

ELIJAH, THE PROPHET OF FIRE

By

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Chapter 4

CHERITH AND ZAREPHATH

"And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee. So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. And she said, As the LORD thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah. And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him" (1 Kings 17:1-17)

"AND I WILL BRING THE BLIND BY A WAY THAT THEY KNEW NOT; I WILL LEAD THEM IN PATHS THAT THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN: I WILL MAKE DARKNESS LIGHT BEFORE THEM, AND CROOKED THINGS STRAIGHT. THESE THINGS WILL I DO UNTO THEM, AND NOT FORSAKE THEM." - Isaiah 42:16. [48]

THE Prophet of Israel had now been nearly a year in his desert retreat. There he remained passive regarding his future disposal, leaving the evolution of events in the hands of Him who

had given His angels charge over him to keep him in all his ways. He knew that he was under good and gracious guidance. So long as the brook murmured by his side, and the winged retainers supplied his table, he took no unnecessary thought for the morrow, assured that the needed strength would be apportioned for each day.

But as this period was expiring, the brook began to sing less cheerily; once a full rill or cascade, which, night by night, was wont to lull him asleep, it becomes gradually attenuated into a silver thread. In a few days it is seen only to trickle drop by drop from the barren rock - until, where pools of refreshing water were before, there is nothing now left but sand and stones. So long as the rivulet flowed, it was a pledge and guarantee of GOD's watchful providence and continued care.

True to His word, the Lord had hitherto, in this "**Valley of Baca**" made for His servant "**a well.**" But now, as each new morning recalls a diminished supply, till at last song of bird and song of stream are alike silenced, it seems as if the Divine promise had failed, and He who "**sendeth the springs into the valleys which run among the [49] hills,**" had "**altered the word which had gone forth out of His mouth!**"

To one, indeed, like Elijah, with his naturally impetuous, and, it may be, impatient temperament, no trial could have more thoroughly tested the strength and reality of his faith than this.

Though he could brace himself for great exigencies,- though he could face Ahab undaunted, and hurl his malediction in the face of angry courtiers and idolatrous priests,- he was not so well fitted to bear with equanimity this slow wearing-out ordeal,- watching the sacramental sign and token of Jehovah's faithfulness gradually decreasing and filtering away;- marking day by day the subsidence of the water in the little pools around, till his cherished shelter turned out no better than all other earthly refuges - a refuge of lies.

May we not imagine injured pride and unbelief doing their best to whisper in his ear, 'Prophet of Fire! the pledge of the Divine presence has failed thee; the altar-flame has forsaken thy rocky shrine; thou hast lost thy Protector now. Go, GOD - deserted one! - take thy staff and mantle; - find out for thyself some safe retreat from this burning drought; - the Lord has forgotten to be gracious, and in anger He has shut up His tender mercies!' But "**he staggered not through unbelief.**"

"**The man of like passions**" successfully combated his own weakest point - his natural failing of hastiness and irritability. During these last solitary musings at Cherith, he clings only the more ardently to his life-motto and watchword - "**The LORD liveth;**" and waits in calmness and submission an answer to the silent Prayer - "**What wilt Thou have me to do?**"

Nor does he wait in vain. The old well-known voice, in due season,; [50] breaks upon his solitude with a new communication of grace and mercy.

And has not this been often GOD's way and method of dealing?

It was when the disciples were in their hour of extremity, during the storm on Gennesaret, giving themselves up to the hopelessness of despair, that, "**in the fourth watch of the night,**" when

darkness was deepest and danger greatest, the great Deliverer appeared on the crested wave - **"Jesus went unto them walking on the sea."**

It was when the bereft of Bethany had, as they imagined, consigned the fond treasure of their affections to everlasting silence; and as they were sitting in their pillaged home, wondering at the mysterious delay on the part of the one Being who could alone have arrested that winged arrow which had laid low the pride of their hearts; - at that crisis-hour, the great Conqueror of death appears, to revive the smouldering ashes of their faith, and reanimate the joy and prop of their existence!

Yes, how often, in the experience of His people still, does GOD thus delay His succouring mercy to the very last, that they may see His hand, and His hand alone, in the gracious intervention or deliverance, and be brought to say, with grateful, adoring thankfulness - **"Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence."**

And even when He does not appear visibly to succour; - when some fond brook of earthly comfort is left to dry in its channel - or when deliverance from some threatened earthly trial or threatened evil is not vouchsafed, it is in order that we may, the more significantly and submissively, listen to His Own voice saying to us, as He did to Elijah,- **"Arise."**

For, observe the difference between the failing of the world's [51] consolations and refuges and joys and those of the true Christian:- when the worldly man mourns his dried-up brooks, he has lost his all - he has nowhere else to turn: there is nothing left him but the tear of despair - the broken heart - the grave.

But in the case of the Believer, when one comfort is withdrawn, his GOD has other spiritual comforts for him in reversion. Miserable indeed are those who have nothing but the poor earthly rill to look to! For, sooner or later, this must be its history, (as multitudes, in their Cheriths of sorrow, can bear testimony, **"And it came to pass, after a while, that the brook dried up!"**)

But even with the new provision GOD has made for His Prophet, there comes a fresh trial of faith. The new arrangement made for his safety and sustenance is the last which, in his meditative moments, Elijah would have imagined.

He is commanded to go to Zarephath, a distant city in the territory of Phoenicia.

Had he been told to take temporary refuge in some of the Trans-Jordanic kingdoms, amid the tribes of the Amorite mountains, or amid the freebooters of Arabia - the roving hordes of the desert - it would not have been so startling nor so strange to him.

But in order to reach this distant Sarepta, he must, in the first instance, traverse nearly a hundred miles of the blighted famine-stricken land of Israel; subjecting himself to want and peril among a people to whom his name was hateful and terrible, as identified with their sufferings. And, it might seem more unaccountable still - that the selected place of his refuge should be in the very kingdom which was responsible for the evils which had overtaken his unhappy country:- Phoenicia, the land of Baal - the old home of Jezebel - itself at that moment suffering [52] under the judgment of God; for over it also the dark wings of the Angel of Famine were brooding, as

well as over the adjoining territory of the Hebrews.

The very directions regarding his sustenance might have been humiliating to a proud heart. There was something romantic and prophetlike about the appointments of Cherith,- the rocky chamber with its crystal brook and sable-plumaged attendants.

Elijah was there a privileged unit of the nation, getting, as his forefathers in the Sinai wilderness of old, day by day the divinely-appointed manna and the running stream. He would perhaps have learned to love his brook as much as Jonah did his gourd and his bower, and be "**exceeding glad**" for it. But now he has to go as a mendicant, an expatriated pilgrim, to seek his food and home at the hands of a Gentile stranger - a heathen of a strange country - an impoverished widow.

But there is no hesitancy on his part - "**The word of the Lord,**" (the living Jehovah,) had come unto him, saying - "**Arise! get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Sidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman to sustain thee.**"

The voice is no sooner heard than obeyed. Casting his mantle around him, forth he goes on the long and perilous journey,- travelling probably by night to elude observation and avoid danger. Depressed, indeed, he could not fail at times to be, during that long and trying route, were it from nothing else than seeing the visible traces of GOD's judgment on every side, among the people to whom he was linked by imperishable ties.

For himself, he knew that the Lord was his keeper. His long and faithful guardianship of him at Cherith, with all the encouraging memories of that secluded home, would brace [53] his faith and inspire confidence for the future.

He had there learned that all things are possible to him that believeth.

We may imagine the girded traveller - lonely, yet confident,- "**sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing**" - "**cast down, but not destroyed,**" - cheering his spirit as he pursues his way with the words of the great minstrel of his nation - "**O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.**"

Let us, like Elijah, be prepared for the Divine will, whatever it be. It may be mysterious. The summons in our case, as in his, may be to get us from some cool shady retreat,- some brook of refreshing,- to a Zarephath, (lit., "**a place of crucibles**" or "*furnaces*" for melting metal). ¹

But there is some wise and gracious necessity in all GOD's dealings.

We shall come to understand and adore their yet undiscovered, undeveloped meaning. Let us, meanwhile, hear the voice addressed to us, which was addressed to a loving disciple of a future age - "**Said I not unto thee, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of GOD?**"

There is surely no small comfort in the thought, suggested alike by Cherith and Zarephath, that the bounds of our habitation are divinely appointed. Our lots in life - our occupations, our positions, our dwellings - what the fatalist calls our destinies - what heathen mythology

attributed to the Fates,- all this is marked out by Him who "**seeth the end from the beginning.**"

"**The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord**" (Proverbs 16:33).

- It is He who takes us to Cherith - a place of solitude - a distant dwelling - it may be a distant land.

- It is He who takes us from solitude - from grove and woodland and murmuring brook,- from the green fields of childhood and youth, and brings us to some busy Zarephath - some thronged city with its "stunning tide of human care and crime."

- It is He who takes us to our sweet shelters of prosperity with their sparkling brooks of joy.

- It is He who, when He sees meet, hurries us into the "house of crucibles" - "the melting furnaces."

He gives the gourd - He sends the worm. Oh, it is our comfort to know, in this mysterious, raveled, manifold life of ours, that the Great Artificer has the threads of existence in His own hands - weaving the complex pattern, evolving good out of evil and order out of confusion.

He who sent Elijah alike to Cherith and Sarepta for his own good, as well as the good of others,

- sent Onesimus, the runaway slave, to Rome,
- and Lydia, the seller of purple, to Philippi,
- and Zaccheus, the tax-gatherer, to Jericho.

But one and all of these, and other notable examples, were brought thither for their souls' everlasting welfare; and the new song was put into their lips - "**Blessed be the Lord, for he hath shewed us his marvellous kindness in a strong city!**"

How many still can tell the same. Their choice of abode seemed to them something purely arbitrary and capricious. A mere trifle seemed, as they thought, to have determined or altered their whole future.

But the finger of GOD had, unknown, been pointing. The inarticulate voice of GOD had been saying, as to Elijah, "**Arise.**" "**He led them** [55] forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works unto the children of men."

At last the Prophet has crossed the border territory, descending the mountain slope towards the southern entrance of the town.

SAREPTA or ZAREPHATH, the modern Surafend, occupied a long ridge, overlooking the blue waters of the Mediterranean on one side, while its view northwards was bounded by the snow-capped summit of Hermon. ² Its streets were hallowed by the footsteps of the seer of Israel; and, in after times, by the Presence of a Greater than he. For the probability is that in this same city, the Syrophoenician who pleaded so earnestly for her daughter, had her faith commended, and her

child restored. [56]

Close by the city gate, Elijah beheld a woman, with sunken cheek and pallid eye, busied in gathering a few broken branches dried and withered by the long-continued drought. The wearied traveller accosts her. He solicits what in the circumstances was no ordinary boon, "**Fetch me,**" said he, "**a little water in a vessel that I may drink.**"

Probably no drop of the refreshing element had crossed his lips since he drained the last mouthful from the cleft at Cherith. From the peculiarity of his raiment, this Gentile stranger seems at once to recognise him as a prophet,- not of Baal, but of the GOD of Israel, and the adjoining kingdom.

She speaks of Jehovah as his GOD;- probably cognisant, too, of the fact that it was the GOD of the Hebrews who had sent the famine. ³

She at once assents to the request he had made. When on her way, however, for the draught of water, he recalls her by preferring a more startling petition, that she bring along with it "**a morsel of bread.**"

The demand unlocks and unseals the hidden story of her woe. With the tear in her eye, she avows her inability. She is preparing for a sad and solemn future. That sunset in the western wave, is among the last her eye is to see! And had it been her own fate alone that was then engrossing her thoughts, these hot tears would not flow so fast. But there was another fond life in her home. One child had been left to cheer her widowhood.

Why is he not here with her now, to help that last gathering for the evening meal? We can dimly surmise the reason. The parent had been able to buffet hitherto these long months of wasting famine; but the youthful sufferer, we may imagine, had sunk prostrate on the couch, from which, the heart that fondly doted upon him, feared he was never to rise.

The few remaining crumbs in the empty barrel are barely sufficient to make one last meal in the cruse of olive oil, there are but a few drops [57] left to spread on the cakes. She is preparing to dole out the last pitiful morsel.

Her emaciated hands are now engaged in gathering a little fuel to bake the scanty remains of her exhausted cupboard; then, casting herself by the side of her boy, she will calmly wait the slow lingering departure.

The Prophet turns to her, and says - "**Fear not; go and do as thou hast said.**" He tells her, however, to bake first a cake for him with the remnant of the flour,- "**Make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son: for thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain on the earth.**"

With alacrity she obeys the voice of the Hebrew stranger. She hies her to her lowly abode, little dreaming of the blessing in store for her from that dust-covered seer of Israel; and that she was yet to experience the truth of the gospel saying, "**Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of**

these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Let us now proceed to gather a few special lessons from this new chapter in the Prophet's history, both in connection with the conduct of the widow; and also in connection with the dealings of the widow's GOD.

Mark, in the case of the widow, her disinterested kindness.

Place ourselves for a moment in her position. A starving, dying woman, reduced to earth's last morsel, with her own and only child sinking fast in her desolate cot under the grip of biting famine. What rare unselfishness! when this [58] stranger prophet (an alien in blood and in religion) comes and reveals himself a fellow-sufferer,- the tear of commiseration steals to her wan cheek and sunken eye.

No miserable exclusive feelings of difference in creed and country are suffered to interfere with the outflowings of tender compassion. Great was the sacrifice, in that season of burning drought, to part with a cup of water; and far more to surrender some of the crumbs of that rapidly-exhausting barrel. But with a combination of faith and unselfishness which have few parallels in Scripture, she hastens, in obedience to Elijah's request, to relieve his distress, and permit him to share the last pittance of her cupboard.

How lovely, in this selfish world, are such pictures of unselfish consideration for the wants, and sufferings and woes of others!

How many are there who, if it be well with themselves, have no care for the necessities of their neighbours:- who, if their own families are prospering, and their own cup filling, and their own circle uninvaded by want and sickness, listen with apathetic ear to the appeal of the helpless,- turn with averted look from the pleading claim of tattered rags and bleak homes!

This woman's generosity was a freewill-offering, in the midst of her own intense sufferings; when pinching poverty was blanching her lips and ploughing deep furrows in her cheek. Alas! is it not to be feared - is it not to be confessed with shame (I speak regarding cases of virtuous poverty, of well authenticated want and suffering) - that a similar generosity and kindness is often withheld, even where the giving involves no sacrifice - no diminution of daily comforts?

How frequent is the miserable spectacle, of men becoming more hardened and [59] incased in selfishness with the very increase of their worldly substance;- GOD storing their granaries with plenty, speeding their wheels of industry, wafting their ships with propitious gales, whilst they only pile up more greedily the gilded heap.

And even if, in some such cases, there be entertained an undefined purpose of posthumous liberality; they miss the present blessedness of being almoners of the Divine bounty, and of lighting up the bosoms of the wretched and outcast with a sunshine of joy. Selfishness is the irreconcilable antagonist of Christianity. He cannot be a Christian who lives for self. **"Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"**

Let us learn, from the case of the widow of Zarephath, the power of feeble influences. She was a poor, lowly, depressed, hunger-stricken woman,- unknown, perhaps, beyond the doors of her neighbours in the Phoenician town. Yet see exemplified that great power in moral dynamics - "the power of littles." It was but a little incident this, in a little-known life - the giving a little morsel of bread - and a small cup of water,- a single word, and no more, of strengthening and comfort. But how manifold and important the results of that one little act!

To herself - the prolongation of her own natural life, and that of her son; - the commencement, as we believe, in both, of a nobler spiritual existence - GOD blessing her household, like that of Obed-edom of old.

To the Prophet - introducing him in that time of drought and famine to a congenial home: [60] perhaps his wavering faith revived and confirmed, not only by witnessing the unselfish love and kindness of this heathen woman,- but by hearing, in that heathen land, and from heathen lips, what he had not listened to for a whole year until now,- his own life-root - to falling like heavenly music on his ear - "**The Lord thy God, Jehovah, liveth!**"

To the Church of God - in having on record this beautiful example of simple faith and unselfish deed.

- How many, in the extremity of want, have learned a lesson of trust and hope from reading of the widow of Sarepta!

- How many a bereft child of poverty, in the depth of her agony, with a blank future before her and her little ones, has risen from this page blotted with her tears, thanking GOD, and taking courage!

Wheresoever this Bible is read, or this gospel is preached, there what this woman has done shall be told as a memorial of her.

Never despise the power of feeble influences.

Often when the giant's spear, the greaves of brass, and the panoply of iron could do nothing, GOD has made use of the sling and brook-pebbles, the "**broken pitchers,**" and "**trumpets of rams' horns.**"

It is worthy of note that this 'power of littles' is specially illustrated in Holy Writ, in connection with two widows;- the one in the Old Testament and the other in the New. The widow of Sarepta, giving the last handful of her drained barrel:- the widow at the temple-treasury, casting in her two mites. Never let anyone say, 'I am of no use in the world - I can do no good - I can exercise no influence;- GOD has clipped my wings - I am like a chained bird - I would soar, but I cannot! - this cage of poverty or of sickness keeps me shut up from the elements of activity [61] and usefulness.'

Imprisoned one, "if you cannot soar, you can sing." If yours is the cage and not the wide blue sky, you can warble your song of cheerfulness and submission to the will of GOD. Remember,

the song of the caged and captive bird has put, before now, music and high resolves into the patriot's heart. Nay, nay,- the widow who, it may be in the midst of poverty and wretchedness, exercises faith in GOD; - the stricken sick one, laid for years on years on a couch of languishing, yet making that couch a radiating centre of holy influences,- can preach a silent sermon which will arrest and convince, when all the eloquence of press and pulpit may be but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

- The domestic servant preserving intact her own honesty in the midst of purloining associates,
- the schoolboy defending purity and virtue, and frowning on vice in the midst of his playmates;
- the shopkeeper foregoing the tempting bribe or gain, in which sterling honour might be tainted or compromised;
- the Sunday-school teacher gathering the waifs of poverty, and vice, and neglect, week after week, under his kindly eye;
- the district-visitor leaving the kindly word and kindly advice in the homes of the poor, or giving the kindly smile or kindly grasp when the timid word cannot come;
- the lowly working man gathering his children on his knee, and imbuing their young hearts with the never-to-be-forgotten lessons of early piety:
- these are but illustrations and exemplifications of those countless little efforts - feeble influences - which have made the world greater and wiser and happier.

Mechanical science has to make the confession that she has lost the secret of those great powers which of old poised in mid-air the blocks of huge stone we still gaze upon [62] with wonder in the pyramids of Cairo, and in the gigantic temples of Memphis and Thebes.

But in moral dynamics the power of littles still remains. That lever is in everyone's possession.

If relics are disowned and repudiated in our Protestant Church, there are relics, better than material ones, to which we love to cling. That Barrel of meal and that Cruse of oil have been handed down for 3000 years as moral relics - heirlooms to the Church - lowly but significant trophies of faith, and love, and humble trust, which she delights to suspend on the walls of her temple!

Go back in thought to that widow of Sarepta, and take courage from her example in doing little things for GOD and for His people. Hear her song of praise and thankfulness:

"Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Commit thy way unto the Lord. Trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday" (Psalm 37:3-6).

But to pass from the widow to the widow's GOD The first and most prominent reflection suggested is, the sovereignty of grace. This was the great lesson the Saviour himself drew from the incident, on the occasion of His preaching in the synagogue of Nazareth. **"In the days of Elias,"** He says, **"when the heavens were shut up, and when great famine was throughout all the land, there were many widows in Israel."** GOD could have hidden His prophet in the home of one of these. It might have been the cupboard of a Hebrew widow he replenished:- her home he rescued from famine,- her heart he made to sing for joy,- the story [63] of her faith and

kindness He selected to go down in enduring memorial to the Church of the future.

But He who acts how and when and as He pleases, directs His servant across the boundaries of the chosen kingdom, to the unlikeliest spot and home on the shores of the Great sea. He sends him amid one of the heathen races,- to Baal's land, and to an idolatrous worshipper of Baal's shrines. He takes the children's bread and casts it to Gentile dogs!

Let us adore the freeness of His mercy.

GOD's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. Man has generally some reason for conferring his favours - some claim arising from person or pedigree, from character or attainments. But His sole motive in conferring favours is His own free and gracious purpose. **"It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."**

- He takes a Manasseh filling Jerusalem with blood, and makes him a monument of forgiveness.
- He takes a Saul breathing out his blasphemies, and converts him into the great Apostle.
- He takes a Samaritan leper and fills his tongue with gospel praise, while the nine of Jewish birth and privilege go thankless and ungrateful to their homes.
- He takes a rude heathen jailer,
- or an unprincipled tax-gatherer of Jericho,
- or a profligate woman of Capernaum,
- or a felon in his last agonies,

while many encircled with the halo of natural virtues or with the prestige of religious education and training, are left to perish in their ungodliness and unbelief and pride!

He took as the founders of His Church and the ambassadors of His cause - not philosophers of Rome, nor polished Greeks, nor learned Rabbis,- but a handful of unlettered fishermen from the villages of [64] half-heathen Galilee.

And it is the same principle we recognise still in His dealings.

He often passes by the great, the powerful, the rich, the learned, the educated - ay, even the virtuous and the amiable; and He crowds the marriage supper of the King,

- from the highways and hedges,
- with the poor and the illiterate,
- the outcast and prodigal.

He often leaves palace and castle and stately mansion and lettered hall, and enters the humble cottage and the poor man's garret.

He leaves the nominal British Christian, the polished European, and He takes the poor Bechuana of Africa, or the cannibal of the South Seas, and converts these children of darkness into children of light.

He leaves noble vessels to lie on the sands on which they have been stranded, and He takes the

mean unsightly craft around them and sets them floating on the waters.

May not this be the solemn reflection of some whose eyes fall on these pages? My old companions - those at one time better and more promising than I - have been long ago scattered as wrecks on life's ocean, entangled in the swirling vortex, and hurried down into nameless depths of infamy.

And how is it that I am made to differ? - that that tale of misery and ruin - that which, in the case of others, has broken a parent's heart, whitened his hairs with the snows of premature age, and sent him sobbing and halting to the grave,- how is it that I have escaped these dread temptations; and that, while others have broken loose with a worse than maniac's madness, I am this day sitting at the feet of JESUS, clothed and in my right mind?

Not unto me, O GOD! not unto me, but unto Thy name be all the glory!

I read the reason, written in gleaming characters, in the heights and depths of Thine [65] own Infinite love. By Thy grace (Thy free, sovereign, unmerited grace alone) I am what I am!

Let us farther learn GOD's recompense of unselfish kindness.

So far as we can infer, this poor woman assented to the appeal of the famished, fainting Prophet, without any hope of recompense or reward. Those who are themselves suffering calamity are generally most ready in their straitened circumstances to lend a kindly ear to the woes of others.

Just as we may have seen that the mother, with naked feet and hungry children, singing her mournful song on the streets, is most willingly and generously relieved by those who have known of sad personal experience, what similar exigencies are, the widow of Zarephath went back for the vessel of water to assuage the Prophet's thirst with the heavy thought and certainty burdening her heart, that the hours of her own life and that of her boy were numbered.

But GOD is not unmindful of her work of faith and her labour of love in that she ministered to one of His saints.

Hers was the "**scattering and yet increasing.**" She had paid her little mite into the bank of Heaven: in lending to His servant, she had lent to the Lord; and back comes the hundredfold interest,- the payment with a divine munificent usury.

She experienced, morally and spiritually, the reality of a Gospel promise, afterwards uttered by the lips of Truth itself,- "**Do good and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest.**" The barrel and cruse are replenished;- the shadows of death are warded off from her home;- and Heaven's blessing descends, better than all.

In giving of her earthly pittance, this [66] idolatress learned, that the GOD of Israel was not like Baal, but a living Being in whom the lowly, the poor, and helpless might trust. In exchange for the "**daily bread which perisheth,**" she received the nobler recompense of the heavenly. Her lone heart was taught a truth which no Baal could utter - "**Thy Maker is thy husband, the Lord**

of hosts is his name, and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel." "She and he and her house did eat many days: and the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which he spake by Elijah."

The old economy dealt largely in temporal blessings.

Good deeds then, were generally acknowledged by temporal recompense. It is different under the new economy. Its recompenses and rewards point rather to the future. But this does not lessen or impair the truth and certainty of the Divine promises:

- **"Them that honour me, I will honour"**

- **"Give, and it shall be given unto you, good measure pressed down and shaken together and running over"**

- **"If thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday . . . And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought."**

If not now, there is a time of recompense at hand for all pure, lofty, beneficent, unselfish, disinterested kindness done in CHRIST's name, and out of love for Him and His people.

On the Great Day of GOD, what is to be the test and evidence of a saving personal interest in JESUS? What is the touchstone which the great Saviour-Judge Himself is to apply in the case of the myriad crowd sisted at His bar? - **"I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was [67] a stranger, and ye took me in . . . Inasmuch as ye did it" to the greatest, such as that Prophet, or to the least, such as that famishing Lazarus at the gate, "ye did it unto ME!"**

And if there be one other thought yet suggested to us, it is this - GOD's tender care of the Widow.

How especially was the Widow's case provided for under the Old Testament economy:- **"Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all to me, I will surely hear their cry." "When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, and for the fatherless, and for the widow . . . When thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow."**

Who can fail to remember, in New Testament story, the scene outside the gate of Nain? How kindly and beneficently the great Sympathizer approaches the chief mourner, and utters first the gentle **" Weep not;"** and then the word of power which brings back her loved one to her side!

There were, we may well believe, other homes and other parents in Galilee similarly bereft at that moment and needing succour. What took the Saviour's steps to the city, of Nain? Why select that funeral crowd amid the many wending their way at that doleful sunset hour to the long home? Are we wrong in surmising that, had any disciple asked the question,- had they ventured

to [68] probe His heart of love,- He would have given, in all probability, the touching reason assigned by the Evangelist, when his enumeration of the elements and ingredients in that bereft one's sorrow rises to this climax,- "**And she was a widow?**"

That Divine love and sympathy remain unchanged. GOD is to this hour, as He ever was, "**a judge of the widow in His holy habitation.**" The name of that Saviour who stood at the gates of Nain, and mingled His own tears with the widow's there, is "**Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.**"

GOD's promises are the same to all,- irrespective of rank, or age, or country. Around this Treasury of comfort for the lone sufferer and sorrower, rich and poor may meet together. The cottager's widow in her lone hut, and the widowed monarch in her sackclothed halls, are heirs to one and the same promise of the widow's GOD,- "**Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.**" [69]

¹ "It was probably a station of glass-houses; so that the name may be taken as analogous to what we call 'smelting-houses,' or furnaces. Some suppose it was a place famous for refining metallic ores - a blast furnace." - See Calmet. [54]

² "*The identity of Surafend with Sarepta is unquestioned. It is a village seated aloft on the top and side of one of the hills, the long line of which skirts the plain of Phoenicia, conspicuous from far by the white domes of its many tombs of Mussulman saints. It throws no light on the story of Elijah, beyond the emphasis imparted to his visit by the complete separation of the situation from the Israelite territory on the other side of the hills.*" - Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 273.

³ *There are some who would make this woman an Israelite, or, at all events, a worshipper of the true GOD. This we cannot think. Dr Kitto well remarks - "That she was a worshipper of Him, as some have thought, is not likely, and betrays some ignorance of the extent to which the heathen were disposed to recognise the gods of other nations as gods - and powerful gods - but not as their gods. Besides, she says 'thy God' - an addition which she would not be likely to have made, had the Lord been her GOD also," - Daily Readings, p. 223.*

~ end of chapter 4 ~
