

MINOR CHARACTERS

OF

THE BIBLE.

BY JOHN HALL,
PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
TRENTON, N. J.

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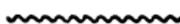
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PREFACE.



THIS little work will promote an object worthy of a great one, if it shall be the means of suggesting to its readers that, in the common use of the Scriptures, many instructive passages are overlooked, because they seem to occupy too small a space, or to be too incidental, to deserve particular attention. The selection of names is sufficiently large and miscellaneous for the purpose, though scores of equally available subjects remain.

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GAIUS.

ALTHOUGH we know him only as the person addressed in the third epistle of John, and the whole of that epistle is contained in a dozen sentences, yet where is there more complete testimony to the piety of any saint? Gaius "walked in the truth." He not only knew, or admired, or contended for the truth, the gospel truth, but he lived according to it. His daily life showed that he had received Christianity, not for the sake of its novelty, or out of reverence to the venerable apostle, but because he believed it to be true; and having received it, he *lived it*. "The truth that is in thee," again says the Elder:—*in him*; not a mere speculation, but

in his heart, and manifested as the heart manifests all its contents, in the living.

One mode of showing that the truth was in him, and that he walked in it, was his hospitality to the poor Christians, whether fleeing from persecution, or going forth to carry the gospel. He brought such "forward on their journey after a godly sort," literally "worthily of God," (and the Divine name ought to have been retained in our version, because in the next verse, as it now stands, "his name's sake" has no antecedent.) And the apostle testifies that what Gaius had done in this way, to the brethren and to strangers, he had done "faithfully," in a manner worthy of the Christian faith, or consistent with it. It was a point of Christian principle with him to do whatever he could for propagating the truth; and if it were only by helping the labourers or the witnesses on their evangelical errands, it was acknowledged as a faithful work. The apostle adds to the

lesson of his example, the declaration that we *ought* to perform such services, "that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth." Let all Christians think of this; those that have property, or the means of hospitality, or the opportunity of obtaining help from others for the promotion of Christ's religion. Whatever the contribution be, however humble, if it be doing what we can, we share the honour and the blessing of the cause we help. We are "fellow-helpers" of the ministry, at home or abroad, of the Bible, of every means of spreading the truth, and thus "workers together" even with the Son and the Father, in and for the truth.

But, perhaps, the most remarkable thing in this mention of Gaius, is the manner in which the Elder salutes him. Most saints, if they have but health enough to be attending to their worldly concerns, would be willing to say, "O, that my soul were no more sick and infirm than my body!"

But John says to Gaius, "beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, *even as thy soul prospereth.*" What a saint was this! Who can venture to make his spiritual prosperity the standard and measure of his prayers and desires for his temporal prosperity? What a rebuke it should be to us, in view of the riches of God's grace, and the promises of his liberality, if we are forced to reverse the terms, and say, We shall be satisfied if our souls are as well off as our bodies!



DIOTREPES.

THE Apostle John gives a few lines to this man in his letter to Gaius. What a contrast! It seems that he was in the Church, but instead of being, like Gaius, a "fellow-helper to the truth," and rejoicing to be a coadjutor of the last surviving Apostle of the Lord Jesus, he aspired to a higher es-

timation and authority than the beloved disciple himself possessed. "He loveth to have the pre-eminence," and so he would not so much as receive the Apostle; and perhaps it was his hindering the reading or consideration of what John had written, that he refers to, when he says, "I wrote unto the Church; but Diotrophes" &c. Nor did he stop here; but he "prated with malicious words" against the lovely old man, and would cast out of the Church such as would not conspire against him.

Well! John himself had been once rebuked for this spirit, and he may have had, on that account, the greater forbearance towards this ambitious and injurious person. When, in the days, of their ignorance, the twelve had disputed among themselves which should be the greatest, their Lord at once corrected their worldly thoughts, and assured them that he who aspired, from such motives as they evinced, to be first of all, should be at length de-

graded to be last of all; and it was then that he set the little child in the midst of them as the emblem of believers. Certainly, however, John felt no disposition to retaliate on Diotrophes, for after this brief allusion to his case, he turns to Gaius with the paternal admonition, "beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good: he that doeth good is of God; but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." Blessed counsel! may all who receive it study their Christian character by this plain criterion! Are we following the good? Are we doing good—both as to godly obedience and godly benevolence?



DEMETRIUS.

"Woe unto you," said our Lord to his disciples, "when all men shall speak well of you." In those days a faithful confessor of Christ could hardly escape reproach and scandal; and to be spoken well of by all

sorts of persons, almost certainly implied that the popularity was gained at the expense of the truth. But Demetrius had good report of all men, *and of the truth itself.*" There must have been, therefore, something peculiar either in his situation, or in his piety, that made him such an exception from the general principle. Yet we sometimes do read and hear of Christians who so firmly and constantly, yet gently and kindly, evince their love to the truth, and their subjection to it, that even the wicked cannot but give a good report of them.

To mention no persons farther off or less known, let me recall the character of good old Joseph Eastburn, of Philadelphia. Did any man ever speak more openly, faithfully, and universally "the truth" as it is in Christ? Was any man less deterred by fear and shame from living, speaking, *looking*, and weeping for the truth's sake? His countenance, tones,

language, employments, all seemed to be always evangelical—in the street, on the wharves, in his house, in the market, as well as at the Bethel. Yet whom did he offend? Who ventured to say evil of him? or if they did, who were able to disturb, for a single day, the general “good report of all men,” which he possessed?

Such a man must Demetrius have been. There are few like him. To have a good report of all men, to be a general favourite, is no uncommon thing. We have our popular authors, actors, statesmen, heroes; but when we think of “the truth itself,” in connexion with their fame, we should not think of uniting the two parts of the sentence by a copulative conjunction.

But, after all, the good report which Demetrius enjoyed from men, may have been founded on a different basis from that on which he had a good report of the truth. He may have possessed so many social virtues, and been so benevolent in

his community, even to those who remained in Jewish or Gentile unbelief, as to have gained their esteem, notwithstanding what they might have thought of his enthusiasm or superstition. It becomes us, however, to endeavour, by "manifestation of the truth, to commend ourselves to every man's conscience," and also, at the same time, to his esteem, by manifestation of the amiable influence of the truth upon our character. For this end we need the love of Christ to be more copiously shed abroad in our hearts, and to resist more steadily the pride, impatience, and worldliness which that love encounters.



THE ELECT LADY.

HAPPY woman! happy family! She and her children were found by the aged apostle "walking in truth." She was beloved "for the truth's sake," by the disciple

whom Jesus loved, and by "all them that have known the truth." She did not walk alone in the faith of the gospel, mourning to see her children going after the world, or rejecting with bigotry and contempt, the religion which John taught, as he heard it from Him whom he had seen seal his testimony on the cross. Christianity had not, in this family, "set the daughter at variance against her mother," or divided it so as to make her foes of her own household. How must the pious matron's heart have overflowed with grateful joy, as she read the Elder's letter, expressing his great rejoicing that he could testify, from his own acquaintance—"I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father." How truly welcome to her was the prayer and benediction which accompanied this congratulation of the veteran disciple—"Grace be with you, mercy and peace, from God the Father,

and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love !”

It would seem, also, that the Divine grace had extended to other connexions of this favoured family. “The children of thy elect sister greet thee.” The sister was elect, and the children would scarcely have sent this greeting through the apostle, if they had not been partakers of their mother’s, and their aunt’s faith.

Let these cases be considered in our Christian families, where it is so often the case that five in one house are divided, three against two, and two against three, and sometimes all against one. Baptism now, as circumcision formerly, should be the bond of families in one Lord, one faith. Would it not be generally so, if the believing parent were consistent in duty and example ?

ORNAN.

“I GIVE IT ALL.” Hear the offer of the Jebusite farmer. The king of Israel finds him, with his four sons, at work on his threshing-floor. A yoke of oxen are dragging the heavy wooden rollers over the stalks of grain. A heap of the winnowed wheat—and it is not likely that after at least a half day’s work of five men, it was a small one—stands near. David informs Ornan that he wishes to buy that very spot, that he may build an altar to the Lord, and at once promises him a “full price.” What an opportunity to the farmer to make a good bargain for himself! True, Ornan was an Israelite as well as David, and the property was wanted for a religious purpose—but might he not take advantage of the chance of making a little money out of his religion and his rich king?

The farmer thought not so. Nor did he

satisfy his conscience by abating somewhat of the full price in consideration of the convenience of the altar to his dwelling, or for the privilege of worshipping at it. In short, he made an immediate unconditional donation of the site for the sacred purpose for which it was wanted.

But this was not the half of the liberality of the gift. Casting his eyes over the field, with its pile of grain ready for the garner, and the heaps of sheaves waiting for a clear floor, and the strong cattle harnessed to the threshing cart, Ornan's pious mind quickly caught the conception that there was collected before him not only the altar, but the burnt sacrifice, the meat offering and the fuel. The good Jebusite did not chill the liberal impulse of the moment by admitting worldly calculations of the folly of giving more than he had been asked for; but let out his full hearted generosity in replying to the king—"Take the floor to thee: lo! I give thee the oxen also for

burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering, *I give it all.*" And the last touch of disinterestedness in the picture is, that Ornan, so far from calculating on any honour for himself from the deed, assigns it entirely to David, saying to the king, in reference to the proposed altar and its sacrifices and offerings, "the Lord thy God accept **THEE!**"

The generosity of this offer is not in the least diminished by the fact that it was refused. It was in the man's heart and intention to do all that he proposed, and he doubtless would have been as prompt and happy in executing, as he was in making the offer.

"All these things," says the sacred history, "did Araunah" (so the Ornan of 1st Chronicles is called in 2d Samuel,) "as a king, give unto the king." Our translators seem to be correct in supplying the *as*, to denote that though the liberal Jebusite

was not a king, he acted royally, and like one who had regard to the exalted character of David, as the head of God's people. It was the king of Israel who wanted the place;—he wanted it for the Lord of Hosts;—it is no time or subject (thought Ornan) for bargains or stipulations; it is for the Lord; “I give it all.”

David acted on the same principle in refusing to accept the property as a gift. He intended it for his own offering, and he would not allow another to pay for it: “nay, but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.” The altar was built; the sacrifice was accepted, and perhaps Ornan had the happiness of knowing before he died, that his old threshing place was the destined site of the magnificent temple which the son of David should rear.

Let Christians reflect on this specimen of liberality. How seldom does a rich

man allow himself the privilege of doing "all" in a good design, even though fully within his means! We give on condition—in part—by instalments, and on credit. For one man to build a church, or a school, or to send forth a missionary, as an offering to the Lord, is a thing scarcely heard of; though many could do it. Even when a number of men unite for such an object, though it be literally "an altar unto the Lord"—a place for his worship—it is rare to find the combined number willing to give it as an immediate offering. A society, worth in the aggregate, many tens of thousands, will suffer what they have professed to dedicate to God, to be mortgaged generation after generation, for a few tens of hundreds! Ye Christian farmers! who scarcely give a bushel of wheat at once to the Lord's cause, though earnestly solicited, what say you to the comparison in which your course stands with the Jebusite, who, when offered a full

price for his threshing hill, was anxious to give not only the ground, but his oxen, his implements, and his grain ?

If Ornan felt that when he was dealing with a king and for sacred purposes, it was no time to chaffer or to calculate, how well does it become us to remember, that when the Lord asks us for any gift by which we can honour Him, and do good to our fellow creatures, we should not act grudgingly, nor meanly ; and that though we may not be able, of ourselves, literally to “ give all,” we should be ready to give as much as we can !



EPHRON.

EVERY example of disinterested generosity is valuable in our selfish world. We have recalled the king-like liberality of Ornan. He may stand as our model of the public, religious benefactor, a specimen of the

Christian method of meeting opportunities to promote sacred institutions. In Ephron and his brethren, we have a pattern of the more private sort of benevolence; of the way to show kindness to an afflicted fellow man, even though he come from abroad; of the humanity that is too honourable and sincere to admit of mercenary calculations.

Sarah had died in Canaan—among the heathen Hittites. Abraham was but a sojourner there. He did not own as much of the soil as was required for her grave. He had to apply to the children of Heth for a burying place. They saw his emergency: they knew he was rich. Christians! what would have been the first thought of your minds, if a stranger had been thrown among you in such circumstances?

But let us see what the heathen did. They came to the bereaved foreigner, and said, "In the choice of our sepulchres,

bury thy dead ; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead.”

It was not merely room for a coffin in a family vault, nor permission to break a few feet of sod in a grave yard, nor the choice of a site in some potter's field, that was thus offered to the stranger. Abraham wanted a whole field—a field surrounded and shaded with trees, and having a secure cave, in which the dear remains might be deposited. He wished to have the whole of it, made sure to him for a possession.

In this reverence for the dead, and affectionate care for their ashes, the ancients, both believers and heathens, present some pleasing contrasts with the spirit of later days. Few things would have been more revolting in their view than our crowded cemeteries, our neglected tombs, and above all, the buying and selling of the soil filled with the ashes of our ancestors, and the

yet un mouldered coffins of our Christian brethren !

Abraham would be secure against the risk of what could, in those times, have happened only by accident. He had his eye upon a field and cave that belonged to Ephron. He offered to buy it from him at its full value. We can suspect no insincerity in such an answer as the Hittite gave—"Nay, my lord, hear me. The field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee : in the presence of the sons of my people, give I it thee : bury thy dead."

The patriarch gratefully, but positively declined to accept the gift, and insisted on paying what he found to be the price. Ephron's conduct was, nevertheless, as generous as if Abraham's had been less so. In this transaction they both set us examples of what is high minded, manly, and brotherly, in circumstances where a sordid disposition is most apt to exhibit it-

self. Let not the Christian be put to shame by the sons of Heth!



EPAPHRAS.

WHEN we hear of gospel "labourers," or of a Christian "always labouring fervently," we are apt to conceive of men toiling hard in preaching, or doing such work as that of colporteurs, or pedestrian missionaries, from house to house. Epaphras was indeed "a faithful minister of Christ" to the brethren at Colosse, and so, doubtless, performed all the active duties which pressed upon ministers in the apostles' days: but he is separately spoken of as "a servant of Christ, always labouring fervently for" the same brethren "in prayers." It is obvious that his prayers were considered part of his labours for the people whom he served; and that he felt it necessary to be indefatigable in them, as

well as in the other. Indeed, the one required and produced the other. If he was diligent in using the means of instructing and converting souls, it must have led him, as a Paul-taught minister, to make his prayers keep pace with his work; and as the one abounded, the other must.

To labour in prayer suggests the idea of earnest, persevering supplication. Epaphras could not have been satisfied with a formal, set utterance of general petitions, appended to his preaching and conversation, as a part of the routine of preparation or performance. It is Paul who gives Epaphras his character, and Paul had other ideas of a minister's prayers for his people. For he could say to one church and another, "without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." "I thank my God on every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine, for you all, making request," &c. "Labouring fervently for you in prayers."

But what was the great subject of the petitions of Epaphras? Was it the conversion of the impenitent inhabitants of Colosse, Laodicea, or Hierapolis?—the recovery of some great apostates?—the deliverance of believers from some dreadful persecution or other calamity? What was the crisis that drove him with such earnestness to the throne of grace? “*That ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*”

It seems, then, that ministers in that primitive age, considered the spiritual progress of those who already believed and were in the church, to be a subject calling for, and deserving of, their most laborious prayers. This was part of the servant of Christ's “great zeal” for the brethren to which his apostolic fellow-worker bare record: and, indeed, in this, as in the other respects, Epaphras followed Paul. For constantly in his epistles, he not only exhorts, and entreats, as evidence

of his anxiety for the holiness and grace of believers, but tells of his *prayers* that they might have "spiritual gifts," that they might be "filled with all joy and peace in believing, and abound in hope," and have "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of" Christ, and know "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints;" and that their "love might abound more and more, and be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ," and that their hearts might be "established unblamable in holiness."

O! for more such labourers! and for more such labouring for the church!



JABEZ.

IN the midst of the pages of names in the beginning of the Chronicles is this little episode: "and Jabez was more honourable than his brethren; and his mother called his

name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow. And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, O that thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thy hand might be with me, and that thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me. And God granted him that which he requested." Was this son of sorrow frightened by his own name into an apprehension of calamity? Well, if that were the case, so it drove him to God for refuge, it were a good kind of superstition. And it is a pity that more of us did not feel that as "sorrow" is our inheritance, by the special sentence of the Creator on each of our original progenitors, there is nothing left for us to do so suitable, and sufficient, as to cast ourselves on the covenant God of Israel, and entreat Him, that the evil, which is unavoidable, may not have power, essentially and finally, to grieve us! "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn and he

will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.”

The worldling may, perhaps, think, on the first reading of the prayer of Jabez, that it is just the collect for himself. “Enlarge my coast” “keep me from evil”—what are these he may say, but petitions for wealth and prosperity? But let him read it again. Is there not a melancholy sadness in the strain? Did not the son of sorrow experience the fear of being forsaken by the God of his fathers, rather than indulge a worldly desire for an extended domain? Does his prayer breathe the spirit of one whose heart is set upon earthly possessions, and who only prays, because he may insinuate into his seeming devotion his request for what he loves more than God’s true blessing? “Bless me *indeed*”—“O that thy hand might be *with me!*” “keep me from evil, that it may not *grieve* me.” If he did ask for the divine protection, it was with the spirit

of one who knew that God alone could make prosperity a blessing, and keep it from becoming a snare; of one who was taught by the history of his nation to associate temporal defence and welfare with the favour of God in a higher sense. So it was with the defrauded son of Isaac! Esau connected the blessing of his dying father with more important results than the impatient heir of our day has in view in watching the privileges of his birthright. "Bless me, even me also, O my father! Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father!"

Those will be, like Jabez, "more honourable than their brethren," who will learn, like him, to seek for nothing in this life but what they can, consistently, pray God to bestow; who will discern the hand of God in sorrow, as well as in rejoicing; and who will desire that if evil come, it

may not either as to its temporal or spiritual effects, unduly grieve them.

∨ If men would learn on what principles and conditions temporal prosperity may be regarded and prayed for, as a Divine blessing, let them study the spirit of the prayer of Solomon, on his accession to the throne, the prayer of Agur, and the prayer of Jabez.



HYMENEUS AND PHILETUS.

GANGRENE is a disease in which the part affected becomes so corrupt, that nothing but the knife gives any hope of preventing a fatal mortification. The microscope shows that the livid mass is filled with innumerable worms, which literally eat into the flesh, and commonly destroy the life. But what have Hymeneus and Philetus to do with the gangrene? Did they die of the disease? Or are they celebrated for

curing it? "Their word will eat as doth a gangrene." (*γαγγραινα*) Their word! Were they great slanderers then? Was it the corruption of their tongues that defiled the whole body and set on fire the course of nature?

No: I suppose these men had been Christian ministers. Paul mentions Hymeneus twice, and Philetus once, in his warnings to Timothy, in such a connexion as seems to imply this. They certainly had been, and probably still were professing Christians. What a fearful thing to have the word of a Christian, whether in the ministry or not, become a gangrene in its moral effects! But it is possible for men, in either capacity, to "corrupt" even "the word of God," and make it fatal through their perversions, though in itself, it is pure, incorruptible, life-giving, sanctifying and saving. And so it is possible for a minister, or other Christian, to be so indiscreet in his use of his own words—so

inattentive to the precepts, to be an "example of the believers in word," and to "show uncorruptness in doctrine, and sound speech that cannot be condemned"—that his influence shall be as a gangrene to those whom he affects by his conversation.

Hymeneus first made shipwreck of his faith, by putting away the truth and a good conscience together. In this he was a partner with Alexander; and both were given up by the apostle to the visitations of divine judgments, in the hope that they might learn not to blaspheme. But from this step Hymeneus went on to adopt profane and vain babblings in his religious opinions, which increased to more ungodliness; so that, finding a new ally in Philletus, they became together bold enough to teach that the resurrection was past, and were successful in overturning the faith of some.

Beware of the gangrene! It cannot be

cured, except by cutting out or cutting off. A little delay of the operation may be too late. The surest preventive is to exercise a double vigilance, that our words be sound, pure, true, profitable to ourselves, and them that hear us—that we abound in the use of those which are “spirit and life.”

PHYGELLUS AND HERMOGENES.

O GREAT men! Illustrious names! Models of independence! They “turned away from” the apostle Paul! Or his own language may be well rendered, “they have turned me off.” He does not say why, but these Asiatics have had so many followers, that it is not difficult to form conjectures as to the cause of their dissatisfaction.

Many theological teachers turn Paul off, because of his unpalatable doctrines. This may have been the case with the

couple before us; for their withdrawal is mentioned in close connexion with the exhortation to young Timothy, "hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me." There are some views of Paul's so fundamental in his system of teaching, so incorporated with every argument he constructs, that the only way of escaping from his authority is the summary one adopted by this distinguished pair—to turn away from him—to turn him off—to dispense with his services as a teacher. See that most unpopular sentiment, yet so favourite an one with the apostle, which he inserts almost in the same paragraph in which he announces his dismissal—"God, who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." What multitudes of Phygellians and Hermege-nians has that single article of Paul's

creed made ! Even many who think well of him in other respects, and listen to him with favour, turn away from him when he writes in this style. Paul was equally unfortunate in this respect in his life time. He often went on smoothly in his public discourses for a while, but would be sure to let fall some expression that would spoil his popularity, and turn the applause of his eloquence into hatred for some doctrinal opinion, or indignation for some home thrust of his practical preaching. The Athenians heard him patiently at Mars Hill whilst he discoursed of the Deity, and quoted their own poets ; but no sooner had he touched on the resurrection than some began to mock, and others put him off more civilly with “ we will hear thee again of this matter.” The Jews heard him with great silence, as he spoke from the stairs of the castle of Jerusalem, so long as they were entertained with the account of his journey to Damascus ; but

happening to make favourable mention of the "gentiles," they gave him no audience after that word, but cried out that he was not fit to live. So Felix was well enough pleased with the specimen of Paul's defence of Christianity, till he got to certain reasonings, which had the air of personalities, and he turned him off for that time. And Festus accomplished the same purpose, when, after hearing his personal narrative, and the apostle running off upon the resurrection and the gentiles, he drowned the sound of the unwelcome doctrines, by shouting that Paul was beside himself!

After this experience, it could not have been so dreadful a trial to Paul to be turned off by Phygellus and Hermogenes. Let us, however, draw this moral from their history:—1. That men may turn from Paul, or dismiss him from his seat as an instructor, and yet his opinions may survive, and find believers. 2. That the **examples of the fate of those who treated**

any opinions of the apostle with contempt in his life, give poor encouragement to imitators. 3. That it is dangerous to make exceptions, or indulge partialities, in our reception of the inspired word.—Let us take all the Bible,—all Paul.



EBED-MELECH.

EACH of the Testaments gives, in an Ethiopian eunuch, an example of faith. Both of these coloured foreigners were in or near Jerusalem at the times in which they are spoken of, but they were six hundred years apart. The one is associated with the Queen Candace and the Evangelist Philip; the other with the King Zedekiah and the Prophet Jeremiah. The former is too prominent to come among our Minor Characters, the latter is so much forgotten that his name will hardly be recognized by many of our readers. But,

though the Queen's officer may have been of "great authority" in comparison of rank, the King's servant may claim equality with him in the good report which is through faith. If the treasurer evinced his faith by a prompt profession, the other manifested his by a bold action. The one said "I believe," was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing; the other remonstrated with the king against his own decree, and in the face of the advice of his princes, on behalf of a persecuted prophet, and when he succeeded, put his own hands to the rope to pull him up from the pit.

It was not mere humanity that prompted the African to so courageous an act, or that made him think of throwing down rags to the old man in the dungeon, before he should put his weight on the cord. It was as a prophet of the Lord that he chiefly cared for Jeremiah. We know this from the prophet's reward that he

received. For a special message came from heaven through Jeremiah to assure his deliverer that when Jerusalem should fall before the Chaldeans, his life should be safe, "because thou hast put thy trust in me saith the Lord." Surely, as the reward was like Rahab's, the faith was at least equal, and Ebed-Melech a man that may say, "I will show thee my faith by my works."

True faith may make itself manifest in the humbler sort of actions, as well as in the greater. The servant of Zedekiah, busy with his ropes and rags over the miry pit, in the court of the prison, honoured God in that honour shown to a prophet for God's sake, as really as did the eunuch of great authority, when he stepped from his chariot to be baptized.

It is a doctrine of the Old Testament, as well as of the New, "he that receiveth you, receiveth me," and a promise of both alike, "whosoever shall give you a cup

of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, he shall not lose his reward."

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### ONESIPHORUS.

If the prayers of Paul shall be answered, this man and his family will find mercy of the Lord in the great day. One of the rewards of benevolence is the prayers of the righteous for these who have done them good. A good deed may thus be connected with the salvation of him who performs it, nay, of his family besides. It was the kindness of Onesiphorus to Paul which caused the apostle to pray for him and his household. "The Lord give mercy unto THE HOUSE of Onesiphorus." "The Lord grant unto HIM that HE may find mercy of the Lord in that day."

And what was the great service which this Ephesian had rendered? It was performed when Paul was a prisoner in the

hands of the Romans, awaiting the pressure of the Emperor, and willing to abide by the alternative of his appeal—"If I be an offender or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die." Had his friend delivered him from bonds? or could he dare to die for that good man, or wear his chain as his substitute? What smaller obligation could the apostle rate so highly?

This is the common standard for weighing our obligations to our benefactors. We ask *how much* they have done; forgetful that if one does all he can do in the circumstances, it is by his disposition, rather than by the results, that his goodness and our indebtedness are to be measured. But Paul had learned a better system of morals. He had studied with Him on the highest grade of whose scale of merit, it is possible to find a cup of cold water, a box of ointment, or the sum of two mites. It was, therefore, his doctrine, that

“if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.”

Onesiphorus was not able to release Paul, either from the annoyance or disgrace of his detention in Rome: but when he went to the city during those two years, he took pains to find the hired house where the apostle and his guard dwelt. He refreshed him with his visits, showing that he was not ashamed of his chain, nor of his Christian friend, in custody. Soothing, indeed, it must have been to the innocent prisoner to have these calls from a sympathizing believer, when he had commonly no better society than a Pagan soldier, or unbelieving Jews—to whom if he opened his lips about Christ crucified, it was foolishness to the one, and a stumbling block to the others; a theme, at best, of controversy and not of sweet communion. The interviews of Paul and Onesi-

phorus might have furnished conceptions for the cartoons of the best masters.

A Christian visit to the lonely—to the afflicted believer, what a cheap, but precious favour! How little it costs! A few minutes deducted from our walk—a few cheerful words—perhaps a text or two of sacred promises, and a short prayer—something to show that the brotherhood is acknowledged—something to set the spiritual chords in vibration. And then what a reward in return!—the prayer of the afflicted saint; that prayer which availeth much, and which may comprehend not only the Onesiphorus, but his household, in fervent petitions that they all may find **mercy in that day!**



### NEBAT.

**HERE** is quite an enigma. Nebat is mentioned at least eighteen times, in three different books of the sacred history; and in

such association as one would shrink from as an infamous entail on one's name, yet his life and character are as utterly unknown as if he had never existed! For a man to attain immortal dishonour, would seem to require at least one enormous crime, or one flagitious trait to descend with his name. When Eratostratus could devise no other way of getting his name into history, he set fire to the temple of Diana at Ephesus. But though Nebat is as immortal as the Bible, not a trace of his life, not a feature of his person or character, not a word that he uttered, not a line that he wrote, is recorded or preserved, in any manner.

The sad, but instructive solution of the riddle is—Nebate was the father of an ungodly child. He is an historical monument to illustrate the proverb, "a foolish son is the calamity of his father;" and to show that such "a son" "causeth shame and bringeth reproach" to his parents,

even when they may not be alive to feel the stroke, and though they may not, as in Eli's case, have winked at the iniquity. For Nebat was dead before the wickedness of Jeroboam was developed in the form which has confirmed his disgrace; and there is no record that impeaches the parental faithfulness of Zeruah, Nebat's widow. But the dishonoured father is now inseparably linked with the corrupt and corrupting child, simply because of their natural relationship. It was "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat" who "lifted up his hand against the king:" it was "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat," who "did sin and made Israel to sin." It is the fate of the house of "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat," which is held up as a warning against rebellion and idolatry. The sins of the son became proverbial, but the father's name is part of the proverb. It seals the character of fifteen kings of Israel, that they walked in the ways of the son of

Nebat, and those ways at length brought the whole kingdom into captivity and dispersion.

It should certainly have some weight in a parent's mind, that the character of his children will reflect either honour or the contrary on his own name. He may be gone from the world long before this effect is produced ; but there is a natural desire in all virtuous hearts to have even their remote descendants, whom they shall never see, receive and transmit an unspotted reputation. In this sense "children's children are the crown of" their ancestors, whether they are alive or dead. What a stimulus should this consideration be to Christian parents, to spare no effort to win the blessing promised to those who train their families in the way they should go ! How would it lacerate the heart of a pious father, to imagine that his dear son should ever be a Jeroboam ; and that of his infidelity, profaneness, sensuality, or

other crimes it should be recorded that the child of that Christian man sinned, and taught others to sin ! Jeroboam's rising by his own industry to a high rank in the service of Solomon, and his final elevation to the throne itself, do not hide his disgrace as a despiser of the religion of his family and nation. So whatever riches and distinctions our children may attain, nothing should console us for the prospect of their irreligion, so long as labour, example and prayer can avail to prevent it. But if all these should fail of the desired end, let parents so devote themselves to the service of their Lord and Redeemer, that something more and better shall be remembered of them, than that they had ungodly children.



### APELLES.

**WHO** has not heard of the fame of the painter, who was so approved by Alexan-

der the Great, that all other artists were forbidden to draw the monarch's portrait? Apelles! His name is a proverb for celebrity. More than twenty centuries have done honour to his pencil; and our own age unites in the tribute, though all the works of his genius have long since perished.

But where is the fame of the Apelles of the Bible? Who remembers *him*? Yet we have as much to remind us of him, as of his Grecian namesake; that is, we have, in either case, only the testimony of former days. We have the mental character of one, and the spiritual character of the other. The painter was approved of Alexander; the believer was "approved in Christ." The prominent mark of the first was his skill—of the other, his faith.

Both were judged according to their works, by the masters to whom they respectively laboured to approve themselves. Alexander looked for accuracy of eye and

hand—exactness of imitation—brilliancy of invention. He found these in his Apelles, and accepted him. The painter was also a devoted subject to the king. He was loyal, submissive, watchful of his will, as the eyes of a servant to the hand of a master. The monarch favoured and rewarded him, as he witnessed these marks of his faithfulness.

The Christian Apelles had, in like manner, by his devotion and zeal, his patience and obedience, manifested true attachment to his Lord. He was a proved—a true disciple. Paul was a witness to this, and therefore saluted him among the helpers in Christ Jesus, the beloved in the Lord, and those who laboured much in the Lord. He was seen to be one of those of whom the apostle says, that they who serve Christ in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, are acceptable to God, and approved of men; one of those approved ones who are made manifest by

their adherence to the truth when divisions and heresies abound; who are approved, not by commending themselves, but by having the marks of those whom the Lord commendeth; and who, by proving themselves in examining their faith, show, by their holiness, that Christ is in them and that they are not reprobates.

Let an impartial world decide who is the great Apelles, and of whom it is best to be approved.



### PHILEMON.

THE letters that one has received, as well as those he has written, will shed light on his history and character. They tell us who his friends were, and let us into the knowledge of many little particulars which show us what the man himself was.

We know no more of Philemon than is to be gathered from a single letter which was addressed to him by an aged friend.

**But that friend was a Christian, an apostle,** Paul himself. It is from incidental expressions in this one short epistle that we learn that Philemon was a believer, that he was hospitable to the saints, and that his reputation for love and faith was such, that Paul could confidently depend upon his performing a certain good action, as soon as it should be suggested to him. This action was not one of mere courtesy or hospitality; not the bestowing of a donation, or the doing of some work for the church: it was to forgive an injury—to forget a loss—to take the offender, though (according to the common understanding,) his own bondman, by the hand as a brother beloved—to receive a fugitive servant in his reformed character, as sincerely as he would have received Paul himself.

That the apostle should write thus to a disciple, with confidence that he had the heart to do even more than he was asking him, is a sufficient monument to Phile-

mon's faith, ignorant as we are of the actual result.

And let us not overlook the fact that the influence of Paul in this domestic matter was one of Christian friendship only. He might have commanded as an apostle; but he was satisfied with beseeching as a friend. He knew Philemon well enough to be assured that all he wanted was to see his duty, and that he would do this as promptly on the friendly hint, as on the apostolic injunction.

Here is the right kind of obedience—the right principle—the real Christianity. The believer says not, “how can I manage to get along without censure? how far can I indulge my covetousness, ill will, or revenge, without incurring discipline?” but his heart is so pervaded by the Spirit of Christ, that he is ready to forgive, or to perform any other duty, even though to his own loss, the moment he sees the fit opportunity of doing so.

Such a believer will kindly receive the counsel of a friend, and account it an evidence of friendship, when he brings him to regard a duty which he might have overlooked. That friend, too, will use his influence in the kindest and gentlest manner; and even those who have official authority to "enjoin," will "rather beseech."

Philemon teaches us another lesson. It is sometimes easier to be hospitable to the stranger than to "show piety at home;" to be zealous for foreigners than for one's own household. This Colossian disciple was expected to show his meekness to his servant, and having a church in his house, he was not to be ashamed of carrying out his professed principles in his deportment to the humblest member of it. To be "the dearly beloved and fellow labourer" of Paul and Timothy; to exercise "love and faith toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints," as a collective church,

may have been no test of Philemon's sincerity. But would he show hospitality to *Onesimus*? Will a master have his servants, as well as strangers, witnesses to his benevolence, in caring for their bodies and souls; witnesses to his religion in his every day conduct? If he would, he must have that "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," which Paul implored for Philemon, as if that alone would enable him to be and do what he ought.



### ONESIMUS.

**POOR** Onesimus comes down to us with a character made much worse by the traditions of commentaries than by the sacred text. That he was a slave—Philemon's slave—that he absconded from his master—that he took with him some of his property, seem to be taken as unquestionable inferences from Paul's epistle. Yet, what-

ever may be the probabilities of the case, any one, or all of these conclusions may be false. He may have been a freed-man, for such often continue to be called slaves after emancipation. He may have been in Philemon's employment as a tradesman, or agent, and have removed to Rome, after involving his principal in loss, without any other crime than carelessness or bankruptcy. No more than this is required to be understood by the apostle's assertion that Onesimus had been "unprofitable," and by his offer, "if he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee aught, put that on mine account; I will repay it."

But let the case have been fully as bad as is ever believed, or as light as our own supposed cases would make it, Onesimus is a fine example. As soon as he embraces Christianity, he begins to make reparation for his misdeeds. The friendship of Paul does not so exalt him in his own opinion as to dispose him to forget

his obligations in Colosse. He does not consider his conversion as cancelling his debts, or imagine himself absolved from his obligations because they were contracted in his unbelief. If the subscription to the epistle be true, Onesimus carried the letter in his own hands to Philemon, and thus surrendered himself to his will. He went back as a servant, to confess his faults and repair the losses they had caused, rather than to claim the privileges of Christian equality. He did not despise his believing master because he was a brother, or try to argue away the rights of the relation in which he stood to Philemon, because he was Christ's freed-man, though called as a servant.

So will true religion—genuine repentance—always lead a man to aim at doing what is *right*. He will confess his whole guilt towards his fellow men, as well as to God. He will place no limit beyond which he will refuse to go in his acknowledg-

ments and restitution. He will not say, such and such a wrong was committed whilst I was in my unconverted state, and I have now nothing further to do with it. An honest bankrupt does not consider himself released by any legal forms from his just debts. He will pay them as fast as he can, though no compulsion can touch him. A Christian will never slight the guilt of an offence, or refuse to make amends for delinquencies, on the ground that he was not *then* a Christian.



## MICAH.

**NOR** the Morasthite, but the Ephraimite ; the man who had his own temple, and consecrated his own priests, and stole his own gods ; the man who was an Israelite, yet thought he was surely in the way of a blessing, because he found a Levite to serve in his house of idols ;—the man who

cried out after the robbers of his shrine, "Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away; and what have I more?"

Micah might have been less disconsolate had he foreseen what a host of followers he should have in his faith. It was an irreparable loss to him, indeed, to have all his piety carried off at one load, by five men; but he is worthy of some fame, as among the very first we read of in history, who held to the opinion, now so venerable and popular, that if one have a Levite of the true pedigree, an altar of the true shape, with ephod and teraphim to correspond, he may say, "What need I more?" and that if these should fail, he may cry, "What have I left?"

But we may be Micahs without a hierarchy. We may depend on ministers, sanctuaries, and ordinances in such a way as to overlook the true spiritual object as much as the Ephraimite did. Our zeal

may be for the name, the house, the favourite; and if these are taken away, we may feel as if all were gone. Or we may so consecrate the emblems and forms of religion, together with its officers, as to make them our machines or hirelings for the performance of our duties, and to cover over our sins by a devout appearance.

The Hebrew Micah might have known even in his day, that God is a Spirit, and that they that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth. We know it, as Christians, still more clearly. The greater, therefore, is our guilt than his, if we substitute any doctrines or commandments of men, or any devices of our own minds, for the simplicity and the sincerity of the truth.

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#### MICAH'S PRIESTS.

THE first was his own son, consecrated to the office by the hands of his father.

Neither of them, indeed, had any affinity with the house of Aaron, but Micah had a double claim to the privilege of choosing and ordaining a priest in his own way. For was it not his own "house of gods"—his private chapel-of-ease—opened in his dwelling, all independent of Shiloh, that required the priest? And were not the molten and graven images, the ephod and teraphim, doubly his—first by his having stolen from his own mother the silver which made and bought them, and then by her giving the shekels back to him again when he confessed the theft? I do not know what turn Matthew Henry has given to the incident, but can imagine his quaint pen fixing here for a *note*: A minister made by man for convenience is only fit for a house of idols. A man may put his son into the pulpit, but cannot consecrate him; neither can the hands of the Presbytery make a man a minister, if God

has not called him. A stolen priest is worthy of a stolen shrine.

Micah's second priest was the mercenary minister; the man who makes no scruple about the religion, but who must have "a place" somewhere, and can accommodate himself to any. He was a Levite, but his story was, "I go to sojourn where I may find a place." For ten shekels and a suit of clothes a year, and his victuals, the Levite was content to dwell with Micah. The young man was so much nearer the priesthood than Micah's son, as a Levite was nearer to Aaron than an Ephraimite, but he was no priest. The Levite's conscience, however, accommodated itself to his place, and he was satisfied to be consecrated, like his predecessor, by the owner of the idols. He was Micah's priest, not the Lord's.—"Thus and thus, dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest." Woe to

the minister who considers who hires him, more than who appointed him!

But the new priest could hardly have earned his first year's wages. A new colony was established in Laish. On their way the emigrants stopped in Micah's neighbourhood. They heard of his cheap priest—a "young" man too! Their argument with him was short—"Is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and family in Israel?" Mount Ephraim now seemed a small place to the popular Levite. The chaplaincy of a family was a poor field compared with the new city of Dan. Besides, his very images, and ephod and teraphim, had been forcibly carried out of his temple by the new visiters before he was asked to accompany them to their destination. His stock in trade was going—his religion was pillaged from him—what could he do but go along? Must he not accommodate himself to his

circumstances? So he did, and the children of Dan set up the graven image, and he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.



### THE TWO PROPHETS AT BETHEL.

THE one who came from Judah to prophesy against the altar of Jeroboam's golden calf, was commanded of the Lord to return without stopping to eat or drink. The old prophet who dwelt at Bethel, where the altar was, and who rode after the other and took him back to eat and drink, lied to him in saying that an angel had been sent to revoke the prohibition. Thus a positive injunction, received by the man himself, directly from the Lord, was made to yield to an opposite command, professing to be conveyed by two separate agencies between the Lord and the person addressed. Behold the power of tradition

over revelation! The angel and the old prophet are believed, before God. Behold how tradition, at second-hand, may be allowed to contradict and to repeal an original revelation! The positive direction is given up, at the bare word of a lying prophet.

Was it an innocent *mistake*? Were the two alleged witnesses so venerable, and their succession so immediate, that the man of God was excusable for his error? Even whilst he sat at table, sentence of death was passed upon him; and the only mitigation of his fate that is left to comfort those who sympathize with it is, that the lion which slew him did not eat his carcass.

Or was it an innocent *deception*? May not a prophet fabricate a plausible story—some pleasant traditionary fiction—to bring the unsteady to his own house and altar? I can only say that the word of God brands the aged prophet of Bethel as a liar; and that the dead carcass of his

betrayed companion seems to cry woe to the man who put him in the way of the lion.

But those who mislead others by their fables will do the best they can for them, after they have succeeded in drawing them from the safe path in which they found them. The old prophet was hospitable to the victim of his falsehood ; and as soon as he heard of his fate, he saddled his ass and went after the corpse ; he furnished a funeral, laid his body in his own cemetery, and mourned over him, "Alas ! my brother !" He even set up an inscription over the sepulchre, and commanded that upon his own death, his remains should be laid beside those of the man of God. Had it not been for this arrangement, Josiah would have burnt the bones of the old prophet along with the rest which he dug from the graves of the idolaters to defile Jeroboam's altar.

Yet the deceiver may be blind and heart-

less. Though the old prophet was compelled by the word of the Lord to charge his deluded victim with his sin, even at his own table, and to declare his approaching punishment, he says not a word of his own sin; and when told of what had befallen his guest, he coolly said as much as that he deserved it—"It is the man of God who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord; therefore the Lord hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him and slain him, according to the word of the Lord which he spake unto him."

But there is none to tell us how much lighter was the punishment of the deceiver, "that brought him back from the way."

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### EPAPHRODITUS.

REPUTATION is to be had in the church as well as in the world, and on the same grounds. Wealth, rank, talents, are marks

of distinction in both. Such an one is famous for his riches; another for his eloquence. This man is honoured for his family connexions, that one for his conspicuous station in the Church; and that one again for his tact as an ecclesiastical statesman. One might wonder what was the standard of reputation in the apostolic time. Of what sort were the ministers and laymen who were then highest in esteem?

Fortunately we can tell what class of Christians are determined by the highest authority, to be worthy of the most distinguished regard. "Hold such in reputation," said Paul, and he spoke of Epaphroditus, and gave his reasons.

Whether he was a "fellow-soldier" in the ministry, or in a more private capacity, we cannot determine from the apostle's language. When he found a devoted "companion in labour," as this messenger of the Philippians was, Paul did not think it important to state what office, if any, he

held in the church, or what position in the world. Such an one's reputation was not to be measured by his titles or rank; nor did the primitive ministers think Christianity so exalted by the worldly eminence of any of its adherents, as to entitle men of that description to be placed in the most prominent places, merely for the sake of their names.

We are to hold such as Epaphroditus in reputation. They are to be received in the Lord with all gladness. They are to be the popular men, however poor in spirit or in purse, however humble in rank or occupation, however small a figure they make in society. "Such," such as Epaphroditus is described to be, without reference to incidental circumstances, which were not thought worthy of being mentioned, as having any thing to do with his real claims to esteem.

What then, was Epaphroditus? Shortly this: he was such an indefatigable labourer

in the work of Christ, that he regarded not his health or life, so that he might accomplish the utmost in his power, for the glory of the Lord and the good of His people. His fatigues in this work produced a fit of illness, which brought him nigh unto death. His services were so valuable, that had it not pleased God to restore him, Paul would have felt his removal as a sorrow upon sorrow. Part of his zeal had been shown in ministering to the persecuted and imprisoned apostle. That was a very humble, but a very useful work, and one that showed his faith in Christ, as much as his charity to Paul. It was a service, for which he deserved more true honour, than if he had been, what some have presumed to call him, a fellow-apostle. However obscure or untitled he may have been, his recovery from sickness was a more important event for the work of Christ, than the life of the richest or most eminent disciple who was

living indolently or parsimoniously as to his Christian duty—esteemed, perhaps, in the church, and excused for all his deficiencies, because it had the honour of his name.

Both of these classes are still to be found in the church : let us remember of which it is said, “hold such in reputation.”

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### ANNA.

WHETHER eighty-four was her entire age, or the term of her widowhood, Anna's character deserves the veneration of her Christian sisters and daughters. It was not at that late day that she began to be devout. The statement implied in the mention of her years is, that though at least four-score and four, she was still punctual at public worship, and made no intermission of her prayers, or even of her fasts, on the plea of age. Her zeal

was not governed by the barometer, nor measured by the dial. She departed not from the temple—that is, she did not absent herself, for insufficient reasons. Whether Sabbath or common-day, light or dark, she loved the courts of the Lord too well to give up at eighty-four the habit and the comfort of her earlier years—probably the whole period since the short seven years of her married life.

Anna was not a mere devotee. She was so well informed in the true meaning of the Christian prophecies, and so believing in them, that coming into the temple at the instant when the infant Jesus was dedicated, she was enabled to recognize the Messiah. Her long continued prayers and fasts gave way to praises, and in the spirit of prophecy she spake of Jesus to those companions in the faith who had been with her, looking for “redemption.”

Anna’s name stands first in the list of women who have publicly professed their

faith in Christ. Even Mary had only come to the temple, as every Jewish mother did, with her first-born son, to perform all things according to the law. Twelve years afterwards she was still pondering, as at his birth, the incomprehensible things spoken of the child. But Anna, first of women, in the temple of the Lord, in the presence of its officiating minister, gave thanks for the REDEEMER. She stood there with Simeon, before the incarnate Son of God, the representatives of the departing generation of believing Jews, assenting to his profession—"mine eyes have seen thy salvation."



### TABITHA.

THERE is room in sacred literature, not only for illustrations of the minor characters of the Bible, but of the minor scenes in the history of its most eminent characters. It is a wonderful transition to turn

from the traditionary Saint Peter—the Pontifical Prince, with tiara, keys and sword, carried on human shoulders under a canopy of silk and gold, and surrounded by a military escort—to the real Peter of the Acts, standing in an upper room in Joppa, listening to the lamentations of a company of poor widows over the corpse of a friend, and viewing a collection of garments which they are exhibiting to him as a specimen of her benevolent industry.

But Peter would be more ashamed of what is done in his name in the Vatican and Cathedral of Rome, than of the scene in that upper room of Joppa. He knew as well what Christian and apostolic dignity is, as any of his assumed successors, and all the pomp, and music, and Swiss guards of Italy could not have given such an illustration of true majesty, as when the late fisherman walked from Lydda to Joppa with the two men, who had been despatched for him, and going up the stairs

to Tabitha's room, heard the widows' account of her, and then, after praying, was obeyed when he said to the corpse, "Arise!"

And the scene is more dignified in its relation to the deceased woman than a thousand masses, or canonization, or temples consecrated to St. Tabitha, would have been. Her character among the true saints was such that they felt as if she could not be spared. Even after she had been laid out for burial, the disciples determined to appeal to the divine interposition to restore her to the church on earth. They heard that one of the apostles was in a neighbouring town, and they sent to entreat him to come to them without delay. The apostle came, heard the good woman's history, saw the evidence of its truth in the tears of the widows, and the works of alms deeds which still remained to testify to her piety, and laying the case

before God in prayer, he obtained a gracious answer and presented her alive.

It will be well for the Christian to ask, whether he has done any thing for Christ which can be produced after his decease, to testify to his active faith and charity. It is probable that Tabitha had no means of signifying her attachment to the Saviour, but by employing her own hands in clothing disciples who were poorer than herself. Yet she is honoured as one who was "full of good works and alms deeds which she did." If she was "full" according to her means, what is the proportion due from those whose resources are greater?



### A CERTAIN POOR WIDOW.

We have not so much as her name to call her by. But we have what is better—her deed. She was poor. How poor? Was she one of that class of paupers who have

money in bank, money for market and shop, money for concerts and journeys, but nothing in the world for charity? Was she one of those who are impoverished by the "so many calls"—who are drained by the mere appeal to give, though they give next to nothing—who have "nothing at present?" Did she belong to one of those congregations who are too poor to pay for their place of worship, or to sustain the means of worship creditably, though they dwell in well furnished and costly houses?

But how poor was the widow? We have the appraisement of all the living that she had. The sum was precisely two mites—or to speak of it in the largest terms it admits of, one farthing.

There was a treasury for the receipt of contributions to the Lord's house in Jerusalem. A constant income was necessary to repair the buildings and maintain the worship. Did the poor woman pass by the treasury and shake her head, saying

she had nothing to give? or that what she had was too trifling to offer—too small to be entered on the subscription book? Or did she say, Let the rich throw in much—they can afford it—my gift would be worth nothing?

No. The certain poor widow gave nobody the trouble of calling on her, or of listening to her polite apologies. She took her farthing in her hand, and went up to the great temple, and when she saw some of the rich throwing in their handfuls of shekels, or their minas, she was glad she had two pieces to add to the collection, and the brass mites were as cheerfully dropped as any gold or silver that went into the treasury that day.

Yes, and they were as cheerfully received. For the Lord of the temple was sitting over against the treasury at the time, and declared, inasmuch as she had, in the fulness of her heart, bestowed *all* that she

possessed, she had done more than all others.

The same Lord has his eye upon every disciple who has now the privilege of contributing to his cause. He knows who gives, and who withholds; he discerns the cheerful and the grudging giver; he estimates the gift, not by its intrinsic amount, but by the proportion it bears to the means of the donor. A farthing may represent more in his view, and be more abundantly recompensed, than the thousands or tens of thousands which men emblazon when they are given, though they scarcely diminish the heap from which they are taken.

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### BARZILLAI.

HE was "a very great man;" but that may be said, even in the Bible, of a very base man, and it is said there of Nabal the churl. They were both very great in

their wealth ; but Barzillai had something besides his sheep and goats to give him a character.

He was great in his generosity. When David, in the most unpromising part of his public career, stopped with his few followers at Mahanaim, "hungry, and weary, and thirsty," Barzillai joined with his neighbours, Shobi and Machir, in sending a supply of food to the persecuted monarch. This spontaneous liberality at such a crisis made an impression on David that he never lost, and one of the latest acts of his life was to charge Solomon to honour and provide for the living representatives of the venerable Gileadite.

Barzillai was great in his patriotism. It was as his lawful monarch that he honoured David, though a fugitive in the wilderness, and though the usurper was the man who had stolen the hearts of the people. He was not afraid of periling his wealth by exhibiting his loyalty to the

true king. He took the right side, instead of the popular; he stood by the Lord's anointed, when the prediction of Hushai seemed likely to be realized that all Israel should light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground, and not leave so much as one of all who were with him. But his patriotism stood a stronger test than this. For when David returned in triumph, and offered Barzillai a home in the palace at Jerusalem, he declined all honours and offices; asked none for his sons or friends; and had but one petition to present—that he might be allowed to accompany the king a little way over Jordan.

Barzillai was great in the dignity of old age. His whole deportment is venerable in the highest degree. The manner in which he sent the supplies to David; his meeting with the king; the interview and parting, are among the most beautiful pictures of a reverend old age that antiquity furnishes. Instead of concealing his dis-

qualifications for public life, or for the pleasures of a court, he tells his age, and appeals to the king whether it was becoming to a man of eighty to leave the quietness of his home at Rogelim, for the feasts and music of the royal house. What a libel on age is a pleasure-loving, an ambitious, a worldly, a death-fearing old man!

Barzillai was great in his gentle affections. Read this sentence without emotion, who can, as coming from such a man at fourscore years of age; "Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, *and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother.*" This trait consummates the dignity of this venerable character. Let it give weight to the example of the rich and eminent Gileadite in the consideration of the young. Let it suggest to them the probability that the foundation of his nobility at eighty, was laid in his preference

to the precepts of godly parents, whom he never ceased to love.



### N A B A L.

WE have spoken of this Carmelite, in connexion with his contemporary Barzillai, as “a very great man.” The Bible ascribes this character to them both, and there are some good reasons for placing the two men near to each other in our view, when we would profit by the memory of either. Nabal was great to the amount of three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. But as we found that Barzillai’s substance was the smallest part of his greatness, let us see what may be said for Nabal.

He was great in his churlishness. He is the churl of the Bible. Barzillai, unsolicited, sent to David in the wilderness, by the hands of his own sons, beds, basons, earthen vessels, wheat, barley, flour, corn,

beans, lentiles, pulse, honey, butter, sheep, and cheese. Nabal refused bread and water when David, in a like extremity, sent to ask for some of the superabundant provisions which his servants were enjoying at their sheep-shearing. The very servants were ashamed of their master's meanness, for they remembered that when they were out with their flocks, David and his men had been as a wall of protection to them by night and by day.

He was great in disloyalty. Saul was yet living, but David had been consecrated his successor on the throne. Nabal's wife certainly knew this, and doubtless he knew it as well. But as he thought he had no reason to fear the power of the destined monarch in his present calamities, he added insult to his treason, and affecting ignorance, asked, "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse?"

Nabal was great in brutality. He railed at the Lord's anointed, and his attendants,

as possibly servants who had escaped from their masters. His own labourers pronounced him a son of Belial. Even his wife had to palliate his inhumanity by alleging that he was no better than a fool. He proved himself to be both fool and brute by his deadly drunkenness. The state in which he passed his last days is a type of the condition of his feelings; "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone," and so in ten days he died. This completes the contrast of the rich Carmelite with the rich Gileadite.

Churlishness is not within the reach of ecclesiastical discipline, as evil doing and intemperance are. But that disposition is as unchristian as those open sins which characterized Nabal. One may be so unreasonable, obstinate, self-willed, morose, that "a man cannot speak to him," with any hope of being heard with attention or respect. "Gentleness" is one of the injunctions of the gospel, for which the ex-

ample of the Lord Jesus is especially cited; so is benevolence in all its forms.



### ABIGAIL.

We might have found a contrast to the churlishness of Nabal nearer home than Barzillai—even in the churl's own wife. She was "a woman of good understanding." Their servants showed their observation of this superiority by appealing to her, and keeping silence to him, in any matter where reason and conscience were to be exercised.

Abigail showed a politic discretion in leaving Nabal to himself, and setting out to appease David's excitement before he could reach Carmel. With an independence equally justifiable, she disregarded the brutish refusal of her husband, and took with her a large present of bread, wine, meat, corn, raisins, and figs. In-

stead of attempting to apologize for the churl, she treated him as a nonentity, and made David feel that it would be unworthy of him to regard the man of Belial, whose folly was written in his name. She made it appear that, under these circumstances, the duties of hospitality naturally rested on her, and that her poor husband was hardly accountable for an insult which should not have happened if she had seen David's messengers. She intimated that it was punishment enough for any of David's enemies to be—Nabal.

But the good understanding of Abigail had marks of grace, as well as of sense. The Divine providence and God's sovereign purposes were seriously referred to in her prudent expostulation with David, and she delicately suggested that when the momentary excitement should have gone over, it would be no happy nor dignified reflection to the heir of the throne of Israel, that to revenge himself on such a

man, he had shed blood. The fool's wife was wiser and cooler than the chosen king, and he, at length, blessed God for her advice; and later still, upon hearing of Nabal's death, acknowledged how much better it is, to leave it to the Lord to return a man's wickedness upon his own head.

Good sense, good policy, good religion, mark the history of Abigail. How happy it is to have reasonable and God-fearing counsellors when our passions would pervert our judgments! How Christ-like to make peace, and yield to peace-making advice! How wise to consider, at every step, what our future and dispassionate reflections may be, and thus prevent future "grief and offence of heart!" How much wisdom, as well as grace, does it require to give advice in the proper season, in the proper spirit, and in the proper manner!

## SIMON'S SON.

HE was a thief, but is not so much remembered in this character as in others. But his dishonesty, as well as his higher crimes, was of an atrocious type. He was a thief, even while a professed disciple. An advocate for the poor, he would embezzle the funds of a few poor men which had been entrusted to his keeping; and that too when even a portion of the little stock was devoted to help those who were still poorer than themselves. He was a traitor all round—to his Master, to his associates, to the poor; a traitor as a disciple, an apostle, a co-partner, a treasurer, a steward. He used his office to hide his villany. "Not that HE cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag."

Religion has been made a cloak for every sin. He who so uses it is a traitor, as well as a hypocrite. As covetousness

is the root of all fraud, so in proportion as a Christian is covetous, does he partake of the guilt of treachery and hypocrisy. He is not what his name imports; his inconsistency betrays the cause he pretends to have espoused.

We may deceive even ourselves by performing religious duties from selfish motives. Our very charities may be but **masks for vanity**;—not that we care for the poor, or the heathen, or the kingdom of Christ, but because we would gain credit for our liberality; buy ourselves a Christian reputation; make our money a substitute for the zeal of the heart.

Simon's son was an apostle, but he thought more of the bag, than of his office. He considered it a great waste to expend a pound of spikenard in honour of Christ, when it might have been sold, and put more than three hundred pence into his hands. It is an evil-time when the servants of Christ would draw to themselves

any of the honour that belongs to their Master alone, or exalt themselves by means that should be wholly devoted to his glory. The ambitious, the vain, the self-seeking, as well as the covetous apostles, may be said to carry their own bag. "Not that they care," so much as appears, for the objects for which they plead, the self denial they preach, the success of the word for which they strive, but that they may gain, besides a livelihood, a reputation for eloquence, a name for influence, and have the popular applause. Some would turn Christ's ointment into money, others into fame. In other words, some would sell the alabaster box, others would break it to fill their own houses and persons with the odour of the ointment.



### PAUL'S HELPERS.

THE title HELPS, which denotes one of the orders of Christ's house, is very compre-

hensive. This is probably the reason critics have considered it to be so indefinite, and that the order is commonly supposed to be exploded. But when we look at the services which Paul acknowledged to be those of his helpers, we shall find that if the succession has been broken, the fault is not in our want either of authority or patterns.

The apostle claimed special regard for "every one that helpeth with us and laboureth," and in that connexion named the house of Stephanas, as having addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints, and Fortunatus and Achaicus, as having exercised the same ministry by their sympathy in refreshing his spirit, and those of other believers, in their trials and labours.

Aquila and Priscilla were his "helpers in Christ Jesus." All the churches of the Gentiles, he says, were indebted to that pious pair. For their munificent gifts? For the honour of the patronage of these

strangers from Italy? No: they were poor exiled Jews, who laboured with their needles for their support. But they helped the work of Christ by their hospitality; by encountering great risks as private individuals in behalf of the evangelical objects of Paul; and by their sending out such a preacher as Apollos, who with all his eloquence, never understood the way of God perfectly, until these tent-sewers brought him to their house and expounded it.

Not to speak of such of Paul's helpers in the preaching ministry as Timothy, Titus, and Epaphroditus, we have the names of Clement, Urbane, Aristarchus, Tychicus, Justus, and others, who appear to have been private members of the churches, and as such, doing what they could, to sustain and promote the gospel; but who for this co-operation are honourably acknowledged, not simply as personal friends and benefactors of the apostle, but as "helpers

in Christ," "fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God," or as in the case of Gaius, who was faithful in bringing the brethren on their journeys, "fellow-helpers to the truth."

And as men are thus recognized who were never ordained to their good works by the laying on of hands, so we find the Apostle acknowledging many women as his Christian helpers. Not only Priscilla, in connexion with her husband, but such as Phebe, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, are enumerated singly, as "labourers in the Lord," and as worthy to be named even in connexion with the apostolic works. Such "teachers of good things" as Lois and Eunice; such friends of the poor as Dorcas, were, doubtless, of this class of the helpers of the gospel.

And Paul would even acknowledge those as his helpers who had but a very silent and obscure way of labouring in the good cause. "Ye also helping together

by prayer for us," he says, and often did he cast himself on his believing friends for this assistance.

We may conclude, after this, that there is no believer who cannot be a helper in the kingdom of Christ; that besides the ordained and consecrated labourers, there are diversities of service required in the church, which call for all kinds and degrees of gifts; that every disciple is ordained by his baptism to help in training or sending out, or encouraging apostles and prophets, although they may not be called to be apostles and prophets themselves; that those who teach, give, pray, or in any manner show their active zeal for the honour and success of religion, are ranked among the friends and companions of the most eminent, even of Christ's own called and inspired disciples. Furthermore, we learn that these services are necessary links in the chain of gospel duties, and that the professed believer must be

essentially deficient in his evidences of faith, who is bearing no such part in the labours of the church.

REUEL.

As seven sisters, in days of yore, repaired to a well to draw water for their father's sheep, they found a stranger by the troughs, who respectfully arose and helped them. This friendly attention ingratiated the wayfarer with the family. He became an inmate of the household, a shepherd of the flocks, and at length the husband of one of the seven maidens. Thus we are introduced to Reuel, Moses, Zipporah.

Reuel or Jethro, as he is also called, was in authority among the Midianites, which people, though descendants of Abraham, had wandered away from Israel, and retained, if any, only a perverted tradition of the true religion. It was a blessed

sight, therefore, that was witnessed in the wilderness of Sinai, when Reuel brought to his son-in-law his wife and children, who had been left in Midian until Moses should fairly have got beyond the reach of Pharaoh. As Moses sat in his tent, and detailed to the venerable man the wonderful deliverances the people had just received through their Divine Protector, the Midianite believed, and professed his faith in the Lord with honest rejoicing. "Now," said he, "I know that Jehovah is greater than all gods." To signify his conversion, and to enter into communion with the Lord's people, Jethro brought sacrifices; and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God.

It was on the day after this remarkable solemnity, that those suggestions were made to Moses, which are immortalized as "Jethro's counsel." It is no slight distinction to have projected at that date a

system which was substantially perpetuated in the government of the people of the Lord. Was it not inspired by the Divine Lawgiver? It was, at least, proposed to Moses by his father-in-law, only with the express proviso, "if God command thee so."

The lapse of thirty-three centuries has not made unseasonable the requisites of good rulers as they were at that time drawn by Reuel. What a different history the world would have made, if his views had always been popular in enlightened governments! In that case the rulers of tens, as well as of thousands, would be 1st, Able men: 2d, Such as fear God: 3d, Men of truth: 4th, Haters of covetousness. The Midianite's ideas are worthy of the adoption of republican voters. Such counsellors are most worthy of the epithet applied to that Hobab, who, if not Reuel himself, was his son, when Moses prayed him not to leave the camp,

for if he should accompany them, he would be to them in the wilderness, *instead of eyes.*



### SHIMEI AND ITTAI. \*

WHEN David was driven from his capital by the usurper of his throne, Shimei followed the king with curses and stones. When the usurper had been defeated, and David was returning in triumph to Jerusalem, Shimei hastened to fall down before him at Jordan, boasting that he was the first of his tribe to welcome the king, and outdoing the whole thousand who were with him, in the display of his sudden loyalty.

Such is the principle of the time-server. Whether he shall cast stones or bow the knee, whether he shall espouse this side, or the opposite, depends on the present popularity which the man or the cause has attained. David was as much the king,

and his cause was as just, when he went barefoot and weeping over Olivet, as when he crossed the Jordan ferry amidst the acclamations of the multitude welcoming his return. But he was not the same to Shimei. When he went out, apparently to exile, he was, in his view, a "bloody man," a "man of Belial;" but he was "my lord," and "my lord the king," when he came back the conqueror.

In contrast with this Israelite, we have the Philistine, Ittai. When David abandoned Jerusalem, this man, though a foreigner, from Gath, voluntarily accompanied him, at the head of a body of troops, highly important to the king in that emergency. David would have dissuaded him from his purpose, on the ground that he had no claim on a stranger for aid, at such an unpromising crisis. He even intimated to the brave Gittite, that he would consult his own interests better, by remaining in the capital, and attaching himself to the

popular and triumphant pretender, at whose approach he was himself withdrawing. Ittai could not be moved by such an appeal, but exclaimed, "Surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be."

Ittai was one of the three victorious leaders at the battle of the wood of Ephraim, where Absalom met his fate, and the tide of popular favour turned again for the lawful monarch. We can imagine the light in which the patriotism of the Benjamite and the Gittite appeared, when they met at the river on the king's return, to all who knew the previous history of the two men. In that same light must selfish duplicity, on the one hand, and disinterested fidelity to good principles, on the other, always appear in the view of those who judge according to truth.

May we not also use these incidents to contrast the humiliation of the Root and

Offspring of David, when he was pursued as a thief, with swords and staves, on the same Olivet, with the glory of his subsequent return to Jerusalem? In following out this contrast, Shimei, the Jew, would stand for the contemptuous and reviling unbeliever; Ittai, the Gentile, for the faithful disciple, who is ready to follow his Lord to prison and to death, and who, as he is partaker of his sufferings, will surely share in his eternal triumph.

THE END.