

day, is far from being commendable; and Jephthah's vow, by general consent named rash, is not an example to be followed. Of Barak not much appears, yet from Judges iv. 8 one would scarcely have chosen him as a representative of men strong in faith. Should it have required a woman's call to raise a man's courage that Israel might be gathered in a forlorn hope to beat back the foe? Yet the names do thus occur as manifestly present to the writer's mind in reviewing the great and faithful of Hebrew history; monuments of faith and toil, fit to be in line with Abraham, Moses, David; to stand among the great cloud of witnesses as it testifies to the steadfastness of faith.

Are our theologies too narrow? Are there to be found men within the overshadowing of the mercy seat that by those theologies would be hopelessly excluded? Must our standard be lowered to the end that Samson, whose life was not pure, may find his place among the heroes of Christian remembrance? Does God's grace live where we would not?

Let the history of these four of the judges of Israel be briefly told. The writer of the book of Judges writes in an apologetic tone; earnest, but apparently with regret at the wild and mixed character of his history. Mark that sentence so frequently repeated: Judges xvii. 6; xviii. 1; xix. 1; xxii. 25. The state of society then is difficult for us to realize now; there must have been some parallel in the condition of England under the frequent Danish invasions, when, *e.g.*, Alfred gathered his scattered friends together and eventually obtained the victory. The Canaanites were divided into tribes or clans of inconsiderable might, as is plain from the confession of Adoni-bezek that seventy *kings* (chieftains) were gathered under his table (ch. i. 7). Israel, too, was disunited; "Judah went with Simeon his brother" (i. 17), implying that all the tribes did not join in individual wars. Tribe would therefore live by tribe, Canaanite with Israelite, in a state of perpetual distrust. Israel the invader, and therefore the object of attack whenever the native inhabitants felt sufficiently confident of annoying, yet constantly pushing her way in, the fastnesses of the place. Ch. i. 2, etc., tersely gives the true position of affairs. Nearly all the sea coast, the strongholds of the plain of Esdraelon, and the rocky fortress

of Jebus were still in the hands of the older inhabitants of the land. Such a state of constant distrust and war was not fitted to nurture the kindlier graces of the heart. No central authority; each compelled to look after his own. Even in worship there was no temple. Deborah prophesied under "the palm tree of Deborah" (Judges iv. 5; comp. Gen. xxxv. 8). Bethel, Shiloh, even the sanctuary of Micah (xviii.), were diverse rallying points to the people. No wonder that the virtues manifested should be of the roughest kind. Barak's name in the Old Testament record is inseparable from that of Deborah, who, inspired with the spirit of patriotism, calls upon a chief in the far north to lead Israel's scattered forces against the enemy. The name Barak signifies lightning. Rapidly the tribes gathered unto him; there were exceptions (v. 23); yet it was a rising of the national spirit, and Deborah's almost savage song of victory graphically describes the scene.

Gideon in like manner, at a time of future straitness, by special voice was called to champion his people. In the defeat of Sisera the last effort of the old inhabitants to regain their now lost territory appears to have been put down. Now from the adjoining desert the Midianites press on; the seed and growing time are allowed to be peaceful (vi. 3-6), but when the harvest is ready to reap the raids begin. Israel becomes impoverished. Gideon is now upon the scene; his stern faith, after having received special confirmation from God, is seen in rejecting all but three hundred of the thirty thousand that first gathered around his standard, and in hurling that little band in the name of Jehovah against the Midianite host. In the earlier overthrow of Baal's altar he had manifested what so few really have—the courage of their convictions. Upon the whole, there seems less ground for an apologetic tone in the case of Gideon than in that of any of the other judges whose prowess is recorded. We can readily read the hero in him, though in the stern punishment measured out to the men of Succoth we discern the rough sternness of the time.

Samson is not a lovely character; save his great strength, ever used against the enemies of his people, there appears at first sight nothing specially heroic in his life. His life was not pure, and his fall was the direct