

take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal."

No strained language; no words of introduction; just a simple statement. There was nothing to emphasize the unusual honor to be accorded the great prophet.

THREE TESTS OF LOYALTY

Elijah tested the loyalty of the younger man: "Tarry here, I pray thee," he said, "for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel." Elisha's answer must have pleased Elijah, for it throbbed with devotion: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they journeyed on together toward Bethel.

The sons of the prophets who were there had been informed of what was about to take place, and asked Elijah, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head to-day?" "Yea, I know it," said Elisha; "hold ye your peace."

Again Elijah tried the faith of the young man and asked him to tarry in Bethel while he went to Jericho. Again Elisha refused. So they went on to Jericho.

A third time Elijah urged him to stay behind while he went to Jordan, and a third time Elisha renewed the declaration of his purpose not to leave him.

It is a wonderful picture that these two present as they left the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho and approached the Jordan. Taking his mantle, Elijah wrapped it together and smote the water: the water divided and the two passed over to the other side.

Elijah then probed the heart of his companion, and this test presented a more difficult problem to Elisha than the three preceding ones. It was much easier for Elisha to declare his intention to follow Elijah—much easier to refuse to be separated from him than to answer wisely the question now put to him: "Ask what I shall do for thee."

WHAT WOULD OUR ANSWER BE?

We may well ask ourselves what our answer would be if we were permitted to have the thing that the heart most desired.

There are many false gods that are worshipped today—gods upon whose altars we lay our offerings. We do not always know what is uppermost in the minds of those about us; only such a question as that asked by Elijah brings the paramount wish to the surface. The real longings of the heart may be suppressed on ordinary occasions, but when an opportunity for gratification comes, but ruling passion finds expression. What would we ask if given our choice by one with power to grant any request?

If Elijah had himself framed the answer, it could not have delighted him more. Elisha poured his heart into his words when he answered: "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me."

It was a hard request to grant, but it was just the thing that Elijah would like to grant. There had been no jealousy in his heart, not the slightest sign of disappointment when he was by God sent to anoint his successor, plowing with his oxen in his father's field. With all the bigness of a big man, he had taken Elisha to himself and trained him for his work, holding back nothing from him. In the answer that Elisha made he saw his confidence justified and his hopes realized.

THE DIVINE CURRENT IS CONTINUOUS

Then came Elijah's ascension to heaven in a whirlwind. Elisha watched the impressive scene until his master was gone; then, following the custom of his time, he rent his garments. Having given expression to his grief, he turned to the task before him.

Taking up the mantle of Elijah, he went back to the Jordan and, in imitation of Elijah, he smote the waters and they parted as they did before Elijah. His act bore witness to his faith, and the sons of the prophets, seeing that he, too, was able to perform miracles in the name of the Lord, recognized in his victory over the waters evidence that the spirit of Elijah rested upon him.

We find in "the mantle of Elijah" a more practical lesson than in the translation of the prophet. In the latter we see evidence of God's power and proof of His willingness to give an extraordinary reward to one who rendered an extraordinary service, but all can succeed to a mantle. "The mantle of Elijah" is a figure of speech that has been woven into the language of all nations.

The success that attended Elisha proves that the divine current is continuous—it only awaits conductors. Throughout the ages God has been working His wonders; His spirit has manifested itself through those who surrendered themselves to Him, and like Elijah and Elisha, were willing to proclaim His truth. The mantle is a

visible sign of invisible power. It does not pass from prophet to prophet as it did in days of old, but the same consecration is necessary today as in olden times.

NO ARISTOCRACY IN CHRISTIAN SERVICE

The succession is not by blood. There is no aristocracy of great servants; Christian nobility does not run in families.

The Bible does not tell us anything about the family of Elijah; we do not know whether he left any sons. But we do know that he was not called upon to anoint a son as his successor. The throne of Israel descended from father to son, but the scepter of spiritual power does not follow man's line of descent.

God calls to His work those who prepare for it. They may have had little thought in their preparation of the use they would make of that which they learned, just as David never dreamed of the use that he would make of the skill he had acquired in the hurling of pebbles with his sling. But the day came when the sling and pebbles were needed to slay a Goliath, and the "ruddy shepherd lad" was ready for the work.

There were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, but only one of them was prepared to do the work of Elijah. There were many young men plowing with oxen, but there was only one Elisha. Many may have coveted the mantle of the great prophet, but the one to whom it was given was the one most worthy to wear and use it, as Elijah did, as a symbol of power delegated by Jehovah to a servant.

NO FAINT HEARTS NEED APPLY

Today there are tasks awaiting all who are willing to consecrate themselves to God's service, tasks as great as ever fell to any generation. No faint hearts need apply. Only those whose trust is complete and who are willing, at any risk, to follow the path of duty can hope for a summons to service.

The task may not seem a large one; but who is man that he should attempt to measure the consequences of a human act? Trivial things become turning points in the life of individuals and nations, and things seemingly important dwindle into insignificance. The servant of God does not ask whether the thing to be done is little or big; he simply asks whether it is a duty—whether it is a thing that should be done.

We can afford to leave the consequences with God. If we have the faith that we ought to have, we pray for light and then act according to the light that is given us. We will not be ashamed to take up the tasks that others lay down, and we need give ourselves no concern about successors. If we are engaged in doing God's work, successors will be found and drafted into service as we ourselves have answered to the summons.

AN INSPIRATION THAT OVERCOMES CRITICS

The critics ridicule the account of the translation of Elijah; they attempt to undermine faith in it and to rob it of its authority and influence. But they work in vain, because the inspiration that the lesson brings into a single human life outweighs the total work of all the critics who are whittling at the Word of God.

Men whose hearts have never responded to a call to duty may scoff at Elijah's mantle; those who will not condescend to take up and carry on the unselfish efforts of others may laugh at Elisha; but these majestic characters still stride up and down the earth arousing the sons of men to sacrifice and service. Hearts that are open to divine suggestion will see in them examples to be followed, and multitudes are following.

Elijah and Elisha are among the "immortals" who still "rule our spirits from their urns."

A GREAT WOMAN'S FAITH By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR FEB. 4

(II Kings 4:18-22, 27, 30, 32-37)

And when the child was grown, it fell on a day, that he went out to his fathers to the reapers. And he said unto his father, My head, my head. And he said to a lad, Carry him to his mother. And when he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then he died.

And she went up, and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out.

And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses that I may run to the man of God, and come again.

And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and

the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.

And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as my soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her.

And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord.

And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm.

Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son.

Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out.

"And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread."

So begins the story of the Shunammite woman whose kindness and faith God rewarded through his prophet according to the faith that was in her.

A great woman—where before in history do we find that word applied to a woman, and where outside of the Bible has woman been honored as she is in Holy Writ?

Besides this Shunammite woman, who exhibited a cluster of the highest virtues—reverence, hospitality, implicit faith, and profound gratitude—the Bible has immortalized many other good women.

The Old Testament tells of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Deborah, Ruth and Naomi, Vashti and Esther, and many others.

In the New Testament we read of a generous widow who with two mites purchased more enduring fame than any other person has been able to buy with unlimited means; of the Tabitha, whose deeds of kindness called forth one of the most eloquent of eulogies; of Martha, who expressed her trust in that classic lament, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died," and of the woman whose alabaster box of ointment has spread its fragrance over 19 centuries. And above and beyond all these, and all others, Mary, chosen for the sacred task of mothering the Saviour.

THE POWER OF GODLY WOMEN

In our own day and in every land great women can be found; nowhere are they more numerous or more beloved than in the United States. In the church, in society, in politics they have made their power felt as they have demonstrated the possession of those virtues that disclose a likeness to Him in whose image we are made.

The one woman to whom our nation has thus far paid the highest honor is Frances Willard, who was so conspicuous in all three lines of work that her statue graces the Hall of Fame in Washington.

While history, sacred and profane, has written high the names of a few women, we must not forget the unnumbered multitude who, just as reverent, as hospitable, as full of faith and as generous in their expressions of gratitude, have glorified womanhood by embodying the best that there is in humanity.

"And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was that as often as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread."

The road from Gilgal to Mount Carmel, which the prophet often had occasion to take on God's business, led by this woman's home. After Elisha had thus become a frequent visitor at the home, the woman said to her husband:

"Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither."

ONE OF WOMAN'S JEWELS

It was a kind thought, just such a thought as has inspired millions of women who have added to the comfort of God's servants. Men do think of these things, but the home has ever been woman's throne and her hospitality has been one of the jewels in her crown.

The prophet, anxious to make some suitable return for the woman's generous thoughtfulness, sent for her and said:

"Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?"

He suggested the rewards that would ordinarily be acceptable. He was in a position to secure for her whatever her heart might wish.