

THE UNSEEN HAND.

ELI BEN AMRAM was one of the richest of his tribe. He had risen from humble circumstances to high honour; from poverty to great wealth. His ships floated on many seas, his merchandise was the produce of numerous lands, his fame resounded through all his nation.

When Jotham, Ben Amram's only son, had attained the age of manhood, his father gave him a purse of gold, and bade him go and make merchandise therewith. "Be diligent, my son," he said, "be prudent, and be fortunate. A man's success depends upon himself; the blessing of God follows the hand of the diligent."

While he was yet speaking with his son, a messenger arrived from a distant city—the bearer of a letter from his brother Jorah. Distress, sudden and severe, had fallen upon him; the hand of God was pressing him sore. Fire and flood had devoured his possessions. Sickness had weakened his strength by the way. He therefore entreated his brother Eli to lend him fifty pieces of silver, to preserve him and the wife and children of his bosom from utter ruin.

Eli was angry because his brother had become poor; and he said to his son Jotham, "I will send him six times as much as he asks, but, withal, I will rebuke him sharply, for he has been negligent. A wise and prudent man will guard against evil, or, foreseeing it, he will hide himself: it is the fool alone who, passing on, is punished. He will thrive well who looketh to his own affairs. Go, my son, entertain the messenger until I have written to my brother."

So Eli Ben Amram wrote a letter to his brother, full of bitter words; and putting into a bag three hundred pieces of silver, which afterwards he secured with his own signet, he sat down to await the return of the messenger.

Suddenly the spirit of slumber fell upon Ben Amram, and glimpses of the Invisible were revealed to him in visions. Before him stood a youth of noble and commanding form, clothed in flowing garb. In his hand he held a wand of ivory. A strange awe oppressed the mind of the sleeper at this vision;

nevertheless, though subdued, his spirit sunk not in utter dismay.

"Eli Ben Amram," said the stranger, "canst thou avoid the poverty into which thy brother Jorah has fallen?"

Ben Amram smiled proudly as he replied, "I have avoided it."

"Hitherto thou hast," rejoined the stranger; "or, rather, hitherto God hath prospered the work of thy hands and given thee wealth. He may also withdraw it."

"The blessing of God," answered Ben Amram, "rests on the diligent and prudent man."

"Wealth is not always a blessing," replied the

stranger, "inasmuch as mortals sometimes use it to their own hurt. Yet it is one of the good gifts of God, which He bestoweth on one and withholdeth from another. Eli Ben Amram, look on the past!"

The visitor waved his wand, and passed his hand over the eyes of the sleeper. Then did a thick mist fill the apartment, while a cold thrill agitated for a moment the whole frame of the boastful merchant. The mist divided, and Ben Amram saw, in distant perspective, the home of his childhood. Youthful forms were sporting round the well-remembered hearth. He knew them to be his brother Jorah and his sister Keturah, while with another shadowy form, he felt himself to be identified.

He saw that boy environed by perils and

temptations—heedless and unconscious of them all, and yet escaping them. Another step in that course would have brought him within the grasp of death, when suddenly it was abandoned. Another movement in this direction would have plunged him into errors as fatal to the spirit, when, without adequate apparent cause, he stopped and turned aside.

"Why doth the child avoid dangers he knoweth not of?" asked Eli Ben Amram.

"Look more closely," said the stranger. And when Ben Amram looked, he saw, hovering above and around the boy, dim and shadowy, yet becoming more distinct the longer it was gazed on, the form of a hand. It was this hand he now saw which guided and upheld, interposed when danger was near, and averted the threatened stroke.

