

will increase, and that we will get into troubles and not soon out of them, compared with which the dangers and distress of the past will seem almost significant.

The Child Samuel.

IT was a dark night in Israel, and all things seemed to be going to wreck from the wickedness of Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, when God in mercy raised up *Samuel the Prophet*.

Observe first the *name* of Samuel—the meaning and the origin of it. It is mentioned in the First Book of Samuel, the 20th verse of the first chapter, that Hannah his mother “called his name Samuel” (a word which means *asked of God*), “saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.” You learn from this that there were many prayers offered up for Samuel, even before he was born. What a privilege it is to children to have parents like Hannah, who pray to God for them often and earnestly! Doubtless Hannah prayed that Samuel might be a child of God *from his very birth*; and the Lord, we think, granted her request, because it is said in the end of the same chapter, that “they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him; therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. *And he [the child] worshipped the Lord there.*”

Samuel could scarcely be more than three or four years of age at this time. But you see he was a *child of prayer* in more ways than one, for “*he worshipped the Lord there.*” He became afterwards a man very eminent for prayer. (See Ps. xcix. 6 and Jer. xv. 1.) But he prayed from his earliest years—not only “said prayers,” but *prayed*—he was a child of prayer, as well as a *man of prayer*. “Those that seek Me *early* shall find Me.”

Then, in the second chapter, at the 11th verse it is said that “the child did *minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest.*” He might now be about five or six; and of course he would “minister” in ways suited to his tender years. It

might be the running of an errand; it might be the lighting of a lamp; it might be the opening of a door; it might be the assisting to sing a sacred song. But it was “*to the Lord*”; and it was not the less pleasing to the Lord, but the more pleasing to him, that it was “*before Eli the priest,*”—that is to say, under his eye, receiving his directions, following the slightest hints of his pleasure. Those who are one day to rule among their fellow-men must first in their childhood learn *obedience* and *subjection*. But what is the meaning of the words, a little further on, at the 18th verse, that “Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, *girded with a linen ephod*”?—for the ephod was a part of the priest’s dress. Now Samuel never was a priest, because he was not of the family of Aaron. We find, however, that the ephod was sometimes worn by holy and eminent persons who were not priests, as in the case of King David, who is said to have “danced before the Lord, being girded with a linen ephod.” Does not this show you what a high place Samuel must have held in Eli’s regard, when he actually girded this child “with the linen ephod,” and thus held him forth to all about the sanctuary as *a holy and consecrated child*?

And then, still further, it is said in the 21st verse, that “the child Samuel *grew before the Lord*,” and in the 26th, that he “*grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men.*” God loved him, and men loved him. His gentleness, his fidelity, his diligence, his respect for superiors, his ready obedience to their directions, endeared him to all around. I suppose that even the wicked Hophni and Phinehas would stand in awe of this child, according to what we read in the Bible—“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast ordained strength, because of thine enemies.” Samuel, it is said, “*grew before the Lord,*”—that is to say, not only grew in stature but grew in grace, in faith, in wisdom, in activity, in the work of the Lord, in the sight of the Lord.

What a lovely picture have we here! No doubt it was all of *grace*, “for there is none righteous,” naturally, “no, not one.” It was just the fruit of that promise: “A new heart will I give you”; it was “the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, shed down abundantly” on Samuel,