

family name, nor learning, nor wealth can insure wisdom.

When Solomon entered upon his reign he prayed, "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad." But nothing was farther from the son's heart than the father's prayer. He came to the throne as his father's successor without a protest, and by one act of folly lost ten of the twelve tribes over which his father ruled.

THE SIN OF IGNORING GOOD ADVICE

His first error was to ignore good advice. We read that Rehoboam "consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while yet he lived, and said: 'How do ye advise that I may answer this people?'"

Jeroboam, who represented the ten tribes of the children of Israel, had presented a petition saying, "Thy father made our yoke grievous; now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee."

Whether the yoke was really grievous or whether their complaint was without just grounds is not the material question. The people made complaint and the old men, whom Rehoboam consulted first, advised Rehoboam, saying: "If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants forever."

This was sound counsel. The king was advised to serve the people and to speak good words to them upon the assurance that the people would then be his servants.

But such advice did not please the young king. He forsook the counsel of the old men and "consulted with young men that were grown up with him," and they, influenced possibly by the impetuous spirit of youth, but more likely by a desire to please Rehoboam, gave him advice just the opposite of that given by the old men. They not only advised him to refuse the people's petition, but they suggested insolent words which could not fail to provoke resentment, if not rebellion.

THE PITFALL OF SELF-IMPORTANCE

Instead of promising relief, or even expressing a willingness to investigate the cause of complaint, they advised Rehoboam to threaten heavier burdens. "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins" was the illustration which was used to measure the increase that he would impose upon them. Instead of enquiring whether his father's yoke was burdensome, he was told to admit—possibly without justification—that his father's yoke was heavy and say that he would add to it.

This was the advice of the young men, and to make his defiance of the people more contemptuous the young men suggested another simile: "My father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

How these young men advisers must have giggled and winked at each other as they urged the young king to impudence. Wit is often more alluring than common sense; with some smartness counts more than simple truth.

Rehoboam was easily led when the appeal was made to his pride and self-importance. He doubtless chuckled at the brilliancy of the retort suggested to him and nodded his head as if to say, "We will nip this familiarity in the bud; we'll teach these people not to bother a king with protests and entreaties. Any encouragement would lead to further demands."

THE OLD STORY OF AUTOCRACY

It is the old story of autocracy. The methods of arbitrary government are not new; they are the natural outcroppings when power is not controlled by love.

Pharaoh exercised them when he compelled the children of Israel to make bricks without straw as a punishment. When they asked for time to sacrifice to their God, Pharaoh replied that it was because they were idle that they asked for time to sacrifice, and he commanded "Let there more work be laid upon the men." And the emancipation of the children of Israel followed.

It was in the same spirit that Rehoboam, unmindful of the lessons of the past, dealt with his people, so that the ten tribes of Israel revolted and made Jeroboam their king; and it is interesting to note that Bismarck, in his story of his own life, criticized the Emperor's military commander for not being more harsh in dealing with an uprising in 1848. He said:

"On Nov. 10, Wrangel, having marched in at the head of his troops, negotiated with the civil guard and persuaded them to withdraw voluntarily. I considered that a political mistake. If there had only been the slightest skirmish, Berlin would have been captured, not by capitula-

tion, but by force, and then the political position of the government would have been quite different."

THE MORAL FOR THE NEW YEAR

The moral that we draw from this the first lesson of the new year comes at a very appropriate time. The spirit of Pharaoh and Rehoboam has too often been the spirit of the world—not only the spirit of those in control of governments but the spirit of those who have dominated in all walks of life.

One cannot travel through the lands where so-called inferior people are held as subjects by a superior force without hearing echoes of this autocratic philosophy. "The people will not appreciate any favors shown them." "They will construe kindness as weakness." "They must be controlled by fear." Peace by terrorism has been a costly fallacy from which the world is now turning.

Rehoboam gives us the antithesis of the spirit of brotherhood, and his failure can be cited today in support of the wisdom of the opposite policy—the brotherhood which Christ taught. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is the remedy—the only remedy—for all the ills which afflict society, whether they come from misgovernment or from friction between different elements of society.

As war, like a boil, indicates poison in the blood, so the domestic boils that appear on the body politic indicate a poison that must be eradicated. Christ is the Great Physician: He purifies the blood and brings to individual, to community, to State, to nation, and to the world that peace for which all hearts yearn.

HUMAN BEINGS AS GOD'S MESSENGERS

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR JAN. 8

(King 17:1-16.)

And Elijah, the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying,

Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, which is before Jordan.

And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there.

So he went and did according unto the word of the Lord: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan.

And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.

And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there had been no rain in the land.

And the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee.

So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow woman was there gathering of sticks; and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand.

And she said, As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse; and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.

And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go on do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.

For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.

And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah; and she, and he and her house, did eat many days.

And the barrel of meal wasteth not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by Elijah.

Elijah, the Tishbite, one of the greatest of the characters of the Old Testament, appears upon the scene unannounced. We have no information as to his early life. His family history is not known, neither is any light thrown upon his training for his work. Simply, he "was of the inhabitants of Gilead."

Like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky—or, since he is sometimes called "the prophet of fire," it might be more appropriate to say like a bolt of lightning—he stands before the wicked king Ahab and warns him of a coming drought as punishment for Israel's sins of idol worship.

A word about the king. He was eighth in the succession of the house of Israel, a man of considerable strength, wedded to a wife who was stronger than himself.

Possibly, expediency may have had some part

in his selection of her as his wife. The children of Israel were surrounded by the worshippers of Baal and the father of Jezebel stood high among the worshippers of that heathen god. As Ahab's wife, she proceeded to introduce the worship of her people's god among the children of Israel, and the sins of Ahab are largely charged to her account.

The story of our talk is a brief one. One verse tells of Elijah's appearance before Ahab and the warning of punishment that he uttered; the next verse tells of his being sent to the brook Cherith, "which is before Jordan," to be fed by the ravens. Then follows one of the most familiar and oft quoted passages of the Bible:

"And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook."

CAN GOD PERFORM A MIRACLE?

"Fed by the ravens" has come to be a popular description of help from an unexpected source, and literature teems with illustrations that are almost as conclusively proof of providential care as that presented by this incident in the life of Elijah. Those who deny the miraculous have devoted a great deal of attention to this account of nourishment furnished by the fowls of the air. Some try to twist the language so as to have Elijah fed by Arabs, but it is a waste of time and energy unless one rejects the miracle entirely.

We may as well consider the miracle now as later, because it reappears continually in both the Old and New Testaments.

Is there such a thing as a miracle? To those who accept the Bible as it was written and construe it according to the rules which they apply to every day life, the miracle presents no difficulty.

Can God perform a miracle? Yes, a God who can make a world can do anything He wants to with it.

To deny that God can perform a miracle is to deny that God is God. A God who can make a man and provide ordinary food for him can also provide extraordinary food. A God who can make a raven can direct it in its flight. If the power exists, means can easily be found. The use of unusual means raises no doubts.

But the second question is the one that has given most trouble. Would God want to perform a miracle?

To answer that in the negative one must assume a larger knowledge of God than any one has yet been able to claim. Modesty, if nothing else, would keep a finite mind from assuming thorough acquaintance with all the purposes, plans, and methods of Infinite Intelligence.

When we remember that we do not know the mystery of our own lives, cannot understand the mystery of love that makes life worth living, and cannot solve the mystery wrapped up in everything that we do, does it not seem presumptuous to attempt to limit the power of the Almighty?

Can one decide without possibility of a mistake what God would desire to do? If God can perform a miracle and might desire to do so, it becomes merely a matter of evidence, and the Bible evidence is sufficient for those who accept the Bible as the word of God. Our difficulty is chiefly with those who declare that God cannot or will not perform a miracle.

THE BOAST OF MATERIALISM

Materialism is the source of most of the doubt entertained by this generation on the subject of miracles. Its attractiveness lies largely in the boast that it brings nature within the limits of human reason by eliminating all that is mysterious. It is built upon the idea of unity, an unbroken chain of cause and effect. It flatters the mind to be told that there is nothing that it cannot understand.

Materialism cannot explain why a raven would carry food to a man; therefore, the materialist denies that it did. Neither can materialism explain why a man would travel a long way to a brook and expect ravens to feed him; therefore, the materialist denies that he did. And, going back another step, materialism cannot explain why God would tell Elijah to go to the brook and then send the ravens to feed him; therefore the materialist denies that He did.

By the same process of reasoning materialism is unable to explain why Elijah appeared at this particular time and why he expressed himself so specifically on the weather; therefore, the materialist denies that he did.

Elijah's knowledge of the weather is one of the most difficult subjects that the materialist has to deal with, for man has not evolved much knowledge in regard to the weather.

We have weather stations scattered over the world, connected by wire and wireless, so that notice can be given of the coming of a storm,