2 Kings - Commentaries by William John Hocking, Editor

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WHILE it may truly be said that faith is never dependent upon circumstances, yet they are largely used both to display God's holy and dignified superiority to all things, and to strengthen the soul in peaceful rest and confidence at all times. Not this only, it is ever the privilege of the children of God to be assured of His love and interest in all that happens, so as to be ever unshaken as to the truth, not only that all shall be well, but that "It is well," even though all may appear otherwise. This was clearly so when the above sentence was uttered, and it may well have its voice to souls in this day, when God and His word are so little trusted, and the influence of circumstances either pleasing or painful, is substituted for calm, unbroken confidence in God.

The "great woman" of Shunem in 2 Kings 4 may teach the saints of today many a practical lesson of love, obedience, and unmoved confidence, in the keen hour of testing. The man of God in her day was Elisha, who caught the mantle of Elijah when he was translated, and gave evidence of it in power and grace in the midst of fallen, unrepentant Israel. The woman, in the love of her heart, constrained the prophet to eat bread; during which time she perceived that his life and ways were in character with the testimony he bore. With this conviction, she proposed to her husband that a room should be set apart for this holy man of God, who, however, was little known or welcomed by Israel. The God Who gave her this perception and loving desire not only observed her action, but, as He never becomes debtor to any, gave by Elisha, an unsurpassed blessing in her home. "Thou shalt embrace a son," exceeded her expectation, having modestly said to his previous offer, "I dwell among mine own people." The gift bestowed, and for a time enjoyed, in due course had to be surrendered to the force of circumstances, for on a day of extreme heat, the child cried, "My head, my head," and the received gift, the fruit of her loving hospitality, passed away on his mother's knees.

Now it is in the hour of keen sorrow and testing, that restful confidence, in active obedience shines. The prophet's special chamber is at once used by placing her dead son on his bed, and in chastened subjection she appeals to her husband to send an ass and young man that she may go at once to the man of God. In vain the husband pleads irregularity, being no special feast day. Her need in its present felt reality was enough, and her assurance begat the quieting response, "It shall be well," which the sequel blessedly proved.

To the young man she said, "Drive, and go forward," for to reach the man of God was her one absorbing object, and her faith and purpose refused all else. The One Who gave the child must be her sole resource, therefore to bring the prophet to the chamber where she had laid him was her aim. Precious indeed such a course; moving onward till in sight of Elisha, who sees her coming in the haste of her distress, though ignorant of its nature. He commands Gehazi to ask, "Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?" To which she significantly replied, "It is well."

Soon she is at the prophet's feet, and in the fulness and freeness of her sad, bereaved heart, she tells her tale of sorrow, reminding him that the son was a gift unasked for. The case, therefore, was touching and urgent, as Elisha manifested by hastily sending his servant; but the servant is not enough for her, it must be himself; so together they go for a new experience.

The chamber of hospitality for the prophet's rest and refreshment, is now to be the place of power, in bringing back the dead son to life. Contact with death is the means used; the living prophet and the woman's dead son touch each other, and the child again lives, followed soon by the proof of how truly well it was. When the son was about to be given, the woman was called into the man of God's presence; now that he is raised, the prophet again says, "Call this Shunamite," that she may hear from his lips, "Take up thy son."

In lowly, joyful gratitude, she bows; receives her lost treasure, and goes out to tell her husband the wonders of the ways of God by Elisha. He whom she gladly provided for at the beginning, proved her confession, "It is well," by a power beyond death, surpassing all her exercise and sorrow.

Such ways of hospitality in the past, followed by such dignified faith and holy fruit, may truly give us a profitable lesson for today. G. G.