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KING'S COLLEGE SERMONS.

BY

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IN KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON;

AND LATE FELLOW OF BRASENOSE COLLEGE, OXFORD.



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TO

FREDERICK CHARLES PLUMPTRE, D.D.

MASTER OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, OXFORD,

These Sermons are Dedicated

IN TOKEN OF THE GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION

DUE FOR MANY YEARS

OF CONSTANT AND FATHERLY KINDNESS.

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KING'S COLLEGE SERMONS.

I.

THE COUNSEL OF THE PREACHER.

“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth.”—ECCLES. xi. 9.

“Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice.”—
PHIL. iv. 4.

IT is scarcely possible to imagine a greater contrast than that between the two men of whom these words remind us. On the one side there comes before the memory, the princely son of David, “Solomon in all his glory,” he of the heaped-up treasures and the ivory throne, he to whom princes came from many lands that they might hear his wisdom—whose fame drew even the Queen of the South, with her camel-loads of spices and of gold, to undertake her long pilgrimage, and yet was found to be far below the one-half of the greatness of his glory. On the

other, we see among those portraits of the past with which we store our minds, the figure of the tent-maker of Tarsus working for his daily bread; journeying from city to city; in some poor lodging or unhealthy prison; suffering from hunger, or cold, or nakedness; loved and honoured, indeed, by those who came within the range of his immediate influence, but with no honour among the great and noble; unknown to the princes of the world. And yet, different as they are in their outward fortunes, their teaching has so far, in this instance, the same character. There is a harmony in those utterances of theirs which bid men to rejoice.

The contrast is, as I need not tell you, even more wonderful when we pass from the circumstances of the two men to their inward spiritual history; to the experiences through which they had severally passed. One had had his fill of all that constitutes sensual or intellectual enjoyment—had exhausted all the appliances of luxury, and stimulated the flagging energies of his life with the novelties and grace of art. When this had failed him, there came the culture

of the intellect, the application of the great gifts which he had received from God, to the world of nature or of man. He spake of plants, from the cedar upon Lebanon to the hyssop upon the walls. He turned himself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly. He had known what it was to find all this fail. Increase of wisdom had brought increase of sorrow; there fell on him the darkness of despair—sorrow and vexation of heart. There went up from him who had sought to make for himself a paradise like the garden of God, a cry like that of one who is in the howling wilderness. “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity.” And yet, he it is who says calmly, and as the best counsel he can give, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth.”

The history of the inner life of Paul the apostle had been very different from this. That rigid, earnest youth, sternly ascetic in the reality of its efforts after holiness, had shut the door against all sensuous indulgence, and had so far narrowed, while it purified, the experiences of his life. His training at the feet of Gamaliel, though it made him perfect in his knowledge of

the Law and the traditions of the elders, was as unlike as possible to that which gave to Solomon so wide and various a knowledge. Then came the great crisis in his life—the agony of the travail pangs of his birth into a new life—the intensest consciousness of his own evil and of the misery resulting from it; then the sense of a calling to a life of ceaseless labours—to a work which, but for one belief, would have made him among the most miserable of all men. And yet, he too gives the same counsel. He who had known what it was to live as in a body of death, dying daily, filling up that which was lacking in the sufferings of Christ; he also utters the words, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.” It must be worth our while to examine that lesson, to which two such different men were led through such opposite experiences; to see what they had in common, and wherein their words, though alike in sound, were yet distinct in meaning. It will be well for us, I trust, to inquire into the bearing of each precept severally, asking what it meant, how we may apply it to the government of our own

lives, how far the earlier teaching is in harmony with the later, how far it falls short of it.

You will have seen that I have taken for granted, that the words of the Preacher mean what they appear to mean. I cannot bring myself, as some have done, to see in them only the irony of a stern and relentless scorn ; I cannot interpret them as if they were the utterance of one who, in the weariness of his own senses, had lost all power to sympathise with the freshness and joy of youth, and, standing on the stepping-stone of his dead self, mocked at the gaiety and light-heartedness of those who were entering on the career through which he himself had passed. To those who take that view, the words may seem to be meant to check and stifle joy rather than to encourage it. "Go forth, young man, upon thy voyage of life,

‘ Youth at the prow and Pleasure at the helm ; ’

indulge thyself without limit in all lust and licence ; leave no desire ungratified, let nature and art be servants to minister to thy enjoyment : I know all this, and have found out its

vanity and hollowness ; I know how that voluptuous youth ends in a miserable age ; I see the days of darkness coming, the which if thou couldst see, thou wouldst cease to exult in thy joyous mirth, and wouldst sit down to weep in sackcloth and in ashes. The joy of youth looks well only in the torchlight of the world's masques and revelries. By the light of truth it is seen to be but 'a poor and shrunken thing.' No joy is possible for him who has before his mind the solemn realities of life, the certainties of age, and death, and judgment."

I do not deny that there may have been a time in the experience of Solomon, when that would have been his mood,—when he might have ended all that he had to teach, with the thought that life, and youth, and joy, and all that belonged to it, were but vanity and vexation of spirit. In those words of the Preacher, in which he retraces and reproduces the phases of his past life, there are tokens enough of such feelings. But I contend that this was not the truth in which he rested, not that to which the discipline of God had led him, and which, in

the wisdom of God, has been preserved to us as part of the great treasure of the Book of Life. Throughout the Book of Ecclesiastes we find again and again the expressions of a clearer and a healthier state. The Preacher does verily and in earnest, counsel a man to "enjoy the good of his labours that he taketh under the sun, all the days of his life which God giveth him. His garments are to be always white, he is to eat his bread with joy." The wisdom to which the king of Israel had been led, taught him the secret of a truer joy than that with which he had started; free from its feverish excitement, calmer and more abiding. He is not out of sympathy with the eagerness and freshness of youth. He understands it better than before. He wishes to give counsel, which may prevent the waste of so priceless a treasure. There may be some sadness, but there is no mockery in the words, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth."

We may accept these words, then, as in very deed the counsel of the Preacher, as embodying the wisdom which he had learnt from God. As such, it seems to me, they assert a truth in

which all of us, whether young or old, have some share. It will not be without profit to us, to ask what that share is. They tell those who are called to the work of teaching or of guiding youth, that all systems of education which tend to repress and coerce its natural elasticity, are at variance with the Divine order, as well as with man's nature. The rigour of a premature asceticism—the substitution of the monastic for the manly type of excellence—will lead to an utter failure. You cannot have a vigorous and useful life as the product of a joyless boyhood. You do not even attain the end which you aim at—you do not root out the germs of evil by this system of repression: simplicity, purity, truthfulness, demand a healthier culture. Under this artificial system you do but drive the sin deeper in; and in its concealment and deceitfulness it takes more hateful forms, and works a more lasting evil. Those who wish to do the work to which God has called them, in the education of the English people, must reject altogether the Jesuit type of discipline.

But if it is an evil that the joy which God gives as the portion of the young, should be sacrificed to a false ideal of goodness, it is yet more terrible that it should be crushed and trampled out by the great wheels with which the world's selfishness moves in its relentless course. And yet, when we look out on the multitudes of young, but not joyous faces, that meet us in this great city—in all the cities of our empire—we cannot escape from the conclusion, that this is what we have been at least acquiescing in. By our silence and neglect, if not by any direct agency, we are verily guilty concerning these our brothers. Commerce has uttered its demands for the cheapest labour, and the demand has been met by the supply; and long days of weary, unbroken toil, have taken the place of the happy activity of home; and the pitiful cry of those who have no comforter, has risen up to Heaven, instead of the glad voices of mirth and innocence. Or, to take what we in this city of ours are most familiar with, neglect has done what greed has done elsewhere; children grow up in thousands, in the

truest sense of the word, fatherless and homeless, never knowing the loving discipline of kindness, never looking on the fair face of nature, or coming under her manifold gracious influences. For them, youth is stript of all its brightness and pleasantness, and they cannot rejoice in it. They grow old before their time, in a terribly premature experience in drunkenness and harlotry.

I do not speak of these things, brethren, merely as great social evils—wrongs of which every one may talk, and wonder that some one does not find the remedy. It is right that all those whom God has called, or may call hereafter, to any position of influence or wealth, should recognise the existence of this evil, and endeavour, so far as they have the power, to meet it. It is right that you, who are before long to be entrusted with the care of souls, who are sure to find the evil very near you, affecting your work, or hindering you in your efforts to win souls to Christ, should know, that no preaching can succeed which ignores the constitution that God has given us; that no edu-

cation can be effectual; which does not recognise honestly and fully the right of the young to rejoice in their youth. You cannot rescue them from the impurity that leads to the abyss, but through the wisdom whose ways are pleasantness. Routine, order, instruction; these are worth much; but there is a time for every thing, and there are seasons in which you will do well to show your sympathy, even in the humblest joys of your fellow-men, and to provide them where, as yet, the taste or the capacity is hardly formed, because they have had no scope to act.

Again, I read in the Preacher's words a warning against a fault into which, as we advance in life, we are all liable to fall. We allow the cares and anxieties of middle age to possess us wholly; we are careful and troubled about many things. The grave responsibilities of duty, or the eager striving after wealth, are dominant in us, and we lose our capacity for enjoyment and become intolerant of the overflowing life of joy, which for us has passed away. We are out of sympathy with it; meet

it with reproofs and frowns; think of it (if our selfishness takes the religious form) as frivolous and sinful. And so we lose the blessings which God designed for us, in making youth the season of enjoyment, and clothing it with so much grace and brightness. In that natural order of man's life, which, in its true development, harmonises with the spiritual, and is brought to perfection by it, the serene brightness of a happy and honoured age glows with a renewed lustre when it comes in contact with those who are yet in the golden dawn of life. Old thoughts are called into life again; old familiar faces and remembrances of past friendships throng upon us as we witness that bounding and exulting life which once we shared. And this sympathy, while it softens and saddens us, helps us to greater thoughtfulness and gentleness, and raises us out of the low cares of life; bringing with it this blessing also, that it, and, we may almost say, it alone, enables us to influence and guide those whose joy may else become reckless, or lose itself in sensuality. Its absence is the cause of much of the estrange-

ment and loss of natural affection which meets us in modern society. Fathers and children, tutors and the taught, rich and poor, do not understand each other—have no common ground—look on one another with distrust. All this is confessedly an evil; it breaks up that unity of the family, of the school, the nation, which God designs for it. I do not see that it is quite compatible with the unity of that Church, the law of whose life is, that if one member rejoice, all the members should rejoice with it.

But the chief lesson of the words, as might be expected, is for those to whom they are addressed. The young man is told that he is to rejoice in his youth. That is God's gift to him, and he should neither reject it, by yielding to dark, sullen, moody thoughts, nor waste it in thoughtless profusion, nor defile it by acts of sin. If any one finds that, instead of that bright cheerfulness which is characteristic of his age, instead of the spontaneous energy which throws itself into well-nigh every form of bodily or mental activity, there hang over him the

troubles of the envious, or the fears of the cowardly, or the shame of the unclean, or the heaviness of the slothful, he may be sure that it is not well with him—that he has lost a blessing which God meant him to enjoy. He will not be in his right state till his heart cheer him in the days of his youth; and the efforts, and the discipline, yes, and the prayers of his life, should be directed to the recovery of the treasure which he has lost.

There are, however, memorable words that accompany this counsel—words which have sometimes been allowed to darken and overshadow it, but which we must not on that account ignore. “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” That cheerfulness and joy of thine do not exempt thee from the great law of retribution, which runs through the whole order of man’s life. Thy idle words, thy least premeditated acts, thy sports and

pleasures, are fashioning thy character for good or evil, bringing with them a blessing or a curse. For all these thou must render an account, hereafter, in the great day when the secrets of all hearts will be made manifest. Of all these thou shalt bear the penalty or reap the reward in those earthly days of judgment, which are fore-shadowings of the final doom. He that sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind. He that sows to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption. The prodigal who wastes his substance in riotous living, comes under the pressure of a mighty famine, and would fain fill his belly with the husks that the swine eat. The "youth of folly" is followed by the "old age of cards." Upon the pleasure-seeker who has forgotten God, there will come the evil days when he shall say, "I have no pleasure in them." For those who have forfeited the blessedness of the pure in heart, there abides the curse of the heart and conscience that are defiled, and to them nothing is pure. The words, "Know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment;" "Remember now thy

Creator in the days of thy youth," while they are not meant to crush and stifle joy, while it is altogether a perversion to take them as if they meant, "Remember this, and then rejoice if thou canst," are designed to regulate and purify that which, in the absence of that remembrance, so soon over-passes its right bounds and becomes tainted with evil. They tell the young man that the thought of God as the Giver of all life, and health, and joy, should be with him always; that in the fullest intensity of his life there should be the recognition of a law, the discernment of good and evil, the battle against selfishness, the spirit of sympathy and kindness. If it is possible to eat and to drink to the glory of God, and in the name of Christ, it is no less possible for that knowledge of the coming judgment, and that remembrance of the Lord and Maker, to be present with men and boys in the hours of their greatest freedom. Duty does not cease because task-work is over. The greater the stimulus to joy, the more reason is there for remembering it. In this sport or in

that, when every faculty of sense is tried to the utmost, and every sinew strained, when you are putting forth all your powers, trampling knee-deep through the heather and the fern—climbing to the mountain-height, that you may gaze on the far out-spread vision of lake, and field, and wood—looking out upon the glowing west as the descending sun kindles the white-crested waves into ridges of crimson fire—stirred in your minds and hearts, by the brave and noble words of the mighty poets of the earth;—in all these forms of enjoyment, which lie open in their fulness to you who are still young, it will be possible for you to remember, that there is a higher life, and a higher blessedness. Not only or chiefly in directly religious converse, but in the instinctive shrinking from all that is vile or base, in the loathing of all falsehood, in the kindness which will not willingly give pain, in the humility which frankly and heartily renounces its own wishes, it will be in your power, to keep yourselves pure, to cleanse your way, to preserve the spring of gladness from waste and failure.

One who has so hearkened to the counsel of the Preacher, will find his joy in things that are lovely and excellent, and of good report; wisdom will enter into his heart, and knowledge be pleasant unto his soul. Even as the young men to whom St. John wrote, he will, even in that youth of his, have overcome the wicked one. Not for him are the feet that go down to death, and the steps that lay hold on hell. Not for him is the mirth of fools that is as the crackling of the thorns. The child shall be father of the man; and the blameless youth, in proportion to its blamelessness, shall be the fore-runner of a manhood full of blessings; and when the days of darkness come, the failure of health and strength, the long weariness of age,—“it shall come to pass that at eventide there shall be light.”

That, brethren, is the pattern of a life based upon the teaching, which bids the young man rejoice in his youth and yet remember the Creator. It presents a blessedness, which few of us attain completely, but which is offered freely to you all, which any one of you may

attain and keep. But there is a blessedness yet more wonderful. There are words which lead you to a higher wisdom. The things which were not revealed to prophets and wise men, have been revealed by the Spirit of God to those who are his children. The wisdom of Solomon was summed up in the counsel, "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth." The wisdom of St. Paul uttered itself in the words, "Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice."

II.

EARLY PIETY AND ITS FAILURES.

“And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.”—2 CHRON. xxiv. 2.

THESE words belong to the history of a very conspicuous series of changes in the kingdom of Judah. To understand their meaning, we must look back upon the causes and the results of the revolution and counter-revolution of which this was the termination; we must picture to ourselves the position of the two kingdoms into which the monarchy of David and Solomon had been divided, when Jehoshaphat sat upon the throne of Judah, and Ahab on that of Israel. That appeared to be for both a time of prosperity and peace. They were driven, it may be, by the pressure

of a common danger—it may be, by some revival of the old feeling that they were all sons of Abraham, into union and alliance. It seemed better that it should be so, than that the old wars should be carried on still as in the days of Rehoboam and Asa. And the alliance was, as the last chapter of the First Book of Kings shows us, a very close one: “I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses.” It was natural that it should be cemented, after the fashion of other alliances, by marriages between the two dynasties. Solomon in this way had strengthened himself, as it seemed, by his alliance with Egypt. Ahab had gained the support of the Phœnicians by his marriage with the daughter of the king of Zidon. Might not such a marriage really tend to heal the breach which had been made by the rebellion of Jeroboam? Might not the two dynasties converge, and the house of David and the house of Omri be sharers in the united monarchy?

These schemes, or such as these, had much to commend them to the counsels of a worldly

prudence. To Jehoshaphat and his advisers it doubtless seemed a very masterly piece of state-craft. Anxious as he was to sustain the character of a religious reformer, sending Levites throughout the land to instruct the people in the Law, re-organising the worship of the Temple, eager to consult the prophets of the Lord, he did not hesitate to accept the daughter of Jezebel as the wife of the heir of his kingdom. And so the name of Athaliah runs, like a blood-stained thread, through the woof of the history of Judah. She comes—true child of such a mother, blood-thirsty, idolatrous, ambitious; an alien in creed and race—to do her work of evil. Like the she-wolf of France in our own English history—like Catherine de Medicis in that of France—her presence is chronicled by crimes, and her name becomes a by-word and a curse. You can imagine without difficulty how true, God-fearing Israelites must have dreaded the approach of such a woman,—how she would meet that dread with hatred and suspicion, biding her time, leading on first her husband

and then her son to their destruction, suggesting the massacre of those who stood in her way, establishing the worship of Baal on the high places of Jerusalem. At last the time seemed ripe: "When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead,"—slain in that revolt of Jehu's,—“she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah.” The line of David seemed in danger of perishing from the earth. Out of all that came within the line of succession, one infant boy only escaped the general doom. The marriage of a sister of the king's with the priest Jehoiada, enabled her to find a refuge for him in the priests' chambers of the house of God. And so the usurpation seemed successful; a new dynasty was established by that bold stroke of state-craft. The temple was left to decay, plundered of its treasures; the images and altars of Baal were seen in all the streets of Jerusalem.

But the day of retribution came. The priest Jehoiada watched the growth of that branch out of the stem of Jesse, we may well believe,

with anxious hopes and fears. He worked surely and silently—gathered men whom he could trust, and took them into his confidence. It came to be known among the priests and Levites, and all who groaned under the yoke of the stranger, that her fall was near at hand. The counter-revolution was organized, weapons were found in the old armoury of David, willing hands were found among the ministers of the temple. The child-king was brought out—not yet eight, let us remember—as the true occupant of the throne, and the courts of the Lord's house once more echoed to the shouts of "God save the king!" "May the king live for ever!" Then came for Athaliah a moment of baffled ambition and panic fear. She has but time to rend her clothes in the agony of terror, to utter the cry of "Treason! treason!" Then comes the sharp sentence, executed speedily; and so the judgment on the house of Ahab was completed, and the she-wolf of Samaria shared the punishment of her mother, as she had shared her guilt.

It is to the events that followed this that the

words I have read refer. After the overthrow of the tyranny came the work of reformation. A false worship had to be rooted out, a true worship to be re-established, the temple of God to be restored to something of its former stateliness. In all this, as might be expected, Jehoiada was acting; his mind was really the governing, kingly mind, though the crown was on the head of Joash. We can picture to ourselves the boy-king growing up to manhood under such tutelage; the hopes which the reform party in Judah would cherish of him; their expectation that he would be the great upholder of the true religion,—the great defender of the worship of the Lord Jehovah. The history of our own Reformation presents an analogy so striking, that it may help us to realize that remote past. What Cranmer was to Edward, that Jehoiada was to Joash. The hopes of Protestants, the fears of Romanists, as the boy-Reformer was growing up to manhood, may be taken as a measure of the like hopes and fears among the contending parties at Jerusalem.

Here, happily for England, the parallel ceases. We must call on our imagination, not on history, if we would form an estimate of that which followed. If Edward had outlived Cranmer, if his father's vices had reappeared in him, if he had thrown himself into the arms of Bonner and Gardiner, and done the work which Mary actually did, then there would have been a change like that which passed over the character and policy of Joash. "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest. . . . After the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king hearkened unto them. And they left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served groves and idols: and wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their trespass." There had been all along, we find, a party opposed to the reformation which Jehoiada accomplished—worshippers of Baal, or advocates of a compromise, who were offended by the thorough and earnest policy which he had so far suc-

cessfully pursued. And thus the work had to be done again. The defender of the faith became the idolator and the persecutor. The child who had been so carefully trained, as it seemed, in the way he should go, did depart from it. When the son of his protector and second father had the courage to reprove him, the weak treacherous king, in the very court of the temple in which his own life had been saved by Jehoiada, caused him to be assassinated.

I have been led by the interest of this narrative to dwell on it somewhat fully as a history. It is well that these Books of Kings and Chronicles should not be the only history which we read without an attempt to realize to ourselves the nature and sequence of events. But I have chosen the subject, as one from which we might learn lessons other than those which concern us as students of history in general. The character of Joash is the character of a class. He is the representative, in his weakness and inconsistency, of hundreds who play no conspicuous part in the great world-drama ; who

shift and change on the small, not on the large scale, but who, in their degree, reproduce his failings and his crimes. Yes; in the ever varying manifold combinations of good and evil in us, we may add that there are thousands in whom there exists a Joash-element of character, even though it may be overbalanced or kept in check by other influences. There is not one of us, it may be, altogether free from it; not one for whom some earnest thoughts as to its nature would be quite a work of supererogation.

What I mean by the Joash type of character is then simply this: the goodness which depends for its existence upon the presence and personal influence of some one of stronger will, or commanding authority; without root, and therefore without permanence; fading away, passing into the opposite extreme as soon as the personal influence is withdrawn. Every day's experience almost, brings such cases within our notice. A boy is trained in the household of religious parents; their habits are his; the buoyancy of youth, it may be, is suppressed in order that there may be nothing to break in upon a

religious seriousness and solemnity; his mind grows up under this discipline and is really fashioned by it. He is in his way, not with a conscious hypocrisy, devout and conscientious; the spell of authority is on him; he obeys his teachers, looks on most questions from their point of view. His friends hope that he at least will not depart from the way in which they have taught him to go. And then comes the time of trial. Sooner or later, he has the responsibility of freedom. He is called from the narrow circle of home to wider fields of action; parents die, or cease to be constantly superintending. He loses his Jehoiada, and then come the princes of Judah and make their obeisance,—men of the world and of the world's law, servants of the flesh or of the devil, tempting him by promises, mockings, defiance, the example of cheerful and successful sin, and then gradually, or it may even be suddenly, the old restraints are cast off. The day that opened so brightly is overcast ere its noon by storms, and closes in the thick darkness. The son of religious parents, bearing an honoured name,

walks in the way of sinners and sits in the seat of the scorner. In that quick growth there was no stability; those early clusters of the vine were as the fruit of Gomorrah, and crumbled into dust and ashes. The goodness was after all veneered only—no heart of oak in it—varnished and glossed over, but giving way under the first rough encounter. The root of a righteous life was never there; of such it is ever true, their fear towards God is taught by the precept of men, and it is not that fear that is the beginning of wisdom. You may grieve, but you can hardly wonder at such an issue. There is no failure here of God's promise. This is not the way in which a child should be trained to go; you need hardly marvel when he departs from it.

It may come home to some men's experience to think of the influence as that of a friend or teacher, rather than of a parent. Their home life has been uneventful—not favourable, they think, to the growth of the spiritual life—dull and commonplace; and then they come in contact with some one whose life attracts them, and

whose words are as sharp arrows winged with fire. Their hearts burn within them; they look up to the friend who has roused new desires and capacities in them, with a reverence little short of saint-worship. They would not for the world do or say in his presence, anything that would grieve him—would shrink from his eyes if they were conscious of anything base or unworthy. They, too, are not hypocritical; but if their goodness rests on no deeper foundations than these, it will be unstable as water. It does not do to live in the fear of man's judgment, even of a saint's, instead of remembering God's. To trust in an arm of flesh, to make man our confidence, becomes a sin; such an one is perhaps likely enough "to do right all the days of Jehoiada the priest," but a time comes when he, too, in the strength or the weakness of his own separate personality, without Jehoiada, has to encounter the hosts of the world, the flesh, and the devil; and woe for him, if in that struggle he is dependent upon friend or brother.

Again, it cannot escape our notice that there are many who find their safety in the early

years of life, not in the personal influence of parents or friends, but in the system under which they live. The discipline of a school or college, the tone of a society, the habits of a set of men ; all these contribute to determine character, are useful and valuable helps in its formation. You in this place may gain the greatest possible good from them, but you may make the mistake —*we* may make the mistake of taking the means for the end. We may think that men are receiving a religious education because there is an outward conformity, or even a real decency and uprightness of conduct. We may come to be content with your doing right during the days that you are under the influence of this system. This is your Jehoiada. And yet a very short experience shows that this may be miserably disappointing. Cases come before my memory now of the most utter failure following on the most auspicious commencement. A man may be regular in his attendance at our service, proficient in divinity, regular and satisfactory in conduct, having a right to very high testimonials,—and then, when the negative restraints

or the positive influence of a college system are removed, he may be tossed hither and thither by the eddyings of wild passions and a powerless will ; a double-minded man, leaning on a broken reed and finding it give way under him ; having loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, and therefore utterly unable to believe, not enduring as seeing Him who is invisible. The risk in all such systems (the very training given by Jehoiada was probably not free from it) is that they tend to substitute the fear of man for the fear of God ; and it is fatally easy, after having followed a multitude to do good, to follow it also in its doing evil. They content themselves with teaching men to do right things, instead of training them to be right and true in their inner heart of hearts ; and hence the absence of effort, struggle, earnestness, and, so far as there is that absence, the loss at once of manliness and godliness.

But there is another warning in the history of Joash. One cannot think without some feeling of pity of that poor child, yet almost in his very infancy, put forward as the champion of a cause,

the leader of a party. The solemn words which were put into such lips, binding him to the Law and the testimony,—“the covenant between all the people and between the king, that they should be the Lord’s people,”—could hardly at that age have been uttered with the full consciousness of their meaning, with the matured purpose of one who knows what he is vowing, and is striving to perform it. Such a position was, it need hardly be said, a perilous one, almost inevitably a false one. Trained to utter the opinions of a party before he understood them, it was not wonderful that he never went beyond their opinions and their practices to the faith on which they rested, that he was ready with an equal facility to adopt the opinions of another. There are few perils so threatening to all firmness and worth of character as that of being put forward prematurely as the advocate of even the noblest cause and the purest form of faith; for in every such instance there is an element of unconscious falsehood. The young combatant speaks more strongly than he feels, uses words that are put into his lips, rests not on inward convictions

which are the fruit of earnest thought, but on the consensus of authority. This also has its counterpart in our own experience, and it is very fruitful in thoughts that are at once humiliating and instructive. It makes us pause ere we rejoice too eagerly in the early knowledge or early zeal of those who come under our care; it should make any one of you suspect and examine himself should he discover that he has been arguing vehemently for the system in which he has been trained, speaking strong words against the system of his opponents. The danger is often great in proportion to the zeal—danger of fickleness, instability, apostasy. Let us strive with heart and soul, night and day, by teaching and by prayers, to foster the growth of piety in those we care for, however young their age, if by that we mean the true piety which stands in reverence, and truthfulness, and purity, and obedience, and love. That cannot be begun too soon, or developed too assiduously; but the precocious counterfeit piety, that lisps in the tones of party, and prattles in controversialisms, zealous, with the zeal of Joash, against

Romanism or Dissent, against this party or that, —that is to be feared and distrusted. None so likely as that (a hundred instances in our Church and our Universities within the last twenty years, are proof, sad enough, of it) to end in unfaithfulness and desertion, in the sad credulities of superstition or the still darker incredulities of a so-called rationalism.

It seems to me, my brethren, that we in this place are more exposed to this danger than most others elsewhere. It is part of the probation which our blessings and responsibilities bring with them, and it is not above our strength to overcome. We are not tempted above that which we are able to bear; but there is no wisdom in shutting our eyes to the temptation and its attendant peril. This College was, as you have often heard, founded in part by way of protest against the false and Godless theory of education which some thirty years ago was perhaps more prevalent than it is now. It was intended to bear its witness that no man's education is completed by storing his memory with facts, or sharpening the subtlety of his intellect; that he has a moral life to

be guided, spiritual powers to be developed. It was intended to assert the truth that man is to be fashioned, not as a wealth-producing instrument, but as an heir of God's kingdom; that he does not live by bread alone, nor by books alone, nor intellect alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. It has borne that witness, on the whole, nobly and successfully; it has done a work for which we may give God thanks. But there has been forced on it, almost by the necessities of its position, a certain self-consciousness in the way in which this has been done. While older schools and colleges take for granted that their training has and must have this spiritual groundwork, recognising it in their habits, discipline, and life, we have been loud in our professions, reiterating in our assertion of it. This was not in itself wrong; it was perhaps inevitable; it has done good service if it has brought before the world a truth which it might otherwise have forgotten. But with this, there is the peril which attends all frequent repetitions of protests against error, by or in the presence of those

who are as yet incapable of entering into their force or power. Words which are true and mighty in the lips of grave and thoughtful men, become to them as the "purple patches" of a declamation; our "Sancte et Sapienter" may come to be (has it not been so with you?), not a rule of life deep and awful in its simplicity, but the clap-trap of a speech, the peroration of a theme. No one of you need lead a life only of outward decency, or reluctant conformity, or undiscerning reverence, or zealous partisanship; but if you would avoid those dangers, you must seek for some higher form of goodness than the Joash type of it; you must ask for the strength that comes not from man but from God. You must live under the guidance, not of any earthly priest, but of that great High Priest who dwells at once in the eternal heavens and in the hearts of his disciples. You must fulfil the words which we often use so lightly, by seeking to be taught by that Holy Spirit of God, who requireth truth in the inward parts, and will make you to understand wisdom secretly.

To-day, brethren, is surely no wrong time for

you to search and examine yourselves, that you may lay aside all forms of evil, whether they show themselves as indeed they are, or present a false show of good. As you draw near to the table of the Lord, you approach to that which is the great witness of God's love and of the oneness of His Church; the great protest, therefore, against all discord or division; pray that you may be delivered from all that tends to division, from all that is at variance with that love. If anger, or sloth, or envy, or impurity, be the sin that does most easily beset you, strive against that, seek that you may be delivered from it. But if, as you search your consciences—not lightly, after the manner of dissemblers with God—you find that the besetting sin is formalism, Pharisaism, hypocrisy half-conscious or unconscious, profession without reality, then seek in the power of Christ's sacrifice to be freed from that; for unless your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case, not even in the act of communion, enter into the kingdom of heaven.

III.

OVER-ANXIETY.

“If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth : and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.”
ECCLES. xi. 3.

THIS eleventh chapter represents a very memorable stage in the experience of the Preacher. Retracing both his miserable fall, and the slow painful process by which God had led him upward as out of the very depths, he brings each stage of his experience before us. First, there is the selfish seeking after wisdom ; then the inevitable result of that in selfish sensuality, deliberate and planned voluptuousness ; then the utter weariness of life, the leaden gloom, the blank satiety, which were and are the fruits that they who choose that course

are sure to reap in the end. This experience of the vanity and vexation of spirit which had followed on all attempts to make pleasure-seeking the end of life, had taught him a stern lesson. There was another and better path; not to seek happiness wildly, running hither and thither, catching at this thing and at that in pursuit of it, but to accept it, to enjoy whatever was enjoyable as the gift of God, reverently, calmly, temperately. That rule of life would carry a man safely through its changes and chances, and secure for him at least the tranquillity of an inward peace. This was, we may well admit, an immense gain, a great step upward. But the whole book, the oscillations backwards and forwards from hope to doubt, from satisfaction to disquietude, the ever-recurring burden of "vanity of vanities," all these show that even here the spirit had not found rest. It was still vexed with unquiet thoughts, could not remedy the disorders of the universe, was troubled by musing on those disorders, and by efforts to solve the riddles of man's life

and of the world. The eleventh chapter of this book indicates, however, an ascent into a higher region, another step onward to that conclusion of the whole matter, which presents the whole work of man in the words, "Fear God, and keep his commandments." Not to seek pleasure, not even to accept enjoyment, but to do good, to work while it is called to-day, to waste no time in fruitless doubts, and fears, and hopes, and wishes; but to act, and do at once the thing that needs to be done; that is the teaching to which the Preacher's sad experience of the opposite plan of life had led him.

After the fashion of his time and country, according to the special gift which he had received from God, he embodies that teaching in forms more or less proverbial, presents it to himself and others under different points of view, and so suggests some of its manifold applications. It lies in the nature of such proverbs that they are, in their keen bright brevity, sayings that catch our eye, and are used readily. They gain currency, and are passed from hand to hand, even where men

think little and unworthily of their value. But it also belongs to their nature, that they are, in that brevity of theirs, condensed parables. To take such a proverb and examine into the parable, is like looking through a microscope upon what to the naked eye is but as a bright speck that almost eludes our gaze. Forms of wonderful beauty, structures of marvellous skill, reveal themselves to us as we gaze. Who would have thought that so much was to be discovered in what at first we passed over so hastily? We need, brethren, that microscope-process here. Thought and patience and study must magnify the proverb into the parable, and then we shall see better than before what it means, and what treasures of wisdom lie hid in that short and simple utterance. Look, for example, at the first of these, "Cast thy bread," *i. e.* thy corn, "upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." Do we not see here, no less than in the Parable of the Sower, the common work of man as a tiller of the ground, turned into the symbol and token of his life as an heir of God's

kingdom? Go forth with thy seed, true words, kind deeds, zeal to serve God and do good to man, wherever there is the possibility of doing it. The sower is to scatter his grain broad-cast wherever natural streamlet or artificial channel supplies the means of irrigation, and renders fertility possible. His work would be ill done, could hardly be done at all, if at each step he were scrutinising into the chances of success, anxious to avoid all waste, full of fear as to the intervening months between seed-time and harvest. The words of the Preacher are in this matter like those of Isaiah, "Blessed are they who sow beside all waters, who send forth thither the feet of the ox and of the ass." They say to each man in the common daily tasks in which his life is spent, to each in his vocation and ministry, "Do that which is right and true always; let acts of kindness be scattered freely. That seed never fails of fruit somewhere or at some time. If another reaps what thou hast sown, yet both he that reapeth and he that soweth shall rejoice together. The harvest may be a long way off, yet after many

days *thou* shalt find. Only look to it well that the seed be of the right kind—wheat from the garner of God, not tares of the devil's husbandry. *That* is a matter of some moment for thee and for thy future. If thou make thyself a sower of that seed, then of this too it shall be true, that thou shalt find it after many days. Here also there is a harvest of evil; others may reap what thou hast sown, and then he that soweth and he that reapeth shall meet together in the outer darkness, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth."

The next verse gives, in part, the interpretation of the parable, in part presents a new one. The giver of a feast does ill to measure out his gifts with a grudging and a scanty hand, calculating precisely the number of his richer guests or his poorer neighbours, allowing no margin, thrown out and troubled if a larger demand is made upon his bounty than he had counted on. "Give a portion to seven;" yes, and if an eighth appear at thy gate, send him not away empty, let him be a welcome guest to thee. Thou knowest not

what evil shall be upon the earth—knowest not how soon he shall be in sore need of the help thou givest him—how soon thou shalt be in sore need of him. The future is hidden; use the present; do not let slip one of the golden opportunities over which thou shalt mourn when evil has come upon the earth, and with thee are the days of darkness. Count not too rigidly the chances of return. Do good, not according to the measure which thou appointest to thyself, but to the opportunities that God gives thee. Do good to seven, and also to eight, hoping for nothing again, not even for thanks. That is the teaching of the Preacher. Is it not also the teaching of Him who was greater and wiser than Solomon, save that He could add, bringing life and immortality to light, “Thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just”?

The next verse is in perfect harmony with this teaching. There is no abrupt transition to a new truth, only a different aspect of the truth which we have heard before. “If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves

upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap." Before, there was the earnest call to be active in well-doing; here, the man who would use his life rightly and be what God meant him to be, is warned against the perils of the over-anxious, over-reflective temper. He would be a bad husbandman who spent his time in watching the floating clouds, fearful lest they should pass away and leave no showers for the parched earth, or should swell the rivers till they burst their banks. In God's time, according to the order of the seasons which He has appointed, the clouds will empty themselves upon the earth. Man cannot control them, and ought not to be careful or troubled over the things which no care or watchfulness can affect. He, in like manner, would make little way in clearing the ground to fit it for the plough, lifting up his axe upon the thick trees, who should trouble himself whether

they fell beneath his strokes this way or that, to the north or to the south. It is enough for him that he does his work, and that the tree has fallen. That is what he is sent to do, regardless of chances and contingencies. If he dwells too much on the chances of the future—chances which are so to him because he knows not their causes, and cannot bring them under his own direction, though they are in themselves no less than other mysteries of nature among the works of God, who maketh all—the work will be left undone.

It may be, but I speak hesitatingly on this point, that the words have another meaning,—that the falling of the tree to the north or to the south, brings before us the scenery of an ancient divination,—the soothsayer planting his staff upon the ground, leaving it to fall as if spontaneously, with no effort to determine its direction, and then drawing auguries of good or evil fortune, according as it has fallen towards the bright propitious south, or the bleak cheerless north. If, as some have thought, this be the ground of the parable, then

the lesson is no less obvious; still it is—
“ Finish thine own work, and care not for auguries and forebodings; whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; dwell not on uncertain good, do not be cast down by anticipated evil. Thy part, at least, is clear,—
‘ In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.’
The truth to which the Preacher was thus led is one to which the experience of all ages has borne witness,—which, if that were necessary, might be confirmed by the authority of all the great thinkers of the world. They tell us, as with one voice, that the future which God appoints will come, for good or evil, joy or sorrow,—that it is unwise in any man to anticipate the worst. Let him do the right thing at the present hour, and then he has done all that in him lies to make his own path clear, and he may leave the rest to God. To be over-anxious about the morrow is to accumulate together what God appoints that

you should receive separately. "The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." No temper is more fatal to energy, manliness, usefulness, than this of anxiety and fear. Thus it is that—

"The native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn away,
And lose the name of action."

But in this case, as in others, the general truth admits of some special applications. Unless we see what bearing it has on our own work, our daily trials, the special uncertainties that darken our own future,—the truth to which we assent so easily may become the idlest of truisms. The words of the Preacher, instead of being "as goads and as nails," sharp-pointed, piercing to the quick, may float around us, like those of the Prophet, as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument, and we may hear them, but do them not.

Here, then, in this student-life of ours, we may, I believe, any day trace the fulfilment of these words. Who that knows anything of school and college work, has not seen a thousand instances of the law, that "he that observeth the wind shall not sow"? The power to win success may be lost through over-anxiety, over-eagerness to win, through calculating each day the chances of good or evil fortune. The patience of the husbandman is a parable of the patience of the seeker after knowledge. Here also the seed must be cast upon the waters, that it may be found after many days. The tasks of each day must be done manfully and honestly: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand." The laws by which God governs the growth of man's mind, in the discovery of truth, will assert themselves at last. When the clouds are full of rain they will empty themselves upon the earth. New thoughts, insight into old truths, the power to grasp the reasonings by which those truths have been ascertained,—these will one day come as the reward of the perseverance

which has its root in faith. Difficulties will disappear, and the path will be made clear and open. The showers will fall, gentle and fertilizing, on the seed which has thus been sown; but in the meantime he who "regardeth the clouds," waiting for that sudden inspiration, trusting in the uncertain future, or timid and over-anxious, shall not reap. For him there is no harvest, either of knowledge or of wisdom, not even of success. You do not see, it may be, in what manner this or that employment tends to the wished-for end. It contributes nothing to your chances of success—presents only a needless difficulty. Well, if it seems so, then master the difficulty, and you gain, at any rate, the strength of practice, and the wisdom of experience. Cut the tree down; what matter whether it fall to the north or to the south—whether the day seem prosperous, or the opposite of prosperous; if the tree is down, you have done what you were called to do, and the ground is open, and the seed has a better chance of growth.

I am sure, brethren, that any experience of this truth which you may gain here, will be

confirmed by that wider range of observation which your after-life will give you. Whether your work be sacred, or what men call secular ; whether you are entrusted with ten talents or with five ; you will see in others, and you will find in yourselves, that the law which leads on to perfection, which makes your work succeed, is that of prompt and energetic action. Whatever may be proposed, schemes of benevolence or of activity, there are sure to be objections to it ; possibilities of abuse—difficulties that seem insuperable—the chances of a formidable opposition. The timid hesitating mind will be deterred by these from doing anything ; for him, again, there will be neither seed-time nor harvest. The slothful man always “sees the lion without, ready to slay him in the streets.” As you are called to any office or ministry in the Church of Christ, or in societies of men, you will have to encounter that danger also ; and it will be well for you if you meet it with minds disciplined and braced by the results of your early training. See well that a thing is right to be done,—that it lies within the compass of

your duty to do it; and then whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might. Give up those forebodings of danger, that temper

“over-exquisite,
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils,”

that eagerness to know whether the tree falls to the north or to the south. It is ill for thee in thy small sphere of work, in that portion of the field of God in which He has set thee to dress it, and to keep it, even as it is ill in the rulers of nations, or of churches, to be deterred by their fears from doing what the well-being of the nation or the Church requires. Dost thou fear that there will be no immediate visible return? Remember that many days come between the seed-time and the harvest. Art thou alarmed lest thou shouldst be called on for a larger measure of exertion and self-denial than thou countedst on at starting? “Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.”

Nay, brethren, but this is true even of the highest husbandry, and of that seed which is

the Word of God. The words of the Preacher may seem to have little to do with the special lessons of Advent, but they lead us on to the same truth as the warning of the Apostle. They, too, bear their witness against introducing into the spiritual life the timidity and delay which is so fatal in the earthly. They, too, tell you that it is "high time to awake out of sleep"—sleep, with its dreams and fears—that "the night is far spent, and the day at hand." There is a danger in the soul's life—in that innermost life which belongs to the kingdom of heaven, precisely analogous to that which we have seen in the life of the student or the worker. Here, also, in relation to our own growth in holiness, and strength, and truth, it is possible, not to be too earnest, but to be too distrustful, and therefore too full of despondency and delay. Here, also, we are tempted to "regard the clouds;" to watch the fleeting shadows of emotions, as they pass over the surface of our souls, and to ask what they portend. Will they bring with them the refreshment and the joy after which we have yearned? Will they gladden the parched

earth, and quicken the dormant seed, till there appear first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear? Will the grace of God come in its fulness upon these barren hearts of ours, and make them bright and fruitful as the garden of the Lord? It is right to desire that blessedness—right to pray that it may be ours in its fulness—not right to delay for it, or to suspend our action till it comes. When *those* clouds are full of rain, they will empty themselves upon the earth. Though prayers, desires, and hopes have risen up like mists into the open heaven, and have seemed to pass away without result, the wind that bloweth where and when it listeth, will one day gather them together, and with its own wonder-working power direct them to the soul that is as a thirsty land, and there shall be the sound of an abundance of rain. Only, in the meantime, do thou in the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand. Let the axe be laid to the roots of the trees that need it. Let evil habits of sloth, procrastination, covetousness, intemperance, jealousy, repining, be

rooted out. Cut down those trees—decayed trunks of trees that once had life, but are now mere cumberers of the ground, corruptions and perversions of feelings that might once have been turned to good,—and care not what may be the immediate consequences, comfort or discomfort, outward prosperity or adversity. Thy work is done when the tree is down; when the evil in thee has been destroyed.

And if you are called, as some among you will be, to the yet higher work of ministering to the souls of others, and being fellow-labourers with God in His husbandry; there, too, you will find that the words of the Preacher are as goads and nails, stirring you to fresh exertions; cutting you to the heart, it may be, as reproving your indifference or procrastination, and yet by that very pain and discomfort urging you to your work. It may be well to watch for opportunities, it is not always well to wait for them; good to speak a word in season, but good, also, to be instant in season, out of season, to be pressing on, never slackening your course till you have reached the goal—never taking off

your armour till the good fight is fought. Your work may seem sad and wearisome, and there may be little fruit to gladden your hearts, and make them strong for it; few signs of renewed life or earnest repentance. The eager expectations with which you enter on your labours may be doomed to disappointment. You may find neither gratitude, nor affection, nor honour. Well, cast thy bread, thy seed upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days. Be patient unto the coming of the Lord. The husbandman *waiteth* for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain: be ye also *patient*. You may doubt whether your efforts to root out the special sins that vex your souls, and are leading those entrusted to you to their ruin, are likely to be prosperous. Drunkenness, dishonesty, falsehood, uncleanness, may seem to present obstacles that are almost insurmountable. Go on, however, in your work in spite of obstacles. Lay the axe which has been put into your hand, the sharp-edged weapon of the Word of God, to the root of the tree. It may fall to

the north, or to the south, may bring to you popularity or ill-will, credit or discredit. Do not trouble yourselves either first or last which it brings ; do not “ watch the wind ” of popular applause. It is enough for you to have done that work of destruction and of blessing. To war against evil at all times, and in every shape, to do each day the good which it gives you the power to do ; to scatter freely that Word of life of which you are the appointed sowers,—that is your calling. Do that, and leave the rest to God.

IV.

CIRCUMSTANCES AND CHANGES.

“ And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not : ye have done all this wickedness : yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart.”—1 SAM. xii. 20.

THE day on which these words were spoken was one which witnessed the passing away of an old order and the beginning of a new. Up to that time, the monarchy of Israël could hardly be said to have been established. It was as yet but an experiment only. So far, it would seem, in the judgment of the people, even of Samuel himself, the experiment had answered. Saul had slain the Ammonites ; the people looked up to him as the hero they wanted ; the murmurs with which some had received him died away ;

the people said unto Samuel, "Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death." Saul had shown that he possessed the nobleness as well as the courage of a hero; as yet, his soul was not darkened, as it was in after years, by the evil spirit of jealousy and hate. True to himself, to the influence of the prophetic spirit with which he had proved himself to have so strong a sympathy, he had declared that not a man should be put to death on that day on which the Lord had wrought salvation in Israel; and so, influenced it may be by all these hopeful signs of the future, the old prophet who had rebuked the people so sternly for demanding a king, himself called them to a great solemn gathering: "Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there. And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal: and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace-offerings before the Lord; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly."

And then there came that scene which this

chapter brings before us with such wonderful vividness. We must picture to ourselves the armies of Israel, warriors young and old, those who remembered the days of Eli, and those who were eagerly looking forward to the struggle with the Philistines under the king whom they had chosen. There, too, stands the king himself; "there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he;" he towers above all others in the greatness of his strength,—such as David remembered him when long afterwards he lamented for him as for "the beauty of Israel." But the central figure in that group, is that of the Prophet, old and grey-headed, looking back upon the long battle of life; confident, with the simple manliness of truth, that he has fought it well. It had been, we may well believe, a hard struggle. To be a Judge in Israel, as he had been, was to unite the work of a warrior and a reformer. He had found the people, enslaved by the Philistines, bound in a yet more shameful servitude to idolatries and lusts. Hophni and Phinehas, the representatives of the family of Aaron, had polluted the sanctuary of the Lord,

and made his people to transgress. The destruction of the Tabernacle was but the righteous punishment of a long forgetfulness of God. Out of these evils he had had to raise the people to a sense of their true relation to God and to each other. He was called to be a Prophet of the Lord; it was given to him to know what was God's will, and to proclaim it boldly and to do it faithfully. That first answer of his, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth," was the pledge of his whole life. Bravely and nobly, through long weary years, had he gone on with that work of his, growing in favour both with God and man, strengthened in his faith by the terrible calamities which overwhelmed other men with fear, seeing clearly that the life of the nation can only be restored by their returning to the Lord, and preparing their hearts before Him. There had been, as in chap. vii., another great national assembly some forty years before, in which the people had acknowledged that truth, and it was followed by increased vigour and by victory. The tide was turned, and the Philistines were driven back. And then came

the long work of reforming and civilizing ; the righteous administration of the Law ; the foundation of the schools of the Prophets, that the people might rise out of the letter of the commandment into the spirit and the power of worship. Like our own Alfred, he stands out as the very type and pattern of a ruler in troublous times, working ever as in the great Taskmaster's eye, the defender and educator of his people.

And now he has to utter words of remonstrance and rebuke. The hearts of the people have changed towards him, yet he remains the same. His hands are soiled by no bribe ; he has wronged no man, defrauded no man. There has been no want of proof that God was with them to lead and protect their armies under his rule. They have been delivered out of the hands of their enemies ; but they have set their minds on another form of government ; they forecast the uncertain evils of the future, and wish to guard against them by remedies of their own. They have desired a king : that is the cause of the protest which he enters against the course they have taken ; that is the evil which they have added to the sins of

their fathers and their own,—the great wickedness, of which the rain and the thunder breaking in upon the bright skies of harvest are the tokens of condemnation. In all this, brethren, there is a lesson which no nation or Church forgets without suffering loss,—which bears upon every one of us in our lives as members of the great family of God. We have to ask why it was so great a wickedness in those men of Israel to desire a king; what was the nature of their sin; what sins essentially analogous to it we are tempted to commit.

It is not sufficient to say, as we sometimes do, that up to that time the government of Israel had been a theocracy; that God had directly and manifestly been the Lord and Ruler of the people; and that afterwards it ceased to be so, and came under a human sovereignty. It is not true that the theocracy had ceased. If any man can recall the whole history that followed, and come to the conclusion that God was not as truly the Lord and King of Israel, training, teaching, punishing, from the days of David down to those of the last king who sat upon the throne of Judah,

as He had been in the time of the Judges, he must read that history very differently from the Psalmists and Prophets of the Bible. He has not learnt to understand it as the writers themselves understood it. It is altogether monstrous to talk of a true theocracy ceasing, because the form of government was changed—because there was to be an hereditary succession of kings, instead of the appearance from time to time, of a deliverer and a judge.

Nor is it, again, a sufficient account of the matter, to say that they sinned because they were passing from a better state to a worse. We cannot think of the time of the Judges as a brighter period, nearer to a golden age, than that of David or Solomon. It was marked, as we are distinctly told, by deeds of terrible atrocity: “There was then no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes;” The old sins of the Canaanites re-appeared in all their malignity, and hence there came want of union, and discord among the tribes, feebleness against their foes, long periods of slavery and shame.

You will remember, too, that there were many circumstances which made the proposal, that the man who ruled them should be a king, appear very plausible. The sons of Samuel, who seemed likely to succeed him, walked not in his ways, but "turned aside after lucre and perverted judgment." To be subject to their rule, would be confessedly an evil; yet, unless they adopted the alternative of a king, it seemed inevitable. There was an imminent danger threatening them. The king of the Ammonites came against them, and they wanted a living centre of unity, round which the whole nation might rally. Other nations had kings, and prospered under them. Were they to be for ever exceptions? Why should they not go to the Prophet whom they still respected, and call on him to make them a king, to judge them like all the nations? It is right that we should put their case in the strongest and most favourable light. Only by seeing how much there was to make them think and act as they did, shall we be able to judge them fairly, and to consider ourselves, lest we also be tempted.

But with all this, it remains true that it was a sin; that so far as they could, they *were* rejecting God, and refusing to acknowledge His kingdom. And this they did, so far as they were refusing to believe that He was guiding and teaching them—so far as they chose their own plans, and devised their own constitution, instead of submitting to Him, and asking His direction. They believed that they should be a great and strong nation, not by becoming a righteous people, not by being more faithful, pure, truthful, than they had been, but by coming under a different organization—by becoming less a peculiar people, and merging the life which God had given them, in that which was common to the heathen. What was this but to acknowledge circumstance, and not God, to be their Lord? Were they not confessing that they did not feel Him to be near them—that they did not believe that He had been educating them—that He had appointed the whole course of their growth and history as a people, and would lead them on to whatever changes might be right and fit for

them? Whatever might be the nature of the new circumstances, or of the old, a change so accomplished was in itself a sin, for it grew out of the very spirit of unbelief. It belonged to a nation separating itself from God, not to one trusting in Him, and seeking his fatherly protection.

This was the root of that wickedness of theirs. It has also been the root of many national sins in all ages of the world. We may be guilty of the sin, though we have had no prophets of the Lord to warn us—though we have never thought of ourselves as living under a theocracy. What I mean, brethren, is this, that we are now, just as much as Israel, the subjects of a righteous government. God reigns over us, as He reigns over all nations; is educating us, even as He is educating them. And the past history of every nation is the record of that education; the institutions, laws, traditions of the national life, the things that have grown with its growth, and strengthened with its strength,—these are the means of discipline which He appoints for us. In these we are to find the instruments for the

work we have to do in fighting the great battle of God, against the evil that is in us and around us. There may be faults and imperfections—it is our duty to correct them. God will help us to set them right. He says to each one of us, through that history which is his teaching, “Thou art set here and not elsewhere, to do good in thy day, and serve thy generation. This is thy portion, and the heritage of thy lot. See that thou do thy work. See that thou art content with the place which God has given thee. Guard thyself against the snare of thinking that thou wouldst be better, wiser, and greater, were the things around thee different. The secret of wisdom and greatness is not to be found in that, or in any change of circumstances.”

You will remember, brethren, many periods in the history, both of our country and of others, when whole nations have been carried away by sudden and violent impulses, precisely analogous in their character to those from which the Israelites acted, and leading to like results. They have been weary of a monarchy, and have sighed for a republic. They have learnt to

loathe their freedom, and have taken refuge in a despotism. In neither case have they been seeking to be more truthful and righteous than they had been before, to root out actual wrongs and do actual good. They have thought, as the Israelites, that all that they needed was the change of circumstance, the altered form of government, and that then all would be well with them. And so, in proportion as any people has yielded to that temptation, their sins have become whips to scourge them. The changes have been but as the restless shiftings of the sick man tossing in his fever, and have brought no respite or refreshment. The pendulum oscillates from anarchy to despotism, from despotism to anarchy, with a terrible regularity. At each swing it seems as if all would be re-adjusted, but all goes wrong again. The cycle of evil is completed, and will go on repeating itself till there is a truer spring of life—a deeper sense of the nature and the source of a nation's greatness.

It has been the great blessing of our history, brethren, that it has been marked by compara-

tively few of these great convulsions. Its history has been more continuous. It has been like the growing of the grain of mustard-seed. We can trace each conspicuous fact to the laws of an orderly succession, which no great shocks have suspended. So far, we are heirs of the ages that are past, and that inheritance, like all other blessings, brings its special responsibilities. But even we can discover, without difficulty, that so far as this feeling that the well-being of a nation depends entirely upon any single set of outward circumstances, has mingled with the acts of our fathers, it has made them imperfect, and marred what would otherwise have been a great and noble work. Take, for example, three great periods of change—the Reformation, the Revolution of 1688, the great political reforms which we have witnessed in the present century. In each case, I believe that the change itself was a beneficial one—a transition from a less measure of truth and freedom and right, to a greater; and, therefore, one in which, as Englishmen and Christians, we can rejoice: but who can help seeing, as he reviews the history of those periods,

how large an element of evil was mingled with the good—what false hopes men were building! on what miserable foundations! It was the old error. They were trusting in circumstances, not in God. It would be enough to renounce the supremacy of the Pope, to get rid of a given dynasty, to sweep away the unrealities of an older system, and then all would be well, and the greatness of the nation would be secured. And so it was—because there was no foundation of repentance—that the Reformation was a work half-done, and that hardness, and cruelty, and rapacity, left their marks upon it. So it was that the deliverance of England from the lawlessness of tyranny, was followed by a more copious growth of littleness and corruption than had been known before. So it was that the golden hopes which hovered, some twenty-eight years since, before the eyes of thousands of our working-men, have been doomed to disappointment. It is not my office, brethren, to deal with the special questions which lie before the nation now, and constitute the great work of its rulers and counsellors.

But of all of them, the law holds good—that, if we trust to forms, instead of seeking for the men who can do the work—if, that is, we acknowledge the omnipotence of circumstance, we shall lose half the good of any change, however beneficial it may be. And the most perilous of all moods is that which shows itself in discontent and scorn. There are signs that some of us are becoming unmindful of our calling and our work as Englishmen, wishing to be as other nations, tending in this direction or in that to the iron rule of a single will, or the lawlessness of mob tyranny. May God preserve this country of ours from all such changes, for they are simply evil. The self-willed interruption of the continuity of a nation's life is a disaster which is all but irremediable.

But the danger threatens us as members of a Church no less than as belonging to a nation. Here also we are tempted, when we look around us and see how much evil has to be overcome, what vast regions of the vineyard of the Lord are producing wild grapes only, to think that all would be well if we had but a different

machinery, if our organization were but more complete. How fatally that feeling has determined the course of many individual lives, we know but too well. They wanted a Church that corresponded more to their ideal of what a Church should be, and they turned, not to the training by which God had educated them, nor to the constitution in which He had placed them that they might work there, but to the Churches that were round about them, and sought to be like them. Hence there came, united with much earnestness and devotion, that strange hankering after customs alien to the mind and character of the English Church, because they were alien ; that impulse to sacrifice the right of individual judgment in order to be free from the burden of its responsibility ; that disposition to fraternise with all that our fathers solemnly renounced, which has marked the course of many men so sadly. Hence, in the extremest cases, the final abandonment of that portion of the Church of Christ in which men had been brought up, and of which they might have been the pillars. Hence, in others, the hardly less evil of a divided service,

the allegiance of unwilling subjects to a polity that they dislike,—the open ministrations after one pattern, and the secret preference of a ritual altogether different.

I do not wish, brethren, to speak as the accuser of one section of the Church more than of another. I believe that we are all guilty of the same sin,—all threatened by the same danger, with whatever party we may class ourselves, or even if we class ourselves with none. We may trust to the formula of maintaining the principles of the Reformation; we may look forward to the surrender of the precious inheritance of truth we have received from our fathers, in order that we may resemble other Protestant societies in our own country or abroad; we may be boasting of the Church of the future, as wider, less rigid, less exacting, and in each such case we may be guilty of the self-same sin as that which the Prophet of the Lord reprov'd in his people Israel. When we put our trust in an arm of flesh,—in a new dogma or confederacy, instead of believing that God has given us His work to do, and

doing it with our might, or seeking His help and repenting of our selfishness and hardness,—then we are choosing our own ruler, and rejecting the sovereignty of the Lord.

And let no one think, brethren, that this holds good only of the great acts in the life of a nation or a Church, or of our own acts only as members of those bodies. To every one of us there has come, or there may come, the wish to be in other circumstances than those in which God has placed us,—to have some other work than that which He has given. We find ourselves restless, weary, discontented; our labour seems profitless; what we call recreation does in no sense re-create us; life itself becomes almost a burden in consequence of this pervading trouble. We are conscious that we are not as we ought to be. The temptations of the world have been too strong for us. The special trials which meet us in the innermost circles of our lives, come with a power to irritate and disturb us on which we had never calculated. We do not seem one step nearer that goal of

happiness on which, when we started, we had fixed our eyes; and on all things within us and around us there is written "Vanity of vanities." And then, according to the character of our minds, comes the desire for change. If we could but break through the routine of our life, and be free from its daily cares,—if we could but take the wings of a dove, and flee far off into the wilderness and be at rest, then it would be well. Another calling instead of that we have, other friends and kindred than those that surround us now,—these are what men are tempted to wish for in order that they may gain the happiness which as yet they have never found, or, having found, have lost. Yes; Satan himself may come disguised as an angel of light, and may tempt us to wish for these, in order that we may be holier than we are.

This state of mind and heart, brethren, is a very perilous one. There are times, it is true, in the life of every man and woman, when they must make a choice,—when the course

of events, or the natural order of their lives imposes on them the responsibility of deciding what their work shall be, how and where they shall live. It is our duty not to evade that responsibility; to deliberate as calmly and anxiously as a nation or a Church deliberates at the great critical epochs of their history; to trace God's guidance in the past facts of our lives; to seek from his Spirit a right judgment in all things. But the temper of restlessness and self-will that seeks for change, that forgets the present duty in bright dreams of some golden possibilities, that rushes eagerly into new paths to which God is not directing it,—this is a temptation and a snare, and many have fallen by it who have resisted stedfastly the grosser forms of evil. There is the same root-sin as there was in the Israelites when they asked the Prophet for a king. Men forget that the Lord Himself has been all along their Ruler and their Teacher, and Circumstance is for them the almighty and everlasting God.

But there is one part of the teaching of this

chapter which must not be passed over. I know nothing nobler in the whole life of that prophet and judge of Israel, than the spirit in which he accepts the monarchy against which it had been his duty to protest, and the demand for which involved the loss of his own personal influence. One who was less truly a prophet, less habitually submitting his own impulses to the guidance of the Divine Teacher, would have been content to record that protest—to denounce the coming woes that were to chastise the nation for its sin. You know, brethren, what kind of language even good men use in regard to changes they disapprove of,—how they lament over the setting sun of their country's glory, and prognosticate long years of sects and schisms, and declare that the religious or the political character of the nation is gone for ever. They act as Samuel would have acted if he had confessed that the theocracy was at an end. But his words (as you have read them in this chapter) were altogether different from these, — noble and memorable words,

which every statesman and preacher should lay to heart when they have been struggling in vain against the tide of change,—“Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. . . . The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way. Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things He hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.”

What strikes us at first in these words, is the great loving, forgiving spirit which shines out in them. We learn to see how possible it was, even for that Prophet who had had so rough a work to do, and had used such sharp instruments, to be in the root and ground of his heart, as full of love as the apostle of the

Lord himself,—the disciple whom Jesus loved. He who hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal, speaks almost in the very accents of St. John. But there is also in that speech of his the truest and the deepest wisdom. When once the nation, or the Church, or the individual, has chosen a new form of life, or entered on a new course, then, in most instances, though the choice itself may have been wilful and wrong, it is better and wiser to accept it than to endeavour to undo it. It must be received as itself constituting part of our probation. God can use that also as means for educating us to know and to do his truth. The step may be in itself irretrievable; we must eat the fruit of our own doings, and reap the whirlwind if we have sown the wind: but out of it all there may come a greater good than we expected,—greater, though different in its nature. To go back and be as we were, to regain the position we gave up, the circumstances which we have altered, is not only impossible in itself, but the attempt to do so is

wrong. It implies the same want of trust in God, the same reliance upon outward things, as that in which the fault originated. The remedy is to be found, not in vain regrets or efforts to undo the past, but in the struggle to go onward and upward, in accepting the work of the new position, and doing it heartily as unto the Lord, and not to men. If our repentance is true, it will lead us to see that it was less that the thing done was wrong, than that we were wrong in doing it. It will keep us from that counterfeit of a true amendment, which really renews the sin while it professes to renounce it. It will lead us to submit ourselves more and more to Him who out of evil can bring forth good, and can make even our errors and our faults minister to our growth in holiness. Only, turn ye not aside, in this new crisis of the national or the individual life; only, "turn not aside from following the Lord, for then should ye go on after vain things which cannot profit or deliver." The lesson which that old fragment of the

history of God's people teaches, admits, as we have seen, of many applications, but it may be summed up in a few golden words:—
“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might.”

THE END.

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