



Reflections on the first chapter of the first book of Samuel

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REFLECTIONS

ON THE FIRST CHAPTER OF THE FIRST
BOOK OF SAMUEL

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The first chapter of the first book of Samuel.

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-Zophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephratite;

2. And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

3. And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Pinchas, the priests of the Lord, were there.

4. And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and daughters, portions;

5. But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah; but the Lord had shut up her womb.

6. And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb.

7. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.

8. Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?

9. So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord.

10. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore.

11. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

12. And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth.

13. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart, only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.

14. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.

15. And Hannah answered and said, No, my Lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.

16. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial; for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

17. Then Eli answered and said: Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

18. And she said: Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

19. And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her.

20. Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying: Because I have asked him of the Lord.

21. And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the Lord the yearly sacrifice and his vow.

22. But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband: I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever.

23. And Elkanah her husband said unto her: Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the Lord establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him.

24. And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young.

25. And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

26. And she said: Oh my Lord, as thy soul liveth, my Lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord.

27. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him.

28. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there.

Reflections on the first chapter of the first book of Samuel.

In the first chapter of the first book of Samuel we behold two characters opposed to each other, two women, the one widely differing from the other in disposition and spirit. Contrasts of this nature frequently occur in Scripture, especially in the book of Psalms, where we find on the one side power, wealth, influence in the world and such like, associated with ungodliness and sin, on the other side none of all these privileges; but the fear of the living God and his statutes. The same contrast is conspicuous in the two women of our chapter, representing, as it were, the two opposite principles of light and darkness; another evidence of the fact that the enmity which God in Paradise has put between world, flesh and devil, and the children of God and his kingdom, ever continues.

It is not to be overlooked, and well worth of notice, that the first book of Samuel opens with an account of the barrenness of Hannah. Facts of similar import we find mentioned in the history of Abraham and Sara, that of the priest Zachary and his wife Elisabeth. And these facts, this barrenness, are not the effect of mere chance, a caprice of nature, no, for in our chapter it is emphatically said: "The Lord had shut up the womb of Hannah." Learn from this, thou pious wife to understand the meaning of thy manifold afflictions and sorrows. May be that misfortunes have invaded thy family, that calamities have disturbed the peace of thy homestead; thou art groaning under the burden of thy troubles with which the Lord has visited thee; thou feelest powerless and helpless, all is taken away from thee; and in thy loneliness it would seem as if the Lord had hidden his face from thee, as if thou wert rejected and cursed, as if the Lord had forgotten his promise. It is the Lord who in his infinite goodness and wisdom has permitted all these troubles to come over thee by which thy faith is put to the test; in order that in the school of

adversity thou mayest be trained up to a knowledge and sense of thy own weakness and an entire dependency on Him alone whose love and power will manifest themselves in thee. May every believing soul bear in mind, amidst the manifold temptations and troubles of life, how much the Holy Ghost has cause to rouse her from despondency and fears with the call: "Rejoice thou barren that bearest not!"

Does it not often seem in human life, whenever we look to the visible only, as if the Lord had suffered his word to be made a scorn and a reproach? "Peninnah, it is said, had children, but Hannah had none." Does it not hold true here: that neither the outward gifts we may boast of; neither the ease and comforts of life and its glittering splendours we call our own; nor outward power skill and such like, are proofs in themselves of a state of grace, of our being children of God? Privileges of this kind but too much tend to betray us into a sense of our own dignity and importance, into unkind and harsh dealings with those upon whom we look down as beings less favoured than we are. If therefore, upon reading this chapter, thou really wishest to be benefited by the word of God for thy own salvation; bear in mind that of all thou hast there is nothing but thou owest it to the Lord. Consider thy own state of weakness; let a sense of thy own wretchedness prevent thee from elevating thyself above the humble and the weak; for behold: the next day may take away from thee, all thou possessest.

We might be allowed to ask here: Why do we so often see those who are undeserving of God's blessings so easily obtain what they desire, while on the other hand, God's own beloved children, as a general rule, only receive their portion after they have gone through severe trials, the heat of afflictions, yea even suffered the anxieties of hell?

A lovely sight it is to see in our chapter Elkanah go up to the house of God to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord in Shiloh. The Lord whom he sacrificed is here called "The Lord Sabaoth;" that is "the Lord of hosts." And Hannah went up with her husband to the temple of the Lord in quest of the blessing she so ardently desired. We may safely suppose Elkanah to have cast Hannah's cares and afflictions upon the Lord; but on the other hand we learn from what we read in our chapter that he was unable to understand his wife's anxieties and sorrows.

A lovely picture it is indeed to behold a loving housefather trying to comfort his wife, to see him bear up with her infirmities and weaknesses, to see him give to her, the afflicted, "a worthy piece" (verse 5) as becomes a worthy husband; but the question he puts to Hannah nevertheless betrays a sense of selfsufficiency and self-

importance, it shows how far he was from understanding the severe struggles and trials of inward life by which the heart of his wife was agitated. Elkanah said to his wife: "Am I not better to thee than ten sons." This remark or rather reproach denotes that he imagines Hannah's only desire to be the possession of a son. But Hannah's song in the second chapter plainly shows that the object she had in view was the glory of her Lord, the accomplishment of his word and promises, the manifestation of his justice and judgment, his merciful kindness and his truth.

Our chapter moreover tells us that Hannah was exposed to the bitter enmity of her spiteful rival Peninnah, who it is said "provoked her sore and made her fret" (verse 6.) And this happened every year, every time Hannah went up to the house of the Lord she was exposed to her adversary's scorn and sneers. Thus even upon the most solemn occasions, upon their appearing into the Lord's presence Peninnah did not refrain from abusing her rival; claiming in the pride of her heart the blessings of Divine spiritual life, its truth and grace for herself alone, and denying all to Hannah.

But what matters it to God's children to be disowned and despised by the world. All its splendours, titles, honours, wealth and riches are of no avail; they present no claims to the Lord's mercy and favour. To be in a state of Grace, to have found mercy, to be at peace with God is a blessedness far surpassing any thing the world knows of or can give. The way of grace is not the highroad of prosperity which the fortunate of this world follow; it is a rough and narrow path that leads first of all into the deep of affliction, through barrenness, anxieties and troubles, through the hottest furnace of adversity, to purify away the dross of worldliness and sin, in order that we may come to a sense of the nothingness of the creature, standing alone in the fulness and power of the Lord. The power of the Lord is the strength of the poor and the contrite of heart, with respect to whom we read in the Scripture: "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench." Is. 42, 3.

Hannah did not retaliate on her rival's injustice with bitter words, she did not revile her or oppose to the Cainlike grudge of Peninnah, who stood by her own conscience convicted of a life without God, even a word of rebuke. With fasting and tears of sorrow she turns away her face from her spiteful adversary to the Lord her only refuge, the rock of her salvation. To Him she unbosoms her whole soul, all her cares, upon Him alone relying in the bitter hour of anguish and trial for

comfort and redress. The one nearest her heart on earth, her own beloved husband, does not understand the nature of her distress; but she suffers not a complaint to escape her lips, she hides from her husband her pains and her griefs. With a cheerful countenance she appears in his presence, and putting aside every token of sadness, she eats and drinks with him. But scarcely had she withdrawn from the holy banquet when she hastens to the sanctuary of her Lord there to unburden her oppressed heart in tears and supplications (verse 9.).

Let us follow Hannah's footsteps, let us do as Hannah did whenever it pleases Divine Providence to lead us into darkness and trouble for our own good. We may feel lonely and sad in the dreary wilderness of our afflictions, forsaken and disowned by the world, even misconceived by our dearest friends and relatives; but let us hie to the only source of all happiness and bliss, the fountain of all light, to the God of all Grace; and we shall experience with Hannah that we have not relied in vain on God's word and promises, His justice and truth for the final victory over darkness and troubles.

Verse 9. we read: "Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple," according to the Hebrew, the seat of the temple, the Lord's tabernacle. Now we almost should expect to see Hannah here approach the priest and disclose to him, as to the natural adviser of the Lord's appointment, all her cares; for the fact of Eli being seated in this place must have borne some reference to his office. He was the High priest, consequently the minister and representative of Him who is the king of Heaven and earth, appointed and consecrated by the Lord on High, whose office it was to intercede with the Lord for his saints, to carry before his throne their wishes, their afflictions and their troubles with supplications and prayers. Here in the holy precincts of the house of God the priest was seated, invested with the dignity and glory of the king of kings, to administer counsel and consolation from the rich treasury of his Lord in whose name he sat there to judge the people; for the seat he occupied represented the seat of royal power and mercy. "He sat upon a seat by a post." To these posts were fastened the manifestations and precepts of Divine majesty, justice and love streaming from the mercy seat, as suggested in Prov. 8. 34. It was this very post of the tabernacle in regard to which the Lord had said: "that there He would dwell amid the impurities of His people to plead the cause of the poor and the afflicted, and execute judgment." But Hannah's eyes are averted from the priest; at her Lord's feet she is moved by the Spirit to cast all

her perplexities and cares. We shall not be long in learning from our history the reason why she was thus led to pour out the afflictions of her soul to God, not to the priest.

In verse 10. we read: "She was in bitterness of soul and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore." What a blessed and precious sorrow is that godly sorrow which is not to be repented of; that sorrow which is the true expression of a contrite heart. But a little while ago when in the presence of her husband, she put ointment on her head, did eat and drink as if there had been nothing to mar her joys; but here in the presence of her Lord she sinks down under the load of her afflictions on the temple's floor, no longer can she master her emotions; for it is her Lord's cause she is pleading, His honour and His love and mercy have been reviled by her enemy; this is more than she can bear. It ever is the great concern of the Lord's saints to uphold and to proclaim His love and glory; they know that God's ways are ever holy and good; and therefore they cannot see without a pang His promise, justice and truth set at nought or even questioned. Thus like a pent up stream breaking through every restraint she gives vent to her sorrows and the bitter pangs of her aching heart by her tears and sighs. "She prayed to the Lord." She poured forth her whole soul, and to whom? "To the Lord of hosts"; namely to Him who exists, who liveth, and who is to perfection what He is: the most High, omnipotent, everlasting and merciful God, who in the hour of trial makes known to His people that He is the Lord the Almighty. And that He is the Lord the Almighty even his enemies shall know, as Pharaoh did who experienced the powerful hand of the most High.

What a difference between the two rivals in our chapter: Peninnah it is true enjoyed many privileges, as a wife and as a mother she could boast of many gifts which were denied to Hannah, upon whom she looked down with scorn and pity; but one treasure she was wanting, a blessing far outweighing all other gifts, a treasure which Hannah could claim her own: the knowledge, the friendship of the Lord, her trust to whom she could bring all her troubles, all her cares, to whom she could look as the rock of her salvation.

And she "wept sore." Surely these tears are counted by the Lord who "giveth grace unto the lowly." Prov. 3. 34. These tears speak far more forcibly than words can do; by them even mountains of cares have been lifted from the oppressed heart and cast at the Lord's feet, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Thus

speaks the Lord to all those who amid their sorrows and afflictions know of no other refuge but their God and have no other trust but God's word and promise. That is Hannah's mind, the reason of her disowning any other ground of confidence save God alone. — "Hannah vowed a vow, and said" our text continues. May we pronounce a vow like this and promise anything to the most High who is all powerful, who commands everything? — What should hinder us? All over the holy Scriptures, especially in the book of Psalms, we read of numerous examples of such vows. The vow which Hannah offered up to God was a solemn promise, one that truly came from the heart; what she promised she knew to be fully able and earnestly meant to perform. Let us be on our guard against lightly pronouncing any vows, against pledging ourselves to any obligations; unless we have before fully weighed the earnestness of our intentions and the range of our own strength; for we are neither sure of ourselves nor of the circumstances in which we may be placed. May the mournful example of Jephthah the judge be to us a warning against the bitter and mortifying consequences of inconsiderate vows! May the Spirit of Grace and truth pervade all our doings, sanctify all our vows; faith be the principle of our life, God's word and precepts our only guide, the glory of His name our aim. Hannah in pronouncing her vow was not swayed by selfish motives or any human considerations, she did not pledge herself to any selfimposed duties prescribed by human laws or statutes; she did not promise to devote herself to a state of perpetual virginity or her son to the life of a monk. Hannah's vow breathed quite another spirit; it flowed from the same Fountain as Jacob's vow. Gen. 28 v. 20—22. These vows are acceptable to the Lord.

May it be thine to have the same spirit of truth pervading all thy being, may its selfrenouncing, selfsubduing influence guide all thy steps, sanctify all thy purposes! When afflictions clouds darken thy path, when the blast of temptations shake thy confidence and thou art led into the deep of despondency and sorrow, let thy heart vow unto the Lord this vow: "Lord my strength and my refuge, if Thou but once more wilt come to my relief, if I but once more may enjoy the blessedness of Thy nearness, the sunshine of Thy love to dispel the shadows of anguish and fear that encompasseth my soul; my whole life shall henceforth be a constant sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise to the glory of Thy name; as long as I may be permitted to travel on in the wilderness of this life it shall be my constant, my daily occupation to proclaim to every fellow traveller I may meet on the common

road to eternity, to the poor, the afflicted, to every lost forlorn sinner, the power of Thy love, Thy justice and the greatness of Thy mercy; for mercy is Thy name. "Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the most High!" Ps. 50.

Indeed the Lord cannot but look down in mercy upon his Saints who are taught by the holy Ghost to find the way to the Lord's heart by their childlike supplications; he cannot help but come to their assistance for His own name's sake. "Lord Sabaoth, Lord of hosts", is the name by which Hannah addresses her God. We find in the third verse of our chapter this very name attributed to the Lord, intimating as it were that Hannah knew her Lord to be "an all powerful God to save", a tower of strength and a refuge to them that put their trust in Him. "Lord of hosts!" Thou art the Almighty keeper of Israel, thy power is unlimited, the number of thy servants untold, if Thou but unfold thy majesty and glory the proud are laid low and thine enemies confounded and scattered. Though I am overwhelmed with grief, thy hand can lift me up; were I even surrounded by the sorrows of death and the terrors of hell, I need not fear if Thou art at my side; for Thou art strong and there is no power to resist thy mighty arm.

"If Thou wilt," said Hannah; "yes if Thou but wilt bend thy pitying eye on me, thy poor handmaid will be restored to happiness and joy! — I will submit to the wholesome discipline of a Father's love, adore a Father's hand and trust a Father's faithfulness; I will lie passive in the arms of Thy mercy, saying: 'Undertake Thou for me;' but if Thou wilt Thou canst take the bitter cup from my lips and I shall, if it pleases Thee to grant my petitions, rejoice in Thy name and offer up to Thee thanksgiving and praise for ever."

"If Thou wilt look indeed on the affliction of Thy handmaid!" Here she has touched upon the very thing on which all her hopes depend! This humble appeal the Lord cannot resist, His mercy is vanquished. What else indeed has the Lord been always doing, what is He doing now, and what will He continue to do but to look on the afflictions of his servants and handmaids? Let us but remember the afflictions of the children of Israel in Egypt, concerning which we read the heartstirring account in Exodus 2, 25: "And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them", and, "I will look even to him that is poor and of contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word," says the Lord Isaiah 66, 2. And thus speaks the Lord Ezekiel 36, 9: "For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn unto you, and ye shall be tilled and sown."

The Hebrew text implies: "If Thou wilt but earnestly look, or but once look on the affliction of Thine handmaid." "Yes indeed, but once for all and ever, and I am saved for ever" that is it what she wants, the expression of her yearning heart. — Hannah calls herself the Lord's handmaid. — What a blessed state is that of Hannah's; her whole being exhaling the sweet perfumes of that true humility which our blessed Saviour has exemplified in His own spotless life on earth and His sublime precepts as we read: "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded, you say: we are unprofitable servants." St. Luke 17, verse 10. No merit or worthiness does she assume, no titles or preferences does she plead; mercy, free and undeserved, mercy she implores; she knows her Lord to be a God of kindness and of mercy, looking with compassion on her afflictions. Hers is a state of mind which according to the Hebrew text denotes in this passage that of wretchedness, of utter weariness and dejection, of breaking down, bruised and crushed under the weight of manifold mortifications and numerous troubles.

"And remember me," she continues. The very words with which the murderer on the cross turns in brokenheartedness of soul to a crucified Saviour, are Hannah's touching appeal to her Great Lord. Full of her own unworthiness she approaches the footstool of His majesty and greatness; what is she indeed that the high and lofty God who inhabiteth eternity should look on her afflictions! Alas, if the Lord only for a moment would remember her! Unworthy she is in her own estimate; but she comes in the nothingness of the creature to the high exalted worthy One; she commits herself to Him who has promised grace to the lowly and shall speedily and gloriously deliver them. The Lord remembereth indeed! for we read: "The Lord remembered Noah," and Psalm 74, 22: "Remember how the foolish man reproacheth Thee daily," and again: "Remember me, o Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation." Ps. 106, 4.

"And not forget thine handmaid," she continues praying. — What a charming simplicity, how lovely this childlike appeal of Hannah! and how does the Lord take it, how does He return such an address, does He grow angry with it, does it provoke his displeasure? — "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee, thus speaks the Lord, thy redeemer." These words

uttered in childlike simplicity are the final appeal of a soul in distress, driven from all creature stays and earthly refuges, of a soul depending on the Lord alone for mercy and salvation. "Wilt thou not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child." In one of the Psalms we read: "Show me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it and be ashamed; because thou, Lord, hast holpen me and comforted me." Three times she calls herself the Lord's handmaid. "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice", writes St. Paul 2. Cor. 12, 3. Hannah is desirous of giving her son to the Lord. Can we give anything to the Lord, have we anything to offer to the most High? In our natural state of utter wretchedness and sinful estrangement from a Holy God we have nothing to give wherewith to obtain mercy, nor have we anything to contribute to our salvation. All we can do here is to come, just as we are, as poor forlorn sinners devoid of all excellence to an Almighty Saviour, without one plea but the precious blood of the eternal Son of the everlasting God, the father. But they who really seek salvation, whose prayers are the genuine outpourings of an upright heart, a heart turning from the nothingness of the creature, from its own deep unworthiness to the infinitely worthy One and his covenant Grace, surrender to the Lord unreservedly all their being, body and soul, their whole heart, all their affections, and what they receive in return, all the blessings of Divine spiritual love and truth, they enjoy not as their own exclusive property and right, but as pensioners on Divine bounty on which they are constantly depending for every new supply of grace. And what is the moving spring with them that are thus actuated to make such vows of sacrifice and surrender to the Lord? What else but the power of that everlasting love with which they have been loved first, that loving kindness with which they have been drawn by Him who saw their tears and heard their prayers, who came to their relief in a day of salvation saying: "Fear not; for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." They who have obtained mercy glow with a holy zeal to promote the cause of the Lord their redeemer; they are burning with an ardent desire to make their fellow-creatures also partakers of the grace of Him who hath delivered them and who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light, of Him who has said: "The poor you have always with you."

"And there shall come no razor upon his head." Hannah consecrates her son to the Lord, he is to be a Nazarite: one devoted to the Lord's service all the days of his life, a living monument of the unspeakable

love and mercy which she had obtained. Her son a Nazarite, one whose head no razor ever should touch! What could have prompted Hannah to such a choice? With the Jews a shaggy head was reputed an uncomely sight, nothing indeed to please the eyes of sense. But under this unseemly form the eye of faith discerns that hidden excellency of Him whose likeness her son is to put on, of Him the despised and rejected of men, of Christ the man of sorrows! How different Hannah's choice from all that is deemed in general excellent by parents and therefore the most desirable object of their prayers for their children! For her son Hannah hath chosen that good part, the "one thing needful." More a mother's heart could not bestow; greater reward a mother's love could not receive than what she obtained from the Lord for her son in answer to her vow: to see her motherly decision, her choice crowned with the high honour of her offspring being "planted in the likeness of the death of Christ."

A careful perusal of the song which Hannah sings in praise of her dear Lord, such as we find recorded in the second chapter of our book from the first to the tenth verse, will explain to us the reason why Hannah insisted with the Lord on having a son to serve Him in his temple all the days of his life. The holy Scriptures offer many examples of godly women taking a vital interest in the concerns of church and state which they had at heart. To what a dreadful state both church and government in Israel were reduced in those times we learn from the second chapter of our book where we find the conduct of Eli and his two sons, Israel's judge and priests, recorded. According to the Hebrew text; Hannah, while she was beseeching the Lord, did not say: "a son"; "a male seed" was the expression she gave to the object of her desire. Women, the genuine types of women, those who are imbued with a true sense of their dignity and duty, will covet in their offspring a man; one endowed with manly courage and energy to rise up in defence of church and state in times when the safety of both are endangered by false doctrine or wicked example. Thus in the days of theocratical or divine government in Israel, when the temple of the Lord was polluted by idolatry and His covenant broken by the iniquity of his people, we find amid the darkness of unbelief and sin godly women sighing for the daybreak of salvation and desiring to bring forth a man armed with the strength of the most High; one personifying as it were the promised Messiah, the expected redeemer to establish judgment and justice among his people. Considering Hannah's situation in those times of general decline: was there a man

in Israel of the true stamp to uphold the Lord's cause, his justice and truth; could she look upon Elkanah her husband as such or expect salvation from the two priests Hophni and Pineas; was even Eli, the High priest and prince in Israel, possessed of a manly character worthy of his office, he who appeared so little concerned about the glory of the Lord as to suffer his degenerated sons to profane the house of the Lord with their shameful conduct and injustices? Alas! how truly did the prophet's words apply to the men of those days: "Children are their oppressors and women rule over them" Ies. 3, 12. and: "their might hath failed, they became as women." How gloriously has Hannah's devotion to the Lord's cause been afterwards rewarded; she had surrendered her son, her all, to God and to His service and lived to see her offspring raised above the brethren of his tribe; a priest, a prophet, a ruler over Israel, anointed with the grace and power of God; the true male seed appointed by the Lord to check the growing corruption in church and state and to establish the Lord's justice and truth, the honour of his tabernacle in the midst of his people. Let us recall to our mind Samuel's life, how he afterwards proved himself to be "a true man seed," especially with regard to Saul.

In the following passage we find the wonderful ways of the Lord exemplified with regard to his children who are crying unto him in a spirit of uprightness and truth. Alas! they often find themselves in life reduced to a state of perplexities and gloom in the dark hour of trial when the tempest of troubles and afflictions burst from threatening clouds that seem to overhang their heads, in a manner as the Lord speaking to his church says: "O thou afflicted tossed with the tempest and not comforted." Isaiah 54, 11. How numerous were the severe tempests that were passing over Hannah's head every time she went up to the house of God and there met with the bitter taunts of her adversary, who as we read: "provoked her sore and made her fret."

But what are the most violent tribulations to God's children? Conscious of their covenant relationship to their God they pass through the hot furnace of their trials supported by the sublime assurance that "the Lord reigneth." Though fortune fail and friendship's most endearing ties be dissolved, what matters it, the very hurricane of temptation must serve to drive them more under the shelter of the Rock, in the bosom of their God. Thus we behold Hannah prostrate at her Lord's feet; to Him unburdening all the bitterness of her soul. Verse 12, we read. "And she continued praying," "repeatedly prayed," according to the Hebrew text. Hannah has cast herself upon the Lord,

disowned by the world, shipwrecked in all her affections, she clings to her Everlasting Hope for the rest of her soul; she is not to be repulsed, she does not relinquish her precious hold; "Help me, Saviour, or I die," is the outcry of her soul; persisting in her supplications she repeats her vow exclaiming over and over again: Wilt thou look on the affliction of thine handmaid, wilt thou, wilt thou indeed! Indeed this is the way with God's elect who like Hannah are drawn by the cords of His love to the great fountain-head of their life and being, ever crying unto the Lord, constantly calling upon his love, his mercy, his faithfulness, his infinite power, his justice and his honour. It is true they never stand upon their own ground, they do not plead their own merit; but ascribing all the praise to the Lord they approach the mercy seat in selfrenouncing lowliness, solely relying upon the mighty arm of Him who "is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." — In this manner they continue with praying and beseeching the Lord, repeating the same words until they have obtained mercy. Oh, the cheerful consolation to every believing praying soul to read of our Lord in Gethsemane, that He himself "prayed the third time, saying the same words." Math. 26, 44.

And does an answer come from heaven, a compassionaté voice proceed from the sanctuary of the Lord whispering to her afflicted soul: "fear not," a Saviour's arm stretch forth to pour the balm of consolation on her wounded heart, to dry her tears and lift her up for ever? Alas! the bitter cup is not yet taken from her lips; the tide of her afflictions is rising higher still and drowns the very utterance of her voice; the prayers of her heart convulsed with grief but move her lips, and like a poor and trembling bird, when terrified by the lurking enemy's presence, she dares not raise her timid eyes; for near her is the High priest of the Lord, invested with the ensigns of his dignity; his eyes are bent on her in stern reproach, watching the very movements of her lips; he thinks she is drunk. And why this thought of his? Indeed if sorrow's swelling tide has reached its highest pitch, if borne down by its crushing weight no friend on earth remains to soothe our pains, no sympathising voice to cheer the dreary watch of anguish and of care, if every earthly prop is giving way and we have nothing more to call our own; then may the dreadful hour have come in which quite overwhelmed with grief we find no words more for complaint, no strength is left for cries, the very fountain of our tears is dried up, and dumb with agonizing cares we seem subdued like victims of

the intoxicating draught without the power to speak; our shaking limbs, our quivering lips, a sigh, is all that tells the inward struggles of the soul. Thus sinking under the cross of her afflictions Hannah mourns and all her soul she pours out to her Lord in mental prayer. "Out of the depths she cries unto the Lord," and as the Psalmist's words express: "her soul is waiting for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." And does the daybreak of deliverance come? Alas, the stern voice of the priest but greets her ear, so suddenly, so unexpectedly it breaks upon the silence of the holy temple's precincts that like a thunderclap it fills her soul with awe: "How long wilt thou be drunken, put away thy wine from thee."

What a dreadful shock to Hannah's heart! how jarring on her feelings; how dismal do these words resound. Thus ruthlessly rebuked and her faith trampled in the dust, and this blow dealt by the high priest of the Lord! So unawares, so suddenly may hell break loose upon us from a quarter where we not in the least expected its assaults! What is she now to do, what to reply to Eli's unjust censure? Shall she, relinquishing her precious hold, turn round upon the priest resenting the insult? To have come to the temple, there to pray, and in a state of drunkenness, what a thought! She is not guilty of this sin; but is it likewise so with other sins? — Alas! how often do we see the fruits worked by the Holy Ghost, the Pure, the Holy and Divine misconceived and disregarded among men! Poor priest! he knows nothing of the pangs that fills a soul, who wrestling with its God, exclaims with Jacob: "I will not let thee go except thou bless me!" Gen. 32, 26.

For the heinous sins committed by his sons and the women that assembled at the door of the Lord's tabernacle Eli had scarcely an eye. Instead of opposing the disorders and wickedness by which the Lord's temple were profaned with all the authority of his office, his only censure was a mild rebuke; but he does not hesitate to wound the heart of the poor afflicted woman that lies here prostrate before him. Oh, let us be on our guard against rashly pronouncing a judgment that may hurt the feelings of our neighbour, lest, by suffering our doubts and suspicions to escape our lips inconsiderately we commit an injustice!

And we who confess our own state of unworthiness and corruption and bewail our trespasses and sins with our tears, we who are desiring to be cleansed from our impurities by the precious blood of Christ, who have accepted the proffered boon of His meritorious work, are we ourselves exempt from having sinned against the holiness of the

ninth commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour?" Must we not feel deeply humbled with the painful consciousness of our guilt? May it be ours to study daily with increasing zeal the spirit and the meaning of this word! The Heidelberg catechism has to the query: What does the ninth commandment demand of us, the following reply: "That I must not bear false witness, against no body, nor misrepresent or pervert anything one may have said or done." I must not condemn my neighbour lightly and without a hearing; but I must shun all sorts of falsehood and of fraud which are the devil's works and which call forth God's dire wrath and anger; that I must love but honesty and truth in life's transactions, confess and tell the truth whenever I be called upon to give evidence in court or any other place; that I must to the utmost of my power promote and vindicate my neighbour's right and honour.

Does the curse from Sinai's heights descend with less force on the heads of those who trespass upon this command, than upon them that sin against the others? Did the Lord not say: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of the law to do them?" How prone are we to judge and to condemn our neighbour even without a hearing or inquiring into his case! We are naturally so perverted that we cannot even refrain from thinking evil of our fellow men! How often do we make ourselves guilty and condemnable on this head in our daily intercourse with our fellow creatures who in our judgment are not what we think ourselves to be? And in making thus ourselves guilty of this general sin could we indeed live on without being startled by a sense of our own guilt without a remorse stirring within our breast? What stronger evidence can we have of the natural estrangement of our unloving selfish heart from the eternal source of love and life! Where is the power of love, the energy to vindicate and to promote the rights and honour of our neighbour to the utmost of our power? "Judge not," says the Lord, that ye be not judged: for with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Math. 7, 1. 2.

From Eli let us turn our eyes on Hannah. There we find the Spirit's genuine fruit. She does not fly into a passion, her lips pronounce no bitter words; she acts as the apostle has commanded: "Having compassion of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering evil for evil or railing for railing." 1. Pet. 3, 8. 9.

And neither does she give herself up to despair and leave the temple's court where she has fled to find refuge from an uncharitable

and wicked world; because the Lord seems to her prayers deaf and she is by His very priest repulsed with disdain; but mildly turning round unto the priest, whose office and whose dignity she honours, she humbly answers him, but firm and true: "No my Lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord, count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial; for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto."

Indeed the workings of the Holy Ghost breathe quite another spirit than the world with her vain passions and her frivolous pursuits! A pious woman, a man who fears the Lord; how different from the worldly minded throng! While in a world that shuns the path of truth and light, we meet at every step with falsehood and deceit, hypocrisy and overbearing pride; we see God's children quietly wandering on in true humility, unnoticed by the powerful and great; but in their heart the treasure of that love and truth that sanctify their dealings and their words that make them steadfastly adhere to God's commands and faithfully come out for what is true and right; for it is God's holy word they fear and love, this is their guide and strength amid the trials and temptations of this world! And such a life of godliness and truth brings forth its fruit as we shall see hereafter. The priest is moved by Hannah's mild reply, and silently he owns that he was wrong.

Oh, that no feeling of false pride and shame prevent us from acknowledging our wrongs with which we may have grieved the hearts of others; may never we retire to rest before we have made due amends for any rash and unkind word or unjust deed we may have said or done, and conscience's voice reprove. It is true, there is no meritorious deed with which we could purchase eternal bliss, no merit of our own to claim a heavenly reward; but God requires of us that we shall lay out on interest with our neighbour the debt of gratitude we owe to Him; conferring on our fellow men that loving and forbearing kindness He has bestowed on us. And let us bear in mind the words of St. James, the apostle: "With the tongue bless we God, even the father, and therewith curse we men who are made after the similitude of God. My brethren, these things ought not to be." James 3, 9. — But a little while ago we saw Eli behaving towards Hannah in a manner unworthy of his office; but the Lord whose power extends over everything, shows that He also holds the heart of men in his hand, that they who are unworthy, that is, unworthy in a certain sense, of the office which they hold in his church and service, have no power to hurt them

that are sincere and true; that upon his command they must even minister comfort unto them that are of a broken heart and of a contrite spirit and have in readiness for them a word of Divine truth to heal their wounded hearts and to extend its salutary effect upon all the remaining days of their pilgrimage. And thou, dear blessed pilgrim of the Lord, who loveth justice, truth and light, travel on in humbleness and faith the road that Zionward leads; let all thy words, thy actions, kindness breathe, give honour him who has a right to claim it; do as Hannah did! She might have taxed the priest with having hurt her feelings and her honour, and cast into his teeth his own indifference and neglect with regard to the shameful conduct of his sons; she does it not, it is not her business. In gentle words she imparts to Eli her distress, and by this soft reply a spark of spiritual life, still living within Eli's breast, is kindled into a recollection of the lessons he himself received once in affliction's school. "God is a God of all comfort, he comforteth them that are in any trouble and he will fulfil the desires of them that fear Him." 2. Cor. 1, 3. Ps. 145, 19; therefore Eli says to Hannah: "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou asked of Him." Oh, that he had known the power of that name which he pronounced here: "The God of Israel!" But Hannah knew the power of that name so sweet to her, it sounds like music in her ears and fills her thrilling heart with new delight. The longed for hour of her deliverance has struck at last! The glorious morn that dawns upon her soul restores her to the joy of God's salvation and drives away care's gloomy shadows. She is to go in peace! That is a word, a boon that neither death nor hell nor sin can take away from her! Thus strengthened in her faith, renewed in hope she rises from the ground. She does not pride herself on what she has recovered, her honour and her right; but happy with that peace which fills her soul she thankfully and with an humble heart owns the great blessing she received: to have found grace with God and in the eyes of men. Thus humbly she addresses the priest: "Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight." So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad. And thou who art in trouble and distress may it be thine to bear thy cross without a murmur, patiently committing all thy cares, thyself to Him who knows thy trials and who sees thy tears. With steadfast faith and childlike confidence look up to Him whose name is mercy, love and truth. May be that severe trials are yet in store for thee, temptation's furious blast may come to shake thy soul; but let not go thy hold;

thy constant cry: hold thou me up, o Lord, will oversound the storm; and surely thou wilt like Hannah live to see the daybreak of God's salvation; for God has said: "Call upon me in the day of trouble;" "I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me;" and: "The word of the Lord is right; and all His works are done in truth," and: "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him, he also will hear their cry, and will save them." And thou wilt likewise go thy way with gladness in thy heart and eat, and thy countenance will no more be sad; for the delight in the Lord will be thy strength.

Verse 19. How inexpressible is God's grace and goodness towards men which He has revealed in the precious gift of his dear word; to be a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path. This word has been to generations past a rule and guide through life, the hope and comfort to God's saints in times of darkness and distress. What would the world indeed be without it, without this word which up to the present time has been a safeguard to all that is acceptable to the Lord: good morals, virtue, honesty and truth, where still it is to be found in social intercourse.

Blessed are they who in this word abide, and seek the Lord with undivided mind;

Their feet, directed by this faithful guide will in the end rest and salvation find. —

Indeed, if God's word be our constant guide, we may tread life's highway with a firm and resolute step; we need not stand with a wavering mind betwixt perplexities that on our right and left hand will arise, nor be tossed about on a sea of fears and doubts, being at a loss what to do or not to do. God's will we find revealed in the holy Scriptures, where we have for every thing concerning this and our future state, a wholesome precept, lesson and example.

The nineteenth verse of our chapter tells us that Elkanah and Hannah rose up in the morning early. They set out early in the morning; for they had a long way to travel. We may derive a useful lesson from what we find related here. Let us consider that the time which God has granted us to live and work, is but a loan; we are responsible for the use of it. Whatever rank or station we occupy in life; we have some mission to perform in the kingdom of the Lord. Let us therefore not squander fleeting moments in vain pursuits or idleness, nor think our talents too trifling to trade upon; but let us cheerfully perform the task imposed upon us, improving every hour, every day as far as health permits, and bear in mind that "the night cometh, wherein none of us can work" Ps. 92. Ps. 63. Isaiah 33, 2.

Isaiah 50, 4. To how many families did the faithful performance of life's duties bring prosperity and joy!

Our verse informs us that Hannah and Elkanah have begun the day with worshipping the Lord. What a lovely picture to behold this married couple offering up their prayers and thanksgivings to the Lord before they set out on their journey homeward. Indeed, if we have thus begun the day with God, if our first thoughts are consecrated to a contemplation of the word of truth; God's blessing will attend us through the day and spread its hallowing influence over all its hours; the happy consciousness that God is on our side will make us strong and steel our heart against adversity and temptation's shocks; with diligence we shall perform the task that we have to perform, and guard against every thing that is displeasing to the Lord, our God. This good old custom to begin the day with prayer and the word of God, whence does it come; if not from God's own word which urgently enjoins upon us to observe this sacred duty. May this good old custom be preserved from falling in disuse, may it be held in high esteem in every home, in every place!

And that they have brought to a happy issue the journey they have thus begun with God we likewise learn from the nineteenth verse! Thus we find that with a mind stayed on God we cheerfully may enter on our daily task, our household duties; for the God, whose sun dispelled the darkness of the night, is our soul's sun, our shield; under his guardian care we need not fear day's toils and troubles; and God to whom we have committed ourselves with childlike faith, will bless the work we have begun with a praying, thankful heart. But with regard to the sluggard who does not honour God, we read: "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of a man void of understanding, and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stonewall thereof was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well. I looked upon it and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man." Prov. 24, 30—34. It is true, in one of the Psalms it is said: "It is in vain for you to rise so early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows! for so he giveth his beloved sleep," Psalm 127, 2, but this is said with regard to all those who undertake without the Lord, whose unsanctified minds are swayed by avarice and bent on vain pursuits. Such a state of mind is abominable in the eyes of God, for it is idolatry. How different it is with God's

friends whose thoughts and aims are sanctified by His Spirit, whose minds are inspired with a glowing zeal to show their gratitude to Him whose loving kindness and untiring care for all the works of his hands, the rising sun of every coming morn anew proclaims. They use with diligence the time, even the most humble means at their command they do not disdain to employ as faithful servants in the vineyard of the Lord, for "He that giveth power to the faint, increaseth strength to them that have no might," is in the heat of day's toils and troubles their prop and stay and their reward. The hundred twenty seventh Psalm referred to above, moreover has a word to shame all those who by their heathenish avaricious cares are led so far as to consider children a heavy charge they like not to possess; because they have to feed and to maintain them; for "lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward." We need not suffer our lives to be consumed by anxious cares how to bring up our children; for the God who has bestowed upon us the gift, will also give us food and raiment for them; if we but hold in high esteem prayer and his precious word which is a rich mine of all blessings, the true source of all happiness and joy. Let us therefore continue with faith and childlike confidence to look up to the Heavenly father from whom all blessings come, and who provides for all our wants; if we but trust in Him and honour his commands.

From the nineteenth verse we may finally derive a lesson of abstinence which the Lord in his word teaches married people to observe upon solemn occasions, of which we find an example in Exodus 19, 14 and 15; as we likewise learn to understand what the apostle writes to the Corinthians 1. Cor. 7, 5. We moreover have another instance here which shows us how the Lord, the author of the matrimonial state which He has consecrated with his blessing, takes delight in them that strengthen and sanctify with mutual love and due regard the sacred ties by which they are united. Oh the sweet and cheerful consolation which the words convey: "And the Lord remembered her!" — Had Hannah's mind at times perhaps been agitated between doubts and fears, if the Lord indeed would listen to her supplications? expressed by her words: "and remember me and not forget thine handmaid." Alas, it but too often is the case with us, that doubts arising within our breast, will dim the eye of faith and fill our heart with apprehension and dismay. Indeed what would become of us if in the midst of troubles and temptations we were left to our own weakness; if we had not a faithful God to lean upon, his Holy spirit to banish our

guilty misgivings from our mind; to foster and to nurse the tender seed of faith that He has planted in our breast!

Thus may doubts and fears arise to disturb our rest and tempt our faith at times; but we do not resign our eternal hope, we struggle on with childlike confidence through darkness, troubles, trials and distress; for we know a faithful Father's eye is watching over us, the hour of triumph is at hand, the cheerful consolation may unexpectedly rejoice the heart: "I will do it, I am with thee." Unexpectedly we say; for what else do the words imply: "And the Lord remembered her!" —

Oh, the precious testimony of God's faithfulness and love; words of life and consolation to God's elect: "The Lord remembered her." And that he is a tower of strength, the Lord of all salvation to all who put their trust in Him; we find corroborated in the twentieth verse: "It came to pass when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son." The holy Scriptures testify all over of God's faithfulness and truth; so we read: "And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken; for Sarah conceived and bare Abraham a son in his old age at the set time of which God had spoken to him." Gen. 21, verse 1 and 2, and Gen. 30, verse 22 and 23 we find a passage of similar import.

Indeed what are we that a holy God should have compassion with beings like we are, guilty cumberers who might have been left through eternity a monument of His righteous vengeance; that He should hear our unworthy prayers; that still mercy is remembered when but wrath is deserved? What would it be if He would deal with us according to our deserts, if His pardoning love and mercy had not held us up? With a compassionate eye He looks upon His children, their weaknesses, their trials and their struggles move His Father's heart to pity. He grows not weary neither does He faint, though they at times may faint; their heart may sink within them, they may mourn a blank, a sense of solitude as if the Lord had left them to despair by reason of their sins, backslidings and departures. But the Lord remains the same amid all the ebbings and flowings in the tide of man's fitful frames and feelings; he remains fixed and immovable, the great Rock of ages, a shelter to His saints; His words and promises are Truth, and Life, and Light. It is true, God's children may at times be led in darkness, when clouds of doubts and fears will dim the eye of faith and hide the sunshine of a Father's smile, when bending like the tender reed before temptation's blast, they feel as if the Lord had withdrawn

His hand from them, as if the Lord had left them friendless, portionless. The Lord but for a time will leave his children in this state of distance and alienation in order to enhance with them his favours, the sweet joys of a Father's tenderness and love for which they sigh. He leads His saints by this rough, uneven path, through darkness, fears and doubts, in order that a sense of their own emptiness may drive them closer to the allfulness of an allsufficient Saviour; that the trembling magnet of their own vacillating affections may be ever pointing more to their Lord, that they may learn to rely with more childlike confidence on the unseen arm of a covenant God, on His strength alone; disowning every other ground of confidence or hope of mercy, and looking with more single faith to His word and promise, to His own gracious assurance that "they who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength." The Lord seems to deny His favours for a while, He seems to hide His gracious countenance from us; that we may learn to be living more from day to day on His grace on which we are dependent for every pulsation of spiritual life; that our affections may be more alive to the incalculable obligations under which we are laid to God for His grants of mercy for every token of unmerited love, and we may show forth genuine fruits of gratitude, not only by lip homage, but by heart and life's devotion. We are but too prone to take God's mercies as matters of course. Alas, how many are thus living on in a state of insensibility and indifference towards God; how many who are daily living on His bounty with a cold, unfeeling heart! But there where spiritual life is really to be found the whole existence will become a sacrifice of thankfulness, a consecrating and surrender of all we have or are, our heart will be an altar whence the incense of praise and love and thanksgiving is constantly ascending to the throne of grace, and we shall bless the Lord for all the wondrous tokens of His infinite love, His faithfulness and rectitude, the great gift and purchase of free unmerited grace, and our soul will exclaim in amazing wonder: The Lord has remembered me; He has done with me according to His word; He has granted my unworthy prayers! Yes, God's Saints proclaim the wonders of His name, of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvellous light, "who loved them with an everlasting love," who put the new song into their mouth: "The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God my strength in whom I trust." "The Lord has done it!" that is their triumphant shout! He has revealed His power, love and mercy, as He had done to Sarah, Rachel and to Hannah, as we find testified in His holy word: "She bare a son."

Again: "The Lord remembered her:" How expressive of our wretchedness by nature, our proneness to dwell on the strength of our temptations, to yield to despondency and doubt, rather than relying on the faithfulness and promise of Him who has said: "I will forgive your iniquity, and I will remember your sin no more!" Jer. 31, verse 34. "She had conceived." How sweet a testimony to the believing soul to know that it is the Lord on whom our joys and happiness depend, the creator of the domestic state which He has blessed, saying: "Be fruitful and multiply!" Indeed such grants of mercies, such marvellous proofs and tokens of unmerited love must call forth fruits of genuine gratitude and praise from all the hearts who like Hannah are renewed by the blessed influence of the Spirit of all grace and comfort.

Samuel, we read, is the name she called her son, the fruit of her prayers, the pledge of her Lord's love and mercy. He is to bear that name in commemoration of God's kindness towards her. At the birth of her son she recalls to her mind the time when she was tried and tempted in affliction's training school; once more she travels back the rough and dreary path to the dark days when her yearning soul was wrestling with the Lord, a season of perplexities and troubles and humiliations, when she, the poor handmaid of the Lord, in broken-heartedness of soul was crying to the Lord of her salvation for a token of His tenderness and love. Her heart was failing within her, her strength was giving way; but the Lord has held her up, He has magnified His grace in her, by His power, love and mercy His poor handmaid has been restored to happiness and joy, His Father's hand has wiped the teardrops from her eyes. It is His word, the Lord it is who has sustained her in her weakness; His unswerving rectitude and faithfulness she did not trust in vain, that is the loftiest ground of her rejoicing. Indeed the Lord hath done all things well, of mercy as of judgment she now can sing.

For all these blessings, all these privileges she owes to God all her affections, every power of her body, every faculty of her soul; her whole existence is to be a living evidence and expression of gratitude and devotion; her son a living monument of God's faithfulness and truth, his name an open book where every one may read: "That the Lord is a rewarder unto them that diligently seek Him," Heb. 11, 16.; unto them whose aim and purpose are the glory of His name. And what a Saviour is the Lord! how wonderful are His ways! From out the depths of humiliation and despondency, through frowning

providences and the narrow path of selfrenouncing lowliness His upholding arm conducts His saints to the glorious heights of His salvation, to the full fruition of His love and nearness. In answer to her supplication Hannah has received a son; therefore she calls his name Samuel, that is: "granted by the Lord!" This name likewise implies: "name of God," or "his name is God."

Thus from the perishable creature she looks up to the everlasting God, to her immortal hope: the origin and end of all existence, in whom all her wellsprings are, whose glorious name her son is destined to proclaim among His people. Here we may start the question suggested by this passage: whether we ought or not to give our children biblical names? It certainly is pleasing to the Lord and profitable to the faithful servant of the Lord, if the child's name, suggested by the holy Spirit's influence and by a thankful heart, recalls to mind the Great Giver of the gift of Divine love and mercy, His faithfulness and truth, the wonders of the ways which God has deemed good to lead us; from weakness unto strength, from darkness into light, from poverty unto the riches of His favour. But it is fanaticism or superstition to tamper and to trifle as it were with holy Scripture names we make our children bear and which we do not understand. The children of the holy women in Scripture invariably have been what their names implied: an index of God's favours, a monument of His grace, a deposite to their godly parents of God's infinite love and mercy. As a general rule therefore let us give our children common names, family names or names taken from history, such as our forefathers have borne and which recall to our mind their lives of labour, their care and devotedness for our well-being and happiness.

Verse 21. we learn that Elkanah with his household went up to the sanctuary of the Lord, there to offer to His God the yearly sacrifice and his vow. Elkanah fears the Lord, the glory of His name is dear to him; he is resolved to serve the living God who has a right to claim all his affections, and therefore he devotes to Him his all, those nearest to his heart on earth. By the sublime example of a godly life he sanctifies his home of which he is the worthy head and guide. The infant smiles of his newborn son enkindles in his heart a holy flame of gratitude to the God of Israel who executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed, to the God who has shown mercy to his dear beloved wife and who has crowned her life with honour and the richness of His grace. Thus he brings upon a praying

heart unto his God his wife and child and all the members of his household; a sacrifice of thankfulness and praise.

May it be ours to follow his example, may every husband, every father be mindful of the debt of gratitude he owes to God, the author of the matrimonial state, for all the gifts of everlasting love, the blessings of a home and family; may every homestead be the dwelling of the righteous who fear the Lord, and their name be: the Lord is there! Woe to the house where God's word is neglected, its hallowing influence not felt, and darkness reigns of unbelief and sin instead of life and light of Gospel truth and love! Alas it is a most distressing fact to see so many husbands, many fathers amidst the all engrossing things of time and sense forget that they are called upon by God who made them head and chief of family and home, to be to those entrusted to their care a guide through life, the guardian of their happiness and welfare. The Lord will call them to account for their neglect, at their hands He will require the souls of wife and child! But threefold blessed is the happy home where God is feared, Salvation's voice is heard; the lovely home whose head a servant of the Lord, a priest among his family and kindred, ministers to all around the bread of life in word and deed. Such a house becomes a church where the holy name of God is praised, a temple of the Lord devoted to His service. Such homes united into one community by the sacred bonds of godliness are blessed indeed; a stronghold of the Lord; for God dwells in their midst! His peace and justice are their shield against all hell, death, world and sin, they need not fear; temptations boisterous roaring seas will spend in vain their fury upon the rock on which they stand.

"Elkanah with his household went up to the sanctuary of the Lord, there to offer to his God the yearly sacrifice." The yearly sacrifice! this is not to be overlooked. At a set time we see this worthy man at the head of his family and household appear into the presence of the Lord, the place of public worship where God's greatness is proclaimed. Elkanah on his way to the house of God is not observing a mere outward form void of sense, he is not following the idle practices of vanity and ostentation; he honours time and place of public worship which are appointed by the Lord for the special benefit of frail humanity; because there in the midst of the Lord's congregation it is where dwells the glory of His name, where peace is offered and the weary heart may find refuge from all the toils and troubles of this world, where the aspiring soul may

draw fresh supplies from the rich treasures of Eternal love and truth. Oh let us therefore follow the example of this godly man and like him honour the sacred custom established by the Lord. May it be ours with the Psalmist to exclaim: "My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the Courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Ps. 84, 2.

Elkanah went to offer to his God the yearly sacrifice and his vow. His vow! We are not told the nature of this vow; but we may well suppose that he made Hannah's vow his own, or may be that he offered to his God a special vow of gratitude and love on hearing from his wife what God had done to her. "Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God: let all that be round about him bring presents unto Him that ought to be feared," we read Ps. 76 verse 11. Indeed the eye with rapture dwells on such a lovely picture of matrimonial happiness and love as that presented by the lives of Hannah and Elkanah. Their hearts in holy wedlock are united, the natural ties are hallowed and strengthened by the indwelling grace of Divine love that animates their souls and blends their mind and will into one common aim and purpose: the glory of God's name and kingdom and the promotion of their mutual happiness and peace; such is the nature of that holy genuine love that makes the husband the faithful head and guardian of his wife, even as Christ the great head of his church the Saviour of the body who also loved the church, and gave himself for it.

Verse 22. "And Hannah went not up." By the law every male in Israel was bound to repair to the sanctuary of the Lord three times a year, there to appear into His presence, not the women, and why not? Naturally of an obdurate and stubborn disposition, hardhearted men, as a general rule, more require than the softer sex the spurs and bridle of the law to keep them within bounds, to urge them on to the observance of their duties towards God and men. Frail woman from a sense of her own weakness and dependency is naturally more disposed to listen to the gentle accents of the Gospel truth and consolation, the words of life which in the house of God are offered to the soul that thirsteth for the living God; and therefore they are often favoured above men with a knowledge of the things which are not of this world, but of the life invisible which is hid with Christ in God. Woman who the first was brought to fall in Paradise by the devils artfulness and cunning, is now in the new world of grace the first to hear and to proclaim the gladsome tidings proceeding

from the vacant sepulchre: "He is not here, the Lord is risen." Oh blessed souls that hastened from the risen Saviour's tomb to bring their brethren the happy news of their redemption from the power of death! Not the behests of outward laws engraven on tables made of stone accelerate their steps; their gentle minds are swayed by another law, the law of Divine love and freedom inscribed on the inner tables of the heart. That is the other law inspired by the Holy Spirit's power to which the holy women owed their zeal to serve the living God with heart and life's devotion, whenever they appeared with their husbands and of their own free will within the sacred place of public worship where God's people met to praise and thank the Lord, the author of all grace and happiness. Thus we learn from the 22^d verse that Hannah looked into that perfect law of freedom and that she ever after adhered to it. And what do the words imply of Saint Paul the apostle: "The wife shall be saved in child bearing?" 1 Tim. 2, 15. Paramount to every other consideration are the duties of a mother, the wife whose chief cares ought to be devoted to the happiness and comfort of her home, the welfare of her child and all the souls committed to her tender solicitude. These duties are of greater consequence and weight than even the observance of church service and the sacred rites; if the performance of her household duties is the preventing cause of her attending public worship. The words of the Apostle alluded to above refer to the position of the wife in which she has been placed by Providence. The house is first of all the place where she is destined to serve the Lord in works of patience, faith and Charity; it is the special province of her activity and aspirations. The happy home where female virtue reigns, the gentle influence of a pious mother, a faithful wife is felt; such a home becomes a sanctuary of the Lord where His grace and blessings are residing. But deeply to be pitied is the house that is neglected by a frivolous wife whose mind is taken up with trifling vanities. A wife who can forget her sacred duties, the dignity of her own sex, who has no heart for God, nor eye for the well being of her family and home, no time to spare for church on the Lord's day by reason of indifference or slothfulness or laziness; such a wife has no favour with the Lord; for she imperils the salvation of her soul, she causes happiness and prosperity to depart from the place whose ornament she ought to be, and finally involves her husband and herself in debt and ruin.

How different from such a course of life is Hannah's conduct! Her devout mind is swayed by that selfrenouncing love that does not seek its own; the love of God her satisfying portion, the glory of His name, that is the lofty ground, the motive of her actions. The child upon whose feeble form her fond mother's eyes are resting, though dear to her, is not the idol of her heart; she looks upon it as a pledge of her Redeemer's faithfulness and mercy; God is the real proprietor of what she merely holds in trust of Him: her son. To watch his tender age to nurse him with the blood of her own mother's heart, to bring him up for God, His temple and His service; that is the sacred task to which Hannah has herself devoted, her time, her rest and all the energies of her soul. Has she then no personal wants, no need of comfort and the consolation of the church to support mind and body in the fulfilling of her arduous task? She does not think of it; she does not require anything for herself; she does not ask her husband to go up with him to the house of God; but she says to him: "I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him that he may appear before the Lord and there abide for ever."

That is the all absorbing business of her life, her great concern, the "one thing needful" to her mother's heart; to remain faithful to her word, to pay her vow which she had vowed unto the Lord her God: that her son should be trained up for His service and be His alone. That is Hannah's heart exhaling the sweet perfumes of true humility and selfdenial. What portion she is to get for herself is not the question that disturbs her mind; the happiness and welfare of her kindred, of those nearest to her heart, are the chief cares that occupy the foreground of her thoughts; if they receive but something from the Lord, something will be left for her the poor but nevertheless redeemed and pardoned soul, may it be ever so little; the rich Lord will not quite forget her. Indeed in Hannah we behold the devout mother, the faithful wife! From a recollection of the past she draws new strength for the performance of her duties, she knows the Lord will do according to His word, He will bestow his favours upon all that fear and honour Him.

Verse 23. "And Elkanah her husband said unto her: do what seemeth thee good, only the Lord establish His word." Instructive is this verse to married people; for they may learn from it the exercise of mutual love and forbearance. Elkanah's conduct towards Hannah

teaches every husband to treat his wife with gentleness and kindness. It was said to the wife: "He (the husband) shall rule over thee;" but God who said this word will be the just avenger to every husband who abuses of this right, who does not honour the companion of his life by paying her all due regard; as He will bless the man who understands to rule the wife whose guiding head the Lord made him to be with love and wisdom; like our Lord Christ is dealing with His church of which He is the head, a kind and gracious Lord. Elkanah does not insist upon the letter of the law, he does not say: Thou must go up with me; he honours the decisions of his wife, for he understands the Spirit that guides her heart and will.

Oh! blessed indeed are wife and husband whose hearts are thus united into one mind and purpose by the same spirit of selfdenying love; that is the solid ground on which the lovely edifice of all domestic peace and happiness is raised. He who merely builds upon the letter of the law without an understanding of the Spirit's quickening power may wish to edify the mind of others; alas! he will but sow the seed of discord and dissention! But he whose heart and understanding are sanctified by the Holy Spirit's quickening grace will by His influence be led into all truth; the spirit of the law will make him free from the servitude and bondage of the letter and peace he will find for his soul. Elkanah's mind is swayed by this spirit, he leaves his wife at home to tend and nurse the child as she had said, and answers: "only the Lord establish His word."

Or does Elkanah perhaps doubt God's faithfulness and truth? do the promises of God, does His word not come true always without fail? Oh indeed! but is this the case with me, with you? That is the question that will sometimes disturb our peace of mind. Therefore it is the ardent prayer expressed by sterling faith and confidence in God: "Deal with us according to Thy word!"

"So the woman abode and gave her son suck until she weaned him!" From this example a mother may derive the lesson that it is her duty to nurse the child herself, with her own hand, if she have but health and strength enough for it.

Let our eyes but for a moment dwell upon the place whither Elkanah bent his steps, the house of God in Shiloh. Alas, the wickedness and sin we there observe! Whence shall redemption come, whence the reform so ardently desired for? From this distressing scene we turn our eyes to Rama, to the silent chamber where Hannah lives. There we behold the faithful mother nursing

her child; her eyes are lifted up to heaven and overflow with tears of thankfulness and love. May be that at the thought of so much wickedness and sin and at the aspect of the little babe she trembled for a while, and doubts and fears for once more may arise to tempt her faith; but no, she need not fear nor tremble for the devil; lo, on her mother's bosom is hanging the reformer, the promised of the Lord!

Verse 24. 25. We do not positively know the age of little Samuel at the time his mother took him up to the sanctuary of the Lord at Shiloh. He must have been either bordering on his third year or he had nearly attained his tenth year. To wean, with the Hebrews, either meant: to wean from the mother's breast or it denoted the act of weaning from the discipline of boyhood. But the words: "and the child was young," and farther on: "and he (Samuel) worshipped the Lord there," rather seem to indicate that he was ten years old. These words imply moreover that the boy must have been of a very delicate frame of body and seemingly unfit for the fatigues and the exertions of the duties upon which the boy was about to enter.

Such are God's ways with men. The Lord loves to reveal the wonders of His power in the frail instrument of Grace which He has chosen for executing His designs; in order that His hand be manifest in all. But little Samuel, though of a weak and delicate complexion, must have been endowed with a comprehensive mind and a heart containing the germs of a godly life, somewhat similar to Saint Paul, the apostle, who likewise was of little stature; for he was named Paul, viz: a little man. At Lystra the people believed him to be Mercury, one of their gods; because he was the speaker and a little man in comparison to Barnabas who was tall and therefore thought to be their Jupiter. Such is our mode of thinking, our way of judging from what appears great to our eyes. Even Samuel himself in latter days when he was called upon to anoint David king of Israel mistook the tall grown elder brother for the chosen of the Lord; and so it was with the people who thought Saul a great and powerful king because he was of stately form and taller than the rest of them.

Let us therefore not look to the perishable creature, to the mere outward form that strikes the eye of sense; but let us rather lift our eyes up to the Throne of Grace; may the thought that God will glorify His power and grace in our weakness and the weakness

of our children sustain us! Oh, the sublime example of sterling faith, the power of love and true selfdenial of Hannah! She pays the vow she vowed to the Lord her God; what she has promised she fulfils, not a word does she retract; she does not suffer herself to be betrayed into unfaithfulness by flesh and blood; the devil's arts and cunning are lost upon her, even the weakness of her child cannot shake her firmness. Thus she takes her son up with her to the house of God. She is going to resign him there for ever out of her hands and motherly protection into the hands of strangers; but she puts her trust in the Almighty God; the boy is the Lord's property, he is to serve but Him alone; therefore she puts away the child from her fond mother's bosom, and with unshaken faith she yields the boy up to her God. May we too look upon our children as the Lord's property, and early in their most tender age give them to God, devote them to His service! True, it is not the work of flesh and blood; but they who passed through the furnace of affliction, and there have been made children themselves, will bear in mind that the child's heart is like a sheet of paper to write upon. Thou godly parent, write then upon it what thou thyself from Heaven hast received; let the youthful heart be impressed by thy prayers and example in an early stage of life, and be assured that the impression will not be effaced nor your labours will be lost! Be not discouraged by waywardness and such like faults which happen just in gifted children to break forth most frightfully; if thou but faithfully continue with the hand of faith to lay down in the little heart the seed of God's holy word; that word which thou hast taken from the holy source of truth and life will be a weapon in thy hand to check the growing evil and thou wilt live to see the precious fruit it will bring forth.

Hannah took the child up with her and three bullocks and one ephah of flour and a bottle of wine. Nowhere else in Scripture we find an offering of this description mentioned. The customary offerings for a boy on such occasions were of a different nature, neither were the offerings made by the Nazarites the same. Besides we do not find that there was ever any provision made with regard to sacrificial rites and offerings bearing relation to vows. But Hannah must have been initiated in the great secrets of godliness. Observations on the Holy Scriptures which date from the ninth century (the gloss or commentary is meant here, of which the preachers of the middle ages, among them Huss, made frequent use, and which bear the

stamp of Scriptural knowledge such as the primitive Christians had received from tradition) represent the three bullocks as an allegorical type of the Holy Trinity. According to these interpretations the ephah of flour and the bottle of wine were prototypes of the flesh and blood of Christ or of the bread and wine of the Lord's supper instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ to whom, according to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews, point all the sacrificial rites. Hannah brought her child and two bullocks to Eli the priest. One bullock the parents slew for themselves. This offering was made in honour of the Lord; the two bullocks were the offering presented by the parents to the Lord both for the child's education in the name of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Ghost, and his transfer and surrender to God the Father and the communion of the Holy Ghost. And as St. Paul the apostle says, 1 Cor. 10. v. 9., that the children of Israel tempted Christ in the wilderness: so did Hannah likewise know Christ as her king and the Lord's anointed. Of this her own words expressed in the 10th verse of the 2^d chapter of our book, give evidence: "and He shall give strength unto His king and exalt the horn of His anointed."

Thus, the ceremony of slaying a bullock on the occasion when the parents brought up the boy to Eli pointed to his surrender unto the passion and death of Christ the expected Redeemer. Hannah and Elkanah did the very thing that Christian parents do who teach their children to pray and to sing: "May Thy blood and righteousness be to me a glorious dress" and: "O Thou Lamb of God without guilt or blemish slain on the cross for the sins of the world."

The ephah of flour and the bottle of wine which Hannah offered to the Lord has reference to the food which the boy required for his subsistence. Does the provision which the devout mother made for her son not equally point to that great Provisionmaker who made provision for the whole world with God the Father, for you and me, for us and for our children, to Him who said: "I am the bread of life" and: "Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood has eternal life"? Yes indeed, this bread of life, this wine from Heaven, the blood of Christ is our soul's support; the very food, the very drink! To this meatoffering refers Isaiah when he, speaking of the righteous, says: "His bread shall be given him, his water shall be sure." (Isaiah 33. v. 16.)

Verse 26 — 28. Verse 26 we have a formulary of an oath such as it was pronounced in those days: "As thy soul liveth." We are reminded on this occasion of a passage in the Heidelberg catechism: that we are allowed to take an oath if we are required by necessity to maintain and promote by its means truth and faith to the honour of God and the wellbeing of our neighbour. A lovely assertion it is: "I have no other wish than that thy soul liveth; how should I then deceive and not tell thee the truth?" We have here again an instance of Hannah's modesty and lowliness; she gives honour to him who has a right to claim it. From the example of her life we may draw a beautiful lesson of true humility of heart similar to what St. Paul the Apostle writes Col. 3, 12: "Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering." Oh, may it be ours to have that childlike grace, the singleness of heart of which Hannah was possessed, may it be ours to study the sublime precept of the apostle! Kindness, meekness, humbleness of mind be our constant rule in the intercourse of our life! Her life exhibits no presumptuous pride; but that humility which gains the heart of men and is the genuine fruit of grace. Far from boasting of the many favours she received, or priding herself on the great sacrifice her mother's heart had come to make, she only says, recalling her past sufferings to the priest: "My Lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord." He who has been taught by the Holy Spirit's influence to cry like Hannah unto the Lord from the innermost of his soul: "Wilt thou remember me and not forget me" will also be imbued with the Spirit of that humility which caused Jacob to exclaim: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which Thou has shewed unto Thy servant."

Verse 27. reads according to the Hebrew text: "I prayed for this child and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him." What a glorious testimony of Hannah in honour to her Lord! In public she proclaims the praise of His everlasting faithfulness and love. Thus we are taught that we ought to praise the Lord and glorify His name everywhere, and above all there where His name is feared and loved and His praise is sung; in the midst of God's beloved children. We ought to proclaim the power of His love not only for the rich grants of Spiritual blessings we received; but also for the favours which God has granted to each of us in private life.

The words of Hannah to the priest are the expression of that holy love and sterling faith which spread so great a charm upon the whole life of that highfavoured woman. How eloquent her words, and the example of her life to all whose hearts and minds are sanctified by that peace, by that indwelling grace, which "passeth all understanding"; whose hearts are burning with that holy flame of Divine love and aspirations which have no other scope than the glory of God's name, the propagation of His truth and mercy. That was the moving spring of Hannah's words and actions; it is the index of her history and life. May the Holy Ghost, the Divine teacher of the human heart inspire us with the same childlike faith, simplicity and confidence that caused Hannah to rely upon her Lord; to expose to Him all her wants and Her desires. "For this child I have prayed and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him." That is the living and abiding proof that the Lord God, who knows the wants of mortal men, listens to all the prayers ascending from a heart entirely devoted to His truth, the glory of His name, His church and kingdom; that He grants every thing, even temporal gifts when the honour of His name is concerned.

Verse 28. "Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord, as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." That is an act of holy gratitude and sublime devotion! Without a sigh, without a murmur she tears the dear gift from her mother's heart and yields it up to her dear Lord, the Dearest above all: "the Lord has given it and He takes His own back again: the name of God be praised." Oh weep fond mother on your darling's grave, but do not grieve like those who have no hope; for lo! the grave in which you look with weeping eyes is but the link connecting you with Heaven! Your child has entered that eternal house where sin and darkness are unknown, where no more troubles cloud the serene peace of everlasting bliss. "And she worshipped the Lord there." Therefore, like Hannah, let us praise the Lord, surrender without murmuring at the dispensations of God's Holy providence the dearest object of our love on earth, when it pleases Him to tear it from our side.

Verse 28. reads according to another translation: "I too have made him pray, I have trained him up for the Lord whom he is to serve all the days of his life. This would imply that Hannah brought her son Samuel to the priest Eli at the more advanced age of ten years, that she impressed the boy from his tender infancy with the love and fear of God that lived in her heart. She thus taught

her child as soon as it had begun to speak to fold its little hands in prayer, to bow its knees to the Lord her God. Let us do with our children as Hannah did; let us make them acquainted with the eternal love of God, with Jesus the great friend of children who loves them dearly and demands in return a loving heart, a holy life devoted to God's service.

“And he (Samuel) worshipped the Lord there,” as we find in the Dutch, English, Danish and Syrian Bibles and in many translations of ancient date. Hannah has thus followed the precious rule we find laid down in one of the Proverbs, and which ought to be written in golden letters on the lintels of every nursery, of every schoolroom: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22, 6.

We conclude our chapter with a word of praise in honour of the Lord:

What a treasure is a devout wife watching on the altar of her homestead the holy flame of godliness, what a blessing is a pious mother who like Hannah trains up her child for God. How often did the Lord lay in their hands the destinies of the church of Christ, the destinies of the world!
