

OUR GOAL, HIS PURPOSE, OUR AIM.

OUR GOAL.

Not wanderers, but pilgrims here,
 For home we have in view,
 And soon we will be with the One,
 Who Holy is and True.

HIS PURPOSE.

And by His grace, and with Himself,
 In all His likeness too,
 Blameless, shall each redeem'd one stand,
 This is His end in view.

OUR AIM.

This purpose He has made us know,
 That all our journey through,
 Finding in Him all needed grace,
 His Holy will may do.



TRUE MEEKNESS AND HUMILITY.

(Read Psalm cxxxi., and 1 Sam. xvi., xvii.)

The happy confidence of the preceding Psalm is not to be condemned as presumption. Eliab may accuse David of naughtiness and pride of heart, but it is not so. Hope "in the Lord" may be bold; and such was David's then, and such is that of every poor sinner who has received the grace and salvation of the gospel.

This Psalm, therefore, strikingly and beautifully follows the preceding one. It was the feeling, possibly, of the really meek David, on turning

away from the reproach of Eliab (1 Sam. xvii. 28, 29). And this assured "hope in the Lord" is ever, when real and spiritual, combined with the quietness and subjection of a weaned child.

This allusion to David leads me for a moment to look at him in 1 Sam. xvi., xvii. We may call the time of those chapters the youth or spring-time of David's soul. And how beautifully simple, and how full of real moral dignity it is!

He was the neglected one of the family. But he was content to be so. He would readily tend the sheep in the field, while his more esteemed brothers remained at home to receive the guests, and do the honours of the house.

On the arrival of the prophet Samuel he is called in. But as scorn had not dejected him, distinctions do not elate him. As soon as the occasion is over, he is back again among the flocks.

He is then summoned to the court of the king to do a service which none but he could do. But again, when the service is done, he is in the wilderness with his few sheep, despised but contented (xvii. 15).

A third time he is called for. He has to go to the *camp*, as before to the *court*. But after achieving the greatest feats, he is willing to be still unknown, and without thought of resentment tells who he was to those whose ignorance of him was itself a kind of slight or indignity (xvii. 55-58).

What beauty, what true elevation of soul! And what was the secret of all this? *He found*

his satisfaction in Christ. The sheepfold was as important to him as the court or the camp, because "the Lord was with him." He did not live by excitement, nor pine under neglect. He let the world know that he was independent of what they could either give him or make him. Blessed attainment! It may remind us of those affectionate words in the little hymn—

"Content with beholding His face,
My all to His pleasure resign'd,
No changes of season or place
Could make any change in my mind.
When blest with a sense of His love,
A palace a toy would appear;
And prisons would palaces prove
If JESUS would dwell with me there."



THE TWO TRIBES AND A HALF.

NUM. XXXII., JOS. I. and XXII.

The history of the Two Tribes and a Half has its own instruction for us, and illustrates a peculiar character of mind and will among the saints of God. They do not stand with the Lot of the days of Abraham, though in some respects they remind us of him.

It is wonderful what a variety of moral character and of Christian experience finds itself before the soul in the histories of Scripture. The soul reads itself there fully; the workings of nature not only in man, but in the renewed man, its conflicts and

its strength, giving us to see so much that we know in ourselves ; and, at times, the lights and shades as well as the distinctive features are to be traced.

The Two Tribes and a Half are not Lot, but there is that in them which tells us of him, Like him, their own distinct, independent history begins with their eyeing the well watered plains which were good for their cattle in the wilderness side of Jordan. They think of their cattle rather than the call of God, and the pilgrimage of their brethren. Had their hearts been full of Christ, they would not have seen anything till they had crossed the river. Abraham, their father, had never been on that side of the river ; nor did their expectation when called out of Egypt stop short of the other side. Neither had Moses said anything about those plains, in the land of Gilead. But they had cattle, and those plains were suitable to their cattle, and they sue for an inheritance ere they reach the land which had been their expectation when they set out. This was all. They had no thought whatever of revolting ; of sacrificing the portion of true Israelites, but their cattle drew their eyes to the goodly plains of Gilead, and they were for *possessing them, though they would do so as Israelites.*

How natural ! How common ! In moral power they come short of the call of God, though they hold to the hope of that calling, and claimed fellowship only with those who were the objects of it. They were not in power a *risen* people ;

though in faith one with such. They were careful to declare and hold to their alliance with the Tribes who were to pass the Jordan, though they remained on the wilderness side of it themselves. I do not regard them, like Lot, a people of mixed principles, who had deliberately formed their lives by something inconsistent with the call of God, but rather as a generation, who, owning all that obey it and refusing all thought of having any other, are not found in the moral power of it.

Again I say : How common ! This is a large generation. We know ourselves too well to ask, is there such a people ?

Moses at once is made uneasy by this movement on the part of Reuben and Gad and the Half Tribe of Manasseh. He expressed this uneasiness with much force. He tells them that they bring to his remembrance the conduct of the spies whom he had sent out years before from Kadesh-Barnea, and whose ways had discouraged their brethren, and occasioned the forty years' pilgrimage in the wilderness. There was something so unlike the call of Israel from Egypt in the hope of Canaan, in all these suggestions on the part of these Tribes that Moses at once thus resents it : and it is bad that this is produced in the soul of a Moses ; when the first instinctive feelings and thoughts of a saint, who is walking in the power of the resurrection of Christ, are alarmed and wounded by what is seen in a brother. And yet how common ! Many a Moses now-a-days is called in spirit to

challenge what offends, as being not in keeping with the calling of the saints, For many a thing gets its sanction or its excuse from the heart of a saint that cannot stand before the judgment of faith.

Reuben, Gad and Manasseh have to explain themselves, and to give fresh pledges to Moses that they by no means separate themselves from the fellowship and interests of their brethren ; and they do this with zeal, and with integrity too. In this they were not with Lot. Lot's conduct separated him, for the rest of the journey, from Abraham. But not so these Tribes. With zeal they assert their purpose to be still with their brethren. Nay, they would by no means have taken the Eastern Gilead, had this produced a forfeiture of their identity with those who were to be in the Western Canaan. They are to give pledges too, that they will be foremost in the action which still remains on the behalf of their brethren's inheritance. By no means do they contemplate anything like the loss of fellowship with them ; in this they are above Lot. But still they have stopped short of Canaan. They are not in the full power of the Canaan-calling—not, in the thoughts of the man of God, a dead and risen people ; for they are pausing (ere the promised inheritance be reached), for the sake of their cattle, in the wilderness.

Moses, however, does not let them go, as Abraham let Lot go. They are not to be treated in

that way, neither does the judgment of God light on them, as on the unbelieving spies who brought up an evil report of the land. They do not belong to such generations, though their way may savour of such. Moses cannot lose sight of them because they propose to feed their cattle in the plains of Gilead, while they thus with zeal assert their proposed fellowship with their brethren. They are his, and he is theirs still, I may say; and they hold on together, unlike Lot and Abraham, who never met after Lot became a citizen of the world; practically forgetful so far, of the calling of God.

This is so; but still Moses has to eye them and remember them, and keep his thoughts somewhat anxiously and uneasily occupied about them. And this is not the best witness for a saint. Happy when the Holy Ghost can have us and our state also, to lead us still onward, and feed us still in the knowledge and with the things of Jesus.

Lot and Abraham never met after the way of the world had drawn Lot into it Jonathan and David, now and again, and in their affections there is communion between them true and warm. Obadiah and Elijah met only once, and it is but a poor meeting; "*Reserve*" marking the way of Elijah; and "*Effort*" that of Obadiah; for they were not kindred spirits. The leathern girdle of the prophet but ill-assorting with the livery of Ahab; but the Two Tribes and a Half are above these. They are still the companions of their brethren, and will not think of anything else; and

Moses admits their title without reserve. Their desire to have their portion in Gilead makes no difference as to this. But still they do not go through and through; they do not measure *the whole* of the wilderness, but they linger; and the thought of their cattle being suited in the fields of Gilead attracts them, and there they find an object, though they still accompany the camp.

What shades of difference there are in these different illustrations; what different classes of the people of God; yea, and what difference in the same class do we meet here. Lot and Jonathan and Obadiah are of one class; men of mixed principles, as the expression is; men whose lives are formed by such every day habits as cannot combine with the pilgrim character; or the suffering-witnessing-character to which the call of God leads. Sodom, as Lot's place, Saul's court as Jonathan's, and the palace of Ahab, King of Israel, at Jezreel, as Obadiah's; when Abraham dwelt in a tent, David in a den or cave of the earth, and Elijah with the provisions of God at Cherith or Sarepta. And yet Jonathan was not Lot or Obadiah personally, though we have to set them all in one class. Neither was Obadiah, Lot exactly; and as between them as a class and such dead and risen men as Moses and Joshua, we have to bring in the Reubenites, Gadites, and Half Tribe of Manasseh, a generation who will by no means admit the thought of their separating themselves from full companionship with the call of

God; but who, nevertheless, exhibit in moral action that which is not according to the full measure of that call. And this is indeed a common case—nay, this is *the* common case among the saints. We know it ourselves; we own the call, we witness it, we speak of Canaan, of death and resurrection, of hopes and inheritance beyond the river; but nature, and present ease, and present desires, the bleating of the flock, and the lowing of the oxen, as they feed in the plains of Gilead, lead to much which makes the more single eye of a Moses, and the more fixed and single purpose of a Caleb or of a Joshua to wonder and enquire (See Num. xxxii).

Joshua, who has the spirit of Moses has them in some anxious and uneasy remembrance, like Moses; and he addresses a word of special admonition to them when he tells the conduct of affairs under the Lord, and for Israel. For they are still, being the Tribes, on the wilderness side of Jordan, the occasion of this fear and uneasiness to the more simple and devoted mind of a full-hearted, single-eyed servant of Christ (Joshua i).

There remains, however, another sight of them still in the progress of the history, and one which has its own striking moral features. I mean in Joshua xxii.

The ark had gone over. The feet of the priests bearing it had divided the waters of Jordan, and the ark had gone over conducting and shielding the Israel of God. And it is true that our Tribes

of Reuben, and Gad, and Half-Manasseh had gone over with them; but the ark and Israel had *remained* there—that's the difference. The two Tribes and a Half return, but the ark remains. The place that becomes a ransomed people, a dead and risen people, is left, and they return to *settle* where Israel had but *wandered*.

Joshua, like Moses, instinctively feels all this, and warns them, and exhorts them on their departure. And as soon as they reach the place they had chosen *they* begin to feel it also. They are not fully at ease and there is something specially significant in that. They raise an altar—the heart of an Israelite in the land of Gilead would do just the same at this day. They are uneasy—Jehoshaphat was uneasy, when he found himself in the court of Ahab, and asked for a prophet of the Lord. The renewed mind speaks that language in a foreign land. They raised the altar, and called it "ED," or a witness—a witness that Israel's God was their God. But why all this? Had they remained in Canaan, where the ark and tabernacle of God were, they would not have needed this. But they were not there, Shiloh was not in view, nor could their souls carry the sense of it, that Shiloh was the common centre with all their brethren. They had to give themselves some artificial help, to give their souls a crutch, if I may so speak, to aid the confidence and the joy of their hearts; that as Israelites, they had fellowship and common interests and calling with their brethren.

All this is very full of meaning, and is constantly experienced to this day. Some witness of our belonging to the Israel of God is needed and craved by the soul, when we get into a position in the earth which the call of God does not fully justify. The countenance of others—the restless examinations of our own state—reasonings with ourselves—remembrance it may be, of better days with the soul—something that is as artificial and of our own device as the altar of ED, and which would have been as unneeded too as that, had the soul been more simple and faithful.

All this is still known, and is all figured here—it is the writing on this pillar on the eastern side of Jordan. And a wonderful pillar it thus is. Lot's wife, the pillar of salt, had a writing upon it which the Divine Master Himself has read for us; and I doubt not, so has this pillar of Ed, which the Holy Ghost would fain teach us to read, that we may be warned to know what uneasiness and doubt accompanies the soul that has retreated to find a *settlement* there, where the saints are and have been *strangers*. This altar witnessed both *for* and *against* these Israelites. It was just what Jehoshaphat's uneasiness was when he found himself with Ahab and the prophets of Baal. It is just what a saint's uneasiness here is when he finds himself involved in a world that he ought to have left. For all this bespeaks the saintly or renewed mind, but in such exercises and experiences as the grace of God has caused it.

Reuben, Gad and Manasseh, are challenged the second time—by Joshua here, as by Moses before ; because of their pillar here, because of their seeking the plains of Gilead before.

This is all natural, as common as Christian fellowship is, but all more or less painful and troublesome now-a-days as it was then. A great stir is made among the tribes ; and a great assemblage is formed to enquire into this further.

Something appeared in the eye of those who were on the other side of the river, which alarmed them as Israelites, as worshippers of Jehovah. It looked to be something which the common call of God could not allow for a moment—it must at least be explained. What a living picture this is ! Are we not at home here ? Do we not scan this spot well ? The calling and the election of those eastern borderers were not made sure to their brethren who were living in the place of the Ark of God. They have to enquire and inspect their condition ; and whatever the result of such inspection may be, the need of such a process is but a poor thing at best.

I believe the first Epistle to the Corinthians is very much an Eleazar crossing the river to look after a pillar. There were things at Corinth which alarmed Paul. They seemed to be reigning as kings in the earth ; his ministry in the meekness and gentleness of Christ was getting despised. The world was fashioning the hearts of saints there ; and people were valued because of their

place in the world. "The princes of this world," the men of the schools, or the ways of the schools, were regaining their place, and saints were returning to *settle* where they ought to be *unknown* and *strangers*. Paul, in the zeal of Joshua xxii., had to cross the river; and whatever the discovery may be, the action is a painful one, and the need of it á sad one in the history of the church.

The tribes may satisfy Eleazar more than the Corinthians did Paul; all these varieties are known at this hour; but there is this common sorrow and humbling, that the call and election is not made sure; and we have either to take journeys, or to occasion journeys, to have our own ways, and Eds, and altars, as brethren, read; instead of reading to all the secrets of God's altar and tabernacle at Shiloh!

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER.

"The moral activities that are abroad are surely immense, and the pressure upon the social system of influences full of deceivableness, I suppose, is beyond all precedent. It is desirable to keep the soul increasingly alive to the fact that the path of the Church is a narrow and peculiar one. Even her virtues must have a *peculiar* material in them. Her common honesty, her good deeds, too, her secular labours, her fruitfulness, purity, and the like are to be peculiar in their functions and their springs. Her discipline does not act after the pattern of the mere

moral sense of man. Society, as another has observed, would disclaim the offence contemplated in 1 Cor. v.; but society would never deal with it as the Church is there called to deal with it. Society, for instance, would never put covetousness or extortion in company with it; but the saint is instructed to do so. The moral sense of man would there make distinctions, when the pure element of the house of God resents all alike as unworthy of it.

“This is ‘fine gold,’ dear brother—gold refined again and again. Even the morals of the Church are to be of another quality from those of men. What sanctions are brought in in 1 Cor. v., vi., as to the common matters of life! If the saint be to abstain from fornication, it is because his body is *a temple*—‘the temple of the Holy Ghost;’ if he be to refuse the judgment of others in the affairs of this life, in their more ordinary ways of right and wrong, of debit and credit, it is because he himself is destined to be a judge in the seat of the world to come, even from a throne of glory. Is not this ‘*fine gold*’? Does not such sanction make morals *divine*? What, in the world’s morality, is like this? And I ask further, is not the need of this divine or peculiar agency, to the effecting of any moral results, intimated in Luke xi. 21–27? If it be not the *Stronger Man* possessing himself of the house, is anything done for God? If it be merely the unclean spirit going out, the end of the history of the house is, that it becomes more fitted for deeper evil. The emptied state, even ac-

accompanied by sweeping and ornamenting, is only a preparation for a worse condition ; and nothing is done for God but when the Stronger enters the house. No instrument of garnishing *according to God*, but Christ. And in the remembrance of these verses, dear brother, ask yourself what is doing in and for the house of Christendom at this moment. Is not many a broom, many a brush, sweeping it and painting it? Is this making it God's house, or getting it ready to be the house of the full energy—the seven-fold energy—of the enemy?"



MEDITATIONS ON THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

(Continued from page 58.)

Strife between Brethren.

(Chap. xii. 1-6.)

Chapter xii is a picture of one of the gravest symptoms of ruin : contention and open war between brethren. Formerly, when the people had not left their first love, or when their leader evinced more spiritual power, this calamity had been averted. The constant design of Satan is to disunite the children of God. He knows that our strength consists in being gathered around a common centre ; and, not being able to destroy this essential unity which God has established, he seeks to destroy that which has been committed to our responsibility—its manifestation. Now we

know how completely he has succeeded in his design. The wolf catcheth and scattereth the sheep.

In the book of Joshua, characterized by the power of the Holy Spirit with Israel, this effort was baffled at the time of the controversy caused by the setting up of the altar, *Ed* (Jos. xxii). Thanks to the energy of the tribes and to the zeal of Phinehas, the introduction of sectarian principles was avoided. When divine principles are at stake we must not fail to stand in the breach, at the risk of war between brethren. The maintenance of Israel's unity, as God had established it, had more value for the saints at that time, than courteous relationships between brethren.

Later, in the book of Judges (viii. 1), when Ephraim began to chide with Gideon, the conflict was quieted through the humility of the latter who deemed the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer. In chap. viii, and still more in the chapter we are considering, it is no longer a question of defending principles. The discontent of Ephraim proceeded from a sense of his own importance. He had been pacified on the former occasion by the humility of Gideon, but, conscience not having been reached and there having been no self-judgment, he renewed against Jephthah the same accusations. A fault in our career as Christians left unjudged will reappear sooner or later in similar circumstances. Here the state of Ephraim had grown worse, for while on the previous occasion he had gleaned, on

the present one, waiting for some incentive from without, he had done nothing. This did not, however, make him the less jealous of the results which the energy of faith in his brethren had produced. It is the same in the present day, and we are all in danger of falling into this snare. The church, instead of being a witness for Christ, has gone back to the world; it is a time when God takes for witnesses the weakest, the poorest, and those least qualified among His people. In acting through them, God would confound the "mighty" or the "noble" (see 1 Cor. 1), in whose eyes there is nothing important except what emanates from themselves. Unable to humble themselves, or to rejoice in what God has done by the instrumentality of others, they despise all that does not come within the circle formed by their own worldliness. If the work goes on they express their jealousy, if it still extends they become enemies and proceed from hatred to threats: "We will burn thine house upon thee with fire" (ver. 1).

In Deborah's day, Ephraim was the first; under Jephthah, God accounted him as nothing. All that he could now draw from his former blessings was the remembrance of his importance and the desire to make the most of it. Alas! on the other hand, we no longer find on the part of Jephthah the disinterestedness or humility of a Gideon. He answered the flesh by the flesh, his own wounded feelings clashing with the egotism of Ephraim. In his defence he made self prominent. "*I and MY*

PEOPLE were at great strife with the children of Ammon ; and when *I* called you, ye delivered *me* not out of their hands. And when *I* saw that ye delivered *me* not, *I* put *my* life in *my* hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and Jehovah delivered them into *my* hand : wherefore then are ye come up unto *me* this day, to fight against *me* ? ” (vs. 2, 3). Jephthah talked of himself, thought about his disputed worth, fell into the snare that Satan had set for him and formed a party, when just before, having identified himself with the people, he had proclaimed their unity in the presence of the children of Ammon (chap. xi. 12, 23, 27). But now, “ my people ” meant Gilead as opposed to Ephraim.

Words intensified the quarrel. “ The men of Gilead smote Ephraim, *because they said*, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites ” (ver. 4). There was not a single principle involved in this struggle. On all sides it was but jealousy, personal importance and angry words exchanged by irritated hearts ; and so a fratricidal war broke out in the midst of Israel, brought about by their own hand. At the passages of Jordan they are known, for the purpose of killing one another, by a Shibboleth, a formula used for the name of Jehovah, and which had nothing to do with the truth of God. And there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.

Let us be on our guard against such snares, for

if there be one thing which especially belongs to a time of ruin, it is strife in the family of God. Let us have our hearts enlarged as to the work of God in this world. When entrusted to other hands than ours, it should have the same importance and value for us, as though it were done by ourselves. Paul, in chains at Rome, writing to the Philip-
 pians, rejoiced that Christ was preached even by those who were adding affliction to his bonds. Let us not give any importance whatever to *our* work, but like Gideon leave the vintage of Abiezer unestimated. A season of quietness is no guarantee against these dangers. At the beginning of the church's history (Acts vi. 1-6), there arose murmurings and jealousies between the Grecians and the Hebrews, to appease which needed more than the humility of a Gideon, requiring even the great wisdom of the apostles. They handed over to others the care of serving tables, relinquishing an authority which would have given them prominence in the administration of the assembly, in order to continue in prayer and to give themselves wholly to the ministry of the word. By such acts as these, consciences are reached and Satan's devices against the testimony defeated.

Ibsan, Elon and Abdon.

(Chap. xii. 7-15.)

After Jephthah, under the reign of three judges, Israel enjoyed the peace which had been acquired.

One of these judges sprang from Judah, another from Zebulun, and the third from Ephraim. They were not called on to fight, but to maintain the people in the condition in which victory had placed them. Possibly they had not the energy of a Jair (chap. x. 1-5), who "arose," as the word tells us, but, like him, two of these judges were men of great wealth. Periods of outward prosperity are not the most profitable for the people of God. The personal importance of the judges comes out, but not the condition of Israel. Who they were, and what they did, is known, but not anything of what was going on in the heart and conscience of the people. And so no sooner was the last of these judges dead, than Israel relapsed into their previous condition (chap. xiii. 1). There are certain occasions when we have to "overcome," others when we have to "stand" (Ephes. vi. 13). How do we employ the corresponding days of peace which the Lord permits us to have? To strengthen ourselves in the truths God has given us, or to go to sleep amid comfortable surroundings, only to be unexpectedly awoke when Satan returns to the charge, and to find ourselves powerless in the presence of the enemy? Those who are not fed are not able to fight. Let us use the times of prosperity in growing in our personal knowledge of the Lord and in walking in communion with Him. We shall thus be strengthened to resist fresh attacks, and avoid falling into bondage more cruel than that from which we have escaped.

(To be continued, D. V.)