

I SAMUEL, CHAPTER II, VERSE 1.

"Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for men abhorred the offering of the Lord."

We have been reading this morning of the grievous offences of Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli; offences by which they desecrated God's holy place and profaned the ordinances of His service. In the text the magnitude of their transgression is marked by the fearful results which followed from it, their 'sin' is said to have been 'very great before the Lord,' because 'men abhorred the offering of the Lord.' We must however be careful to observe that the consequences of their iniquity are, probably, thus made the measure of its guilt, only because those consequences were natural and all but inevitable—the legitimate fruit of their conduct—a harvest of evil which reason and conscience would have taught them most assuredly to anticipate from the corrupt seed which they had sown. We have indeed no reason whatever to suppose that the Almighty estimates the criminality of conduct by results of a more accidental nature. Some very grievous consequence may occasionally follow from an act of sin not only without the design, but to the bitter regret, of the offender; and although instances of this kind may serve the wholesome end of opening our eyes to the danger of doing anything whatever in violation of the holy law of God, yet it cannot be supposed for a moment that any such fortuitous result can stamp a sinful act with greater guilt than that which would have attached to it had no such result followed. We must therefore bear in mind that the sin of Hophni and Phinehas 'was very great before the Lord,' because the abhorrence of His offering on the part of the outraged worshippers was its natural consequence, a consequence which the profane priests could not but have anticipated, and which they had learned to contemplate with indifference. We must also remember that 'the state of life to which it had pleased God to call them' was in every way calculated to awaken their conscience—to quicken their moral perceptions—in respect of the point in question. They could not easily