

WRITINGS OF H NICOLS

by H. Nicols

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by H. Nicols, compiled for study and devotional reading.

2 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. S. The last words of David."
2. S. Ye serve the Lord Christ."

S. The last words of David."

The last words of David."

We may contemplate the close of David's life under two aspects — one historic, the other moral and typical. The first is found in 1 Kings 2:9, the last word uttered by the aged king being, "But his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood." "Blood" is the word on the lips of the dying warrior, "a man of war from his youth," as Philistine enemies and Amalekite foes could testify. Memories of holy righteous victories, mingled with those of sin, shame, and sorrow, crowd together, as we think of Elah's valley and Ziklag's sorrow, of righteous judgment on the messenger of Saul's downfall, and the sons of Rimmon, the Beerothite. And would that the picture could end here! But Uriah's cruel death, and Nathan's "Thou art the man," cast their sad and sombre shade over all, as we hear the judgment pronounced on the king's enemies.

How refreshing, then, to turn to the other scene, where the Spirit of God introduces us to "the man after God's own heart," in quite a different atmosphere, and with other surroundings. As we listen to the holy breathings of the prophet in 2 Samuel 23:1-39 :, we learn that "no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation," for every word he utters carries us beyond the history and the facts narrated, and the scene becomes a "gate of heaven" to our souls, as we view "great David's greater Son."

Let us look for a moment in detail at the lovely way in which every word tells us of another and greater than he — yea, of One that eclipses" Solomon in all his glory." "David, the son of Jesse, said."

How this leads our heart to the manger at Bethlehem, the home at Nazareth, to Him who was a carpenter, and the Son of a carpenter! The lowly Man of Luke comes before us vividly, as He tells of "the son of David, the son of Jesse," unknown amongst those robed in purple and fine linen — of whom, when it was asked at kingly courts, "Where is he?" the answer was returned, as of David in 1 Samuel 17:1-58 :, "O king, I cannot tell;" and so he has to answer for himself, "I am the son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite" — a small, despised house, and he the least in the house.

Such was David, such was Jesus — lowly in heart, a companion of the poor of the flock. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Marvellous, precious, and ineffable grace! Jehovah's Fellow stooping to the lowest place, condescending to the meanest estate. How this draws out the renewed affections, as the soul contemplates the travel-stained feet, the weary frame, the furrowed cheek of God's Well-beloved, "hunted as a partridge upon the mountains." But now in spirit are we carried on from the evangelist Luke to the historian Luke, as, in the opening chapter of the Acts, he presents the lowly Son of Jesse as "the man raised up on high." In lowliness He had humbled Himself, taken a servant's form, had gone down into death, obedient to the Father's will; and now, when the lowest point is reached in holy descent, "He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father." And His ascent was indeed glorious and exalted, for "he was set far above all principality, and power, and might,

and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." The sceptre of majesty is in His hand, enthroned in the excellent glory, at the right hand of the Majesty on high. It is no longer the despised "Nazarene" that Peter has to announce: "God hath made that same Jesus whom ye crucified both Lord and Christ."

"Worthy the Lamb that's gone on high To be exalted thus." This once despised but now exalted One is likewise "the Anointed of the God of Jacob," the centre and the sum of all God's purposes for Israel and for the Gentiles — as indeed of the heavenly counsels also. David was speaking of the things "touching the king," truly "inditing a good matter." He had been anointed with Samuel's "horn of oil;" but the Anointed of the God of Jacob passed in vision before David's soul, and he too, with Abraham, looked on to the day of glory, and saw Him who was at once David's "Son" and David's "Lord" — to Him who was "the Prince of the kings of the earth" — to "the Lord who sitteth King for ever" — to Him "who holdeth the key of David" — to Him who should ask and "have the heathen for a possession" — to Him "who was set as King on the holy hill of Zion." The next note of the dying patriarch directs us to another glory connected with the One who was thus to manifest God's ways in rule, and we have "the sweet psalmist of Israel."

David had said and sung sweet and holy melodies, but never such music as that which sounded through the lips of Jesus, as He "piped" in the midst of Israel melodies of grace, compassion and love. Alas! alas! Israel's heart was fat, and their ears dull, and "the voice of the charmer" was unheeded. Cold, listless, careless, defiant were they, as they heard the voice of Him who "spake as man never yet spake;" hearing, they heard not, and so the voice becomes hushed in the midst of the nation, and instead of the "garment of praise," the sweet singer has to wrap himself in the "robe of heaviness," and, thus robed, sits to weep that touching lament over the rebellious city, "O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, but ye would not." He turns sadly away from the city of solemnities, "the joy of the whole earth," leaving it desolate indeed. O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! no longer sheltered by the shadow of those eternal wings. And soon that voice of compassion is hushed in death upon Calvary's mount, but only to awake again in the morning of resurrection glory, when, having burst the bonds of the tomb, and taking His place in the midst of His "brethren" — those "He is not ashamed" to own as such, the voice is again heard, not now to win a rebellious and perverse nation, but "in the midst of the church" He sings praises to God; and we who are the favoured ones in that heavenly choir answering, as Miriam did Moses, and giving back to Him all the glory of His "glorious triumph." But¹ this is a note altogether heavenly; and so the Spirit of God tells us that after this wondrous melody there is yet another to rise from "the great congregation" (Isaiah 22:25), and Israel shall praise Him in the great congregation in millennial days yet to come, when holy adoration and "a pure offering" shall proclaim His worth.

Yet again is He brought before us as the instrument of divine communications: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by him, and his word was in his tongue." So we read in Acts 1:2 that Jesus, through the Holy Ghost, had given commandment unto the apostles whom He had chosen. And indeed He was ever, while on earth, the humble, dependent Man, led of the Spirit in every word, act, and deed, so that all He did was by the direct power of the Holy Ghost; but not only does "the Spirit of God" speak "by him," but Israel's God and Israel's Rock speaks to Him, and the eye of faith is directed to the moral qualities essential in the One who was to reign over all, and of whose kingdom there shall be no end.

Let us, however, notice in passing that God is present as "Israel's Rock." The nation failed, miserably failed; and wrath has come upon them to the uttermost; but "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance;" and so Israel will find, in a day yet to come, rest and refreshment in that One who is "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The qualities requisite in the one who is to rule for God's glory and man's benefit, are righteousness, obedience, and dependence — alone found in that blessed One, who came not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him. "He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God."

Saul wielded the power for himself. David and Solomon, in the palmy days of their unparalleled glories, in the list of Israel's kings, had to hide their heads in shame, and own, in the words of the humbled king, "My house is not so with God;" and so we have to turn from "his house" to Him who "had neither beginning of days nor end of life," a kingly Priest after Melchisedec's order, as David proceeds to describe the verdant beauty of the kingdom under the reign of Him who is alone worthy; and exquisitely indeed is the picture drawn. "He shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even as a morning without clouds, as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain." Unsullied light will shine upon this now dry and arid scene, and "the wilderness blossom as the rose," when "a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment, and a man shall be a (Refuge) — "hiding-place from the wind;"

(Protection) — "a covert from the tempest;"

(Refreshment) — "as rivers of waters in a dry place;" and (Rest) — " as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

Thus refuge, protection, refreshment, and rest will be found in Him who "shall come down like rain upon the mown grass," as showers that water the earth. "In his day shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace as long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth; his name shall be continued as long as the sun, and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed." (Psalms 72:1-20 :) Truly we can add, in the presence of the prospect so resplendent with moral and physical glory, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things; and blessed be his glorious name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, amen. The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended."

All now is praise and adoration as David entered into the blessedness of that reign; and, as the vision filled his soul, he could devoutly and fervently say, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire." We may well ask ourselves, Have we the same spirit of earnest desire that animated his soul, and captivated his inmost affection? And if the vision tarry, have we patience to wait for it, "though he make it not to grow"? Are we found in "the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ," in company with the beloved John in Patmos's isle, content to let opposition, violence, and oppression take their course, until He come forth whom Jehovah "has made strong for himself"? Then shall Belial's sons feel the weight of His righteous judgment, for by "the breath of his mouth, and the brightness of his coming" shall He "clear out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity." "The thorns cast away" tell of righteous indignation on those who "know not God, and [those that] obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," when the mighty Conqueror shall descend, with His glittering sword and glorious apparel, "the day of vengeance in his heart." And with Him shall be "the armies which are in heaven" — ten thousand of His saints associated

with Him, "for this honour have all his saints."

Here let me ask, is there not significance in the fact, that the names, the valour, the victories of David's associates in the day of rejection, find a connecting link with the holy breathings of our prophet? Does it not tell us that the kingdom will be the theatre for the display of recognition of those who, knowing the Beloved whom earth rejected, seek to walk in heavenly association with Him now during the time when the sons of Belial are in power? Does it not point us to the time when "the Lord, the righteous Judge," shall award the crowns of "life" (Revelation 2:10; James 1:12), "glory" (1 Peter 5:4), and "righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:8), when He shall pronounce the "Well done!" and "every man shall have praise of God," who, suffering now, shall reign by-and-by — co-heirs, co-glorified?

If so, beloved, does it not behove us to be "diligent, that we may be found in peace; looking for that blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ," when the "Son of Jesse," and "the man raised up on high," "the sweet psalmist of Israel," "the anointed of the God of Jacob," will — .

"Give these bodies vile A fashion like His own:

He'll bid the whole creation smile, And hush its groan."

How blessed to be able to say, "Thus far by grace preserv'd, Each moment speeds us on: The crown and kingdom are reserv'd Where Christ is gone. When cloudless morning shines, We shall His glory share; In pleasant places are the lines, The home, how fair!"

H. N.

S. Ye serve the Lord Christ."

Ye serve the Lord Christ." To things give character to all true service in the present day. One is, the world has rejected Christ; the other, God has rejected the world. (John 12:31.)

These two facts, if practically acted upon, would materially alter the character of that which professes to be the service of God, as well as the labours of many who render true service of God in some respects, but whose chief efforts are now misdirected. "In every good work doing the will of God." A work may be good in itself, but if it is not according to the will of God for the present moment, then it loses its savour to Him, and is deprived of its true value. In Romans 12:1-21 : we have a complete summary of different characters of service. It embraces every member of the assembly of God, assigning to each his proper sphere of service. All are first exhorted to present their bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God which is their intelligent service. (Romans 5:1.) This gives the positive side; placing ourselves absolutely in the hands of another, which is the first requisite of a true servant — intelligent but absolute obedience. In verse 2 we have the negative side, "not conformed to this world;" and, as the certain result of devotion to good on the one side and separation from evil on the other, a practical acquaintance with the Master's will is obtained "proving what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." To admire a truth is not enough; it is only in practice that one proves its reality. "He that doeth the will of God shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." In 2 Samuel 15:1-37 ; 2 Samuel 17:1-29 ; 2 Samuel 19:1-43 : we find three classes of servants, each rendering to David in the day of his rejection intelligent and acceptable service, and illustrating the New Testament truths that "all members have not the same office," and "there are gifts differing according to the grace given to each" — truths practically ignored in this day of one-man ministry, when all the gifts are assumed to be possessed by one individual, who is not supposed to receive them from their true source — an ascended Christ — but by humanly ordained and appointed means, frequently "of man," as well as "by man."

1st. — Ittai, the Gittite (2 Samuel 15:20), a stranger and an exile, has his heart attracted to the person of David, who tests the professed devotion of his servant by putting before him his own portion as that of his followers, warning him that an outcast and a wanderer in this scene is the only prospect before him. In spirit he says, "The world hateth me and it will also hate you." How beautifully this test brings out the depth of Ittai's devotion, as he replies, "As Jehovah liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in life or in death, even there also will thy servant be." Practically he put his life in his hands, and this self-abnegation is the first grand requisite of a true servant. It is this the apostle speaks of when he says, "We who live are always delivered unto death . . . and are made the off-scouring of the world." He is willing to leave Jerusalem with all its attractions to be a servant, and a homeless wanderer.

God in His sovereignty called out, in a distinct manner, certain men to be in the wilderness with Christ and for Christ. Home, friends, wealth, position, ambition, all that man as man values most, must be relinquished when there is a distinct call from God. We have a striking example of this in

Saul of Tarsus. Peter, too, must leave his nets, boats and fishes at the call of Christ. Obedience to such a call will never be accompanied by ease and comfort after a worldly sort. Alas! the spurious servant of the present day seeks to find a lodgment in the wide-spreading branches of the mustard tree of profession. The "minister" must wait on "his ministry," "the teacher" on his teaching, "the exhorter" on exhortation: that is to say, the Lord's service is to be the distinct business of his life — all other things being subservient to this one end. He may make tents, though tent-making is not his object. This is important to notice, for some imagine that a true servant ought not at any time to be engaged in a worldly calling. The example of him who was "not a whit behind the chiefest of the apostles" teaches otherwise. "These hands," he could honourably say, "have ministered to my necessities and to those who are with me." In closing the first list of gifts and class of servants (Romans 12:6-8), he adds (Romans 12:9), "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good," in other words telling us that a "loving heart," a "separated path," and a "devoted walk," are grand moral requisites for a true servant.

2nd. — But not only has God called out some distinctly to be His servants here, by leaving everything that would in the least interfere with his service, but we read of others, who in the exercise of "brotherly love" are "not to be slothful in business, or in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality." Zeal, fervency, patience, joy and dependence are to be exhibited in service towards those who belong to God, the circle of Christ's affections, the members of His body, the church, which He loved, and for which He died and now lives. This will call forth service of a very varied character. The action of Shobi, Machir and Barzillai, in 2 Samuel 17:27-29, furnishes a beautiful illustration of the second class of servants. Their service is as grateful in its way and season as that of Ittai, though differing in its nature and character. They do not go out, leaving everything to follow a rejected king; but they place their wealth, their beds, their basins and their food, at the disposal of David and those who shared his rejection. "The people," say they, "are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness." This carries our thoughts to the faithful Gaius of New Testament days, and to the devoted women who ministered to the Lord of their substance. A cup of cold water given in the name of Christ is treasured up by Him in sweet remembrance until that day when "Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of one of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me" will recall many a long-forgotten act of "brotherly love."

This, beloved, has a very practical application. It may be I cannot evangelize, teach or exhort, but this I can and ought to do — hold all that I have in this world absolutely at the command, control and disposal of my Master, reckoning neither wealth, home, nor comfort as my own, but as a "good steward of the manifold grace of God" using all for Christ. Experience proves that nothing conduces more to the well-being of saints in any locality than the practical activities of that love that looks not upon its own things, but the things of others.

3rd. — But some may say, "I have no special gifts wherewith to serve the Lord, nor house nor means to place at the disposal of those that are His." I reply that the Lord Himself in Luke 12:1-59 : distinguishes between a "waiting" servant (Luke 12:37) and a "working" servant. (Luke 12:43.) He serves the former, and rewards the latter; but both are equally termed servants. Paul in writing to Timothy says, of the crown of righteousness, that it is for those who love the appearing of their Lord. The heart that is freed from itself can "weep with those that weep," and if done in communion with the Master's mind, it is a service of a very grateful and acceptable kind to His heart. What He

desires is that our bodies should be the lamps through which the light of companionship with a rejected Lord is seen.

Such service is beautifully exemplified in the demeanour and conduct of Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 19:24, etc.), during the absence of his beloved though rejected king. He had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes from the day the king departed until the day when he came again in peace. During the whole term of David's exile, this devoted servant, unable to follow him in his place of rejection and reproach, or to minister to him of his substance, was the standing witness to the fact that, though actually present in Jerusalem, his heart was "in the wilderness" with his beloved master. His body was the practical expression of this truth.

Let me ask, beloved, is it so with us? Do our bodies express the fact that we are dead and risen with Christ, and that our only desire is to be with Him where He is? Mephibosheth might have cultivated the favour of the usurper on the throne, but he cared for neither position, appearance, nor ridicule. Wealth too was disregarded by him, for in verse 30 he can afford to say, "Let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house." Let us test our ways, beloved. Are we "like unto men that wait for their Lord"? May we each earnestly desire and ask.

Lord, awaken in our hearts the desire to be Thine, only Thine, wholly Thine; to use all that we have and are in Thy service, and to wait for Thy coming again. H. N.

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