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I. LITERARY.

DAYBREAK ON THE NILE.

PROF. W. W. MOORE.

A green ribbon a thousand miles long, and ten miles wide; striped with a central line of silver; ravelled at the northern end and the threads spread like a half-open fan; this ribbon of verdure stretched directly south from the Mediterranean upon a limitless expanse of scorching, dazzling sand,—that, says Dr. W. B. Wright, was Egypt, the land “in which it seemed always afternoon.” By others the shape of Egypt has been likened to a lily with a crooked stem. At the upper end is a broad blossom, two hundred miles wide, more commonly called the Delta because of its resemblance to the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet; while a button of a bud projects from the stalk, a little below the blossom, on the left-hand side. This bud is the Fayoum, “a natural depression in the hills that shut in the Nile valley on the west, which has been rendered cultivable for many thousands of years by the introduction into it of the Nile water through a canal.” The long and crooked stalk of the lily is the Nile valley, which is a ravine ploughed through the rocky soil in prehistoric times by the great river itself. Well may Rawlinson say that no other country in the world is so strangely shaped, so long compared to its width, so hard to govern from a single centre.

And yet here was established one of the earliest governments known to history. When the curtain goes up on antiquity, it discloses a venerable civilization in the valley of the Nile with political institutions already organized. The fact that

THE PRICELESS LEGACY.

A SERMON TO YOUNG MEN.

BY REV. T. D. WITHERSPOON, D. D.

“And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.”—II. Kings ii:9.

Two men, in prophet's garb, have crossed the Jordan, and are climbing the rough hills of Gilead beyond. The elder of the two, who leads the way, with stalwart form, long, shaggy locks, and goat's hair mantle, is Elijah, the prophet of Gilead. He is coming back to the familiar landmarks of his childhood and youth. A little more than ten years have passed since he precipitated himself, like one of the impetuous torrents of his native hills, upon the idolatrous court of Ahab, startling the nation from its sinful slumber with the cry, “As Jehovah liveth, the God of Israel, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” Now his work is finished, his testimony is borne, he has anointed Elisha to be prophet in his room. Not far from him towers the height of Nebo where Moses the man of God had laid down his burden when his work was done, and the Tishbite is climbing the height from which in the rush of the whirlwind, as he well knows, he is to go up to God. Behind him, following with unequal pace, for he is no experienced mountain climber, is Elisha. From the early dawn he has struggled, through fatigue and exhaustion, to keep pace with the rapid strides of his leader. Time and again in tender consideration of his physical fatigue, Elijah has turned to bid him tarry by the wayside and allow him to make the long journey alone. But on each occasion the bursting heart of the disciple, who knows that his master in a few hours is to be “taken away from his head,” has found expression in those words of inimitable pathos, “As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee.” Steadily they pursue their way upward, until at length, “as they went on and talked, behold there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”

It was as they climbed the hill, and just before the dark storm-cloud swept down with its enfolded chariot, that Elijah turns and says to the devoted disciple whom he is to leave be-

hind: "Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee." And the parting benediction, the legacy of love, which the sorrowing disciple asks, is that contained in the text—not for riches, not for honors, not for exemption from the hardships and perils of prophetic life, not for gifts of person, or miraculous power does he plead,—but, "Let, I pray thee, a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." The men of God at whose feet we sat in early youth, have for the most part passed away. As they have crossed the Jordan, one by one, we have followed them at least far enough, like the sons of the prophets, to see from the distant hilltops the windstorm sweeping down, enfolding them with its black wing and bearing them away. In some cases their deaths have been so triumphant that we seemed through the dark folds to catch glimpses of the celestial chariot within. Here and there one of these venerable ones still lingers amongst us, with sandals upon his feet and staff in hand, awaiting the summons to go forth to his translation. Venerated representatives of a generation that is gone, we walk reverently behind them, as Elisha behind Elijah, and seem to hear the generation to which they belong addressing through them that which is now coming upon the stage saying, "Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken away from thee." And as there rise before us in memory the noble forms of the men and women who sat in the house of God in our childhood, who carried the great interests of the kingdom of Christ upon their hearts, and who gave the earliest impulse and guidance to our own religious experience, can the generation that now fills the pews and gathers about the communion-board do better than to reply in the words of Elisha, "Let, I pray thee, a double portion of thy spirit be upon me?"

I. For you will notice that the fulfilment of this prayer would not involve a slavish copying by one generation of the customs and methods of another. The prayer in Elisha's case was fulfilled. A double portion of Elijah's spirit came upon him. And yet Elisha was not changed into an Elijah. Whilst he took up the mantle that was symbolic of the prophetic office and wore it for a time, he never exchanged "the smooth, well-shorn head" that had provoked the derision of the children at Bethel for "the long, shaggy locks streaming down the shoulders of the great and awful Elijah." He did not keep aloof, like Elijah, dwelling in remote and inaccessible parts of



the mountains, but was a man of the people, dwelling among them, mingling familiarly with them, entering into all their joys and sorrows, and working miracles of beneficence in striking contrast with those of terror wrought by Elijah. He could not have transformed himself into an Elijah if he would. It would have been fatal to the success of his life-work to do so if he could. Elijah's work was that of a pioneer, who blazes roadways, dislodges savages, exterminates wild beasts, fells forests, and opens the way for the ploughshare of civilization. Elijah was a rough man, for he had rough work. But now Ahab was gone—Jezebel was gone—the false prophets were gone—the fallow ground of the national heart was broken up—Elisha's gentler ministry was needed to pulverize the soil and harrow in the grain and quietly reap the harvest. And as Elisha, in receiving a double portion of Elijah's spirit was not transformed into an Elijah, so we would not have the men and women of the coming generation mere servile imitators of the one that is gone. To have a double portion of its spirit, it is not necessary that we should wear the same cut of hair, or the same cut of clothes, that we should ride in stage coaches or light our houses with tallow candles because they did. We need not build our churches with high pulpits and straight-backed pews, or feel constrained to sing the same hymns to the same tunes, if we can find better ones. In all the externals of religion we not only may adopt ourselves, but ought to adapt ourselves to the progressive spirit of the age. Like Paul we should "become all things to all men, if by all means we may win some." But along with this progressive spirit which seeks new bottles in which to put the new wine of the kingdom, it is practicable and obligatory that, under all the peculiarities of feature and method which distinguish the new generation, the double portion of the spirit of the one that is gone shall abide.

II. Let us therefore inquire what this Elijah-spirit is which we would have rest upon our Elishas. There are certain grand characteristics of the spiritual life of Elijah which reappear in Elisha. The circumstances and methods of their exhibition may change with the changing times—but their essential qualities abide.

(1.) The spirit of the generation preceding ours, like the spirit of Elijah, was one of impregnable faith in God, and in

the truth of his revealed word. The days in which Elisha lived, were, like the days in which we live,—an era in which it was fashionable to doubt. Between the claims of the Jehovah-worship, and the claims of the Baal-worship, it was popular to maintain an attitude of irresolution and uncertainty. There was a small minority of the people, mostly of Phœnician origin, wholly addicted to the idol-worship. There was a smaller minority still, fully persuaded that Jehovah alone was God. Between them was the vast majority, fluctuating, wavering, irresolute, not knowing what they believed—not decided in their belief of anything. Very similar is the state of things confronting the young men and young women who enter the fashionable literary circles of today. The popular fads of the day are the agnosticism which does not know what it believes, and the theosophy which claims inspiration for itself and for all religions alike. Now in contrast with all this mere namby-pamby in religion, stands forth the deep-rooted and majestic faith of Elijah. He has convictions upon all these subjects that are clear-cut, sharply defined, unmistakable. He knows what he believes. He lived it with a faith that admits of no doubt, or conjecture. In these sublime verities his soul anchors itself, as in a quiet haven. He is a fast and firm believer. And so were the men and women of the generation that is gone. They had no doubts as to the existence of a personal God, as to the inspiration of scripture, as to the doctrine of the Trinity, of the incarnation, of the vicarious atonement, of the resurrection of the body, and the eternal punishment of the wicked. Contrast the calm equipoise of spirit of men whose hearts rested in the undoubting assurance of the great things of God, with the unrest of a soul drifting upon the icy sea of conjecture, doubting everything that is worthiest of believing, and you will see how eminently fitting it is for our young men and young women to lift this prayer of Elisha.

(2.) Elijah's spirit was characterized not only by deep-rooted convictions, but by the courage to defend them. In the midst of the court of Ahab, where the Baal-worship was enthroned in all its splendor, and supported by all the power and patronage of the kingdom, where his knee was the only one, in so far as he knew, that bowed to Jehovah, and where the wrath of a despotic tyrant might strike him down in a moment, his voice rings out like a trumpet asserting his loyalty to Jehovah in

those ever memorable words, "As Jehovah liveth, the God of Israel, before whom I stand, there shall not be rain or dew these years but according to my word." There is no doubt as to Elijah's position. No ambiguity in his language. No uncertainty or hesitancy in his stand. The metal rings clear. The trumpet gives no uncertain sound. Of such stuff also were our fathers made. You know just where to find them. If they had convictions they were not afraid or ashamed to avow them. They were no trimmers, no time-servers, no weathervanes to shift with the popular breeze, but great-souled men, who, convinced that they were right, would stand against the world. The times call for men who have the courage of their convictions—who will stand up for the old Bible, the old Sabbath, the old creeds and confessions, against the scoffs and jeers, the flippancies and follies of the fashionable literature of the day.

(3.) This Elijah-spirit for which we need to pray is one that sets high store by spotless reputation, and unsullied personal honor. Our fathers were very jealous of their reputation, keenly sensitive to the slightest imputation upon their honor. They were, no doubt, in many instances, too fiery and hot-headed in the avenging of what they regarded as reflections upon their character or impugment of their honor. We rejoice that the day of the duel and the "code of honour" is gone. As we recall the instances in which the soil of our country has been crimsoned with fratricidal blood shed on what is falsely called the field of honor, we are thankful that the authority of the bloody code is waning, and that it is soon to take its place with other relinquished customs that have been remanded to the barbarism of the past. But the delicate sense of honor, which through mistaken principles led men to the field of honor, the spirit that put character above price, that held it worthier to be poor with clean hands, than to walk the high places of the earth, with hands stained with bribery or with ill-gotten gain—this is the spirit for which we ought most devoutly to pray. This is a legacy which we may pray God that the noble men of a preceding generation may leave to ours in this era of bank defalcations and breaches of trust, when the doors of promotion so often open only to the hand that holds the golden bribe.

(4.) Finally the Elijah-spirit was one of consecration, supreme, whole hearted, all sacrificing consecration. Elijah's

mission was to stand before the Lord, as the servants stand uncovered in his master's presence and awaits his orders. Elijah waited to know God's will. It was not a question of cost or exposure, of hardship or peril. Whether to confront the four hundred and fifty priests of Baal, or to live upon ravens' food at Chereth, or to run as a crier before the chariot of the despotic Ahab, he had but to know God's will. His heart responded with the alacrity with which the needle responds to the attraction of the magnetic pole.

Our fathers were consecrated men. They made sacrifices for religion. Some of them knew what it was to suffer for conscience sake. Consecrated men stood in the pulpits. Consecrated men and women sat in the pews. We ask for our young people a double portion of their spirit of loving, fervent, self-sacrificing consecration. Other men have labored, and we have entered into their labors. Let us not be content to enjoy the fruits of their labor and sacrifices. Let us aim in our lives to sow the seed of self-sacrificing service, that shall spring up in harvests of beneficent influence to bless the generations that are to come. When our time comes to go up like Elijah to our reward, may the spirit we have exhorted before our fellow-men be such that the Elishas who follow us weeping, shall feel that their highest privilege would be to have a share in the spirit that has animated us, and shall find in our examples incentive to higher faith and holier consecration.