

# THE AGES DIGITAL LIBRARY COMMENTARY

## THE PULPIT COMMENTARY **2 SAMUEL** CHAPTER 16

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# 2 SAMUEL

## CHAPTER 16.

### EXPOSITION

**Ver. 1.** — **Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth.** It is the misfortune of troubled times like those in which David found himself, that unscrupulous men use them for selfish purposes. For those in danger have no time for careful examination, nor are their minds sufficiently calm for impartial judgment, but they act on first impressions, and catch at every straw. Ziba's present would naturally raise everybody's spirits, and be taken as a good omen; for it showed that David had adherents in unlikely quarters, when thus a servant of the house of Saul of his own accord brought so timely an offering. The asses saddled for riding contradict the idea that Ziba met David by chance as he was bringing the produce of the farm for the use of Mephibosheth's household. More probably the asses had been saddled for Mephibosheth's own use (comp. <sup><101926></sup>2 Samuel 19:26), and the provisions had been prepared as a contribution to the king's needs: but at the last moment the cunning Ziba managed to hurry away with his men, leaving his master in the lurch, and unable to get anything to ride upon in the short interval between David's escape and Absalom's entry. Moreover, possibly from being a cripple, and from the distressing circumstances of his early life, Mephibosheth always seems deficient in energy, and perhaps David's conduct in mulcting him of half his property may not really have been so unjust as it looks, supposing that it was his dilatoriness which gave Ziba the chance of going away with the whole convoy while he was wasting time. It was this apparent desertion of him by one whom he had so befriended which may have made David say, "All men are liars" (<sup><19861></sup>Psalms 116:11), though subsequently he learned that the lie was Ziba's. The food consisted of two hundred loaves, or rather fiat cakes of bread, a hundred bunches of dried grapes, a hundred cakes of pressed dates, and a skin of wine. Instead of "date cakes," some of the versions render "fig cakes;" but for this there is a special Hebrew word (see <sup><19812></sup>1 Samuel 30:12).

**Ver. 3.** — **Thy master's son;** that is, the son of Jonathan, or even of Saul, as the word "son" is used very indefinitely in Hebrew. Mephibosheth held

the property as their representative. **Today shall the house**, etc. Ziba's slander was absurd. Mephibosheth was likely to meet with no kind treatment from Absalom; but perhaps he was a visionary, and David may have thought that he was holding back for any chance that might turn up. But upon this slander David acts with blamable impetuosity, and, indignant that the son of his old friend should so desert him, he gives Ziba all his lands. The grant would be valid only if David's cause prevailed, and Ziba so far deserves credit in that he attached himself to a ruined man; but his motive was not love to David, but selfish calculation.

**Ver. 4.** — **I humbly beseech thee that**, etc. The words are really a form of grateful acceptance. "I do obeisance" (see margin), that is, "I make my humble bow: may I find favour," etc.; may the king continue to look favourably upon me.

**Ver. 5.** — **Bahurim**. The exact site of this place is unknown (see note on <sup><1016></sup>2 Samuel 3:16). Lieut. Conder, following a Jewish tradition, identifies it with *Almit*, a village about four miles northeast of Jerusalem. If so it lay, not on the direct road to the fords, but on a side route. **A man of the family of the house of Saul**. The words do not mean that he was a near relative of Saul, but that he was a member of the mishpachah, the larger division of the tribe of Benjamin, to which the house of Saul, a much smaller subdivision of the family, belonged (see note on <sup><1047></sup>2 Samuel 14:7). But he was a strong partisan, and so fanatical as to care little for his life, if only he could annoy the usurper. For besides "all the people," David had with him "the mighty men," a few of whom could easily have punished him.

**Ver. 7.** — **Come out**; rather, *out, out*; that is, "get out; begone, begone, thou murderer and worthless man." Shimei could scarcely have referred to the murders of Ishbosheth and Abner, which were too remote to have so rankled in his memory; but as ch. 21. is not in its chronological order, what probably called forth his anger was the surrender of Saul's sons and grandsons into the hands of the Gibeonites. Shimei, probably, even resented David's taking the side of the Gibeonites, and treating as a crime to be severely punished what he and all Saul's partisans regarded as righteous zeal for Israel. The three years' famine, followed by the execution of Saul's sons, made more tragic by the noble conduct of Rizpah, contributed largely to the revolt of the nation from David, and helps to explain that abandonment of him by the people, which otherwise

seems so hard to understand (on the date of the famine, see note on ch. 21.).

**Ver. 9.** — **Then said Abishai.** Abishai's indignation was natural, and it is evident, from ver. 10, that Joab shared it. Shimei's conduct was abominable, and David finally condemned him to death for it (~~1~~<sup>1</sup> Kings 2:8, 9), having probably found that, even after his pardon, he was an implacable enemy. His revilings now must not only have been painful to David, but depressing to all the people that were with him, and there must have been many a murmur in the ranks at the king allowing such conduct to go unpunished. But he was in a state of great mental distress and self-condemnation. He had borne sorrow after sorrow since the day when, by his own great sin, he had opened the floodgates of wickedness; and now the son whom he dearly loved, and who had first been put wrong by a crime which might never have been committed but for his own example, was seeking both his crown and his life, and had made his cup of sorrow full to the brim and running over. At such a time of agony it was even a relief to have outward affliction to bear; for it brought the consoling thought that the Divine chastisement had its merciful limit. Jehovah had bidden Shimei revile him, and he would bear it because it was Jehovah's doing. "It may be that Jehovah will look upon my wrong, and that he will requite me good for his cursing of me this day." **Go ever.** Abishai's word is explained by ver. 13. David's route seems to have lain in a narrow valley, and Shimei, running along the ridge on one side, was near enough for his words to be heard, and for his stones to come near the king's retinue. Abishai, therefore, asked permission to cross over to Shimei's side of the steep ravine with a few men, who would seize him and put him to death.

**Ver. 12.** — **Mine affliction.** This reading is supported by the Septuagint and Vulgate. The Syriac has "my subjection," possibly a free translation of the same reading. But the written text (K'tib) has "my wrong," either the wrong I have done, and of which I am bearing the punishment, or, as in the Revised Version, "the wrong done unto me." The correction of the Massorites (K'ri), is literally "my eye," that is, "my team."

**Ver. 14.** — **Weary.** Evidently the name of a place; for David "refreshed himself there." It was probably a caravanserai, the full name of which was, "Rest for the weary," but gradually the title was shortened down to the last word, "Weary," Hebrew *Ayephim*, which the Revised Version puts as a proper name in the margin.

**Ver. 17.** — **Is this thy kindness to thy friend?** After carrying the king to Ayephim, on the banks of the Jordan, the narrator now turns back to Absalom, because David was to wait at the caravanserai for news from Jerusalem. And immediately on his arrival, Hushai hastens into Absalom's presence, loudly exclaiming, "Long live the king!" for such is the meaning of the Hebrew. The young man is surprised; for Hushai was David's friend and trusted confidant. Yet he does not suspect this sudden breaking of old ties, but, looking at the bright side only, sees in it a proof that his party was looked upon as sure of success, and David's cause as hopeless. He welcomes, therefore, so notable an adherent, and Hushai's pretences confirm his self-deceit; for he professes to regard Absalom as king, not by fraud and violence, but by the formal choice of both Jehovah and the people. On this assumption, obedience to the nation's choice became a religious duty, and Hushai's love to the father was a pledge of love to the son. We must not, however, condemn Absalom for too easy credulity. The nation was in his favour, and, had he acted with promptitude, David's cause would have been lost.

**Ver. 18.** — **The men of Israel.** Here and in ver. 15 the men of Israel are not contrasted with the men of Judah, but include them (see <sup><101510></sup>2 Samuel 15:10). Absalom's rebellion began at Hebron, in Judaea, and the selection of Amasa, a first cousin both of David and Joab, as commander-in-chief, suggests the conclusion that Absalom's chief strength lay in David's own tribe, though men from all the tribes on the west of the Jordan had also flocked to his standard. Besides them, Hushai speaks of **this people**, that is, the citizens of Jerusalem. For, while there had been general lamentation at David's departure (<sup><101523></sup>2 Samuel 15:23), yet the citizens had admitted Absalom without a struggle, and submitted to him. David's adherents are also constantly called "the people," because they did not belong to any special tribe, but were drawn indifferently from them all.

**Ver. 20.** — **Give counsel among you;** Hebrew, *for you*; but we have no way in English of expressing the force of this phrase. In Greek it is called the ethic dative, and is supposed to give character to the address, and indicate that those to whom the words are spoken have also an interest in the matter.

**Ver. 21.** — **Ahithophel said.** Ahithophel's counsel was utterly abominable, even though the deed would not be regarded by any of the Israelites as incestuous. A king inherited his predecessor's harem, and Absalom's act was a coarse and rude assertion that David's rights were at

an end, and that crown and hinds and property, even to his wives, now all belonged to the usurper. But, while polygamy had thus degraded the wives and concubines into mere chattels, the harem was the property most jealously guarded by its owner (<sup><1037></sup>2 Samuel 3:7; <sup><1022></sup>1 Kings 2:22); and Absalom's act was an outrage which David could never have pardoned. And this was what Ahithophel wanted. He was afraid that if Absalom's cause began to decline, he might come to terms with his father, who would readily forgive a son if he submitted, but would certainly punish Ahithophel. For his own selfish purposes, therefore, he led Absalom on to a crime which rendered a reconciliation with David impossible, and pledged all the conspirators to carry out the matter to the bitter end; and that end could only be the death of David if the conspiracy succeeded. But this bitterness to David would vex all moderate men, and weaken Absalom's cause. It was of advantage only to such as were deeply committed to the rebellion, and bent on killing David. To him it was terrible sorrow; for he knew that this open shame was the punishment of his own secret infamy (<sup><1021></sup>2 Samuel 12:11, 12); and in it, again, he saw the meshes of the avenger's net tightening around him.

**Ver. 22.** — **A tent;** Hebrew, *the tent*; that constantly used by David and his family for the enjoyment of the cool evening breeze, and which the citizens of Jerusalem had frequently seen erected on the flat roof of David's house. It was when walking on this roof that David had given way to guilty passion, and now it is the scene of his dishonour.

**Ver. 23.** — **The counsel of Ahithophel,** etc. These words form a sort of apology for Absalom. He ought to have had more respect for his father than to offer him so grievous an insult, and aggravate by so terrible a deed the quarrel between them. But his conduct from first to last was utterly mean and selfish, and his only excuse here is that there was such a glamour round Ahithophel, that men yielded up their own judgment to him without an effort, and did what he advised as if it had a religious sanction. **At the oracle of God;** Hebrew, *had asked the Word of God*; that is, had consulted God by Urim and Thummim. When a man went to the priest to inquire in this way, he did whatever he was told; and the word of Ahithophel was accepted with equal deference.

## HOMILETICS.

**Vers. 1-14.** — The facts are:

1. David, passing on his way, is met by Ziba with a present for the king and his servants.
2. On inquiring after Mephibosheth, David is told by Ziba that he was staying in Jerusalem in expectation that, as a result of the present revolt, the kingdom would be restored to him as representative of the house of Saul.
3. Accepting this statement as correct, David assigns Mephibosheth's property (~~1000~~ 2 Samuel 9:9-12) to Ziba, who thereupon makes obeisance.
4. Proceeding to Bahurim, David is assailed by Shimei, who curses him, casts stones at him, reproaches him with deeds of evil, and avers that, as a punishment, God had taken the kingdom from him and given it to Absalom.
5. Astonished at the insolence, Abishai seeks permission to slay the man; but David, piously recognizing a providential chastisement in the event, will not have it so, and points out further to his people that this was but a small trouble in comparison with Absalom's conduct, and that probably God would have compassion and vouchsafe a compensating blessing.
6. David and his company proceed on their way, still insulted by Shimei, till they come to a place where they can refresh themselves.

### *The cruelty of avarice.*

In this chapter the historian elves us a foil to the loyalty and devotion of the men referred to hitherto. Ittai, Zadok, Abiathar, and Hushai have their opposites in Ziba and Shimei and Ahithophel. It is said that the beasts of prey and creeping things come forth in the night; and so in this dark and sad time for David, the foul creatures come forth and manifest their full strength. Good men are always encompassed by evils, but they are kept in check by the very force of the prosperity of the good. When once that begins to wane, they revive and put forth their destructive powers. The time had now come for their appearance. In the case of Ziba we see avarice in its most hideous form.

**I. IT CAREFULLY FRAMES ITS SCHEMES.** An avaricious man is usually endowed with a good measure of prevision, and his success lies

very much in the wicked perversion of this gift. The elaborate present of Ziba to David (vers. 1, 2), and the meeting with him just when a token of kindness would be most acceptable, was the result of hours and days of scheming. The end in view is so precious to the greedy soul that trouble and toil to attain to it go for nothing. There is a spontaneous avarice, as when men suddenly seek to grasp what is apparently within their reach, for the evil principle, like a slumbering hungry dog, is ever quick to discern and to act; but the great achievements of avarice, by which men become rich or gain some swift advantage, are the result of the prostitution of the gifts of foresight and skill in arrangement to low cunning and selfishness. There is many a scheme being concocted at this hour, in commercial and political circles, for the circumvention of others to the enrichment of self..

**II. IT CONFORMS ITS PLANS TO THE NATURE OF MEN AND CUSTOMS OF THE AGE.** Ziba knew what David had done for Mephibosheth (<sup><1090></sup>2 Samuel 9:1-10), how generous was the king's heart, how he would appreciate fidelity in the time of trouble and scorn ungrateful conduct, how his associates in trial would approve any favour conferred on the loyal at the cost of the disloyal, and how it was within the prerogative of a monarch to confiscate the property of a traitor. Avarice is a careful student of human nature and of the usages of the world. Its success often depends on quickness of discernment, and a practical application of the knowledge of men and things to the purposes of a base, greedy heart. A good and generous man may be as quick in discernment, and may in the intercourse of life gather as much knowledge of human nature, but he differs from the avaricious man in that he scorns to turn all this to the sole promotion of purely selfish interests.

**III. IT TAKES SPECIAL ADVANTAGE OF THE TROUBLES AND WEAKNESS OF OTHERS.** There is a fiendish sagacity in avarice. Ziba saw that the sorrows of David furnished a choice opportunity for making an impression on his generous sympathetic nature by a manifestation of loyal interest and kindly consideration for his comfort; and he saw also that the bodily infirmity of Mephibosheth (<sup><1091></sup>2 Samuel 9:13; 19:25, 26) would prevent his going out to David to express his own loyalty. How splendid the opportunity of so representing matters as to secure the confiscation of Mephibosheth's inheritance to himself as a reward for his personal faithfulness! How this is too often illustrated, in the eager rush after wealth, in the conduct of certain nations towards others, is well known. There are hard-hearted men who rejoice in the commercial calamities of others, because they see their chance of turning them to their own

advantage, and not a few are willing to profit by the incapacity, physical, social, and intellectual, of others, by not providing them with the means by which they can rise above it, and act their own part in the world's affairs. The curse of God surely rests on such evil doers.

**IV. IT IS HEEDLESS OF THE PAIN IT INFLICTS.** David's heart was sad enough. Trouble in most fearful form had come on him. His anguish is seen in the comfort he felt in the fidelity of the high priests and in the presence of the ark. But what though his heart was smitten! Avarice can rive it the more by concocting a lie most suited for such a purpose. Ziba knew that the story about Mephibosheth would rend further the sore wounds of the much-riven heart. What of that? Property would be acquired. What of blasting the reputation and scattering the fortunes of an innocent cripple? His property would become Ziba's. Such things do occur still in the earth. There may be degrees in avarice, but in every case there is a heedless infliction of pain and a positive injury to the innocent. Is there a God to avenge wrong? Is there a future retribution? Seeing that many avaricious men escape positive punishment in this life (<sup><19416></sup>Psalm 49:16-20; 73:1-17), a righteous moral order must either be denied or we must look on to the day when God shall give to every man according to the deeds done in the body (<sup><17510></sup>2 Corinthians 5:10).

**V. IT ASSUMES THE FORM OF NOBLEST VIRTUES.** Ziba comes to David as a kindly, faithful, generous subject, sorrowful for his affliction, ready to minister to his comfort, and even prepared to break the ties which for years had held him to Mephibosheth. Loyalty and religion are publicly professed. The assembled friends of the king are witnesses to his noble conduct. Wolves may come in sheep's clothing, Satan may assume the appearance of an angel of light, and, in the same way, avarice may, if occasion requires it, hide its hateful form under the guise of the two most reputable of all qualities loyalty and religion. This is done in varying degrees. There is a conformity to prevalent political opinion, to social customs, to decency of bearing, and to the observances of the sanctuary, not because of a thorough conviction of right founded on knowledge and principle, but because it will contribute to swell the amount of one's gains and elevate one's position in the world. God desireth *truth* in the inward parts (<sup><19510></sup>Psalm 51:6). The whited sepulchre is no screen from his eye (<sup><10227></sup>Matthew 22:27; cf. Psalm 139.).

### *The reproaches of the wicked.*

A more graphic account of insult and personal wrong than this is not found in the Bible. The language of the sixty-ninth psalm is fitly descriptive of the events of this sad day, as also of Psalm 3. and 4. The harsh voice of Shimei, it is to be feared, was but the index of a feeling in many hearts towards the unfortunate man of God. The political element enters into the attack (ver. 8), but there was a deeper sentiment of hostility in which the ungodly of Jerusalem would be predisposed to share. Everything seems intense in David's life, as a consequence of the natural force of his character, the depth of his feelings, and the corresponding strength of emotion, whether of love or hate, which his conduct aroused. Except in seasons of fierce persecution, and most of all in the instance of our Redeemer, the reproaches of the wicked do not assume the violent form here indicated, but in every instance of their occurrence we may trace features in common with this.

**I. THEY PROCEED FROM RELIGIOUS AVERSION.** David was a religious man. His kingly position was won by virtue of his being a man after God's own heart (<sup>491528</sup>1 Samuel 15:28; 16:7-13). In spite of his great fall, he was a lowly, devout servant of God, intent on the spiritual welfare of the people. When Shimei assailed David as a usurper (ver. 8), and so made a political allusion, he revealed his own intense aversion both to David's piety and the religious reason for his elevation to the throne in the place of Saul. He evidently did not enter into the theocratic views of Samuel (1 Samuel 15., 16.). He was a man who preferred the unspiritual order of Saul's government to the Divine order of David's. Here lay the real secret of the reproaches heaped upon the unfortunate king. No godly man, no man of elevated views or of spiritual sympathies, could originate such malicious words. This was the secret also of the reproaches heaped on Christ. He was better than his haters liked him to be. Intense aversion to his superior spirituality was the spring of their conduct. They hated him without a cause, *i.e.* a valid reason. In looking at the reproaches against the persecuted Christians, we find the same to be true. The evil words spoken nowadays against good men have their root in a dislike of the holy life which, by contrast, is a reminder of sin and guilt.

**II. THEY ARE PROFESSEDLY BASED ON DEFECTS OF CHARACTER.** It might be inferred from the words of Shimei (ver. 7) that he was a very righteous, peaceful, God-fearing man, for he comes forth as the accuser of the king, and pleader for what is just to man and God. But

we know that this was only a cover for the real feeling. Those who are not holy are obliged, by compulsion of conscience, to find a plea for deeds of shame. The failure of David in one period of his life was most probably known to Shimei, and it is seized with eagerness and made the justification of a reproach bearing on his entire life, and imputing deeds of which David was innocent. Saving the case of Bathsheba and Uriah, David's life was anything but one of blood and worthlessness (Belial). To Saul and his sons he had been unusually kind. The elevation of his character had given dignity and power to the kingdom. These tactics of wicked men are constant; the occasional weaknesses of life are laid hold of, and magnified so as to be representative of the entire life. The free and frank words of Christ, true as they were, not long before his death, were laid hold of and used as though blasphemy and evil works were his general characteristics (~~40124~~ Matthew 12:24; ~~41032~~ John 10:32-36). Our failings in Christian life doubtless are a reproach to us, and give occasion to the enemy to blaspheme; but the malice of the wicked is seen in that they gladly lay hold of these as a plea for gratifying the feeling of aversion they cherish towards the religion we profess.

**III. THEY ARE ESPECIALLY DEVELOPED IN THE DAY OF ADVERSITY.** The slumbering aversion of Shimei found expression in form of outrageous insult when David's fortunes began to wane. Malice is associated with cowardice, and it is only when fear of punishment passes away that the malice puts forth its vigour. Malice is cruel, and therefore it adds wound to wound. The history of Christian persecution illustrates this. The very sorrows which ordinarily would draw forth sympathy only induce the feeling expressed in "There is no help for him in God." The natural tendency of the multitude to adhere to the prosperous and stand aloof from the failing cause, becomes intensified into active opposition when a lurking aversion to the individual and his cause has been cherished (~~49815~~ Psalm 35:15; 49:18). Even the patience and sorrow displayed in the season of providential trial are turned against the sufferer by the keenness of an evil ingenuity. So much freedom does the evil spirit find in the day of calamity that the whole life is charged with the faults that belong only to a portion of it. No consideration is given to repentance and amendment. To crush and ruin are the sole aim of the reproach.

**IV. THEY ARE CHARACTERIZED BY THE DARING ENCOURAGED BY A SENSE OF SECURITY.** Shimei knew his victim well enough to believe that he would not have the heart to allow the sword to smite him down; for all the antecedents of David's life were in the

direction of leniency and gentleness towards those who sought his hurt, though he spared not the man who sought or professed to take away the life of Saul. He was shrewd enough to notice that the grief of the king was so intense, as barefooted and in silence he passed out of the city, as not to allow of his finding room for thoughts of vengeance, and thus, being secure, the reproaches poured forth. The same conclusion was arrived at by the vindictive Pharisees, who loaded the Saviour with reproach. They knew, from all they had seen and heard, that he would not use force against them, and would not avail himself of the Roman authority in self-defence, and hence, secure in these directions, they were very daring, and spared not words and deeds to crush still further the spirit of the illustrious Man of sorrows. In daily life young Christians are often loaded with reproaches by wicked young men, with a boldness that gains strength from the fact that there is no one present to rebuke them, and that the assailed youth is prohibited by the principles he professes from using reproach and violence in return (~~4163~~ Matthew 5:39, 43, 44).

## GENERAL LESSONS.

1. In the providential discipline of life, we may look for a combination of sorrows from independent sources, but yet all subservient to good for the children of God.
2. We should be so careful of our life every day that we give no apparent occasion for any one to bring charges against us when the failure of our earthly prosperity arouses attention.
3. The freedom exercised by wicked men in pouring forth their hatred against the good is of short duration, and cannot really hurt those who bear their reproaches in a right spirit.
4. We ought to discount largely the accusations brought against good men by those whose life and conduct reveal an absence of sympathy with the kingdom of God.

### *The waves and billows of God.*

The events narrated in vers. 5-13 have an aspect towards man and towards God. The scene of a rejected monarch leaving his seat of government, and, while so doing, assailed by an enemy, is a vicissitude in human affairs which, though special in its colouring, is frequent in the annals of the world. It is a case of human ingratitude and violence on the one side, and human suffering on the other. But to the mind of David the sufferer, and to

the sacred historian, the vicissitude is seen to stand in direct relation to the government of God, and is invested with its deepest interest in that aspect. The expression of the psalmist here finds exemplification: "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (<sup>19437</sup>Psalm 42:7). The troubles are earthly; they roll on according to fixed laws, and are raised by agencies that seem to act by virtue of their own nature; and yet they are God's. The Hebrew discernment of the Divine element in the bitterest trials is clear and sure. We learn here the following truths.

**I. THERE ARE GRADATIONS OF TROUBLE IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GODLY.** There are distinct troubles in David's experience as here described, and they are graduated in weight. It was something to leave the city and worship he loved; it was more to break up a home; it was worse to lose regal authority; it was worse still to pass out in sight of the thousands of Israel, poor and powerless; it was a greater wave to have to listen to the reproaches and cursings of the wicked; but the greatest billow of all was the knowledge that his now eldest son, his former pride and delight, was in rebellion against him, and was seeking his life (ver. 11). Fathers, kind and loving, only can estimate the greatness of this swelling billow. Compared with this, all else in form of loss of property and home and friends, must be expressed by the inferior term "waves." And, as we shall see, the magnitude of this is the greater still, because perceived to be in some sort the consequent of the former errors of the sufferer. There are many tribulations for the righteous, in many instances arising out of their own conduct, and it may seem a truism to say that some are greater than others; but the fact deserves noting, inasmuch as material and social troubles, which to an observer seem to press most heavily, are often slight compared with others that enter more into the depths of the soul.

**II. THE REAL GRADATION OF TROUBLE IS OFTEN NOT DISCERNIBLE BY ANY BUT THE SUFFERER.** To Joab and men of his character it would seem to be the climax of all calamity that a "dead dog" should curse and throw stones at a king. It was a climax in the sense of coming upon other calamities, but only David could perceive its relative weight in the storm then passing over him. His fatherly heart alone could feel the full crushing force of the son's ingratitude and cruelty. He alone could discern with agonizing feeling the relation between his own sin and this dire evil. He only knew the rebound in this dreadful form of the recent alienation of his own heart from purity and God. We often spend our pity on suffering men and women when visible disasters fall, and perhaps fix on some loss of property, or health, or children, or some terrible blasting of a

life's hopes, as the item most oppressive to the smitten one. Possibly, in the unrevealed record of their own personal experience in relation to God, there is a fact which does more to bow down the spirit than all else beside. The heart of each man knoweth its own bitterness. There are secrets never to be unravelled here below, or, if made known in words, fully realized in their sorrow causing power only by those whose past experience is bound up with their existence.

**III. THEY ARE ASSOCIATED IN THE MIND OF THE SUFFERER WITH A SENSE OF PERSONAL DEMERIT.** The connection of the events of this period of David's life with his past life was not simply discerned to be organic, but in that discernment there was a distinct recognition of his own unworthiness in the sight of God, yea, of his richly deserving these troubles of varying gravity. Probably not one man in that strange procession, except Nathan, divined the real thoughts and feelings of David. The curses of Shimei were as the echo of his own conscience on that dark and dreadful day when love to God yielded to unchastity and design to slay. The horrible sin came forth, and, though truly forgiven, was now "ever before" him (<sup><35103></sup>Psalm 51:3). No curses of the wicked were too bad for him! No rebellion of cherished son was too severe a chastisement for him! The "waves and billows" rolled on. Were they not fitly framed to swallow up one so self-condemned, so unworthy of pity? Yes; here lies the meaning of those bared feet, that bowed head, that silence under the curse, that moral inability to raise a finger to stay the swelling flood of troubles. Nor are we to wonder that this should be so in the case of a forgiven and restored soul (<sup><101213></sup>2 Samuel 12:13); for the more pure the heart of the restored one, the more blessed the sense of actual forgiveness, the keener will be the feeling of demerit when the old sin is brought to the memory by calamitous events which it set in train. It takes a very holy nature to appreciate properly what sin really is. In the instance of all who experience the "waves and billows" of God, there is, with a clearness more or less full, an association of the trouble with their own past demerit. Whether they can, as David did, actually trace the lines, they know that all trouble is in some way connected with the presence of sin in the world, and that their own past relation to God was at one time such that no earthly disaster could be too great as a chastisement. Irreligious men don't know what this is; but it is a real fact in Christian life. "I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies;" "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (<sup><013210></sup>Genesis 32:10; <sup><25122></sup>Lamentations 3:22).

**IV. THERE IS A DISTINCT RECOGNITION OF THE WILL OF GOD IN THEM.** There is an instructive difference in the conduct of Abishai and David. The man of the world saw the passion and heard the voice of Shimei, and his anger was roused accordingly; the sorrowing man of God saw only the will of God. He seemed deaf to the torrent of curses; with head bowed to the earth, he saw not the man, and the thud of the stones made no impression. "The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David." Yes; it was the Lord. The words of the prophet were true (<sup><101210></sup>2 Samuel 12:10-14). Spiritual perception is spontaneous, and, to the godly man, infallible. It passes by the visible to the invisible. Second causes are lost in the efficient Cause. Speculative questions as to human freedom and consecution of events are left behind. The solution of the actual experience in the passing events is found. It is God. This is the significance of all to David. The "waves and billows" are *his*. They roll to do his will. The force of almightiness is in them. This spiritual discernment plays an important part in the lives of all true Christians. It is not ignorance, it is not a disregard of philosophy on their part, it is not a violation of the sequences of scientific law, when, with an intuition clear and irresistible, they see God in the troubles that fall upon themselves. For spiritual intuition is a higher faculty than logical judgment, and relates to a sphere above all physical sequences. There is no more possibility of men setting this aside by reasonings and discussions concerning physical laws, than the perception of an external world by vision can be set aside by the proof of the existence of a physiological structure of the eye. If commercial disaster falls, if health fails, if friends die, if children become rebellious, if the seeds of former sins bear their bitter fruit, — in all God is seen. Nothing comes in form of trouble to his children but that he has a will in it. There may be a human, even physical side, but the child will discern the Father's will (<sup><81216></sup>Hebrews 12:5-10).

**V. THE SENSE OF PERSONAL DEMERIT AND DISCERNMENT OF THE WILL OF GOD TONE DOWN THE HARDER TENDENCIES OF HUMAN NATURE.** Abishai was true to his nature in wishing to cut off the head of the "dead dog;" and David was true to the chastening effect on his nature of these terrible trials when he resisted the suggestion (ver. 10). The heart becomes tender and gentle when under the chastening hand of God, provided, as in David's case, there is a due discernment of personal unworthiness, and of the gracious though just purpose of God in the trouble. We are reminded of One who also endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; who when reviled, reviled not again, and even

when bearing more than David could here was pitiful and kind to his foes (<sup><5812></sup>Hebrews 12:2, 3; <sup><1023></sup>1 Peter 2:23; <sup><4234></sup>Luke 23:34). It is the mark of a true endurance of the righteous will of God, and conformity of self to the scope of the Divine purpose, that there is in time of trouble no fretting and chafing against the instruments which he may use, be they men or things. Who can curse when the holy will is doing its work? Who can be in wrath and find time for antagonisms when the soul is absorbed in contrite recognition of sin and humble prostration before a storm designed to purify the heart? What gratitude is due to God for the softening influences of calamity? How much richer in meekness and gentleness and the milder and more Christly virtues are many for the poverty and pain they have experienced! The sons of Zeruah, still so strong and fierce in the world, little know the blessedness of being like unto him who was “meek and lowly in heart.”

**VI. WITH SILENT HOMAGE TO THE MAJESTY OF GOD THERE IS BLENDED TRUST IN HIS MERCY.** David was not playing a part before the eye of man. There was nothing histrionic in his conduct. The profound homage to the Holy One which underlay his confession before Nathan, “I have sinned” (<sup><10123></sup>2 Samuel 12:13), was now again rendered in the secrecy of his own soul. The head bowed in submission to the fierceness of the storm indicated an acknowledgment of the righteousness of God. Much rather would the humbled king have been free from the necessity of speaking with the “sons of Zeruah,” and have borne the terrible storm without a thought of protest or feeling of complaint. It is in the most critical moments of life that the soul shrinks from the outward strife of tongues, and in the solemn silence of its own thoughts renders to God a sinful creature’s homage. But with this utter surrender to the rights and punitive appointments of the Eternal there is blended a quiet, modest trust in his great mercy. “It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction” (ver. 12). “It may be.” Note the content of the words: “He is merciful and gracious. It is inherent in the nature of the Author of the covenant with Israel to be so. The words of the past are evidence of this. I am undone and have no claim; all that comes to crush me comes justly; what he does he does for his Name’s sake. Other poor sinners have waited not in vain; the hour may come when he will see his glory to be one with my deliverance, and then the storm will cease. ‘He will requite me.’ Mercy will find a way of enriching my poor troubled soul out of the very ills which so justly have come upon me.” The true heart in its deepest sorrows never loses faith in God’s goodness and care. It holds to the possibility of a

turn in the tide. It rests not on its merits, not on speculations upon what is unknown, but upon the assured character of God as revealed in Christ. It assumes and presumes nothing, but leaves all with him, and so finds comfort in the hope that through his free unmerited grace all things shall be found to work together for good (~~cf.~~Romans 8:28).

## GENERAL LESSONS.

1. It is an illustration of the dreadful nature of sin that it deposits seeds of trouble which may be inactive during a season of prosperity, but which put forth their strength when adversity falls upon us (vers. 5, 6).
2. The children of God may do well to remember that there are watchful foes, human and Satanic, ready to take advantage of any circumstance that may bring reproach on them as servants of the living God (vers. 5, 6).
3. Our faithful attachment to those bearing sorrow because of their shortcomings is a duty, when they bear it in a submissive spirit, even though it cause us to be sharers in their sufferings (vers. 6, 13, 14).
4. In seeking to alleviate the sufferings of the oppressed, we should abstain from vindictive passions (ver. 10).
5. The most tender consideration and sympathy should be extended towards those whose hearts are crushed by the ingratitude and cruelty of their own children (ver. 11).
6. The most effective way of ministering to those whose spirits are broken down by providential chastisements is to foster in their hearts simple trust in God's great mercy (ver. 12). We obtain evidence of our being true children of God when, in the time of our calamity and amidst persecutions, we are followers to those who, when "reviled, reviled not again" (ver. 11; cf. ~~cf.~~1 Peter 2:23).

**Vers. 15-23.** —

### *Illustrations of facts and principles.*

The facts are:

1. Absalom enters Jerusalem with his adherents and Ahithophel.
2. Hushai presents himself before Absalom, with a salutation in ambiguous language.

3. On Absalom expressing surprise that he had not gone with David, he, with studied caution, expresses his readiness to serve whom the Lord and all the men of Israel might choose, and further declares his intention to “serve” in the son’s presence as he had in the father’s.

4. Absalom, seeking counsel, is advised by Ahithophel to strengthen his position by taking possession of his father’s concubines.

5. Whereupon Absalom, in the view of the people, conforms to the advice.

6. Ahithophel is represented as a man whose reputation as a counsellor was of the highest character. The historian passes from the sorrows of David to the aspirations and first measures of Absalom, and reveals another line of providential events apparently working in another direction, and yet, in the light of Nathan’s words (~~10127~~ 2 Samuel 12:7-12), clearly tending to the realization of one purpose. It is only the religious man that can discern the mind of God in occurrences utterly dissimilar in their bearing. The good are crushed and the vile are exalted, but the crushing and the elevation are but products of free human instrumentality, taken hold of by an unseen Power, to bring about the ends of a righteous administration of justice. In the opening accounts of Absalom’s entrance on political power we have instructive illustrations of facts and principles.

**I. DEFERENCE WON BY AGE AND CHARACTER.** The rash and reckless Absalom treats the aged Hushai with unwonted respect, even while regarding him as a “friend” of David (vers. 16, 17). The violence usually accompanying a bold revolt was evidently restrained by the will of God acting through the natural influence of years combined with reputation for moral worth. Occasionally wicked men have been heedless of infancy and age, and the better the men associated with their opponents, the more readily have they cut them off. But as a rule it is not so. History records cases of the kind here narrated. The reason is plain: sin is ashamed in presence of goodness, and the sinner’s arm is weak to smite down what is its own condemnation. Conscience revives and restrains action in the presence of goodness; and the heart must be brutal beyond all relief if hoary hairs do not touch it. They speak of the coming grave, and the voice is not in vain. *Integer vitae scelerisque purus*, man wields a silent power, not only over the fabled wolf, but over wolf-like men (Horace, I. ode 22.).

**II. THE PART OF SAGACIOUS MEN IN HUMAN AFFAIRS.** Hushai and Ahithophel differed much in moral character, but they were similar in their position as advisers in the affairs of state. Their acts show them to

have been men of sagacious mind, able to apply the results of extended observation and insight into character to the changing circumstances of the day. As a matter of fact, they played the most important part, by means of their sagacity, in the events of this part of David's life; and their action suggests to us how much of human life in its social and political relations is connected with the thoughts and plans of men of this class. As in a ship a few really control the fate of the many, so in nations a few regulate affairs that involve the weal or woe of millions. No system of government can avoid this fact. Mental power is supreme in the state. Moral influences from the mass may set limits to its action, and open lines along which it must work, but its mighty force is manifest. It is a case of mind rising above mind. Hence the need of prayer that our mentally gifted men may be good men. Hence, also, their solemn responsibilities before God.

**III. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A POST OF EXTREME DELICACY AND DANGER.** Hushai was just now entering on his perilous duties as friend of David in the court of Absalom, and the utmost care was requisite that he might both save his own head and serve his beloved king. Had he not been sustained by the confidence that God would bring to nought the devices of the wicked, he must have often been overwhelmed by the pressure of his responsibilities. There are analogous positions still in life. Diplomacy knows them; commerce is not a stranger to them; the Church furnishes them; benevolent men have often to work in secrecy, though not by deceit; peacemakers find that they may mar their work for lack of discretion, and run the risk of losing reputation with one or both parties. In all such instances the consciousness of being in the right, that wit and wisdom are devoted to unselfish ends, and that God may be asked to give his help, will sustain the heart, give penetration to moral perceptions, and ensure self-possession. All honour to the men who for a good cause assume such responsibilities!

**IV. THE COEXISTENCE WITH EVIL OF NEUTRALIZING FORCES.** Ahithophel had a great reputation, and devoted the force of his sagacity to the evil cause of a rebel. The forces of evil at work against David were strong, and, to ordinary men in Israel, invincible. Yet we who know more than Absalom and his friends then knew, can see that all this time there were, coexisting with and working secretly and silently against all the forces of evil, other forces which could not but tend to neutralize their action. In this we have on a small scale an illustration of the fact that, though there are in the world many pronounced forms of evil at work against the good of man and the rightful authority of Christ over mankind,

there is also a silent, and in its operation a secret, force at work, through the agency of the faithful few, which all the time tends to check the evil, and must in the end overcome it. It has been so from the day when the Seed of the woman was promised to bruise the serpent's head. This fact should inspire the hearts of the faithful in every land in spite of outward appearances.

**V. THE CITY OF GOD IS SOMETIMES THE SCENE OF CONTENDING POWERS.** The holy city, the joy of the whole earth, the chosen abode of the Eternal, and the natural abode of peace, was now the scene of a strife between adverse powers of good and evil. The happy days when the people sang for joy and felt secure in the presence of the symbol of the Divine favour (<sup><0062></sup>2 Samuel 6:12-19) were no more. As in some great historic wars the conflict becomes concentrated on the seat of government and influence, so now the great question which involved the welfare of Israel and the Gentiles was being fought out in Jerusalem. Here we certainly find an analogue to times of trouble when the city of God — the Jerusalem of the Christian dispensation — has been the scene of conflict between the powers that would get rid of the Divine authority and set up an order of things not of God. Men have contended within the Church to rob Christ of his Divine rights, and the faithful few have striven to render service for him according to the measure of their wisdom and goodness. The apostles seem to have anticipated such seasons (<sup><6000></sup>2 Peter 2:1, 2). As this trouble in Jerusalem was connected with the failings of David as well as the vices of Absalom, so the contentions and sorrows that have been experienced in the Church have not been unconnected with the shortcomings of the elect of God.

**VI. AMBIGUOUS FIDELITY IS A PURELY HUMAN EXPEDIENT.** The words of Hushai to Absalom were understood by the latter to be the expression of his loyalty to himself; and, on the surface of them, the words doubtless had that meaning. But as a matter of fact, Hushai's heart was with David, and his language was capable of being interpreted in accordance with his true feelings. It is a question of casuistry as to whether, under the circumstances, he was warranted in devising means for deluding Absalom. The Bible does not commit itself to all the acts of its characters; and in our judgment on men we ought to have some regard to the moral atmosphere of their daily lives. But in this ambiguous expression of fidelity we have an instance of what largely prevails in the world. Men still coin phrases to afford satisfaction to others while keeping peace with their own convictions. Forms are adopted which are unimpeachable; but

the real feeling is kept secret. In some countries there are current forms for expressing loyalty to the “powers that be,” freely employed to the satisfaction of rulers and the safety of those who use them. Attachment to certain political principles is announced while the particular application of them is a matter of private reservation. In commercial houses a form of loyalty to employers’ interests often passes with a purpose to sacrifice them to a rival interest. In Church affairs it is possible to accept standards in form and empty them of essential content. The practice is to be condemned in every case. Strong faith in God can dispense with such expedients. He who was chastising David through Absalom knew how to restore the chastened one in due time, without the expedients of human duplicity. The example of Christ and his apostles is better than that of Abraham, Jacob, and Hushai (cf. <sup><011213></sup>Genesis 12:13-20; 27:20-27; <sup><01883></sup>John 18:33-37; <sup><04007></sup>Acts 4:7-12).

**VII. GREAT PRINCIPLES ARE LIABLE TO ABUSE.** Hushai evidently laid down a great and sound principle as the rule of his conduct when he declared that, as for himself, he was prepared to serve him whom the “Lord, and this people, and all the men of Israel” might choose. Had Absalom been as keen as he was ambitious, he would have seen that this was a principle which so far could not ensure attachments to himself, because two of the conditions were not fulfilled at present. No doubt he hoped that, in some strange way, his choice by “this people” would be supplemented by the choice of God and all Israel. There was here an abuse of a principle, commonly recognized in those times, by both Hushai and Absalom. Hushai took it as a mere cover for saving his conscience, while getting Absalom to believe in his fidelity. The same twofold object was sought by the following question and the very safe assertion, “As when (*rvaḵ*) I served in thy father’s presence, so will I *be* (*hyj ḅ, ḵe*) in thy presence.” He would *be* the same man while professing to serve Absalom. On the other hand, Absalom evidently thought the principle laid down very pious and patriotic, and to be respected because it was a principle, and in his superstitious and superficial deference to an orthodox utterance, he detected not the purpose for which it was stated. In the one case a principle was subordinated to cunning in a good cause; and in the other it was simply admired as a platitude by a bad man. The trade in important principles of action is very common. They are made to subserve ends by no means good. Advantage is taken of their natural influence over men, by reason of their clearness and moral force, to hoodwink them for carrying out special designs. Platform and press too frequently have dealt with great

truths for no special love of the truths, but for party purposes, and to save credit for intelligence and good sense. Also there is a superstitious regard for a certain class of religious, moral, and political principles which causes many persons to think well of those who proclaim them, simply because of proclaiming them. This unreality in both public and private life should be discountenanced.

**VIII. GREAT POWERS CONCENTRATE AGAINST THE LORD'S ANOINTED.** The followers of Absalom, under the guidance of Ahithophel, confer with him as to the best course to pursue in order to effectually establish the position of the usurper, and out off the fugitive king. In a measure, the second psalm is now fulfilled, substituting "counsellors" for "kings" (~~<1901>~~Psalm 2:2). The fact that David had been anointed by God must have been familiar to them all. This evidence of his right to reign was clear enough, and no counter deposition had come from God; and yet such is the blindness and desperate nature of men when alienated from God, that they meditate the destruction of a rule guaranteed from on high. Sin is madness as well as vileness. Our Saviour reminds his disciples that the same combination will take place against his authority (Psalm 2.; ~~<1068>~~Matthew 16:18). The conspiracy was formed when keen and crafty men sought his death (~~<1024>~~Matthew 12:14; 27:7; ~~<1814>~~John 18:14); it was revived when they sought to crush his disciples (~~<1033>~~Acts 5:33); and it is in force now when men presume to dispense with his teaching and saving power. It is the old antagonism of the serpent and the Seed. Let every Christian brace himself to the conflict.

**IX. THERE IS AN UNCONSCIOUS FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY.** It is not likely that either Nathan or David proclaimed to the world the terrible prediction that was to be fulfilled within a few years (~~<1037>~~2 Samuel 12:7-12). Ahithophel was, therefore, an unconscious instrument in fulfilling the Word of God when he gave the desperate advice to Absalom (vers. 21, 22). It is thus that, in the perfectly free action of men, God's purposes are realized. He chastises his children by using men who at the same time are unconscious of being so used. This wonderful foreknowledge of what free men will do, and the execution of moral ends by the action of responsible agents, is possible alone to the Infinite One. There is involved in it a mystery before which we do well to bow with all humility. Men little think how their very deeds of evil are being worked into the warp and woof of the world's life, so as at last to bring out to view the wisdom and righteousness of God.

**X. PUBLIC MEN HAVE IT IN THEIR POWER TO DEBASE PUBLIC MORALS.** By the counsel given to Absalom, Ahithophel no doubt widened the breach between father and son beyond the point of reconciliation, and by a bold stroke inspired confidence in the minds of waverers; but he did it at the cost of public morality. The tone of public life was lowered. Vice became familiar. A blow was struck in an ostentatious way at purity of thought and feeling. A voluptuous throne meant a sensual people. There is always a temptation to public men to strike for power by deeds of doubtful and sometimes immoral character. Political ends may be secured at the cost of loss of moral tone to the community. Those who do this may be great and wise in the eye of the world, but they are the real enemies of the people, and deserve, as they will experience, the retribution of God.

**XI. REPUTATIONS GREAT IN THE WORLD ARE NOT, THEREFORE, GREAT WITH GOD.** Ahithophel was a man in great repute as a counsellor (ver. 23), but he was not in honour with God. The clever head was associated with a base and treacherous heart. The standard of distinction on earth is not the same as that in heaven. Intellectual powers are often grand in their range, but the excellence of the man lies in the subordination of them to high and holy moral principles. The greater the abilities, the greater the sin of not using them for God and his kingdom. There are many “first” in this life who will some day be “last” (~~4093~~ Matthew 19:30). The worship of intellect is one of the banes of modern times. Conformity to the sermon on the mount is more honourable than cleverness in human affairs.

### **GENERAL LESSONS.**

1. It is a safe rule of life to commit ourselves to an undertaking only on the condition that God approves as well as “all the men.”
2. It is of immense advantage in times of perplexity to have in the mind a few clear and well-defined principles of conduct to which we may refer for guidance.
3. It is legitimate to bring the force of first principles to bear on those who are bent on evil ways, though it is not right to use them as a cloak for double-facedness.

4. In the midst of contending claims on our allegiance, we should give due force to the inquiry as to whom we are under the most binding obligations to serve, and it will be seen that Christ has the prior claim.

## HOMILIES BY B. DALE.

**Vers. 1-4.** — (OLIVET.)

### *The benefaction of Ziba.*

(References: ~~<1008>~~ 2 Samuel 9:3, 9-13; 19:24-30.) David had taken his last look at Jerusalem, and was “a little past the top” of Mount Olivet in his descent on the other side, when he was met by Ziba, the servant of Mephibesheth, with an apparently thoughtful and generous present. This man was originally a slave of the house of Saul; became a freed man at its downfall; made his fortune out of its ruins; and had fifteen sons and twenty slaves. About seventeen years before, when inquiry was made for “any of the house of Saul,” he gave information concerning the son of Jonathan. By the restoration of Mephibosheth to his patrimony, Ziba was reduced to his former status, and thenceforward cultivated the land for his master. And now, foreseeing the issue of the conflict, he sought to ingratiate himself with the king, regain his position, and obtain his master’s estate. Such appears to be the key to his conduct. We have here an illustration of a benefaction:

1. Occurring at a *seasonable moment*; when most needed and least expected; valuable in itself, and still more for the faithfulness and kindness it seemed to manifest. A man of David’s generosity could not but be greatly affected by it. But an admirable gift does not always express a commendable purpose (~~<1519>~~ Deuteronomy 16:19; ~~<2107>~~ Ecclesiastes 7:7). “Whatever Ziba intended in this present, God’s providence sent it to David for his support” (Matthew Henry).

2. Proceeding from *unworthy motives*: selfishness, covetousness, cunning craftiness (~~<1012>~~ 2 Samuel 1:2-10), hidden under an ostentatious display of loyalty, sympathy, and benevolence. Ziba was well acquainted with the character of David, and shrewdly calculated upon the means of improving his present necessities to secure his own advantage. Impure motives often lurk, sometimes unconsciously, beneath imposing benefactions.

3. Conferred at *another’s expense*; and by the employment of deceit, treachery, and robbery. “The whole, though offered as Ziba’s, is the property of Mephibosheth: the asses are his, one of them his own riding

animal: the fruits are from his gardens and orchards” (Smith, ‘Dictionary’). Poor Mephibosheth! He was at this moment waiting for the return of his faithless and pitiless slave with the ass, to enable him to follow the king. His own account of his absence was consistent with his actions (~~101924~~ 2 Samuel 19:24); and the treachery of Ziba could not be denied. “Traucherous servants are a curse to their masters.” It is no uncommon thing for one man to seek the credit which is due to another, and obtain it by deceiving, disappointing, and injuring him.

4. Accompanied with a *false accusation*. “And Ziba said,” etc. (ver. 3). It was not improbable that the adherents of the fallen dynasty might seize the opportunity to attempt its restoration (ver. 5; ~~1000~~ 2 Samuel 20:1); and already, perhaps, David entertained some suspicion of the loyalty of Mephibosheth. Hence Ziba might calculate on finding a ready hearing for his calumny. But “every tie, both of interest and gratitude, combined to keep Mephibosheth faithful to David’s cause. Innocent men are often suspected and accused groundlessly. “When much treachery and ingratitude have been experienced, men are apt to become too suspicious, and to listen to every plausible tale of calumny” (Scott). “I cannot but pity the condition of this good son of Jonathan; into ill hands did honest Mephibosheth fall, first of a careless nurse, then of a treacherous servant; she maimed his body, he would have overthrown his estate” (Hall). “A false witness will utter lies” (~~10145~~ Proverbs 14:5).

5. Receiving an undeserved *recompense*. “Behold, thine is all that belonged to Mephibosheth” (ver. 4). “David, in the excitement of a momentary misfortune, is here guilty of a double wrong — first in treating the faithful Mephibosheth as a traitor, and then in royally rewarding the false and slanderous Ziba” (Erdmann). “Hearsay is no safe ground of any judgment. Ziba slanders, David believes, and Mepbibosheth suffers” (Hall).

6. Followed by *flattering servility*. “I humbly beseech thee,” etc. “He pretends to value the king’s favour more than the gift he had bestowed” (Patrick).

7. Revealed at length in its *true character* (**ch.** 19:27), as a selfish, deceitful, and base procedure; though even then the wrong done to the master is not fully repaired, nor the wickedness of the servant adequately punished.

## APPLICATION.

1. Look beneath the outward appearance (~~101724~~ John 7:24).

2. Guard against plausible detractors 3 Avoid hasty judgments (<sup><1961></sup>Psalm 116:11. <sup><2145></sup>Proverbs 14:15); and hear the other side.

4. Wait for the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. — D.

**Vers. 5-13.** — (BAHURIM.)

*The reviling of Shimei.*

(References: <sup><10916></sup>2 Samuel 19:16; <sup><1028></sup>1 Kings 2:8, 9, 36-46.) On pursuing his flight until he reached the Benjamite village of Bahurim (<sup><1086></sup>2 Samuel 3:6), David was encountered by another man connected with the house of Saul, who, instead of bringing flatteries and presents, flung “grievous curses” and stones; and (from a safe distance) gave vent to the long repressed rage which, in common with other partisans of the fallen dynasty, he felt on account of David’s exaltation (ver. 8). “Along the ridge he ran, throwing stones, as if for the adulterer’s punishment, or when he came to a patch of dust on the dried hillside, taking up and scattering it over the royal party below, with the elaborate curses of which only Eastern partisans are fully masters — curses which David never forgot, and of which, according to Jewish tradition, every letter was significant” (Stanley). Abishai returned reviling for reviling, and wished to take instant vengeance. But David said, “Let him a one,” etc.; presenting an instructive contrast to both. “He strikes the same string of nobleness as before.” We have here —

**I. AN INSTANCE OF RAILING ACCUSATION.** “Out, out [of the kingdom], thou man of blood,” etc.! The language and conduct of Shimei were:

1. *Cruel.* He rails against David in the day of his calamity, and has “no pity.”

2. *Cowardly.* Fear had kept him silent all these years; but “he that smiled on David on his throne curseth him in his flight” (Hall). Seeing that he is not pursued, he is encouraged to continue his imprecations, and becomes more furious (ver. 13).

3. *Malicious;* imbued with personal hatred. “The ungodly are always selfish. They judge of others, not by the laws of impartial justice, but by the standard of self-interest. David was called a usurper, a man of Belial, a murderer; and why? Because he had made himself the slave of lust, and had cruelly slain the noble Uriah? No; because he had been elevated by God to

the throne of Israel, and had thus marred the prospects of the ambitious Shimei” (C. Bradley).

4. *Unfounded* and unjust. “Every word of Shimei was a slander.” His accusations of wickedness in general, and of “the blood of the house of Saul” in particular (<1041>2 Samuel 4:11; 21:6), are the offspring of a wicked heart. “Shimei curses and stones at David, and barks like a live dog, though Abishai calls him a dead one. The only unjust act that ever David had done against the house of Saul he had newly done; that was, giving Mephibosheth’s land; and here a man of the house of Saul is soon upon him” (Lightfoot).

5. *Misinterpretive*. (Ver. 8.) Whilst recognizing the judgment of God, he makes a wrong application of it. “We may here learn how falsely and wickedly men sometimes wrest the providence of God, to justify their unjust surmises and gratify their malignant passions” (Lindsay).

6. *Criminal*. He is guilty of high treason and blasphemy, and might justly suffer the penalty of the Law (<10228>Exodus 22:28; <101921>2 Samuel 19:21; <112113>1 Kings 21:13); and if David had put him to death at the time, he would not have been condemned for injustice.

7. *Provocative* of wrath. Surely no man might more reasonably feel resentment than David; no man was ever more strongly incited to inflict punishment; and nothing but “a spirit of meekness” could have restrained him. It is not improbable that Psalm 109. records “the very words of Shimei, and the curses which he threw out against David, and which, as they could not but make a deep impression on his memory, he here repeats and then condemns. They are directly contrary to that temper and disposition shown by David in the other parts of the psalm; and they run all along in the singular number, whereas David speaks of his enemies in the plural” (C. Peters, ‘Sermons:’ 1776; see <102218>1 Samuel 22:18, 19; 26:13-25; *Expositor*, 2:325).

***O God of my praise, be not silent!***

***For a wicked mouth and a deceitful mouth have they opened against me;  
They have spoken against me with a lying tongue,” etc.***

***(<1019401> Psalm 109:1-5.)***

*“And they have requited me with evil for good,  
And with hatred for my love (saying):  
Set thou a wicked man over him,  
And let an adversary stand at his right hand;  
When he is judged, let him go forth guilty,  
And let his prayer become sin,” etc.*  
(<sup><19406></sup>Psalm 109:6-19.)

*“This will be the reward of mine adversaries from Jehovah,  
And of those who speak evil against my soul.  
But thou, O Jehovah Lord, deal with me for thy Name’s sake;  
Because thy loving kindness is good, deliver thou me!  
They curse, but thou blessest;  
They arise and are ashamed, and thy servant is glad,” etc.*  
(<sup><19401></sup>Psalm 109:20-31.)

**II. AN EXAMPLE OF PATIENCE AND FORBEARANCE.** “Let him curse,” etc. (vers. 10-12). The manner in which David endured it was:

**1. Uncomplaining.** He does not retaliate; does not even vindicate himself; but is *silent* (<sup><09106></sup>1 Samuel 10:26, 27; <sup><25316></sup>Isaiah 53:5; <sup><42319></sup>Luke 23:9). “When Shimei railed on him, he held his peace, and, though he had many armed men about him, yet did he not retort aught savouring of revenge, yea, repelled with the high courage of a patient spirit the instigation of the son of Gera. He went, therefore, as one dumb and humbled to the dust; he went as one mute and not moved at all .... Consider not what is rendered by others, keep thou thy place, preserve thou the simplicity and purity of thine own heart. Answer thou not the angry man according to his anger, nor the unwise man according to his indiscretion; one fault quickly provoketh another. If thou strikest two flints together, cloth not fire break forth?” (Ambrose, ‘De Officiis’).

**2. Repressive** of resentment, not only in himself, but also in others. “Answer him not” (<sup><23621></sup>Isaiah 36:21; 37:3, 4).

**3. Self-accusing.** Although guiltless of the crimes imputed to him, he feels himself guilty of others not less heinous. “Conscience in that hour had her own tale to tell, of the Almighty Disposer of events, who speaks to us by the reproaches of men as well as by his own blessings. Had he not merited from God, if not from men, whatever disaster could befall the murderer of Uriah? David feels within him that destitution of the Divine presence of which the absence of the ark is but an outward type” (R. Williams).

*“Pure from the blood of Saul in vain,  
He dares not to the charge reply;  
Uriah’s doth the charge maintain,  
Uriah’s cloth against him cry.*

*Let Shimei curse: the rod he bears  
For sins which mercy had forgiven;  
And in the wrongs of men reveres  
The awful righteousness of Heaven.”*  
(C. Wesley.)

**4. Reverential;** looking devoutly (as others did not) beyond Shimei to the All-seeing, All-holy, and Almighty One, by whom he was permitted to be an instrument of retribution, and even employed as such, although not thereby exonerated from guilt (<sup><101918></sup>2 Samuel 19:18-20). “Abishai looked only to the stone (as it were), an instrument; but David looked higher, to the hand that was the supreme caster, and chastiser of him, as all the godly do (<sup><010133></sup>Genesis 1:20; <sup><180121></sup>Job 1:21); which is the ground of their patience under sufferings (Guild). His vision of the supreme Judge fills him with holy awe and lowly penitence; his conscious offences against God make him reluctant to punish offences against himself; his dependence upon mercy disposes him to show mercy (<sup><10544></sup>Matthew 5:44; 6:14, 15; <sup><51219></sup>Romans 12:19-21).

**5. Submissive;** humbly accepting the chastisement of God; and deeming this to be his proper business now, rather than seeking to execute justice on another (<sup><33709></sup>Micah 7:9). “Behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good to him” (<sup><101526></sup>2 Samuel 15:26). “The ways of Providence interlace, not only in capacity, but in retribution; one thing is set over against another. Yet the payment comes, not in the manner nor at the time we might expect, it seems not in the connection we think due; but it comes, like doom. Call Absalom thankless, Shimei brutal, etc. All these things read half a riddle, unless we own that God, in whose counsels these are all as instruments in the hand of a man of war, is just. He gave us wine, let us take also the gall from his hands. If it is not due to us now, nor for this, it was for something else at some other time.”

**6. Palliative.** “Behold, my son seeketh my life,” etc. (ver. 11). He makes light of present wrongs by comparing them with other and greater. “It is the advantage of great crosses that they swallow up the less.”

**7. Hopeful.** “It may be that Jehovah will look upon my guilt [tears],” etc. (ver. 12). “This consciousness of guilt also excited the assurance that the

Lord would look upon his sin. When God looks upon the guilt of a humble sinner he will also, as a just and merciful God, avert the evil and change the suffering into a blessing. David founded upon this the hope that the Lord would repay him with good for the curses with which Shimei pursued him' (Keil). "Ziba's gifts did more harm than Shimei's curses; for those betrayed him into an act of injustice, but these proved his patience" (T. Fuller). They also had the effect of making him more humble, pure, prayerful, and filling him with new confidence and joy in God (~~<19A90>~~ Psalm 109:30, 31). "A curse is like a cloud, it passes." "All things work together for good," etc.

*"Lord, I adore thy righteous will;  
Through every instrument of ill  
My Father's goodness see;  
Accept the complicated wrong  
Of Shimei's hand and Shimei's tongue  
As kind rebukes from thee."  
(C. Wesley.)*

## REMARKS.

1. The best of men have been maligned; of the Son of God himself it was said, "He hath a devil." Can we expect to escape insult and provocation?
2. The maledictions of the wicked can do us no harm unless we suffer ourselves to imbibe their spirit. "No man is ever really hurt by any one but himself" (Chrysostom).
3. When reviled of men, instead of considering how little we have deserved their displeasure, we should rather consider how much we have deserved the displeasure of God.
4. We should also consider how little, in comparison with God, do we endure at their hands!
5. "Bless, and curse not" (~~<1P21>~~ Proverbs 25:21, 22; 16:32).
6. Imitate "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (~~<7100>~~ 2 Corinthians 10:1).
7. So what is meant for evil will turn to good. — D.

**Vers. 9, 10.** — (BAHURIM.)

*The zeal of Abishai.*

(References: <13106> 1 Chronicles 2:6; <09166> 1 Samuel 16:6; <10218> 2 Samuel 2:18; 10:14; 21:17; 23. 18; <131812> 1 Chronicles 18:12.) Of the three sons of Zeruah (<10183> 2 Samuel 5:39), the youngest, Asahel, was slain in early life (<10223> 2 Samuel 2:23); the oldest, Joab, was now present (ver. 10), “little trusting the revolution which a capricious stripling (like the Stuart Monmouth) was to lead;” the second, Abishai, was one of the earliest, bravest, and most faithful of David’s supporters. As on a former occasion, when he sought to destroy Saul with a stroke, so now his thoughtless, headstrong, and undevout impulses needed to be checked. “The characteristic trait of his nature was a blunt, impetuous ferocity.” His passionate emotion was —

**I. NATURALLY EXCITED** by the conduct of Shimei; and was, in some respects, commendable; inasmuch as it showed:

1. *An ardent affection* toward the king, his “lord;” like that of James and John toward Jesus (<10154> Luke 9:54), and of Peter and the other disciples (<10224> Luke 22:49; <10161> Matthew 26:51). The zeal of the Lord’s enemies against him calls forth the zeal of his friends on his behalf.

2. *A burning indignation* against wrong doing. “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.”

3. *A vehement desire* for the triumph of justice. He doubtless felt that the offender deserved to die; and was eager to “take off his head,” in order to the vindication of the royal honour, the maintenance of the Divine Law, and the promotion of the public good. He thus displayed something of the zeal of Phinehas (<102513> Numbers 25:13; <10530> Deuteronomy 33:9) and of Elijah (<111840> 1 Kings 18:40; <120110> 2 Kings 1:10); without, however, being justified therein by the same necessity and authority, or imbued with the same simple, pure, and lofty spirit. It is difficult to indulge in resentment, even when proper to do so, without sin (<103217> John 2:17; <10406> Ephesians 4:26).

**II. WRONGLY INDULGED.** “Let me go over,” etc. This request was marked by:

1. *Inconsideration* and want of judgment. It is doubtful whether his attempt, if permitted, would have succeeded, for Shimei was hardly likely to be without defenders (<101917> 2 Samuel 19:17); it could scarcely fail to hinder the king’s flight and imperil his safety; and its success would have

effected no useful purpose at such a crisis. Zeal is often blind and misguided (<sup><5102></sup>Romans 10:2; <sup><5185></sup>Philippians 3:5; <sup><4175></sup>Acts 17:5) as to the right *end*, the proper *means*, and the suitable *time*. “Zeal without knowledge is as wildfire in a fool’s hand.”

2. *Vindictiveness*; such as frequently mingles with deserved indignation toward evil doers; is bitter (<sup><9114></sup>James 3:14) and violent; and makes him who entertains it partaker of the evil which he condemns. “The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

3. *Presumption* and vain glory; not altogether unlike that of Saul (<sup><1010></sup>2 Samuel 21:2) and of Jehu (<sup><12016></sup>2 Kings 10:16). How often do men feel confident of the rectitude of their course, although acting contrary to the will of God! and how often, whilst apparently full of zeal for public justice and “the glory of God,” are they really full of pride and self-will!

*“True zeal is merciful and mild,  
Can pity and forbear;  
The false is headstrong, fierce, and wild,  
And breathes revenge and war.”*

**III. RIGHTLY REPROVED.** “What have I to do with you,” etc.? The spirit of Abishai and Joab (who, perhaps, joined in the request) was different from that of David; which, in its self-control, patience, and forbearance, displayed the highest heroism, and foreshadowed the meekness of Christ. “True Christian zeal is no other than the flame of love. This is the nature, the inmost essence of it” (Wesley). What is contrary to it should be rebuked by:

1. The indication of the will of God (ver. 10).

2. The exemplification of a spirit of submission (<sup><5181></sup>John 18:11) and charity.

3. The assurance of the blessing with which it will be followed (ver. 12). “So the travellers went on. The roads diverged. The curses died away. The stones fell short of their aim. The evening closed on that long day of weariness and sorrow — the dreariest day that David had ever known; and he and the partners of his exile rested for the night” (Plumptre). — D.

**Vers. 15-19.** — (JERUSALEM.)

*An inconsistent friend.*

“Is this thy kindness to thy friend?” (ver. 17; <10157>2 Samuel 15:37). On his unresisted and triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, Absalom was met by Hushai with the exclamation, “Long live the king!” (<09102>1 Samuel 10:24). Such a display of loyalty to himself on the part of “David’s friend” (companion, favourite) appeared to him so inconsistent that he asked, in ironical astonishment, “Is this,” etc.? “One might have said to him, ‘Is this thy duty to thy father?’” (Patrick). But Hushai’s answer was, in effect, that (being bound to prefer the public good before his own private obligations or affections) he could do no other than abide with him whom Jehovah and the people had chosen king, and would as gladly and faithfully serve the son as he had served the father. Although proceeding from a good motive and serving its special purpose, it was marked by flattery and dissimulation; and these, in common with other sins, are certainly inconsistent with the proper character of a “friend of God” and of Christ (<09184>1 Samuel 18:4). The question may be regarded (in the latter application) as expressive of —

**I. RECOGNIZED OBLIGATION.** (<20182>Proverbs 18:24; <18064>Job 6:14.)

“Absalom had not so little sense as not to consider that no man ought to forsake a friend in his distress.” If kindness (love, gratitude, faithfulness, useful service) be due to others, how much more to him who said, “I have called you friends” (<13151>John 15:15)! What does his friendship require? To be with him, to follow him, to share his sufferings; to “walk as he walked” (<10106>1 John 2:6), without guile, in truth, purity, self-denial, etc.; to be separate from “the evil that is in the world,” to confess his Name before men, to seek his honour, to aid his friends, and to promote the accomplishment of his purposes.

**II. SURPRISING INCONSISTENCY;** too often observed (<09201>1 Samuel 29:1-11) in those who are his real or supposed friends:

1. When they exhibit indifference to his transcendent claims.
2. When they refuse to bear “the cross.”
3. When they love “the friendship of the world” (<5040>James 4:4).
4. When they solace themselves with his friendship in secret, but shrink from confessing him openly.
5. When they profess that they know him, but “in works deny him.”

6. When they employ deception and other “carnal weapons” (<sup><47104></sup>2 Corinthians 10:4) in his behalf.

7. When they honour success irrespective of the means by which it is attained.

8. When they neglect and despise those whom he loves.

9. When they are zealous for him in some things, but not in others of greater moment.

10. When they are much concerned for their own safety and advantage, and little concerned for his glory and the welfare of mankind. Alas! how often is he “wounded in the house of his friends”!

**III.** SEARCHING INQUIRY. Is there not ground for it in the conduct and speech of many? Is the answer which may be given to it satisfactory? Will good intentions and beneficent ends justify unrighteous means (<sup><48108></sup>Romans 3:8)? Should the answer satisfy others and even ourselves, will it satisfy him “who searcheth the heart”? “Search me, O God,” etc. (<sup><49223></sup>Psalm 139:23).

**IV.** DESERVED REPROACH; which the enemies (and not merely the friends) of Christ are ready to utter, and an enlightened conscience confirms. “As many as I love I rebuke,” etc. (<sup><66110></sup>Revelation 3:10). But he rebukes that he may restore. “When thou hast driven him away and lost him, to whom wilt thou then fly? and where wilt thou find a friend? Without a friend, life is unenjoyed; and unless Jesus be thy chosen Friend, infinitely loved and preferred above all others, life will be to thee a scene of desolation and distress. Of all that are dear to thee, then, let Jesus be the peculiar and supreme Object of thy love” (A Kempis, ‘Of the Friendship of Jesus’). — D.

## HOMILIES BY G. WOOD

**Vers. 5-13.** —

### *Shimei’s curses.*

There are peculiar bitterness and moral peril in troubles which spring from, or are mingled with, human malevolence. Such was David’s affliction at this time. Absalom’s unnatural conduct, Ahitophel’s faithlessness, and Shimei’s cursing rendered his misfortunes much harder to bear than similar misfortunes coming from the ordinary vicissitudes of human life.

**I. SHIMEI'S CURSING.** A striking picture here: David, in the midst of his people and servants, including his famous "Ironsides," marching along the ravine; and from a town on the heights, this fierce Benjamite rushing forth, cursing and throwing stones as he comes; and then moving along the ridge which overlooked the line of march, keeping pace with the king and his company, vomiting forth his rage in bitter taunts and reproaches, and casting down stones and dust; his fury increased by the calmness with which those below marched on, heedless of his impotent rage. It was an outburst of feelings long pent up which dared not express themselves until David seemed to have fallen from his throne beyond recovery. Shimei was a relative of Saul, and chose to regard David as the author of that king's downfall, and of the humiliation of his house, and chargeable with all the bloodshed that had accompanied these changes. And now, in his view, the Divine retribution has at length visited David for his usurpation of the throne, and the "bloody" measures by which he had reached it; and he triumphs over the fallen monarch with bitter resentment and scorn, and unmeasured invective, unsoftened by the spectacle of humiliation and grief which presented itself to his view. In his passion, like most angry people, he is not scrupulous in adherence to the truth. David was not guilty of wantonly shedding blood to reach the throne; he had spared Saul again and again when he might have slain him; and he had punished with death one who professed to have killed him, and others who had treacherously murdered his son. Nor was it nearer the truth to call David a "man of Belial" (a worthless, wicked man). But Shimei cursed the more freely because that was the only way by which he could vent his malice: he was powerless to do anything else. Yet he showed some courage, or at least recklessness, in so freely reviling one who, though fallen, was surrounded by brave warriors, any one of whom could so easily have effectually silenced him (as Abishai desired to do), if permitted by their king. Violent anger is, however, often as regardless of prudence as of truth. Its courage is as that of a maniac.

**II. DAVID'S MEEK ENDURANCE OF IT.** He doubtless felt it to be annoying and humiliating to be thus bespattered in the presence of his friends, and trampled on so savagely by so contemptible a foe. To be falsely charged with crimes he had carefully avoided was no small addition to his already too heavy affliction. A very natural and justifiable resentment would prompt him to permit the swift punishment that Abishai begged to be allowed to inflict. But he restrained such feelings, and meekly endured the insults heaped upon him. His words reveal the secret of his meekness

1. *He recognized the infliction as from God.* With the freedom which the sacred writers employ when speaking even of human wickedness as it fulfils Divine purposes, he declares that God had bidden Shimei to curse him (ver. 10), and no one must forbid him. Besides his general faith in God as universal and rightful Ruler, just and good, the memory of his own ill desert doubtless aided him, and the conviction that God was chastising him for his sins. Contrition prompted and nourished submission. He no longer saw in Shimei the cruel and vindictive slanderer, but the rod in the hand of his righteous yet merciful God. To his tormentor he would not have submitted, but to his heavenly Guide and Friend he could and would. And evermore the best remedy for impatience and resentment under afflictions and provocations is the recognition of our Father in heaven as ordering and appointing all; and the exercise towards him of confidence and love, humility and self-surrender. Thus Job discerned, behind and above Sabceans and Chaldeans, lightnings and tempest; and would have discerned behind and above Satan, if he could have known him as his accuser and the prompter and mediate cause of his calamities, — the Lord; and therefore could say, “The Lord gave,” etc. (<sup><18012></sup>Job 1:21). Thus also One who was greater than Job or David could say, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (<sup><3181></sup>John 18:11).

2. *The thought of the greater trouble of his son’s conduct helped to reconcile him to the lesser trouble of Shimei’s.* (Ver. 11.) What was chiefly burdening and paining his heart is shown in these words. The ravings of “this Benjamite” was a small matter in comparison.

3. *The hope that God would regard him with pity soothed him.* (Ver. 12.) He felt that he was in a condition fitted to awaken the Divine compassion, and hoped it would be exercised towards him. In like manner, we may yet more confidently be assured that he who chastises pities us, as a father the children he is correcting (<sup><19A313></sup>Psalm 103:13).

4. *He trusted that God would render him good in place of the evil he was suffering.* (Ver. 12.) Not that he thought he deserved it, or that his sufferings gave him a claim on God for it; but, confiding in the mercy which had pardoned him, he could hope for it. Shimei might curse, but if God would bless (<sup><19A928></sup>Psalm 109:28), all would be well. So may we be sure that all that God appoints us to endure from men or from circumstances and events, he will cause to issue in a thousandfold more of blessing, if we trust and serve him, and resign ourselves to his will (see further in homily on <sup><101525></sup>2 Samuel 15:25, 26).

In conclusion:

1. *In Shimei we see an example to be carefully avoided.* Let any who permit themselves outbursts of passionate anger and railing, see here what a repulsive spectacle they present to others, and how sad a spectacle to him whom they call their Master. Let all give heed to St. Paul's injunctions in <4031>Ephesians 4:31, 32

2. *In David's meek endurance we see an example to be closely imitated;* yea, by Christians exceeded. For we have a still better Example, corresponding to a higher Law than David knew (see 1 Peter. 2:23; <4054>Matthew 5:44, 45; <4113>1 Peter 3:9). — G.W.

**Ver. 17.** —

### *Unfaithful friends.*

Bad men may and often do see and reprove in others the baseness they are themselves practising, and thus unconsciously condemn themselves. Absalom reproves his father's friend Hushai for supposed unkindness and unfaithfulness to him, while he himself, not merely a friend, but a fondly loved son, was usurping his father's throne, and ready to take away his life (see <4072>2 Samuel 17:2, 4). Nevertheless, the sentiment which underlies his remonstrance is just, and Hushai would have deserved severe rebuke if he had really been guilty of the conduct he was charged with. It was a time for David's friends to prove themselves to be friends indeed; and to desert him at such a time (as Ahithophel did) would have been perfidious in the extreme. Hushai, however, was serving him by obeying his directions and promoting his interests. Whether the deception he practised on Absalom was justifiable is another, question, depending for its solution on the answer to be given to the larger question whether and how far belligerents are bound by the ordinary laws of truth and righteousness. The remonstrance of Absalom is suitable to be addressed to any who are acting in a manner contrary to the duties of friendship. As one and another instance of unfaithfulness or unkindness occurs, the question might well be put to those guilty of them, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" The force of the remonstrance would be proportionate to the degree of friendship which had existed, the benefits received, the professions made, etc.; and also the degree of flagrant violation of the laws of friendship which each act exhibited. And if to the obligations of friendship are to be added those of some other relationship, as here that of subject and servant of a sovereign, the guilt of unfaithfulness is increased, and remonstrance may

well be more severe. The words are very suitable to be addressed to professed friends of our Lord Jesus Christ who act a faithless and disloyal part towards him.

**I. CHRIST IS OUR ROYAL FRIEND.** King, and yet Friend; Friend, and yet King. The claims of each relation to us strengthen those of the other. Although he is so glorious a King, he stoops to be and act the part of a Friend to the meanest and most sinful of his subjects.

*1. He fills this position towards them:*

(1) By his self-sacrificing services on their behalf (<sup><481513></sup>John 15:13).

(2) By admitting them to the closest and most confidential intimacy of which each is capable (<sup><481515></sup>John 15:15).

(3) By the greatness and abundance of the benefits he confers on them.

*2. And they on their part take the position of friends to him:*

(1) By their acceptance of his friendship.

(2) By their vows of eternal love, loyalty, and service to him. The relation of sovereign and subject is, in the best Christians, more and more lost in, though not destroyed by, that of friend and friend. A love boundless in its promptings and requirements overflows and obliterates the limits of mere law.

**II. TO ACT AN UNFRIENDLY PART TOWARDS HIM IS DESERVING OF THE SEVEREST REBUKE,** “Is this thy kindness to thy friend?”

*1. Conduct to which the words are applicable.*

(1) Desertion of Christ in times of difficulty. “Why wentest thou not with thy friend?” (comp. <sup><81313></sup>Hebrews 13:13); “Let us go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.”

(2) Moral cowardice in respect to him. The words might well have been addressed to Peter when denying his Lord and Friend — were virtually addressed to him when “the Lord turned and looked” upon him (<sup><42261></sup>Luke 22:61). It would be well if they could ever be heard by us whenever, from fear of man, we are silent when we ought to speak for Christ, inactive when we should act for him.

(3) Parsimony in gifts and services for the promotion of his cause.

(4) Failure in duties of love to his friends and representatives — our fellow Christians, especially the poor and suffering. A timely reproach, reaching the heart, might prevent more terrible words at the day of judgment (~~4054~~ Matthew 25:41-45).

(5) Any act whatever of inconsistency with our position and professions as disciples of Christ.

2. *Their peculiar force.* Arising from the words, “thy Friend.”

(1) Who has proved himself a Friend indeed.

(2) Whom thou hast often addressed and rejoiced in as such.

(3) Whom thou hast often been glad to appeal to in that character for help and deliverance.

(4) To whom thou hast many times vowed eternal friendship, and fidelity unto death. The reproach, thus viewed, is adapted to break the offender’s heart, producing the deepest shame and self-humiliation, and leading to the most earnest penitence and prayers for forgiveness.

3. *From what quarter the remonstrance might come.*

(1) From a man’s own conscience and heart. It is well when these are sufficiently loyal to Christ to speedily address the offender after this manner.

(2) From other friends of Christ. Christians should be sufficiently faithful to their brethren and their Lord to lovingly reprove serious inconsistencies.

(3) From the enemies of Christ. As by David’s enemy the words were originally spoken. Those who are not themselves Christ’s disciples are often quick to detect the faults of those who are, and to taunt them with them. They sometimes thus render good service to Christians. *Fas est et ab hoste doceri.* — G.W.