



## DEBORAH : A BIBLE STUDY.

BY THE RIGHT. REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF LICHFIELD.

"And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time."—JUDGES iv. 4.

**B**OOK at Jael's conduct and at Deborah's sentence on it. Both are abhorrent to the moral sense of those who accept the Christian standard of right and wrong. The murder of Sisera was not only an act of basest treachery, but it was also a breach of hospitality such as even the people of that age would have condemned. Yet Deborah the prophetess exults over it, and says: "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent" (v. 24); and then she describes in poetic rhapsody all the details of the wicked act, and jeers at the high hopes of the mother of the Canaanite chief, which are doomed to be so terribly shattered. And Deborah is a prophetess, but she is not therefore infallible; and the Bible, being a true book, tells us what she did say, and not what she ought to have said. Israel has been delivered, the enslaver of the people of her adoption has been overthrown, and the general of his armies has been killed. What woman would not rejoice? She does not pause to moralize on the means. Israel is saved from the enemy of the people of God: that is enough for her. Her enthusiasm carries her away; she has a blessing for every one who has helped the good cause, and the human heart goes along with her as we read that most natural outburst of feeling which has been handed down to all generations in Judges v. As for Jael, we know nothing of her motives, nor of the impulse under which she acted. We are bound to condemn her action, but we leave her for judgment in the hands of One who knows all, and Whom we pray to be merciful unto our sin, "*for it is great.*" Each age,

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each generation, each people must answer for itself before God.

There are some things that we learn from the story which deserve special attention.

It is striking, so early in the history of the Israelites, to find the full recognition of woman's right (on occasion) to take a leading part in promoting her country's welfare. Deborah, a married woman, was a prophetess and a judge. Her wisdom, her tact, and her disinterestedness led her fellow countrymen to acknowledge her authority and to seek counsel and justice from her. The primitive state of society in Israel at that time is simply, but graphically, set out: "She dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Beth-el in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment" (iv. 5). They trusted her. She was a true mother in Israel. She settled their disputes, and sent them home with good advice; for there was no king in Israel in those days, no settled government—every man did that which was right in his own eyes. She was also a prophetess. Deborah was recognized as one who spoke under the inspiration of God. She was possessed with the conviction that God was the great Deliverer, the Saviour of His people, and that faithfulness to Him was the secret of national life and prosperity. This was the great inspiration. We have seen that her views as to the method of the accomplishment of that deliverance were imperfect, human, faulty; but the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit is not for the perfect alone—all flesh shares it in a measure. It is the same in kind everywhere and at all times, although differing in degree. It wrought with power in Deborah. She was filled