

THE FAITH OF DAVID.

"God hath made all things for Himself, even the wicked for the day of evil. The wrath of men praise Him; the remainder He will restrain." Unworthy men are often called to fulfil most worthy purposes; apparently inadequate instruments do His bidding. Balaam, self-destroyed, could utter prophetic strains which even Isaiah could not excel. Some of the sweetest strains of poetry have come from those whose lives alas have been vile. These things, beyond the fact that sin must ever be considered a strange thing, call for no special wonderment; but that this man, David, should be the king, "after God's own heart," is an apparent wonder and perplexity, and that those psalms, whose universal application to the varied experiences of earnest hearts and lives in every age and clime, attest their inspiration, should have been largely shaped, and written by such an one as God's elected poet of the sanctuary, does bewilder the trust we would repose in the purity and truth of God. Let us however not be turned aside, but fairly meet these perplexities, for we may be assured that, by thus doing, faith can but be strengthened and truth confirmed.

"After God's own heart." This expression occurs in 1 Sam. xiii. 14; it is repeated by Stephen, Acts xiii. 22, with which quotation Ps. lxxxix. 20 is associated. Attention to the context will manifest that the expression is not one of moral signification, but expressive of regal power in face of Israel's foes; compare vers. 22-3 in the Psalm. The days of Saul were days of cruel necessity, might made right, and no strong arm appeared to administer justice. Saul, chosen by popular vote, had disappointed the hopes of the nation; through whom should deliverance come? David appears his courage, strength and patriotism were fit instruments for consolidating, and events proved that under David Israel did attain solidity, order and influence. Isa. xlv. 28; xlv. in its reference to Cyrus will illustrate the use of expressions, which for theological purposes are often regarded as having a direct moral reference, to indicate simple fitness for the object then contemplated, which is all we are justified in reading into the words "after His own heart." 1 Chron. xxviii. 2-4, and 1 Kings v. 3 give a moral estimate which from Solomon's remark to Hiram would appear to have been well known. David might and did gather together wealth and material and plans for Jehovah's house, but that a man of violence should erect the permanent sanctuary for the Ark of the Covenant was not to be tolerated; divine indignation must mark its disavowal of David's acts of lawless violence. David's course of sin is neither approved of nor palliated in the records we deem sacred and divine. Let that be fully understood.

This may clear the way for a calm and candid view of David's career, which for moral purposes we may divide into three eras—youth; conflict and early rule; penitence, fervour and age.

As a youth we feel the full power of his name David, the beloved, the darling, "Ruddy, beautiful, and good to look upon," 1 Sam. xvi. 12, and yet the apparently neglected of the family, for "He keepeth the sheep" was said as Jesse's sons were made to pass before Samuel. He grows upon our sympathies as the chance champion of Israel, chap. xvii., and the expressed estimate of his brethrer, ver. 28, only brings out in bolder relief the indignant patriotism and trustful confidence of the stripling hero. No lip can falter or heart misgive in saying now "Surely the Lord's anointed is here." The simple guilelessness of the shepherd lad is certainly marked from his subsequent career by strong contrast.

"Latest born of Jesse's race,  
Wonder lights thy bashful face,  
While the prophet's gifted oil  
Seals thee for a path of toil."

The scene soon changes, called by his prowess into prominence (chap. xviii. 7), the daughters of Israel's enthusiasm outran their discretion as they sang "Saul hath slain his thousands—DAVID HIS TEN THOUSANDS." We cannot wonder at Saul's jealousy even though we curse his ingratitude and the cruel persecution of one who, in tented field, palace and privacy alike, had proved himself a loving and faithful friend. David's happy days were passed; the doom of greatness was upon him, and his youthful integrity must be sorely tried. At his early entering, we may imagine well his guardian angel thus addressing him.

"Go, and 'mid thy flocks a while,  
At thy doom of greatness smile;  
Bold to bear God's heaviest load.  
Dimly guessing at the road—  
Rocky road, and scarce ascended,  
Though thy foot be angel tanded,  
Double praise thou shalt attain  
In royal court and battle plain."

"Then comes heart-ache, care, distress,  
Blighted hope and loneliness,  
Wounds from friend and gifts from foe,  
Dizzied faith and guilt and woe:  
Lofliest aims by earth defiled,  
Gleams of wisdom, sin beguiled.  
Sated powers tyrannic mood,  
Counsels shared with men of blood."

"Sad success, parental tears,  
And a dreary gift of years  
Strange that guileless face and form  
To lavish on the scathery storm. . .  
Little chary of thy fame,  
Dust unborn may praise or blame,  
But we mould thee for the root  
Of man's promised healing fruit."

It was a hard experience to be hunted like a partridge on the mountain by the king he had faithfully served, the father of his wife and bosom friend. We can scarce wonder that hard usage and stern necessity should have changed the quiet, faithful shepherd lad into the almost lawless chief in the fastnesses of En-gedi (1 Sam. xxiii. 29), compelled at last to take refuge in the court of his hereditary foe, the people of Gath (chap. xxvii). Rough discipline for the anointed future King of Israel. Yet he continued mindful of his people and never, as the Roman Coriolanus, led a foreign foe against his ungrateful countrymen. And now comes Gilboa's fatal field; Saul and Jonathan find a common grave, and David pours out his pathetic grief in the lament preserved to us, 2 Sam. i. 19-27.

The men of Judah now crown David in Hebron; the war of the succession followed, 2 Sam. iii. 1, with the result tersely told: "The house of David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker," until at length the kingdom became established, Jebus was taken and the throne set upon Mount Zion. But David had gathered fierce men around him, and within had allowed lawless rule to have its sway. Violence was no stranger to his court; his own dread double crime avenged itself upon the helpless king in Joab's continued turbulence and Absalom's rebellion; blood never forsook his court nor trouble his home, and his dying charge to Solomon testified (1 Kings i. 1-9) how heavily the wrongs and weaknesses of his reign hung over his heart; yet he spent the closing years of his life in preparing for the great purpose of his heart which he was forbidden to perform, and handed over to Solomon his son, wealth, stores, and a united and peaceful kingdom. Israel was no longer scattered, broken, but united; and when under Rehoboam it divided, it did not break up into fragments but into two not necessarily hostile but compact kingdoms. David's work was done, and he slept with his fathers.

But David's inner life remains to us in his Psalms, and there we are to seek for what after all must temper our judgment regarding

the outer. He had fallen into many sins, blackest crimes, but "the remorse, the temptations, the often-baffled, never-ending struggle must not be forgotten," fierce conflict within, but

"A good man, in the direful grasp of ill,  
His con-sciousness of right retaineth still."

and David's inner life has been powerfully spoken of as "the truest emblem ever given us of a man's moral progress and warfare here below. Struggle often baffled, sore baffled, driven as into entire wreck; yet a struggle never ended, ever with tears, repentance, true unconquerable purpose began anew."

The double crime which above all others remains the foulest blot upon David's life was not committed in the courts of modern Europe but in the east, where a Sultan or Caph would not think twice before he followed precisely the same rule of conduct, but where what followed would not be for one moment endured. Would the Sultan of Turkey this day endure a Nathan with the stern, "Thou art the man?" Will Christian people even now after eighteen centuries of Gospel light be submissive under the rebuke, not of sin in general, which is readily evaded, but of that sin in particular under which they have fallen? Ps. xxxii., li. remain the most perfect exponents of true penitence as chap. xxiii. is of contentment and trust.

David's penitence in a noteworthy manner differs from that of chiefs whose natural religion is ritualistic—he builds no sanctuary to atone, nor offers costly sacrifices to propitiate. "Thou desirest not sacrifice" are his words, else would I gladly, and could easily give it. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit—"a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

Like Bunyan's pilgrim—David's journey was often broken, hindered, but he never turned back, his trust never forsook him, hence his crimes neither hardened his conscience nor let him to despair—in the name of his God he set up his banner, and even the excesses of his soldier life never caused him to forsake that standard. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth I desire besides Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

There is one whom David owns as Lord, he sits upon David's throne, the King of the true Israel, which at present like Israel ere David reigned is separated, and too frequently hostile, our personal conflicts partake largely—as the Psalms in their adaptation to our varied records abundantly testify—of David's chequered life—may we be partakers of his penitence and trust, our sacrifices may we through our great High Priests truly bring.—*Canadian Independent.*

"My sin, O Lord,  
I have confessed to Thee;  
I have not hid  
My great iniquity;  
I spake and said,  
All my transgressions now  
Unto the Lord  
Freely confess will I.  
Thou pardonest hast,  
My sins, iniquity."

"In evil day,  
A hiding place to me  
Thou only art!  
Yea thou shalt set me free  
From all distress;  
And Thou my sure defence  
On every side  
About shall compass me,  
With grateful songs  
Of happy liberty."

It is not reason, or culture, or arts, or civil institutions, but "religion that makes vows kept"—vows of personal truthfulness, domestic purity, commercial integrity, or political honour.—*Watchtower.*

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