

A FATHER'S GRIEF

David Mourns for His Son Absalom.

STORY BY THE "HIGHWAY AND BYWAY" PREACHER

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Scripture Authority:—2 Samuel, 18: 19-34.

SERMONETTE.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?"—Many a father to-day is asking this question. The mistake is that the query comes too late. The safety of the young man is not a matter of concern until the young man has progressed in the downward pathway of sin to the point where turning back is improbable and almost impossible.

David's anxiety was the greater because of the inner consciousness of his own responsibility for the waywardness and wickedness of his son. As he asks the question: "Is the young man Absalom safe?" there comes crowding in upon him the memory of many lost opportunities in the past for making sure that the young man was safe.

Parents should begin to ask this question: "Is the young man safe?" not after he has gone out into the way of temptation and sin, but years before while he is yet in the cradle. There the praying and the planning should be done which will safeguard the growing life. The question should be asked as the boy goes out to mingle with his companions and the parents wisely pick the intimate associates. The question should be asked again and again, and should be as often answered by the parent taking the time and trouble to know where the boy is and what he is doing.

"And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept."—What poignant and hopeless grief is that which arises from a consciousness of guilty responsibility for the tragedy which has fallen. That is a pitiable sight—the aged king utterly crushed and inconsolable because his son had gone out into eternal darkness. He had hoped he might be spared, clinging, no doubt, to the thought that he might yet turn to the God he (David) loved. And when the truth was borne in upon his heart that it was now too late, too late, he was utterly overwhelmed.

It is hard to lose the loved ones even when we know they are safe with God, even when the dying hour is made bright with the consciousness of God's presence, but what grief is that which sees no ray of light, which knows that the Godless life has sunk into the Godless grave. And then how doubly hard to realize that because of the sins of one's life and because of the failure to speak the word, that lost soul is chargeable to him.

THE STORY.

"SURELY they will remember my charge to deal gently with the young man!"

Thus spoke King David half aloud to himself as he sat in the gate of the city waiting for tidings from the army which had gone forth that morning to battle with the army of Absalom.

his son. Over and over again he had repeated the words as he had kept his long vigil, and the plaintive yearning in the voice and the haggard, careworn look upon the face indicated the depth of feelings which surged within.

It was David the father, and not David the king, who strained his eyes out over the plain, and longed for tidings of the wayward son. Not since he had left Jerusalem, driven forth by the strong conspiracy of Absalom, had he ceased to yearn for the young man or plan for his safety. If the rebellion should be successfully crushed.

For this reason when the army which had rallied to the support of King David was marching forth he charged the captains of the three divisions, saying: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." And the men standing near heard and told others so that it was known to all the army what David had said. And now as he sat there in the gate and the hours dragged slowly by, David wondered if his admonition would be heeded. His heart was troubled because of the weight of personal guilt which he felt was responsible in large measure for the present trouble.

"Ah," he sighed, "how I wish I could go back 20, 30 years. It is my sin which has brought this upon me. Had I done my duty my son would not to-day be seeking my life and the kingdom."

Vain regret is a poor comforter, and so it was that David found only harassment for his soul in living over again his life in memory. His mistakes and sins rose up before him. He recalled the beautiful boy Absalom, his fair countenance and noble bearing, and he remembered the pride with which he had watched his physical and mental development. He had not been conscious then that the influence of the mother Maacah, who was a daughter of the king of Geshur, was strong enough to turn the heart of the youth away from the true God, but now it was all plain to him how the taking of wives from among the princesses of the heathen nations about had led to all manner of evils, not only in his own family, but in the nation as well. Absalom had not the fear of the Lord before him, and he knew now that he had failed to help his son by precept and example to know and serve the true God.

"Surely," he exclaimed again, "they will remember my charge to deal gently with the young man. Gladly would I give my life for him. Oh, that he were restored to me that I might help him into the right way. Gladly will I forgive him all if he will but turn and serve the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob."

His musings were suddenly cut short by the cry of the watchman upon the tower far above his head.

"A runner, my lord the king!" he shouted.

"Cometh he alone?" anxiously inquired the king, "for if so, there be tidings in his mouth."

"Yea, he runneth alone," was the reply, and then after a moment pause he added, excitedly: "Behold, I see another man running, and he is also alone."

"If that be so, he also bringeth tidings," ejaculated the king, and rising from his seat he paced back and forth in nervous expectancy.

"Me thinketh," shouted down the watchman again, "that the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok."

"God be praised," cried David, "he is a good man, and bringeth good tidings."

And without waiting to hear more he hurried through the gate and almost ran in the direction of the man who by this time was in plain view. The sight of the king caused the runner to redouble his efforts, and as he drew within hailing distance, he shouted:

"All is well!"

And then as he came near to the king he fell upon his face to the

ground, exclaiming, as soon as he could catch his breath:

"Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king."

The king leaned over eagerly, and hastily, almost rudely forcing the man to his feet, demanded, hoarsely:

"Is the young man Absalom safe?"

A blank look of confusion overspread the countenance of Ahimaaz, but he managed to stammer:

"When Joab sent the king's servant (indicating the second runner, who was now drawing near), and me, thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was."

Impatiently the king thrust him aside and hastened toward the second runner, who as he drew near, shouted:

"Tidings, my lord the king: for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee."

The king lifted his hand with an impatient gesture, demanding with insistent voice:

"Is the young man Absalom safe? Tell me! Is the young man Absalom safe?"

Ah, what tenseness in that voice! How the body of the king fairly shook with the anxiety which surged within.

And Cushai answered, letting his voice fall almost to a whisper, as he realized the mood of the king:

"The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise up against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is."

The king's face blanched, the light died out of the eyes, his limbs shook so that he could scarce stand, and then with a cry of anguish he turned and retraced his steps to the city's gate, wringing his hands as he went tottering along, and crying in an agony of despair:

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

Slavs Make Farms Pay.

The Slavs are colonizing Connecticut valley. Old Hadley is said to be full of them occupying the old colonial residences up and down the elm-shaded streets of that beautiful New England town in tenements, four or five families to a house, and even taking boarders. Industry is their watchword, and they are taking up the farms that the New England stock is abandoning. They bring a lower standard of living. This is to be regretted but, it is said, that they are making the New England farms pay, and as they get rich they spend more and live better.—Lewiston Journal.

Dogs Useful in War.

Another field of usefulness has been found for the dog in war. He is already employed as a scout. He is now to serve in the ambulance corps. Two French army surgeons have taken up the question with eagerness, pointing out the limitations of human agency in collecting the wounded, of whom, after every engagement, large numbers go to swell the dismal list of the "missing." It is contended that dogs of keen scent could, with proper training, render aid.

The Lesson of the Flowers.

One of the first flowers to bloom in the spring is the hepatica or liverwort. The chill of the winter was in the air, and the snows were hardly gone, when I saw some beginning to grow amid the dried leaves my stick had poked away. The sturdy hope of the plant moved and helped me. Never give up; keep alive and alert even amid the dreariest scenes and times. Chance will open somehow if you are getting ready for it by the faithful daily duty.

Wealth West and East.

The states west of the Mississippi possess a combined wealth of more than \$23,000,000,000, and the states east of that river \$80,000,000,000.

The Best Guide.

The folks who make the worst mistakes are those who follow the head instead of the heart.

Trees Not Ostracized.

Brazilian cocoanut palms live from 600 to 700 years, and the Arabs assert that the date palm frequently reaches the age of 200 to 300 years. Wallat's oak near Paisley, Scotland, is known to be over 700 years old, and there are eight olive trees on the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem which are known to have been flourishing in 1059. The yews at Fountains Abbey, Yorkshire, England, were old trees when in 1132 the abbey was built, and a redwood in Mariposa Grove, California, is a manifold centenarian. Baobab trees of Africa have been computed to be over 5,000 years old, and the deciduous cypress at Chapultepec is considered to be of a still greater age. Humboldt said that the Dracaena Draco at Orotava, on Teneriffe, was one of the oldest inhabitants of the earth.

Made Record Climb.

Dr. Longstaffe, who is mountaineering in the Himalayas with two guides and a Gurkha officer, has reached the summit of Trisul, 23,406 feet. This is the record for the Himalayas.

become a necessity instead of a luxury, when the workings of your liver come to be of more importance than the affairs of your heart—then you are growing old."

"You are all wrong," announced a fourth. "When in pulling on your trousers in the early morning you are compelled to gain the support of the bedstead when you slip in the other leg—then—you are growing old!"

Prices of Stocks Fall.

Since last December there has been an average fall of prices of stocks equal to over \$40 a share in the case of railroad shares and of \$27 in the case of industrial shares. Applying this to the entire capitalization of stocks and bonds of the railroad and industrial corporations of the country, and the apparent depreciation in prices amounts to about five billions of dollars.—Wall Street Journal.

The World and You.

The world owes every man a living. Every man owes the world a good life.

FOR DANTE'S TOMB

LAMP IS TO BE KEPT CONSTANTLY BURNING.

Monument to Be Marked in Like Manner, Florence Vying with Ravenna in Move to Honor the Famous Poet.

All lovers of Dante the world over will be interested in the plan of the Italian Dante society to honor the memory of the illustrious poet. The idea is twofold and has been enthusiastically received by the municipalities of Florence, where Dante was born in 1265, and of Ravenna, where he died 1321. The scheme is to have the people of Ravenna contribute toward a lamp which shall be hung over the poet's monument in the Santa Croce in Florence and for the Florentines to contribute to a lamp which shall be hung above the poet's tomb in Ravenna. Both lamps will be kept burning always, as a symbol of the great poet's undying fame and influence.

The lamps are to be made in Venice in the Byzantine-Venetian fashion, the bottom of each shaped in the form of a "conca," from which Dante got his idea of the geography of hell. They are to be made of brass and the glasses of the Ravenna lamp will be in the old ducal colors, while those of the Florentine will be according to the ancient colors of Florence. Again, the former will bear the arms of Dante's last host and patron, Guido Novello da Polenta, while the latter will have on it the arms of Dante's own family of the Alighieri.

What makes the idea of the mutual contribution of the two cities particularly appropriate is that Dante, while on his mission to Rome in 1302, was fined 8,000 lire and condemned to banishment from Florence for two years. On the 10th of the following March he was again sentenced, this time to be burned, if taken. He never saw the city of his birth again, except, possibly, from the heights of Fiesole. From that time on he became a wanderer, until, in 1320, he sought asylum with Guido Novello da Polenta in Ravenna. In the following year he was sent by his patron on a mission to Venice, and, on his return, discour-

aged at his failure, he soon afterward died from fever contracted on the way.

Dante was buried in the Franciscan convent opposite the house in which he dwelt. The street running between is now called the Via Dante, and in a corner of the convent wall there stands a little chapel with the monument and two inscriptions, one of which, composed by Bernardo Canac-



Dante's Tomb at Ravenna.

clo, concludes with the following couplet, in translation:

"Here I am inclosed, Dante, exiled from my native country, Whom Florence bore, the mother that little did love him."

In the Santa Croce in Florence there is a vacant tomb below the monument erected by Ricci. The Florentines have again and again requested the bones of the poet from Ravenna, but Ravenna has declined to part with them. The last request was made in 1864. The first was in 1337, when Taddeo Gaddi completed his portrait of Dante in the lower figures of the "Paradise" painted by Giotto on the walls of the chapel of the Podesta. Gaddi probably had for his model a sketch made by his master, Giotto, from life.

SAVED BY HIS NERVE

NAVAL POSTMAN COWS GREEK WITH PENCIL CASE.

Looked Like a Revolver and Checked Murderous Assault—Desperate Adventure in the Harbor of Patras.

The British protected cruiser, to which I act as postman, was anchored one dark winter evening about a mile from the crude breakwater of Patras.

Immediately upon the arrival of the man-o-war, I had been sent ashore to secure our overdue mails, dispatch telegrams, and ascertain the postal regulations of the port.

Loaded with bags of correspondence for the bluejackets aboard, I returned to the beach late in the evening and shouted at the top of my voice: "Varka! Varka!" (Boat! Boat!)

A battered skiff, rowed by two coarse-featured Greeks, quickly drew up to the pebbly beach, and I stepped into the little craft, where, seated in the stern sheets, I was rapidly drawn away from the town of Patras with its myriad sparkling lights.

Neither the boat nor the men were at all to my liking; but, there being no other boats within hail, I could not be particular.

The cruiser swung on her cable about a mile from the rudely constructed breakwater, and, as a heavy sea was running at the time, it was no light task which the men had undertaken. The two Greeks—who seemed but shadows in the blackness of the night—carried on a whispered conversation as they laboriously propelled the leaky boat; and, dark as was the night, I could not fail to note the ominous glances which they occasionally cast in my direction.

Their threatening looks made me feel quite uneasy, as I was unarmed—through my own carelessness—and I began to conjure up all kinds of ghostly encounters which had taken place in these rocky Grecian islands.

My meditations were cut short by the actions of the men, who had suddenly ceased rowing and were standing over me in a threatening manner, blusteringly demanding payment of their fare! Helpless as I was, my pride as a British marine forced me to refuse, though my heart was thumping like a steam hammer.

"I'll pay when you take me alongside," I replied firmly, "and not before!"

With a curse and a hiss one of the brutes was upon me; but I was prepared for him, and hit out with all my strength, luckily felling the man to the bottom of the boat, where he lay like a log.

But my triumph was transient! I glanced upward to discover the long arm of the second Greek stretched above me, in the bony hand of which a long, murderous knife reflected the few straggling rays of the almost hidden moon.

Just as I was giving myself up for lost a brilliant idea occurred to me. In my pocket I carried a fancy pencil case, made in imitation of a revolver. Pulling out this toy, I presented it at the head of my assailant with a desperate air of bravado.

To my joy the man shrank back, completely cowed by the seeming weapon! Still keeping the man covered, yet fearing that he might at any moment detect the trick, I ordered him and his now recovered ally to pull me to the man-o-war.

Never before were the lights of the vessel so welcome to me. A few more strokes and the brightly illumined gangway was reached. With what joy did I climb aboard my floating home and deliver the precious mails. Thank heaven—I was saved!

Glass Blackboards.

An innovation at the College of the City of New York in its new home on St. Nicholas Heights is the use of glass blackboards. What is written on a glass blackboard may be read from any angle except from behind it, as Dr. Baskerville, professor of chemistry, explained to his students. When a blackboard ceases to be a wall slate then what will it become? Evidently a new word must be coined.

A Big Difference.

Diogenes—What is the difference between a plain, downright burglar and these financiers who wreck big institutions?

Cynicus—A great difference, my friend. The burglar blows up good, useful safes, and just takes the money. The financial wrecker merely unlocks the safe, takes the money and puts the loot on the books as assets.—Baltimore American.

Brief.

"Were you away long on your vacation?"
"No. Only eight souvenir post-cards."—Milwaukee Sentinel.