

tion at David's court, invited to be Absalom's guests. These were to be detained as hostages, in case they should not support the rebellion. *They knew not any thing*; thinking they were going to a religious service, so adroitly did Absalom plan that their influence would, to the public view, seem to be on his side. *Sent for Ahithophel*; David's chief counsellor, ch. 16: 23. The conspiracy must have been strong, to win a man of such

sagacity. *While he offered the sacrifices* (Rev. Ver.). See v. 7. Religion was used as a cover for his black villainy. *The people increased continually*; so shrewdly had all the preliminary steps been taken.

Vs. 12-23. David is informed of the rebellion, and flees from Jerusalem with his household. Ittai of Gath, though a stranger, joined him as he passed over Kidron. In ch. 18: 2 Ittai appears as a military leader.

APPLICATION

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And it came to pass after this, v. 1. Absalom was an ungrateful son, a self-seeking man, a vile traitor, and yet we may learn even from his actions. He professed an affectionate interest in behalf of his father's subjects. Had his profession been real, what a power for good he might have exercised! There is no surer way of gaining power over our fellows, and power that we may exercise for good ends, than just to take an interest in them and in their affairs. If we do that, and those with whom we have to do are persuaded of our honest intent, it will give us immense influence over them, which we may use for their welfare.

And it was so, that when any man came nigh, v. 5. We are all sensitive to courteous treatment. It is not only what we do that affects men, but also the way in which we do it. A dinner is a much more appetizing meal when it is nicely served. Fine manners are the fine dishes on which our dispositions may be presented to others. And we may be courteous without being dishonest. If the courtesy of a bad man has such power, how much more will the courtesy of a good man affect favorably all with whom he is brought in contact. There are few graces that make such rich returns as the grace of a genuine courtesy.

Absalom stole the hearts, v. 6. It is a frequent trick of the tempter to lead men astray by perverting the noblest qualities to evil ends. He uses the tactics of one who should poison the wells from which people drink, so that a means of life becomes an agent of death.

Let me go and pay my vow, v. 7. All deception is to be condemned, but the worst of all

deceptions is when one makes a pretense of worshipping God a cloak to advance wicked devices. And yet it has often been done in the world's history. And the sad side of it is that, when some man is shown to have professed devoutness for a selfish purpose, and his hypocrisy has been unveiled, unthinking people will look upon this happening as a slur upon religion. One might as well despise good money because there are counterfeiters of it made. In a case like Absalom's or that of Judas there is a warning for us to shrink with fear and trembling from the temptation to profess piety for some selfish advantage. But it furnishes no sufficient ground for concluding that all religious profession is a sham and a pretence.

But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes, v. 10. How the clever wicked man leads the thoughtless into wickedness! These men who are here brought before us may have been loyal to the king, but they were ready to be led by this gallant young prince, and likely enough the penalty of their thoughtlessness was death on the field of battle. The same story is being told every day of boys and girls who mean no harm but who are easily led, and who do not look ahead to see what the probable results will be. Evil is wrought by want of thought as well as by want of heart. Many a well-meaning youth has allowed himself to be led by companions down to ruin, because he did not enquire as to whether he was being taken. We have no right to yield ourselves to the guidance of another without some knowledge of where he is wishing to take us.

And Absalom sent for Ahithophel, v. 12