

XLIII.

Enlisha

II Kings iii, 11.

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II Kings iii, 11, l.c.: Elisha the son
of Shaphat, who poured water on the
hands of Elijah.

these words fitly describe the
prophet ~~Elisha~~ with whose career, as
detailed in the third to the ninth
chapters of Second Kings, the Sabbath-
schools will be engaged for ^{over} two months
from this day. I propose to make a
brief review of that narrative this
morning.

Begin here
No passage could be quoted which
gives in a single sentence a clearer
notion of Elisha, than the one I
have read as a text. ~~The phrase "to
pour water on the hands" evidently
refers to a servant, & the fact that
it was used to describe Elisha on an
occasion when by men who were stand-
ing in great awe of him, suggests and
recalls the~~ He was the successor
of ~~that~~ Elijah, the chief of the Prophets²

3 (Stanley, J. C. ii, 321); his servant, as the Oriental phrase in the text signifies; and in every feature of his life, ^{illustrated} ~~illustrated~~ chiefly by his succession, or his contrast to his master. Elijah raised the standard of revolt ^{alone} against Jezebel's idolatry, ^{summoning prophets, till he saw Jezebel dead & her idols ~~destroyed~~} ~~destroyed~~, under Jehu. Elisha carried it ~~to victory~~. ~~He~~ ^{he} ~~was~~ stood alone; Elisha sat in the midst of the prophets of Jehovah. Elijah was fierce; Elisha gentle; the former a destroyer, the latter a healer; the master a wild Bedouin of the caves and mountain tops; the servant a dweller in the city & an attendant upon kings. Elisha died in his bed, ^{Joash} ~~the king~~ mourning over him; but ~~while Jezebel was raging for Elisha's blood~~ ^{Jezebel was raging to slay} the prophet when God translated

Elijah, deathless, to heaven. 4

Yet there were resemblances, as well as these contrasts. The spirit of prophecy was to continue in Israel after Elijah, & his follower received a double portion of that spirit. ~~He~~ ~~like his master~~ in his death, Elisha's in the grave yet spoke also of the resurrection, when ^{at} the touch of his bones ~~had gave life~~ ~~revived another~~. The scoffers of Bethel had occasion to see the day when they marked a distinction in ^{the} appearance, ^{of Elisha} that they found did not extend to his power. And as the two were alike in their miraculous career, so the end of each testified to the same immortality; Eli-

5 jah's body rose above death, & Elisha's remains had a touch of life given to them. Both were prophets of God; ordained of Him, to witness to His eternal power & Godhead in the midst of a wicked & faithless & dying generation. The difference of temperament, of character, of habit, and of act & end, is ~~perhaps~~ at once adds interest to the history, & points to the grand law of diversity in unity which characterizes the Kingdom of God.

Elisha lived during the reigns of six Kings; Kings, not of Judah, but of Israel or Samaria. He lived

in the royal city of Samaria. His ⁶ life was in no small degree concerned with the Kings of the southern division, whom he respected & honored as the true servants of God; but, like Elijah, he was distinctively a prophet of the northern Kingdom, where ~~Satan's~~ Satan's seat was. The duration of his life appears to have been fully sixty-five years after he began to be a prophet. ^{The Kings were these: Ahab (say 44 yrs. after E's call); Ahaziah (2 yrs); Joram (12); Jehu (28); Jehoahaz (17); and Joash (2).}

Elisha is first mentioned in the Bible in I Kings xix, 16, where Jehoahaz directs Elijah to return from his ~~deep~~ exile & anoint Elisha, son of Shaphat, to be prophet in his room. ~~He first met with the new prophet at the time of his~~ In the verses imme-

7 directly following the read the fulfill-
ment of the call. ~~Elijah~~ ^{the prophet} returning
homeward, seeks ~~the~~ ^{the} prophet
Elisha at his abode near the Jor-
dan. He finds him ~~neither studying~~
following the plough in the fields; ~~the~~
^{hindmost} of a company of twelve, all busy
turning the furrows together, after
a custom still to be seen in Pales-
tine. Passing by him, he casts his
rough mantle over him, in token of
adoption & of the divine call. The
chosen man of God perceives the
utter as plainly as the former, &
does not refuse to obey; betrays a
tender heart ~~at the outset~~ as
he asks leave to honor his father &
mother at the outset of his consecrated

career; he puts his hand to the
plough for the last time, for he knows
it, & makes a sacrifice of his own; nor
do we read that he ever again looks
back from the kingdom of God.

Delaying with the last incidents of
the reign of Ahab, the sacred writer
returns to speak of Elisha, in the sec-
ond chapter of Second Kings. God
took up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind,
in the year 896 B. C. (according to
the chronology commonly in our Bi-
bles). Elisha had earnestly craved to
behold the end, & to receive his
master's prophetic power; & since
Elijah had given him this sign,
that if he should see him depart-
ing, he should be endowed, we do
not wonder at the exulting cry:

9 "My father, my father! the char-
iots of Israel, & the horsemen thereof!"
Of favored man, whose vision was
opened that he should see the heavenly
hosts! as ~~he himself enabled me~~
~~at a later day behold~~ by his prayer
(vi, 17^{seq.}) another was encouraged once
with the sight of the legions of angels
who are ever encamping about God's
people, & delivering them.

The mantle remained to Elisha, tho'
we do not read that he ever wore it;
but it has furnished a proverb which
to this day betokens the universal in-
terest which attaches to this narrative.

That was of greater value, the spirit
of Elijah rested on Elisha; he used
the mantle to divide the waters of
Jordan, as at another time he needed

another ~~no~~ instrument of aid in 10
working a miracle (iii, 15); & the
young prophets acknowledged therefor-
ward his authority.

The Kingdom of Israel was at this
time, it will be remembered, filled
with idolatry. ~~It was~~ its very cor-
ner-stone, indeed, had been idolatry; Je-
oboam unified its people by the com-
mon worship of golden calves. ~~Pont~~ ⁱⁿ
~~ing~~ Elijah's time, while Elisha was
yet a youth, the seventh King, Ahaz,
a weak & irreligious man, had mar-
ried a queen who introduced a far
more ^{debasing} ~~corrupting~~, if not more
blasphemous, form of idolatry: the
worship of Baal, ^{the god of fire, or the sun.} ~~Astarte~~. Baal
~~was worshipped as the deity of~~
~~power~~, ^{fire} ~~it is the instructive~~

" ~~parallel of Divine Providence, that~~
~~Elijah had shown the nation that~~
~~fire is in the hands of Jehovah, by~~
Against this corruption of a part of
His chosen people, the living God had
made Elijah His instrument to testify;
with what significance & power, the
fascinating narrative of the sacri-
fices on Mt. Carmel, in the ~~ninth~~
eighteenth of First-Kings, relates. Is-
rael had seen the fire fall from
the throne of the living God, &
had cried out in awe: "The Lord,
He is the God."

But it needed more than one ~~mirac-~~
~~le~~ rebuke, or one miracle, to keep
that matched people in mind
of the Lord. He, favored above ~~all~~

their lot, have now the complete 12
written testimonies of God, whose ev-
idence to the soul fireth light; & we
wonder, accustomed to Bible-civili-
zation, how idolatry ever could
have held men's minds, or the
truth have lost its power. But we
need only to look abroad over the
Earth now, as well as at the ra-
ces adjacent to chosen Israel, to
behold that which seems so im-
probable, an appalling fact. Two-
thirds of the human race now live
in ignorance of the love of God;
they bow down, in blindness, to
^{gods of} wood & stone. Should God leave
His chosen people to be drawn
into that idolatrous fellowship?

It was to preserve the name of ~~Elijah~~ ^{Elisha} among the subjects of Ahab his successors, that Elisha was endowed with the power of working miracles. ~~But~~ ~~the~~ He was to Israel

what the printed Bible is to America & England. ^{His miracles may make recitation from 200} In the other Kingdom, God was keeping His name remembered, thro' a holy King Aza, who was a sort of royal Elijah in his zeal against the same filthy idolatries that prevailed in Israel. It pleases God ever to be manifesting His glory in different ways: now among the food, by leading them in green pastures, & restoring their souls; again, among

them who will not obey His word, by ~~acts~~ ^{modes} that show as well His mighty power & justice.

So Elisha was made ~~of God~~ by God a miracle-worker. Without considering duly this reason, we must needs be puzzled, & perhaps disturbed of faith, in reading the marvelous tale of his life. There is no fiction that obtains in our literature to compare with its wonders. ~~Elisha parted the waters of Jordan with a blow (ii, 14); he made a bitter spring sweet, with salt, as it is to this day (21); he filled a dry valley with water for an army in one night, without~~ ~~making a river (iii, 17);~~

15 It was given to Elisha to (B. viii, 33) turn a river into a wilderness, & ~~the waters springs~~ for the success of the Kings of Israel, Judah & Edom (iii, 17); to make bitter waters sweet, & a barren ground fruitful, with a handful of salt (ii, 21); to fill a house with oil, from ^{the contents of} a ~~single~~ vessel (iv, 6), without being present at the place; ^{delay the corruption of a corpse by his staff in the hands of his servant, & to} to restore to life a lad that had died (iv, 35); to cleanse pottage of poison by a handful of meal (iv, 41); to feed a hundred ~~prophets~~ men with a score of cakes & a handful of corn (44), & yet leave a portion; to heal a leper of his leprosy, & to transfer it to miked Gehazi (v); to make iron swim (vi, 6); to reveal to the King of Israel what his enemy of Syria speaks in his bed-chamber (12). Elisha, fairly besieged by

the terrified King, prays (hitherto we ¹⁶ have not read, save ⁱⁿ ¹⁴ ~~once~~, that he prayed for the miraculous grace) that his attendant may behold the ~~un~~ invisible host of Heaven that are protecting him; he prays again, that the enemy may be smitten with blindness; in both ^(17, 18) cases it is done as he acts, & he leads the blinded Syrians to the very midst of their foes, & by prayer again opens their ⁽²⁰⁾ eyes, & then dismisses them safely. When their King, stung ^{with} ~~the~~ shame, besieges Samaria, & ~~his a famine~~ reduces it ~~to~~ to such a famine that King Joram blasphemes Jehovah, & ~~then~~ sends a messenger to murder Elisha; it is given the prophet to foretell the exact of the messenger, & to ~~drive~~

prophets, & foreigners, that Jehovah
 is the living God. His personal char-
 acteristics are sufficiently brought out
 on occasion. He leans on Elisha while
 that prophet remains to him, & will not
 be separated from him; his heart goes
 out kindly to the poor people who, at
 Shunem, were hospitable to him, & he
 was never weary of serving them.
 He loved his parents, & his country; &
~~On the other hand, he seems to say nothing~~
~~in rebuke to the idolatrous King at~~
~~whose court he is a witness for Je-~~
~~hovah; tho' he shares not the royal~~
 ~~bounty, dwelling with the young pro-~~
~~phets in a poverty illustrated in his~~
~~miracle of healing the pottage, yet~~
~~and receives not the presents which~~
~~Naaman would give him, yet how~~

19 It is a strange fact that ~~the~~ translators who have judged
 meaning, not by any means that he
 as equally in this instance ~~to profit by the sense of Hazael's~~
 words which Josephus gives. That ~~the~~ thought of ~~the~~ words
 & tormenting Samaria but that such
 a course is for the Syrian King, ~~the~~
~~is far below that.~~ Then Elisha fore-
 tells him plainly, that the Lord has
 shown him that Hazael shall become
 King of Syria; a prophecy which no theology
 but the Calvinist can ^{fully} understand; yet which
 Here are sixteen miracles recorded.
 can by no devout mind be supposed, than giving im-
 of Elisha the prophet; & beyond them
 tipications to the scheming Syrian, & further his crimes,
 we have little else. There is no
 & had determined that the man should praise him;
 such incident in his life as Elisha's
 & he chooses to make known ~~the~~ the divine insight into
 despondent flight to Hama, nor does
 his character; but a ~~man~~ man whose heart should be roused to shame
 there seem room for one. I have
 in the one brief ~~quand~~ exaspera-
 tion of Jeoram at the ~~the~~ eyes of
 Elisha, Elisha lives by the court
 in peace; quietly, & constantly, ~~the~~
 reminding the Israelites, King, people,

21 strong a contrast he continually presents to Elijah; despising ~~Jehoram~~ Joram, & telling him so twice, yet in both instances directly aiding with but ~~two~~ ^{two} exceptions, that at Bethel, ~~he does a kindness~~ & that of Rehoboam, his work is one of beneficence & friendliness. His death is full of a beauty that might hardly have been anticipated from one in whom so few strong & positive traits of character appear. Joash the King of Israel - one of the best of that throne - attended by his bedside, & lamented his approaching end in the very words of Elisha ~~at the~~ ~~on a~~ ~~sinister~~ when Elijah was taken up: O my father! my father! the chariot of Israel, & the horsemen thereof! But the aged

22 prophet was stronger of heart than the young king. He recalled to him the needs of his kingdom; bade him seek the help of the Lord for his war against Syria; & gave him the notable sign of the arrows, which ~~to~~ ~~Joash~~ at once of his own weakness & of the grace of God. Then he died & was buried; notably illustrating ^{in his last days} that holy doctrine of God which Isaiah, 150 years after, thus declares (xl, 29-31) in Jerusalem:

29 He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.
30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:
31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

The inspired record of the life & character of Elisha leaves little room for comment. Notwithstanding the troubled age in which he lived, & the many mighty miracles which

23 he received power from God to do, his career seems strangely barren of any single, strongly marked lesson. Perhaps it may point us as plainly as anything, to these two considerations:

That there is a work for God to be done in courts & among the great of the world, as well as ~~among~~ out in the highways & hedges. Elide was unquestionably a servant of God; one of the three or four Bible saints aft. whose devoutness & faithfulness ~~nothing~~ no sin or slip is recorded; & he was a court preacher. In these days of abundant & sometimes enthusiastic work for

24
Christ among the myriads, & closes, in the tenement houses, & among all low-down & worst of men, let this instruction of the need of acceptance of other labors of God's people not be overlooked. God has work to be done for Him among all classes, in all places; the rich & the poor meet together, the Lord is the Maker of them all."

The second inference is: that when God has begun a good work by means of His specially-endowed servants, others must needs carry it on to its completion. Such was the lot of the Master, the Man of Jesus; greater works than these, said the Lord's disciples, shall ye do,

25 because I go to My Father. It
is a law of the Kingdom, & we must
neither lament the imperfection
of our own successes in the work,
therefore, nor deplore the too-
early removal from earth of envi-
ously useful saints thinking that
God's work needs them. ~~God~~ needs
no man, nor his work; but men
who are to receive the promise
of life in the great world of
Heaven need their work here for
the sake of their own training,
& God alone can tell ~~how~~ when
that end has in any given life,
been sufficiently met.