassert your loyalty and your allegiance to Him. 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.' "Make your choice," he pleads earnestly, "and make it now. I am only asking you to do what I am doing myself. Here at the end of the journey I am without regrets. Long years ago I gave myself in surrender to God. Today I rejoice to renew the vows of allegiance that I made in life's springtime. 'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'" So beautiful and strong had been his loyalty that he did not simply save himself, but he cast the spell of the winsomeness of his Lord over every inmate of his home.
IV

There are certain lessons that we learn from this book that are of abiding importance.

1. The Book of Joshua teaches us that no single individual is essential to God's enterprise. Every man is needed. The Christ that commanded His disciples to gather up the scraps that no piece of bread be lost, certainly has not a single human soul to throw away. The Christ who commanded His disciples to say to those who questioned them about a certain little donkey, "The Master has need of him," surely has need for every single man and woman and child in all the world. But while every one is needed, no single one is absolutely essential.

Every popular pastor, I dare say, has had misguided and admiring friends to come to him along the way, and wonder what in the world the church was going to do during the seven lean years that were sure to follow upon the heels of the seven fat years that made up his own pastorate. In my early ministry I used to feel quite pathetic about it. How would the church manage when I was gone. What a pity that such a promising and growing work should go down! But more than one church has suffered the calamity of my going during the passing of the years, and all of them still survive. Such a statement may tax the credulity of some, but it is true none the less.

And I am encouraged to believe that what I have found true in my own experience may also hold good in the experience of others. We have all heard of churches that were destined to go on the rocks when some prominent layman died or moved away, or when some popular and gifted pastor was no longer there. And it
is altogether possible for such changes to prove disastrous. But if the going of any single individual, be he pastor or layman, results in the ruin of the church, it is usually for one reason, and that is, that those who were left had been trusting in man rather than in the Living God, and that they refused to lay hold on any higher faith after their idol had gone to another charge or to Heaven.

Then I have seen this pitiful happening: Some member, large or small, gets offended. Maybe a real injury has been done. Maybe the injury is only imaginary. Possibly this real or fancied injury has come, not at the hands of the congregation, but only of one single man. But, be the causes what they may, in anger this individual withdraws from the church. What are the results? He may weaken the church, but he will not wreck it. But he surely hurts, and may wreck himself. God needs you, needs you desperately: The church needs you. But if you will not respond, though God will be disappointed, yet He will still move on to the accomplishment of His purpose. No man can thwart Him, for no man is absolutely essential to the ongoing of His kingdom.

2. The one essential is God, and He is always available.

"It came to pass after the death of Moses that God spake." How heartening! That means that God did not die when Moses died. No more did He die with Saint Paul, nor Wesley, nor with any of the other great spiritual leaders. Our God is the Living God. He does not have to abandon an enterprise to which He has dedicated Himself because He takes one leader home: He set out to bring Israel into the land of promise, and though Moses was dead, He was still interested in the enterprise and He was still interested in His People. If He did not lose interest with the death of Moses,
no more did He with the death of Joshua. He has been interested through the centuries and He is interested now. God has set out to win this world and He will never give up "till every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed."

And because God is still living and vitally interested, He still speaks to men. After the death of Moses, He spoke to Joshua. It is easy for some of us to believe in a God who spoke yesterday, while they refuse to believe in a God who speaks today. During the days of Jesus the Jewish people were firm in their belief that God ceased to speak to men with the closing of the Old Testament canon. And there are those today who believe that God has ceased to speak with the closing of the New Testament canon. But God is speaking in the living present to every soul that will listen to Him. And since this is true, we have every resource that we need for the carrying out of God's plan. When Elijah was gone, there were a few spiritually blind who went about the hills of Gilgal searching for the prophet and saying hopelessly, "Where is Elijah?" But Elisha, with his clearer vision, wasted no time in futile search. His cry was, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" That is to be our cry. What we need is not this man or that man. What we need is God. Why complain about the loss of the gourd from which we used to drink when the spring still laughs and gurgles at our feet, offering us a draught of its liquid life? Why ask for some lost Moses when it is our privilege to have God himself?
JUDGES

The Book of Judges covers a period of between four and five centuries. The era was one of chaos and confusion. Its revealing characteristic was lawlessness. The author sums up the situation in a single sentence: "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." This does not mean, of course, that there was never an effort made to remedy the situation. There were repeated efforts that ended in at least temporary success. In fact, the whole book is a constantly recurring story of relapse, retribution and recovery. Through it all, too, there was slow progress toward a better day. But the fact that stands out as the most prominent characteristic of that time is that it was the golden age of personal liberty. Here for once that high goal of freedom from all restraint for which so many are clamoring today, was realized with amazing fullness.

I

Look at the completeness of this freedom.

1. It was a universal privilege. It did not belong simply to the few. It belonged to the many. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Every man, - that takes in the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the native and the foreigner, the socially elite and the social nobodies. In our less exciting times this absolute freedom belongs only to the gangsters and the racketeers, to the bootleggers and their patrons, to certain corrupt politicians and those who are able to buy their way out of difficulties. For today, as in Shakespeare's time, "Oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself buys out the law." But in those good days every man did that which was right in his own eyes.
2. Not only was this freedom from restraint universal, not only did every man do as he pleased, but he did as he pleased in every particular. He accepted no law, human or divine. He did as he pleased in the domestic circle. He reserved the right to wreck his home just as often as he saw fit. He did as he pleased in the social circle. He acted with regard to his own self-expression and self-pleasing, and with no thought of the good of others. There were therefore in those dark days tragic souls like Jepthah who came into the world branded by a shame not his own. Men did as they pleased in the world of commerce. They declared that they were not in business for their health, and they possibly had a motto that ran something like this: "Every fellow for himself and the devil take the hindmost." They did what they pleased with regard to the laws of the land. No law, human or divine, was considered as binding. Of course, this does not mean that every man broke every law. It only means that every man broke every law that he desired to break.

This brief summary of the situation is sufficient to indicate that the Book of Judges, though one of the oldest in the Sacred Record, is yet very timely and very up-to-date. In fact, in its spirit it might be a page of the history of any one of a score of our American cities. We are not quite so lawless as they, yet we are the most lawless nation on the face of the earth. We are rich and increased in goods. It costs four and one half billions of dollars yearly to run our federal government. Our automobile industry amounts to five billions of dollars, but our crime industry, if we may believe a recent article in the North American Review of Reviews, is more than both of these together. The biggest business in America today, measured in dollars and cents, is the crime business. Surely a book that deals with
lawlessness has a message for ourselves.

II

"Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." How had such a situation as this come into existence? Here was a very little orgy of personal liberty. How did it come into existence? Did it come as a result of a long and patient process of religious education, or did it come as utter neglect? Was this freedom a child of the light or a child of the darkness? Was it born of a great spiritual awakening or was it born of a tragic spiritual relapse? How had these people become free?

The author leaves us in no doubt as to the answer of this question. Their casting off of all restraint was born primarily of their forgetting and forsaking God. They first rebelled against God, and the issue of that rebellion was the casting off of restraint in every department of life. That is always the case. The wise man spoke sober truth when he declared: "Where there is no vision the people cast off restraint." The only sure foundation for the individual as well as for the social life, is the fear of God. To fly away from God is to fly away from those fundamental integrities upon which civilization must rest.

For the citizen to make himself pleasing of all of his conduct is to turn his face fully toward anarchy. To have an ordered society it is absolutely necessary that we renounce the right to do in all particulars as we please, but it is the refusal of so many of our respectable and well-to-do citizens to realize this, that accounts in large measure for the tragic reign of lawlessness that prevails today. There are those that have no respect for the rights of private property. There are even those who have no respect for
the sacredness of human life, but these are vastly in the minority. There are multitudes that have no respect for a law written into the Constitution that declares that the United States government should not engage in the by-pass business. The danger of the patronage is that not only violates the law, but in proportion to his respect for the law, he makes the violation of the law seem respectable.

Just as self-will in the state is the essence of political anarchy, so self-will in the Kingdom of God is the essence of spiritual anarchy. All sin has its source in the determination of man to do as he pleases. Why did the prodigal son go into a far country? It was not to to grieve his father. It was not to wreck himself. He went into the far country because he thought he would have a freer and gladder life in the world beyond the hills. He did not wish to hurt anybody, but he was willing to run the risk of doing so in order to get to do as he pleased.

Why does the bootlegger sell his wares? It is not that he wishes to make drunkards. It is not because he wants to wreck a single human life, but he is willing to run the risk of doing so in order to get to do as he pleases. Why did that young chap bring shame upon the girl that loved and trusted him? It was not because he wished to make an outcast of her, but he was willing, if need be, to pay that price in order to get to do as he pleased. Sin in its essence is self-pleasing, the casting off of restraint. Complete personal liberty, therefore, is anarchy, spiritually and politically. It is born not of faith in God, but of complete rejection of God.

III

It is interesting to notice next what was the outcome of this freedom of every man's doing that which was right in his own eyes.
truly was a golden age of self-expression, of absolute freedom. What kind of a social order was the result? Did these people find the happiness for which they sought? Is the Book of Judges a story of Paradise Regained? Did self-pleasing, complete independence of all law, bring these people of the long ago into a Utopia? We are compelled to answer that such was not the case. They bought the freedom that they had at a great price.

1. Their casting off of restraint brought individual and national disintegration. Sin always results in a disorganized and discordant personality. The entrance of sin means the entrance of civil war. No sooner does a man turn from God than there begins a conflict between his lower and his higher self. He finds that the thing that he longs to accomplish, the heights that he feign would scale, somehow mock him. He finds also that the thing that he hates, that he loathes, that he vowed in his soul that he would never do, - that that very thing he does. He cries desperately "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." "My soul cleaveth unto the dust, Quicken Thou me,"

Rebell ing against God not only means that man is divided against himself. It means also that he is divided against his brother. Sin means strife within. It also means strife between man and man. Having forsaken God these twelve tribes no longer made common cause against a common foe. They were split into warring factions. They fought one against another. Brother thirsted for the blood of brother. The little tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped off the face of the earth through these devastating civil wars.

2. The natural outcome of this strife was weakness. The divided man is always the weak man. "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." No man ever attains the maximum of his strength
till he can say with Paul, "This one thing I do." It is perfectly amazing how mighty an ordinary man can become if he is a unified personality. It is pathetic how little a genius can accomplish if he can never focalize his vast abilities on one single task.

Samuel T. Coleridge had a genius almost equal to that of Shakespeare. He planned enough books to have filled a small library, but all he left was a few glittering fragments. He could never say, "This one thing I do."

Just as strife weakens the individual, so also it weakens the group. The armies of Israel standing together were equal to the situation, but divided they were not. One secret of the power of the early church was this: "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." Strife means weakness. How often we have seen a church that might have been a strong conquering church made utterly weak and powerless by strife. I know of no surer way to kill a church than by strife and discord among its members. Division always means weakness. The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.

The final result growing naturally out of this weakness was defeat and failure. These people, in seeking to be absolutely free, became little better than slaves. The times were so lawless that the roadways grew up because no man dared travel them. Legitimate industry was at a standstill. Even a brave man like Gideon had to hide himself away in order to get to thresh his bit of wheat. Poverty and want stalked abroad. Everywhere was fear and terror. The people were not happy; they were wretched and in sore distress.

It is evident, therefore, that the casting off of restraint did not bring to these people the liberty of which they dreamed. Lawlessness never ushered in liberty. There is no freedom except
in conformity to law. For that locomotive that is panting to begin its journey down yonder at the station to remain free, it must obey the law of its being and confine itself to that little narrow track. For the ship out at sea to remain free, it must obey the little compass that marks its course. If it refuses to do so it will become a wreck. For the citizen to be free he must obey the law of the state. For man to be free he must obey the law of God. That is the only road to freedom, but it is a sure road, for "if the Son of God shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

The author tells us that the wretched plight in which these people found themselves, was due to the fact that they had forsaken God, and that God was punishing them for their sins, and in this he speaks truly, for this world is built on a basis of righteousness. It is governed by the unalterable law of sowing and reaping. What the individual sows he reaps. What the nation sows it reaps. Russia went for years sowing pleasure and tyranny. At last the reaping day came. The nations of the earth before the outbreak of the World War were sowing to Mammon and Mars. At last a little blaze broke out, in an obscure nation of Europe. Soon twenty-four nations were in flames. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

IV

But this picture is not all dark. If there is relapse and if there is retribution following upon its heels, there is also recovery. How did this recovery come about?

1. The first fact that the author makes clear to us is that the source of the recovery in every instance was God. It was not born of any skillful manipulation on the part of the people. Wherever there was deliverance, God was the Deliverer. This old
book teaches us this tremendously important lesson, that the one
man, the one supreme need of the social order is God. There is no getting on
for men or nations without God.

"On God our help in ages past
   Our hope for years to come
   Be Thou our Guide while trouble lasts
   And our Eternal Home."

2. The second fact we learn from this book is that while
God is always a deliverer, he works his deliverance through man.

God has no way of saving this world except through human instrumen-
tality. The individuals whom he chose in this book were doubtless
not the ones that we would have chosen. There is Shamgar with
nothing but an ox goad in his hand and a great faith and moral
indignation in his heart. There is Jephthah, an outcast. There is
Gideon with his caution and courage. But God used them to great
ends because they were willing to be used.

3. The fine bracing fact we learn from this book is that
God always wrought his deliverance when the people were willing
for him to do so. When things reached their desperate worst, when
their backs were to the wall and the future held no hope, then
they turned in penitence and prayer to God, and God, who is always
waiting for the least opening to break in for our help, responded.

And their cry of need and brought about their deliverance.

And What a hopeful word, for us today. There is certainly
much in our modern life to distress any man who is not spiritually
blind. We are passing through a tremendous moral slump. The forces
of righteousness are not advancing with the sure and conquering
step that we feel that they ought. The supreme need of the hour is
a great spiritual awakening for a rediscovery of God. It is for

Only that is sufficient for individual and national reviving such a deliverance that He is eagerly waiting to work. Let us see
that he gets his opportunity through us. Let us come to him in the faith that "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him."
"The Messages of the Books."

"Judges."

The book of Judges is a tremendously interesting book to me. It is full of the thrill of battle. It shouts with victory and sobs and wails with defeat. Its characters are rugged, human characters and its God is a mighty and merciful God.

I think it is possibly easier to find the message of this book than of any we have yet studied. I think, as another has pointed out, there is a verse in Proverbs that gives a fairly full statement of its message. That verse is this, "Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people." The word here translated "reproach" means literally something that bows the head and bends the back. So that the verse would read, "Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin bows the head of any people."

I think we are perfectly ready to admit the fact that sin lays an unbearable burden upon the shoulders of the individual. Sin means slavery. It always has, it always will. "He shall be holden with the cords of his sin." Every sin that a man commits becomes a new link in the chain that binds him.

But sin not only means the wreck of the individual. It means the wreck of the nation. These Canaanitish nations that were driven out before the people of Israel - they were defeated primarily by their sin. Israel was exalted and the people of Canaan cast out, not because of favoritism on the part of God. It was because of the law expressed in this text. Israel herself was defeated before Ai. She would never have won had she not put away the sin that in that instance bowed her head.

But under the leadership of Joshua the Israelites were finally victorious. They conquered the people of Canaan and possessed their land. They remained in possession all the days of Joshua. But shortly after his death they began to lose out. By and by they themselves were completely conquered. The nation that had been complete victors became just as utterly defeated. What was the cause of their ruin?

The cause is not hard to find. It lies right upon the surface. They were not defeated because of the hard situation in which they were placed. They were not defeated because of the shrewdness of the enemy or because of his superior might. Nor were they defeated because their defeat was the original purpose in the mind of God. There was only one big cause that lay back of their defeat and that was their sin.

Look how this sin started. It did not begin with open rebellion. Sin seldom starts so among the people of God. It began with an easy tolerance of evil. The Lord had commanded them to drive out the corrupt Canaanites. They drove them out in part but not altogether. They allowed some to remain. Soon they came to feel at home among them. They came to be easily tolerant of their sin.

It always is a danger signal when we find ourselves tolerant in our own lives of what is wrong. You can tell if you are growing in grace by whether you are growing in your hatred of sin. For remember God hates sin and the more you become like Him the more you hate it. We are to hate it with that intense hatred that will lead us to resist under blood striving against it.
Now, what these people at first tolerated they came later to admire. And what they admired they came later to practice. It is an old story. It has been taking place throughout all the centuries. "Vice is a monster of such hideous mien
That to be hated needs but to be seen.
But often seen, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then fondle, then embrace."

You remember the story of Samson. It is told here in the Book of Judges. And the fall of Samson is a bit like the fall of the nation. He goes for a holiday to Gaza. He admires in Gaza. He falls in love there and that love became his ruin just as the love of and practice of idolatry became the ruin of ancient Israel.

What was the outcome of this departure from God? It lead to national weakness. Sin always makes for weakness. It is right alone that is strong. Purity is power. Samson is like any other man when he has broken his vow of consecration.

This sin not only lead to weakness but quite naturally it lead to conquest. They who had been victors became victims. Society was reduced to utter chaos. The highways grew up because people dared no longer to traverse them. And the story says that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes". What a state of affairs is this! There are few better definitions of hell than to say its a place where every fellow does as he pleases. Every man here sought his own selfish ends without any regard for the rights of others. That marked the very lowest moral ebb. For individuals to do that means a devilish community and for nations to do that means a devilish world.

So you see this nation that had been conqueror was in turn conquered. Its sin bowed its head, but again and again it was delivered. This Book of Judges is a record of one overthrow and deliverance after another. How were these deliverances wrought? What was their source? Answer - God. Every single deliverance had its beginning in Him.

And believe me, He is our hope and deliverance today. We have always been prone, I think, to look too much upon the things that are seen. Our supreme asset always, individually or nationally, is God. When Sennacherib was threatening Jerusalem, Hezekiah summed up the assets of both nations when he said, "With him is the arm of flesh but with us is the power of God". And you know who won. It was the weak little city that was sheltered beneath the everlasting arm. "And now Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in Thee."

You will notice, also, that while God is the source of every deliverance these deliverances are always wrought through human instruments. Wherever God finds a man that is willing He uses him. And some of the instruments in this book were exceedingly astonishing. We would never have chosen them ourselves. But He chose them as He later chose fishermen and tax collectors.

It is an interesting array of warriors. There is Shamgar with his ox goad; there is Gideon with his fleece and his faith and his fear; there is Deborah with her courage and her enthusiasm; there is Samson with his jawbone and the broken vow and his broken body. Crude instruments many of them and yet through every one of them as long as they are
The messages of the books - Judges #3

obedient, God wins deliverance.

And notice, last of all, when these deliverances were wrought. They were not wrought when they organized new armies and drilled them. They were not won except under one condition. They were won when the people hated their sin and turned from it in humble prayer to Almighty God. The nation had its head bowed in the dust so long as it sinned but when it repented and put God in its place then, and only then, was it exalted.

And the message of the Book of Judges is just as true today as it was then. It has been true all through the centuries. Sin bows the head of the nation that persists in it. Call the roll of the nations of yesterday. Why are they in their graves? They were once mighty. Think of Babylon and Nineveh and Persia and Greece and Rome. Why did they kiss the dust? One word answers that question. Sin.

What was the humiliation of Germany? What was it that bowed her proud head? The answer is the same. What is it that constitutes the heaviest burden of heathenism today? What is it that bows the head of China and India and Japan? What is it that makes the head of the republics of South America to bow lower than our own? It is this, sin. Even to a less extent than ourselves are they exalted by the one power that can exalt and that is righteousness.

"Sin bows the head of any people." At the close of the war America was the best loved and most honored nation on the face of the earth. This was true not because she entered with absolute unselfishness into the world war but because she entered with a larger spirit of unselfishness than any other nation.

How is it with her today? We are almost universally suspected. We are largely hated. What is the cause? Oh, there stole upon us that old time foe. We began to say "America first" and that marked us in the grip of that spirit of selfishness that has never and never can exalt a nation. And our heads are bowed today in some measure because of our sin.

Possibly we are going to repent. Some are looking most hopefully to the present Disarmament Conference to do what we fail to accomplish. I sincerely wish that it might. However, I must say that while I sincerely hope that the burden of war may be lessened I can hardly hope for a permanent remedy in this direction.

Why do men fight? Not because they are well armed. They fight because they are unbrotherly. Scrapping battleships is good but there is something else that must be scrapped. We must scrap our hate. We must scrap our selfishness. We must scrap our sin. It is only with sin dethroned and God enthroned that peace comes to the heart of the individual and we must have God enthroned in the nations before the lion and the lamb shall lie down together.

Our own selfish schemes will never bring deliverance. It can only come through our hearty turning from sin to the God of righteousness.
This message that righteousness exacteth its is illustrated by a process that runs all through the book and, in a sense, this is the history of God's people. This process is summed up by three words: Relapse, Retribution, and Recovery.

I. Relapse
1. Its Cause—departure from God
2. Its Process
   a. Indecision
   b. Admiration
   c. Participation

II. Retribution
1. This is an unrelenting law.
2. Its nature
   a. Weakness, division, civil war, defeat.
   b. Distress. Everything went dead wrong.

III. Recovery
   Sin is the wrecker of nations as of men. Always it bends the neck, look at nations of yesterday. Look at our own as compared with broken and southern nations. Look at us in comparison with what we were immediately after the war. We are beginning to talk that devil's language—"America first." Today our heads are bowed in a measure.

III. Recovery
1. Source—God
2. Instrument—human
3. Time—Repentance. We need to repent now that times of refreshing may come.
The Book of Judges covers a period of between four and five centuries. The era was one of chaos and confusion. Its prevailing characteristic was lawlessness. The author sums up the situation in a single sentence: "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." This does not mean, of course, that there was never an effort made to remedy the situation. There were repeated efforts that ended in at least temporary success. In fact, the whole book is a constantly recurring story of relapse, retribution and recovery. Through it all, too, there was slow progress toward a better day. But the fact that stands out as the most prominent characteristic of that time is that it was the golden age of personal liberty. Here for once that high goal of freedom from all restraint for which so many are clamoring today, was realized with amazing fullness.

I

Look at the completeness of this freedom.

1. It was a universal privilege. It did not belong simply to the few. It belonged to the many. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Every man, - that takes in the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the native and the foreigner, the socially elite and the social nobodies. In our less exciting times this absolute freedom belongs only to the gangsters and the racketeers, to the bootleggers and their patrons, to certain corrupt politicians and those who are able to buy their way out of difficulties. For today, as in Shakespeare's time,
"Oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself buys out the law." But in those good days "every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

2. Not only was this freedom from restraint universal, not only did every man do as he pleased, but he did as he pleased in every particular. He accepted no law, human or divine. He did as he pleased in the domestic circle. He reserved the right to wreck his home just as often as he saw fit. He did as he pleased in the social circle. He acted with regard to his own self-expression and self-pleasing, and with no thought of the good of others. There were therefore in those dark days tragic souls like Jepthah who came into the world branded by a shame not his own. Men did as they pleased in the world of commerce. They declared that they were not in business for their health. They possibly had a motto that ran something like this: "Every fellow for himself and the devil take the hindmost." They did what they pleased with regard to the laws of the land. No law was considered as binding. Of course, this does not mean that every man broke every law. It only means that every man broke every law that he desired to break.

This brief summary of the situation is sufficient to indicate that the Book of Judges, though one of the oldest in the Sacred Record, is yet very timely and very up-to-date. In fact, in its spirit it might be a page out of the history of any one of a score of our American cities. We are not quite so lawless as they, yet we are the most lawless nation on the face of the earth. We are rich and increased in goods. It costs four and one half billions of dollars yearly to run our federal government. Our automobile industry amounts to five billions of dollars, but our crime industry, if we may believe a recent article in the North
American Review of Reviews, is more than both of these together. The biggest business in America today, measured in dollars and cents, is the crime business. Surely a book that deals with lawlessness has a message for ourselves.

II

"Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

How had such a situation as this come into existence? Here was a veritable orgy of personal liberty. How did the people come into possession of such treasure? Did they find it as a result of a long and patient process of religious education, or did they drift into it through utter neglect? Was this freedom a child of the light or a child of the darkness? Was it born of a great spiritual awakening or was it born of a tragic spiritual relapse? How had these people become free?

The author leaves us in no doubt as to the answer to this question. Their casting off of all restraint was born primarily of their forgetting and forsaking God. They first rebelled against God and the issue of that rebellion was the casting off of restraint in every department of life. That is always the case. The wise man spoke sober truth when he declared: "Where there is no vision the people cast off restraint." The only sure foundation for the individual as well as for the social life, is the fear of God. To fling away from God is to fling away from those fundamental integrities upon which civilization must rest.

For the citizen to make self-pleasing the test of all his conduct is to turn his face fully toward anarchy. To have an ordered society it is absolutely necessary that we renounce the right to do in all particulars as we please. But it is the refusal
of so many of our respectable and well-to-do citizens to realize this, that accounts in large measure for the tragic reign of lawlessness that prevails today. There are those that have no respect for the rights of private property. There are even those who have no respect for the sacredness of human life, but these are vastly in the minority. There are multitudes that have no respect for a law written into the Constitution that declares that the United States government shall not engage in the liquor business. These flout this law by patronizing the bootleggers. In so doing they not only violate the law, but in proportion to their social prestige help to make the violation of the law seem respectable.

Just as self-will in the state is the essence of political anarchy, so self-will in the Kingdom of God is the very essence of spiritual anarchy. All sin has its source in the determination of man to do as he pleases. Why did the prodigal son go into a far country? It was not to grieve his father. It was not to wreck himself. He went into the far country because he thought he would have a freer and gladder life in the world beyond the hills. He did not wish to hurt anybody, but he was willing to run the risk of doing so in order to get to do as he pleased.

Why does the bootletter sell his wares? It is not that he wishes to make drunkards. It is not because he wants to wreck a single human life. It is not that he necessarily desires to discredit all law. But he is willing to run the risk of doing all this in order to get to do as he pleases. Why did that young chap bring shame upon the girl that loved and trusted him? It was not because he wished to make an outcast of her. It was not that he wished to shame and grieve those who loved her. But he was willing, if need be, to pay that great price in order to do as he pleased.
Sin in its essence is self-pleasing, the casting off of restraint. Complete personal liberty, therefore, is anarchy, spiritually and politically. It is born not of faith in God, but of complete rejection of God.

III

It is interesting to notice next what was the outcome of this freedom. What kind of a social order was the result? Did these people find the happiness for which they sought? Is the Book of Judges a story of Paradise Regained? Did self-pleasing, complete independence of all law, bring these people of the long ago into a Utopia? We are compelled to answer that such was not the case. They bought the freedom that they had at a great price.

1. Their casting off of restraint brought individual and national disintegration. Sin always results in a disorganized and discordant personality. The entrance of sin means the entrance of civil war. No sooner does a man turn from God than there begins a conflict between his lower and his higher self. He finds that the thing that he longs to accomplish, the heights that he feign would scale, somehow mock him. He finds also that the thing that he hates, that he loathes, that he vowed in his soul that he would never do, - that that very thing he does. He cries desperately, "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." "My soul cleaveth unto the dust, quicken Thou me."

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factions. They lost all sense of oneness. They fought one against another. Brother thirsted for the blood of brother. The little tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped off the face of the earth through these devastating civil wars.

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3. The final result growing naturally out of this weakness was defeat and failure. These people, in seeking to be absolutely free, became little better than slaves. The times were so lawless that the roadways grew up because no man dared travel them.
Legitimate industry was at a standstill. Even a brave man like Gideon had to hide himself away in order to get to thrash his bit of wheat. Poverty and want stalked abroad. Everywhere was fear and terror. The people were not happy. They were wretched and in sore distress.

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IV

But this picture is not all dark. If there is relapse and if there is retribution following upon its heels, there is also recovery. How did this recovery come about?

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their cry of need and brought about their deliverance.

And what a hopeful word is this for us in our tempestuous times. There is certainly much in our modern life to distress any man who is not spiritually blind. We are passing through a tremendous moral slump. The forces of righteousness are not advancing with the sure and conquering step that we feel that they ought. The supreme need of the hour is a great spiritual awakening. We need desperately a new sense of God. It is God and God only that is sufficient for our individual and social remaking. It is just this deliverance that He is eagerly waiting to work. Let us see to it that he gets His opportunity through us. Let us come to Him in the faith that "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of him whose heart is perfect toward Him."
JUDGES

The Book of Judges is one full of the classic battle. It is a very human book. The characters that we meet on its pages have an appealing naturalness about them. There is much of moral failure and decline, also there is repentance and returning to the Lord. The time covered by the book is nearly five hundred years.

There are three divisions in the book. There is, first, the introduction which covers the first chapter. Second there is the main body of the story, chapters 2 to 16 inclusive. Then there is an appendix which includes the remaining five chapters of the book. In the second chapter, verses 11 to 15, the author states the real purpose of writing the book. All the stories that he tells in the following chapters are told because of their bearing upon this purpose. The message of the book may be summed up with unusual accuracy in three words: relapse, retribution and recovery.

I
Relapse.

After the death of Joshua, the decline of the people over whom he had ruled was very rapid. The secret of this decline was their departure from God. It seems of course that their marvelous history would have made it impossible for them to have for-
gotten so readily but it seems that there is nothing more easily forgotten, even to this day, than a spiritual experience. Those of you who are familiar with Pilgrim's Progress will recall that the author says that Forgetful Green is the most dangerous spot on all the road from the City of Destruction to Mt. Zion.

The process of their relapse can be easily traced. The first step was compromise. They were to sweep the Canaanites with their gods from off the earth. But this they failed to do. They made a partial conquest. By and by they came to regard their heathen neighbors with easy toleration.

This is the usual way of decline. We do not, as a rule, plunge into sin all at once. We do not go to the depths all at once. Dr. Jekyll does not become Mr. Hyde in a single day. The first step is compromise and easy toleration of the questionable and the forbidden.

Pilate affords a good example of the peril of compromise. Jesus was brought before him under the accusation of treason. It was his business to determine whether He was guilty or innocent. If He were guilty, then He must be punished. If He were innocent, He was to go free. He decided at once that He was innocent but instead of sending Him free, he said he would chastise Him and let Him go. Having taken this step towards compromise, the next step, that of complete surrender becomes very easy, if not inevitable.

2. The second step in their moral relapse was admiration. First they tolerated the evil then they came to admire it. The final step was conformity. Having come to love the heathenish practices of their neighbors, it was quite natural that they should soon begin to engage in them. Thus they came to utter moral relapse.
They came to that place that is so dangerous and deadly, where it is said that every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

II
Retribution

Now this moral relapse brought with it its own penalty. No man can forsake God without paying a terrible price and what is true of the individual is true also of a nation. The wise man was right when he said "Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people". The word 'reproach' here is one that means to bow the head and bend the shoulders. That is, sin bends the back and bows the head of any people.

What did this relapse do to these people?

1. It destroyed their unity. During the days of Joshua they made common cause against a common foe. They were under the leadership of a common God. It was He that welded their twelve tribes into a single nation. They were united under His banner.

But when they turned from God, they turned from one another. When they forgot their relation to Him, they forgot their relationship to each other. They were no longer fighting shoulder to shoulder for a common cause. They began to pursue different aims and worse still, they began to fight among themselves. The tribe of Benjamin was almost exterminated by civil war.

Now this is a tragedy that has taken place among the people of God multitudes of times since that far off day. We have wasted some of our best ammunition during the years gone by fighting one another instead of making common cause against a common foe. I have seen individual churches almost exterminated spiritually
as was the tribe of Benjamin, by fighting among themselves. Any church of considerable size brings together people of varying temperaments and social standing. There is only one way that these differing types may be welded into a brotherhood and that is by the spirit of Christ. To become divided from Him is to be divided from each other.

2. With this division came a natural consequence and that is weakness. As long as they were united, they conquered. Joshua told the story when he said, "Not a man has been able to stand before you." But now all is changed. From being victors, they became victims. From strength, they were reduced to weakness. No longer did they conquer. On the contrary, they were completely cowed and overcome.

3. On the heels of their defeat had come a state of lawlessness that amounted almost to complete anarchy. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." It seems that there was great freedom but they were not free. They were little better than slaves. They dared not travel the highways. Should they do so, there was every chance that they would be murdered and robbed. The very roadways grew up, we are told, because they were no longer travelled.

Not only was travelling dangerous but every form of legitimate labor was performed in fear. When Gideon received his call, he was secretly threshing out a bit of wheat in order to hide it from the robber bands that he knew were likely to swoop down upon him at anytime. Against these robber bands they were defenseless as they had even been robbed of their weapons. By doing as they pleased, they had lost everything.
4. In the wake of this trying condition there quite naturally came wretchedness. The story says that the people were distressed. They thought that by compromising with evil, by turning away from God, by throwing off restraint that they would find happiness. But such is not the case. It never is. They found division, weakness, defeat, slavery and wretchedness.

Such a course brings exactly the same results to this day. It brings them to the nation, it brings them to the individual. Sampson, just as the nation, began a course of compromise and what did his sin do for him? It robbed him of his power. It robbed him of his vision. It robbed him of his freedom. In the end it robbed him of his life. And the law of moral retribution has not changed. The wages of sin is death yesterday, today and forever.

III
Restoration.

But though these people had forsaken God, He did not forsake them. He stood them, as He stands today waiting to be recognized, waiting to be appealed to, eager to help whenever we make it possible for Him to do so. This book tells us again and again how God restored His wayward and sinning people. What were the steps in their restoration?

1. The people themselves had to repent of their sin. This they would never do until they reached the very depths of degradation. But when they got to their wicked worst, then they would begin to remember their past history. They would begin to think of God again. This would lead to their turning from their idolatry. They would appeal to Him for help.
This appeal was always heard. For the God of Judges is a God of mercy. He forgave their sins and sent them a leader who would lead them out of their bondage into a new freedom. This freedom they would enjoy until the Judge was dead then they would begin to forget their former degradation. Then they would begin to repeat their former sins. Then they would plunge into the abyss once more.

Thus you see the Book of Judges is a story of a series of lapses and recoveries. The wanderings of a people from God and their being brought back by the power of God. But that is not simply the story of Judges. It is the story of the spiritual history of the world. Civilization hasn't moved forward with a continuous upward stride. There has been many a relapse but taken as a whole, the trend has always been upward.

There is much that is present in our present day. If we look at the present only, we are likely to be discouraged but it is heartening to remember that it is when they have reached their wicked worst that God has again and again made bare His arm. Twenty centuries ago the world had reached the state of moral depth almost beyond our power to imagine. It was then that Jesus was born. When all Europe seemed destined to turn to spiritual need, Martin Luther began the Reformation. When religion in England was little more than an exploded theory, then the great revival under Wesley began.

Three or four years ago a man wrote a book called "If Winter Comes". It was only a part of the full sentence- "If Winter Comes, Spring is Sure to Follow". So it is with a moral
winter time. Some of us feel that the atmosphere is a bit frosty now. There is surely a way to get out of winter into the spring. There is a way for the individual and a way for the nation. The road that leads out is a road of repentance. "Return unto me and I will return unto you saith the Lord" "I will forgive your iniquities and heal your backslidings, and I have loved thee with an everlasting love."
I. Relapse
1. Forgetfulness
2. Carelessness
3. Compromise
4. Anarchy - Every man as he pleases

What criminal element want to keep
6. License - Can drive on any dirt road
9. Poison at any speed, 9 feet

II. Retreat
1. Loss of direction - Become divided
2. Loss of vision - Direction - Strength
3. Loss of vision - Because? Look purpose
4. Loss of illusion - Anarchy
True action of individualism

III. Recovery
4. Sense of guilt
2. Reflection
2. Response of God
6. Seat a winner
6. New deliverance
4. Savor these victories
4. Relapse and recovery
6. Always this means -
JUDGES

The book of Judges is an exceedingly human book. It is of the very stuff of which life is made. It is not of one color. It is as mixed as we are. There is tragedy in it, and also triumph. There is heroism and cowardice. There is shameful defeat and amazing victory. The book does not march breast forward all the way. In fact, its story may be summed up in three words: Relapse, Retribution, and Recovery.

But this need not greatly amaze us nor can we look upon these ancient faltering, fighting, and failing people as different from ourselves. Relapse, retribution, and recovery is largely the history of our world. We have made some progress though that progress is not so evident today as we thought it was a few years ago. This is the case because the progress we have made as been too much "of the earth, earthy." We have made so much greater progress in material things than we have in spiritual. Our shrewdness has outrun our good will. Therefore, we have overdeveloped our capacity to kill one another. Unless our good will keeps pace with our material progress, civilization must inevitably destroy itself.

But assuming that we have made progress as a world, that progress has not been in one unbroken line. It has been a story of relapse, retribution, and recovery. That was the history of the Hebrew people during the same five hundred years that this book covers. It was the history of the Hebrew people as a whole. It has been the history of the church. There was a great revival at Pentecost, followed by the dark ages. There was the revival under Luther and under Wesley. There was the great revival under Charles G.
Finney and the one under D. L. Moody. Through the years it has been a story of relapse, retribution, and recovery. It has been the history of most of our lives individually. We are not always at our best. The best that can be said for some of us is what was said of the Arizona outlaw who died with his boots on. His friends were trying to hit upon a suitable epitaph. They finally decided on this: "He was not as bad sometimes as he was at others."

I

RELAPSE. The author gives us a summary of his book in the second chapter, verses ten to fifteen inclusive. The first relapse came soon after the death of Joshua. You can see from this second chapter that Judges takes up the story where Joshua leaves off. Here we read that the Israelites remained loyal to God during the days of Joshua and during the days of those others that had known Joshua and had been associated with him. But when he and this company of men had passed, the people suffered a relapse.

It is easy to guess how this came about. In the first place the older generation of which Joshua was a part had failed in some measure properly to train their own children. I can imagine that having won their place in the sun they began to be at ease. They grew complacent. They refused to complete the conquest of the land. They became easily tolerant of other gods. The new generation lacked the moral earnestness of the old because they had not been so well trained and because they had found life too easy.

The next step was natural. Living in close touch with pagan gods, they fell easily into idolatry. Little by little, they forgot God altogether. Forgetting God they began to go their own way. Here is a word that we find over and over in this book: "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." What a day in which to live! Surely this was the golden age of personal liberty.
This reserving of the right to do as one pleases was widespread. It was not the privilege of the few but of the many. It belonged to all sorts and conditions of men. Every man, says the story—the high and the low, the old and the young, the privileged and the underprivileged. "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Every man made his pleasure the law of his life. Every man sought to be independent of God.

Not only was this freedom all but universal; it referred to the whole of life. Every man did as he pleased in every particular. That does not mean that every man broke every law. It does not mean that every man sought to wreck every one of the Ten Commandments, but it does mean that he broke every law that he desired to break. Here then was a veritable orgy of self-pleasing. Here was a course of life that is of the very essence of sin, for the fountain source of all sin is saying, "My will, and not Thine, be done."

II

RETRIBUTION. What was the result of this wilfulness, of this utter rejection of God?

1. It resulted in division both for the individual and for the nation. In the Genesis story when man sinned, he lost God. When he lost God he lost also the unified personality. He began to be at war with himself. Sin always makes for inner division. Paul in the seventh chapter of Romans shows us a man at war with himself. That is true of every man that sins. "My soul cleaveth unto the dust," cries an ancient psalmist. "Quickly thou me according to Thy word." That is, there is that in him, as there is that in us, that reaches for the mud, but we can never be satisfied because there is also that in us that makes us reach for the stars.

Just as they became divided individually they became divided as a nation. They were no longer a united people. Each seeking his own ends, they failed to seek the common good. As they fought themselves individually,
so they fought each other as tribes. So bitter were the civil wars of this period that the Tribe of Benjamin was almost exterminated. Losing God, they lost their unity.

2. Being divided they were weakened. There is no measuring what one man can do if he is gripped by one single purpose. A man of ordinary strength who can say, "This one thing I do," becomes a creature of power, but the mightiest man in the world is little better than a weakling if he is divided. Coleridge planned enough books to have filled a library, but all he left was a few glittering fragments. He was weakened by his lack of purpose.

3. These tribes warring among themselves were weakened. They became so weakened that they were an easy prey for their enemies. Therefore, from being conquerors they came to be conquered. They became the playthings of their enemies. They were robbed and plundered. All their arms were taken away so that they could not fight back. There was not a blacksmith in all Israel so that arms could not be made. When some daring man raised a bit of a crop— even so bold a soul as Gideon—he had to hide himself in order to thresh it.

Being thus plundered and robbed, they were starved and wretched. All commerce died. The very roadways grew up because no man dared to travel them. Every man set out to do as he pleased, but in so doing, he did not find freedom. He found slavery. That was the case in that day. It is the case every day. The plight of our wretched world in this moment is due to the fact that so many have turned their backs on God and have made up their minds at any cost to do as they please.

This book is a record of God's punishment of man's sin, but as you see throughout God does not punish directly. He doest not have to. Man is not so much punished for his sin as he is punished by his sin. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." When an individual or a nation makes
self-will the law of his life, that nation and that individual always suffers. A terrible retribution never fails to follow.

III

RECOVERY. Now when things got at their wicked worst, when men grew desperate, when the way got so dark that they felt they must have light, then they gave God a chance. They turned back and gave Him the opportunity that He was always offering, always seeking, but that they refused to recognize. It is when they decided that there was no getting on without God that there always came a recovery. There are certain facts about these recoveries that are permanent and abiding.

1. This recovery for the individual and for the nation was always wrought by God. There is nothing that the Bible teaches more plainly than that the prime mover in our salvation is God. That is a truth that haunts us from the first page of Genesis to the end of the Book. When the first pair had sinned and had lost God, they did not set themselves to seeking, saying "Oh my God, where art Thou," but it was God Who set Himself to seeking them, saying, "Adam, where art Thou?" Always this fact is true; "We love Him because He first loved us."

2. But while God is always the prime mover in our deliverance, while He was the prime mover in the deliverance of His people in the long ago, that deliverance was always wrought through a human agency. That is a fact that we need to bear in mind. I was in a large empty church for a service not long ago, and the preacher called on a good old brother to lead in prayer. He prayed in a loud voice as he pounded the seat, "Oh Lord, go out into the highways and byways and compel them to come." But it so happens that this is exactly what the Lord told us to do, and this good brother was
having the effrontery of saying, "Lord, you do it yourself." If there is
anything done for the salvation of this present world today, we are the
ones that are going to have to do it.

It is interesting to notice too the kind of folks that God can use.
Here is a strange assortment of heroes. Had I been picking them, I am sure
I would have left some out. Here for instance is Deborah, a Joan of Arc
of the long ago. She was a married woman, a mother. But when things got at
their wicked worst, she dared to make a stand and through her God brought
deliverance.

Then there was another even less hopeful a man by the name of Shamgar.
He had no backing at the first. It would seem that he had nothing but a vast
indignation and a wreckless courage. His only weapon was an ox-gode, but he
fell to with that with such high-hearted determination that other men who
were waiting for somebody to lead rallied to him, and even an ox-driver
became a hero and a deliverer.

Then there was Gideon, cautious and courageous. He was astonished when
God called him. "The Lord be with thee, thou mighty man of valor!" Gideon
looked up with mingled astonishment and indignation. "The Lord with me?"
he asked. "Why are we in the miserable plight that we are in?" God used
to could do something. Why can't He do it now?" Then, when the Lord told
him he was going to do something through Gideon himself he had to have
proof in order to believe it. When he had the proof, the crowd rallied to
him. Then Gideon sent back all the cowards. Then he sent back all the fool-
hardy. Then with three hundred cautious and courageous men he won the
fight.

One of the most tragic characters in the book is Sampson. His life is
typical of the people of his day. He went to Gaza for a holiday, fell in
love in Gaza. That love robbed him of his power, robbed him of his vision,
robbed him of his freedom, but at last he recovered enough to slay men in
These are not the kind of heroes that we would choose today. They belong to an iron age, but they had this in common with those that God can use even now. They cared. They took the needs of their people to heart. Second, they had a high faith that God was equal to the most hopeless condition. Third, girded with that faith, they dared make a stand. Cowardice is contagious. If one man takes to his heels, somebody will follow him, but courage is contagious too. If one man makes a stand for God and the right somebody will follow him. Thus God worked and still works His deliverances.
It is going to be necessary to use a little different method in our study this evening from the one before followed. This grows out of the fact that First and Second Samuel are practically one book. This one book is too large for a single lecture. However, in as much as it is made up of the lives of three men we can best understand it by studying those three men separately.

The three men whose biographies practically constitute First and Second Samuel are Samuel, Saul and David. Tonight we will study the first of these, Samuel. He is the man from whom the books took their name and his story constitutes a large part of the book of First Samuel.

First Samuel opens with a picture of an ancient home. There is a husband and two wives. One wife is a mother. The other is not. We are afforded here some brief glimpse of the bitterness and heartache growing out of polygamy.

But Hannah is the favorite wife. But though she is the better loved she is not a happy woman. The big dream and longing of her life is for children. She regarded the privilege of motherhood as the highest privilege that could come to a human soul. And when little Samuel was born he was welcome. He came with his chubby baby hands full of springtime and his cry had in it the very music of the song that the angels sang.

When you set out to account for Samuel, all that he did and all that he became, you have to give the largest part of the credit to his mother. And that is not true simply of Samuel only. It is true of most of the men who have either blessed or wrought ruin in the world. The mother of Lord Byron was a proud and wicked woman. She had a temper that was terrific. The truth of the matter is, she died of rage that was brought on by getting angry over an upholsterer's bill. With a mother like this it is not to be wondered at that Byron was not a saint.

But Samuel's big asset was his mother. When she held him in her arms she said, "For this child I prayed." She was a praying woman. Prayer was the habit of her life. Prayer was her power. It was the secret of the wonderful blessing that she gave to the world.

Not only was she a praying mother but she was a wise mother. She dedicated her child to the Lord. She vowed that she would give him to the Lord before he was born and when he came she did not forget her promise. She said, "I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."

Happy is the child of such a mother. Before Hudson Taylor was born his father and mother got the burden of China's lost millions upon their hearts. They asked for a child that he might go and preach to China. They knew they could never go themselves. And Hudson Taylor was the answer to that prayer. And China Inland Mission is the outcome of this man's labors. It numbers missionaries and workers today by the thousands and it is all the outcome of one praying home.
Not only did Hannah give her child to the Lord but she dedicated him in his infancy. She did not believe that it was necessary for the child to spend the springtime of life in sin. She did not think, as some seem to, that a child must go wrong before it can go right. She believed that it was her privilege to have a son who was God's from the first moment of morning till the last ray of light at eventide.

And how wise she was. The story says that she made him a little coat and carried it, year by year, for him to wear in the temple service. She did not make a coat to fit Eli. She realized that Samuel's religion must be the religion of a child and not the religion of an adult. Now, a child is not supposed to be strong in theology but he can be strong in the love of Christ none the less.

Samuel not only owed much to his mother but he owed no small debt to his kind and patient teacher, Eli. Eli and Samuel worked and slept in the temple. Eli was a very old man and Samuel was a very young lad. It was early April associating with late December. But Eli was a great help to the bright and pious and growing boy.

We say this for Eli in spite of the fact that he made a horrible failure in the rearing of his own children. The first message that Samuel ever delivered was a message of doom to the house of Eli. And the cause of the ruin of his house was this, that his sons corrupted themselves and he restrained them not. That is, Eli was a good man but he was soft. There was not enough of strength, of force, of ruggedness in him.

There are those today and their name is legion, who fancy that Eli's type of piety is the highest type. They think that anything like sternness is inconsistent with Christian character. I do not know whether Susanna Wesley would be allowed to speak in a mothers' club of today. In fact, I fancy that she would be shouted down. She is too firm. She compels her children to cry softly and makes it an inflexible rule that they are never to have anything at all if they cry for it. Softness may be exceedingly pleasing. It also may be, as it was in this case, exceedingly ruinous. This good man, Eli, though a great help to Samuel, wrecked his own boys through his softness.

Now, it was natural for a boy trained as Samuel was to come into a vital religious experience. When we are told of Samuel's call the story says that "as yet he knew not the Lord". That means, I take it, that as yet his faith was in large measure an inherited faith. He believed in God but he had not yet come into a vital experience of God. But he had that genuine faith that made it possible for God to speak to him. We read that at this time the word of the Lord was rare because there was no open vision. But the reason the word of the Lord was rare was because there was no one prepared to hear it. Samuel, through the preparation that came from his mother and from his teacher was made ready to hear God's voice.

Now, because he was ready that voice came. It is a very beautiful and very simple little story, this of the calling of Samuel. He had lain down to sleep when he heard his name called. It is a beautiful fact that God knows your name and mine. He know the name of every child. He knows where you sleep, where you live, where you suffer. He knows you just as you are. "He calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out."
So He called Samuel and Samuel mistaking the voice of God for a human voice, hurried to his old teacher and said, "Here am I". This quick response on the part of Samuel showed that he had learned at least one lesson and that is the lesson of obedience. I fancy that the child who has learned to obey human authority finds it far easier to respond to divine authority than the one who has not.

It is a significant fact, also, that Samuel at first did not understand the divine voice. He thought it was only the call of a human voice. That mistake is made often. You read a certain book; you hear a certain sermon; you face a certain need; you feel the stirring within you of a desire to respond to that need. But you account for the stirring of that desire in terms of the human only. In reality it is God speaking to you, calling to you, urging you into the path along which He wants you to walk.

As it is true that we sometimes mistake the divine voice for the human, I think it is also true that we sometimes mistake the human voice for the divine. We take the call of man for the call of God. I do not know that the mistake is made so dreadfully often. Did you ever see an instance where a young fellow was led into study for the ministry, for instance, because it was the desire of his mother or his father or of his teacher or of some faithful and godly friend? Or sometimes we hear the call of the rewards of the world and fancy that it is the voice of God calling to us. Happy is the soul that can distinguish God's voice.

Now, there are times when we need help. Samuel needed help from one who was older and wiser than himself. How many young fellows struggling with the problem of the call to preach, how many young girls trying to decide as to what God wanted them to do with their lives, have needed such wise and consecrated advice. Samuel came to Eli and Eli, when he heard his story, said to him, "God is speaking to you". Then this wise man told him what was to be his attitude. He said, "When He calls again you say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Yes, Eli was wise in spite of his failure. He was good in spite of his failure. He knew that the only one to whom God could really speak was the one who was in a listening attitude. The reason God is so distant and seemingly so far off from many of us is because we take no time to listen to God. The psalmist's resolution was this, that he would incline his ear, that he would hear what the Lord would say.

And not only must we listen but we must listen with the determination to obey. "Thy servant heareth." That means "Thy servant stands willing to respond, to do whatever he is called upon to do." It is to the willing that God reveals his will. There is no use in His revealing His will to any other. But to those who really seek to know the will of God in order that they may do it, soon or late, somehow, God will certainly make His will known. For the word of the Lord is sure. "If any man wills to do His will he shall know it."

Now, when Samuel so responded God made known His will. He did not give him a map of his entire life. He did not tell him every thing that He wanted him to do in the future. But He told him the next step to be taken. He committed to him a message that He wanted to deliver. There were many other messages that this prophet was called to deliver at a later date, but only one message was revealed to him at this moment.
And the delivery of that message, mark me, was a sharp test. It was a message of doom. It was a message that he knew would break the heart of his old teacher and his old friend that he so much loved. But it was not his to consider consequences. It was his simply to speak what the Lord had bidden him speak. So he told Eli of the doom that God had pronounced upon his house. And if you doubt the goodness of old Eli you have only to hear his response to that sentence of doom which meant the wrecking of his fondest hopes. What did he say? He didn't cry out against God as unjust and harsh. He said, "The Lord do as seemeth Him good." He was submissive to the divine will.

And the execution of this sentence that Samuel was called to pronounce followed very shortly. Eli's two sons followed the ark of the Lord into battle against the Philistines. Both the sons were killed and the ark captured. And when Eli heard the news he fell in a faint from the prophet's throne and broke his neck. And thus ended the tragic story of a man, who, while a good man, wrecked his own home by his too great softness.

For the following twenty years Israel was without a judge. During this time we hear little or nothing of Samuel. But while we hear nothing it is evident that Samuel was busy working at the task of being a prophet. At the end of twenty years his fame had so spread that all Israel knew that a prophet had risen. He had become so famous and so trusted that the people came together and made him Judge.

Samuel was the last of the Judges. He was the last and the greatest. During the years of his judgeship he showed himself faithful. He was a hard worker. He was wise. He was consecrated. He lived in fellowship with God. He did the utmost in his power to bring the kingdom of God to be a fact among the men whom he served.

But in spite of his toil dissatisfaction arose. That dissatisfaction became so pronounced that at last the people came together and demanded a king. There were various reasons assigned for this demand. One of them was that Samuel's sons, who had become Judges, walked not in the steps of their father. A second reason and I am sure the most dominant reason, was that they wanted to be like the nations round about them. That was the demand, "Make us a king like the nations round about us."

When Samuel heard this it broke his heart. It meant the wrecking of his fondest hopes. It meant the repudiation of himself. He learned that "a foundation fickle and unsure has he that builds upon the common favor".

But in the midst of his dissatisfaction God spoke to him. And He tells Samuel that it is not the prophet who has been deposed, but that He himself is the one who has been rebelled against. And that taking the judgeship out of the hands of the prophet was only secondary. The prophet was God's representative. Their real rebellion was against God himself. God was the king. In asking for a king they virtually renounced the kingship of the Lord.

And how modern is the reason. They wanted to be like the nations round about them, but God had called them to be a peculiar people. They were to be different. Their difference was to consist fundamentally in this, that they were to have God as their king. To renounce God was not to become worse that the nations of the earth but to become like them.
Truly it is a sad day when a church becomes like the world. God expects us to be different. If we really make Christ our king we will be different, but if we turn from Him we will not be. Samson true to his vow is invincible but Samson unfaithful is like any other man. Not weaker than any other man, understand, but just like him. That is bad enough. That is so bad that it means utter ruin.

Now, what did this deposed and dishonored judge do? I know what many of us would have done. We would have withdrawn quietly and uncomplaining to our homes and spent our time in railing against the people that deposed us and knocking the man that was to take our place. But what did Samuel? The man that took his place, you remember, was named Saul. Saul was young. Young enough to have been easily Samuel's son. How did Samuel take it when he was promoted above him?

I will tell you. He took it like a christian. He took it like the great saint that he was. When this young man, who truly did not have half his wisdom, came to the feast, for instance, Samuel didn't sneer at him. He didn't seek to humiliate him. He gave him the seat of honor at the table. It takes a man of some bigness to do that. A pygmy wouldn't do it in a thousand years.

Then when Saul was actually on the throne Samuel, instead of standing in his way put forth his utmost ability to help him. He advised him. When he went wrong he prayed for him, went to see him, rebuked him. And when he utterly failed he mourned for him as only one can whose heart is really broken.

Now, if you had a job and were doing it quite well and a young Samuel were to come along and be appointed in your place, what would you do about it? Would you honor him or seek to humiliate him? Would you help him or would you knock on him? Would you pray for him or would you go home and pout and say, "I'll have nothing more to do with him"? It you can give up your position and give it up as one who has failed in some measure, then devoutly and earnestly pray for your successor then I confess that you show the characteristics of a man who knows Jesus Christ.

Not only was Samuel's attitude to his successor one of love and helpfulness but such was his attitude to the people who had turned against him and had taken his judgeship away from him. What did he say? "God forbid that I should sin in ceasing to pray for you." "You have given me a bit of a raw deal", he said, "but that will not interfere with my attitude".

On one occasion I failed to give a man an office in the church that he thought he had a right to expect. As a result he came to me declaring the intention to give up the other position that he held. I did not persuade him to keep it. I simply said, "Alright, if you think it is sufficient justification for you before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ for you to say that you are angry with the Pastor it is alright". But to give up for such a reason is sin. Samuel knew it. "God forbid that I should sin by ceasing to pray." 

Not only did he help them by his prayers but he helped them by teaching them. He said, "I will show you the good and the right way." The truth of the matter is, I am perfectly confident that Samuel's largest usefulness came after he had been put out of the judgeship. From then on
From then on he became their preacher and the teacher and the pastor of the nation. He founded schools and by his ministry he kept the nation from going to pieces.

And I read the funeral notice one day. In fact I got a glimpse of the funeral service myself. Listen: "And Samuel died and all Israel gathered together and lamented him". And I heard a man say, "Yes, I wanted a king but I must say that Brother Samuel was more kingly than the king. It will be a colder and a sadder world since he's gone." And there is a vast company and their faces are wet with tears. They have come together to mourn the loss of a preacher. And all Israel mourned him. And had he thought more of his own pride than he did of God and right and duty he might have died in rage like a rat poisoned in a hole. And none but his immediate family would have known the difference and they would have been relieved. But he made his very loss into gain. He determined that nothing should rob him of the privilege of serving and when he died a nation burst into tears. May God grant such Christlike character to you and me.
The Message of the Books

Samuel

For the past three weeks we have been studying the biographies of the men whose stories are told in the first and second books of Samuel. Samuel, Saul and David are made to pass before us with wonderful vividness. The writer makes us intimately and personally acquainted with them. We see them in their trials and triumphs, in their victories and in their disasters. What is the message of the book as a whole?

I think the teachings of both books are summed up in that wonderful song of Hannah in the beginning of the second chapter of First Samuel. And the teaching of that beautiful song may be put into a single sentence. "The Lord reigneth." The old Hebrew writers made much of that fact. "The Lord reigneth," said the psalmist, "let the earth rejoice." "The Lord reigneth", he said in another place, "let the people tremble."

The kingship of God is a fact of which the modern man does not make very much. There was a time when it was the supreme fact of religion. The simple idea of Calvinism was the kingship of God. That was the simple thought of Puritanism. Now, I know there was much in Puritanism that was harsh and ugly. It has been known as the hard religion. Possibly there is much truth in the name but ours is in danger of degenerating into the soft religion.

This fact of the kingship of God made those who emphasized it about the brawniest and bravest spiritual giants that have been in the world since the apostles. A Puritan, in his realization of God's kingship over him, did actually tremble. He was a man full of reverence and also full of strength. He was a man stern and humble. He groveled in the dust before his Maker but he set his foot on the neck of his king. His song was, "Oh, how I fear thee, living God, with deep and tenderest fears, And worship thee with trembling hope and penitential tears."

The thought of a holy God, present and reigning in human affairs and in human hearts, makes for reverence and godly fear. It also makes for joy. No wonder the psalmist said, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice." There is much that is disturbing and distracting. There is much that is rotten and wicked. The devil seems to be having his way in many things but it is a gladsome fact to think upon that God has not left the world to the devices of the devil. He has not abdicated the throne. He is neither distant nor dead. He is here. He is reigning. That is the reason that the poet spoke truth when he said, "Right forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch about His own." The old conception of the book of Samuel is of God, living, present, reigning, moving irresistibly on toward the establishment of a reign of righteousness upon the earth.

But what is the nature of the kingship of God? God's kingship over man and kingship over this physical universe are not the same. God has no trouble with anything but man. The weather is never in rebellion. You and I are often in rebellion against the weather but the Lord can run the weather without us. He can run the stars without us. He has His was among them perfectly. (Addison's poem) "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork", but the heavens don't deserve any credit for that fact. They have no will in the matter. The stars deserve no more honor for twinkling in the night sky than the
The message of the books - Samuel #2

nettle does for stinging. They each obey the will of God, not consciously but unconsciously and by force.

But God's kingship over man is more than physical. God exercises a physical kingship. He is able, as Hannah tells us, to make rich and to make poor. He is able to exalt and to abase. He is able to kill and to make alive. This He can do by the power of His might. But there is a limit to His kingship. With all His might He can not force the love of His weakest child. He can not enter into my life to possess it unless I will it so.

Now, God's real kingship over men must be a kingship over wills and not over bodies. His kingship over will is not one of force. It is a moral kingship. That is, it is a kingship that is based upon motives. Before God's kingship can be complete in the world every heart must acknowledge Him, every soul must bow of its own free will to the sway of His love.

Of course, it is needless to say that that day has not yet come. God has been moving toward it from the dawning of history. Christ taught His disciples to pray for it - "Thy kingdom come". And the petition was not only a prayer but a prophecy. It makes clear to us the blessed fact that one day Jesus shall be the world's King; that Christ shall reign from the rivers to the ends of the earth.

Now, since God's kingship over man is a moral kingship it is up to you and me to decide whether He shall truly reign over ourselves or not. That was the decision that belonged to the three central characters that we have just studied. Samuel, Saul and David all had the privilege of choosing for themselves whether they should accept the kingship of God in their own lives or whether they should reject it. And their lives teach us the results both of accepting and of rejecting.

For instance, Saul elected to reject the will of God. What was the result? Saul lost his peace. He was plunged into despair. He became little better than a madman. He led his nation to defeat. He lost his crown. He plunged out into eternity stained with his own blood.

Saul's rebellion meant his own ruin. That's what it means to every man. Saul's rebellion did not mean the overthrow of God's kingdom. You may rebel against God but you do not thereby unseat Him. Your rebellion will surely mean your own ruin but it will not mean the defeat of God in His final victory in this world.

Not only will your rebellion not defeat the triumph of God's purpose but He will use your very sin for resulting triumph. God certainly does make the wrath of man to praise Him. I am sure that you could recall instance after instance in your own experience. Take this story for instance. Here lies a man dead upon the shores of the Red Sea. Once he was the king of the mightiest nation that was then in the world. Now he is nothing more than an uncrowned corpse. And what is God's word to this man? "For this purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show forth my wrath in thee."

That sounds a fearful thing to say, does it not? Just what does it mean? It does not mean that God sent this man into the world for the one purpose of wrecking him. He longed to make him a monument not of wrath but of love, but pharaoh rebelled. God continued to pray and Pharaoh con-
continued to rebel. At last there was but one use that God could make of him. He could fling him across your path and mine and let him say through his lips white with death, "What a terrible thing it is to persistently rebel against God." 

So it is with Saul. Saul's sin meant utter ruin to himself but the story of his life is full of instructions for you and me. God would have used him in a far finer and better way if Saul would have allowed him. But Saul refused. But even in his rebellion God makes use of him for his final triumph of righteousness. He puts him here in this conspicuous book and we can never look at the pathetic ruin without realizing what a terrible thing it is to refuse to obey God.

What we learn of God's government in the life of Saul we also learn in the life of the nation. When Israel called for a king Samuel was grieved. He thought the people had rebelled against himself but God said, "It is not you that they have rejected. They have rejected me." And God therefore allowed them to have a king. He will not and can not force Himself upon the individual and the nation. When they refused the best He gave them the second best. At last when they continued to rebel He scattered them over the face of the earth and destroyed them. Their rebellion meant their ruin, but it did not mean the ruin of God's kingdom. He used their very downfall to tell the tragic story of the blight of sin upon national life. So you see the result of rebellion is ruin to the rebel but it does not mean the defeat of God.

The result of obedience is seen in the lives of Samuel and David. They had no better chances than Saul had but while Saul was willful they heard the voice of God and responded to it. What was the result? God used them for the accomplishment of His purpose. He was able to realize not His second nor his thousandth best in them but his first best. They helped on the triumph of God's kingdom by their obedience.

And the result to themselves was fellowship with God, the realization of their highest and best possibilities. In their obedience they found not only their highest possible usefulness. They found a present and an eternal salvation.

There is no more needed lesson today than the word of the Lord to His prophet Jeremiah "As the clay in the potter's hands so art thou in my hands, O house of Israel." How is the clay to realize its possibilities? Not through its own efforts. Not through rebellion. There is only one way, through obedience. If you will obey God will make you into a vessel for His glory. If you rebel you will end in the potters' field. As broken crockery you will still have a use but your use will be to tell what a terrible thing it is to persistently rebel.

The conclusion of the whole matter is this: To rebel against God is not to defeat Him in His purpose for the world but it is to defeat Him in the salvation of your own soul. Rebellion means ruin for you, certain and sure. Obedience, on the other hand, means the highest service and the highest self-realization.

A vessel to show love or wrath, which
I SAMUEL = Vital Religion

The books of First and Second Samuel were originally one book. They might be so treated in this lecture but for their too great length. These books center round three outstanding personalities, Samuel, Saul and David. Samuel and Saul play the most important roles in the first book, though the part played by David is by no means inconspicuous. But since David is practically the sole hero of the Second Book, we leave all consideration of him for our next address. At present we are to study the First Book of Samuel as it centers especially about Samuel and Saul.

Some of the most gripping stories in the Old Testament are to be found in First Samuel. It is very easy to see, however, that the author of this book is far more than a mere teller of good and exciting stories. He is also a preacher. In fact, preaching is his primary purpose. He is seeking to do far more than merely inform us regarding certain historical characters. He is seeking through these narratives to give spiritual inspiration and guidance. As he writes he has a very definite theme. He is undertaking to show us what vital religion is. He is seeking to make us see the beneficent results that follow upon our possession of this vital religion, and the tragic results that follow upon our failure to lay hold of it, or upon our loss of it once we have attained it. The whole book, it seems to me, is centered round this great theme.

I

What is vital religion? What, according to this author,
constitutes a saint? This is a question that is just as vital today as it was then. Of course, we ought to be able to give a fuller and more comprehensive answer than he gave. However, as we shall see, his answer is amazingly full and amazingly accurate.

It is rather remarkable that in describing a saint this author has nothing to say of merely negative qualities. He realizes that holiness, genuine goodness, is a positive something. He realizes that no man is a saint simply by virtue of what he does not do. He knows that however long a column of ciphers may be, the sum of them when added is naked nothing. Look at Eli for example. No positive wrong is charged against him. So far as we know he was never guilty of a single cruel or wicked act. All his life he was a kindly, retiring and inoffensive ecclesiastic. No man comes forward to tell us of any aggressive wrong that he has suffered at his hands. But though he is so free from positive faults, he is not reckoned among the worthy and heroic saints. On the contrary, in spite of all his negative goodness, the displeasure of God rests upon him. He is cast aside at the last, not because he is aggressively evil, but because he refuses to be positively and aggressively good.

No more does sainthood consist in doing certain worthy deeds. Of course, one who is vitally religious will do good. He will busy himself with tasks that are helpful and worthwhile, but it is altogether possible for one to do many good works and yet fail to be vitally religious. It is possible for us to "bestow all our goods to feed the poor and give our bodies to be burned" and yet lack that one something that constitutes a real saint.

"Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out demons, and
in Thy name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you." Saul was willing enough to sacrifice. But he had to learn that sacrificing was not enough. There is something that goes deeper and is far more fundamental. What is that something? Samuel put it in a single sentence: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice."

Vital religion then, according to this author, is whole-hearted obedience to God. It is impossible to improve on that even today, though of course, we ought to have a better understanding of what obedience includes. But to be perfectly surrendered is the very sum total of saintliness. It is sainthood in its beginning; it is sainthood in its course; it is sainthood in its consumation. To surrender is the least we can do and belong to God at all. It is the very most we can do throughout all time and throughout all eternity.

This life of obedience may be entered upon by sudden decision as in the case of Saint Paul and of countless others. It also may be as gradual as the opening of a flower, as it often is in the lives both of children and of adults. But however it begins, it is always more than a single act; it is life. It is more than an enlistment; it is a campaign that continues to the very end of the journey.

II

What are some of the beneficent results that follow upon our surrender to God?

1. The one who surrenders to God, says the writer of this book, finds spiritual certainty. And in so saying the author he is in full agreement with the whole teaching of the Bible as well
as with human experience. To surrender to God is surely to discover God. To be willing to do His will is to come certainly to know. How strikingly this is illustrated in the beautiful story of the call of Samuel. When Samuel was a lad religion was at a low ebb. The story tells us that the Word of God was rare in those days because there was no open vision. The reason for this lack of open vision was of course, not the fault of God. He is ever eager to reveal Himself. There was no open vision because there was no open eye. The reason that nobody heard was that nobody was willing to hear.

But Samuel was a beautiful exception. He had been greatly blessed by being cradled in the arms of a praying mother. This mother had dedicated him to God in his young and tender years. He was now working in the temple of Jehovah. But though he was engaged at a religious task, he had not yet come to possess a vitally religious experience. He had not yet come to know God at first hand for himself. But one night after he had gone to bed there came to him a call from God. At first Samuel believed this voice to be purely human. That is often the case. Again and again we mistake the call of God that comes to us through a sermon, or a book, or the lives of consecrated parents or friends, or from a vision of need, as only a human voice. Happy is he who can recognize at once the call of God.

On the other hand it is also true that we may sometimes mistake the voice that is of the earth as the call of God. I fancy that we have known more than one to volunteer for the ministry whose constraint was not that of the Spirit. Jeremiah knew such in his day. "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." Often young
hearts need a wise and sympathetic teacher to interpret the voice that may be speaking within their hearts. Samuel found such a teacher in Eli. Eli had made a bit of a failure of his own life. He had not lived up to the best that he knew. But in spite of this he was a man of some spiritual discernment. Then too, he was sympathetic and devoted to Samuel. He was therefore able to give this promising lad just the instruction that he needed at this hour of crisis. "God is speaking to you," he said. "That you may hear His voice, that you surely understand when the voice comes again, say 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.'"

That instruction was absolutely sound and wise. It was altogether worthy of one who had used life in a far higher and more courageous manner than Eli had done. Had this gentle old priest followed his own instruction how much tragedy he would have spared both to himself and others. "Be willing to hear," he told Samuel, "and you will hear." Samuel was heroic enough to be willing. Therefore he entered at once into the rich possession of religious certainty. His religion was no longer a matter of inheritance, but a matter of personal experience. Henceforth he could say with all those who have brought most spiritual help to men, "I know."

2. Those who surrender to God not only come to know Him, but through this knowledge they come to their highest usefulness. Absolutely nothing can altogether rob an obedient heart of its joy and of its power to bless. Hannah, for instance, seemed destined to play a rather small and useless part in her day. She was a wife without a child. But this may be said in her favor, she was not content to be so. She yearned for the hug of baby arms and for the kiss of baby lips. So great was her yearning that she took the matter to God and put herself in his hands. Then one day when
she held her own baby in her arms she said with great gladness: "For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." When that all Israel knew that child grew to manhood, the story tells us that a prophet had arisen. And all the high helpfulness that Samuel brought to his own generation and to all the generations since, had its origin in the heart of this one consecrated woman.

Then there came a day when it seemed that Samuel was going to be robbed of his usefulness, in spite of his loyalty and devotion to God. For the people whom he had served so faithfully began to clamor for a king. Having lost their sense of the Kingship of God, they desired to make up for the loss by a king human and visible. Always as religion loses its inwardness we seek to atone for the loss by outward display. In addition Israel had been brought under the spell of the surrounding nations. Although called to be a peculiar people, she determined to be like the nations round about. Therefore Samuel was put out of the judgeship and a younger man, far inferior to himself in every way was made king. This certainly seemed to strike a heavy blow at the usefulness of the faithful prophet.

But such was not the case. Instead of its destroying Samuel's usefulness it only increased it. The richest years of the prophet's life were those that followed upon the heels of his seeming disgrace and rejection. Why was it so? One reason might be that having been relieved from the judgeship, he was free to do work that was more distinctly and definitely spiritual. But the supreme reason was that in spite of his rejection he kept humbly within the will of God. He flatly refused to become sour
and critical and cynical. Instead he showed to his youthful successor every possible courtesy. He helped him in every way within his power to measure up to the high responsibilities that his call to the throne laid upon him. Nor was he less loyal and faithful to his ungrateful people. Instead of turning from them in anger and disgust as would have been most natural, he continued to serve them with unabated eagerness. Nor was this service a mere outward performance. It came from the heart. "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you," he says with fine magnanimity. To one who takes that attitude all things must work together for good.

III

Then this book tells us something of the tragic consequences that result from our failure to obey God.

1. To refuse to obey God is to lose Him. Nor is it necessary that this disobedience be open and aggressive rebellion. The sin of Eli, you remember, was in what he failed to do rather than in what he did. He simply did not have the staunchness, the sturdiness of conviction that is necessary for the making of a real saint. He was too soft. Therefore we read regarding him this stern word: "I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not." He was too weak, too easy-going, too mistakenly kind to control his own children. His was the seemingly harmless sin of softness. But in spite of its apparent harmlessness it blinded his own eyes to the vision of God. It stopped his ears to the voice of God. Thus by refusing to obey God, he lost Him.
The sin of Saul was a bit different. Saul could never be convinced of the necessity of whole-hearted obedience. He could never be brought to see that partial obedience was not just as good as full and complete obedience. To carry out a part of the divine will was quite as good to his thinking, as to carry out the whole of it. Therefore, when commanded to do certain tasks he went as far as pleased him in carrying out those commands, and no further. Not only so, but having been partial in his obedience he could never be convinced that he was guilty of any wrong. He was always rich in excuses. The people were to blame, or circumstances were to blame, never Saul himself. Or if that was not the case his motives were good even though his conduct was openly rebellious. Therefore, though he confessed his sin more often than any other man in the Bible, he never repented.

This does not mean that Saul was the worst of men. Multitudes have sinned far more deeply than he. Saul was the cleanest king morally that Israel had ever had. But he could never be brought to obey to whole-hearted surrender. Thus, refusing God he lost Him.

Having lost God, of course he ended by losing all else that was worth while. He became a creature of dark and sullen moods. Oftentimes he was little better than a mad man. When, returning from battle one day, he was met by a company of foolish girls who ascribed a larger prowess in battle to David than to himself. Henceforth he allowed envy to torture him till he became at heart a murderer. At last, his faith dead, his courage gone, taunted by ghastly fears, he throws himself in tragic weakness at the feet of a frightened witch with this pathetic cry: "God has departed from me and heareth me no more." Thus does this book haunt us with the fact that to refuse to obey God is to surely lose Him, and that to lose Him is to lose all that counts.
2. Just as rebellion robs us of the sense of God and destroys our spiritual certainty, so also it kills our finest possibilities and blights our highest usefulness. It would not be true to say that kindly and tender-hearted Eli rendered no service at all. He was a great help to young Samuel, for instance, in his hour of crisis. And there were doubtless others who found him genuinely helpful. But in spite of this it is certainly true that his life was more of a curse than a blessing. The boys that he was too soft to correct, grew into men whose lives were a blight to the nation. His lack of firmness resulted therefore not only in the ruin of his own sons, but in the ruin of many others whose faces he never saw.

Then what a disappointment is the life of Saul! What an opportunity was his and what a pitiful wreck he made of it! At the time of his anointing he was God's chosen. He had a great and helpful friend in the person of Samuel. He had a brilliant and dashing and loyal follower in David, that youthful genius from the sheep folds. He had staunch and faithful sons, among them Jonathan, one of the most winsome and princely characters in literature. He had at one time a loyal and enthusiastic people. The finest possibilities were open to him but he flung them all away and ended by falling on his own sword.

The sorry wreck that he made of himself personally is a story too bitter for tears. But there is something even more tragic than that. Saul did not go to his ruin alone. Look at him as he lies there with his own sword piercing his once gallant heart. Who are these that lie about him with their hacked bodies sprawled in every possible and ungainly posture? Most of them we do not know. They are common soldiers whose failure to return home will
only break the hearts of certain nameless folk of whom the world
takes no notice. But over there lies a prince and yonder is
another. And here, with body butchered almost beyond recognition,
is the most princely of all, generous and lovable Jonathan. In the
distance are the disordered and fleeing fragments of Israel's
armies, limping home in shame to bear the heavy burdens of a
defeated people. When Saul crashed, his fall was like that of a
giant of the forest. He carried others down with him. "I have
played the fool," he said of himself most truly. Certainly his
supreme act of idiocy was his flinging away from God. Certainly
by that tragic folly he wrecked both himself and countless others
as well.

First Samuel, then, preaches this telling sermon: Vital
religion involves whole-hearted obedience to God. To obey is
to find God. To obey is to find our highest usefulness. To
refuse to obey is to lose God. To lose Him is to lose our highest
and best possibilities. It is to change life from a help to a
hindrance; from a blessing to a curse. So it was then; so it is
today. Jesus centuries later put the same message in a single
sentence: "He that saveth his life shall lose it, but he that
loseth his life shall keep it until life eternal."
The Books of First and Second Samuel were originally one book. Following the charming interlude called Ruth, they take up the story of the Book of Judges. These two books contain some of the most gripping and inspiring stories of the Old Testament. It has been well said that history is but the length and shadows of great men. These two books center around three outstanding personalities. There are others naturally that play supporting roles but the three leading characters of this impressive drama are Samuel, Saul, and David. Each is a striking star in his own right. Inasmuch as the Second Book of Samuel concerns David alone, we shall confine ourselves in this book to the study of Samuel and Saul.

I

Look first at Samuel. He marks the end of an era. He is the last of the judges. He is also the first of the great prophets. How do we account for him?

1. To understand him, we must know his background. When we see from whence he came, we understand that what he became was but the natural outcome of his training. As the book opens, we get a glimpse of an ancient Jewish home. There is a well-to-do husband who has two wives. One of these wives, the favorite, is childless. To the Jewish woman that was the height of tragedy.

It is natural, therefore, that Hannah was not satisfied. She had a comfortable home. She was a favorite wife, but she did not feel that she had arrived. She longed for the hug of baby arms and the kiss of baby lips. So deeply did she long that, being genuinely religious, she made this longing a matter of prayer. Her prayer was answered. Therefore, when by and by she
held little Samuel in her arms, she said: "For this child I prayed. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord."

It is, therefore, in Hannah that we find something of the explanation of Samuel. His mother was a woman of prayer. Blessed is the lad whose mother can say, "For this child I prayed." Not only was she a woman of prayer, but she was a woman of rare wisdom. She dedicated her child to God. That in itself is wise. But not only did she dedicate her child to God, but she dedicated him in his young and tender years. She did not believe that it was necessary for a child to go wrong before he went right. She did not believe that a course of training in the far country by the swine-trough was necessary in order to enjoy the privileges of the Father's House.

Not only did she dedicate her child to God, but as soon as he was old enough, she brought him to the Temple and dedicated him to the direct service of God. She put him in charge of the best man that she knew, kindly and religious Eli. This good man who was then Judge of Israel made a bit of a mess of his own life. He made a terribly tragic mess of his own sons. He is one of the best examples I know of the evil that a good man can do. Yet along with the evil there was much that was fine in him. This comes out in his wise guidance of the boy Samuel.

Here is the beautiful story. One night after Samuel had gone to bed, he thought he heard a voice. Believing that Eli was calling him, he hurried to the old man saying, "Here am I." This he did twice. By that time, Eli was wise enough to realize that God was calling. Often youth need some wise saint to interpret the voices that speak in their own heart and conscience. Sometimes we mistake the voice of God for a mere human voice. Quite as often perhaps we mistake an entirely human voice for the voice of God.
Ili was wise enough to tell Samuel how to be sure. "When the voice comes again," he said, "you answer in this fashion: 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.'" The word of the Lord, the story said, was rare in those days because there was no open vision. The reason there was no open vision was because there was no open eye. The reason God's voice was not heard was because no one was listening. God is always seeking to reveal Himself. God is always broadcasting, but there are times when we are too dull and listless to tune in. How may we hear? By this attitude: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." This means, "Speak for I am listening. I am listening not out of idle curiosity. I am listening with a burning desire to know in order that I may obey." It is altogether useless for God to make known His will to those who have no purpose to do that will. Nothing is gained thereby but "he that is willing to do His will shall know." Through this dedication Samuel, whose faith up to this time had been a mere tradition, came to know God for himself.

It was then that God gave him his first commission. It was a trying and difficult one. He was to be the bearer of a message of doom to his old friend and teacher. Eli had failed to govern his own household. His boys had followed him into the ministry, but they had used that ministry as a means for the satisfaction of their own selfishness and of their own lust. They had made religion ugly and repellent, and the fault was not only their own. It was in part that of their good father. So God sent to him this terrible message: "Tell him that I will judge his house forever, for the iniquity that he knoweth. For his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not."

What a terrible word! It was literally fulfilled. These two corrupt sons went out to battle. They were both killed. The Ark of the Lord was captured. When a messenger brought the heavy news to Eli, he fell over and broke his neck. Thus Eli, though a good man, brought a curse upon his family. He
helped to make religion hateful throughout Israel. All this happened not because he was a bad man. When the news of his doom came, he said with beautiful submission, "It is the Lord. Let Him do as seemeth to Him good." His failure grew out of his softness. He did no aggressive harm. He was too soft aggressively to oppose evil.

After his death we hear little of Samuel for the next twenty years. During this time Samuel was growing. "He was increasing in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." He became the last and the greatest of the judges. He was coming to be a truly great prophet. He was far ahead the noblest, the finest leader that Israel had had for centuries.

Then as he was feeling that he had arrived, that he had in large measure accomplished his purpose, something happened. The people became restless and discontented. They came to demand a king. They based this demand upon two reasons. Samuel's sons had not turned out well. They too were judges, but they lacked the high character of their father. Then Israel wanted to be like the people around about them. They were afraid, as we so often are, to be unique. They wanted to be like the other nations. Their rejection broke Samuel's heart. He made it a matter of earnest prayer, but God answered by saying, "They have not rejected you. They have rejected Me. Do their bidding and anoint them a king." Thus the older and wiser man was set aside for a younger without a tenth of his wisdom. This big man was set aside for one who was far smaller. This great soul was set aside for one who was seriously lacking in greatness. Samuel was displaced by Saul.

What was Samuel's reaction? He might have become soured and embittered. He might have made Saul's task hard to the point of impossibility, but he helped the younger man all that he could. No more did he get soured against the people who had rejected him. He kept them in his heart. "God forbid," he said, "that
I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

Thus this blow instead of making him less a man made him far greater. Making him a greater man, it added to his usefulness. This it did for two reasons. It made him more useful because the first step in order to do more is to be more. It made him more useful because freeing him from secular tasks, it enabled him to give himself to the work of the ministry. Thus his last years were the richest of his life. Then one day when he went home he was mourned not by a little handful but by a nation. "Samuel died and all Israel gathered together and lamented him."

II

As Samuel's long and useful life ended in triumph in spite of his rejection, so Saul's ended in dire tragedy in spite of the fact that he was divinely called to be king. Saul is one of the most tragic characters in the Bible. When his opportunities are taken in consideration, only Judas had a more horrible downfall. Yet Saul had more that was fine in his character, I am quite sure, than did Judas though both of them at the beginning were men of exceedingly high possibilities.

1. Look at Saul's finer side.

(1) He was a fine animal. He stood head and shoulders above any man in Israel. Whatever the soul may be, it is fine to have a strong healthy house in which to live. Saul was impressive physically. In an iron age in which the measuring string used to determine the size of a man was put more about his muscle than about his mind, Saul had a high rating.

(2) Then Saul at the time of his call had youth. The best of his life was yet ahead. He had not blighted his possibilities by wasteful or careless or ignoble living. He was not only a choice man; he was a choice young man.
(3) He was possessed of a beautiful modesty. When his father had lost his donkeys, he was not above the lowly task of going to search for them and ofsearching with persistent faithfulness. It was while he was doing this lowly task well that he was appointed with kingship. In search of a donkey, he found a kingdom. Many a man has gone in search of a kingdom to find a donkey. His modesty is further seen in that on the day of his crowning, he hid himself. There is a questionable side to that, but I think he was beautifully humble in his estimate of himself.

(4) Saul was clean in his personal life. Many of the kings of Israel gave themselves to an orgy of marrying. Solomon took wives by the hundred. But Saul in this respect seems to have been one of the cleanest kings that Israel had.

(5) He was a man of fine courage. Nobody accused him of being afraid in the presence of the enemy.

(6) He was religious. It is true that his religion was never quite the biggest fact about him, but he did have a sense of God and a sense of mission growing out of the fact that he knew God had chosen him to be a leader for his people.

2. But along with these fine qualities there went others that led to his ruin.

(1) He was seriously lacking in moral earnestness. He had no very definite sense of the difference between right and wrong. He was presumptuous. When Samuel failed to come at the appointed hour, he became restless and impatient and took upon himself the office of the priest. This was a deed of presumption for which he was severely rebuked by the prophet.

(2) Being morally dull, he could never distinguish clearly between obedience and disobedience. He thought to render half obedience was equivalent to being wholly obedient. One day he was given a mission to destroy an old
enemy, the Amalekites. That there might be no selfishness in this mission, he was forbidden to take any spoil. He was to destroy utterly all that they had. But instead of fully obeying, he spared the best of the sheep and the cattle. He spared the king himself. That is, he obeyed in so far as it suited him. But so far as it suited him, he did as he pleased.

That night, according to the story, the Lord spoke to Samuel saying, "Saul has turned back from following after me." Saul might have been regarded as a rival, but Samuel looked upon him as a friend, as a member of his church. He, therefore, cried unto the Lord all night. Happy is the man who has a friend thus concerned and thus faithful! Samuel could not see his friend and king turning his back on his best possibilities without heartache. He gave himself up to prayer for this sinning man. Not only so, but the next morning he went to see him. Saul must have been informed of his coming. When Samuel came into his tent, the king greeted him in a most pious fashion. "Blessed be thou of the Lord! he said. "I have performed my mission." Then it was that some sheep and cattle gave him the lie. The sheep began to bleat and the cattle to low, and Samuel said, "If you have been obedient, what mean the lowing of the cattle and sheep in mine ear?"

(3) This brings us to the most fatal defect in Saul's character. When his sin was brought home to him, he always had an excuse. There are few characteristics more dangerous than this. Saul confessed his sin more often than any other man in the Bible. But he always did it in such fashion as to show that he was not to blame. Here he was caught red-handed, but he had an answer. He did not spare the sheep and the oxen; the people did it. Not only so, but they had done it for religious reasons. They brought them along to sacrifice to the Lord their God. Not only had he disobeyed, but he put a religious face on it. He was seeking the good of others just like we are when we desecrate the Sabbath and do a thousand other things to serve the soldiers.
(4) In refusing to repent, he lost his sense of God. Losing God, he lost the fine generosity that had characterized him in an earlier day. He became a bitter and envious man. When a group of foolish girls came out to meet him when he and David were returning from a battle, they sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David has slain his tens of thousands." It so enraged Saul that he spent the remainder of his life seeking an opportunity to kill a faithful servant whose only fault was conspicuous service.

(5) At last this man, embittered, with no sense of God in his life, came to a desperate hour of need. In that hour instead of turning to the God Whom he had forsaken, he hunted up a fortune-teller, a witch. He greeted her with this terribly pathetic word: "God has departed from me and heareth me no more." And in the most trying hour of his life, he had to go to a feminine fakir.

From this pathetic scene, he went to his final battle. He fought it bravely but with a sense of doom. He led his army not to victory but to defeat. At last he fell on his own sword. His downfall was tragic and complete. But sadder even than his own fall was the ruin of those whose fate was bound up with his. There on that lonely battlefield were many dead whose loved ones would look in vain for their homecoming. But here lay more than common soldiers. Here were princes, Saul's brave sons, among them the finest and bravest of all—Jonathan. Saul fell like a forest tree, but as he went to his ruin he reached out his long arms and caught others who crashed to ruin with him.

III

Here then are two men who were closely associated. They had an equal chance. In fact it might be said that Saul had the better opportunity of the two. But one of them so used his opportunity as to become increasingly
strong and useful with the passing of the years. When he died, all Israel lamented. The other took a great chance and threw it away.

Why, I repeat, the difference? It is just in this: One made the will of God the ruling factor of his life. The other, while religious, was always partial in his devotion. The supreme lesson of the book is in this: To obey is better than sacrifices. Nothing in the religious life will take the place of obedience. To do the will of God—that is Christian in its beginning, in its course, and in its consummation.

It is interesting, notice too, how different these three men acted in times of crisis. It is always interesting to see where a man turns when his dark hour is upon him. When Saul's dark hour came, he went to a fortune-teller. When Samuel's black hour came, he pressed closer to God. When David, whom we will study at fuller length in our next lesson, came upon a black day when everything seemed lost we read of him this fine sentence: "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." Our Lord is eager to use all of us and bring us to our best, but He can only do that in proportion to our obedience to Him.
SECOND SAMUEL

The story of Second Samuel centers about one of the most popular heroes of all time. The popularity of this man does not grow out of the fact that he was perfect. He was far from being of the "faultilly faultless" type. Few men have ever sinned more deeply than he but it is equally true that few have ever more genuinely repented. Very few have ever won their way more beautifully into the knowledge and love of God. At his worst, David was a great sinner. At his best he was one of the greatest Saints.

I

With the opening of the Book, David comes first to the throne of Judah and then to the throne of all Israel. It is interesting however to know something of the preparation through which he passed. He was God's chosen man. He was selected and educated for the great work of being the leader of God's people. His life story falls naturally into two parts.

First, his preparation. Our first glimpse of David is in a very humble home. Samuel at the command of God has gone to anoint Israel's future King. Jesse has his stalwart sons pass before the prophet. He selects none of them. The father was going to allow the matter to be dropped there. He was to send for the young stripling who was away at the sheep fold.

But Samuel is of a contrary opinion. He declares that while men looketh on the outward parts, God looketh on the
heart. So David is sent for. His coming is like the coming of a fresh breeze from the hills. The roses are on his cheeks, sunshine was in his hair, laughter in his eyes. Poetry and dreams are in his heart. To the surprise of all present Samuel proceeds at once to the anointing of this obscure and handsome youth.

The ceremony over, David goes back to his work. This speaks well for him that the event did not turn his head. He gives himself, with his usual diligence to the work of shepherding his sheep. When a lion comes, he does not flee, he fights. When a bear comes, he does not get a lamb. The shepherd gets him.

But there are bright hours during the day when the sheep are not in danger. During these hours, this shepherd gives himself to the luxury of music. He plays upon the harp with rare skill. He plays his own compositions. He steals the songs from nature's beauties and interprets them through his harp strings. David thought that nobody was listening but in this he was mistaken. Somebody discovered that David was a musician.

You can do a hundred things passably well and yet be a failure. You can do a hundred things passably well and nobody find it out but if you do one thing superlatively well, somebody's going to discover it regardless of where you live. Not only so, but the world will make a track to your door. It was this skillful harp playing that brought David into contact with the court of the King. It was this skillful playing that enabled him to relieve Saul, at least temporarily, of his fits of madness and of despondency. But this work of being the shepherd was giving him opportunity to do more than simply make himself skillful in music. It was also training him in the fine art of courage and self-reliance. Better still it was training him in the highest of all arts, the art of communion
with God. One day an errand was to be run. David was sent to carry some provisions to his brothers who were fighting under Saul. No sooner had he arrived than he heard the bully of the opposing army give his challenge to any champion of the army of Israel. David's young heart leaped within him. He loved to fight. He counted on seeing one now. He looked to see thousands ready to accept the challenge but instead, all hung their heads. He saw that they were covered with shame and fear and confusion.

Then it was that he decided to do what seemed a very reckless thing. He proposed to fight the giant himself. His biggest opposition came not from the enemy but from his friends. "Where did you leave those few sheep?" said his big brother with cool contempt. "You are not able," said Saul, not with contempt, but sadly.

But David was bent on making the venture. He conceded the fact that the giant was stronger than himself. He conceded that he had had more experience but he claimed that while the giant had only his strength, that he himself could depend on the help of God. Also he made bold to declare that he had faced danger before. When the wild beasts had come for his sheep he had not run, he had fought them and conquered. If David had proven a coward in those lesser dangers, he would certainly have proven a coward in the present situation. In faith that God would be with him, this young hero went to the fight. He won his victory.

This brought him into the limelight. It brought him into close contact with the King. In Saul's fellowship he went to battle. On his return the women came out and sang their foolish songs. "Saul has slain his thousands but David has slain his tens of thousands". Saul's envy is aroused and David is forced to flee.
From then on to Saul's death, he is a fugitive, hiding himself in the dens and caves of the earth.

With the death of Saul we come to the second period of David's life. Though Saul was his enemy, he did not glory in his death. He rather sorrowed over it. Especially did he sorrow over the death of Jonathan. David was already popular. This popularity soon lifted him to the Kingship of all Israel.

It was during those eaceful days that David fell into the horrible sin that left its mark on all his future life. He became guilty first of adultery and then of murder. The first sin could have been more easily forgiven. The latter was done deliberately, maliciously and in cold blood.

Worse even than the sin, if possible, was David's attitude toward it after it was done. He went on judging others just as he had done before. He tried to excuse himself by saying, "The sword devoureth one as well as another". At last God sent Nathan, the prophet, to speak home to his heart and conscience. Nathan marks the beginning of the prophetic all the prophecy and nothing more. He rebukes David for his sin. David repents and is forgiven but he is warned that he is not to be saved from the consequences.

These hideous consequences follow rapidly enough. Tamar is outraged. Ammon becomes a rapist. Absalom murders his brother to avenge the wrong done to his sister. A few years later Absalom leads a rebellion. David warns the officers to deal gently with Absalom but they do not regard him. He is ruthlessly killed and thrown into a pit. David's heart is broken. He gives way to that pathetic lamentation: "O Absalom, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee. O Absalom, my son, my son!"
We began by saying that David was one of the world's most popular heroes. Not only was he popular with men but he was dear to the heart of God. He is known as the man after God's own heart. This sounds a bit strange when we remember how greatly David sinned. Yet as we study his life, we recognize those qualities of character that are most pleasing to God and man in every generation.

1. David was a man of most beautiful humility. He came from a position the most obscure. He reached the highest that a man of that day could reach but we never find the slightest mark of haughtiness or condescent about him. He never swaggers. He is never egotistical. Throughout all of his career he remains beautifully human and beautifully humble.

2. David surpasses almost all the saints in the beautiful grace of gratitude. Ingratitude is a very common sin. It is as ugly as it is common. How good we often are at remembering injuries and how easily do we forget a favor. But David remembered the kindnesses of his friends. He remembered peculiarly the kindnesses of his Supreme Friend. No man so far as we know, surpassed David in giving thanks to God.

3. David was possessed of a forgiving spirit. Saul hated him and tried to murder him but he never succeeded in making David hate him in return. Absalom might rebel and seek his life but he never cherished against him the slightest resentment. Shimeah might come out and curse him but his curses could not cause David to curse back. He was great in forgiving.

4. David was whole hearted. He could never do anything by halves. That is one of the greatest secrets of the spell that
he casts over us. Whatever he put his hand to, he did it with his might. When he fought, he fought with all his power. When he sinned, he sinned with mad recklessness. When he repented, he repented with a beautiful abandon.

5. David was a man of vital and vigorous faith. David's life was not all roses. Again and again he was called to pass through the valley of the shadow. One day when he was hiding in the dens and caves of the earth, he could hear the wild beasts as they snarled and fought over their prey. In spite of his hard situation making him distrustful, it seemed to have the opposite effect. He interwove the very snarls of the beasts as he sang. "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger but they that seek the Lord do not want anything." When his baby dies, he is not driven to despair but says with a calmness that might do credit to any saint of the New Testament. "He cannot return to me, I shall go to him."

6. As a result of these characteristics, it is not to be wondered at that David was a man of beautiful intimacy with God. It is one of the amazing miracles how well David came to know God long centuries before the birth of Jesus. If the Twenty-third psalm had been written by St. John or Paul, we would not be surprised, but that such a song should be written by a man long centuries before Jesus was born is nothing short of miraculous.

III

What was David's contribution?

1. He made the scattered tribes of Israel into a great nation. He put his hand upon the future generations of his people. This he did by making possible the building of the temple. This he did through his saintly life. This he did through his miraculous
2. Not only did he touch his own people, but he has touched the world. By how many saints have the psalms of David been blessed? Even today, after David has been gone to his reward for almost thirty centuries, his Psalms are as tender and as winsome and as spiritually inspired as any part of the Bible. An innumerable company, that no man can number, have lived to thank God for the winsome shepherd lad called David.
The book of II Samuel is the story of the reign of David the King. In studying David we are considering the most life like, the most clearly delineated and the most popular of all Old Testament heroes. Bishop Conybeare used to say that if he were going to hug a poet he would choose Longfellow. If we were going to become thus familiar with any of the Old Testament worthies we should surely choose David. Not that he is a perfect man. He is very far from it. At his worst he is the chiefest of sinners, but at his best he is one of the choicest of the saints. He is a many-sided man. He is a great warrior, a great statesman, a great friend. It is impossible to say how many of the Psalms he wrote. But tradition certainly has it that he was a great poet.

His story has two natural divisions. First there is a period of preparation. This part of the story is covered in the first book of Samuel. Second, there is a story of his vigorous and successful reign as king of all Israel. We are going to study both of these periods though only one of them belongs properly to II Samuel.

I

Preparation. David had three distinct courses of training in preparation for his great destiny.

1. He was trained through the task of being a shepherd. There was no small stir in the humble home of Jesse that day when the prophet Samuel came. His coming was in itself an occasion.
But the excitement of his coming was immeasurably increased when he told Jesse his purpose. God had sent him to anoint one of Jesse’s stalwart sons to be the future king of Israel. It is not to be wondered at that this consideration occasioned immense excitement.

A feast was prepared. The father paraded his sons before the prophet one by one. They were a fine looking lot. But to the amazement of both father and sons, the prophet made no choice of any of them. Instead, when they had all passed he looked a bit perplexed. If these were all the sons Jesse had, then he had misunderstood his orders and had made a mistake. So he asked a question. "Is this all?" "Practically all," Jesse answered. "There is one left but of course he cannot be God’s chosen. He is only a youngster. At present he is out with the sheep." "Send for him!" demanded the prophet, "For we will not eat till he comes."

So they waited. I can well imagine that they were a bit restless and resentful. They were hungry and dinner was being delayed. Then they could not persuade themselves that this youthful shepherd could possibly be the future king. Surely he could not be chosen instead of one of themselves. But they were not left in doubt for long. Suddenly this David came upon the scene. His coming was like a breath from his native hills. The sunshine was tangled in his hair and laughter sparkled in his eyes. His spell was upon the prophet at once. He recognized him as God’s chosen and anointed him then and there.

The feast over, David went back to take up the work that he had laid down in order to be anointed. This business of keeping his father’s sheep was the best of training for the great destiny that was ahead of him. Here he received that fine discipline that
comes from fidelity to a mean task. His responsibilities were very far from being kingly. But David never shirked. He did not think the task below him. Had he done so he would have certainly been below his task. As poor as was his position, he made the best of it. He gave himself to it with such devotion that he was willing to risk his life in order to fill it faithfully.

Then, as David kept his father's sheep, he learned how to make the best of meager opportunities. What little chance he had at self-improvement! In the eyes of many he had no chance at all. What were his resources? A sling, a harp and the great out-of-doors. But he took his sling and learned to use it with rare skill and accuracy. In his leisure hours he so mastered his harp that when the best musician in Israel was required they went at once in search of him. Then he so read the book of nature that he found "sermons in stones" and "books in the running brooks." As he looked into the night sky he heard "The Heavens declare the glory of God." He not only learned nature, but he came into a beautiful and winsome awareness of God. It was such an awareness that made him songful in the realization of life's daily joys, that made him cool and calm and courageous in the presence of danger.

2. David's second course of training was at the court of King Saul. Just how he first won Saul's attention we cannot say with certainty. There are two stories that it is next to impossible to harmonize. One story says that their meeting was due to the fits of madness to which Saul was subject. When no relief for this tragic affliction was found, David was brought to court in the hope that he might be able to soothe the king with his music. And so skillfully did he play that the king's madness did actually give
way to sanity. Such a musician is sorely in need today, for we have
those among us who not only fail to make the mad sane, but they
tend to drive the sane into madness.

Then there is another version that David first came to
the attention of Saul through his encounter with Goliath. David
had been sent on an errand to the army. Arriving there he heard
the boastful challenge of the Philistine giant. The young shepherd’s
heart leaped within him. He loved a fight and he was quite sure he
was now going to have the privilege of seeing one, for certainly
there were thousands in Saul’s army that would be eager to accept
the challenge of this boastful Philistine. But to his amazement
no champion came forward. Instead the soldiers of Israel only bowed
their heads in fear and shame. It was more than this daring youth
from the sheppfolds could stand. He resolved then and there that
this swaggering giant should have his challenge accepted if he had
to accept it himself.

David made known his purpose. Some were filled with
admiration, some were amazed, some were scornful, while others were
positively indignant. This was especially true of David’s oldest
brother. We need not be greatly surprised at Eliab’s anger. The
sneer flung at David by this older brother is perfectly natural.
It grows out of the fact that he does not dare to undertake what
this younger brother has determined to do. “With whom hast thou
left those few sheep?” he sneers. He reminds David that he is only
a shepherd and a very insignificant one at that. But in spite of
these sneers David persists in his purpose. Soon the news of his
purpose reaches the king’s ears. Saul has little hope of victory
at the hands of this daring youth. But the situation is desperate.
He is the only champion that offers, so he resolves to allow him to
engage in the unequal combat.
The outcome is vividly told. It is one of the best stories in the Old Testament. It has an eternal truth in it, too. David knew that Goliath as a soldier was better trained than himself. He knew that he had better equipment. He knew that he had had far more experience. He knew also that he inspired far greater confidence in his own people than he himself inspired in the people of Israel. But he knew further that he had assets that Goliath did not possess. "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: But I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." It is faith pitted against force and in such combats faith always wins. "By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea as by dry land! Which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." Faith can do what force cannot. Therefore we need not be surprised that David won a glorious victory.

This victory at once brought the young shepherd into the limelight. He almost instantly became the hero of his people. He also became fast friends with Jonathan, the king's son. A little later he married the king's daughter. He now moved in the atmosphere of royalty. He went out to the battle along with Saul and conducted himself with such valor that he outshone even the king himself. Certain rash singers foolishly ascribed to him tens of thousands while ascribing to Saul only thousands. Thus Saul's envy was aroused against David. So hot was his envy that Saul actually tried to murder David. Therefore he was forced to leave the court and flee for his life.

3. David's final course of training came during this period of hiding from Saul. Having been driven from court, he did not go into hiding alone. Instead he quickly gathered about him the distressed and the discontented and those who were in debt. He drew
to him the scattered and masterless men, many of whom were being hunted as he himself was. These made a considerable handful even in that far off day. Of course anyone able to organize all these who are in debt today would certainly command the largest army that ever marched into a field. Now David was a genius as an organizer and trainer of men. As a result he soon transformed these malcontents into an efficient fighting force that while too weak to take the field, was yet strong enough to prove highly successful in guerilla warfare.

With these at his back, David became a kind of Robin Hood. His native hills became a Sherwood forest. He was a great protection to his own people. But in return for this protection he asked now and then for a free-will offering. He expected everybody to make a donation. It was black mail, of course. But there was some justice in it. If the offering was not given freely, pressure was brought to bear. When Nabal, for instance, refused to give, he set out to collect by force. It was only the wit and wisdom of Abigail that prevented bloodshed. David's record through these days is not altogether clean. But it is far cleaner than one would expect of an outlaw of that distant day. And all the while David was receiving training in the handling of men that was preparing him for his life work.

II

With the opening of the second book of Samuel David comes in to the kingship, first of Judah, then of all Israel. In this position he showed himself a leader and statesman of rare ability. Chaos reigned over all the tribes of Israel at the time of his coming into power. David brought order out of chaos. He welded the
scattered tribes into a compact and vigorous and powerful nation. He had a genius for government. His reign was so successful that it became the most precious memory of his people. It became also their ideal for the future, the embodiment of their Messianic hopes. When the Messiah came He was to sit on the throne of David and reign with David's wisdom.

This does not mean that there were no tragic happenings during David's long reign. When he was secure in his position, at a time of idleness and ease, he fell into the great sin of his life. His unfaithfulness with the wife of Uriah is easily understood and might be readily forgiven. He was swept off his feet by a sudden gust of passion. But it is hard to forgive the murder of Uriah. It was the blackest of crimes in that it was committed deliberately and in cold blood. Then worse still, if possible, was the hideous hypocrisy of the royal murderer during the days that followed. "Let not this be an offense unto thee," he writes to Joab, "For the sword devoureth one as well as another." Thus he is saying to himself, "I did not murder Uriah, I am not guilty. He would have been killed anyway." This marks the period of David's deepest degradation and danger.

But under God he was wakened and saved from utter ruin by his faithful friend, Nathan, the prophet. One day Nathan went to see this royal sinner. He told him a very ingenious story of a great injustice. David became exceedingly indignant and declared the offender was worthy of death. Then Nathan took his life in his hands and put his finger in the king's face and said, "Thou art the man!" And here David shows his ingenuity. Instead of becoming angry at the prophet, instead of pleading not guilty, his face went hot,
his voice choked, his heart broke and he sobbed out his bitter confession of guilt. "I have sinned," he cries in bitter penitence. And he clutched at God's skirts and prayed for forgiveness. Of course that happened which always happens when one repents. David was forgiven and entered again into fellowship with God.

But while David was forgiven freely and fully, he was not saved from the consequences of his sin. If we sow taxes God will forgive us if we repent. But there is one thing our repentance will not do. It will not pull up the taxes that we have already sown. They will keep on growing. It was so in the case of David. His son Amnon became a rapist. His daughter Tamar was the victim. His son Absalom was the avenger. He murdered his half-brother Amnon. Then later Absalom again broke his father's heart by rebelling against him. One of the most pathetic stories in literature is David's sorrow over his wayward and worthless son. Thus, though David was forgiven, the sword never departed from his house and he had sorrow upon sorrow.

III

What is the secret of the spell that David casts over us? The men of his day felt it. We read that everything that he did pleased the people. Men of all times have felt it. Even God Himself is not immune. It is at times with amazement not unmixed with resentment that we read that he was a man after God's own heart. Yet we cannot but realize that in spite of all his shortcomings and positive sins he is still a favorite of ours. This is true because he possessed those qualities which are admired in every age.

1. He was a man of beautiful humility. David never
swaggers. He never despises his lowly origin. He never loses the child heart. He is just as human, just as natural, just as childlike as the idol of his people, as when he was fleeing for his life. He is as winsomely genuine and humble upon the throne of Israel as he was as an unknown shepherd among the Judean hills. It is easy to hate a proud and haughty despot. It is easy to despise a conceited swaggerer whose head has swollen from quick success. But it is equally hard to resist the charm of one whose no honor nor good fortune can spoil or rob of his childlike heart. He knew how to be grateful. He was always appreciative. He never forgot a favor. Some people pride themselves on never forgetting an injury. David might have prided himself on never forgetting an act of kindness. He is full of thanksgiving, both to God and man. That is a mark of his charming humility. Conceited folks have nobody to thank but themselves. The rich feel thanked neither God nor man for his abundant crops. He had done it all himself. But people of childlike humility have a profound sense of their obligations to others and are therefore genuinely grateful.

3. David was unfailingly magnanimous. He was possessed of a forgiving spirit that is most amazing when viewed in the light of the bloodthirsty day in which he lived. Saul persistently sought his life, but David never once struck back. He always carried towards his king a heart full of loyalty and forgiveness. Even when he had been dead for years he sought out one of his obscure kinsmen that he might show kindness to him. Absalom rebelled against him and showed himself a most unnatural son. But never once did David cherish the slightest resentment. While he was alive he sought his safety and when he was dead he was heartbroken that he had not died for him. Shimei cursed him but
his bitterest curses could not induce David to curse back. He was a man of a forgiving spirit.

4. Then he was fascinatingly wholehearted. "I hate folks that are half and half," says the writer of the 119th Psalm. So do we. We love wholehearted people. That is one of the chief secrets of the spell that David casts over us. He never did anything by halves. As a friend he was wholehearted. When he sinned he sinned with an awful recklessness. When he repented he did so with a beautiful abandon. No wonder that he was idolized by his own people! No wonder that he has cast a spell over all subsequent generations! No wonder he won a place so near to the heart of God! He was kingly in his wholeheartedness!

5. Finally, with all these characteristics, it is not to be wondered at that David was a man of beautiful intimacy with God. Whether he wrote the Shepherd Psalm or not, we do not know. But here is a father on his face in prayer. He is pleading for his sick laddie. The little fellow is swinging like a pendulum between life and death, and the father cannot let him go. But go he does in spite of prayers and tears. No wonder they are afraid to break the heavy news to the desperate father. But when he hears the truth there is no wild cry of rebellion. He rather rises quietly, saying, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." The man of that fine faith is capable of writing even the Twenty-Third Psalm, for he has a beautiful intimacy with God. And we love David because, though a great sinner, he was also a great saint.
The book of II Samuel is the story of the reign of David the King. In studying David we are considering the most life-like, the most clearly delineated and the most popular of all Old Testament heroes. Bishop Quayle used to say that if he were going to hug a poet he would choose Longfellow. If we were going to become thus familiar with any of the Old Testament worthies, we should surely choose David. Not that he is a perfect man. He is very far from it. At his worst he is the chiefest of sinners, but at his best he is one of the choicest of the saints. He is a many sided man. He is a great warrior, a great statesman, a great friend. It is impossible to say how many of the Psalms he wrote. But tradition certainly has it that he was a great poet.

His story has two natural divisions. First there is a period of preparation. This part of the story is covered in the first book of Samuel. Second, there is the story of his vigorous and successful reign as king of all Israel. We are going to study both of these periods though only one of them belongs properly to II Samuel.

I

Preparation. David had three distinct courses of training in preparation for his great destiny.

1. He was trained through the task of being a shepherd. There was no small stir in the humble home of Jesse that day when the prophet Samuel came. His coming was in itself an occasion.
But the excitement of his coming was immeasurably increased when he told Jesse his purpose. God had sent him to anoint one of Jesse's stalwart sons to be the future king of Israel. It is not to be wondered at that this consideration occasioned immense excitement.

A feast was prepared. The father paraded his sons before the prophet one by one. They were a fine looking lot. But to the amazement of both father and sons, the prophet made no choice of any of them. Instead, when they had all passed he looked a bit perplexed. If these were all the sons Jesse had, then he had misunderstood his orders and had made a mistake. So he asked a question. "Is this all?" " Practically all," Jesse answered. "There is one left but of course he cannot be God's chosen. He is only a youngster. At present he is out with the sheep." "Send for him!" demanded the prophet, "For we will not eat till he comes."

So they waited. I can well imagine that they were a bit restless and resentful. They were hungry and dinner was being delayed. Then they could not persuade themselves that this youthful shepherd could possibly be the future king. Surely he could not be chosen instead of one of themselves. But they were not left in doubt for long. Suddenly this David came upon the scene. His coming was like a breath from his native hills. The sunshine was tangled in his hair and laughter sparkled in his eyes. His spell was upon the prophet at once. He recognized him as God's chosen and anointed him then and there.

The feast over, David went back to take up the work that he had laid down in order to be anointed. This business of keeping his father's sheep was the best of training for the great destiny that was ahead of him. Here he received that fine discipline that
comes from fidelity to a mean task. His responsibilities were very far from being kingly. But David never shirked. He did not think the task below him. Had he done so he would have certainly been below his task. As poor as was his position, he made the best of it. He gave himself to it with such devotion that he was willing to risk his life in order to fill it faithfully.

Then, as David kept his father's sheep, he learned how to make the best of meager opportunities. What little chance he had at self-improvement! In the eyes of many he had no chance at all. What were his resources? A sling, a harp and the great out-of-doors. But he took his sling and learned to use it with rare skill and accuracy. In his leisure hours he so mastered his harp that when the best musician in Israel was required they went at once in search of him. Then he so read the book of nature that he found "sermons in stones" and "books in the running brooks." As he looked into the night sky he heard "The Heavens declare the glory of God." He not only learned nature, but he came into a beautiful and winsome awareness of God. It was such an awareness that made him songful in the realization of life's daily joys, that made him cool and calm and courageous in the presence of danger.

2. David's second course of training was at the court of King Saul. Just how he first won Saul's attention we cannot say with certainty. There are two stories that it is next to impossible to harmonize. One story says that their meeting was due to the fits of madness to which Saul was subject. When no relief for this tragic affliction was found, David was brought to court in the hope that he might be able to soothe the king with his music. And so skillfully did he play that the king's madness did actually give
way to sanity. Such a musician is sorely in need today, for we have those among us who not only fail to make the mad sane, but they tend to drive the sane into madness.

Then there is another version that David first came to the attention of Saul through his encounter with Goliath. David had been sent on an errand to the army. Arriving there he heard the boastful challenge of the Philistine giant. The young shepherd's heart leaped within him. He loved a fight and he was quite sure he was now going to have the privilege of seeing one, for certainly there were thousands in Saul's army that would be eager to accept the challenge of this boastful Philistine. But to his amazement no champion came forward. Instead the soldiers of Israel only bowed their heads in fear and shame. It was more than this daring youth from the sheepfolds could stand. He resolved than and there that this swaggering giant should have his challenge accepted if he had to accept it himself.

David made known his purpose. Some were filled with admiration, some were amazed, some were scornful, while others were positively indignant. This was especially true of David's oldest brother. We need not be greatly surprised at Eliab's anger. The sneer flung at David by this older brother is perfectly natural. It grows out of the fact that he does not dare to undertake what this younger brother has determined to do. "With whom hast thou left those few sheep?" he sneers. He reminds David that he is only a shepherd and a very insignificant one at that. But in spite of these sneers David persists in his purpose. Soon the news of his purpose reaches the king's ears. Saul has little hope of victory at the hands of this daring youth. But the situation is desperate. He is the only champion that offers, so he resolves to allow him to engage in the unequal combat.
The outcome is vividly told. It is one of the best stories in the Old Testament. It has an eternal truth in it, too. David knew that Goliath as a soldier was better trained than himself. He knew that he had better equipment. He knew that he had had far more experience. He knew also that he inspired far greater confidence in his own people than he himself inspired in the people of Israel. But he knew further that he had assets that Goliath did not possess.

"Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: But I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." It is faith pitted against force and in such combats faith always wins. "By faith the Israelites passed through the Red Sea as by dry land; Which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." Faith can do what force cannot. Therefore we need not be surprised that David won a glorious victory.

This victory at once brought the young shepherd into the limelight. He almost instantly became the hero of his people. He also became fast friends with Jonathan, the king's son. A little later he married the king's daughter. He now moved in the atmosphere of royalty. He went out to the battle along with Saul and conducted himself with such valor that he outshone even the king himself. Certain rash singers foolishly ascribed to him tens of thousands while ascribing to Saul only thousands. Thus Saul's envy was aroused against David. So hot was his envy that Saul actually tried to murder David. Therefore he was forced to leave the court and flee for his life.

3. David's final course of training came during this period of hiding from Saul. Having been driven from court, he did not go into hiding alone. Instead he quickly gathered about him the distressed and the discontented and those who were in debt. He drew
to him the scattered and masterless men, many of whom were being hunted as he himself was. These made a considerable handful even in that far off day. Of course anyone able to organize all those who are in debt today would certainly command the largest army that ever marched into a field. Now David was a genius as an organizer and trainer of men. As a result he soon transformed these malcontents into an efficient fighting force that while too weak to take the field, was yet strong enough to prove highly successful in guerilla warfare.

With these at his back, David became a kind of Robin Hood. His native hills became a Sherwood forest. He was a great protection to his own people. But in return for this protection he asked now and then for a free-will offering. He expected everybody to make a donation. It was black mail, of course. But there was some justice in it. If the offering was not given freely, pressure was brought to bear. When Nabal, for instance, refused to give, he set out to collect by force. It was only the wit and wisdom of Abigail that prevented bloodshed. David's record through these days is not altogether clean. But it is far cleaner than one would expect of an outlaw of that distant day. And all the while David was receiving training in the handling of men that was preparing him for his life work.

II

With the opening of the second book of 'Samuel, David comes in to the kingship, first of Judah, then of all Israel. In this position he showed himself a leader and statesman of rare ability. Chaos reigned over all the tribes of Israel at the time of his coming into power. David brought order out of chaos. He welded the
scattered tribes into a compact and vigorous and powerful nation. He had a genius for government. His reign was so successful that it became the most precious memory of his people. It became also their ideal for the future, the embodiment of their Messianic hopes. 

When the Messiah come He was to sit on the throne of David and reign with David's wisdom.

This does not mean that there were no tragic happenings during David's long reign. When he was secure in his position, at a time of idleness and ease, he fell into the great sin of his life. His unfaithfulness with the wife of Uriah is easily understood and might be readily forgiven. He was swept off his feet by a sudden gust of passion; But it is hard to forgive the murder of Uriah. It was the blackest of crimes in that it was committed deliberately and in cold blood. Then worse still, if possible, was the hideous hypocrisy of the royal murderer during the days that followed. "Let not this be an offense unto thee," he writes to Joab, "For the sword devoureth one as well as another." Thus he is saying to himself, "I did not murder Uriah, I am not guilty. He would have been killed anyway." This marks the period of David's deepest degradation and danger.

But under God he was wakened and saved from utter ruin by his faithful friend, Nathan, the prophet. One day Nathan went to see this royal sinner. He told him a very ingenious story of a great injustice. David became exceedingly indignant and declared the offender was worthy of death. Then Nathan took his life in his hands and put his finger in the king's face and said, "Thou art the man!" And here David shows his bigness. Instead of becoming angry at the prophet, instead of pleading not guilty, his face went hot,
his voice choked, his heart broke and he sobbed out his confession of guilt. "I have sinned," he cries in bitter penitence. And he clutched at God's skirts and prayed for forgiveness. Of course that happened which always happens when one repents. David was forgiven and entered again into fellowship with God.

But while David was forgiven freely and fully, he was not saved from the consequences of his sin. If we sow tares God will forgive us if we repent. But there is one thing our repentance will not do. It will not pull up the tares that we have already sown. They will keep on growing. It was so in the case of David. His son Amnon became a rapist. His daughter Tamar was the victim. His son Absalom was the avenger. He murdered his half-brother Amnon. Then later Absalom again broke his father's heart by rebelling against him. One of the most pathetic stories in literature is David's sorrow over his wayward and worthless son. Thus, though David was forgiven, the sword never departed from his house and he had sorrow upon sorrow.

III

What is the secret of the spell that David casts over us? The men of his day felt it. We read that everything that he did pleased the people. Men of all times have felt it. Even God Himself is not immune. It is at times with amazement not unmixed with resentment that we read that he was a man after God's own heart. Yet we cannot but realize that, in spite of all his shortcomings and positive sins, he is still a favorite of ours. This is true because he possessed those qualities which are admired in every age.

1. He was a man of beautiful humility. David never
swaggers. He never despises his lowly origin. He never loses the
child heart. He is just as human, just as natural, just as child-
like as the idol of his people, as when he was fleeing for his life.
He is as winsomely genuine and humble upon the throne of Israel as
he was as an unknown shepherd among the Judean hills. It is easy
to hate a proud and haughty despot. It is easy to despise a con-
ceited swaggerer whose head has swollen from quick success. But it
is equally hard to resist the charm of one whom no honor nor good
fortune can spoil or rob of his childlike heart.

3. He knew how to be grateful. He was always appreciative.
He never forgot a favor. Some people pride themselves on never for-
getting an injury. David might have prided himself on never forgetting
an injury. David might have prided himself on never forgetting an
act of kindness. He is full of thanksgiving, both to God and man.
That is a mark of his charming humility. Conceited folks have
nobody to thank but themselves. The rich fool thanked neither God
nor man for his abundant crops. He had done it all himself. But
people of childlike humility have a profound sense of their obliga-
tions to others and are therefore genuinely grateful.

3. David was unfailingly magnanimous. He was possessed
of a forgiving spirit that is most amazing when viewed in the light
of the bloodthirsty day in which he lived. Saul persistently
sought his life, but David never once struck back. He always
carried towards his king a heart full of loyalty and forgiveness.
Even when Saul had been dead for years he sought out one of his
obscure kinsmen that he might show kindness to him. Absalom
rebelled against him and showed himself a most unnatural son.
But never once did David cherish the slightest resentment. While
he was alive he sought his safety and when he was dead he was
heartbroken that he had not died for him. Shimei cursed him but
his bitterest curses could not induce David to curse back. He was a man of a forgiving spirit.

4. Then he was fascinatingly wholehearted. "I hate folks that are half and half," says the writer of the 119th Psalm. So do we. We love wholehearted people. That is one of the chief secrets of the spell that David casts over us. He never did anything by halves. As a friend he was wholehearted. When he sinned he sinned with an awful recklessness. When he repented he did so with a beautiful abandon. No wonder that he was idolized by his own people! No wonder that he has cast a spell over all subsequent generations! No wonder he won a place so near to the heart of God! He was kingly in his wholeheartedness!

5. Finally, with all these characteristics, it is not to be wondered at that David was a man of beautiful intimacy with God. Whether he wrote the Shepherd Psalm or not, we do not know. But here is a father on his face in prayer. He is pleading for his sick laddie. The little fellow is swinging like a pendulum between life and death, and the father cannot let him go. But go he does in spite of prayers and tears. No wonder they are afraid to break the heavy news to the desperate father. But when he hears the truth there is no wild cry of rebellion. He rather rises quietly, saying, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." The man of that fine faith is capable of writing even the Twenty-third Psalm, for he has a beautiful intimacy with God. And we love David because, though a great sinner, he was also a great saint.
1 KINGS

The Book of 1 Kings is a continuation of the history found in the previous books. Of course it is very evident that the history herein recorded is written from the standpoint of one who believes. The author, whoever he was, was a religious man. His interest in events grows out of their religious value. The events that an unbeliever might have regarded as of great importance, he dismisses altogether or gives them the slightest mention. He records just enough to let us know the moral value of the King in power. He then tells us that the other events may be found recorded elsewhere.

This Book illustrates with peculiar impressiveness the law of sowing and reaping. If I had to put into one sentence the whole lesson of the Book, I could do so with that word from Numbers: "Be sure your sin will find you out." This fact is driven home with irresistible force. We are made to see that sin finds us out both nationally and as an individual.

The Book falls naturally into two parts. The history of the Kingdom of Solomon constitutes the first eleven chapters. The remaining chapters, 12 to 22, record the history of the North and South Kingdoms after their division.

I

Solomon came to the throne with every promise of a prosperous and successful reign. There was a little flare up of rebellion just before he was crowned, but this soon melted away.
The young King found himself at the head of a great and united people. The record says that he loved God, and there seemed to be every reason to believe that his reign was going to be one of prosperity and great blessing to his people.

Much is to be said in Solomon's favor.

1. The Lord appeared unto him. He was a man who at the beginning seemed to have a personal knowledge of God. He had had the inspiration of a father who had greatly sinned and greatly repented. He himself was a monument to Divine grace. He was the son of the woman for whom, and against whom, David had so deeply sinned. But he was God's chosen man for the Kingdom. Thus his very position was evidence of God's forgiving grace.

Then too, Solomon had a great teacher in the prophet Nathan. Therefore, when God appeared unto him and put the key of heaven in his hand, he brought to this experience enough training to be biased in the right direction. He made a wise choice, the story says he chose with an understanding heart. There are those who have criticised Solomon for this choice but I do not know that he could have chosen better. At least this is true, that God approved his choice. He told him that because he had passed by the secondary and chosen the primary, that the secondary should be added. That is the law that holds good forever. Jesus stated it in these words: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you".

2. The second fine quality that Solomon possessed was genuine ability. I do not mean to say by that that he is the wisest man that ever lived. He is far from it. None of the promises that God made him when He appeared to him were completely fulfilled. They
were conditional promises and Solomon refused to meet the conditions therefore he did not receive the fullness of reward. But that he was a man of large capacity, of goodly parts, there is no denying.

3. Then it is greatly in favor of Solomon that he was a man of peace. Up to his day, the nation had not been a building nation. Its energies had been given, in a large measure, to war. Solomon avoided war as much as possible. He became a great builder. The temple that he builded to the honor of God was one of the most marvelous ever erected. It was said to have cost about four and one-half billions of dollars. The most holy place, which was only about thirty feet square, cost one hundred and ninety millions of dollars.

But Solomon had his weaknesses. Wise he was, but his wisdom in certain directions was utter folly.

1. He was tremendously fond of display. He seems to have been a typical oriental despot. He reigned with a pomp and splendor and showiness such as his nation had never known before and has not known since. To his delight he became the talk of the world. She has heard about him and could not believe the marvelous stories that were told. She came to see for herself and declared that the half had not been told her.

Now it is evident that all this pomp and splendor and display was costly. It was not helpful to Solomon and his court. It made it all the more easy for them to rot down. It was hard on the common people. They gave their version of the worth of Solomon's reign when they spoke to his son. They said: "Thy father made our yoke heavy". Heavy it was, almost to the point of exhaustion.

2. The story says that Solomon loved many strange women. He was a bit of a sensualist. There are those who write books some-
times to tell us how to get married, but many times they do not know themselves. Solomon ought to have written one. He lead several hundred blushing brides to the altar. Certainly he knew, there is no two ways about that. These brides represented almost all the nations in that oriental world.

Why did Solomon marry so numerously and so widely? Such marrying was expressly forbidden by the Lord his God. Nor can we find a competent reason in the fact that he was a bit of a libertine. Had that been the sole reason, he could have married sufficiently among his own people. This was Solomon's way of staying on terms of friendship with all the surrounding nations. Solomon had a good end in view but he took a wrong method of arriving at the good end. He was a Jesuit before his time. He thought it was perfectly right to do wrong if the end in view was a good end. That is he thought sin in some circumstances, could be made to pay. In this he was not wise, he was very foolish. The final evidence of the folly of Solomon was in allowing these numerous foreign wives to rob him of his faith in God. It came to pass, the story says, when he was old, that his wives turned away his heart from his Lord.

When he was old. What a time to forsake God. When he was already getting close to the harbor lights of home. This does not mean that Solomon broke with God altogether. It only means that he became very broad. He began to say, "There is a lot of good in all religions". Then he said, "All religions are equally true " and by that he meant that all religions are equally false. Thus he was plunged into doubt and into utter unbelief.

What was the result? He became the most miserable of men. He became a thorough-going cynic. His gospel is the gospel
of despair. The dead are better off than the living and those that have never been born are better off than the dead. The world is all wrong and can never be righted. "What has been will be and there is no new thing under the sun". He ends by being an incarnate despair, crowned agony, a goodly heartache, scintillated pain. "Vanity of vanities," is his cry. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit."

II

The Kingdom that Solomon left behind him was very showy in its appearance. But it was established on a foundation of sand. The King himself, during his last days, had lived above a smouldering volcano. No sooner was he dead and buried than it was ripe for eruption. "Lighten our yoke" was the demand of the people. "Thy father made our yoke heavy". "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loin", was the reply of Solomon's pig-headed son. Upon this the Kingdom was divided, two tribes remaining with the son of Solomon, Rehoboam and the other ten uniting under Jeroboam.

From now on, our interest centers mainly in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. During the period covered by this Book there were four Kings in Judah. Two of them, Rehoboam and Abijam, were wicked. The other two, Asa and Jehosaphat were good Kings. These helped to keep the Kingdom of Judah from the rapid deterioration that went on in the Kingdom of the North.

The first King of Israel was Jeroboam. He was a man of decision and ability. He was God's chosen man. He believed in God, after a fashion but he believed that God needed to be managed. Therefore, he had no sooner come to his place of power than he set
about the task.

What Jeroboam feared was that the divided tribes might be reunited. They were still one religiously. He felt that it would be worse for him to allow them to go to Jerusalem to worship. Therefore he said, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem." He offered them an easier way. He built idols in their native villages. He raised up priests from the very lowest. Thus he sowed the seed for the future ruin of the nation.

For his sin he paid an awful penalty. He lost his touch with God. He came to know a bitter sorrow. He went to his grave with the knowledge that his sin was going to work the absolute undoing of his family. Soon after his death, the last one that had a drop of his blood in his veins was exterminated. His successors were no better than himself. There were six in all. They reached their climax of wickedness and weakness in Ahab. Ahab would have been bad enough left to himself, but he married the Lady Macbeth of the Old Testament. Under their corrupting influence, the nation went from bad to worse. By the time we reach the end of the Book, the Northern Kingdom is hovering on the brink of utter and final destruction.

But the writer makes us understand that the ruin of the nation was not accidental. It was the natural outcome of national apostacy. Elijah told Ahab one day that there would not be rain or dew in the coming months except at his word. A terrible drought followed. There was much loss and much suffering. The foolish King placed all the blame on the prophet, but Elijah put his finger upon the sore spot when he returned. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" said the King. "I have not troubled Israel,"
answered the Prophet, "But thou and thy father's house in that you have made Israel to sin". This is, sin found Israel out nationally and also found it out individually. This was the case with Solomon. It was the case with Jeroboam. It was the case with Jezebel. It is the case with Ahab.

There were many crimes for which this guilty pair were responsible. The murder of Naboth was one of the worst. Ahab did not dare commit the crime. He was perfectly willing, however, for his wife to do it. When he knew the deed was done, he went down to take possession. A shadow fell across his path. He looked up to face the Prophet Elijah. "Hast thou found me, oh my enemy?" he asked. "I have found thee," answered the Prophet and he pronounces his doom. He tells him that in the same place where the dogs licked up the blood of Ahab they are going to lick up his blood.

Just what King Ahab thought of that, we do not know. For the moment God has frightened him. Little by little the prophesy is forgotten. One day he goes out to battle. Evil forebodings take hold on him. He has been warned that his undertaking is going to end in disaster. He puts on a disguise. For a long time he escapes but at last a certain man drew bow at a venture. You see those dogs licking up the blood, that blood by the pool of Samaria? It is rich royal blood. Ahab's sin has found him out.

But if sin finds us out, so does righteousness. God did not leave him without witness in those terrible days. One of the greatest prophets of all times was preaching there. God walked with him, he took care of him. He sheltered him in the hollow of his hand. When he was worried and discouraged, he gave him food and refreshment. He gave him to listen to the still small voice.
If we sow tares, we are going to reap them but flowers will also grow.
If we sow to the spirit, we are sure to reap life everlasting.

* * * * *
The Message of the Books.

1 Kings.

First Kings is a continuation of the story that we read in the First and Second Books of Samuel. The message of the book is therefore vitally connected with that of the two preceding, of which it is a part. You will remember that we said that the message of the books of Samuel was this, "The Lord reigneth." It makes very clear the fact of the kingship of God. It shows that though a nation or an individual may reject God they do not thereby dethrone Him. It is one thing to rebel against God. It is quite another to unseat Him from the throne of the universe.

We summed up the message of the books of Samuel in one sentence, "The Lord reigneth." Now, the message of First Kings grows naturally out of the fact of the kingship of God. A holy God is on the throne of this universe. Since that is true what kind of world do you expect this world to be? What is to be of necessity the nature of His reign? Since God is holy we expect His reign to be one that makes for righteousness. We expect Him to so order this world as that righteousness will make the ultimate victory and sin end in disaster. That such is the case the book of First Kings makes perfectly clear. Matthew Arnold did not believe in God but he did believe there was a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness. Therefore, there is a power not ourselves that makes for the destruction of wrong. This book makes these facts perfectly plain. Its message may be summed up in one single sentence, "Be sure your sin will find you out". It would be hard to find any book in the Bible that is more emphatic in the teaching of that lesson than is this book of First Kings. "Be sure your sin will find you out". That is emphasized again and again.

Now, it is well for us to remember that this is not true on the sterner side simply. If sin finds the wrong-doer out, righteousness also finds the right-doer out. Sin in this God ordered world can have but one ultimate end and that is disaster. Righteousness, though the victory may be long deferred, must end in conquest and in triumph. How full is this story of illustrations of the truth of moral retribution. Sin certainly finds the sinner out. This is true nationally. Look at Israel as a nation. It began by asking a king like the nations round about them. God desired to be their accepted king. They refused Him and He gave them a king after their hearts. Then He chose for them a king after His own heart. Under the reign of this God chosen king Israel reached the height of its power.

After David came Solomon. Solomon did not walk in the steps of David, his father. David, in spite of a fall here and there, did put God at the center of his life. Solomon, on the other hand, did not. It is true he built the temple. It is true that there was a magnificent form of worship. Yet the will of God was not considered. Solomon shaped his policy according to his own will instead of according to the known will of God.

Upon what did Solomon depend for his success? Not upon right and justice. He depended upon pomp and splendor. He depended upon outward show and magnificence. The court in his kingdom was exceedingly impressive to one who merely looked upon the outside. The fame of his splendor spread over the world. The Queen of Sheba heard about it and could not but believe that it was exaggerated. But when she came and saw for herself she said that the half was never told.
But to the eyes that really saw Solomon, in spite of his magnificence, was treading upon the verge of ruin. He was sowing the seeds of inevitable disaster. His showy kingdom has been compared with that of Florence under Lorenzo Medici. It is said of the Florence of that day that it lay in bonds or rather danced in them, with her garments smeared with blood and with a foul song upon her lips. But he found out that pomp and splendor make a poor foundation for a staple government and before Solomon died the prophet had foretold the disaster of his kingdom.

When Rehoboam came to the throne the people came to him asking that their lot might be bettered. And they summed up the reign of Solomon in one sentence, "Thy father made our yoke heavy". His reign had been full of magnificence and of show and of splendor but it had been at the price of the peoples' toil and pain and poverty.

Now, Rehoboam was not wise. He was a bit of a fool. And he had some fellow-fools for advisers. And while he did not depend upon the same form of godlessness as did Solomon yet he chose just as wicked and ruinous a course. He decided that he would depend for his success upon autocracy. Therefore he said "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. If he has chastised you with whips, I will chastise you with scorpions."

This was as a spark of fire to a powder magazine. The nation that was already much eaten by the white ants of ruin fell to pieces. Two tribes remained loyal to Rehoboam while ten united under the kingship of an able leader named Jeroboam. Then followed disaster after disaster. The little nation of Judah became the easy prey to almost any foreign king that wished to conquer her. The northern kingdom fared even worse.

When Jeroboam had settled himself upon the throne asking over the ten tribes he wanted to make sure his position. Now God had promised to make the throne sure to him if he would only be obedient. But Jeroboam was not quite willing to trust God. He did not rely on magnificence as did Solomon. He did not rely upon autocracy as did Rehoboam. He relied upon policy and compromise. He was a politician. He believed in God after a fashion but he believed that God needed to be managed. He thought that he knew a better way to make his position certain than the way of obedience to God.

He reasoned after this fashion: "If these ten tribes continue to go to Jerusalem to worship, if the people remain one religiously before long they will become one politically. Before long I will lose my throne. To prevent this I must make them separate religiously as they are politically." Therefore he set up idols, calves, in Samaria and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem."

Now, what was the result of this government of policy and compromise? It, too, ended in disaster. This book tells how seven other kings followed Jeroboam one after another, each one bringing the nation a little closer to its final ruin. By the time we reach the end of this book the nation made up of the ten tribes is already ripe for utter destruction and we are faced with the pathetic fact that the nation that was so great and strong under David has become a torn and shattered wreck. The secret of her ruin is unmistakably this: her sins are finding her out.

The whole national story is summed up, I think, in that little scene between Elijah and Ahab. Elijah dashed in on Ahab one day and told him
that there was not to be rain or dew in his land for the next month except at his word. Then Elijah went away and hid carrying the key of Heaven with him. Ahab sought for him everywhere but failed to find him. Then one day the old prophet suddenly put in his appearance. Ahab was anxious to get his hands upon him and so when they faced each other Ahab shot at him this question, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"

And what answered God's prophet? "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that you have made Israel to sin." Ahab was thoroughly human in that he wanted to blame the suffering upon the physician instead of upon the disease. But Elijah put his finger upon the one sole cause of the nation's downfall. Why had she become divided? Why was she torn by civil war? Why was she invaded again and again? Why was she parched with drought and disseminated by famine? Why was she at last scattered over the face of the earth? Just one reason—Sin. True she had been made to sin by a wicked leadership but that did not save her from responsibility as a nation. Israel's downfall was through sin. And when we read her history today upon the pages of this book this big fact must haunt us, "Be sure your sin will find you out". That was true of Israel. It will be quite as true of the nations of today.

The truth of the matter is, I know of no fact that is more broadly written upon the pages of history than that the nation that ignores God reaps a harvest of ruin. Take the history of the nations that have tracked their way to their death. Take the history of France before the outbreak of the Revolution. Take the history of Germany. Take our own nation and think of the price it paid for the introduction of slavery. Sin finds us out nationally.

Sin also finds out the sinner individually. Take the story of Solomon. What a brilliant wreck he is. How gloriously the morning of his life begins. In what a black bank of storm clouds his sun goes down at eventide. Solomon rejected God. He became a cynic. He went upon the rocks spitting this disastrous sentence from his lips, "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity and vexation of spirit."

Solomon's sin find him out in his own soul. It found him out in the ruin of others. And what is true of Solomon is true of one character after another that passes before us in this dramatic story. Rehoboam sinned. He had to pay the penalty. That penalty was the tearing of ten-twelfths of his kingdom from his hand. That penalty was defeat and humiliation. But this was only the outward penalty. In addition to this there was that infinitely greater penalty, the loss of peace with God.

And what a price Jeroboam paid. How surely his sin found him out. It found him out in the utter destruction of his family. It found him out in the pathetic blasting and blighting of his own moral life. His death sentence and the death sentence of all that were related to him was spoken days before its execution. And the message of Jeroboam's life is this, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

The house of Jeroboam was destroyed by one Baasha. He was as godless, however, as those he destroyed. Then upon his house was executed exact poetic justice. His house was utterly destroyed by Zimri just as he had destroyed the house of Jeroboam. But Zimri was no better than those who he destroyed. He burned the palace over his own head and died by his own hand.
Then there are Jezebel and Ahab. Ahab was possibly the most bitterly condemned man in the book. The very height of his condemnation is this, that he married Jezebel. Jezebel, you know, is the Lady Macbeth of the Bible. She was a fanatical devotee of Baal. She made Ahab a worshipper of Baal and a persecutor of the prophets of the Lord. She was a brilliant woman, strong of character and even more corrupt than she was brilliant and strong.

There is a chapter in her life that especially interests us. Ahab came in one day in the dumps. For a long time he had wanted a vineyard that was close to his summer palace in Jezreel. But the owner, Naboth, did not care to sell. Ahab did not like to be disappointed so he went home like a big baby and took his bed. Jezebel came in and looked at him and said, "What is the matter?" And he told her the story and she said, "Leave it to me."

Now, he left it to her and you know what happened. The man who owned the vineyard was cruelly murdered by her order. He was stoned to death and eaten by the dogs. And then what happened to the queen? She went on prospering but she did not prosper forever. Some folks think that because the Lord does not pay off every Saturday night that He does not pay at all. What says the wise man? "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the wicked men are fully set in them to do evil". But the Lord did pay. Whose face is that yonder at the window? Who is that being hurled from the window, a morsel of meat for the hungry dogs that wait for her in the street? That's Jezebel. And what is the message of that ghastly feast? "Be sure your sin will find you out."

And Ahab - he was accessory after the fact if not before. He was afraid to do what Jezebel did but he was glad when she did it. When she tells him what she has done he is immensely pleased and crawls out of bed to go down and take possession of the vineyard. But as he walks among its vines and its flowers a shadow falls across his way. His face goes white. He gasps, then he says, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" And the stern prophet of the Lord, Elijah, answers back, "I have found thee". And then as God's representative he passes sentence upon this man. He tells him the message of the book, that his sins are going to find him out and that one day the dogs are going to taste richer blood than that of Naboth, even that of King Ahab.

I do not know just what were Ahab's feelings as he left this vineyard. He might have gone away laughing to himself. He might have congratulated himself in the secrecy of his room that the vineyard was his and that the threat of the prophet would come to nothing. But my private opinion is that it worried him much for a while. Then little by little he threw off his depression. He refused to think of it. He refused to look on it as a possibility.

Then there came a time when he decided to go out to battle. He had induced Jehoshaphat to go with him. But Jehoshaphat wanted to know the mind of the Lord in the matter, so he asked that the prophets be consulted. Ahab was perfectly willing and called in his troop of paid liars. And they said, "Go up and prosper."

Now, Jehoshaphat didn't like their looks. So he said, "Isn't there a prophet of the Lord?" "O yes, there is," said Ahab, "but I don't like him. He always prophesies evil. He always tells me the truth and I want
somebody who is a facile liar." But Jehoshaphat insisted on the prophet of the Lord so Micaiah was called and he prophesied that the campaign would end in disaster.

But Ahab refused to believe him. He seems to have made up his mind that he could gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles. But when the battle was actually begun he seems to have become a bit doubtful. He disguised himself and for a long time his disguise seemed to have been effective. The soldiers of the opposing army were ordered to give their attention especially to the killing of the king. But they were never able to find him. At last, however, one man drew a bow at a venture and Ahab is mortally wounded.

What makes those street dogs red of muzzle as they lap down by the pool of Samaria? Ah! They are lapping up blood, the blood of a king. And as they lap and snarl and bark and growl they are saying in their own gruesome language just this, "Be sure your sin will find you out".
I KINGS

The books of First and Second Kings like those of First and Second Samuel, were originally one book. They take up the history where the writer of Samuel leaves off. But their story is not one of such brilliant success and prosperity as we find in Second Samuel. It is rather a story of disobedience and disloyalty to God. For this reason it is also largely a story of political and moral decline and disaster, both for the individual and for the nation.

This author, like the author of the books of Samuel, is at once a historian and a preacher of righteousness. He writes always from the religious point of view. He looks upon men and events not as a man of the world, but as one who has a keen sense of spiritual values. For instance, he is not greatly interested in the ivory house that Ahab built. He knows well enough that it counts for little even though it doubtless produced quite a temporary sensation. But he is profoundly interested in the kind of character that Ahab built. He is interested in Ahab's attitude toward God. He centers his attention upon those spiritual values that are eternal. Thus he takes captive the interest of all the centuries. For though we care little or nothing today about the kind of house that Ahab or any other built in the long ago, we are forever concerned by how he met sin and conquered it or was conquered by it.

This author writing from a religious point of view, emphasizes constantly the fact of a reigning and righteous God.
He is firm in the conviction that in loyalty to God is man's only salvation. He believes that when the righteous are in authority the people rejoice, but when the wicked are in authority the people mourn. He is further convinced that every road away from God has disaster for its goal. His whole theme might be summed up in that familiar word from Saint Paul, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Every event that he relates is but an illustration of the truth of this text. This first book has two natural divisions. First, the story of the reign of Solomon that begins with the death of David. Second, the division of the Kingdom and the history of Judah and of Israel under their various kings up to the death of Ahab. Both these divisions haunt us with the unalterable law of sowing and reaping.

I

Look first at the reign of Solomon.

After a brief flare-up of rebellion Solomon began his reign with every promise of success. His father, David, had laid for him a most excellent foundation upon which to build. His nation was strong and unified and respected by the surrounding peoples. Solomon himself was well trained and highly gifted. In matters of religion he had the prophet Nathan as his teacher. Under his influence and that of his father he seems to have been possessed, at least at the beginning, with a beautiful humility that made him a seeker after God.

Not only so, but the story indicates that he came to possess a vitally religious experience. He had some first hand
knowledge of God, for the Lord appeared unto him. Not only so, but He put the key of Heaven in his hand, as He puts it in ours, and invited him to make his choice. And Solomon did choose, and choose wisely. He asked for an understanding heart. I am aware that he has been criticized for making this 'choice'. Yet I hardly know how he could have improved upon it. The treasure for which he made request is certainly one of high value. This is proven by the fact that God was pleased with him for making it. He promised him then and there that because he had asked for this fine treasure, and had not sought things of secondary worth, that these lesser values should be given to him in addition. That is ever the case. Jesus makes that clear when He says, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Thus Solomon began his reign with the fine gift of an understanding heart. This does not mean, of course, that he was the wisest man that ever lived as we were taught in the old time Sunday-school stories. He was, however, a man of great ability, though exceeding far from being the wisest of men. God had made him rich promises, but not one of these promises was completely fulfilled. This was the case not because God is unfaithful, but because Solomon refused to meet the conditions. All God's promises are conditional and neither Solomon nor anyone else can claim a promise without the obedience upon which the promise is conditioned. Solomon was wise, but he had much of folly mixed with his wisdom.

Let us glance at some of the matters in which Solomon was truly wise. He was wise in that he was a man of peace.
The pastime of all kings in his day was war. Solomon seems to have realized the folly of war. That marks him as a man far ahead of his time. War has been the greatest scourge of humanity. It wastes our material resources. It destroys our choicest young men. It brings always in its wake an aftermath of death to our highest moral and spiritual values. Yet there are many today who have not caught up with Solomon in realizing the futility and madness of war. He saw that war was suicidal and, therefore, he became an ardent, though often mistaken, peacemaker.

Not only did Solomon refuse to destroy by war, but he took the resources that might have been employed in this wasteful and worse than useless fashion, and turned them in some measure to useful, constructive purposes. Solomon was a builder. This does not mean that he always built wisely. But he was certainly looking in the right direction when he used the energies of his nation to build rather than "to steal and to kill and to destroy." To make peace is the height of wisdom. To make war is the supreme madness of history.

But having acknowledged the wisdom of Solomon, we cannot shut our eyes to his great folly. The first mark of his foolishness we discover in his extravagance and love of display. It is wise to build as we are able, but it is foolish to build extravagantly and beyond our means. It is not only foolish but criminal to build when that which we build crushes the hope and happiness of others. Solomon's temple is thought to have cost about three and one-half billion dollars. The Holy of Holies, a small room only thirty feet square, cost one hundred and ninety-two million dollars. This is an indication of the extravagance of the man. Much of this money was left by his father. But that
used for other enterprises was wrung from the people by the hard hand of tyranny. When Solomon was gone those who knew summed up his brilliant reign in one sentence: "Thy father made our yoke grievous."

Second, as a seeker after peace Solomon played the fool. He married as extravagantly as he squandered money. It is a pity that Solomon did not write a book on how to get married. Surely it would have been worth our reading, for he led hundreds of blushing brides to the altar. But this does not mean that he was a mere sensualist and nothing more. Had this been the case he might have found sufficient wives among his own people. His reason for marrying all these foreign women, contrary to the law of God, was in order to have peace with the nations from which they came. That is, he chose to fight with one representative of the nation rather than with the nation as a whole. (He was a bit of a Jesuit before his day.) He thought it was wise to do evil that good may come. Thus he played the fool.

And what was the outcome? This, of course, Solomon reaped according to his sowing. First, he totally lost his grip of God. That is a most tragic sentence we read in the eleventh chapter of this book: "It came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: And his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. It is horrible to forsake God at any time, but to forsake Him when in sight of the harbor lights of Home, to forsake Him when there is such desperate need of a strong staff upon which to lean, this is the very climax of tragedy. This does not mean, of course, that Solomon renounced God altogether.
He simply gave hospitality to other gods. He became very broad and very tolerant. He first found that there is a bit of truth in all religions. That was right and wise. He passed on to say "all religions are equally true," which was equivalent to saying "all religions are equally false." Therefore he came to the twilight and eventide without any sense of the undergirding of the Everlasting Arms.

Second, Solomon was compelled to see something of the blight of his evil life fall upon his kingdom. While his throne still seemed quite secure he was warned by God's prophet that disaster was in the offing. The reason that it was not immediate was not because of any good in Solomon himself. Therefore, though he went to his death with his kingdom outwardly prosperous, he knew that it had in it, from his own hands, the germs of disaster and disintegration. He left a people on the verge of the abyss of rebellion, needing only his pig headed son, tinctured by his father's tyranny, to push them over the brink. Thus Solomon reaped a tragic harvest both in himself and in his kingdom.

II

This same law continues to be illustrated by the kings that follow after the death of Solomon. Rehoboam might have had a loyal and united people, but the despotism of his father was in his blood. His people were ready to deal fairly with him. They only asked for the lightening of their heavy yoke. He took their request under consideration. He sought advice first from the old men. They told him that if he would listen to the people they would be his servants forever. He then turned to the young fellows
with whom he had grown up. They told him to take the tyrant's way, to tell them that his little finger should be thicker than his father's loins. He listened to the young men because their advice was more to his liking. He had no sense of responsibility. He had not come to serve, but to be served; not to give, but to take. Thus he sowed, and he reaped accordingly. The ten tribes flung away from him, and the nation thus divided faced the more surely toward ruin. He lived his life in the midst of strife, and died, so far as we know, without God and without hope.

The story of Jeroboam is equally tragic. He was God's chosen man for the ruler of the northern kingdom of Israel. He was also the choice of the people. He was a man of vigor and ability. He was a man of some faith in God, though he thought God needed to be managed. He was above all else a politician. He felt that he must depend upon his own chicanery for the maintenance of his throne, rather than upon the sure promise of God. This conviction led to the supreme sin of his life, his failure to put first things first.

When Jeroboam was firmly seated upon the throne his one ambition was to make his position secure. He saw a threat in the fact that though the people were divided politically, they were yet one religiously. He was afraid that if his own people continued to go to Jerusalem to worship they might end by becoming one with Judah once more. Should this happen he would certainly lose his place. Therefore he set about to divide them religiously as well as politically. This he did, not by trying to turn them away from religion altogether. He knew that would be futile. Instead he "made two calves of gold, and said unto them: 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; Behold thy
gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."
That is, he appealed to their love of ease. He did not say that it was wrong to go up to Jerusalem, but that it was too much trouble. Thus he won them from their loyalty to God. That was wrong of course, but it was more important, to his thinking, that he keep the throne than that he obey God.

And what was the outcome of this sowing? What did he win by his shrewd scheming? He did not gain the end he sought. His throne was not established as it might have been had he taken God into his confidence. Instead death snatched the scepter from his hand a few years later; then from the hand of his son. No other son was allowed to succeed him. On the contrary everyone that had a drop of his blood in his veins was put to death. Not only did he bring about the ruin of himself and his own children, but he left an abiding blight upon the nation. He came to be known in the after days, not only as one who sinned tragically himself, but as one who had made Israel to sin and thus hastened her steps toward final national disaster.

Five other kings succeeded to the throne of Israel after Jeroboam. But they are no improvement morally over their predecessor. Of every one it is said that he did evil in the sight of the Lord. But the climax of wickedness was reached by Ahab. He was reckoned the very worst of the ugly lot. Ahab would doubtless have been a force for evil under any circumstances; but his natural wickedness was greatly strengthened by his marriage to Jezebel, the Lady Macbeth of the Old Testament. These two were not only tyrants, but they reigned, so far as they wished, in utter disregard of the laws both of God and man.
was none like unto Ahab, the author tells us, whom Jezebel, his wife, urged on. They sinned openly and prospered in it.

Then one day the prophet Elijah dashed into their presence to tell them boldly and to their faces that calamity was ahead, that there should not be rain nor dew for the coming months except at his word. He then hid himself in the wilderness and left the king and queen to nurse their rage. At last, after more than three years of drouth Elijah came back as suddenly as he had gone away. Ahab is eager to get at him. Now, at last, he will "feed fat the ancient grudge." He hears him. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" he cries hotly. But the prophet is not the least awed. Instead he towers above the king as Pike's Peak might tower above an ant hill, and answers calmly: "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house in that you have made Israel to sin. You are only reaping according to your sowing. It is sin that has blighted your crops and withered your pastures. Your physical poverty has its origin in your spiritual poverty."

But this law of sowing and reaping is illustrated most emphatically in our final picture of Ahab. Here is poetic justice in the strictest sense. One day Ahab came home in a pout. He was as peevish as a spoiled baby. Shrewd Jezebel saw at once that something was wrong. She asked him what the matter was. "I want Naboth's vineyard," he answered fretfully, "and he refuses to sell it to me." Having made his complaint he flung himself upon a divan, turned his face to the wall and sulked. But there was no sulking on the part of Jezebel. "I will see to it," she said, and see to it she did. She had Naboth quickly put out of the way. That was a small chore for her. Then she told fretful Ahab that the vineyard was his.
The big baby is delighted. He dared not commit the crime himself, but he is exceedingly glad that Jezebel has done it for him. He will go now and take over the vineyard. What is to hinder? So away he goes. What a lovely place! He walks leisurely among the vines and looks at them with pleasure. "It is all mine," he says, "and so easy." Then suddenly a shadow falls across his path. He looks up with a start. How unfortunate! The one man that he most dreaded is standing before him, and Jezebel is not there to help. It is Elijah, the prophet: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" he whines. "I have found thee," is the stern answer, "and the dogs that lapped up the blood of Naboth are going to lap up yours."

It was a startling sentence! Doubtless the king was terrified for a while. But Jezebel poured her courage into him when he returned home and somewhat eased his mind. By and by the event was half forgotten in the rush of matters of state. And now Ahab is going out to battle. He possibly remembers the prediction and is a bit disturbed by it. Besides, another prophet, Micaiah, has told him that his campaign is not going to turn out well. Therefore he disguises himself as he goes into battle. For a long time the disguise is effective. But at last a certain man draws a bow as a venture. He is not shooting at any target in particular. He just has one arrow left, perhaps. He bends his bow and lets it fly! But an unknown soldier, standing upright in his chariot, staggers. His knees grow weak. He sinks down and dies! What are those dogs lapping down there by the pool? It is blood, rich royal blood, the blood of Ahab! And as he sowed, so he reaped.
But this story is not all tragic. During these dark days of decline God did not leave himself without a witness. Judah had two kings, Asa and Jehoshaphat, that followed Jehovah. Above all there was that rugged preacher of righteousness, Elijah. He was Israel's real standing army, the real defender, and the safeguard of the nation. He was "the horsemen of Israel and the chariots thereof." Through his bracing ministry there were seven thousand that did not bow the knee to Baal. The chief harvest of those days was tares, because that was what most men were sowing. But there was also a harvest of wheat because there were a few dauntless souls that dared to sow wheat. Evil seed will grow if we plant them, but it is equally true that good seed will grow also. We reap according to our sowing. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."
II KINGS

I

The author of this book as we reminded you in the first book is a prophet. He is a preacher of righteousness. Being a preacher he fixes his thought on one simple theme. Had he taken a text, this would have fitted exactly "Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." All that this pleader for righteousness has to say is built around that tremendous fact.

II

Now much of the sowing of this period was to the flesh. Naturally the harvest was one of corruption. The writer emphasizes this in three definite directions.

1. In the life of the individual. He believed, this ancient preacher, that nobody ever gets away with anything. When Ahab goes to take the vineyard that had come as a price of blood, he meets the prophet Elisha who passes the sentence of death upon him. A sentence that was as inevitable as ever passed upon a prisoner at the bar. By and by the dogs lap up his blood just where they had lapped up the blood of his victim.

King after king comes to the throne to sin and to pay the penalty for his sin. There is no escape. How about Jezebel you ask? Hers was the chief guilt for the murder of Naboth, but because our sin does not pay us off every Saturday night does not mean that it does not pay at all. Years slip by, one king replaced another, often by murder. At last Jehu, the
hard driver has come to the throne.

One day he makes his way to Jezreel, this is where Jezebel lives. She hears of his coming, she knows her life is in danger, but she does not hide, she is daring and dashing. Instead she goes to the hair-dressers, she goes to the beauty specialist, and having made herself look her best, she takes her place at an upstairs window. When Jehu comes down her street, instead of hiding, she shouts at him. She assumes an entirely new roll. She becomes a preacher of the law of sowing and reaping.

What does she say? She greets Jehu and challenges Jehu with a question "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" What did she mean by that? Zimri had killed his master and he himself had been murdered almost immediately. It was Jezebel's way of saying to Jehu "Be careful what you do." "Be sure your sins will find you out." "He that soweth of the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption." "Right" answered Jehu "Now by way of illustration, Who is on my side?" he shouts. Two or three faces appear at the window "Throw her down" he commands. There is a scramble and a scream and a body falls through the air to topple on the cobble stones. Jehu drives over this mangled body and leaves it in the street. He goes to the palace, has a feast, then orders the body of Jezebel to be buried. When the undertaker arrives, the street dogs are sitting about on their haunches with a satisfied look of those that have already feasted. Jezebel fed the dogs once with the body of Naboth, and now she feeds them with her own.

2. What we sow, we reap in the life of those that are dear to us.

King after king in Israel went wrong. That was bad, but what was worse, he did not go bad alone. Nobody ever goes to hell alone. Nobody ever goes to Heaven alone. What I sow I reap, I reap it in myself, I reap it in my children. I reap it in all whose lives touch mine.

3. What we sow as a nation we reap. That was true in the long ago
it is true still. If you read the 17th Chapter of this book, you will
find a summary of the indictment against the nation. You will find out-
lined step by step the path of Israel and Judah through to ruin. It is
the faith of this writer that these nations were not destroyed because
they were weak. They were brought from weakness to strength when they
were delivered from Egypt. They were not destroyed because they lived
on a bridge between three continents. He believed that they were destroyed
because they refused to listen to their prophet. They lost God, they
lost unity, and lost their sense of mission. They ceased to live because
they ceased to be fit to live. And what was true of those nations is
true of all others. What a nation sows, it reaps.

III

But, if the seeds of evil have a growing power, so do the seeds of
righteousness. Most of the Kings of this period were corrupt, and while
the nation as a whole sowed to the flesh, there were many individuals that
were radiant and beautiful exceptions. Elijah sowed to the spirit. He
reaped according to his sowing. He could not save the nation, but through
his faithfulness there were seven-thousand that did not bow their knee to
Baal.

He reaped his reward in being able to call into the service of God
and train the prophet Elisha. Elijah seems a stern man, he is the prophet
that is credited with calling down fire from Heaven and destroying two
companies of fifty each that had been sent to arrest him. It is the authors
way of telling us that if we rebel against any form of power, that power
will destroy us. It is true with electricity. It is true with God.
It is true in the nature of things.
Then Elijah reaped his reward in the beauty of his home-going.

That last scene in the life of Elijah is worthy of a place in the New Testament. In some fashion, the prophet has come upon the conviction that his end is near. How does he approach it? With wonderful serenity. "As they still went on and talked, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

Elisha, who was his successor was not so spectacular as Elijah. He seemed to live the quiet life. It was he who was credited by sweetening the waters of a certain section. He was credited also by changing a barren land into a fruitful land. That is what is constantly taking place in the realm of the spiritual. We have the promise "That a man shall be as a river of water in a dry place." It is God's purpose to change the barreness of dessert in your heart and set it to flowering. Some of the most thrilling stories in the Old Testament are connected with Elijah. He had a friend who is spoken of as a great woman. She used to entertain the wondering prophet, and he brought to her home an unmeasured pleasure. He, it was that healed Naaman. He it was that told the king and his starving people in Samaria that "Bread in abundance was waiting for them in the tomorrow."

Nobody believed it, but the next day they were fed.

While the kings both of Israel and Judah were predominately bad, there were some exceptions. The most outstanding was King Hezekiah of Jerusalem. He is the man who is credited for saving his people from the great Assyrian Empire by prayer alone. Not being able to defend them by force of arms, he took their cause to God. It is in celebration of this development that Byron wrote one of his most beautiful poems.

"The Assyrian came down like wolves on the fold

...........
During this period also appeared some of the greatest prophets of Israel: Amos, Hezekiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, these flung themselves in desperate earnestness against the downward path of their people and warned them of impending disaster. But they pushed them aside as if greedy for their own ruin and at last the Israelites were carried away into captivity. Judah met a kindred fate a little later. But the sowing of this great prophet was not in vain. To this day we hear their voices. "And having sown to the spirit, they are to reap everlasting life."
II KINGS

The book of Second Kings is the continuation of the tragic story that was begun in the first book. Here the tendency is still downward. The period is marked by moral and spiritual decline. Here, too, the author still fills the role of a prophet. He is still a preacher of righteousness. He continues to haunt us with that unalterable law that he so pressed upon our consciences in the first book: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

I

In the seventeenth chapter of this book the author gives a kind of summary of the causes that led to the downfall, both of Israel and of Judah. What were these causes? Why were these nations destroyed? It was not because of their natural weakness. They had been led from Egyptian bondage by one lone man. Surely they were weak then; but they triumphed in spite of their weakness. No more were they the victims of circumstance. Their disasters were not born of their geographical position. They were not trampled into the dirt because they happened to occupy a little bridge of land that joined three continents together. The fountain source of their ruin was their rejection of Jehovah. All their woes, all their painful trekking from national greatness to defeat and exile was born of their forgetfulness of God.

Having rejected God they were prepared to take their next downward step. That step did not consist in their ceasing to be religious altogether. Man is incurably religious. If he does not have a religion of reality he will have a religion of sham and falsehood.
if he will not have a genuine religion he will have a spurious religion. But a religion of some kind every man is going to have. Therefore, when these Jews rejected Jehovah they began to worship the gods of the surrounding nations. When they lost all sense of their living Lord they sought to atone for their loss by the making of idols. They did not become idolaters and then lose God. They first lost God and then turned to idols to fill the vacuum that had been left by that tragic loss. Every form of idolatry is only a substitute for reality.

Now it is only natural that this idolatry resulted in a further ripeness for ruin. Carlyle points out the fact that men are like the gods they serve. He who truly worships a holy God will himself be holy. He who lays hold by faith of a mighty God will be strong. But those who worship gods that are lustful or cruel will come to share in their lustfulness and their cruelty. Those who worship gods that are weak and powerless will come also to share in their weakness and in their powerlessness. Thus Israel and Judah came to be infected with the sins of the surrounding nations. There was hardly an abomination that they did not practice. They even got so low as to offer their own children in sacrifice.

Now it is the faith of this author that such sowing to the flesh cannot but result in a harvest of corruption. He is sure that this is true in the life of the individual. What each separate man sows he reaps. He reaps it in his own body. He reaps it in his own soul. He reaps it in those whom he loves. The same is true of nations. What nations sow they reap. Sometimes this reaping comes in the natural order of things. At other times it comes through the meting out of the most exact poetic justice either at the hands of God Himself or at the hands of some divinely appointed agent. But
always men and nations reap as they sow. There is absolutely no exception; there is absolutely no escape.

"But how about Jezebel?" one asks who has only read so far as Ahab's tragic story. "She did not die with him though she seems the more guilty of the two." Now we are ready to admit that if there had been anyone in that day shrewd enough to dodge this law, that one surely would have been Jezebel. She was brilliant and daring and daring and daring. She was evidently a woman of great personal power. During her reign she literally swept Israel off her feet. She was the greatest friend of idolatry and the bitterest foe of true religion that this period knew. For a long time, too, she prospered in her evil course. But at last the reaping time came, even to this audacious and forceful queen.

Hers is a graphic story. She is now in the city of Jezreel. Jehu, who has just murdered all the sons of Ahab, is entering that city. Doubtless he is on her track. But when she hears the news, she does not go pale and faint with terror. She does not hide. She does not even seek to make her escape. Instead, with her old-time audacity she dresses her hair and paints her face, and takes her position at an upstairs window. Here she dares to undertake an absolutely new role. She becomes a preacher of righteousness. She boldly warns the man bent on her death of the awfulness of sin. As Jehu dashes down the street she shouts at him, "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?"

What does this daring woman mean by this? She is reminding Jehu of what he already knows, that Zimri had rebelled and had killed his master; that for a while he succeeded in his evil course. But that in the end he did not escape. His triumph was only temporary. His sin found him out. So she is warning Jehu, "Be careful what you do."
She seems to say, "This is a world of law, not a world of chance. Remember that there is no hiding from your own sin. It will track you down. 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'"

"True," shouts Jehu, "everlastingly true, and now by way of illustration - who is on my side?" Two or three faces appear at the window. "Throw her down!" is the curt command. There is a scuffle in that upper room, a brief, grim struggle, a wild, piercing scream; then a woman's form is seen hurtling through the air. There is a dull, sickening thud upon the cobblestones. Jehu drives over the prostrate form and the hoofs of his horse and the walls of the nearby buildings are sprinkled with her blood. But he rides on as if she were not there.

He then goes to the palace where a feast is given in his honor. When the dinner is over and he is inclined to be in a good humor, he bethinks him of that battered corpse in the street. "Go, see now this cursed woman and bury her;" he orders, "for she is a king's daughter." You can see that he gives this command not because of anything that was good in Jezebel, but simply because she was of royal blood. His servants hurry away to do his bidding. But when they reach the spot under the window where the body was, there is nothing there except a few bones and some street dogs that sit upon their haunches with that satisfied air that indicates that they have just enjoyed a good dinner. This is the second time that Jezebel had fed the dogs. The first time she fed them with the blood of Naboth. The next time she fed them with her own.

Now just as the individual cannot escape the law of sowing and reaping, no more can the nation. The sin of Israel and Judah also found them out; for forsaking God, they lost their oneness. They became
weak. As a result they became an easy prey of the surrounding nations. They were trampled upon and plundered. They passed as a prize of conquest from one bloody hand to another. But all the while a strange blindness was upon them. Seeing, they saw not, and hearing, they failed to understand. Though they found the path of disloyalty to Jehovah as burning lava beneath their feet, they persisted in walking it. Warned over and over that their salvation was not in making alliance with this and that nation, but in God alone, yet they never had the wisdom to turn whole-heartedly to Him.

"Why should ye be stricken any more?" Isaiah shouts at them in utter desperation. "Ye will revolt more and more; the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores . . . . . . . Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; your land, strangers devour it in your presence . . . . . . . You are more senseless than the cattle!" he cried in hot indignation and anguish of heart. "You are more stupid than the donkeys. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

What is there in the future for the individual or for the nation that will not think? What is there for the people that find sin the mother of every kind of heartache and every form of tragedy, and yet cling to it and persist in it? What can the potter do with clay that simply refuses to be molded to his will? There is no place for such clay except among the shattered crockery of the potter's field. And there is no place for such a nation except in the graveyard of shattered and broken nations. At last, after numberless warnings and deliverances, Israel fell and her inhabitants were carried away into exile. This took place at the hands of the King
of Assyria in the year 722 B.C. Judah, some of whose kings had been
men of his character, lasted nearly a century and a half longer, then
it passed under the yoke of Babylon. Thus the Lord "delivered them
into the hand of spoilers till he cast them out of his sight."

II

But the history of this period is not one of unbroken tragedy.
The fact that men and nations reap as they sow is far more than a
warning. It is also a most heartening promise. It tells us that we
live in a God ordered world. It assures us that we can look ahead
in the springtime of life and determine for ourselves what our harvest
is to be when the reaping time comes. The author makes us very sure
that if we sow tares we shall reap them. But the picture is
not all dark. He makes us equally certain that if we sow wheat we
shall reap that also. Thorns and nettles will indeed grow in our
world if we plant them. But roses and violets will also grow just
as luxuriantly if we give them an equal chance.

Now, since the sowing of this time was so largely to the flesh,
there was in consequence a great harvest of corruption and tragedy.
But all the sowing, even of these days of decline, was not to the
flesh. There was some sowing to the spirit. Not even in the darkest
days does God leave himself without a witness. There were
a few staunch men and women who, in spite of all
difficulties, lived their lives within the will of God. Some of them
were hidden and obscure, some were in places of prominence. But all of
them reaped a harvest according to their sowing.

There was Elijah, for example. He was a mighty man with much
iron and fire in his character. He had the courage to sow to the
spirit when such sowing was far from easy. It was like trying to grow
a garden in a desert. It was fearfully hard to keep up courage. There was one time when even he despised. He decided that the soil in which he had sowed was too hard and lean and uncongenial to produce a spiritual harvest. But God in His mercy showed him his mistake. When he had decided that his brave fight had gone for nothing, God showed him that there were seven thousand who stood unshaken in their loyalty to Him. And Elijah knew that the loyalty of many of these was born of the loyalty of his own brave heart. Even so far as the multitude was concerned, he had not labored altogether in vain.

Then Elijah was privileged to see a further harvest in Elisha. He trained this vastly useful man to be his follower, and therefore had a share in all his fruitful ministry. At last he reaped the harvest of a quiet and peaceful eventide. One day information comes in some fashion that he is nearing the end of his journey. Only a few steps further, then God's chariot will meet him. But how quietly and free from fear does he do that last mile! No weary worker going home from a day of honest toil ever went with a heart more at rest. That quiet faith is equal to the best in the New Testament. He reaped a rich harvest in the life that now is. And when we meet him again, centuries later, on the Mount of Transfiguration, we realize that he is still reaping his harvest of life everlasting.

Elisha was another who dared during these dark days to sow to the spirit. His ministry was in many respects more quiet and obscure than that of Elijah. He was not so dashing and spectacular. He seems to have loved the ways of lowly service. He delighted to make a bitter spring sweet. He took time to save the two sons of a widow who were being menaced by slavery. Then when that little Jewish captive bore her witness to the power of God in far-off Damascus and sent Naaman to be cured, Elisha did not disappoint either her or him.
He did not deal with Naaman as that distinguished gentleman expected, but when he dared to follow the directions of the prophet his flesh came back to him like the flesh of a little child. And yet, so far as we know, he never cured a single soul in Israel. But we may be sure that this was the case, not because he was not able, but because no one had the faith to ask him.

But all Elisha's ministry was not obscure. At times he moved about the courts of kings, and had to do with great men and great events. It was he that promised deliverance to Samaria that time when famine stalked her streets and death looked her citizens eye to eye. "Tomorrow," he told the king and his minister, "there shall be food in abundance." It seemed a most rash promise and far too good to be true. But it turned out as the prophet had foretold. But it did not do so through the might of man. The deliverance wrought was of God only. The Syrian army that had shut them in, suddenly took flight for some reason that they could only account for in terms of God. They had fled in panic, leaving countless spoil behind them.

What a fascinating story it is! Samaria is starving with food in abundance just without the walls. But what is the good when nobody knows. Meantime four leprous beggars meet in the city gate for a counsel. These men are well worth knowing. I never cease to admire their sturdy common sense. They form themselves into a kind of starvation committee and proceed to a sane consideration of their situation. They ask themselves this question, "Why sit we here until we die? If we have to meet death let us at least meet it after doing our best to avoid it. Here are the facts: If we stay where we are death is sure; if we go back in the city death is equally certain; if we go outside the city the chances are overwhelmingly great that we shall meet death there. But at least death is not absolutely
Therefore, "reasoned these wise beggars, "let us fall into the hands of the Syrians." But when they come, with their small expectation of life and their big expectation of death, lo, the army has gone and has left plenty of food behind. They eat their fill and then one of the wisest makes a speech. "We do not well," he declares, "if we keep silence some harm will befall us. Let us tell our starving brothers." So they hurry back with the great news and the city is saved from starvation.

Then, here and there, especially in Judah, was a king who trusted God and whom God could trust. The most conspicuous among these good kings was Hezekiah. He was a man of prayer. He was a man of staunch and beautiful faith. One day a letter came from Sennacherib. It was a taunting letter asking with biting sarcasm in whom he trusted that he dared to rebel against him. It was a letter with which the writer intended to strike the death blow to Hezekiah's faith. And we cannot fail to see that it was well suited to that purpose. "Have the gods of the other nations been able to deliver them?" he asked with assurance. "Look where my armies have marched like a devouring forest fire and swept everything before them."

Now when Hezekiah received this letter he did a wise thing. The story says that he went in and spread it out before his Lord. He seems to say, "Lord, here is a letter that came to me today. It was addressed to me, but it was really meant for thee." And he read it before the Lord and prayed for deliverance. And his prayer was not in vain. He had no more than risen before the prophet Isaiah came with an answer. The king was assured that the enemy should not come near his city; that on the contrary Jehovah would put a bit in his mouth and a hook in his nose and turn him about, and that he should die in his own land. Thus:
"The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

"Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

"For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still.

"And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

"And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail,
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

"And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord."

Finally, it was during this difficult period that almost all the great prophets of the Old Testament lived and enriched the world by their prophecies. During these days of sowing to the flesh Amos thundered boldly against the sins of the Northern Kingdom. During these days also Hosea of the broken home and the broken heart plead with his people to turn from the evils that he saw were working their ruin. It was during this period that the silver-tongued statesman and prophet Isaiah preached in the city of Jerusalem. Finally, in the latter part of this period Jeremiah, with heart full of love and voice choked with sobs, plead for righteousness and proclaimed the sure doom of the wicked, for forty long and seemingly fruitless years. But while these men were unable to save their own people as a nation, they did not labor in vain. They have been an immeasurable blessing to the generations since then, and will continue to be so till the end of time. They sowed to the spirit, therefore they reaped and still reap a harvest of life everlasting.
I suppose you know there the promises of
saints that history from 2 Kings and in
Chronicles is disputed by modern scholars.
They say that these books were written with a
purpose that the second is true in which the
controversy over more virtuous and then the story
of the 2.1.1.1. is fully recognize. It is
true, however, that they failed to live up to the
stumbling
which Jesus Himself of the nation just as
as one during in America. The opportunity of the
Nations was for helping help from international com-
plication and standing for a new type of justice
principle. They failed to do it, and provide. But
now and from that many things come from Israel
also, for as I see the immoral connection be-
tween material prosperity and righteousness in
which the crown by tribes is fully believed. The
only duty for the righteous is in the conviction
that righteousness itself is success and the only
success.
II KINGS

The Second Book of Kings is full of sordid tragedy. In the Seventeenth Chapter, the author sums up what he conceives to be the cause of the nation's downfall. In the Thirteenth and Fourteenth verses he writes, "The Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, "Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes.......Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God."

As I reminded you in my address on First Kings, this is history, written from God's viewpoint. The author is concerned with the moral quality of the characters and of the deeds of those about whom he writes. He passes by their battles, their building, those things that loomed so large in that day, and fixes his gaze on the kind of character that they builded. Naturally, it means nothing to us how well they succeeded in their varied schemes today. Yet it still matters whether they did that which was right or that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. It is the purpose of this author to point out that men reap according to their sowing. He emphasizes over and over that no one gets away with anything. He is firm in the faith that to sow to the flesh is of the flesh to reap corruption. The author emphasizes this law in the life of the individual. Kings and queens were above the common lot in many respects, but they never climbed above this law. For the most part the kings of the Northern Kingdom were corrupt men. Here and there upon the throne
of Judah sat a good man. But of all the evil kings of both kingdoms, the
pet horror of this author was Ahab and his brilliant and forceful queen,
Jezebel. It did not add to the popularity of Jezebel that she was foreign-
born. But aside from this she held her bad reputation by what she was and
what she did.

Jezebel has the distinction of being the worst hated woman in the Bible.
She was a worshiper of Baal. Her religion was corrupt, and, "As men are like
the gods they serve," she was corrupt. But she was also forceful. Evidently
she was a woman of great ability. She molded her husband Ahab to her will.
She did more. She fairly swept the Kingdom of Israel off its feet. There
were seven thousand that did not bow the knee to Baal, but there were so
scattered and so silent that Baal worship seemed almost unanimous. Not only
did this woman rob the nation of its faith, but she was ruthless in carrying
out her purposes. When Naboth refused to sell his vineyard, she cunningly
had him murdered. When her husband went to take possession, Elijah met him
and warned him of his coming doom. A little later he went out to battle in
disguise, but a certain man drew a bow at a venture and hit Ahab. And the
dogs leaped up in blood where they had leaped up the blood of Naboth.

But for years Jezebel seemed to get away with her wickedness. Sin is
always dangerous, but it is never so dangerous as when it seems to succeed.
It is never so swiftly as when it flows. Others said, but Jezebel seemed to
be getting by. Then one day a certain nameless prophet appointed a man by
the name of Jehu. Jehu was about as ruthless and cruel as Jezebel herself.

It was this man who murdered the kings of both Israel and Judah. It
was he who ordered the elders of Samaria to send him the heads of Ahab's
seventy sons in baskets. There are few episodes in history more gruesome
than that. Jezebel knew about Jehu, what he was doing and had done. But
when he came to Jezreel, true to her character she did not hide. She did not fling herself at his feet and beg for mercy. Hard as she was, we cannot but have some admiration for her courage. Instead, when she heard that this usurper was coming, she went to the hair-dresser, got herself fixed up, painted her face, the story says. That was a custom they had in distant and primitive days. Certain types of savages have been known to do it in this country, but that is incidental. When Jezebel heard it, says the writer, she tired her hair and painted her face and looked out at the window. And here she assumes a new role. She becomes a preacher of righteousness, this blood-stained, hardened, and wicked woman.

When she sees Jehu, she shouts at him, "Had Zimri peace who slew his master?" What does she mean? A little while before Zimri had rebelled against his master and murdered him. A little later Zimri himself was murdered. What Jezebel is telling Jehu is this--"Be sure your sin will find you out. Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap." Did Jezebel believe that? She did for everybody, but herself. She believed that she could out by. She thought that weak and silly souls would have to pay the price but that she could somehow so manipulate the laws of nature as to gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles. So she shouts this warning to Jehu: "Men reap as they sow." "All right," Jehu seems to answer. "Let me illustrate it."

Then he shouts, "Who is on my side?" Two or three men show their faces at the window. "Throw her down," he commands. There is a brief struggle, a shriek, and a woman's body coming hurtling through the air to smash upon the cobble stones. Jehu drives over her as if she were so much rubbish. He goes to the palace for a feast. When the feast is over, he gives orders to his followers. "Go and bury her," he said, "For she is a king's daughter."

When they hurried away to do his bidding, they do not find the body. There are two hands, a crushed skull, and the feet. The street dogs
are sitting about on their haunches with a satisfied look. And this woman that had fed Naboth to the dogs has fed them a second time—this time with herself. It is a gruesome story. The author seems to tell it with a grim satisfaction. He calls Jezebel "that cursed woman". What is true of the individual, says the author, is also true of the nation. The Jewish people were never vastly strong so far as numbers were concerned. Then they had a land that was hard to hold. It was a bridge that joined the three continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. It was ruthlessly trampled over again and again by large and brutal nations. Yet the writer is convinced that the downfall of the nation is not because of their geographical position nor because of the smallness of their numbers. Their ruin was an inside job. God warned them by all His prophets and all His seers, but they refused to hear. Israel fell first about the year 722 B.C. Judah lasted for nearly a century and a half longer. But at last both went into exile.

We need to bear in mind, however, that this is not the end of the story though these nations sinned and suffered for their sins as the nations of the world are doing today, for we miss the point of this story if we do not realize that our present tragedy is born of sin. It too is a result of our failure to listen to the prophets and to listen to the voice of God. Of course great nations have in some measure failed. All of them are having to pay a terrible penalty.

II

But all of the sowing of that time was not to the flesh. There were some sowing to the spirit. It is heartening to find that even in the worst of times there are people that live clean, strong, and brave lives. Even in Nero's court there were some choice saints. Even when Jezebel sat upon the throne, there were thousands that had remained true and had not bowed the knee.
II KINGS - page 5

to Baal.

That which served to keep religion alive during these days was largely the influence of the great prophets. Some of the greatest prophets of all time lived during these desperate days of sin. There were Elijah and Elisha. There was Moses with his broken home and his broken heart. There was Amos the shepherd prophet with his sense of social justice and his stern denunciation of men in high places. There was Isaiah, the silver-tongued orator among the prophets. There was Jeremiah with about the tenderest heart that we find on the pages of the Old Testament doing his best to keep his people from ruin.

This author has little to say of any of these prophets except the first two. Elijah is the central character in the First Book of Kings, Elisha in the Second. Elijah was a strong man, the man of fire and iron. Elisha was of a tenderer type. He seemed to delight in kindly deeds and to render service to any who appealed to him for help.

Elisha owed much to his teacher Elijah. In the Second Chapter of the Book there is a story beautiful enough to be in the New Testament. In some way it has come home to Elijah that the end of his earthly journey has come. "What shall I give thee?" he asks of the younger man. Elisha with fine wisdom said, "Grant me a double portion of thy spirit." That means the older son's portion. It is another way of saying, "Grant that God may be as real to me as He has been to you." "If you see me when I am taken up," came the answer, "it will be granted."

Having said this, the older prophet seems eager to get away from the younger. "Tarry here awhile while I go yonder," he says. But Elisha is not to be shaken off. "As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth," he declares that he will be with him. Then follows this lovely story. As they talked,
there appeared unto them a chariot of fire and horses of fire and parted them both asunder and Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind into Heaven. What did this experience do for Elisha? We can understand it by asking what was the attitude of the younger prophets with regard to Elijah's homegoing. Having found that he was gone, they went about the hills of Gilgal searching for him, saying, "Where is Elijah?" These felt that they could not get on without Elijah. But Elijah knew better. He no longer asked where is Elijah. He asked where is the Lord God of Elijah. He did not ask for the sound out of which he used to drink when he went to the spring.

III

Now the life of this lonely prophet is full of good deeds that make some of the most charming stories in literature. Let us look at just a few of them.

1. There is the story that begins after this fashion: "And Elijah came to Shunem where was a great woman." This choice woman had evidently married a husband much older than herself. He was a farmer, interested in farming only. She was interested in farming and something else. One day she said to this husband, "Behold, I see that this is a holy man of God that passes by us continually. Let us make for him a little room upon the wall and set there a table and a stool and a candlestick, and it shall be as often as he passeth this way that he shall enter in and lie there." So she built that famous prophet's chamber.

Then one day when he was resting in that lovely little room, his heart went out in gratitude to his hostess; so he had his associate pastor to ask her what she wanted. A rabbi was not supposed to talk to a woman; so he talked through his associate. "Would you like," asked the servant, "to be spoken of to the king and to the captain of the guard?" This prophet while
interested in ordinary folks could also move in the atmosphere of royalty. He had an approach to the king. But she answered, "I dwell among my own people. I am contented to stay at home."

Then the junior pastor put his finger on the sore wound in her life. "Master," he said, "she has no child." That was the big dream that had not come true. So Elisha had his servant call her and tell her that she should become a mother. It fairly took her breath. It was too good to be true. She answered with a desperate gladness, "Nay, my Lord, do not lie unto me." That is, "Do not excite expectations that cannot be realized." But these expectations were realized and when the little chap was four or five years of age he asked to go out in the field where his father was harvesting grain. The sun was too much for him. He was taken violently ill. He rushed to his father saying, "My head! My head!" But the father could not be bothered. It is a terrible human story. He was too busy with the grain. "Take him to his mother," was the curt order. And we read this pathetic ending, "And he sat on her lap until noon and then died."

But even death could not overcome this determined woman. She went after the prophet that had promised that son. She brought him home with her. She never left off until she had her son alive once more in her arms. From the standpoint of a gripping story that is hard to beat.

2. Then there is that charming story of the healing of Naaman. It is one of the most thrilling and helpful stories in the Bible.

3. Finally, there is the story that gives us the secret of Elisha's power. He is hiding in the town of Dothan. Dothan is on a hill surrounded by a plain. It so happens that the prophet has a price on his head. To make sure of his capture, an army comes by night and encircles the city. When Elisha's servant goes out and sees this encircling army, he is filled
with terror. He hurried back shaken to the depths of his being, saying,
"Alas, Master, how shall we do?"

Elisha's reaction to this startling news must have filled the young man
with utter amazement. At once the prophet began to pray. Of course, that
is not surprising. That is perchance what the servant expected. But what
did make him gasp in utter amazement was that for which the prophet was praying.
For what was he asking in that desperate hour when he seemed utterly without
hope? He was not asking for deliverance. He was not asking for help. He
was not asking for God to draw near. He said, "Lord, open his eyes that he
may see." And when he opened his eyes he saw the horses and chariots of
God around about. The source of strength to the prophet as for ourselves
was his power to see the Unseen. He was strong because he realized the under-
girding presence of the invisible God.

Here then is a book of blood and tears, a book of tragic sin and of
terrible failure. It is also a book where choice souls found God and walked
with Him. And walking with Him, they found peace, and finding peace they were
able to bring help and peace to others.
The Message of II Kings

II Kings 17:7-23
Proverbs 29:18

The book of Second Kings is a continuation of the story in First Kings. There are some lovely chapters in this book. There are records of deeds of devotion and courage that it would be hard to surpass. Some of the finest saints of all times speak in its pages. But on the whole the book is a record of disastrous failure.

This book is intended to tell something of the doings of the kings of the two nations of Israel and Judah. It might be aptly named "The History of a People's Failure." For certainly it is a record of failure, tragic and pathetic beyond words. To read the book is to follow the downward steps of the chosen people to their final overthrow and captivity.

But the record is one full of instruction for all time. Why did this nation fail? Why did these people trudge their way down to ruin? It is good for us to ask and answer these questions because, while circumstances have changed, the same causes that worked ruin in that far off day will work ruin today. Now I am convinced that the very same evils that destroyed these ancient people if persisted in will destroy ourselves.

Why then, I repeat, did this nation fail? First, it did not fail according to the plan of God. God had planned for these people an entirely different destiny. He had put other possibilities within their reach. They were expected to be His peculiar treasure. He had promised to bless them. He had put Himself at their disposal provided that they would put themselves at His disposal. They did not fail, therefore, because God had planned their failure.

Neither did they fail because circumstances were against them. It is true they were surrounded by nations far stronger than themselves. The northern kingdom was captured and destroyed by the king of the Assyrians. The southern kingdom was captured by Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonian empire. These conquering nations were far stronger than the little peoples that they overran. Still, I repeat, it was not the fault of circumstances that these chosen people were destroyed.

We are safe in saying this if we keep in view their past history. Their God had delivered them from the greatest nation in the then world when they were a lonely company of defenseless slaves. He enabled them to conquer and to dispossess greater nations than themselves and thus to come into the inheritance that at that time they were occupying. Again and again in the past God had shown Himself Almighty in their defense. So that it is perfectly sure that their failure here was not due to circumstances over which neither God nor themselves had any control.

And what was true of the nation is also true of the individual. No man makes a moral failure according to God's plan. Neither does any man fail morally because circumstances make success impossible. Into whatever circumstances our Lord leads us He is able to keep us there. Wherever we walk with Him His promise is that there shall not temptation take us that we can not bear and with the temptation He will make a way of escape.
The message of II Kings #2

The failure of these people therefore was not the fault of God nor the fault of circumstances. It was the fault of themselves. That is the secret of your failure and of mine. It is the secret of everyone who has ever failed. I know we try to dodge this unpleasant fact. I know we are prone to take the cowardly position of Adam and blame it upon somebody else. But in our deepest and most honest moments we know that every sin we ever committed is our own sin and every wrong road that we have ever taken has been the result of our own wrong choice.

So the secret of the failure of these people, the cause of their calamities, the cause of their final ruin was just this - they turned their backs upon God. They lost their vision of the Lord who had been the God of their fathers. I know that there are notable exceptions among them. Some of the greatest saints of all times lived in those tragic days. But as a nation they forsook the Lord. If you want to read a summary of the whole tragic story you can find it in the seventeenth chapter from the seventh to the twenty-third verses of this book.

Now, having rejected God they took the next step in their downward course naturally and inevitably. Rejecting God they became idolaters. That was altogether natural. Every man is going to have some sort of God. That was true then. It is true today. If you do not have a real God you will have a false one.

But they never became idolaters till they had lost God. That is easily seen. No man who had a real sense of the present, living God would ever be tempted in the least to bow down to an image of wood or clay. An idol is an impossibility till the man who worships it has lost God.

Becoming idolaters they took the next step down. They ceased to be a peculiar people. They became like the nations round about them. Like them in worship they were like them in wickedness. Like them in faith they were like them in the confidence upon which they counted in time of conflict. God's chosen people turned their attention to various alliances with Godless nations when they were in need and ceased to seek help from God altogether.

Losing that peculiarity which was born of their peculiar relation to God they lost their sense of mission. They continued to be a very exclusive people but their exclusiveness was of the wrong kind. They thought they could have the peculiar blessings of God without any pecu-

liar conformity to His will. The Book of Jonah was written at this time to rebuke these proud people and show them that God had not blessed them that they might do as they pleased but that He had blessed them that they might be a blessing.

Their next step down was this - they lost their sensitiveness. Their consciences became hardened. Their eyes went out. They became morally blind, a people without a vision. As you read the story you will see that God spoke to them by every means that He had at His disposal but that He spoke almost wholly in vain.

In the first place, He spoke to them through the prophets. You will remember that almost every great prophet of the Old Testament lived during the three hundred and eighteen years covered by the book of Second Kings. During that time people had such preachers as Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Malachi, Daniel and Ezekiel. But while these
men reached individuals here and there their ministry to the nation was a failure. The experience of all of them is summed up in the tragic cry of Isaiah, "Who hath believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" They spoke and spoke faithfully but they spoke in vain. The people saw indeed but perceived not. They heard but they did not understand.

Not only did God speak through the prophets. He also spoke through His providences. Calamity after calamity came upon these people at the hands of a merciful God. They were meant to be the thorns that pierced their feet and reminded them that they had wandered out of the way. There was famine and defeat and failure, one after the other. But they were as blind to the message of calamity as they were deaf to the message of the prophets. ISAIAH 5:6.

Ahab's story will serve for an illustration. When he met Elijah after the long drought of three and a half years he asked the prophet, "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" It never occurred to him to face the fact that the trouble with Israel was the result of Israel's sin. A man with a sense of God will see God's hand in all His providences. But when the light has gone out within the soul and man has lost God he sees His hand in nothing at all.

These people refusing to hear God's message as proclaimed through prophets and disasters naturally refused to repent. I know that here and there there was a reformation but they were every one superficial. If you will study them you will find that the people repented or seemed to repent under two sets of circumstances. They repented when they had a pious king and religion became popular; or sometimes they repented in times of calamity when they were afraid not to repent. But there was never any hearty turning away from sin. Hosea summed up the whole tragedy when he said, "your righteousness is as a morning cloud. It is fleeting, superficial, vanishing utterly after a little while."

Now what was the inevitable result? We find it expressed by the wise man and I think we might take that sentence to be the very message of this book. "Where there is no vision the people perish." Remember God had raised these people for a peculiar purpose just as He has raised you and me up for a peculiar purpose. But they had turned from him. They had hardened their hearts. They had made it impossible for Him to speak to them. They had made it impossible for Him to use them. What therefore is there to do with them? There is nothing that He can do except in a sense to give them up.

And this is what happens. First they are conquered. They become the captives of their enemies. They are cast away. I know in His mercy He followed them and they were brought back again to their own land, but as a nation at that time they were thrown away and they were thrown away just as the marred and broken cup is thrown away in the potter's field. Why did the potter throw his cup away? Because there was that in the clay that resisted his will and made it impossible for him to make any thing useful of it. And thus this nation became cast away.

It is a solemn lesson heart, and one that our nation needs to learn and it is one that we need to learn individually. Paul thought of it with reference to himself and he said "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection lest by any means after I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway." To reject God is to make it impossible for Him to do anything with you except cast you off as He cast off this ancient people that He so tenderly loved.
CHRONICLES
The way to Individual and National Greatness

We are treating Chronicles as the author intended, as one book. It begins where Genesis began, with Adam, and extends beyond the end of Second Kings. It therefore covers a period longer than all the books together that we have studied up to this time. The author of this book is more of a priest than a prophet. He is more of a preacher than a historian. The author of Kings wrote history from the religious point of view, but he left his story, as a rule, to make its own impression. The author of Chronicles tells his story and then points out the moral.

This book is closely connected with Ezra and Nehemiah. It seems to have been written shortly after the exile. If such is the case the author was writing to a little group that was a very meager and pathetic handful with which to begin a new nation. They were therefore in need of encouragement. They also needed wise counsel as they were making this new start, to save them from the pitfalls that had brought disaster to their fathers.

I
The first fact that the author seeks to impress upon his readers is that in order to our highest self-realization, and in order to our highest national realization, God is our one essential. "Seek first the kingdom of God," is his earnest admonition.

The book begins with a dreary wilderness of names that extends through the first nine chapters. To read these chapters
is a bit like trudging through a desert. There is scarcely a sprig of
greenness or a vestige of beauty anywhere — just names, names, names!
But if we notice these names closely we see that many are missing. The
genealogy is by no means complete. For instance, the list begins
with Adam and then goes to Seth. This indicates that through those
eages God was choosing, sifting, and selecting. Some men were chosen
to help to further the purposes of God, and some were rejected.
What was the basis upon which these fortunate ones were chosen? It
was not upon a basis of favoritism. It was not upon a basis of birth.
The one test was obedience. The individual that was obedient, that
put God first, was useable; and everyone who was useable was used.
"That is," says the author, "the matter of supreme importance is to
put God first."

The story of Saul is briefly told. Saul had many fine
qualities. He was a magnificent man physically. He stood head and
shoulders above all others in Israel. He was modest. He was work­
ing willingly at a lowly task when he was called to wear the crown.
He never gave himself to a wild orgy of marrying as did so many of
his successors. But in spite of these excellent qualities our author
has not one good word to say for Saul. He dismisses him curtly with
one half-indignant sentence: "So Saul died for his transgressions."
In failing to mention Saul's good qualities, however, the author
does not mean to deny them. They are not mentioned because they are
not pertinent to his purpose. He is concerned to tell us that Saul
failed, and that the one reason for his failure was that he refused
to put God first.

Then follows the story of David. David is certainly the
author's hero. Just as he had not one good thing to say about Saul,
he has not one evil thing to say about David save only his sin in
numbering Israel. He does not mention his sin with the wife of Uriah. He does not tell us that he was a murderer. He does not tell us of those drab days of hypocrisy when David was trying to excuse himself by saying, "For the sword devours one as well as another." If we had only this author to go by, we should certainly be driven to the conclusion that David was a paragon of perfection.

This is true not only as regards his moral and spiritual life. He was a great saint, but he was far more. He was a myriad-minded man. He was a matchless singer. He was a flawless military hero. He knew how to make an army into an efficient fighting machine. He had a large company of soldiers that could use the sling in either the right or the left hand. That indicates fine training. There were those skilled to use both the spear and the shield. That means they were good both at offensive and defensive warfare. He was a most efficient military leader. He was able even to take the impregnable fortress, Jebus, which he made into the capital of his kingdom.

But he was far more than a trainer of armies, he was a maker of men. The author delights to tell us of the mighty men that David gathered about him. These men he would have us know were not mighty when they came to him. They were a bunch of bankrupts, of malcontents, of men who had soured on life. They became valiant and chivalrous through his transforming and bracing influence. This incident gives us an insight. One day as David was hiding in the fastnesses of the hills he became thirsty. Possibly the day was not and wistful, so he said, doubtless more to himself than to others, "O, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem." And three men who had once been of those who were only soured malcontents, overheard him. At great personal risk they slipped out of
their hiding place, made their way past the outpost of the enemy, and by and by every one came back with a drink of water for their leader. But when they gave the water to David it was so tinged with the sweat and blood of sacrifice that he was too big a man to drink it. He poured it out rather as a libation to their loyalty and love and devotion. David was manly and was therefore a maker of men.

But the supreme fact about David was his devotion to God. We discover this devotion in many ways, but most of all when we come to learn the supreme ambition of David's life. What, according to this writer, was David's dearest dream? What purpose lay closest to his heart? By what did he expect to live longest in the minds and hearts of his people? It was not through his prowess as a warrior. It was not through his fine statesmanship. It was not through his gripping poetry. David expected his immortality to rest upon his being the builder of the temple of Jehovah. This, he was sure, would be his supreme contribution to his people.

But this dream was destined to disappointment. Through the prophet Nathan God told him plainly that his great ambition was not to be realized. But by way of consolation God said to him, "For as much as it was in thy heart to build me a house, thou didst well that it was in thy heart." But how do we know that David was really possessed of an unselfish purpose to build a temple to the honor and glory of God? We know that this was the case because, when he himself was forbidden to build, when he found that it would not be David's temple but that of another, he did not lose interest. He did his best to make possible for another to do what he himself could never hope to accomplish.

That is an excellent indication of David's unselfish eagerness to serve. If I lose interest in a church the moment I cease to be its pastor, then there is every reason to believe that my motives
are at least very mixed, if I am not acting from self-interest altogether. If you lose interest in the church the moment you cease to occupy some prominent official position, then the chances are overwhelmingly great that you are more interested in yourself than you are in the enterprise to which you have vowed allegiance. David put God first. Therefore, when he could not do the conspicuous part, he did the hidden and obscure and inconspicuous part and did it with all his heart. That showed his genuineness and his greatness.

II

Not only does the writer of Chronicles believe that it is necessary to put God first in order to reach our best, but he believes that religion must be institutionalized in order to help us to that end. This writer is a profound believer in the temple. Its services and its sacrifices are immeasurably dear to him. He found in these, as he believes, an indispensable aid toward the realization of God, and therefore toward a holy life. And by the emphasis he places upon the temple, he means to strongly urge upon these exiles who are beginning anew, its vast importance. He is greatly concerned that these give themselves the inspiration of the worship of the temple as a means toward a saintly life.

Now in emphasizing the importance of the temple he is eager for them to know that he is not alone. David, he reminds them, the greatest of all their kings, believed in it and went as far as possible towards building it. Solomon, one of the wisest of men, believed in it and builded it, and when it was dedicated with its magnificent ritual, God set His seal of approval upon it by making His presence manifest within its walls. And we of today are still believers in the temple. We believe in the visible church. There is
no such thing as solitary Christianity. Worship is social. "Neglect not the assembling of yourselves together," is a wise admonition from the New Testament. If we are to assemble there must be a place to assemble. That place is our temple.

Now, there is much to be said against institutionalized religion. But there is this to be said in its favor, that it seems necessary to a conquering and abiding faith. Our meeting together Sunday after Sunday to sing and pray and preach, seems to some a very trite and trifling matter. But, as another has pointed out, when the World War was on and we desired a revival of patriotism, we gathered the people together, sang patriotic songs, preached patriotic sermons, and called for men and women to offer of themselves and of their money for the carrying on of the war. And this method we found effective. In the same way the meeting together of the people is essential for the arousing and maintaining of religious fervor. "Put your temple at the center of the nation," urges this writer. The state cannot save the temple, but the temple can save the state. Our churches are the saviors of our city in a far greater degree than this is the savior of the churches.

III

But while urging the importance of the temple he does not believe that the temple is an end in itself. While the author believes that religion must be institutionalized, he believes that it is absolutely necessary to keep the institution religious. "Our fathers," he tells them, "failed to do this." That is what led to their downfall. They were repeatedly warned. "The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; . . . . . . But they mocked the messengers
of God, and despised His works, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy." These people became victims of those dangers that constantly threaten institutionalized religion.

1. They came to look upon the temple as an end in itself. They became so absorbed in forms and symbols that they forgot the reality for which they stood. The American flag is dear to the heart of every true American. There are multitudes who would die for it. But wherein does its value consist? It is not intrinsic. The flag is a symbol. It stands for America, its yesterday, its today and tomorrow. We love it for what it symbolizes. But what madness it would be to love the flag itself while we lost all regard for the country for which it stands.

Some time ago I saw a widow with a little gold band upon her finger. Her husband at his death had left her but little. With some of this small property she had to part in order to get bread for her children. But there was one seemingly useless something that she refused to sell. That was her wedding ring. This was the case, not because she was foolishly fond of jewelry. It was because that ring was a symbol of the wedded love of herself and of him who had slipped out into the silence. She counted that ring of more value than any treasure she possessed, but that was only because she was still a lover. Had she ceased to love it and would have been worth its intrinsic value no more.

In all our churches we celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is about the most beautiful and sacred service of the church. But what is the good of it? What value is there in a little bit of bread and a few drops of wine? Intrinsically, no value at all. If the Sacrament were an end in itself, then it
would be absolutely worthless. Its value comes when we pass beyond
the symbol to Him who is symbolized. We gain strength when through
faith we use the bread and wine as an aid toward laying hold upon
the bread of life. To be satisfied with the symbol is to lose the
reality.

This same danger threatens a certain type of Bible readers. The Bible is a marvelous book. To me it is the most wonderful and
winsome of all books. But it is not an end in itself. It is a
guidepost, not a goal. "Ye search the Scriptures," said Jesus, "for
in them ye think ye have eternal life. But these are they which
testify of me." What is the good of a telescope? It may serve as
a plaything. You may use it to look at. You may also use it to
look through. That is the case with the Bible. We are not simply
to look at it. We are to look through] to Him who in time past
spoke through the prophets, but who now speaks through His Son.

2. Then these people came to make the doing of religious
things a substitute for the living of religious lives. With them
wickedness and worship went hand in hand. Prophet after prophet
thundered against this deadly practice. "To what purpose is the
multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full
of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I
delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.
When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your
hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense
is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling
of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn
meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth;
They are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye
spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: Yea, when
ye make many prayers, I will not hear: Your hands are full of blood."
Thus blazed Isaiah in his day. And Jesus tells us with biting indignation of certain ones he knew that robbed widows' houses and then for pretense made long prayers.

The tendency to make religious observances atone for irreligious conduct is present still. Church attendance is not an end in itself. To go to church in the morning that you may the more complacently go to the devil the rest of the day is madness. Prayer is not an end in itself. It is of value only as it brings us into personal touch with God, and thus helps toward holy living. Giving is good, but it is possible to bestow all our goods to feed the poor and even give our bodies to be burned, and yet be nothing profited. It is said of a certain French king that he never sinned so gleefully as just after he had prayed. We need to be ever on our guard against trying to make religious observances a substitute for Christian living.

3. The final step in the spiritual decline of Judah was the flinging away both from that which was symbolized and from the symbol as well. When form ceases to connect up with reality, the form itself is likely to be thrown into the discard. We are not likely to honor the flag once we have ceased to honor the country for which it stands. When prayer becomes a form rather than a force, we are on the way toward throwing away the form. When we consistently fail in the services of the church to make contact with the Living God, the chances are vastly great that we shall cease to attend. This is doubly true where we are not constrained by some external authority.

Such was the case with these Jews. We read that Asa renewed the altar and restored the sacred vessels. That means that the altar had been allowed to get in a state of disrepair and that
the sacred vessels had been desecrated. We read that Joash repaired the temple. That means that it had been partially destroyed, either through neglect or through desecrating hands. Hezekiah had to have the temple cleansed and its doors reopened. This shows that the temple had been virtually abandoned and that its services had been neglected. The feet of the heart-hungry crowd no longer thronged its courts. In spite of this cleansing on the part of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah the temple was still little more than a lumber room. When he had it cleansed again they found amidst its multitudinous rubbish, an old book whose existence had been largely forgotten. "And Hilkiah the priest said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord." Having lost their sense of God, they turned away from the temple. Having lost their sense of God, they lost their Bible, not by violence, but through indifference and neglect. Failing to find reality through their religious observances, they abandoned them. They were right in institutionalizing their religion. But through failing to keep their institution religious they lost God, their institution and themselves. Thus, the author tells us that to put God first is to win all, but to fail to do so is to lose all.
In passing from Kings to Chronicles we find ourselves in an entirely different atmosphere. The author of this book is not a historian in the same sense as the author of the books of Kings. The latter wrote history for a purpose, he tells a consecutive story. He does not often interpret the events that he relates, he leaves them to speak their own message. This is not the case with the author of Chronicles. He does not tell a consecutive story, he uses history to illustrate and enforce his thesis. Naturally, he leaves out quite a bit that the author of Kings puts in.

One matter of deep interest that we miss in Chronicles is some of the charming stories that so fascinate us in the books of Kings. Naturally, Chronicles therefore is less interesting. The book in many parts is genuinely dry. It is a sermon where the preacher brings in stories that suit his purpose to drive home the lesson that he is undertaking to teach. Of course, the author of Kings was a preacher also, but his is a story sermon. He shows how the nation by sowing to the flesh, reaps corruption, but as hinted above, he lets his stories teach their own lesson. But this author finds it necessary to interpret his material, he tells us what his events have to teach.

The reader cannot fail to see the close connection between these books and that of Ezra and Nehemiah. They were all written evidently soon after the return of the Israelites from exile. They were written for a definite purpose. The author is undertaking to encourage his broken people to make a new start, confessing their past failures, he is trying to
inspire in them, that they now face a new beginning, and, that the same
God that brought them to national greatness in the past can do so again
if they will but give him a chance.

The theme of the message of the author of Kings is that sowing
and reaping. He traces the downfall of his people to their disloyalty
to God. With that view, the author of Chronicles would agree. But it
is not so much his purpose to tell how the nation failed, as it is, how they might yet recover themselves. Their own hope,
he declares, is in their putting God in the center of the individual and
national life. It was this that brought them to greatness in the past,
it is this that will restore them to greatness in the future.

II

Now to enforce this truth, he gives three groups of illustrations.
He makes a three-fold appeal to history.

1. This is proven by God's dealings with his people from the
beginning of time. This author begins his story with Adam, then follows
nine chapters that seem little more than a bewildering wilderness of names.
These names, we must confess make dull reading. It is about as thrilling
as a trudge through a desert. But, in writing these names, the author
has in mind a definite purpose. You will notice that his characters are
not named in order; He begins with Adam and then skips to Seth. What does
he have in mind? He is showing that God has a way of sifting and selecting
the men that fit into his purpose. He believes in the doctrine of election;
so do we. But what is the basis upon which God elects one man and rejects
another? It is on the basis of that man's attitude toward God. The author
states this in the 9th verse of the 16th Chapter of the second book. Here
is an illuminating word that would be at home in the New Testament.

"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

Here then is the answer to the question: Why does God use one man and refuse to use another? Why is Simon Peter lifted to a position of power and usefulness while his brother, Judas, is cast aside? Why does God use one man today while his brother just as capable becomes a curse rather than a blessing? It is not because God hates one and loves the other, but rather because one man allows himself to be used and the other does not. One man cooperates with God and the other refuses to cooperate. And what is true of the individual is true of the nation.

God was able to use certain individuals, God was able to use Israel because these individuals gave him a chance.

2. The second division of the book concerns itself with Saul. You will notice that the story of Saul is very brief and very tragic.

The author of Samuel had some splendid things to say about Saul, he was a man who possessed some sterling qualities. He was a man who won some splendid victories. But none of these is mentioned by the author of Chronicles. This is the case, not because he is prejudiced against Saul, but because Saul's virtues do not fit into the purpose. He has but one question to ask about Israel's first king "Was he a man that God could use, or was he not?"

He has to answer this question in the negative. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." He had to pass by Saul. Why? It was not because Saul had nothing good in him, it was rather because the main bent of Saul's soul was away from God. In spite of some sterling qualities, God could not use Saul because Saul would not allow
himself to be used. He refused to obey. He turned from the God who longed to help him to consult a witch who could not help. In his own language, "He played the fool." He faced away from God, then God in the nature of things had to face away from him. The one reason then that God did not use Saul was that he could not.

3. The illustration that the author gives is David. The story of David takes up the remaining 19 chapters of the book. It is evident that David is the author's hero, he is his ideal. A casual reading would indicate that he is too prejudiced in David's favor to give the plain facts about him. He leaves out the filthy story of his sin with Bathsheba. He does not tell of how he murdered his faithful and loyal friend in cold-blood. But this he does, not for purposes of deception, but because these facts do not fit into his purpose. He leaves them out for the same reasons that he left out the virtues of Saul.

What then is his concern in writing of David? He is undertaking to tell us that David was useable. He is trying to tell us that God can show himself strong in David's behalf because David's heart was perfect toward him. By this he does not mean that David was altogether good, any more than he meant to say that Saul was altogether bad. He means only this, that the main bent of David's heart was toward God, that David was a surrendered man that fit into God's purpose.

Because this was the case, God made him a great king. He was not only a king, but a statesman who made his age the golden age of his people. Because he fit into God's purpose, God used him in the making of men. The author delights to tell us of the mighty men that David gathered about him. How did these men become mighty? They were not such when they came to David. Fitting into God's purpose he had the power to change the useless into the useful, the weak into the strong, the undisciplined into the highly trained and disciplined.
But the greatest achievement of David was not his success either as king or statesman, or as the maker of men. His supreme achievement was his sainthood. To the author of this book, David is the ideal saint.

III

Why is this the case?

1. The author makes David the ideal saint because of what his supreme ambition seems to be. What was this supreme ambition? According to this writer, it proposed that the closest thing to his heart was the building of the temple of God. This writer believes profoundly in institutionalism religion. He believes that religion will be lost unless it is kept alive by an institution such as the temple. Therefore, when he writes his book, he has almost nothing to say of the Northern kingdom.

He interested mainly in Jerusalem because that is the center of religion.

But though David yearned to build a temple to Jehovah, he was forbidden to realize his great dream. The prophet Nathan brought him the disappointing message. But having told him of God's prohibition, he adds this beautiful word: "Whereas it was in my heart to build me a house, thou didst will that it was not in thine heart." That is, God takes the will for the deed. He judges us, not by the poor dross of our actual achievements, but by the fine goal of our longing: "It is not what man does", says Browning, "But what man would do, that exhausts him." Therefore, though when David fell asleep he left no temple behind him, he was credited with one on the records of God. Though he had failed to build a temple in Jerusalem, he had built one in his heart.

What proof is there that David really longed to build a temple? Here is one that is most convincing: When he found that the temple was not to be built by himself, when he saw that it was not to be David's temple,
he did not lose interest, he still dreamed about it. He went as far as he could to make its building by another a possibility. If when you are put out of leadership you lose interest in the church, what does it mean? It means your supreme interest was not in the church but in yourself. David's supreme interest was not in himself but in the temple.

God ever judges us by what is in our hearts instead of by what we actually achieve. But what is the test of what we have in our hearts? There is one that is absolutely sure; the test of what is in our hearts is what we do with what is actually in our hands. How do we know that the widow really longed to give? It was not by her telling us what she would give if she had a million dollars, while she clutched her two mites and gave nothing. We know that she would have given largely had it been in her power because she actually did give the two mites she did possess. The proof of what we have in our hearts is what we do with that which is in our hands. David went as far as possible toward building a temple that was to be called by the name of another.

His saintliness was shown by his attitude toward giving. How did David feel about giving? That is one of the sharpest tests at this hour. If an appeal angers you, if it fills you with resentment, then believe me, there is something wrong. David could never face the privilege of giving without a shout of sheer joy. "Who am I?" he asked gleefully, "And what is my people that they should offer less willingly?"

Why was it such a joy to David to give? He believed in and loved the temple. He loved his people. Love always delights to give, it breaks its heart when it cannot give. But this was not the whole reason. David recognized the fact that the privilege of giving was born of the mercy and love of God. God already owned everything—all David was—all David had. Yet, he accepted David's gifts as if David were the real owner. His mercy in so doing set David's heart to singing, this is his song. "All things come of thee, O Lord; and of thine own have we given thee."
Not only did David give willingly, but he gave sacrificially. When one wished to let him off with cheap giving, he refused it as unworthy of his Lord. "I will not offer unto the Lord, with a kind of holy pride, that which cost me nothing." This preacher seems at times a bit dry, but he was a man of deep spiritual insight. His words have a flavor of the cross about them. If sacrificial giving was a necessity then, how much more so for us, the symbol of whose religion is a cross.

And giving ought to make us sing. It ought to make us sing as we give sacrificially.

3. Then as a final proof of the saintliness of David, the author sites his parting charge to his son Solomon. It is a beautiful word, too, might be at home in the most spiritual passage of the New Testament.

"And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee. If thou forsake him, he will cast you off forever."

What a magnificent charge!

Hear what the author is saying: "Our God is a God that is... available. He is a God who may be found last and loveliest and least. He may be found because he is ever seeking. If you seek him, he will be found of you. But if you forsake him, he will cast you off! This is the case not because God grows impatient and angry, but because he desires to, but because he cannot help doing so."

Now, since David fit into the purpose of God, God was able to show himself strong in David's behalf. He was able to bring David's kingdom to the height of its power. The same God, the author tells us that did this for David will do it also for us. He has already rebuked kings for year sakes, he reminded them. He has already said "Touch not my appointed
and do my prophets no harm." God had worked in their behalf in the past to bring them to individual and national greatness. He is eager to do so still. Therefore, they must be strong and loyal and devoted in their present hour of crisis. They must be strong by remembering the central appeal of his message. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.
FIRST CHRONICLES

I

The Book of First Chronicles concerns itself, in part, with the same period in the history that is covered by Samuel and Kings. But there is this difference. In Samuel and Kings the facts are given and the reader is as a rule, left to draw his own conclusions. These two books are history in a far more strict sense than the Book of Chronicles. While the latter book concerns itself with history, that is not its primary purpose. The author of this book, whoever he was, was pre-eminently a preacher.

For this reason he is not undertaking to give a full and connected history of the chosen people. He is undertaking to teach a lesson. The reason he concerns himself so much with the facts of history is to enforce that lesson. The events that he narrates are used more for the sake of illustration than for any other reason. He calls attention to these events in the history of his people that served to enforce the truth he is trying to teach.

II

What is the message of the book? To write an answer to this question it is necessary not only to know something of its contents but also of the circumstances under which it was written. As you can see from the sixth chapter, mention is made of one who is carried away into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. Hence this book was written after the exile. It was written to a weak little handfull of people who had returned to Jerusalem for the
purpose of rebuilding the wrecked and shattered nation.

Now one who was writing to a people so situated would naturally try to encourage them to hope for a better day. He would seek to show them that while their golden age seemed behind them, they could still have a golden age on tomorrow. To help them to realize this, he seeks to show how they had become great as a nation in the past; how they had fallen and also how they might again regain the place of power and of national greatness that they had thrown away.

It is for this purpose that he tells his story.

The book has three natural divisions. The first nine chapters are given over to a table of genealogy. It seems little more than a string of uninteresting names. The tenth chapter concerns itself with Saul. The remaining nineteen chapters tell the story of David.

Now it is through these three divisions that the author undertakes to enforce the lesson that God must be put at the center of life.

1. Notice this long and uninteresting table of names. You will see that there are many names that are omitted. The table begins with Adam and skips to Seth. God is here sifting and selecting. Some He accepts and some He rejects but the basis of the selection is never favoritism. Nor does He choose of necessity the first-born. God always elects the man that elects Him. He chooses the man who chooses Him. The names that are left out are the names of the men who by their disobedience made it impossible for God to use them.
2. In the tenth chapter we have the story of Saul. It is very briefly told. None of his triumphs are mentioned. He had many fine qualities but not one of these is mentioned. What is told is this. That Saul was rejected because of his transgressions. The particular sin that he was guilty of is named. He rejected God and lost Him. He then in his desperation turned to a witchwoman. It is ever true that those that will have a false one.

3. The remaining nineteen chapters are taken up with David. To the author of this book, David is all but ideal. He is as nearly perfect as one can possibly be. His sin with the wife of Uriah is not mentioned. It is not told that he murdered a man who had served him faithfully and well. The terrible failure of his children is not mentioned. Only one sin is set down to his account and that is the sin of numbering Israel.

On the other hand his fine qualities are strikingly brought out.

(1). He is pictured to us as a great and successful ruler. His kingship has changed the nation from a scattered people of little consequence into a great and compact nation. David was the ideal King. He was a wise and successful statesman. No ruler, according to this author could do better than seek to be like David.

(2). David was a brave and victorious warrior. He easily won the enthusiastic admiration of his people because of his prowess as a soldier. Military heroes have always been honored. I think they have been unduly honored. David was a fighter. He was a successful fighter. His personal presence was worth thousands of
of ordinary men. Therefore he was looked upon as the ideal soldier.

(3) Then David is presented to us as an organizer and as a builder of men. His soldiers were such as could keep step. That is the result of organization and efficiency. They could use a sling in either the right or left hand. That indicated marked training. They were good at handling either the spear or shield. That is, they were good in offensive and defensive warfare.

Then the author gives a list of the mighty men that David gathered about him. These men were not famed for their might when they came to enlist under David's banner. There were three classes that came to him. The distress; those that were in debt and were discontented. Those who had by chance passed through some great sorrow that had made them rather reckless of life. The indebted; those who had squandered their money and were unable to pay. It was out of these that David fashioned his mighty men. The author makes us to understand that the fact that they became great was not due so much to the men themselves as to their leader. They drew their greatness from him. He was their inspiration. He taught them courage. He taught them chivalry. It was three of these discontented men that went to bring David a drink of water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem. David had a genius for transforming the unpromising and worthless into the promising and worthwhile.

(4) Then David is presented to us as a great singer. He was a poet of rare ability. His harp was dedicated not to sing the praises of himself or any other man, but it was dedicated to sing the praises of God.

(5) Above all else, David was a great saint. This fact is
emphasized in relation to the building of the temple. The supreme ambition of David's life was to build a temple for the worship of God. It was by this, above all else, that he expected to live in the minds of his people. This was his supreme ambition because God occupied first place in his life.

But this ambition was not to be realized. But the story shows that God accepted the will for the deed. "It is well," He says, "that it was in thine heart to build me a house."

The world looks upon our achievings. It gives us credit for the good things that we actually do and nothing more. God looks upon our hearts.

But how do we know that it was really in David's heart to build this house? For one big reason. When he was not allowed to build it and give it his own name, he did not lose interest in it. He was willing to do the hidden and the obscure work. He was willing to be like the coal that is thrown into the fire box of the engine. He was willing to burn up that the train might go forward. If you lose interest in an enterprise simply because you do not lead it or have some conspicuous part in it, that means that you are not interested in it but only interested in yourself.

What did David do toward the building of the temple? He did everything that he could. For one thing he made a great donation toward it himself. He gave freely of himself and of his wealth. Not only so but he took up a collection. The story says that the people offered willingly. That is the kind of collection that God likes.

And when the offering was made David prayed a
a beautiful prayer of thanksgiving. That was fine. There are some people who give and then grumble about it. They give but they give with a snarl. David gave but when the gift was made he burst into songs of praise. "What am I and what are my people that we should offer thus willingly?" "All things come of Thee, O Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee".

How beautifully accurate was David in his theology. He recognized God's universal ownership. The material world was His. "All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made." We're His. His by right of creation and also by right of redemption. In the strictest sense therefore, it is not possible for us to give God anything, yet He accepts our offerings as if they were wholly our own.

Now after David has served his own generation according to the will of God, the story tells us that he was gathered home. He had been in every sense successful. He brought the nation from littleness to greatness. This he had done not simply because he was a man of great ability. He had succeeded because he had put God first, just as Saul had failed because he had given God the second place. What the author of this book is telling his people is this: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you".
FIRST CHRONICLES

In passing from Kings to Chronicles, we find ourselves in an entirely different atmosphere. The writer of Kings is a prophet and historian. So in a sense is the author of Chronicles. But the methods of these writers differ greatly. The author of Kings undertakes to tell a consecutive story. He relates the facts of history and as a rule permits those facts to speak for themselves. He is bent on telling us how God runs His world. By one gripping story after another, he shows how there is no escaping the moral law. He emphasizes not by preaching but by historic facts that sowing to the flesh brings a harvest of corruption, while sowing to the spirit brings a harvest of life everlasting.

The author of Chronicles is a preacher. He has a theme. He writes always with his text in mind. Therefore, he does not tell a consecutive story. He uses historic material, but he does so by way of illustration. Rather than a writer of history, he is an interpreter. The historic events he uses are used to prove the truthfulness of his contention. He selects those that are in harmony with his text. What is his text? It is found in the ninth verse of the Sixteenth Chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

As we read these two books, we are conscious of the fact that the author is undertaking to show us from history how God's election works. He shows us that God is constantly sifting men, selecting one and rejecting the other. This He does not on the basis of favoritism. This He does not on the basis of race. His one test is that of obedience. God is always searching for
those He can use. God can always use any man that will allow himself to be used. No man, however handicapped, need be useless. God can use any man that will put himself in His hands.

What purpose does this preacher have in view? This book was doubtless written very soon after the Exile. In the Sixth Chapter of the book, we read of a certain man whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away into captivity. Those to whom the author is writing are a little handful of discouraged and harassed people who are trying to build anew on the ruins of a nation whose glory has departed. He is trying to convince them that their golden age is not necessarily behind them, that it may be before them. This will surely be the case if they will enter into the purpose and plan of God. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

II

Now to enforce this truth the preacher gives us three groups of illustrations. He makes a threefold appeal to history.

1. He declares that his contention is proved by God's dealing with man from the beginning of history. The author begins his story with Adam. Then follows what seems like little more than a string of uninteresting names. For nine chapters the reader trudges through these barren, dead names with about as little thrill as he would trudge through a desert. But in writing those names, the author has in mind a definite purpose. You will notice that his characters are not named in order. He begins with Adam and then skips to Seth. What does he have in mind? He is showing that God has a way of sifting and selecting men that fit into His purpose. He believes in what the Presbyterians would call the Doctrine of Election.
But what is election? Who are the elect? They are not certain favorites of the Lord. They are those always that choose God's way instead of their own. Why, for instance, was a blundering fisherman, Simon Peter by name, lifted to a place of honor and power while Judas was thrown into the potter's field? It was not because Jesus loved the one and did not love the other. It was not because Jesus chose one and did not choose the other. He chose them both. It was not because one entered into God's plan and purpose for His life while the other refused. Nothing can hinder our being used of God except our own stubborn refusal to be used. This list of names then is made up of people who by their own choice fit themselves in some measure into God's plan.

2. The second division of the book has in it only one chapter. It deals with Saul. This preacher has not one single word to say for Saul. If we had nothing but his story, we should have to conclude that Saul was bad and altogether bad. Of course, such was not the case. Saul was possessed of many fine qualities. He was a man of splendid physique. He was beautifully modest. He was generous beyond the ordinary. He was cleaner in his personal life than most of Israel's kings. He was a man of genuine courage. But of his virtues this author has no word to say.

But in taking this course, he does not mean to deny Saul's virtues. He is concerned with only one question about Saul. That question was this: "When the eyes of the Lord were running to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in behalf of those whose heart was perfect toward Him," did He find Saul that kind of man? He did not. Saul, in spite of many virtues, rejected the will of God. "Thus died Saul," he sets in one terse sentence, "for his transgressions." In spite of much that was good, the best of his life was away from God. In the hour of his sorest crisis, he turned not to God but to a fortune-teller. Therefore, Saul was rejected because he first rejected God.
3. The last nineteen chapters of the book are taken up with the life of David. David serves this author as the perfect illustration of his theme. David is his hero. Just as he has no good word to say for Saul, even so he has practically no evil to say of David. The one fault that he finds with him is in his numbering of Israel. He passes over his sin with the wife of Uriah. He makes no mention of the fact that David murdered his friend in cold blood. He makes no mention of the great failure that David made as a father. All his vices, his cruelties, his uncleannesses are passed over as if they did not exist.

Why is this the case? It was not the fact that he is deliberately concealing the vices about his hero. As he asked only one question About Saul—How did he stand with the relation to the will of God—so that is the one question he asked about David. He is not concerned with the secondary matters but about the one primary matter. Did he or did he not enter into the will of God? In spite of all his faults, the author asserts that the bent of David's life was toward God. He asserts that the biggest fact about him was his dedication to the will of God. When the eyes of God went in quest of a man that He could use, David responded by a whole-hearted obedience. The biggest fact about David was that he was God's man.

III

In proof of this the author cites certain high points in David's conduct.

1. Because of his devotion to the will of God, God devoted Himself to David. Thus David became a great king, a great statesman, a great warrior.

Under him ten weak and scattered tribes were welded into a great nation. Under His leadership David was victorious in every conflict.
2. Then David became a great trainer and transformer of men. The author delights to tell us of the mighty men that David had under him. They were men, he tells us, that could keep step. That is, they were well trained. They were men that could sling with either their right or left hands. They were highly trained. They could use both the shield and the spear. They were good at offensive and defensive warfare. They were an army on which their leader could depend—hardy, skilled, and courageous.

But they were more than mere fighters. They were men of fine chivalry and devotion. In proof of this the author tells a charming story. One time when the day was hot and wistful, David said, more to himself than to others, "I wish I had a drink out of the old well at Bethlehem." But three of his men overheard him and they went in spite of deadly danger. By and by each came back with a drink of water from the well for their leader. The water was so tinged with the sweat and blood of sacrifice that David was too big a man to drink it, but poured it out in libation of his devotion. He had an army of brave and chivalrous men.

Then, the power of their leader was all the greater because he had made this fine army out of such unpromising material. He said that David's army was made out of three classes of men—those who were distressed, those who were discontented, those who were in debt. They were men, therefore, who had, up to their joining David, made a mess out of their own lives. They were drawn to him at first not so much by the fact that he was a great leader as they were drawn to him by their own desperation. They were like a certain type of men who went to the west in the old days. They were in disgrace and wanted some place where they could start life anew. And David had taken this broken and shattered earthenware and made it into a beautiful vessel.

But David's saintliness was seen above all else in his attitude toward the Temple. This preacher is a great believer in the Temple. He believed in
institutionalized religion. This has been an argument through the years. It is hard to keep an institutionalized religion religious. It is very easy to become so concerned about holy things that we forget the holy Lord and yet unless religion is institutionalized it dies. An idea must be incarnated in some kind of institution or it refuses to live. So this author magnifies the Temple.

He believes that David's saintliness is seen nowhere more than his desire to build a Temple to Jehovah.

What is the supreme ambition of David's life according to this preacher? It was to build a Temple. It was an ambition that he could not realize. But when he was forbidden to build it, he did not lose interest. He went as far in that direction as he could. Even when he found out that the Temple should be named not for himself but for another, he was just as interested as if it were to be named for himself. That showed that his ambition was not selfish but altogether unselfish.

Another proof that this preacher gives of the saintliness of David was his beautiful attitude toward the offering. How do you feel about an opportunity to give? There is no sharper test than that. One day Paul wrote a letter in which he said, "I want to tell you of the grace of God that has been bestowed upon the saints of Macedonia." And when he tells us of the nature of that grace, it is this—that these saints had begged him earnestly that he would receive a gift for their needy fellow Christians in Jerusalem. There is no surer mark of sainthood than an eagerness to give.

That, declares this preacher, was one of the beautiful characteristics of David. He is at once thrilled and amazed that God would permit him and his people to help on his cause by their gifts. "Who am I," he said in humble joy, "And who are my people that they should offer thus willingly?" "How good God is," he declares, "to take what is unseqly His very own and welcome it as if we
were giving what really belonged to ourselves." "All things come of Thee, oh Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee." Yet when we put into God's hands what is in reality His already, He rejoices over it as if we had given Him our very own. That made David's heart thrill and ring and, believe me, the author has something here! Whenever you see anybody who rejoices genuinely in making an offering, the chances are very great that that individual is one of the saints. But if you find your heart grow sour and cold at the sight of the collection plate, the chances are that you have missed the road.

Then the final proof that this preacher gives of the saintliness of David is in his parting charge to his son. It is a beautiful word worthy of a place in the New Testament. "Thou Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy fathers and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind. If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee, but if thou forsooke Him, He will cast thee off from Him forever." Notice something of the richness of this word.

1. It is a call to know God. David was sure that his son could know God because that knowledge had been his own rich possession. This is a knowledge that is not for the few but for the many. It is a knowledge that comes through obedience. If any man is willing to do His will, he shall know.

Knowing God, he was to serve Him with a perfect heart. Mar't you, that does not mean a perfect service. It only means a perfect willingness. I heard a father tell sometime as how glad his small boy was to see him upon his return home after a considerable absence. The little chap was eager to show his gladness. He volunteered to bring his dad a glass of water. But when he brought it, he had four dirty fingers down in it, and the father said, "I could see the muddy water trickling down off the fingers." But the father said, "I took it and drank a part of it not because the service was perfect, but because
the marble back of it was perfect. We often muddy the water, but if we have perfect hearts, that is what counts.

Then that final word—"If thou seek Him he will be found of thee. If thou forsake him he will cast thee off forever." That is in harmony with the theme of the preaching. It is in harmony with his text. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him." Why does God cast us off when we refuse to obey? It is not in anger. It is because he can do nothing else. If you face the sunrise, the sunrise will face you. If you turn your back on the sunrise, the sunrise in a profound sense will turn its back on you. That is true in the nature of things. Therefore, God can only give Himself to us as we give ourselves to Him.

What then is the message of the book? It is just this—God uses the man that is willing to be used. Here was this weak and discouraged people. When they laid the foundation of the Temple, there was a strange mingling of shouts and sobbings. Who were doing the shouting? The young people. They were saying, "What a Temple! It is the best we have ever known. We shall surely find God here." Who were doing the sobbing? The old folks. They said, "What a miserable little affair. It is nothing like so great as the Temple that we knew in our childhood." But this preacher is saying, "What counts is not the size of the Temple. It is your willingness to obey." God is still seeking an opportunity to break into human life and into human history. You can give Him that opportunity by your personal obedience. If you are willing, nothing can hinder Him from using you.
II CHRONICLES

"No Remedy"

Bear in mind what this author is trying to do, he is writing for a definite purpose. The people to whom he writes are the fragments of a once proud and vigorous people, but they have been conquered. They have been driven into exile. Though the servants of Jehovah, they have been made proud and arrogant pagans, naturally they are discouraged. The author realized that it is absolutely necessary for them to have courage if they are to rebuild their ruined and broken nation.

I

How does he set about the task of giving them new courage? His first step is reminding them of the cause of their failure. How did this nation that had come from the bondage of Egypt to the freedom and power of the reign of David lose that power and come to utter weakness. How was their victory changed into defeat? How did their glory become shame?

The author assured them that the failure of their fathers was not due to any lack of love on the part of God. All through the years he had loved them. All through the years, his compassions have been unfailing. Their failures were no more due to a lack of love on God's part than are ours. We too have failed somewhat. Our dreams have not all come true. Perhaps we are only shadowed fragments of the personalities we dreamed of becoming. But whatever the causes of our failure this is not one of them: A lack of love on the part of God—let us be sure of that. God has loved us as he loved Israel, with an everlasting love.
No more had their nation lost its freedom, and gone into exile because God had made no effort to save them. When we love, our love leads us to go into action on the part of the beloved. This is most true on the part of God. "God so loved that he gave" love can never be inactive. Real love can never do more than its best on behalf of those that are loved. The author is sure that God has done his best for Israel.

Then, their failure was not due to God's weakness. The author is perfectly sure that there is nothing too hard for God. He is sure that "It is nothing for God to save with them that have no power." Their failure was not due to God's failure, but to their own. God had always been amply able to help, but they had refused His help. They had turned their backs upon Him. They had gone into bondage with their pagan enemies because they had begun by going into moral and spiritual bondage. Since, by rejecting God, they had gone from strength to weakness; by accepting Him, the author is sure that they may pass from weakness to strength.

II

Now, if the author is right in affirming that God has loved his people through all the years; if he is right in saying that God has been doing his best for them, wherein is this true? You will find the answer in verses 14 to 16 inclusive of the last chapter of the book. This is a summary of the causes of the nation's downfall. Listen to it! "Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the
messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy."

God has been speaking to them constantly by every voice by which he could speak.

1. He has spoken through the ministry of the temple. The temple that Solomon built might have been of a great spiritual value to the Jewish people; for a while it was. But the author informs us that at the conclusion of Solomon's prayer, the presence of God filled the temple. God manifested himself to those who worship their again and again. It was in the temple that Isaiah had his transforming vision of the Lord. It was in the temple in later years that the Holy Spirit was given.

But how did these people respond to God's message spoken through the temple? Many of them made the temple an end in itself. This visible church was intended as a means to an end. It was to help the worshipper realize God. But, some got so interested in the temple that they lost God all together. Their worship became a form rather than a force.

While some misused it, others did not use it at all. As we read the record, we find a story of continual neglect. It had to be in-part rebuilt under Joash. Its sacred vessels had to be restored under Asa. It seems to have been little more than a plunder room. In the reign preceding that of Hezekiah, he had to have it cleaned up, and had to start the services anew. These people neglected their church as millions are prone to do today. The bride, which is the church, was saying to them "come" but they did not hear.

2. God was seeking to speak to them through the written word—they had a book of the law. It was a small fragment of the Bible that we know, but it was all they had. How did they treat it? They lost it. They did
not tear it in fragments, understand, they were not antagonistic to it, they were just indifferent. They treated the Bible as it is treated by vast multitudes even now. They neglected it, that for all practical purposes it was a lost book to them.

3. God was constantly speaking to them through the living voice of his prophets. During this period the greatest prophets of Israel lived. They were constantly warning the people. They were constantly calling the people back to God. They were constantly warning them that to neglect him would mean individual and national disaster. The most compelling and insistant voices of all was that of Jeremiah. He was a prophet of doom. He could not prophecy otherwise and tell the truth. "I will cause them to be scattered abroad over the face of the earth because of Menasseh." If these people failed, they would not do so for lack of warning. They had been warned by the living voices of the prophets.

4. Then they had been warned through God's providences. They had been warned through the punishments that had come to them through their disobediences, and through their deliverances that had come to them when they had given God a chance. Take their punishment, for instance, they had suffered again and again. Not so much because God was punishing them for their sins, as they were being punished by their sins.

It was the sin of Solomon's extravagance, his idolatry, his tyranny that had made the nation right for rebellion. It was the wicked stupidity of his son that had brought the rebellion to a head, and had caused the nation to be weakened by division. It was the continued moral blindness and stupidity of their kings that plunged the nation again and again into war among themselves. It was weakness growing out of this war and division that made them an easy prey for their surrounding foes. Yet, though they were made to suffer again and again, they refused to learn. All their
suffering went for nothing.

"Why should you be stricken anywhere?" Isaiah asked in pained amazement, "You will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint from the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, putrifying sores. . . . . Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devoured in your presence, and it is desolate." He reminds them that they are more sinless and stupid than the beasts. "The ox knoweth , an ass knoweth his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

Years ago I had an old school friend who threw away a promising future to become a dissipated-rake. He was brilliant and attractive, but he wasted his substance with riotous living. By and by he turned from his foolish way and became a sober and upright man. When he explained his reason for transforming, he was careful not to leave a wrong impression. "Do not understand me to say that I have become a Christian. I have not. The reason I gave up my wild ways was not that I wanted to be religious, it was rather that I got tired of hurting all the time. I got tired of being in constant pain." Well, his suffering heart taught him that much, but Israel had refused even to learn this lesson.

Then, if God had spoken to them through their sufferings, he had also spoken even more clearly through their deliverances. How often,"when they had been sorely pressed, he had made bare his arm in their behalf." As we reminded you in our study of the first book, he was constantly seeking an opportunity to do just this. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth, to show himself strong in behalf of them whose hearts are perfect toward Him." When Asa found himself beset by foes in whose
presence he was powerless, he prayed this simple Christian prayer: "Lord, it is nothing for thee to save whether with many, or with them that have no power."

That is a word that is true in every age. The measure of God's power to use you and me is not our capacity so much as our consecration. There is a story of a certain Mohammed General who won victory after victory. At last Mohammed desiring to know the secret of his prowess asked to see the sword with which he had wrought so many victories.

"The secret is not in the sword" came back the answer, "it is in the arm that wields the sword, and in the heart that backs up the arm."

Then there was that signal deliverance wrought during the reign of Hezekiah. The great empire of Sennacherib was hanging like a threatening storm covered over with Jerusalem. The king sent a letter, a brazen and bully letter, to Hezekiah. He warned him of the peril of resistance. He warned the Jew not to let their pious king make a fool of them. "Don't be silly enough to think that Jeremiah can deliver you out of my hands. Have the Gods of other nations been able to deliver them? Look!" he said appealingly, "to history where my armies have gone like a devouring forest fire and swept everything before them."

When Hezekiah got the letter, the story says that he went in and spread it out before the Lord. I always like that language. He seemed to say "Lord, here is a letter that came to me today, it was addressed to me, but it was really meant for you." The writer seems to think that you cannot do things anymore. Then before Hezekiah could get off his knees, the prophet Isaiah was on his way over to see him. He told him not to be in the least afraid that the king would not come near the city. He promised that God would put his bit in this arrogant king's mouth; treat him like a horse. Put a ring in his nose; treat him like an ox and turn
him about. And the promise was made then.

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the shean of his spears was like stars on the sea
When its blue waves roll nightly on blue Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,
That host with its banners at sunset was seen.
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn has blown
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the angel of death spread his wings o'er the blast
And breathed in the face of the foe as it past.
And the eyes of the sleeper, waxed deadly and chilled;
And the heart that once heaved, lay heavy and still.

And there lay the steed with his nostrils all wide,
But them and rolled not the power of his pride.
The foam of his gasping lay while on the turf,
And cold is the spray of the weather beaten surf.

There lies the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail.
The tents are all silent, the banners alone
The lances uplifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broken in the temples of Baal.
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Has vanished like mist at the glance of the Lord.

Thus through the ministry of the temple, through the written words,
through the appeal of the prophets, through their terrible suffering, and
their mightiest dreams; God had constantly sought to save his people from
their doom.

IV

But what response did they make? They refused to listen. The author
gives three stages in their downward course.

1. They despised God's messengers and his message. To despise, does
not mean to hate, it only means to undervalue. When Christ warns us not to
despise one of these little ones, he is not saying "Do not hate a child" he
is rather saying "Do not undervalue a child." These people had no great
appreciation for God's message whether written or spoken. They lost their sense of spiritual values.

2. Their next step was mockery. Beginning by refusing to listen, they came as a whole to sneer. It is awfully easy to ridicule a truth that you have not the gallantry to live out. When the ten spies found themselves lacking the courage necessary to possess the land, they did not say "It is a good land, but we haven't the gallantry to take it." In order to keep at peace with themselves, they talked the land down, declared it was not worth the taking. These people came to mock at a message that they lacked the consecration to obey.

3. They came to conform the pagans about them. They did not become worse than the surrounding nations, they simply became like them. That is always tragedy enough. One of the supreme dangers of the church, is not that we shall become worse than those outside the church; our doom is sealed, and our power of help destroyed when we become like the world.

4. Refusing to hear, they lost their capacity to hear. Refusing to see, they became spiritually blind. That is eternally true. Live up to the light that you have, and it will bring you into the fullness of the light. This is true, however far in the night that you begin. Spurn the light that you have, and it will turn into darkness, though it may have shown once as brilliantly as the noon-day sun. What can God do for the man or the nation that simply will not hear his voice? The only answer is nothing. For such, in the language of this author "There is not remedy."

But if there is no remedy for the man or nation that will not hear, there is absolutely no defeat for the man or nation that is obedient. Therefore, this preacher dares to tell his weak and struggling people "If you put God in his right place in your life, nothing can defeat you."

He can again bring you from weakness to strength—from shame and dishonor to
honor and glory. It depends, not on God, he is always willing, it depends on you. "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face; Then, will I hear from Heaven my dwelling place and will forgive their iniquities and heal their diseases." That is true yesterday, today and forever.
THE BOOK OF JOB

In studying this book we are considering one of the greatest pieces of literature in the Bible or out of it. It is a magnificent drama written by an uninspired yet unknown master. Carlyle called it the greatest epic poem ever written.

As quiet as the summer might
As the world and seas and stars.

It is certainly one of the most pressing of problems, one that is as old as man and as new as the tragedy of today. It is certainly of the age-old problem of pain.

I

Let us look first at the characters in the drama.

1. First is God. The God whom we meet on the pages of the Book of Job is not always like him who is revealed to us by Jesus Christ. But we need to bear in mind that God is here pictured as seen through the eyes of men who saw but dimly. Therefore, he is not always a loving father and friend. Sometimes he is petty and vindictive, ready to strike dead anyone who renounces him. Sometimes he seems little more than a powerful despot. Job, at one time, calls him a spy. "If I do sin what is that to thee, O thou spy upon mankind". But at his best he is seen as man's vindicator and saviour.

2. The second striking personality of the drama is Satan. In the opening scene the author sees nothing inconsistent in having Satan come along with the sons of God to present themselves before the Almighty. The word Satan means adversary. He is the traducer, the slanderer and the ___.

He is the eternal fault finder. He is full of pride and self-conceit. He can see more through a key hole than others can through a wide open door.

Being thus wise, he no longer believes in goodness. That is proof
positive that he himself is not good. Whenever we hear anyone say, "every man has his price", we may be dead sure that the speaker has a price. Those who do not believe in cleanliness, are not clean. Those who refuse to believe in honesty are not honest. Those who question every man's goodness are not good.

When, therefore, God calls attention to the high character of his servant Job, Satan was not convinced. He is only amused. He then proceeds to live up to his name of slanderer. He goes about the task in the shrewdest possible way. He does it in a way that is both safe and unanswerable. He does not make an assertion that might get him into trouble. He rather asks a question. Nobody can slap your face for asking a question. Yet just as damaging can be a question as an assertion. Do you think Bill Jones is honest? Is Sam Smith's wife walking out on him? Those who ask such questions do not assert a thing but they obtain the same results.

Now, having asked the question, Satan passes on to draw his own conclusion. "Job", he affirms, "is a good man but he is only good superficially. He is decent because it pays him to be decent. You have fenced him about, you petted him, paid him a big salary. Cut off these things, stop feeding him bonbons, and you will see how good he is. He will curse you to the face. Satan believes in nobody; finds fault with everybody. The more we come to share his lack of faith, the more devilish we become.

Then there were Job's friends, including his wife. These intimate friends were three - Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. Later a fourth man is introduced who is not so intimate. He is much younger than either Job or his three friends. Elihu is his name. He has all of the certainty and self-assurance that goes with youth, inexperience and ignorance. He comes more nearly knowing everything than anybody in the book with the possible exception of Satan himself. If you want to know all the answers, turn to Elihu. He takes his time also in giving them. His speech flows on somewhat
as Tennyson's brook.

4. Finally, there is Job, the hero of the story. Job the sufferer. Job, who in addition to his affliction, has to undergo the agony of the criticism and the taunts of his friends. In Job we see a man who is stripped of every visible support. He loses every outward value upon which we depend to make life livable.

II

Look then at the losses suffered by Job.

1. First he lost his wealth. In the days of his prosperity, he had been one of the richest men of all the East. His flocks and herds were large. He had not only plenty for himself and for his household, but he was able to distribute to the needs of others. He was an open-handed benefactor.

Now, when Job lost his wealth, he lost more than ease and comfort. He lost what goes with prosperity and success. He lost the respect of his fellows. Those who had once, as he reminds us, listened to his every word, refused to listen any more. The very youth despised him. His own slaves looked on him with contempt. A friend of mine who was threatened during the days of depression with the loss of all he had, mentioned the fact that it was not the loss of money that he dreaded so much. He dreaded being rated as a failure.

With wealth and respect gone, there went with it much of his capacity to serve. That he had been a great servant even those who were criticising him unmercifully confessed. Here is a fine compliment they paid him: "Words have kept men on their feet". Words can be very flippant and not substantial things. They can also be stronger than granite. Job, before his first great loss, had been able to steady others both by his gifts and by the words of a successful man. Even when his loss came, he faced it heroically, saying nothing. "Naked came I into the world and naked shall I return".
2. Hard upon the heels of his financial tests, came the loss of his children. He was possessed of seven sons and three doughters. These were very dear to his heart. He had reared them in an atmosphere of faith. Each week these devoted children met in his home of a brother or sister to feast. Job did not always attend the feast but, as a godly father, he constantly prayed for his children lest one of them should sin. Then suddenly a messenger came saying that all had been swept away. Here again Job faces up to his tragedy with high faith. Instead of rebelling, he cried, "The Lord giveth and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed by the name of the Lord.

3. The next tragic loss was the loss of his health. What connection there was between the first two disasters and latter, we are not told. Often the connection is close. When Job had stood up to the first two tests, Satan had declared that he had only done so because the disasters had not touched him personally. "If any disaster touches him in his own body, then he will collapse, for 'all that a man has will he give for his life'". This is sometimes quoted as Scripture. Of course, it is the devil's own statement and a despicable Satanic lie.

The disease from which Job suffered we are not told. Anyway, it was something that tortured him. It was something that made pain to walk with fire-shod feet along every nerve of his body. It was something that made him ghastly and hideous in the eyes even of those that loved him. It was something that so utterly wrecked him that his fondest wish was to die.

4. The fourth tragedy that befell Job was the loss of those human supports that might mean so much.

(1) He lost the undergirding of the faith of his wife. Her advice is not quite so heartless as it seems. She had made up her mind that her husband was without hope. Since he was going to die anyway, the quicker the better. The surest way to die was to renounce his and God. Therefore, she said, "Curse or renounce God and die". Thus from an asset she became a
liability. Job could only answer, "You are talking like a fool."

Then followed the loss of his friends. These three men who came to see him were real friends. That is indicated by the fact that they came. Mere acquaintances would not have dared. They indicated it further by the fact that they sat with him seven days and nights without saying a word. If they had kept up that record they might have been immortal.

At last, they let go. Instead of becoming the comforters of their friend, they tortured him even more than his sickness. Thus he had to face it. Tragedy stripped and worse than stripped of all human support.

5. Thus he came to his final loss, a loss worse than that of his children, a loss of faith in a God who really cared and who was just. This loss was the natural outcome of the failure of his friends. Listen to Job's own words. Kindly friends should be kind to one who is in distress or he will lose faith in the Almighty, and so he said, "If I do sin what is that to thee, O thou spy upon mankind". That is, "I am so insignificant that what I do one way or another is of no importance. But in spite of the fact that I could have nothing, God insists not on helping me but on spying upon me and shooting his arrows at me."

In the midst of these periods of black darkness, there was sometimes strange glimpses of light. Job finds himself longing for a go-between, a dragoman, he calls him, who should put his hand also upon God and upon himself. He longed for God to plead his cause against himself. In spite of the fact that for the most part he had no faith in immortality, yet he dreamed of it and hoped for satisfaction in the life to come for the ills that he had suffered here. But when these brief gleams went, darkness and utter night closed over.

III

Now Job's problem is this. Why do I suffer? That has been the problem of countless millions. That same question was asked by Jesus on the
cross. He never asked God but one question and that was this, "My God, my God, why?" What is the answer? Of course we can give no sure answer but we can get glimpses.

1. Job's friends have a sure answer so far as they themselves were concerned. Job was suffering for just one reason, because he had sinned. There could be no other answer that accounted for his suffering but sin. Of course the answer is - millions. But that was not their conviction. They affirmed dogmatically, every man who suffers, suffers as a result of his sin.

Now, the faith of Job's friends that his suffering is born of sin has persisted in the minds of men through the years. It has persisted because there is some truth in it, but that faith is a mingling of truth with falsehood.

Look at what is true about it. This is true. One hundred percent sin always involves suffering. There is never any exception. It was written in the Scriptures "Be sure your sin will find you out". That is true yesterday, today and forever. Whoever sins, suffers. Not only does he suffer but generally he involves others in his suffering.

Now, in asserting that sin always involves suffering, they pass on to the conviction that all sufferers were suffering as a result of their sin. This, of course, was not true. There are some who suffer as a result of natural law. There are some who suffer because they are bound up in a bundle of life with others. There are some who suffer not because they are evil, but because they are good. Jesus would have suffered far less in our world if he had been less good. While it is true that sin always brings suffering, it is not true that everyone who suffers is suffering the consequences of his own sin.

3/ A dangerous error in this attitude of these friends of Jobs was that since sin always involves suffering, those who do not suffer have not sinned. That, of course, is utterly false. It may be very convincing to a certain type
of 
man to say, "Good men prosper in every way while veil men always went to the wall", but life tears that complacent faith into shreds and tatters. Look what such faith did for these friends. They were not suffering as Job was, therefore they concluded we are far better than Job. They became self righteous prigs. They came to look upon all misfortune with contempt rather than with compassion. They lost the capacity to sympathize. They said some heartless things to Job. Here, I think, is one of the most heartless. "Were I in your place, I would repent and turn to God". "Were I in your place". That might be a tender and helpful word. It might have in it the practice of the Golden Rule. It might be shot through with spirit of the Cross. To put yourself in the place of another is so Christlike that Jesus tells us that it not of the law, but it may be the very essence of cruelty and self-conceit. So it is here. It is awfully easy to tell anybody what you would do in their place if you have sympathy enough or imagination enough to really take their place.

IV

What did Job learn from his sorrow?

1. He learned to count on sorrow as a part of the human lot. Nobody escapes it altogether.
2. He learned to accept it.
3. He learned to use it. "Why", he asked desperately, "is life given unto me who is at his wit's end?" Well, when Job repented, he found his wits end to be for him the beginning of a new day. The new prosperity that came to Job we are not to think of as being looking in dollars and cents. He came to prosperity in a new knowledge of God. He came to know what Paul learned years later, "That all things work together for good to them that love God."
The Problem of Pain

The book of Job stands as one of the supreme monuments of human genius. As a piece of literature it is almost without a rival. Carlyle thought it the greatest product of human genius. "So sublime; so true every way. Sublime sorrow; sublime reconciliation; oldest choral melody, as of the heart. As quiet as the summer midnight, as the world with its seas and stars. I know nothing else in the Bible or out of it to compare with it."

But the book of Job is far more than a wonderful piece of literature. It is a study of one of the oldest of human problems, - the problem of pain. Why do people suffer? Why does one man succeed and another fail? Why does one man laugh and another weep? Why does all one man touches turn to gold while all that another touches turns to dust and ashes? Why does one man spend all his years in perfect health while for another every breath is a breath of pain? These are the big questions that are considered in this ancient drama of Job.

They were very pressing questions in those days. They are very insistent questions today. I know that they are not insistent with some of us, but that is because we have not yet greatly suffered. But there are times in our lives when these questions demand an answer. We can remain neutral upon them oftentimes when the sun is bright. We can leave them unanswered when the voyage is peaceful and the sea is smooth and every moment is jeweled with a joy. But when the fierce tempest sweeps and the sea rages and sorrow sits sobbing like a troubled ghost in every chamber of the heart, then we must have some sort of an answer to these questions or we are likely to go mad.

The central figure in this drama is Job. He is a man who lives in the land of Us, in northern Arabia. When we first meet him he is one whose lot is to be envied. He has about everything that that day considered worthwhile. He is a man of great worldly prosperity. He owns vast herds of cattle, sheep and camels.

In addition to this, he is the father of a large family. I am not saying that that is looked upon as any great boon today, but it was at that day. These children of his were much upon his heart. He was a pious and consecrated father. He was also tolerant and liberal and loving toward his children. He allowed them the privilege of feasting, but he rather gave himself to prayer, private, intercessory prayer lest perchance some one of them had sinned. This great father of a great family was the spiritual guide of his own household.

Then this man held a position of distinction in his community. He exercised an open handed liberality. The needy were never turned empty from his door. He had many acquaintances. He had three friends. And all these material blessings joined with faith in God made him a man who was truly rich.

But one day a messenger came announcing that a great calamity had befallen him. All his property had been swept away within a single day. From a man of wealth he was reduced to poverty. Then a little later another messenger came announcing the death of all his children. Of course, this was an infinitely worse calamity than the first. It was even a worse calamity than a like loss would be to ourselves. Job did
not have our firm assurance of immortality. The death of his children also robbed him of his hope of being the father of the Messiah.

On the heels of these terrible losses came the loss of his health. He was afflicted with a terrible and hideous and painful disease. He was transformed suddenly into a piece of living loathsomeness. Every moment was made long with the bitterness of his agony. To add to the weight of his sorrow he lost the fellowship and understanding of his wife. She gave him up and told him to curse God and die.

Then he lost his friends. These three men were real friends. They showed that by the fact that they came to him when he had lost everything. His acquaintances let him alone. They showed that by sitting silent with him on the ash heap for seven days. They showed their friendship, in the third place, by saying what they said to his face. They condemned him but they did not go behind his back to do it. They talked it out with him eye to eye, doing their infinite best to help him.

The next great loss that came to Job was the loss of a sense of his own personal worth. When he lost his property he said, "Naked came I into the world, etc." He seems to say, "Goods are not necessary. I am independent of things." He has a sense of his own personal worth. But with his overwhelming calamities he lost that. He comes to the place where he can curse the day that he was born. He himself is so wretched, so utterly worthless and useless.

Then, too, Job lost his former sense of relationship to God. When his children died Job said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." In spite of loss and death he still stood on terms of intimacy with his God. Now he feels himself a target for the arrows of the Almighty. He is half persuaded at times that God has become his bitter enemy.

So here we have a terrible conflict. There is a loss of wealth, a loss of loved ones, a loss of health, a loss of understanding between husband and wife, between friend and friend, in some measure a loss of faith in God. What is the meaning of all these sorrows? Why is Job suffering as he is suffering? The three friends of Job are absolutely certain that they know the answer to this question. They are perfectly honest and perfectly sincere. In fact, they seem perfectly heartless in their sincerity.

What is their answer to this question? This is the answer: Job was suffering because he had sinned. Their faith had at least two articles. First, they were firmly convinced that if a man was righteous he would prosper. They believed that if a man obeyed God, God would certainly give him material as well as spiritual success. Their second article of faith grew inevitably from the first. "All righteous men", they said, "prosper. Therefore, if a man fails to prosper it is because he is a sinner. All pain comes as a result of sin. The greater the pain, the greater the disaster, the greater the sin that must lie back of it."

This was the faith of Job's three friends. It is the faith that has had a hard time dying. I remember the Sunday School stories of a few years ago usually had in them a good boy and a bad boy. And the good boy was always coming out first best. He was always getting the pie and the bad boy was having to go hungry. There are those today who want to attribute all sickness and pain to the fact that we are in error, that is, that
we have been guilty of some kind of wrong. Now, Job stood up against his three friends to argue with them that their contentions were not true. He said that the good do not always prosper, and the bad do not always fail. And in the face of all that his friends could say he refused to admit that his own personal suffering was the result of some sin that he had committed. He refused to admit that he had been the great hypocrite that his three friends declared he had. He refused, when robbed of everything else, to allow them to rob him of God. He said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Now the trouble with these three friends of Job was that they considered that all suffering was penal. This is where they made their first big blunder. It is absolutely true that those who sin suffer. That is a fact of utmost of universal acceptance. Sin always means suffering. Everywhere we look today we can see something of the suffering that comes from sin. Europe dotted with graves and torn with strife is paying the awful penalty of sin. It is absolutely impossible to sin and not suffer.

But while this is true, they forgot that there is a pain that is in no sense punishment. For instance, there are those who suffer, not because they are bad, but because they are good. Were they less good they would suffer less. The agony of Jesus was an agony born of goodness. The reason that a mother breaks her heart over herward boy is not because she is selfish and Christless and wicked. It is because she is Christlike and unselfish and good.

Then they forgot that there is another reason for pain. Pain is to show a man that he has wandered out of the way. It is to punish him that he may come back into the way of righteousness. That is true. But there is a suffering that is also meant to strengthen and to develop and to bring to perfection. Such pain is in no sense punishment. It does not grow out of the displeasure of God, but out of His good pleasure. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

This is the secret of the sufferings of Job. He was not suffering because God did not love him. He was not suffering because he had sinned. He was suffering because the path of pain was the only road along which he could travel in order to reach the highest possibility of Godlike character. "Who did sin, this man or his parent, that he was born blind?" the disciples asked one day. They thought, as did Job's friends, that no calamity ever came except as a punishment for some sin. But Christ answered, "Neither did this man sin, nor his father, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him." That is, his blindness was not as a punishment for sin. His blindness was rather a means of grace. It was an avenue by which untold blessings would be able to enter into his life.

It is a marvelous service that the author of this book rendered. Of course, in the light of the New Testament we understand far better than he that "all things work together for good to them that love God." We know today that sickness and pain and poverty and heartache are not necessarily marks of the divine displeasure. They may be the very opposite. They may be the hammer and chisel by which the Divine artist is seeking to bring to light the angel of our better nature.

Job says some very savagely sincere things in the course of his argument. I think, however, his rebellion is not so bitter against God, the God of his own heart, as it is against the God of the popular theology of
that day. All Job said was not true, but God vindicated him at the end of
the book and condemned his friends. And Job had to offer a sacrifice for
his three friends who, in their friendship, had so cruelly wronged him.
Let us then recognize the fact that pain is a part of the divine plan. It
is the only way that God has of bringing some of us to our highest and to
our best. The choicest souls that I have ever met have been those who
have suffered. When you find a life tender, sweet, sympathetic, Christ-
like you usually find that in the past of that life somewhere there is a
broken heart.

Paul was a greatly afflicted man. He bled from a hidden wound. How
he suffered none of us will ever know. He had a thorn in the flesh. Why
was that thorn there? Not because Paul had sinned. It had altogether
another purpose than that of punishment. The purpose of the thorn was to
bring him into a deeper and more intimate fellowship with God. And it
did not fail of its purpose. And God touched that old thorn and made it
bloom into sweetest flowers so that Paul said, "Most gladly therefore will
I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon
me."

This book then ought to teach us this lesson: to thank God and to
rejoice even in the midst of our sorrows. It is easy to thank God when
we are prosperous. It is easy to have gratitude when everything is coming
our way. But the triumph of faith is to be able to thank God even for
the heartaches and for the disappointments and for the failures that are
ours. And this we will be able to do when we come to recognize that pain
is just as real a part of God's plan as pleasure. And it may be as truly
a mark of His love as any coveted gift of fortune.