

ing protest. "The fiercest zeal of the Huguenots in France, of Covenanters in Scotland, against the badges and symbols of the Latin Church, is perhaps but a dim shadow of that which grew to a white heat in the hearts of the worshippers of Jehovah. They spoke out in words of corresponding strength. Evil was coming on Jerusalem which should make the ears of men to tingle (2 Kings 21. 12). . . . Foremost, we may well believe, among those who thus bore their witness was the old prophet, now bent with the weight of fourscore years, who had in his earlier days protested with equal courage against the crimes of the king's grandfather. On him, too, according to the old Jewish tradition, came the first shock of the persecution. Enraged at the rebukes which the aged prophet doubtless administered, the king is said to have caused him to be sawn asunder with a wooden saw; this fate seems to be alluded to in Heb. 11. 37. Habakkuk may also have shared his martyrdom. But the persecution did not stop there. It attacked the whole order of the true prophets, and those who followed them. Every day witnessed an execution (2 Kings 21. 16). The slaughter was like that under Alva or Charles IX. The martyrs who were faithful unto death had to endure not torture only, but the mocks and taunts of a godless generation (Isa. 57. 1-4). Long afterward the remembrance of that reign of terror lingered in the minds of men as a guilt for which nothing could atone (2 Kings 24. 4)" (McClintock and Strong's Cyclopædia).

THE STOCKS FOR A FOOL

Manasseh's mad career of folly and crime brought inevitable retribution. God used the kings of Syria and Assyria as his police for the discipline of his people. Verse 10 of the lesson tells us that "the Lord spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken." His words were delivered by his prophets, and

many of them the king had caused to be put to death. Then came the Assyrians. We are told nothing of the siege. The resistance was probably weak, for a people so corrupted lacked the spirit for heroic resistance. The king was captured, and, as the account seems to indicate, with a hook in his nose and bound with brass chains, was led away to Babylon. He was the chief fool among the kings of the earth, and God set him in the stocks for the cure of his folly. And God usually provides the stocks for such a fool, whether a king or not.

A PITIABLE REFORMATION

In his captivity and deep humiliation Manasseh repented, and humbled himself before God, and prayed, and at last God heard him and had pity upon him. His repentance, we may believe, was genuine, and as deep as his nature had capacity for repentance. God permitted him to go back to Jerusalem and assume what must have been but the shadow of kingly authority, for he was the vassal of Babylon. Nothing but such affliction could have saved him. It was a hard way of coming to the knowledge, but for him it was the only way, that the Lord was God. He should have known that at the beginning and ordered his ways with reference to it. But we must not overlook the fact that his repentance and reformation did not make his life worth much. He tried in a weak kind of way to undo the mischief he had done to the nation, but it went but a little way. It was negative rather than positive. The Book of the Law was lost sight of, and was only brought to light in the days of his grandson. The ark of the covenant which he had removed was not restored. The prophets whom he had killed could not be recalled. God is merciful, and the sinner that truly repents will be pardoned; but God himself cannot undo the mischief which a sinner has done, nor make great a life whose great chances have been thrown away.

THE LESSON PRAYER

O Lord, in the story of the king's life which we have studied to-day we have been made to see the folly of sin and the impotence of man in his fighting against God. How little a thing it is for thee to humble the pride of men and to break them with the rod of thy correction! And we have learned also that it is better for a man to be overthrown in his sin than to prosper and prevail; for if affliction had not come upon the sinning king he would not have been brought to repentance. Give us to see what ruin sin works in life, and how beyond all remedy are many of its effects; and may we shrink from putting evil influences in motion, by our words and by our deeds, which, though we repent with bitter tears, we can never arrest. And yet we thank thee that, though we have destroyed ourselves, in thee is our help. Amen.

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