

one hundred and thirty five thousand strong—and to be attacked by three hundred! The situation is absurd, tragical! Surely down on those slopes can come nothing but defeat. Is it thus with thee? When thou dost look down the slopes of thy to-morrows, are they occupied and filled with difficulties not imagined, but real? Is thy life a grim outlook into struggle? And hopeless struggle does it seem? Is it thy time of difficulty?

Yet more. To Gideon had come an hour demanding decision. Whether flight in dishonour, or attack in faith must be decided that night. And how great the issues! Who shall say what temptations crowded against the hero's soul at that great moment? And has it come to thee to make decisions whose outcomes shall change all thy years? Is it the supreme decision thou art urged to make? Is there a divine hand upon thee, and a divine voice pleading with thee to decide—to decide for the living Christ? And are there temptations? Is it thy time of decision?

To Gideon, God spoke opportunely and with encouragement. We may easily blunder in our attempts at encouraging, speaking soft words when edged words should be said. We may misread character and be ignorant of circumstances; but God is unerring. If it is thy time of disappointment, or of difficulty, or of decision, it is God's time of encouraging.

A wistful soul would learn in what manner the encouraging God will aid. The divine encouragement hath its mode. How then will God deal with one so circumstanced as Gideon? Does God see the pallor on the brave man's cheek, and mark the trembling of his lip when He bids him to get down to the opposing host? Will He speak with harshness and contempt? Will He chide? Listen, "If thou fear to go down." O word of tenderness! God hath understanding, and sympathy, and infinite tact. We, in our littleness and stupidity, might criticise Gideon in his hesitancy and shrinking, and charge him to remember how signally and wonderfully God had responded to his tests when He called him to this campaign. We might ask him in wounding tone whether he had forgotten so soon the drenched fleece and the dry, that now he should grow white at the word to attack? If we are in search of any whom to criticise and condemn, let us but look each man within himself. Our ways with each other are not God's ways with us. Harken then to what God said to this man in his time of varied and severe trial, and learn the mode of the Divine encouragement. "Go thou with Phurah (mark, "with Phurah," God doth enter into the detail of things) thy servant down to the host." Here is a plain direction, an authoritative word. "And thou shalt hear what they say, and afterwards shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host." Here is a clear promise, a pledged word. This, then, is God's mode. He gives to men His word of direction to be obeyed, and His word of promise to be trusted. To the man in distress for sin He saith, "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out." To the man in anxiety of life He saith, "Come unto Me . . .

. . . and I will give you rest." For the man in perplexity of circumstances He hath had it written, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." For the man fainting beneath his life-load He hath given the word, "Cast thy burden on the Lord, He will sustain thee." To the man looking on amid his life hardships to the rest that remaineth, He saith, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." Thus through words of plain direction to be obeyed, and through words of precious promise to be delivered, doth the divine encouragement come. And Gideon had his reward that night, when accompanied by his servant, he stealthily trod down the hillside on his expedition of reconnoitre, which was also an expedition of faith; and in a place of secrecy listened to the strong voice of the Midianite sentry breaking through the hushed darkness as he told to his fellow without interruption his curious dream of the tumbling cake of barley bread, and the levelled tent.

It is for us also to catch the message brought to Gideon through a foeman's dream and its interpretation. Our God is wonderful in His working and strange sometimes are the sources whence He brings to His children counsel and uplift. The dream may teach the holy truths which are the contents of the divine encouragement. From it Gideon would learn that God was ahead of him in His arrangements of Providence, paralyzing with apprehensions the dreaded foe. And so is God before us. There would be heart of strength within us were we but firm in faith that God was in the morrow and in all the morrows till shall

down the day which is everlasting, and hath no morrow. Doth not our God go before us? And Gideon would gain assurance that God was above him in the sublimity of His purpose. And is not the sky of God's unfaltering purpose that under which we walk? It is our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. His purpose is as stable as His throne. Our God is not unmindful. Is He not above us? To Gideon would come the truth that God would be with him an invincible strength. And if God were with him it could not matter how many Midianites and Amalekites were against him. And are we not to be brought off more than conquerors? Is not our God with us? Gideon's blood was stirred and warmed with the revival in him of these great truths, the preparing God ahead, the purposeful God above, the powerful God accompanying and indwelling. Can any wonder now that he returned with swiftmess, and zeal, and cheer to summon his men to the contest which must be victory. And shall not we, having such a God, go forward into our life with brave and cheerful heart, confident that through Him we shall pass from victory unto victory? Verily, He is the encourager—God.

THE MINISTER'S DEBT.

Justice Brewer, of the Supreme Court of the United States, in his suggestions to the ministry from the viewpoint of a layman, thus refers to a very practical and significant point:

"It may seem harsh and hard, and yet I must say that those beautiful words commencing, 'Behold the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin,' have misled many a preacher. They have suggested to him, and been a suggestion influencing his life, that somehow or other he is exempt from the control of the ordinary laws of business and that, because he is as he fancies the special servant of the Most High, he may disregard those laws and still escape the consequences of such disregard. While he may not formulate in his own mind the process of reasoning, his argument practically is this, 'that while confessedly the age of miracles has passed, that of special providences still exists and it is a good equivalent. While the Almighty may not send ravens to bring me food when I am hungry, while He may not strike the dead rock to open living streams of water when I am thirsty, yet as He cares for the lilies so He cares for me, and that as I am engaged specially in His work I may trust Him to provide all that my life or the life of my family may, according to my judgement, require.' But the truth is special providences seldom come to him who seeks to trade in them. They never can be depended upon for the payment of debts. You are not authorized to write the Lord's name as endorser on any note you give to the man from whom you have purchased your library, or piano, or horse and buggy. If you want to give full play to the matter of special providences trust the Lord to bring the thing you need, and never trust Him to furnish the money to pay for that which you think you need and therefore have bought. Trust Him to provide the piano you think your daughter's musical education requires, rather than trust Him to provide the money to pay for it after you have bought it. He may think that your delay in putting your trust in Him presents a case which He may well leave outside the reach of special providences. It does not add to the power of your preaching or the influence which you, as a man, exercise in the community to have the grocer or the butcher saying that your bills are harder to collect than those of the saloon keeper, or the woman who keeps a house of entertainment not for man or beast, but for beasts of men. And even the patient members of your own congregation, who, most of them, are apt to have something of earth in their make-up, often get wearied, unreasonably though it may seem, of waiting for the payment of their bills. I do not mean to intimate by these words of advice that all preachers act in this way, or even that it is a common habit. Still there is enough of it to make it worthy of notice."

FILIAL CONFIDENCE.

BY C. H. WETHERBE

It is a very reasonable proposition that Christian parents should so conduct themselves before their children that the children will have confidence in them. This seems to be self-evident enough, but as a fact there are Christian parents who so live in the sight of their children that the latter do not have confidence in them. They do not have confidence in the promises of their