

The King's Highway.

And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The Way of Holiness: . . . The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. Isaiah 35:8

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THE DEFEAT AT AI.

REV. B. CARRADINE, D. D.

The reader will remember that after the children of Israel had crossed the Jordan into Canaan, and after the great victory at Jericho, there came a most mortifying defeat to them at a place called Ai. The aggravating features of the humiliation were the small size of the town assailed and the smaller number of the enemy's forces, compared to the Israelites. Well might the people be astounded.

The explanation of the reverse was, there had been transgression in the camp. God was grieved, and would not go out with his people to battle. As a result their power was gone, and they not only could do nothing with their foes, but could not even stand before them.

We read that Joshua rent his clothes and fell upon his face, while the elders of Israel put dust on their heads. It was after that, God told them there was an accursed thing in the camp. The search was made, and under the tent of Achan was found the wedge of gold and Babylonish garment which had been secreted there by the disobedient Israelite. The rest of the history is well known as to the stoning of Achan, the destruction of the hidden things, and the burning up of all the man's property.

Once more power and victory returned to the children of Israel; God went out with a powerful arm, and the nations melted at their very presence. The occurrence makes a melancholy narrative, but it is something that has transpired many times since in the lives of Christians and in the history of churches.

It is not uncommon to see a church, after a career of usefulness and power, go into a condition of moral apathy and deadness. It is even more common to behold men, once clothed with heavenly zeal and mighty with the unction of God, gradually cool off, lose their spiritual force, and become weak like other men. They have had Jerichos to fall before them, but now, under some strange change, they can not take Ai. Indeed, they retire from before Ai. They recognize the loss in themselves, and others observe it as well. Something has happened. Something is the matter.

Time would fail to tell of preachers and laymen who were well for a season, and then gradually or suddenly their triumphant career was ended. There have been a number of evangelists who fairly blazed for a while, and then their light began to wane and finally, in some instances, went out entirely. Among the names were some prominent ones. They had the ear of the people, drew multitudes, pulled down fire from heaven, and yet after all this went into eclipse and darkness.

In some cases there can be a proper explanation like unto that of John the Baptist, who saw himself decrease and Christ increase. The man's work may be ended, his mission accomplished, and so he passes away.

In other instances the explanation is not so easy. The demand for workers is great, the laborers are few, the people need instruction and salvation, and the sheep are scattered; why should men once so useful, become useless, and who shone as stars of the first magnitude retrograde to the glimmering of the fourth and fifth rank, and at last go out altogether?

Surely the Holy Ghost did not exhaust Himself on them in the first year. Surely usefulness should increase with growing wisdom and experience and from long and deep communion with God. Certainly some kind of explanation is in order.

It is curious to hear the man himself talk. He tells of great battles in the past, great victories over every kind of forbidding circumstance. It is while lying in the fields besieging little Ai, he describes how he captured Jericho on the fourth or fifth day, his auditors meanwhile wondering why he can not take the small place now before him.

His explanations of present inability and failure are voluminous, some of them pathetic, others eloquent. He says that his natural force is abating. But it is noticed that he eats as much as ever, and perhaps more. He speaks of nervous prostration a great deal; time was, he had more to say about bodily prostration on the floor in prayer. It is sad to hear him talking so much about what "the doctors say about his case." Meantime the people are also discussing his case; but it is another one than that which the physicians are thinking about. One is looking at the physical and the other at the spiritual side of the man. From what he says about the great power he once possessed before he broke down physically, one would suppose that spiritual force could not abide in or proceed from a frail and delicate body; that religious influence depended more on health than grace, and on the state of the nerves rather than on the condition of the soul.

Without depreciating the advantages of health and strength in the work of God, yet, as an offset to this idea, we would call attention to Sumnerfield, Payson, and a number of others, who scarcely ever knew an hour of physical ease, who would in preaching be interrupted by hemorrhages, and swoon in the pulpit after an hour's faithful labor, and yet their power with God and man was marvelous.

Let it be understood that we are not referring to defeats before places which would not surrender if an angel fresh from heaven would come and offer them the gospel. The Bible speaks very plainly about individuals and places that are given over to idols and to believe a lie. Christ himself came to towns where He could do no mighty works, and Paul came to Athens, and had to leave it as he found it, in its silly mirth and with its multitudinous false gods. To this day there are Jerusalems that have to be wept over as not knowing the time of their visitation, and towns whose very dust, Christ says, shake off from your feet.

We allude not to defeats before such communities, but to the departure of spiritual power from individuals who once possessed it abundantly, and to needless reverses before Ai, when the place should and can be taken by men and women filled by the Holy Ghost. The town has not been given over to hardness, and yet it is not taken for God. What is the matter? There is an explanation. What is it?

Just as in the instance of Israel, something wrong had been done, and the wedge of gold and Babylonish garment were buried under a tent in the midst of the camp—so there has been a moral misstep, a transgression

of the Divine law, and the fact is hidden in the life, is unconfessed, and perhaps unrenounced.

The result is, that God will not go up to the battle with the man. The sermon is preached, the prayer uttered, the testimony and exhortation given, considerable intellectual ability is displayed, an appearance of something being done is created; and yet devout hearts feel that something is lacking, and victory, clear, glorious, unmistakable victory, does not come. An accursed thing is in the camp; the offender has his tent pitched over it, and the face which looks out of the tent is one of darkness and profound melancholy.

But this is not the explanation of all cases of defeat, nor indeed of the great majority of instances of failure. The blessed power of prevailing with man and obtaining gracious victories in the work of God can be lost in ways far less gross, and criminal. It can go through actions which are not the breaking of the letter of the Ten Commandments.

Loose thinking can do the deed.

Careless speech can sap the holy power.

Lack of prayer will affect the divine glow and glory.

Still more remarkable: an undue attention given to things that are lawful and proper in themselves will, in time, leave us weak in the presence of friends and foes.

He who possesses the wonderful blessing which Christ promised the disciples, is called upon to walk in a very narrow way. There are many things which others can do that he can not. He is a Nazarite. There are pursuits which are perfectly honorable, but he can not walk in them. There are books which are untainted, and yet he can not read them. There are songs that are clean, but he can not sing them without hurt to his soul. He may be in the possession of gifts which, if used, might lead him to prominence and wealth. Other men, good and true, tread these paths and are succeeding with gifts not superior to his own; but he is called by the Master to a close walk and a peculiar work. He can not do as others may do.

So, if betrayed by his gifts into these walks and pursuits, he after a while discovers in some important hour that the old-time force is gone. He can not take Ai. It is while he feels his inability to take Ai that he tells how he once captured Jericho. This, of course, is intended as an apology for the present failure, and also helps to while away the time.

The things mentioned may seem too little and insignificant to some to cause such a disaster; but they are not little. A spider-web once took so much electricity from a telegraph wire and buried it in the ground that a message could not be sent from one town to another. The stock company and the public were as much troubled and annoyed about it as if the little white threads were chains of iron. The connection was broken and the power shut off.

There is nothing wrong in the bicycle as used for exercise, health, and business, but the writer knew a holiness preacher who allowed his wheel to so monopolize his thoughts and conversation, and consume so much time in oiling and repairing, that he lost his power and found himself helpless before Ai.

We knew another to devote so much of the day to telegraphy, that should have been spent in communion with God and in soul-work, that the bubbling joy went out of his heart, the shine from his face, and in sermon and prayer you could see that he could not capture Ai.

The writer once had with him for a week or so, while in his active work, a large, sweet-toned music-box. It was only a few days when, through the pathetic sentimental pieces, he felt that a spider-web was getting on his wire. Of course, the box went, for he was anxious to get some messages through to the throne about Ai, which at the same time was holding out most remarkably.

Recently we met a young man who had lost his spiritual joy and power by over-devotion to a musical accomplishment.

A kodak is a pleasant article to possess, and is capable of giving much genuine and innocent pleasure; but if a man, filled with the Holy Ghost and called to a special work, begins to use one too much, he will soon commence wondering where the dew is that was once on the fleece, and what can be the matter with the walls of Ai, which will not go down under his sermons and prayer-guns.

Politics, election returns, Associated Press dispatches, questions of reform, and many other matters can and will, if we are not careful, become switch-lines to take the Divine electricity out of our souls.

Abundance of talk on any ephemeral, non-essential, and temporal question will be a spider-web to the line.

Bicycles, kodaks, telegraphy, music, literature, and art are all good things. They are legitimate and proper, but through them it is possible to lose the old-time glory and power, and we be left everlasting besiegers of Ai, when we should take it at once with a charge and shout of victory.

If we are having continued reverses, meeting with frequent defeats in our religious work and life, let us look under the tent. Small things may be hidden there, and, according to the Bible, God notices small things.

If anything is there to which, while lawful, we give undue attention and devotion, let us correct matters and put them in proper relation.

If anything is there that is doubtful and questionable, we had better dig it up at once and say good-bye to it forever.

If there is a sin, may we not only dig it up, but stone it to death in the valley of Achor. God will then go up with us to the battle; Ai will fall; greater cities still go down, and the inhabitants of the land will tremble at our presence.

BEGIN IN TIME.

The influences of a Christian home are beyond our conception. Those who have spent the most of their lives, and the best of their powers for God and humanity are generally the ones who have had the advantages of early religious training. Parents should not ignore the importance of the proper development of their children's moral natures. Many mothers and fathers today leave the essential work for the Sunday school teacher or preacher, and vainly think if they send their children to Sunday school regularly, this will answer the demands of God and their own conscience in the matter.

Nothing in all the world can take the place of home training at the family altar, at the fireside, at the bed side and in the secret closet; and the parents who come short on this line will find in later years when their children are grown wise in sin and ignorant in divine things that they have made a fatal mistake,—too late to rectify. Begin in time—Herald of Light.

SPURGEON'S ESTIMATE OF THE BIBLE.

The following is Spurgeon's estimate of the Bible: "The Bible is the writing of the living God. Each word in it dropped from the everlasting lips; each sentence was dedicated by the Holy Spirit. Albeit that Moses was employed to write the histories with his fiery pen, God guided the pen. It may be that David touched his harp and let sweet psalms of melody drop from his fingers, but God moved his hands over the living strings of his golden harp. Solomon sang canticles of love and gave forth words of consummate wisdom, but God directed his lips and made the preacher eloquent. If I follow the thundering Nahum when the horses plow the water, or Habakuk, when he sees the tents of Cushan in affliction; if I read Malachi, when the earth is burning like an oven; if I turn to the smooth page of John, who tells of love, or the rugged chapters of Peter, who speaks of fire devouring God's enemies; if I turn to Jude, who launches forth anathemas upon the foes of God—everywhere I find God speaking. It is God's voice, not man's; the words are God's—the words of the Eternal, the Invisible, the Almighty, the Jehovah of ages. This is God's Bible; and when I see it I seem to hear a voice springing up from it, saying: 'I am the book of God; man, read me, I am God's writing; study my pages for I was opened by God; love me, for He is my Author, and you will see Him visible and manifest everywhere.'"

"UNTO GOD."

What a mighty transition—"From the power of Satan unto God." Could there possibly be any greater extremes than these opposite personalities? Or any more definite than from blindness to sight, "from darkness to light." O what a mighty and safe transition; to pluck a soul from the strong hand of the "Prince of the world," and then to bring it into the place of pardon, peace, purity and safety—"unto God." What an exalted position to be the "minister" called to such a work, and what a benediction and blessing for poor sinners to be the subjects of God's mighty power in being delivered from the great enemy of all righteousness. "Unto God!" Oh, that is the end of all; the haven of all troubled hearts, the resting-place of every weary soul. Thank God, for God. O beloved, let us make sure of this, for only those who are brought "unto God" can have an inheritance among them which are sanctified."—Nazarene Messenger.

A good man once said to his wife, who was complaining that she was tried beyond bearing by some persons with whom she had relations in her daily life: "My dear, you are not taking the right view of the matter. You are not forgetting that these are giving you a great deal of help in developing the finer qualities of your character. You are sweeter, more self-restrained, and nobler, through the exercise of tact, tenderness and unselfishness to them. You ought to thank God that He has given you just this discipline."—Margaret E. Sangster.