

SAMUEL THE PROPHET

by

F. B. Meyer, B.A

CHAPTER SIX

THE WORK OF RECONSTRUCTION

(I Samuel 7:2)

“Be still and strong
O Man, my Brother! hold thy sobbing breath
And keep thy soul’s large window pure from wrong!
That so, as life’s appointment issueth,
Thy vision may be clear to watch along
The sunset consummation lights of death!”

- E. B. Browning.

WHILST the events described in the last chapter were in progress, Samuel was giving himself to the great and noble work of reconstruction. As soon as our flesh is lacerated, or our bones broken, Nature begins to pour out her reparative forces to renew the damaged tissues, and so rebuild the ruined temple.

As it is in physical life, so in spiritual, there are always holy and gentle natures that are charged with the Divine work of bridging over the roaring torrent of revolution, and of rearing new continents of order from the weltering ocean waste by which the previous land had been engulfed. Blessed work, indeed, is this, like the work of the Almighty, who, when the earth was without form and void, began to build in the midst of her the habitable places for man’s existence.

To this Samuel devoted the twenty years that followed directly on the field of Aphek. The Philistine invasion seems to have somewhat subsided from its first triumphant outburst, and to have retired from the occupancy of the interior portions of Israel. He was thus able to pursue his quiet and unobtrusive toils for his fatherland, free from the zealous supervision and opposition to which, otherwise, he must have been subjected.

He seems to have taken up his abode in Ramah, so intimately associated with his earliest days. Here were his headquarters, where young men gathered to him, and were formed into the earliest of the schools of the prophets, and where also he married, and became the father of two sons.

Their names are suggestive of their father’s piety and walk with God the name of the one being **Joel** “*The Lord is God,*” and of the other **Abiah** “*The Lord is my Father.*”

Amid the general disturbance of the religious life in which he had been nurtured, with the Ark in one place and the remnants of the Tabernacle in another, with the discontinuance of the sacred rites and feasts, which had been so great an assistance to piety in former years, Samuel nevertheless was able to walk with God, and to preserve a devout religious life.

Probably this is why God permits from time to time so great a shaking of the things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken, the unseen and eternal, may be more clearly defined and more eagerly sought unto. In this present age we have heard Him saying, “**I will overturn, overturn, overturn;**” we have seen theories of inspiration rudely assailed; churches menaced with destruction; ancient creeds ruthlessly questioned; but out of it all true religion is destined to emerge in undiminished luster, as gold from the purifying furnace.

In the meanwhile, let us say with Samuel, the Lord is God and the Lord is my Father. Let us hold fast, above all, to the unchanging love of our Father, who loves us with a love with which there is nothing to compare in Heaven or earth.

Samuel knew that there were two objects which must be realized before Israel’s sad condition could be remedied or the Divine ideal realized.

First; the national unity must be recovered from the anarchy in which it had been overwhelmed.

It was useless to think of holding the land against the inroads of the neighboring people so long as each tribe was content with an isolated existence, repelling its own enemies for a time, but indifferent to the condition of its neighbours and of the country at large. Israel must be one, animated by a common enthusiasm for its future independence and integrity. Let each tribe be proud of its idiosyncrasy, and fulfil its own distinctive mission; but let all be one in asserting the independence and glory of the chosen people.

This is no less desirable in our own age. The divisions of the Church are her bane, and render her impotent before her foes. Ephraim envies Judah, and Judah vexes Ephraim; and their common enemies make profit out of their mutual recriminations and rivalries. It is a sad spectacle to witness the divisions between Christians in the face of a mocking world, and we shall never be able to make men believe till we have learned to magnify the points of agreement, and to bear with all those who love the Lord Jesus, and are united with Him as their living Head, though their method of stating the truth may differ widely from our own.

Secondly; the evils that had eaten into the nation’s heart must be put away.

The people had forsaken the God of their fathers for the Phoenician and Philistine deities, whose images were worshipped in his stead. Shrines to Baal and Ashtoreth covered the land. Foul orgies of shameless impurity were everywhere rife. And it was evident that only a widespread revival of religion could save the people from rotting away before the very evils for which the ancient Canaanites had been destroyed.

This was Samuel’s opportunity.

“And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your heart, then put away the strange gods and the Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare (or direct) your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only.”

Men cannot live permanently without God. There may be long periods of irreligious carelessness, of unholiness, and sinful self-indulgence, which are the counterparts of the Baalim and Ashtaroth of the old nature-worship; but there will be a flow where there has been an ebb; and all Israel will presently lament after God. Let the servant of God be then prepared to strike in, for his hour has come.

Samuel was pre-eminently a man of prayer. He is known on the subsequent pages of Scripture, as he that called on the Divine Name (I Samuel 9:6-9; Psalm 99:6; Jeremiah 15:1).

In addition, he was a man of blameless reputation and life in themselves eminent qualifications. It has been truly said that the special work of guiding, moderating, and softening the jarring counsels of men is the particular privilege of those who have grown up into natural strength from the early beginnings of purity and goodness; of those who can humbly and thankfully look back through middle age, and youth, and childhood, with no sudden rent or breach to their pure and peaceful recollections and such was certainly Samuel's happy lot.

He was also a man of practical sagacity, and by his appeals wrought upon the national conscience; so that, as the result of his efforts, **“it came to pass, while the Ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.”**

Notice those two phrases; **“all the house of Israel”** - there is the restoration of the lost unity; **“lamented after the Lord”** - there is the national repentance, which was followed by a widespread reformation: **“Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only.”**

Would that there might be a similar turning unto God in our time and land!

“Revive, O Lord, thy work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years make known.”

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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