

SAMUEL THE PROPHET

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

A GREAT SUNSET

(I Samuel 25:1)

“Life is only bright when it proceedeth
Towards a truer, deeper Life above;
Human Love is sweetest when it leadeth
To a more divine and perfect Love.”

- A. A. Procter

AT length Samuel came to his end, so far as this world, at least, was concerned; and was borne to his grave, as a shock of corn fully ripe. Though he had spent the last years in retirement, partly because of his great age, and partly because of the breach between the king and himself, he had never lost the love and respect of his people; and when, finally, the tidings sped through the country that he had fallen upon that blessed sleep which God' giveth to his beloved, the event was felt to be a national calamity, so that from Dan in the far north to Beersheba on the southern frontier, **“all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him, and buried him.”**

Josephus adds this significant paragraph to the record of Scripture:

“His moral excellence, and the esteem with which he was regarded, were proved by the continued mourning that was made for him, and the concern that was universally shown to conduct the funeral rites with becoming splendor and solemnity. He was buried in his own native place, and they wept for him many days, not regarding it as the death of another man or a stranger, but as that in which each individual was concerned. He was a righteous man, and of a kindly nature, and on that account very dear to God'.”

The impression made on his contemporaries lingered, as an afterglow, long after his sun-down. Again and again he is referred to in the sacred record.

I Chronicles 9:22 suggests that he laid the foundations of that elaborate organization of Levites for the service of the sanctuary which was perfected by David and Solomon.

I Chronicles 26:27, 28, asserts that he began to accumulate the treasures by which the House of the Lord was ultimately erected in the reign of David's mighty son.

II Chronicles 35:18 contains a passing reference to some memorable Passover Feast, which he instituted.

Psalms 99:6, and Jeremiah 15:1, commemorate the fragrance of his perpetual intercessions.

Acts 3:24, and 13:20, indicate what a conspicuous landmark was furnished by his life and work in the history of his people.

Hebrews 11:32, 33 places him in the long gallery of time, the niches in the walls of which have been filled one by one by the statues of those who have lived and wrought in the power of faith.

“The time would fail me to tell . . . of Samuel . . . who through faith . . . wrought righteousness . . .”

I. THE BLESSEDNESS OF HIS LIFE

Though Samuel’s career was an arduous one, it must have been fraught with the elements of true blessedness.

He was pre-eminently a man of prayer.

This was his perpetual resort. Whether for his people or his king; for the overthrow of the Philistines or the recovery of Saul from his evil courses he never ceased to pray; he would have counted it a sin if he had. **“God forbid,”** he exclaimed on one memorable occasion, **“that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.”** Many a sleepless night did he spend in tears and prayers for the king whom he had set up, and to whose hands he had committed the national interests as a precious charge.

It has yet to be seen, and probably we shall never know until the veil of eternity is lifted, whether the world has benefited most by our prayers or labours. It is more than likely that the men and women who have poured out perpetual supplications and intercessions have, like Epaphras, wrought most effectively. These have resembled mighty mountains, commencing with the skies, down whose slopes the perennial streams have poured, wreathed in rainbow vapour, and carrying the quality of the mountain soil into the plains.

All books, says an eloquent writer, are dry and tame compared with the great unwritten book prayed in the closet. The prayers of exiles! The prayers of martyrs! The prayers of missionaries! The prayers of the Waldenses! The prayers of the Covenanters! The sighs, the groans, the inarticulate cries of suffering men, whom tyrants have buried alive in dungeons, whom the world may forget, but God’ never! If some angel, catching them as they were uttered, should drop them down from Heaven, what a liturgy they would make!

Can any epic equal those unwritten words which pour into the ear of God’ out of the heart’s fulness? But these prayers have been deeds. In the words of James 5:16, they have availed much in their work. An energy passes from the holy soul, striving mightily in prayer, which becomes a working force in the universe, an indestructible unit of power, not apart from God’, but in union with his own mighty energies, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things.

Let us pray more, especially as life advances. Let us seek to be enrolled among those who call upon his name. Let us so live that men may shelter themselves in the thought of our intercessions, as Saul in those of Samuel.

“More things are wrought by prayer
than this world dreams of.”

Samuel was also characterized by great singleness of purpose.

He could court without flinching the most searching scrutiny (I Samuel 12:3). From those early days when, as a child, the vision of his childlike purity, contrasted with the evil of Eli's house, struck on the imagination of Israel, his had been a career of stainless and irreproachable honour.

The interests of his people had been his all-absorbing concern. For these he had spent himself with ungrudging devotion; and to find that he must withdraw from them in favour of another was the sorest grief of his life. The troubles which had befallen his land had only led him nearer God', and bound him more tightly to his fellow-countrymen; but when he discovered that they desired him to give up his position, it required all the gifts of God's grace, and all the qualities of a naturally noble nature, to sustain the shock with equanimity. But again his unselfishness, which had become the inner law of his life conquered; he set himself to secure the best successor which the age could afford, and humbly stepped down from the supreme place of power.

It was this beautiful humility and singleness of purpose that arrested the reverence of his people, and attracted their veneration. And it was to this trait of his character that we must attribute his perception of the divine purpose. The eye must be single in its intention if the whole body is to be full of light. Sir Percivale missed, but Sir Galahad beheld, the golden vision of the Holy Grail, because the one failed in what the other possessed.

O son, them hast not true humility,
The highest virtue, mother of them all;
Thou thoughtest of thy prowess and thy sins?
Thou hast not lost thyself to save thyself,
As Galahad.

Oh, to be so absorbed in a consuming passion for the glory of God' in the salvation of others, that we may be oblivious of ourselves, willing to take the second place, to be reckoned as of no account, to retire from the blaze of light that falls on the stage to the retirement and twilight of the cloister, where the progress of the days is marked by the clock-chimes, and the incidence of the shadows indicates the progress of the sun from solstice to solstice!

Samuel was also careful to construct.

When the whole land was disorganized, he began to lay the foundations of a new State. The time and care he expended on the schools of the prophets, his administration of justice in his itineraries, his appeals to the people in their convocations, formed a great policy which resulted in a consolidated and united people.

Do something in your life. Don't waste the precious time in criticizing others, but put a piece of solid work into the great fabric which is rising around us, and on which the new Jerusalem will one day be established. To criticize others is a less efficient way of setting them right than to do the same thing as they are doing, so much more quickly and deftly, that they are led to follow our example. I like the story of the man who, instead of criticizing the garden plots of his neighbours, made his own so beautiful that those on his right and left to the extreme ends were led one by one to do the same.

We will not cease from mental strife,
Nor shall our sword sleep in our hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In this our green and pleasant land.

As first of the prophets, as the connecting link between the first days of the settlement in Palestine and the splendor of Solomon's reign, by his unblemished character, by his sympathy and strength, by his evident fellowship with the God' of Israel from his boyish days to his old age, Samuel won from his people the most profound veneration; and it is not to be wondered at that one of them who owed everything to him, though he was unable to appreciate the majesty of his personality in the supreme hour of his desperate need, when all beside had deserted him, turned for help to the great prophet, though he had been withdrawn for a considerable time from earthly scenes, and cried, "**Bring me up Samuel.**"

II. HIS BLESSED DEATH

Death is not a state, but a step; not a chamber, but a passage; not an abiding-place, but a bridge over a gulf. None are dead. We should speak of the departed as those who, for a moment, passed through the shadow of the tunnel, but are living in the intensity of a vivid existence on the other side. "**God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him.**" None are dead, in the sense of remaining in a condition of deadness. Those whom we call dead are those who died, and passed through death into the other life. They put off their earthly tabernacle, but the spirit has passed into other scenes and activities for weal or woe, from which it would be an effort to tear itself, if summoned to return to the cares and responsibilities of this mortal existence; "**Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?**"

Remember how the Apostle Paul describes death. He speaks of his departure (II Timothy 4: 6). His word is a nautical term, and signifies the loosing of a ship from its moorings, not that it may reach harbor, but that it may go out from the harbor on to the broad bosom of the ocean.

This is the exact thought caught by Tennyson, when he sings;

"Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me;
And may there be no moaning of the bar
When I put out to sea.

“For though from out our bourne of time and place
The Hood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar.

To recall this sonnet is to be irresistibly reminded of another of the noble conceptions of death given by this great Christian poet so exactly in keeping with the Apostle’s thought in describing the passing of Arthur;

“So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan,
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs.”

This is death. It is a moving out of the soul from the stagnant waters and containing walls of the harbor, on to the great bosom of the ocean of eternity, where there is width and space, opportunity to explore to the furthest coast-lines of thought, and to attain to the golden shores of the blessed isles.

Speaking of the deaths of two men, whom we both knew and loved, a friend of mine has quoted a poem of Bret Harte, which is exceedingly beautiful and apposite, because it so exactly expresses the desire of the man who is in a strait betwixt two, knowing that the blessedness of this mortal life is far less than that of departing to be with CHRIST;

“But lo, in the distance the clouds break away!
The gates glowing portals I see;
And I hear from the outgoing ship in the bay
The song of the sailors in glee.

“So I think of the luminous footprints that bore
His comfort o’er dark Galilee,
And wait for the signal to go to the shore,
To the ship that is waiting for me.”

Remember how the Apostle Peter describes death. Speaking of his death, he uses the very word which had been employed in the conversation on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Moses and Elijah spake with the Master of the decease which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. “**After my decease**” (Luke 9:31; II Peter 1:15). The Greek word is *exodos*. There is only one other place in which that word occurs in the whole New Testament, when the reference is to the going out of the people from Egypt (Hebrews 11:22).

Death, under this conception, is a going out, not a coming in. It begins. If it ends, it ends the life of slavery and pain, and opens the way into a world where the development of the soul will be unrestrained.

Let us not dread to die. With most the soul is probably as unconscious of the act of death as of that of birth. It needs but the cracking of the frail shell, the withdrawing of the thin curtain, the slackening of the golden cord of life. In all probability we shall be surprised to find that Heaven has been lying all around us, throughout the day of our mortal pilgrimage, and that we had come (long before we died) into the midst of Mount Sion, had been walking the streets of the New Jerusalem, had been mingling with the innumerable hosts of angels and the spirits of just men made perfect.

The Lord justly claims the title, “**the Resurrection and the Life.**” He has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through His Gospel. We are not now left to the dim light of a surmise, of supposition, or of hesitating guess-work. We know that there is a life beyond death, because men saw Him after He was risen.

“We are witnesses,” says one of them, **“of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.”**

Yes, He lives; and because He lives we shall live also. He has gone to prepare mansions for us in the Father’s house. In that world we shall see his face; and, in company with kindred spirits, we shall do his commandments. Even now I suppose Moses and Aaron are among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his Name, “in the solemn troops, and sweet societies” of eternity.

~ end of chapter 23 ~

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