

THE HAND OF POWER.

“ And Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.” — 2 KINGS, xiii., 16.

WE have read about the prophet of old, Elisha, and we remember how he succeeded Elijah, and became, after him, God's chosen prophet among His people. I know of no more interesting study in the Old Testament than the life of His prophet Elisha; simply a farmer's son, called to be an instrument in God's hand, whose name and fame should reach to the end of the earth. The thought of God's choosing such a man — a young man too — is one that brings comfort and blessing as we think of it. He was a dutiful son, doing his father's bidding, in perfect subjection to his will. His father was a man of means; he, as the oldest son, was to succeed to the estate and name and hand it down to posterity as a name honored and re-

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spected; but God, knowing his heart, had other plans.

Elijah's work was almost finished, and every man is immortal till his work is done. Elijah did not die one day too soon. No man ever dies till his work is completed; then God says, "It is finished," and takes him home to Himself. We mourn over the loss of a good man, a man who has helped to make the history of the nation. We wonder how the gap is to be filled. But He makes nations, raises them up, brings them down. He creates man, puts him in his place. No man ever yet was brought into the world to be an idler or simply to help fill up the number of people on the face of the earth. Every man has been called according to God's purpose; he may fail to take his position, and avail himself of his privilege; but it is his loss, for to every man is given a work and God expects him to do that work.

Elijah was ordered to take a day's

march across the mountain, and there he would find with his father, at work plowing, the man who was to be his successor. He did this; put his mantle upon the young man's shoulders; and at once — without a question, without finding fault because he must leave home — the young man follows Elijah as fast as his feet can carry him. He returns to his home, calls the people together to *make a feast to commemorate this call of God*. The feast is not because he is to inherit the father's estate, or because he is called to be a general or occupy the best place in the land, but *because God has called him to be His messenger*. From that day onward, he is to walk up and down the earth, go in and out among the people, stand before kings, and tell them of the truths of this Word, the surety of God's judgment upon all who wander from Him and God's blessing upon those who stand by Him and own their allegiance to Him.

For many years, seventy at least, Elisha had followed the bidding of the Master; warning the people against the worship of false gods, telling the kings themselves that destruction must come upon them if they disobeyed the voice of God. You remember once when he went to a neighboring king, and the king hearing that there was such a prophet, that he had prophesied destruction, sent his horsemen to search him out. The servant of Elisha was troubled, and said, "Master, what shall we do? Here we are surrounded by horses and chariots of war, we shall surely be taken prisoners." What did Elisha do? Prayed to God; that was all. He prayed: "O God, open the eyes of this servant, for I have just told him that they that be for us are greater than they that be against us!" God answered his prayer, and opened the eyes of his servant, so that he saw the mountains filled with horses and

chariots, God's messengers to protect His own chosen prophet.

We walk to-day by faith; we see not the messengers that God sends to care for us and protect us round about the mountains of Zion. We see them only by faith. Our faith is not centred in chariots and horsemen, but in Him who says He has all power in heaven and on earth. We smile at dangers, turn our backs upon difficulties. We look straight upward and onward, and trust Him to make that Word true to us, "No evil shall befall you."

Elisha's life was made up of scenes like this. You remember when the axe was lost in the river, and of course sank. He then displayed the power of God by cutting down a piece of wood and throwing it into the river, when the axe floated upon the surface of the water like wood. All through his history were marvelous demonstrations of the power of God and of God's love to him

whom He had chosen to walk this earth and witness for Him. "God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Elisha had cast down the idols of kings and they hated and feared him.

He had now come down to the last days of his life; his sickness was to be the fatal sickness that should end his life, when he was to go to be with God. There is a vast difference between the dying bed of a man who knows that his sins are forgiven, who can say with Albert Cookman, "Sweeping through the gates, washed in the blood of the Lamb," and one who closes his eyes and dies with no hope in Christ. We have some death-bed scenes in God's Word. We have read the account of Joshua's death. If you will notice, in connection with this, in the last chapter of Joshua we have the whole condensed history of the children of Israel. God was in it all. He created Abraham

and Isaac and Joshua and Aaron. He directed them and He cared for them. There was no room left for them to boast. When it came to leading the people, it says distinctly that *God did it; He led His people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, through the wilderness, and across the Jordan, and broke down the walls of Jericho. He did it all. Where does it say that Joshua did all this? He was but God's instrument.*

God does love to make His promises true, to make Himself real to those that trust Him. Elisha's work was almost done; there is only one more record of any act of his, and that is this act that I call your attention to for a few moments: "Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands." The king had heard that Elisha, the prophet, was dying, that he never would come again to his palace to warn him and to prophecy to him that he should have victory over the Assyrians, saying, "O king,"

you must do this or that. And the king feigned—or perhaps he was honest, I know not—to be very much grieved as he stood by the dying bed of Elisha. He wept over his face, and said, “O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!” He wept over him, perhaps because he knew him to be a man of God; let us think of it that way, a man of God honest and true, whose words always came to pass when he prophesied, who gave rich and good counsel. The king felt, perhaps, that he was to lose his prime minister, his grandest and best advisor. Perhaps he thought,—who will show me and lead me on to victory?

Alas, alas, that people only weep over the *graves* of such men! Criticism, persecution, all leave when death lays its hand upon them. The news goes out, the prophet is dead; the one that advised and warned of evil. Thank God for the tardy recog-

nition of virtue. But that we might pour the “alabaster box of ointment” upon the heads of those we love while they are living, and thank God when their eyes are closed that their work is finished, that they have entered into the kingdom, into the palace that God has prepared.

And Elisha said unto the king: “Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows.” The king had come, even at the death-bed of the prophet, to know what he should do, as well as to weep over the thought of his death. The prophet said, “Open the window to the eastward.” It is the prophet, not the king, who gives orders now. He commanded, “Shoot the arrow,” and he shot. And he said, “The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance out of the hand of Syria.” But, mind you, *the hands of the prophet were laid upon the hands of the king as he shot.*

How true the analogy to the child of God! There can be no victory

unless the King of kings guides the hand that is used for Him, no success unless we put our hand into the hand of our King, saying, "Lord, guide and save me and use me. In this spirit alone could we prophesy to others. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice unto God, which is your reasonable service." These hands are of no use unless God takes them. This body of ours may walk the streets and be used in the accumulation of wealth or seeking its own pleasure, but it is useless unless God takes it for His own.

If there is anything in us of use it came from God, it belongs to God. It is one thing to say we are the Lord's, another thing to *walk before Him*, living first of all for Him who gave His life for us. I would rather die in rags and in the poorhouse, with my Master's blessing upon my head, and hear Him say, "Well done,

good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," than to die in a palace with millions without His blessing.

The last act of the prophet was to tell the king that he was to have deliverance, but it must be by the hand of God. So he cries, "Open the window and shoot." The king fired his three arrows and stopped. The prophet was angry with him. "Why do you not shoot your other arrows, five or six of them? You have now only a partial victory over the enemy, when you might have had a complete and perfect success. Why do you stop short?" The illustration comes to me of the many who are content to be simply saved; who say to themselves, "My sins have been forgiven; I have taken a seat in church; I give so much a year to missions, home and foreign; once in a while I go to a prayer meeting." Why be content with simply a name? Why not have the whole? The

blessing that shall be like a crown upon the head, like a "well of water springing up" within, the abiding Comforter speaking peace to the soul.

The king's mistake was a common one. We narrow down God's full provision, and in our poor way endeavor to win trophies to His Name. Beyond this, it would be presumption, we say, and so relegate His power back to the few who brightened the background of the dim ages of long ago.

In one of the battles of the East, years ago, a certain conqueror was advised by one of his officers that, if he could take his position on a neighboring hill, it would command a view of the entire battle-ground, and victory would be assured. The advice was followed, and the flag was planted on the hill-top. The troops cheered, and cried, "Now bring the flag down to the troops."

"No," said the officer, "Bring the troops up to the flag." Up they

rushed at the word of command, carrying everything before them, and victory crowned the day.

O, it is not to bring God's Word down to our poor, little interpretation, but to rise to His presence, — by a glorious faith to "mount on wings as eagles, to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint." This we can do by obeying His word of command to "take hold of His strength," then His hands will be upon our hands for victory and for power. When Wellington commanded one of his officers to take a certain place, with a look at his commander he replied:—

"Yes, though it cost me my life."

As he held back a moment, said the grand old "Iron Duke," "Let me take your hand." The magnetic touch of that hand thrilled his whole being, and he went on to victory.

Let us commence the year before us with the certainty of success, for He who orders our lives has said He

will never leave us, "even unto the end." *With His hand upon us*, we shall not know defeat. But He expects entire loyalty. He does not give a command to have it half obeyed. He asks for the whole. As we throw up our windows and look out upon the everlasting hills, the glory is upon us, the heat-giving sun thrills and warms our very being; even so, the whole heart turned toward the Sun of Righteousness *has* life, has strength, has victory, has power. Beloved, what I desire for you I desire for myself. Life is too short to spend in indecision. Let us bow in subjection to the Father of spirits, that His Spirit may be upon us and that our hearts may throb with joyful receptivity as He says to us:—

"Son, daughter, all that I have is thine."

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