

roofs. Over the shoulders of the hill we can look off a mile or so over open moorland. A highway, not in sight as we now stand, runs past here at the left of that wooded hill and on towards the north. It leads from Jerusalem, ten miles away behind us, to Shechem, twenty miles ahead, beyond that low horizon.

The hill village yonder among the olive trees is believed to be the Bethel of the old Hebrew records, though twentieth century dinginess and poverty give it a character very different from that of King Jeroboam's time.

Use a stereograph entitled, Rocky Bethel and Its Olive Groves from the South.

THE LESSON APPLIED

Jeroboam owed his position as king to the free choice of the people and the election of God. Yet he began his reign by distrusting both. Because he feared that the loyalty of the people to him could not stand the strain of the annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem, he established new centres of worship within his own kingdom and made devotion at them more easy by the erection of two golden calves. By these actions he broke the unity of Israel's worship, helped to destroy the spiritual conception of Jehovah and paved the way for that degrading idolatry that was afterwards the cause of so much suffering and ruin for his nation. Right relations with others can never be established by compromising with conscience, lowering the standard of religion or undermining faith in God. Many a young man, fearful that he will not win his place in the affection and esteem of the world, if he remains loyal to the teachings of the Bible, tries to succeed by accommodating himself to the lax views and loose morals of his social and business circles. Whatever temporary gains he may make, in the end his endeavor must prove disastrous.

Jeroboam also distrusted God and His promise to secure the throne for him (see 1 Kgs. 11 : 38). So he took matters into his own hands. God had called him to the throne, but instead of recognizing the supremacy of God and becoming His vicegerent, he sought to use men's devotion to God to buttress his own supremacy. He failed. God must have first place. His ways are wisest. His plans are best. Jeroboam thought he could improve on the divine methods, and the ancient historian, estimating the effects of the king's attempts to do so, declares no less than twenty-three times in the record : "Jeroboam . . . made Israel to sin." He wrought only harm to his own cause and to the people. Whenever we put self before

God we blunder, and others suffer with us in the consequences of our folly and sin.

The golden calves were intended to help men to realize the personal presence of Jehovah ; they soon became substitutes for Jehovah. All the legitimate interests of life rightly used may make us richer, happier, more helpful Christians. But there is always the danger that we let one or other of these interests assume first place in our lives and supplant God in our affections. That interest then becomes an idol and its pursuit can only work our ruin. Thus pleasure may become so fascinating that the love of it may crowd out of our hearts the love of service. Or the desire to make money may grow into a greed for gold that will destroy the passion for goodness. The delight in power in order to serve in the spirit of Christ may turn into the love of power in order to dominate others for our own selfish ends. The dangers of idolatry are as real to-day as ever, and the evil consequences as certain and as terrible.

The people erred also in listening so readily to the gospel of ease. Ostensibly the king was much concerned about their comfort and sought to make religion a very convenient thing for them. No more long trips to Jerusalem. No more sacrifices. Two thoughts are suggested by the king's words. First, not all those who pat us on the back and talk sweet to us have our real interests at heart. "Fiends may look like angels bright," and talk their language. When a man who professes to be supremely interested in our welfare, holds before us visions of rest without labor, achievement without effort, the crown without the cross, the fruits of sacrifice without the necessity of self-denial, we need to beware of his message and his purpose. Secondly, a gospel that promises easy things is not Christian. God calls us to heroism, self-crucifixion, strenuous labor.