

DAVID:

SHEPHERD, PSALMIST, KING

F. B. Meyer, B.A.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“THOU DIDST WELL IN THAT IT WAS IN THINE HEART”

(II Samuel 7; II Chronicles 6:8).

There lives
A Judge, who, as man claims by merit, gives;
To whose all-pondering mind a noble aim,
Faithfully kept, is as a noble deed;
In whose pure sight all virtue doth succeed.”

- Wordsworth

WITH the assistance of Hiram, king of Tyre, a palace of cedar had been erected for David on Mount Zion. It was a remarkable contrast to the shelter of Adullam's cave, or even to any house he might have occupied during his stay at Hebron. It was a great contrast also to the temporary structure which served as a house for the Ark.

One day the impulse suddenly came to David to realize a purpose, the germ-thought of which had probably been long in his heart. Calling Nathan the prophet, now mentioned for the first time, he announced to him his intention of building a house for God. For the moment, the prophet cordially assented to the proposal; but in the quiet of the night, when he was more able to ascertain the thought of God, the word of the Lord came to him, and bade him stay the king from taking further steps in that direction.

The next day he broke the news to David with the utmost delicacy and gentleness. Indeed, in the account of his interview with the king, it is difficult to detect the sentence which contained the direct negative. The impression of the whole is that the offer was refused; but the refusal was wrapped up in so many assurances of blessing, in so much promise and benediction, that the king was hardly sensible of disappointment amid the rush of intense and overwhelming gladness which Nathan's words aroused.

**“Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? . . .
The LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house.”**

I. A CONCEPTION OF A NOBLE PURPOSE

It was a great thought that came to David. It was in part suggested by the exigencies of the situation.

After the Ark had come to its new home, Asaph and others had been appointed to celebrate, and thank, and praise the Lord, and minister before Him (I Chronicles 16:4-37); and it is supposed that, at this period, the twenty-four courses of priests were appointed, an arrangement which lasted to the time of our Lord. It is also supposed that the Levites were now organized twenty-four thousand to help the priests, four thousand as musicians and singers, four thousand as guards and watchmen; whilst the remainder were scattered throughout the land to teach the law, execute justice, and perform other public offices. An immense body of men was thus gathering around the Ark and palace, for whom it was necessary to find suitable head-quarters; and this no doubt partly urged David towards the fulfillment of his purpose. But surely there was a deeper reason; to show his love for God, to establish some monument of his reverence, devotion, and lasting gratitude.

It is thus, especially in young life, that great conceptions visit the soul; ideals of surpassing beauty cast a light forward upon the future; resolves of service for God and man brace the soul as the air from the glaciers does the dwellers in the plains; and all life assumes a nobler aspect, and is set to a higher key. Secretly that lad resolves to be a preacher, missionary, or philanthropist; and that girl, to be queen in an ideal home, or to go far hence to the zenanas of India.

“I will do this great thing for God,” the young heart says to itself, altogether heedless of sacrifice, tears, blood. The bugle-notes of lofty purpose ring out gladly, summoning the soul to noble exploit; and it is saved from the low levels which satisfy others by the immortal hope that has already gone forward to occupy the future.

Young people, never surrender your ideal, nor act unworthily of it, nor disobey the heavenly vision. Above all, when you come to the house of cedar, and God has given you rest, be more than ever careful to gird yourselves, and arise to realize the purpose that visited you when you kept your father’s sheep.

II. THE IDEAL IS NOT ALWAYS REALIZED

There is no definite “No” spoken by God’s gentle lips. He presses his promises and blessings upon us, and leads us forward in a golden haze of love, which conceals his negative. Like David, we cannot point out the word or moment of refusal, we are lovingly carried forward from sentence to sentence in life’s long speech of Divine care and bounty; and it is only in moments of review that we find that our purpose is not destined to work itself out just as we thought.

The plant is conscious of a great possibility throbbing within it; but somehow the days pass, and it does not come to a flower. The picture which is to gain immortality is always to be painted; the book which is to elucidate the problem of the ages is always to be written; the immortal song is always to be sung.

The young man is kept at his desk in the counting-house instead of going to the pulpit; the girl becomes a withered woman, cherishing a faded flower; the king hands on to his son the building of the house.

III. GOD EXPLAINS HIS REASONS AFTERWARDS

What we know not now, we shall know hereafter. Years after David said to Solomon his son, not born at this time, **“The word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars, thou shalt not build a house unto my Name”** (I Chronicles 22:8).

The blood-stained hand might not raise the temple of peace. It would have wounded David needlessly to have been told this at the time. It was enough to wrap up the Divine “No” in a promise of infinite blessing; but, as the years passed, the reason for God’s refusal grew clear and distinct before him. Meanwhile, David possessed his soul in patience, and said to himself: God has a reason, I cannot understand it; but it is well. Some day we shall understand that God has a reason in every “No” which He speaks through the slow movement of life. He would reveal it to us if we could bear it; but it is better not to pry into the mystery of his providence. He fences our questions, saying, **“If I will that he tarry, what is that to thee!”**

But the time will come, probably in this life certainly in the next when the word of the Lord will come to us; and from the eminence of the years we shall descry why He led us as He did.

IV. AN UNREALIZED CONCEPTION MAY YET BE FRAUGHT WITH IMMENSE BLESSING

Solomon completes the story:

“The Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house for my Name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart.”

David was a better man because he had given expression to the noble purpose. Its gleam left a permanent glow on his life. The rejected candidate to the missionary society stands upon a higher moral platform than those who were never touched by the glow of missionary enthusiasm. For a woman to have loved passionately, even though the dark waters may have engulfed her love before it was consummated, leaves her ever after richer, deeper, than if she had never loved, nor been loved in return. That a plant should have dreamt in some dark night of the possibility of flowering into matchless beauty, stamps it as belonging to a higher family than the moss that clings around the stump. **“Thou didst well that it was in thine heart.”**

The martyrs in the apocalyptic vision behold a day when their wrongs will be avenged; but they are told to wait, since God’s time had not come: in the meanwhile, white robes are given them. Their ideal was not yet, but it purified them, and bound them closer to the Christ. God will credit us with what we would have been if we might.

- He that has the missionary’s heart, though he be tied to an office-stool, is reckoned as one of that noble band;
- The woman at Zarephath, who did nothing more than share her last meal with the prophet, shall have a prophet’s reward;

- The soul that thrills with the loftiest impulses, which the cares of the widowed mother, or dependent relatives, stay in fulfillment, will be surprised one day to find itself credited with the harvest which would have been reaped had those seed-germs been cast on more propitious soil.

In the glory David will find himself credited with the building of the temple on Mount Zion.

V. DO THE NEXT THING

The energy which David would have expended in building the temple wrought itself out in gathering the materials for its construction. **“I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God . . .”** (I Chronicles 29:2, etc). If you cannot have what you hoped, do not sit down in despair and allow the energies of your life to run to waste; but arise, and gird yourself to help others to achieve. If you may not build, you may gather materials for him that shall. If you may not go down the mine, you can hold the ropes.

There is a fact in nature known as the law of the conservation of force. The force of the accumulating velocity of the falling stone passes into heat, of which some is retained by the stone, the rest passes into the atmosphere. No true ideals are fruitless; somehow they help the world of men. No tears are wept, no prayers uttered, no conceptions honestly entertained in vain.

Somehow God makes up to us. He stooped over David’s life in blessing. The promise made through Nathan was threefold: That David’s house should reign for ever; that David’s seed should build the temple; that the kingdom of Israel should be made sure. As we read the glowing words, we feel that they could only be realized in Him whom Peter declares David foresaw. There is only One of the sons of men whose reign can be permanent, and his Kingdom without end, who can bring rest to the weary sons of men, and build the true temple of God (Acts 2:30). But how great the honour that He should be David’s Son!

Then David the king went in and sat before the Lord, and he said, **“Who am I, O Lord God . . .”** (II Samuel 7:1 8). We have no words to characterize the exuberant outflow of his soul in that transcendent hour. There was no complaint that the purpose of his heart was thwarted, amid the successive billows of glory that swept over his soul. Does God withhold the less, and not give the greater? Does He refuse the offer we make, and not bestow some heavenly gift that enriches for evermore? Dare to trust Him: sit before Him; and let his assurances comfort thee. Claim that He should do as He has said, and know that not one good thing shall fail: **“For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron . . . The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.”**

~ end of chapter 23 ~

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