

SAMUEL THE PROPHET

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE SIN OF JEALOUSY

(I Samuel 18)

“All selfish souls, whate’er they feign,
Have still a slavish lot;
They boast of Liberty in vain
Of Love and feel it not!
He whose bosom glows with Thee
He, and he alone, is free.”

- Cowper

ALONG the most terrible of human sins is jealousy the parent of the blackest crimes that have disgraced the annals of our race. And of all the delineations of it, which are frescoed on the walls of history, none is more absolutely true to life, and terrible in its graphic coloring, than this portraiture of the first king of Israel.

I. JEALOUSY OPENS THE DOOR TO THE DEVIL

In Saul’s case the interval was the briefest possible. On the morrow, after the song of the women, which first aroused in his heart the feeling of jealousy towards David, we learn that “**an evil spirit**” came mightily upon the ill-fated monarch.

There is an impenetrable wall, as we believe, built by the Providence of God between human souls and the evil spirits which tenant the atmosphere around us, and are therefore called “**spiritual wickedness in high places**” (Ephesians 6:12), whilst their leader is known as the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2).

This evil spirit, in Saul’s case, is said to have been “**from God**” a phrase which can only be interpreted on the hypothesis that God permitted it to come, and that this tragic result transpired in direct pursuance of the immutable fixtures of the universe.

If a man tampers with his soul, God cannot save him from the inevitable results. Obey the law of fire, and it will obey you like a dutiful slave this is God’s will and appointment; but it is also his will and appointment that, if you disobey it, it will devour your towers, palaces, treasures, and homes, with merciless fury.

When men rebel and vex the Holy Spirit, He turns to be their enemy and fights against them. “God,” says one, “must be something to us; what He shall be, depends on what we are to Him.” Go with the wind, and it beneficently wafts you forward; go against it, and your progress becomes ruinous in its deadly cost.

**“With the merciful, Thou wilt show Thyself merciful;
With the upright man, Thou wilt show Thyself upright;
With the pure, Thou wilt show Thyself pure;
And with the froward, Thou wilt show Thyself froward.”**

II. JEALOUSY DEFEATS ITS OWN GOOD

With almost a single bound, David had leapt into the throne of universal homage and affection. **“All Israel and Judah loved David”** (ver. 16). In this common affection for one who was so accessible to them all, the people forgot their ancient feuds. Not only they, but the court was enamoured of him.

He was set over the men of war, and went out with them whithersoever Saul sent him, and his promotion was good not only **“in the sight of all the people,”** but also **“in the sight of Saul’s servants”**; while Jonathan loved him with a love passing the love of women; and Michal, Saul’s daughter, was tenderly attached to him. There must have been something of a spell in the influence of that pure bright soul over all who came into contact with it.

Besides this, the Lord was evidently with him. Note how constantly the sacred chronicle touches that note; **“Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him”** (ver. 12); **“David behaved himself wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him”** (ver. 14); **“And Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David”** (ver. 28). Moreover, he behaved himself wisely, or prospered (ver. 5); wisely in all his ways (ver. 14); very wisely, so much so that Saul stood in awe of him (ver. 15); more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was much set by (ver. 30).

Under these circumstances, how judicious it would have been for Saul to bind the son of Jesse to himself! Admitting frankly that he was his designated successor, and that he was enjoying the special favour of the Lord, the king might have used David for the rehabilitation of his waning fortunes. It was evidently impossible to reverse the Divine choice, but he might have postponed the infliction of the inevitable sentence.

Nothing could have made the king himself more popular than to have identified his fortunes and those of his family with one who could have rendered conspicuous and inestimable service to court and kingdom. Nothing could have been easier, nothing more politic.

But instead of this, Saul allowed his mad passion to smolder and sometimes burst into a flame, until it broke out in irresistible fury, and consumed the house of his life.

In the case of the higher passions of the soul, it is often easy to curb and restrain them by the introduction of considerations of self-interest and personal prestige; but it is not so with jealousy.

At the shrine of this passion, the jealous soul is prepared to repeat the act of Palissy the potter, who tore up the very boards of his home, after having destroyed every atom of furniture, in order to prosecute the design by which he was consumed. The peace of the home; the success of some great enterprise; the happiness and prosperity of some loved one who has been the unwitting cause of jealousy; the service of God; the prospect of long, happy years of high respect if only the passion is resisted and extinguished - I have seen these, and more than these, sacrificed because jealousy has demanded its revenge.

III. JEALOUSY IS VERY INVENTIVE OF METHODS OF EXECUTING ITS FELL PURPOSE

Its shape is protean. Sometimes it uses the stiletto, whose edge is so fine that you do not know you have been struck till afterwards; and sometimes the bludgeon, that fells to the ground with one murderous blow. The poison cup, or the fine meshes of a subtle stratagem, which leads the victim to inflict his own doom such are the methods which jealousy employs.

Trace this in the history before us.

First Saul, under the excuse of his malady, attempts to take David's life with his own hand. He knew that the murderous deed would be imputed to the deranged condition of his mind, and therefore, with impunity, twice launched the javelin at the minstrel who sought to charm away his malady.

Then he sought to throw him into positions of extreme peril, by inciting him to valiant deeds on the field of battle, and in border warfare. For a bribe he promised him his elder daughter, Merab, and to this was added the appeal of religion, than which no motive could be more potent with this devout and chivalrous soul.

“And Saul said to David, Behold, my elder daughter Merab; her will I give thee to wife; only be thou valiant for me, and fight the Lord's battles.”

And then, with unsparing hand, the sacred writer draws aside the veil, and recites to us the secret thoughts that were passing in that dark and evil-haunted nature **“for Saul said, Let not mine hand be upon him, but let the hand of the Philistines be upon him.”**

The stratagem had failed, but it seemed too insidious, and too likely to realize the royal purpose, to be abandoned without being put to one further proof; and Michal, Saul's younger daughter, who really loved David, at this time, at least, was made the guerdon or prize to allure the young unsuspecting warrior to fresh encounters with the Philistines. The sure evidence that a hundred of these doughty foes had fallen by David's hand was the only stipulated dowry which was required; and the honour of becoming the king's son-in-law was the theme of many a hint, suggestion, and open conversation between the courtiers and the young soul on whose career so much attention was being concentrated. To his servants, Saul must have seemed to be sincerely attached to David, and to desire, with genuine earnestness, to enroll him in his family. Clearly, he was playing a game of unusual adroitness.

On the one hand, his servants really believed that the king delighted in David, and wanted the alliance; on the other, **“Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.”**

It was only after the plot had failed, and it seemed as though, through the providence of God, David was possessed of a charmed life, that Saul spoke to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should slay David; again hurled his javelin at him with such force that it stood quivering in the palace wall; and afterwards pursued him, first to his own home, and finally to Samuel’s home in Naioth (see chap. 19).

Not otherwise is it with jealousy. When a wife is jealous of another woman, who may be absolutely guiltless of any attempt to influence the husband’s affections; when an elder minister becomes jealous of his assistant, or of a neighbour; when a person becomes jealous of the influence which another is obtaining over his friend it becomes almost impossible to enumerate all the unkind suggestions, all the insinuations, all the wrong constructions on conduct, all the perversion of words, actions, and looks, through which the soul will vent its spleen.

IV. JEALOUSY OF THE INNOCENT IS UNABLE TO AVAIL AGAINST GOD

It was remarkably so with David.

Saul was bent on alluring him to his ruin. Through God’s interposition, however, each murderous intent was foiled, and became the cause of the still greater popularity to his rival.

- If he is set over the men of war, he prospers wherever he is sent;
- If he is separated from the immediate proximity of the king, and permitted to go in and out before the people, the whole nation loves him (18:13, 15).
- If he is sent to fight the Philistines, he slays not one hundred but two, so that his name is much set by (ver. 30).
- If Saul urges Jonathan to slay him, he drives his own son to a closer friendship, and forces him to plead the cause of the twin soul with which his own was knit.

Everything that is meant for ill turns out for good. The weapons that are hurled on the young life are boomerangs which return on the hand that launched them. The curses came home to roost. Saul digs privily a pit, into which he falls himself.

If only jealous people would ponder such a story as this, surely they would see the uselessness of their malignant attempts to injure those who may seem destined to take their place. It is not thus that the peril can be met.

There is a Nemesis in life which will certainly return on the evil-doer. The Lord will not leave his Davids to the cruel mercies of a Saul. He will raise up Jonathans to warn them of their peril, will cause Michals to ward off the molesting blow, will overpower with the mysterious spell of spiritual influences the murderous bands, and will still the enemy and avenger.

**“God judgeth the righteous,
and God is angry with the wicked every day.
If he turn not, he will whet his sword;
He hath bent his bow, and made it ready.
He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death;
He ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors.
His mischief shall return upon his own head,
and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate”**
- (Psalm 7:11-13, 16)

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