

of one of the towers of the outer gate; it was a suitable place for a watchman. "A man running alone:" swift runners was the ancient method of obtaining news; two messengers had left the scene of battle, but one, Ahimaaz, had outrun the other, Cushi.

Vers. 25, 26. "If he be alone—tidings:" that is, of victory. David as a warrior knew well enough that a defeat would have brought on a large number of fugitives. "The porter:" whose business it was to attend to the opening and shutting of the gate, and who being below could inform David. "Another:" and only one, so the King would be confirmed in his previous opinion as to the result of the battle.

Ver. 27. At first a mere speck on the horizon, only visible, perhaps, to the practised eye of the watchman, the form of the runner and his gait as he drew near were familiar. It was "Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." David knowing his loyalty and attachment at once said, "He is a good man and bringeth good tidings." He had borne good tidings before at the rejection of the counsel of Ahithophel. (Chap. 17: 14-17.) There are some people who appear to delight in bearing evil tidings; Ahimaaz was not one of these.

Vers. 28, 29, 30. Full of his message he scarcely waits to reach the King but calls out, "All is well;" lit., "Shalom," peace, or "Hail." "Blessed be the Lord:" Ahimaaz did not forget, as some too often are apt to do, from whom our mercies come. "Delivered:" lit., "Shut up." (See 1 Sam. 17: 46 margin.) The idea is of confining our enemy and not giving him the liberty to work evil. There is one thing, however, about which the King is more anxious than victory. "Is—Absalom safe?" On the power of a loving heart! The son who had deceived him, rebelled against him, and would have taken his life, yet his first thoughts are for that son's safety! Ahimaaz seeing the heart of the King in his question, and remembering the charge of the morning, gives an evasive answer, and would have him think that he had been sent before Absalom's fate was known. He was willing to be the bearer of good news, but afraid to announce the bad. "Turned aside and stood still:" tired as he would be after his long run of several miles, he could not sit down in the presence of the King.

Vers. 31, 32. "Cushi:" we are not sure if this was the proper name of an Israelite, or whether he was a descendant of Cush, a son of Ham. (Gen. 10: 6, 7, 8.) If so, he was a Canaanitish slave of Joab. Cushi brings the same news of victory as Ahimaaz, "The Lord hath avenged thee," and he is met by the same question, "Is the young man—safe?" Note how David dwells upon the thought of the youth of Absalom, as if that were an excuse for his crimes, although he was really over forty years old. Delicately, yet unmistakably, does Cushi give the reply, "the enemies—be as that young man is." It carries the dreaded news to the heart of David.

Ver. 33. "The King was much moved:" hope that had lingered with him had fled, the dreadful calamity was there—Absalom was dead. With kingly pride he will not show his grief, but goes up into the chamber over the gate weeping, mourning, and lamenting for his slain son. "Would God:" so Moses would have died if the people could have been saved (Ex. 32: 32); and so Paul "could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren" (Rom. 9: 3); and how are we reminded of Him who, when He beheld the city, wept over it, knowing so well the sore trouble that was coming upon it. (Luke 19: 41.)

HINTS TO TEACHERS.

PRELIMINARY.—This lesson is the fitting completion of the last. David was troubled once at the prosperity of the wicked and their success in life; it appeared to him as if God let things take very much their own course, that the

plotting, the devices and schemes of the wicked were not interfered with and that in the full harvest of his works the doer of evil could look around him and despise the power and providence of God. The Psalmist learned in "the sanctuary" that he had made a mistake, and that the course of the wicked was held as by a bridle in the hands of Jehovah. "He sets them in slippery places, casts them down to destruction, brought them into desolation in a moment and utterly consumed them with terrors." No more striking illustration of this truth is to be found in the whole range of Bible narrative than the story of Absalom! Everything up to the commencement of our lesson gave promise of the ultimate and complete success of his scheme. His plans were well and carefully laid; he had won the hearts of a large number of the people, had secured the services of brave, wise and faithful men. The circumstances of the country and of the court favoured his cause. It is more than likely that David's sin, of which we have had the story, had alienated a large number of the people; it is certain that the King had withdrawn from his active duties of attending, either personally or by deputy, to the interests of his subjects; he had shut himself up and forgotten what he owed to the nation, and if, as *Geikie* supposes, the numbering of the people, and the plague by which it was punished, came before this, we have an additional element of disaffection. The country, if not actually ripe for revolt, was not, at any rate, unwilling to try the experiment of a new and younger King, seeing that the old one was apparently worse than useless. Absalom had, too, that rare virtue in a conspirator, *he could wait*; he would not risk anything by precipitating his actions, but plotted patiently on for years. The time came and the opportunity, and without striking a blow he leaped into the royal position; there it appeared as if he was King beyond peradventure, as if nothing could supplant him, and he was safe for life; but "The Lord reigneth:" a fact Absalom had forgotten, and although He permitted chastisement for sin to fall upon David, He did not intend that the penitent should be destroyed, nor that wickedness should triumph. Let us then teach this great lesson, that although to-day, as then, wickedness may appear to succeed, and the wicked to triumph, yet all are in the hands of God, and only so far as it serves the wise purposes of His counsel will He permit the success of evil, and even if we do not see here the reward of the wicked we may be sure that it will come in that after life which is but the development and completion of this.

HINTS TO TEACHERS.

Topical Analysis.—(1) Waiting for the tidings 24-27; (2) the tidings received 28-33.

On the *first* topic, picture the intense anxiety of the king as he sat waiting there to hear the result of the battle that was to decide his fate and the fate of the kingdom. It would appear that he had little doubt as to the issue; as a soldier he knew his men and had confidence in them; perhaps he had the assurance from God that so far his afflictions would go, but no farther. Sure of victory, there was another care upon his heart; that was Absalom. He feared, too truly as it proved, that his son would perish in the battle, and this foreboding hung heavy upon his heart. Recall another waiting for tidings, which we studied in the fourth quarter of last year, poor old Eli, sitting trembling by the wayside, not so much for the result of the battle, or even for the fate of his two sons, but for the Ark of God. Refer also to that picture, if you have seen it, so expressive, so touching, "Waiting for the Verdict," the old father and mother sitting just outside the court while their son is being tried within. Oh, the deep and bitter sorrow and anxiety of their hearts as the life, or life-long liberty, of their dear boy trembles in the balance! These show that this is one, and a perfectly natural result of disobedience to parents, disregard of par-