

LOVE IN RETURN FOR TREACHERY

- II. SAMUEL 18:24-33. - NOVEMBER 8. -

Golden Text: – "A foolish son is a grief to his father."

– Prov. 17:25.

KING DAVID, thoroughly unsuspecting Absalom's duplicity, was completely taken by surprise with the proclamation that Absalom was King of Israel, with Hebron as his capital. "To the pure all things are pure," writes the Apostle, and as David's heart was guileless towards his son, it was far from his thought to imagine such deceit and treachery as had been practised against him in a cunning and underhanded manner for two years preceding the opening battle.

Hearing that Absalom had started on his march of twenty miles toward Jerusalem, intent upon the capture of his father and the overthrow of his kingdom, King David hastily retreated, accompanied by his bodyguard of 600 men and a comparatively small number of people who manifested sympathy for him and went with him to share his fortunes. Doubtless several motives combined to lead up to this decision to retreat. (1) He wished to avoid, especially in his capital, the horrors of civil war. (2) He was overwhelmed with grief that his antagonist, his enemy, was his own son. (3) The evidences were plentiful about him that Absalom had stolen the hearts of the people and that his former friends had become his enemies, who now jeered at his discomfiture, and anticipated with evident pleasure the oncoming of Absalom and the establishment of his kingdom. "God is not in all his thoughts," says the inspired writer. (Psa. 10:4.) So evidently the people of Israel failed to think of what would be the Lord's will in the matter, and this was their great mistake.

That must have been the darkest day of King David's eventful life. Accompanied by his bodyguard, most of whom were foreigners – and of his own nation comparatively few with him – he fled from his own family and the capital city of his kingdom, which he had established, and from the people in whose interests he had given the best years of his life in harmony with the divine anointing. He fled from the face of the people who some years before had sung his praises as their deliverer from the hand of the Philistines – "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his tens of [R4277 : page 343] thousands." Poor old man! The street rabble cursed him and threw stones and dirt at him. Amongst the persecutors was one of Saul's sons, to whom David had shown great kindness, sparing his life and providing for his maintenance and comfort. Here certainly was an occasion for the trial of David's faith and patience and love. What he would have done in earlier life we cannot tell. His history in every place shows him to have been a man of well-balanced mind, but his chief protection was his possession of a Spirit of a sound mind, the spirit of consecration to the Lord, the spirit of faith and trust and loving devotion. Instead of threatening the mob or returning railing for railing, or in any way defending himself, King David gave instructions to his guard that no harm should be done to those who were speaking evil of him, slandering, smiting. "The cup which my father hath poured for me, shall I not drink it," were our Master's words in his dying hour (John 18:11), and we can see his spirit exemplified in King David, who typified him in some respects.

It is supposed that the fourth Psalm and portions of the third were written from the standpoint of David's experiences as an exile from his capital. Dean Stanley says, "It has been conjectured with much propriety that as the first sleep of that evening was commemorated in the fourth Psalm, so in the third is expressed the feeling of David's thankfulness at the final close of that twenty-four hours." The king's objective point was a fortified city,

Mahanaim, on the east side of Jordan; but the little army camped on the west side for the night.

ABSALOM THE HEARTLESS

Starting from Hebron with 200 men, Absalom's army made rapid increase, the population evidently rising en masse to share his sedition. Alas for the weakness of humanity. This scene reminds us of our Lord's experience, of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the multitudes shouting Hosanna to the Son of David, and five days later shouting, Away with him, crucify him, release unto us Barabbas. They were Jews in both cases; but we have no reason to suppose that they were more fickle than others of our race.

Absalom had a triumphal entry into Jerusalem and quite probably was intoxicated with the success. The records of his doings, of the various ways in which he endeavored to cast dishonor upon his father and to arouse the bitter prejudice of the people about him, all correspond with the vain, treacherous, ignoble character which we see displayed in this young man of large opportunities. We, who belong to the King's sons of a higher plane, should search our hearts diligently and scrutinize critically our every thought and word and act to make sure that we are thoroughly loyal to the Lord, our Father, the Great King; that we are not self-seeking, nor humble merely in outward appearance, but humble of heart, and that we are fully desirous of doing the Father's will, and that his will is not grievous to us, but that we can sincerely say, "I delight to do thy will, O my God." – Psa. 40:8.

VICTORY FOR THE RIGHT

For three months the rebellion seemed to grow and prosper. The seeds of slander and disloyalty which Absalom had so carefully sowed through others, while quiet himself, had taken deep root in the hearts of many, who joined their cause with

Absalom as rebels against the Lord and his anointed. The army of Absalom was increased rapidly from various quarters, while few came to the cause of King David. The size of Absalom's army is not stated, but can be conjectured from the fact that more than 20,000 were slain, while apparently the great mass was discomfited and fled in the battle of the Wood of Ephraim. What may have been David's sentiments during these three months of trial of faith and love, we can merely conjecture; but we have every reason to believe that he was a victor along all these lines. His patience certainly was manifested. His faith must have held secure to the Divine promises that the Lord would not take from him his sure mercies; but that he would deliver him out of all evil. And as for his love, even for his wicked, treacherous son, it surely was very great, as we shall see.

The attack was evidently led by Absalom and his army, while David's forces were divided into three little bands under three of his able generals. Apparently with purpose they drew the battle into the woods, where their smaller forces would have the advantage over the attacking party. The result of the battle was the complete defeat of Absalom's forces, and the death of the latter. Riding on his mule through the woods, his head was caught between the forks of a branch, his mule going on, leaving him hanging by the head while the army was in rout. One of King David's soldiers found him, but would not kill him because the King had strictly charged all the soldiers before they left for the battle that they should do Absalom no harm. But when the soldier reported the matter to Joab, the King's chief general, the latter without hesitation slew the traitor, and at his command he was buried under a huge pile of stones.

"IS THE YOUNG MAN ABSALOM SAFE?"

King David had proposed going with his army, but wiser counsel prevailed, for because of his advancing age (about 62

years), and because of his grief, and because of his love for his enemy, he would not be so competent as others to have charge of the battle. Conforming himself to the advice of his generals and counselors, he remained at Mahanaim, waiting near the gate for tidings from the battlefield to be brought by couriers, runners. On a lookout, a watchman perceived one of the runners, and, recognizing him by his movements, announced that it was Ahimaaz. King David at once remarked, He is a good man and undoubtedly will have good tidings for us. (v. 27.) What a lesson there is in that very expression! As our Lord said, "A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things." (Matt. 12:35.) On the other hand, from a bitter heart proceed bitter words, evil speaking, injurious arrows. Our lives should be so that all of our friends and acquaintances would be ready to say of us, He is a good man; his message will have something of consolation in it. He is never a strife-breeder, nor a heart-wounder, nor a betrayer of confidences.

When the runner reached the King, he prostrated himself to the King, saying, "All is well." This was indeed good tidings to the King, but we note his love for his dishonoring, treacherous, enmitous son, evidenced by his first inquiry, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Some may consider that the King had a love for his son to the extent of weakness. We will not dispute that, but we will hold that if he must err on the one side or the other, it was far more pleasing to the Lord that he should love his enemy too much rather than too little. That loving expression gives evidence that the King had under divine discipline learned considerable of the "Love divine, all love excelling." If King David loved and pitied Absalom in his rebellious condition, how much more **[R4278 : page 344]** intently he must have loved him when he was in harmony; and so, if God so loved us while we were yet sinners that he gave his Son to die for us, how much more does he now love us since we are no longer aliens and strangers, but brought nigh by the precious blood and begotten of his holy Spirit through

consecration, sanctification! (Rom. 5:8.) It does us good to see an illustration of great earthly love, because it pictures favorably to us the great lesson that the Master impressed by the words, "The Father himself loveth you."

With such an illustration before us of David's love for his son, we may safely surmise that to some extent he misrepresented the sentiments of his own heart during the two years after Absalom had been permitted to return from his foreign exile. The King refused to see him during that time, and thus possibly encouraged Absalom's defiance and hatred. We mention this because we believe there is a lesson in it for many parents. It has seemed to us frequently that for some reason parents are disposed to treat their children much more harshly than they really feel, and thus misrepresent to their children their real heart attitude of affection. Whatever severity or austerity may be necessary, whatever chastisements appropriate in dealing with children, all should be done in such a manner as to fully assure them always of the parent's love, and that the punishments inflicted are given with a view to duty, and for the good of the children. Justice is excellent, Wisdom is valuable, punishments are necessary, but above all, "Love is the principal thing." Let us, therefore, judge ourselves along the lines of this divine standard – our acts, our words, our very thoughts. Whatever acts, words or thoughts will not fully square with the purest of love will be injurious to us as well as to those upon whom they are exercised.

"O ABSALOM, MY SON, MY SON!"

The good messenger broke the news as gently as possible to the King. He knew of the general rout of the enemy and of the concourse in connection with Absalom; but instead of telling all that he knew and, drawing upon his imagination for details, his goodness of heart led him to say little except that there had been a victory and that it seemed a great tumult, but did not know all of

the particulars. Presently Cush, a second runner, came, announcing the death of Absalom. King David's heart was bowed with great grief. This was what he evidently had feared. He betook himself to a room in the tower, on the way sobbing, "O, my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" Of these words one writer says, "There is not in all of the Old Testament a passage of greater pathos than this. The simple beauty of the narrative is exquisite; we are irresistibly reminded of him who, while he beheld the rebellious city of Jerusalem and thought of the destruction it was bringing upon itself, wept over it." – Luke 19:41.

The expression, "Would God I had died for thee," finds two parallels in the Scriptures. Moses, Israel's mediator under the Law Covenant, gave vent to a similar expression when the people had come under divine displeasure and were threatened of the Lord because of their sin. St. Paul gave utterance to a similar sentiment when he said, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh." I could wish that I might be separated from membership in the glorious Church of Christ, and have my share with the earthly restitution class, if by the sacrifice I could bring to my kinsmen the great blessings of the Gospel privileges which they are missing. (Exod. 32:32; Rom. 9:3.) We are reminded here of the words of Longfellow, the poet:

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"There is no far nor near, there is neither there nor here;
There is neither soon nor late, in the Chamber over the Gate,
Nor any long ago,
Nor any cry of human woe,
'O Absalom, my son!'

"That 'tis a common grief, bringeth but sweet relief;
Ours is the bitterest loss, ours is the heaviest cross;
And forever the cry will be,

'Would God I had died for thee,
O Absalom, my son!'

If in Absalom's perverse course of vanity, treacherous sedition, and in its ruinous end we find a lesson respecting the undesirable, evil, godless way, in King David's course we find the opposite lesson of faith and submission and growth in grace, knowledge and love. In a previous lesson we have noted the fact that David committed a most awful crime, violating three of the divine commands most wantonly and inexcusably – coveting his neighbor's wife, committing adultery with her, and indirectly murdering her wronged husband. The Scriptures most pointedly condemn those sins, and intimate that the severe experiences which we have just recounted were permitted of the Lord to come upon him as retributive justice. Yet David's recognition of his sin and his penitence for it testify distinctly that at heart he was not a murderer and not an adulterer. The Lord who looketh at the heart approved him ultimately, while reprobating his misdeeds and permitting him to suffer therefor.

We can draw a great lesson and a profitable one from the lives of these two men without copying either of them. We are not to feel that it is necessary that the man who would preach temperance should be able to say, I was once a drunkard in the gutter; neither is it necessary for us to follow David into his sins in order to profit by the lessons taught us by his experiences.

"Happy the man who learns to trace
The leadings of Jehovah's grace."

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