

# **ELIJAH, AND THE SECRET OF HIS POWER**

By

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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BESIDE THE DRYING BROOK**

(I Kings 17)

WE are studying the life of a man of like passions with ourselves - weak where we are weak, failing where we would fail; but who stood single-handed against his people, and stemmed the tide of idolatry and sin, and turned a nation back to God. And he did it by the use of resources which are within reach of us all. This is the fascination of the story. Prove to us that he acted by the spell of some secret which is hidden from us meaner men; convince us that he was cast in an heroic mold to which we can lay no claim - then we must lay aside the story; disappointment has overcast our interest: it is a model we cannot copy, an ideal we cannot realize; a vision that mocks us as it fades into the azure of the past.

But this is not the case.

- This man, by whom God threshed the mountains, was only a worm at the best.
- This pillar in God's temple was, by nature, a reed shaken by the breath of the slightest zephyr.
- This Prophet of Fire, who shone like a torch, was originally but a piece of smoking flax.

Faith made him all he became; and faith will do as much for us, if only we can exercise it as he did, to appropriate the might of the eternal God. All power is in God; and it hath pleased Him to store it all in the risen Savior, as in some vast reservoir; and those stores are brought into human hearts by the Holy Ghost; and the Holy Ghost is given according to the measure of our receptivity and faith.

Oh for Elijah's receptiveness, that we might be as full of Divine power as he was, and as able, therefore, to do exploits for God and truth! But, before this can happen, we must pass through the same education as he. You must go to Cherith and Zarephath before you can stand on Carmel.

Even the faith you have must be pruned, and educated, and matured, that it may become strong enough to subdue kingdoms, work righteousness, and turn to flight armies of aliens.

Notice, then, the successive steps in God's education of His servants.

#### **I. GOD'S SERVANTS MUST LEARN TO TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME**

This is an elementary lesson; but it is hard to learn.

No doubt Elijah found it so. Before he left Thisbe for Samaria, to deliver the message that burdened his soul, he would naturally inquire what he should do when he had delivered it. How would he be received? What would be the outcome? Whither should he go to escape the vengeance of Jezebel, who had not shrunk from slaying with the sword prophets less dauntless than himself?

If he had asked those questions of God, and waited for a reply before he left his highland home, he would never have gone at all. Our Father never treats His children so. He only shows us one step at a time - and that, the next; and He bids us take it in faith. If we look up into His face and say: "But if I take this step, which is certain to involve me in difficulty, what shall I do next?" the heavens will be dumb, save with the one repeated message, "Take it, and trust Me."

But directly God's servant took the step to which he was led, and delivered the message, then **"the word of the Lord came to him, saying: Get thee hence, hide thyself by the brook Cherith."**

So it was afterwards; it was only when the brook had dried up, and the stream had dwindled to pools, and the pools to drops, and the drops had died away in the sand - only then did the word of the Lord come to him, saying, **"Arise, get thee to Zarephath."**

I like that phrase, **"the word of the Lord came to him."**

He did not need to go to search for it; it came to him. And so it will come to you. It may come through the Word of God, or through a distinct impression made on your heart by the Holy Ghost, or through circumstances; but it will find you out, and tell you what you are to do.

**"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him. Arise and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do"** (Acts 9:6).

It may be that for long you have had upon your mind some strong impression of duty; but you have held back, because you could not see what the next step would be. Hesitate no longer. Step out upon what seems to be the impalpable mist: you will find a slab of adamant beneath your feet; and every time you put your foot forward, you will find that God has prepared a stepping-stone, and the next, and the next - each as you come to it.

- The bread is by the day.
- The manna is every morning.
- The strength is according to the moment's need.

God does not give all the directions at once, lest we should get confused; He tells us just as much as we can remember and do. Then we must look to Him for more; and so we learn, by easy stages, the sublime habits of obedience and trust.

## II. GOD'S SERVANTS MUST BE TAUGHT THE VALUE OF THE HIDDEN LIFE

**"Get thee hence and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith. "**

The man who is to take a high place before his fellows, must take a low place before his God; and there is no better manner of bringing a man down than by dropping him suddenly out of a sphere to which he was beginning to think himself essential, teaching him that he is not at all necessary to God's plan, and compelling him to consider in the sequestered vale of some Cherith how mixed are his motives, and how insignificant his strength.

So the Master dealt with His Apostles. When, on one occasion, they returned to Him, full of themselves and flushed with success. He quietly said, "**Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place.**"

We are too strong, too full of self, for God to use us. We vainly imagine that we are something, and that God cannot dispense with us. How urgently we need that God should bury our self-life in the darkness of a Cherith or a tomb, so as to hide it, and keep it in the place of death. We must not be surprised, then, if sometimes our Father says: "There, child, thou hast had enough of this hurry, and publicity, and excitement; get thee hence, and hide thyself by the brook - hide thyself in the Cherith of the sick chamber, or in the Cherith of bereavement, or in some solitude from which the crowds have ebbed away."

Happy is he who can reply, "This Thy will is also mine; I flee unto Thee to hide me. Hide me in the secret of Thy tabernacle, and beneath the covert of Thy wings!"

*Every saintly soul that would wield great power with men must win it in some hidden Cherith.*

A Carmel triumph always presupposes a Cherith; and a Cherith always leads to a Carmel. We cannot give out unless we have previously taken in. We cannot exorcise the devils which possess men, unless we have first entered into our closets and shut our doors, and spent hours of rapt intercourse with God. The acquisition of spiritual power is impossible, unless we can hide ourselves from men and from ourselves in some deep gorge, where we may absorb the power of the eternal God; as vegetation through long ages absorbed these qualities of sunshine, which it now gives back through burning coal.

- Andrewes had his Cherith, in which he spent five hours every day in prayer and devotion,
- John Welsh had it - who thought the day ill-spent which did not witness eight or ten hours of closet communion.
- David Brainard had it in the woods of North America, which were the favorite scene of his devotions.
- Christmas Evans had it in his long and lonely journeys amid the hills of Wales.
- Fletcher of Madeley had it - who would often leave his class-room for his private chamber, and spend hours upon his knees with his students, pleading for the fullness of the Spirit till they could kneel no longer.

Or - passing back to the blessed age from which we date the centuries - Patmos, the seclusion of the Roman prisons, the Arabian desert, the hills and vales of Palestine, are forever memorable as the Cheriths of those who have made our modern world.

Our Lord found His Cherith at Nazareth, and in the wilderness of Judea; amid the olives of Bethany, and the solitudes of Gadara. Not one of us, therefore, can dispense with some Cherith, where the sounds of earthly toil and human voices are exchanged for the murmur of the waters of quietness which are fed from the throne; and where we may taste the sweets and imbibe the power of a life hidden with Christ and in Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost. Sometimes a human spirit, intent on its quest, may even find its Cherith in a crowd; of such an one God is its all-sufficient abode, and the secret place of the Most High its most holy place.

### **III. GOD'S SERVANTS MUST LEARN TO TRUST GOD ABSOLUTELY**

We yield at first a timid obedience to a command which seems to involve manifest impossibilities; but when we find that God is even better than His word, our faith groweth exceedingly, and we advance to further feats of faith and service. This is how God trains His young eaglets to fly. At last nothing is impossible. This is the key to Elijah's experience.

How strange to be sent to a brook, which would of course be as subject to the drought as any other! How contrary to nature to suppose that ravens, which feed on carrion, would find such food as man could eat; or, having found it, would bring it regularly morning and evening! How unlikely, too, that he could remain secreted from the search of the bloodhounds of Jezebel anywhere within the limits of Israel! But God's command was clear and unmistakable. It left him no alternative but to obey. **"So he went and did according to the word of the Lord."**

One evening, as we may imagine, Elijah reached the narrow gorge, down which the brook bounded with musical babble toward the Jordan. On either side the giant cliffs towered up, inclosing a little patch of blue sky. The interlacing boughs of the trees made a natural canopy in the hottest noon. All along the streamlet's course the moss would make a carpet of richer hue and softer texture than could be found in the palaces of kings. And, yonder, came the young ravens - bringing bread and flesh.

What a lesson was this of God's power to provide for his child! In after days Elijah would often recur to it, as dating a new epoch in his life.

"I can never doubt God again. I am thankful that He shut me off from all other supplies, and threw me back on Himself. I am sure that He will never fail me, whatsoever the circumstances of strait or trial through which He may call me to pass."

There is strong emphasis on the word there - **"I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there."**

Elijah might have preferred many hiding-places to Cherith; but that was the only place to which the ravens would bring his supplies; and, as long as he was there, God was pledged to provide for him.

*Our supreme thought should be: "Am I where God wants me to be?" If so, God will work a direct miracle, sooner than suffer us to perish for lack.*

If the younger son chooses to go to the far country of his own accord, he may be in danger of dying of starvation among his swine; but if the Father send him there, he shall have enough and to spare. God sends no soldier to the warfare on his own charges. He does not expect us to attend to the duties of the field and the commissariat. The manna always accompanies the pillar of cloud. If we do His will on earth as in heaven, He will give us daily bread. **"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."**

We will not stay to argue the probability of this story being true. It is enough that it is written here. And the presence of the supernatural presents no difficulties to those who can say "**Our Father**," and who believe in the resurrection of our Lord JESUS. But if corroboration were needed, it could be multiplied an hundred-fold from the experience of living people, who have had their needs supplied in ways quite as marvelous as the coming of ravens to the lonely prophet.

A little boy, having read this incident with his widowed mother one wintry night, as they sat in a fireless room beside a bare table, asked her if he might set the door open for God's ravens to come in as he was so sure that they must be on their way.

The burgomaster of that German town, passing by, was attracted by the sight of the open door, and entered, inquiring the cause. When he learned the reason, he said, "I will be God's raven;" and relieved their need then and afterward.

Ah, reader, God has an infinite fertility of resource; and if thou art doing His work where He would have thee. He will supply thy need, though the heavens fall. Only trust Him!

#### **IV. GOD' S SERVANTS ARE OFTEN CALLED TO SIT BY DRYING BROOKS**

**"It came to pass after a while [margin, at the end of days] that the brook dried up."**

Our wildest fancy can but inadequately realize the condition to which the Land of Promise was reduced by the first few months of drought.

- The mountain pastures were seared as by the passage of fire.
- The woodlands and copses were scorched and silent.
- The rivers and brooks shrank attenuated in their beds, receding continually, and becoming daily more shallow and still.
- There was no rain to revive vegetation, or replenish the supplies of water.
- The sun rose and set for months in a sky, the blue of which was unflecked by a single cloud.
- There was no dew to sprinkle the parched, cracked earth with refreshing tears.

And so Cherith began to sing less cheerily. Each day marked a visible diminution of its stream. Its voice grew fainter and fainter; till its bed became a course of stones, baking in the scorching heat. It dried up.

What did Elijah think? Did he think that God had forgotten him? Did he begin to make plans for himself? This would have been human; but we will hope that he waited quietly for God, quieting himself as a weaned child, as he sang, "**My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him.**"

Many of us have had to sit by drying brooks; perhaps some are sitting by them now

- the drying brook of popularity, ebbing away as from John the Baptist;
- the drying brook of health, sinking under a creeping paralysis, or a slow consumption;
- the drying brook of money, slowly dwindling before the demands of sickness, bad debts, or other people's extravagance;
- the drying brook of friendship, which for long has been diminishing, and threatens soon to cease.

Ah, it is hard to sit beside a drying brook - much harder than to face the prophets of Baal on Carmel.

Why does God let them dry? He wants to teach us not to trust in His gifts, but in Himself.

- He wants to drain us of self, as He drained the apostles by ten days of waiting before Pentecost.
- He wants to loosen our roots ere He removes us to some other sphere of service and education.
- He wants to put in stronger contrast the river of throne-water that never dries.

Let us learn these lessons, and turn from our failing Cheriths to our unfailing Savior. All sufficiency resides in Him - unexhausted by the flight of the ages; undiminished by the thirst of myriads of saints, who drink yonder in the uplands, near its source, as we do in these lower lands of earth and time. "**The river of God is full of water.**"

**"He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but it shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."**

Drink abundantly, O beloved!

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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