

# The Orphans' Friend.

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## ELI AND HIS SONS.

Eli was high-priest and judge in Israel when the ark was in Shiloh. How he came to be priest, and how the priestly office was transferred from the house of Eleazar to the house of Ithamar, who was Aaron's youngest son, we do not know. The beginning of Eli's career is hid in the gloom of the dark ages of Jewish history. Samson, who was little more than a lawless leader of lawless men, could do but little for Israel that would survive his own turbulent life. He was no true ruler of the people, teaching them right principles, and illustrating them in his own life. He made no contribution to the progress of the nation. He left to history nothing but the story of his amazing strength and his terrible revenges. When the blind giant pulled down upon himself the temple of Dagon in Gaza and found common death with the lords of the Philistines, Israel was left to the turbulence and revenges of discordant factions, and to the rage of relentless enemies. There followed a long and gloomy period of anarchy, when "there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his own eyes." This is the last word in the history of the Judges of Israel, and it tells us plainly enough what the historian had not the heart to record. The last five chapters of the book of Judges are crowded with pictures of confusion, anarchy, irregular worship, idolatry, internecine struggles, and horrid war—pictures drawn in fire and blood.

Amid some of the disorders of this dark period Eli became high-priest and judge of Israel. He appears upon the scene abruptly—sitting upon "a seat by a post in the temple of the Lord," close by the spot where Hannah, the sorrowful, because childless, wife of Elkanah, was praying that God would give her a son. When he died at the age of ninety-eight, he had been priest and ruler for forty years. But we cannot tell how long he had been in office the day he administered the unmerited rebuke to the pious Hannah.

The parent who can read the story of Eli and his sons without anxious interest, increased by many mingled hopes and fears concerning his own children, is strangely insensible. For it is a story replete with dramatic power and tragic interest. Nor does the simple recital of the ancient chronicler who compiled the annals of Samuel need the garniture of many words.

As to Eli himself, he does not appear to have been a man of great gifts or great deeds. His life is not instructive by its exalted virtues and deep devotion so much as by its neglects, its misfortunes, and its punishment. That his disposition was amiable and affectionate is evident. Very kind were his words to Hannah when once he understood why she lingered and prayed in the house of God.

The brightest trait in Eli's character is his submission to the will of God when it bore hardest upon him and his house.

In the morning after young

Samuel's vision Eli called him and said, "What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me. . . . And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him." It was no message of hope, but the revelation of the doom that was hovering over the high-priest's house. "And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering forever."

In this last warning ever given to Eli there is a reference to admonitions and threatenings already delivered. About twenty years, as is supposed, before the midnight revelation, to young Samuel, "a man of God"—an unknown and unnamed prophet—suddenly appears before Eli, delivers a fearful message, and then steps back into the obscurity from which he came and we see him no more.

What had this unnamed prophet said to the venerable priest, while Hophni and Phinehas were yet in their youth, while there was yet hope for their reformation and salvation?

"And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honorest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me forever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shalt not be an old man in thine house forever. And the man of thine whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.

And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine Anointed forever. And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left in thine house shall come and crouch to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and shall say, Put me, I pray thee, into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread."

All this was terrible. God's wrath was to be poured in overwhelming and desolating storms upon Eli and his house. But this was not the worst; so far, at least, as this world was concerned, there was to be no mercy. "I have sworn unto Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice and offering forever."

What answer can Eli make to Samuel's message, announcing the impending judgments of God, and declaring anew what the "man of God," the unnamed prophet, had said twenty years ago? Truly it was no ordinary humility and resignation to the Divine will that could promptly reply to all this, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." We have a further and striking proof of his personal piety in his deep concern for the ark of God, and his heart-breaking sorrow at its capture, on the day of Israel's overwhelming defeat by the Philistine armies.

But Eli was a very inefficient ruler, a very unwise, unfaithful, and unhappy father; "a wavering, feeble, powerless man, with excellent intentions, but an utter want of will." As chief judge and high-priest of Israel during forty years, he held the reins of authority with a feeble and irresolute hand. Frederick Robertson says of him: "He could not rule his own household; he could not rule the Church of God—a shy, solitary, amiable ecclesiastic and recluse was Eli. And such are the really fatal men in the work of life. . . . Eli's feelings were always good; his acts were always wrong. In sentiment he might be always trusted; in action he was forever false, because he was a weak, vacillating man. All history overrates such men. Men, like Eli, ruin families by instability, produce revolutions, die well when only passive courage is wanted, and are reckoned martyrs. They live like children and die like heroes. Deeply true to nature and instructive is this history of Eli. It is quite natural that such men should suffer well. For if only their minds are made up for them by inevitable circumstances, they can submit. When people come to Eli and say, 'You should reprove your sons,' he can do it after a fashion; when it is said to him, 'You must die,' he can make up his mind to die; but this is not *taking up the cross*."

It is evident from various circumstances that during his long and feeble rule many abuses that should have been crushed the day they were born had grown up all around him. When Hannah went into the temple of the Lord at Shiloh, "and was in bitterness of soul," as she prayed to God for a

son, Eli who was sitting close by where she knelt mistook her for a lewd and drunken woman. "And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee." All this shows that religion was at a low ebb indeed, and the regulations concerning the admission of improper characters into the sacred inclosure much neglected. The manner in which this circumstance is introduced into the narrative shows that drunken women were frequently seen close about the altars of God. When matters had reached such a pass that the sight of one supposed to be a drunken woman in the sanctuary excited no surprise, and only drew from the high-priest a common-place reproof, we may well believe that there had been strange and criminal carelessness in the administration of affairs.

Under Eli's slack and feeble rule many grave abuses had developed in the dealings of the subordinate priests with the people. Certain parts of the offerings were allotted by law for the support of the priests and their families. In addition to this it had become customary for the servants of the priests to come, while the flesh was being boiled for the use of the offerer and his friends, and, with his three-pronged flesh-hook in his hand, "he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot." What his "three-pronged flesh-hook" brought up the priest appropriated to his own use. "So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither." The people, perhaps, out of a habit of veneration for a priesthood that was indeed no longer entitled to respect, submitted to this additional tax upon their offerings, by which the appetite of the priests was gratified with greater variety, and their avarice with larger perquisites. But these rapacious sons of Belial, Eli's sons, were not satisfied with this. The flesh-hook plunged into the pot at random did not always bring up the choicest pieces. They claimed the very best of the offerings, and if any devout, honest-minded Israelite objected to a proceeding so unjust, and so unworthy the sacred office of the priests, the very servants of these apostates had the effrontery to take by force whatever pieces of the flesh they chose. Eli was a careless judge and a negligent high-priest to allow such outrages to pass unrebuked, or even to allow them to exist for a single day. Had Eli been faithful to his sacred duties, had he "honored God" aright, he would, without ceremony or delay, have ejected from an office they so shamefully abused these "sons of Belial," Hophni and Phinehas—"lording it over God's heritage," and profaning his altar."—A. G. Haygood, D.D.

—A book agent, writing to the publishers concerning a valuable educational work, says that he is much discouraged, because seventy per cent of the teachers are young girls, who do not hesitate to spend ten dollars for a fashionable bonnet, but can not be induced to spend two dollars for a work essential to success in their calling. While we believe the young man exaggerated, still his statement contains an element of truth. We have too many in the school-room, who seldom, if ever, read anything pertaining to their profession, or make any effort to improve their qualifications as teachers. It would be an interesting fact, if we could know the number of teachers who take an educational journal, or own so standard a work as 'Page's Theory and Practice of Teaching.' We lack an *esprit de corps*, and while we are not willing to croak, still we do wish to tell the truth. If by any means, we as teachers, could respect ourselves more, we should be more respected by others, and if we could elevate our own mental character, we could more easily elevate the minds of others. Teaching should be an intellectual calling; it often is not, and years pass away in dull routine, with no genuine study into the art and science of that grandest of all callings, training the mind. Successful teaching is the result of profound study, first of ourselves, and then of our pupils, and lastly, of what we are to teach them.—National Teachers' Monthly.

## ONLY.

Only a seed—but it chanced to fall  
In a little cleft in the city wall,  
And taking root grew bravely up,  
Till a tiny blossom crowned its top.

Only a flower—but it chanced that day  
That a burdened heart passed that way;  
And the message that through the  
flower was sent,  
Brought the weary soul a sweet content.

For it spoke of the lilies so wondrously clad  
And the heart that was tired grew strangely glad  
At the thought of the tender care over all,  
That noted even a sparrow's fall.

Only a thought—but the work it wrought  
Could never by tongue or pen be taught,  
For it ran through a life like a thread of gold;  
And the life bore fruit—a hundred fold.

Only a word—but 'twas spoken in love,  
With a whispered prayer in the Lord above;  
And the angels in heaven rejoiced once more,  
For a new-born soul "entered in by the door."

FIRST THINGS FIRST.—A young man having embraced the Gospel, and made open profession of it, his father, who was much offended, gave him this advice: "James, you should first get yourself established in a good trade, and then think of religion." "Father," said James, "Christ advises me very differently. He says, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven, and the righteousness thereof, and all other things shall be added unto you.'—Frank Leslie's Sunday Magazine.

DID YOU EVER.—Did you ever know a tradesman asking for his account who had not "a bill to make up by Friday?"

Did you ever know a cabman or a ticket porter with any change about him?