

shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" This enquiry would not have been at all suitable, or in character, from the lips of an Israelite, or of the Hebrew nation personified; with whom, on such a subject, there could be no room for question or doubt. But it was otherwise with Balak, an ignorant and idolatrous king, who reigned over a people among whom even human sacrifices were not unknown. (2 Kings iii. 27.) What could be more unnatural than that Balak, when called on to approach Jehovah, should make such an enquiry? What more unnatural than that Israel, or an Israelite, should make it? Balaam thus answers the questions which the Moabitish king has urged: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah vi. 5-8.) Should this view of the passage be questioned, our argument will not be greatly affected by its omission; but if the assumption is correct, that these words are Balaam's answer to Balak, that answer must heighten our estimate of the son of Beor as a preacher of righteousness. When taken in connexion with his other declarations, they show how truthful and comprehensive were his conceptions of religion and of duty.

But, while Balaam's official character as a prophet stands thus high, what was his personal character? Was his conduct as exemplary as his views were enlightened and correct? Did his practice agree with his preaching?

While his professions were noble and heroic, and some of his actions were praiseworthy, in others he stands reproved by his own standard. He had repeatedly sought by costly sacrifices to obtain from God an answer different from that which had at first been given; and this, too, from selfish and worldly motives.

We regard him, as one who gradually yielded to temptation, and by degrees became wicked, in proportion as his moral and religious principles were weakened in their influence until they lost their hold upon his mind. Having taken one or two false steps, through the impulse of a covetous disposition,—having gone out of his providential way, in the pursuit of wealth and grandeur, and thus placed himself in a situation of increased peril, temptation, and difficulty,—it is not surprising that he should stumble on and fall more deeply: because, though often warned, he refused or neglected to retrace his steps in time, and to retreat from a position so full of temptation and danger. He had come to Balak's court at the hazard of incurring the Divine displeasure. He had been refused permission to pronounce that malediction without which his royal patron will not be satisfied; and he is prevented by the restraints of conscience, and the remembrance of God's reiterated injunction, from pronouncing it without that permission. Must he, then, be entirely baffled? Must his journey end in failure and utter disappointment? Must the golden opportunity afforded by Balak's invitation, and his own visit to the court Moab, thus pass away, and he return to his own country no richer than he came? He loves "the wages of unrighteousness," but has not obtained them, because he has done, as yet, nothing by which they may be earned. Is there no resource that invention can supply—no method of reconciling his worldly interest with his religious duty, and of serving God and mammon at the same time? This is the problem he is endeavouring to solve. But