

# SAMUEL THE PROPHET

by

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### “CRUEL AS THE GRAVE”

(I Samuel 20:27)

“‘Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours;  
And ask them what report they bore to Heaven;  
And how they might have borne more welcome news.  
Their answers form what men Experience call;  
The Spirit walks of every day deceased,  
And smiles an Angel, or a Fury frowns.”

- Young

JEALOUSY has no scruples, and will not hesitate to violate the most revered sanctities. Her foot is ruthless; it will trample upon the relationship of home, the bonds of friendship and kinship, and the reverence which attaches itself to the house and worship of God. When once this passion has kindled, there is nothing on which it will forbear to feed nothing is too sacred to be fuel for its flame. Not that it often, under the restraint of Christian civilization at least, proceeds to murder; rather, by whispered suspicions, by the shrug of the shoulders, the movement of the finger, the furtive look, the suggestive question, it may destroy the peace which one has in husband, wife, child, or friend.

The home is one of the most sacred institutions of our human life. Originated by the knitting of spirit with spirit, the twain become one; and from that union springs the dower of blessed children, sowing the world with flowers, and making the race perennially young.

Such a home, in David's case, was due, under God, to Saul's own arrangement. Michal, his daughter, loved David; they told Saul, and it pleased him, and he gave her to David to wife. It was the burst as of a new spring-tide to those two young lives happy in each other's affection, though afterwards to be sadly alienated. Yet when David had evaded his javelin, and fled to the security of his home, saying to himself, At least my father-in-law will respect the sanctity of his daughter's love, the madly-jealous monarch sent messengers thither to watch him, and slay him in the morning, eliciting from the imprisoned singer the plaintive strains preserved in one of his Psalms (59).

**“Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God;  
Defend me from them that rise up against me.  
Deliver me from the workers of iniquity,  
And save me from bloody men.**

**“For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul;  
The mighty are gathered against me;  
Not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O Lord.”**

Michal knew her father too well to trust his clemency; she warned her husband of the imminence of death, and with woman-wit (and what will not women do for those they love!) aided him to escape, with her own hands letting him down from the window. It was due to her that the newly-formed home was not rendered desolate, and the light of its hearth quenched.

The sanctuary of religious worship is next in importance to the home, if not superior.

They stand or fall together. The one is generally the guarantee of the stability of the other. From the home as its forecourt, we pass into the house of God as our abiding-place. **“In my Father’s house,”** said our Lord, **“are many mansions”**; and may we not suppose that human homes are included amongst them?

But the case of Saul shows that jealousy will break down the precincts of the sanctuary as ruthlessly as of the home. David hastened to tell Samuel of the turn that things were taking, and of the grave suspicion which was forcing itself on his soul, that Saul’s attempts on his life were not the result of a disordered brain, but of a wicked and murderous will. For greater security Samuel led him to a cluster of booths, perhaps woven of osiers (called Naioth), where a number of young men were being trained for the prophetic office, and were living in the fullest manifestation of spiritual power in an atmosphere which seemed charged with spiritual electricity. Into this sacred assembly Saul forced three successive bands of messengers to arrest David; and finally, in hot wrath at their failure to return, came himself.

In after days it was distinctly remembered, how he came to the great well, or cistern, in Sechu, and asked with peremptory vehemence for Samuel and David. When one told him he went off to Naioth, but was stricken down before ever he reached the place; and, divested of his royal robes for a second time in his life, lay on the ground in a kind of trance, which lasted all that day and all that night.

We cannot read of this singular incident without being reminded of scenes in the life of John Wesley, of whom it is said, “While preaching on the common at Bristol a young woman sank down in violent agony, as did five or six persons at another meeting in the evening. One was a young lady, whose mother was irritated at the scandal, as she called it, of her daughter’s conduct; but the mother was the next who dropped down and lost her senses in a moment, yet went home with her daughter, full of joy. Bold blasphemers were instantly seized with agony, and cried aloud for the Divine mercy, and scores were sometimes strewed on the ground at once, insensible as dead men.

A Quaker who was admonishing the bystanders against these strange scenes as affectation and hypocrisy, was himself struck down as by an unseen hand, while the words of reproach were yet upon his lips.

The difference, of course, between these two phenomena lay in the result. In the case of the sunken down under Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, the outcome was a change of heart and life, together with a very blessed and exalted religious experience. In the case of Saul, the experience was as the early cloud and the morning dew, which goeth away.

Whatever the nature of the experience, whether physical, mental, or spiritual - and probably it was the latter - it was transient and evanescent, and left him really worse than it found him; for his jealousy next threatened the life of his noble son Jonathan.

The very fountains of a father's love and pride dry up before the volcanic fares of jealousy, and become the cause of even deeper and wider contortions. Jonathan was one of the noblest types of manhood. A truly princely soul was his. In any age, even of the most romantic age of chivalry, he would have stood easily, and by a universally acknowledged right, in the foremost rank. Whether in the court or on the battlefield, he shone as a star of the first magnitude. Grace and beauty must have adorned his person, whilst intrepid daring and courage characterized his behavior.

The darling of the people who once saved his life from his father, the chosen ideal of the maidens and youth of his time, wise in statesmanship, true in friendship, strong in resolution, there was everything to bind his father to him, for reasons of policy as well as of paternal pride. But these considerations had no weight with Saul, whilst jealousy of David laid heavy in the other scale.

He might be, as his friend eloquently expressed it in his funeral elegy, "**lovely and pleasant,**" swifter than an eagle, stronger than a lion; but Saul was prepared to sacrifice it all to the spirit of revenge.

It was on the monthly festival that this new vent of the volcano, which raged within Saul's heart, revealed itself.

It was the second day, and as on the previous one, David's seat was empty. Speaking of him derisively as "**the son of Jesse,**" as though accentuating his lowly birth, and ignoring the relationship that bound him to the royal family, the king asked Jonathan the reason of his absence; and when he received the answer on which the two friends had previously agreed, he fell into a grievous rage, abused Jonathan with the vilest epithets that an Eastern can use, who to-day vents his scorn on the mother of the object of his hate insisted on David's immediate arrest and execution, and ended by hurling his javelin at his noble son, who had interfered to mollify his wrath.

*But jealousy is also responsive to the worst possible suggestions.*

Of this there is an illustration in the following chapter (21). The fugitive fled this time to Nob, where Ahimelech, the high priest, presided over the relics of the ancient sanctuary. The suspicions excited in Ahimelech's mind by the unescorted and hasty advent of the king's son-in-law were removed by an evasive reply, and David was received with deference, supplied with bread, with the sword of Goliath, and such spiritual counsel as the ephod could afford.

The incident was reported to Saul, some months afterwards, as he was encamped “on the height” (marg). above Gibeah, waiting for tidings of his hated rival, that he might at once march with his household troops, composed of trusted Benjamites, men of his own tribe, to capture and slay him.

It seemed as though all the demands of the public service were set aside and accounted as dust in the balance so long as the vengeance of his soul was unappeased. The promulgation and execution of law, the hearing of suits, the defenses of the kingdom all were of no account in his estimation until this one purpose was fulfilled.

In the heat of his spirit he gave vent to the complaint (and jealousy so often takes on the tone of injured innocence), that all his servants were in conspiracy against him, that no one cared for him, that Jonathan was at the bottom of David’s conspiracy, and that each was cherishing the hope of his speedy downfall in order to receive possessions and promotions as the price of treachery from the hand of the son of Jesse. It was an unjust and injurious taunt.

Well might the Apostle James affirm that the tongue is often “**set on fire of hell.**” It was so here. Mad jealousy runs amuck, striking here and there, with absolute disregard of all that is most precious and true in human loyalty and love. Amid the silence that followed these undeserved reproaches, Doeg narrated what he had seen on that fateful day when he had happened to be detained at the Tabernacle for some ceremonial ablution or other rite, and had witnessed Ahimelech’s attentions to the king’s son-in-law.

Doeg’s malicious statement at once diverted the king’s suspicions from his courtiers to the priests; Nob was not far distant from Gibeah; and a peremptory summons, after a brief interval, brought Ahimelech and all his father’s house i.e., all the males of the high priest of the house of Eli into the presence of the king. In unmeasured terms Saul accused the whole of them of connivance with David for the overthrow of his throne and dynasty, and would give no heed to Ahimelech’s mild expostulations.

The high priest pleaded that though he had done what the king accused him of, he had done it quite innocently. He had always accounted David as one of the most faithful of Saul’s servants, had looked on him as being constantly entrusted with secret commissions, and had frequently made similar inquiries of God on his behalf, believing that in this he was serving the royal will. But he might as well have tried to stem the swelling of Jordan. The king’s mind was made up before he began his defence.

Yielding to an unholy impulse, which surely must have come to him from some malign and evil spirit, and to which his disordered nature was as susceptible as it had been to the spiritual afflatus of Naioth, he said, “**Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech thou and all thy father’s house.**”

The royal bodyguard shrank from executing the awful sentence; but Doeg, the Edomite, a foreigner, with his herdsmen, had no such compunctions, but forthwith fell on the unresisting priests, who were butchered one after another, until their mangled corpses were piled in heaps, and their white robes were saturated with their hearts blood.

It was a cowardly and dastardly deed, the tidings of which must have staggered the whole nation with dumb-foundering horror. All good men must have felt that the foundations of society were loosed, and that neither life nor liberty was safe while such frenzy was enthroned in their monarch's breast.

What a warning is here that we should not yield to the first intrusion of evil, lest the thought should lead to the act, and repeated acts to the habit, and habits congeal to character, and character become set in destiny!

*Jealousy is, however, subject to strong remorse.*

These scourges are the remonstrances of that blessed Spirit, who allows no soul to drift unwarned to the bottomless pit. Saul was very subject to these powerful eddies in the hurrying current.

When, in an earlier stage, Jonathan reminded his father of the priceless services that David had rendered, he hearkened attentively, relented, and pledged his royal oath that he should not be put to death (19:1-7).

When David spared his life in the cave, near the Fountain of the Wild Goat, amid the wild ravines that border on the western shores of the Dead Sea, refusing to put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and restraining his surprised and eager followers touched by a generosity which was wholly unexampled in those rude days, Saul lifted up his voice and wept, and poured out the pent-up generosity which had been natural to him in earlier days, but had for long been restrained.

**“If a man find his enemy,”** he said, **“will he let him go well away? Wherefore the Lord reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day”** (24:16-22).

And, when again he came in search of David and pitched his camp on the ridge of Hachilah, on the southern hills, and again, through David's clemency, his life was spared from the fatal plunge of the spear, which would not have needed a second thrust, Saul went so far as to say before all his camp; **“I have sinned; return, my son David, for I will no more do thee harm. I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly”** (26:21).

But, alas, in every case, his remorse was of brief duration, and failed to produce any permanent change in heart or purpose.

The fire still smoldered in his soul, awaiting the least breath of air to rekindle its flames. He might exclaim, **“Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail.”** But David not daring to trust him, **“said in his heart; There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines”** (I Samuel 26:25, 27:1).

*But the cure of jealousy is clearly set forth in these terrible chapters.*

Without doubt, Saul's surmises were well known to all the members of his family, and especially to Jonathan. Before ever Saul had blurted out his threat that Jonathan's kingdom would not be established, so long as the son of Jesse lived upon the ground, the heir-apparent had assured his friend that he knew the time would come when the Lord would cut off the enemies of David, every one from the earth (20:14, 15, 30, 31).

And later, while Saul was seeking David's life amid the ravines of Ziph, urged on in his madness by the treacherous Ziphites, Jonathan came to him, and strengthened his hand in God, and said: **"Fear not, for the hand of Saul, my father, shall not find thee, and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth."**

Jonathan, then, was even more affected by the choice of David than his father was. It was certain that he would never succeed to the throne. Respected and loved he might be, but enthroned never. But not a cloud of jealousy ever darkened the pure heaven of his love, or cast its shadow on the crystal lake of his peace. Perfect love had cast out hate ; we are told that **"he loved David as his own soul."**

If you are tempted to jealousy do not brood over the fell passion, or allow it to grow from less to more, but arise to deal with it at once, and with all the energy of your soul. Insist on loving the one of whom you have felt the unholy passion. You may reply that that is the very difficulty which confronts you - you cannot love. You complain that to bid you love, is like bidding a lame man walk. Granted; but you must distinguish between love and the emotion of love. It may be impossible for you to command the latter, but quite possible to practise the former, since love consists primarily, not in the feeling, but in the doing; not in emotions, but in strong acts of self-denial and service.

Find out the individual concerning whom you were beginning to feel jealous. Be on the alert to do kind acts, and speak kind words. Whenever you are tempted to utter a depreciating remark, arrest the words before they cross your lips, and utter some kindly ones instead. Whenever you find yourself on the point of speaking contemptuously or judging harshly, go out of your way to do some generous deed. Overcome evil with good, hatred with love. Do not wait to feel kindly, but act promptly and heartily. Go out of your way to confer a kindness. Above all, avoid aloofness. Throw yourself in that other's company; try to enter into the anxieties, trials, and temptations by which that life is torn and rent; cultivate a near and close friendship, and always offer and present yourself to God as a living sacrifice.

Believe also that God does hear you, that his Holy Spirit takes part with you against the enemy of your peace, and that He who has led you to desire perfect deliverance is prepared to work in you to will and do of his good pleasure.

~ end of chapter 22 ~

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