

(compare 2 Chron. 20 : 3, 4 ; Jer. 36 : 6, 9 ; Joel 1 : 14 ; 2 : 15). A fast was appointed when it was discovered that a community lay under the divine displeasure ; and there was general confession. At the same time efforts were made to find out who had committed the offence. Jezebel's plan was that Naboth should be the victim. *Set Naboth on high* ; not in the place of honor ; it was not a feast, but a judicial inquiry, for the people must find out the cause of the divine wrath. Naboth as the accused man was set forward.

Vs. 13, 14. *Two men, sons of Belial* (Rev. Ver.) ; "base fellows", "worthless, reckless men", is the meaning, "men with no character to lose, and easily bribed for any purpose". They were the queen's tools. The two acted together : the law demanded two witnesses (see Deut. 17 : 6 ; 19 : 15, and compare Matt. 26 : 60). *Bare witness* (Rev. Ver.) . . . *in the presence of the people*. In those simple days the people, with the elders at their head, were both jury and judge. *Curse God and the king* (Rev. Ver.). The word translated "curse" is rather "renounce", "disown". The punishment for blasphemy was death (Lev. 24 : 16). Amongst Mohammedans to-day, to curse Allah would cost a man his life. *They carried him forth . . . and stoned him* ; and his sons with him (2 Kgs. 9 : 26), as involved by blood relationship in the father's guilt. (Compare Num. 16 : 25-33,—the rebellion of Korah.) Stoning took place outside the city walls (see Acts 7 : 58).

II. An Apparent Success, 15, 16.

Vs. 15, 16. *Jezebel said . . . Arise, take possession*. He might do so now, for, according to the rabbis, the property of executed criminals fell to the crown. Blasphemy was a crime punishable with death. *Ahab rose up to go down*. Samaria lies more than 1,000 feet higher than Jezreel.

III. A Terrible Doom, 17-20.

Vs. 17-20. *Word of the Lord . . . to Elijah*. With One, Jezebel had not reckoned,—the God of righteousness ; and Elijah was His champion. *Go down to meet Ahab* ; whence we cannot guess : the prophet's appearance was ever sudden and startling. He was personified conscience to Ahab, as Nathan to David, as John to Herod Antipas. *In the*

vineyard of Naboth. At the hour of triumph the grim ghost of conscience appeared. *Thus saith the Lord*. Ahab shuddered as inexorable doom laid its cold hand on him. *Hast thou killed, and also taken possession ?* The two things go together,—*"Aha ! thou art both murderer and heir."* *In the place . . . shall dogs lick thy blood* ; a most horrible death, unloved, unburied, the sport of the wild dogs, the scavengers of the town. *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy ?* Half in anger, half in anguish,—the king was in the grip of doom.

The doom pronounced on Ahab and his family, and its postponement on account of Ahab's repentance are described in vs. 21-29. For its ultimate fulfilment see ch. 22 : 37, 38 and 2 Kgs. 9 : 25, 26.

Light from the East

STONED—Stoning was the only form of capital punishment prescribed by the Jewish law ; but other forms were employed at a later date. In Egypt some criminals were placed in a recess of masonry and killed by a huge stone roller moved by machinery. In Persia poisoners were punished by having their heads placed upon a broad stone block, and fatally crushed by another stone. In Israel stoning was the punishment inflicted upon those guilty of apostasy, idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath-breaking, incorrigible disobedience to parents, murder, unchastity, sorcery and kidnapping. To impress men more deeply, this punishment was inflicted on beasts also. The witnesses must throw the first stone, to make them feel the dread responsibility they had assumed, and to remind them forcibly of the fate that awaited them should their testimony turn out to be false. Then after the witnesses, all the spectators took a hand, to broaden the responsibility and lessen the risk, in case an avenger of blood from the criminal's family should turn against them. The method of stoning was so arranged that death was instantaneous. The criminal was laid upon his back, and the witness went up to an elevation at least twice the height of a man above him, and dropped a large stone upon his chest. If death did not take place immediately, then others followed.