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A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

Christ's dead to partake in the glory of His coming. Then, he foretells the results of the judgment—eternal destruction from the face of God for the wicked, and everlasting presence with the Lord for His own. Of the time of the Advent the Apostle professes ignorance; he only knows that it will come unexpectedly. But he does know that before it the apostasy of the Jews must be completed, and the persecuting power of the Roman state be revealed. This apostasy and its punishment he sees is immediately ready for completion (1 Thess. ii. 16). Finally, he mentions having previously foretold the persecutions under which the Thessalonians were already suffering (1 Thess. iii. 4).

Allegheny.

BENJ. B. WARFIELD.

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

XVIII.

SLAYING SELF THE FOUNDATION PRECEPT OF PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY.

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, the which is idolatry; for which things' sake cometh the wrath of God upon the sons of disobedience; in the which ye also walked aforetime, when ye lived in these things. But now put ye also away all these; anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth: lie not one to another”—COL. iii. 5-9 (Rev. Vers.).

“MORTIFY *therefore*”—wherefore? The previous words give the reason. Because “ye died” with Christ, and because ye “were raised together with Him.” In other words, the plainest, homeliest moral teaching of this Epistle, such as that which immediately follows, is built upon its “mystical” theology. Paul thinks that the deep things which he has been saying about union with Christ in his death and resurrection have the most intimate connexion

with common life. These profound truths have the keenest edge, and are as a sacrificial knife, to slay the life of self. Creed is meant to tell on conduct. Character is the last outcome and test of doctrine. But too many people deal with their theological beliefs as they do with their hassocks and prayer books and hymn books in their pews—use them for formal worship once a week, and leave them for the dust to settle on them till Sunday comes round again. So it is very necessary to put the practical inferences very plainly, to reiterate the most commonplace and threadbare precepts as the issue of the most recondite teaching, and to bind the burden of duty on men's backs with the cords of principles and doctrines.

Accordingly the section of the Epistle which deals with Christian character now begins, and this "therefore" knits the two halves together. That word protests against opposite errors. On the one hand, some good people are to be found impatient of exhortations to duties, and ready to say, Preach the gospel, and the duties will spring up spontaneously where it is received; on the other hand, some people are to be found who see no connexion between the practice of common morality and the belief of Christian truths, and are ready to say, Put away your theology; it is useless lumber, the machine will work as well without it. But Paul believed that the firmest basis for moral teaching and the most powerful motive for moral conduct is "the truth as it is in Jesus."

I. We have here put very plainly the paradox of continual self-slaying as the all-embracing duty of a Christian.

It is a pity that the R. V. has retained "mortify" here, as that Latinized word says to an ordinary reader much less than is meant, and hides the allusion to the preceding contest. The marginal alternative "make dead" is, to say the least, not idiomatic English. The suggestion of the American revisers, which is printed at the end of the R. V.,

“put to death,” is much better, and perhaps a single word, such as “slay” or “kill,” might have been better still.

“Slay your members which are upon the earth.” It is a vehement and paradoxical injunction, though it be but the echo of still more solemn and stringent words—“pluck it out, cut it off, and cast it from thee.” The possibility of misunderstanding it and bringing it down to the level of that spurious asceticism and “severity to the body” against which he has just been thundering, seems to occur to the Apostle, and therefore he hastens to explain that he does not mean the maiming of selves, or hacking away limbs, but the slaying of the passions and desires which root themselves in our bodily constitution. The eager haste of the explanation destroys the congruity of the sentence, but he does not mind that. And then follows a grim catalogue of the evil-doers on whom sentence of death is passed.

Before dealing with that list, two points of some importance may be observed. The first is that the practical exhortations of this letter begin with this command to put off certain characteristics which are assumed to belong to the Colossian Christians in their natural state, and that only afterwards comes the precept to put on (ver. 12) the fairer robes of Christlike purity, clasped about by the girdle of perfectness. That is to say, Paul’s anthropology regards men as wrong and having to get right. A great deal of the moral teaching which is outside of Christianity, and which does not sufficiently recognise that the first thing to be done is to cure and alter, but talks as if men were, on the whole, rather inclined to be good, is for that very reason perfectly useless. Its fine precepts and lofty sentiments go clean over people’s heads, and are ludicrously inappropriate to the facts of the case. The serpent has twined itself round me, and unless you can give me a knife, sharp and strong enough to cut its loathsome coils asunder, it is cruel to bid me walk. There is not a man, woman or child on the

face of the earth who does not need, for moral progress, to be shown and helped first how *not* to be what he or she has been, and only after that is it of the slightest use to tell them what they ought to be. The only thing that reaches the universal need is a power that will make us different from what we are. If we are to grow into goodness and beauty, we must begin by a complete reversal of tastes and tendencies. The thing we want first is not progress, the going on in the direction in which our faces are turned, but a power which can lay a mastering hand upon our shoulders, turn us right round, and make us go in the way opposite to that. Culture, the development of what is in us in germ, is not the beginning of good husbandry on human nature as it is. The thorns have to be stubbed up first, and the poisonous seeds sifted out, and new soil laid down, and then culture will bring forth something better than wild grapes. First—"mortify;" then—"put on."

Another point to be carefully noted is that, according to the Apostle's teaching, the root and beginning of all such slaying of the evil which is in us all, lies in our being dead with Christ to the world. In the former chapter we found that the Apostle's final condemnation of the false asceticism which was beginning to infest the Colossian Church, was that it was of no value as a counteractive of fleshly indulgence. But here he proclaims that what asceticism could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, that union with Jesus Christ in His death and risen life will do; it will subdue sin in the flesh. That slaying here enjoined as fundamental to all Christian holiness, is but the working out in life and character of the revolution in the inmost self which has been effected, if by faith we are joined to the living Lord, who was dead and is alive for evermore.

There must, however, be a very vigorous act of personal determination if the power of that union is to be manifested in us. The act of "slaying" can never be pleasant or easy.

The vehemence of the command and the form of the metaphor express the strenuousness of the effort and the painfulness of the process, in the same way as Paul's other saying, "crucify the flesh," does. Suppose a man working at some machine. His fingers get drawn between the rollers or caught in some belting. Another minute and he will be flattened to a shapeless bloody mass. He catches up an axe lying by and with his own arm hacks off his own hand at the wrist. It takes some nerve to do that. It is not easy nor pleasant, but it is the only alternative to a horrible death. I know of no stimulus that will string a man up to the analogous spiritual act here enjoined, and enjoined by conscience also, except participation in the death of Christ and in the resulting life.

"Slay your members which are upon the earth" means tears and blood and more than blood. It is easier far to cut off the hand which after all is not me, than to sacrifice passions and desires which, though they be my worst self, are myself. It is useless to blink the fact that the only road to holiness is through self-suppression, self-annihilation, and nothing can make that easy and pleasant. True, the paths of religion are ways of pleasantness and paths of peace, but they are steep, and climbing is never easy. The upper air is bracing and exhilarating indeed, but trying to lungs accustomed to the low levels. Religion is delightful, but self-denial is always against the grain of the self which is denied, and there is no religion without it. Holiness is not to be won in a moment. It is not a matter of consciousness, possessed when we know that we possess it. But it has to be attained by effort. The way to heaven is not by "the primrose path." That leads to "the everlasting bonfire." For ever it remains true that men *obtain* forgiveness and eternal life as a gift for which the only requisite is faith, but they *achieve* holiness, which is the permeating of their characters with that eternal life, by

patient, believing, continuous effort. An essential part of that effort is directed towards the conquest and casting out of the old self in its earthward-looking lusts and passions. The love of Jesus Christ and the indwelling of His renewing spirit make that conquest possible, by supplying an all-constraining motive and an all-conquering power. But even they do not make it easy, nor deaden the flesh to the cut of the sacrificial knife.

II. We have here a grim catalogue of the condemned to death.

The Apostle stands like a gaoler at the prison door, with the fatal roll in his hand, and reads out the names of the evil doers for whom the tumbril waits to carry them to the guillotine. It is an ugly list, but we need plain speaking that there may be no mistake as to the identity of the culprits. He enumerates evils which honeycombed society with rottenness then, and are rampant now. The series recounts various forms of evil love, and is so arranged as that it starts with the coarse, gross act, and goes on to more subtle and inward forms. It goes up the stream as it were, to the fountain head, passing inward from deed to desire. First stands "fornication," which covers the whole ground of immoral sexual relations, then "all uncleanness," which embraces every manifestation in word, or look or deed of the impure spirit, and so is at once wider and subtler than the gross physical act. Then follow "passion" and "evil desire"; the sources of the evil deeds. These again are at once more inward and more general than the preceding. They include not only the lusts and longings which give rise to the special sins just denounced, but to all forms of hungry appetite and desire after "the things that are upon the earth." If we are to try to draw a distinction between the two, probably "passion" is somewhat less wide than "desire," and the former represents the evil emotion as an affection which the mind suffers, while the

latter represents it as a longing which it actively puts forth. The "lusts of the flesh" are in the one aspect kindled by outward temptations which come with terrible force and carry men captive, acting almost irresistibly on the animal nature. In the other aspect they are excited by the voluntary action of the man himself. In the one the evil comes into the heart; in the other the heart goes out to the evil.

Then follows covetousness. The juxtaposition of that vice with the grosser forms of sensuality is profoundly significant. It is closely allied with these. It has the same root, and is but another form of evil desire going out to the "things which are on the earth." The ordinary worldly nature flies for solace either to the pleasures of appetite or to the passion of acquiring. And not only are they closely connected in root, but covetousness often follows lust in the history of a life just as it does in this catalogue. When the former evil spirit loses its hold, the latter often takes its place. How many respectable middle-aged gentlemen are now mainly devoted to making money, whose youth was foul with sensual indulgence? When that palled, this came to titillate the jaded desires with a new form of gratification. Covetousness is "promoted vice"—lust superannuated.

A reason for this warning against covetousness is appended, "inasmuch as (for such is the force of the word rendered 'the which') it is idolatry." If we say of anything, no matter what, "If I have only enough of this, I shall be satisfied, it is my real aim, my sufficient good," that thing is a god to me, and my real worship is paid to it, whatever my nominal religion. The lowest form of idolatry is the giving of supreme trust to a material thing, and making that a god. There is no lower form of fetish-worship than this, which is the real working religion to-day of thousands of Englishmen who go masquerading as Christians.

III. The exhortation is enforced by a solemn note of warning: "For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh upon the children of disobedience." Some authorities omit the words "upon the children of disobedience," which are supposed to have crept in here from the parallel passage, Eph. v. 6. But even the advocates of the omission allow that the clause has "preponderating support," and the sentence is painfully incomplete and abrupt without it. The R. V. has exercised a wise discretion in retaining it.

In the previous chapter the Apostle included "warning" in his statement of the various branches into which his Apostolic activity was divided. His duty seemed to him to embrace the plain stern setting forth of that terrible reality, the wrath of God. Here we have it urged as a reason for shaking off these evil habits.

That thought of wrath as an element in the Divine nature has become very unwelcome to this generation. The great revelation of God in Jesus Christ has taught the world His love, as it never knew it before, and knows it now by no other means. So profoundly has that truth that God is love penetrated the consciousness of the European world, that many people will not hear of the wrath of God because they think it inconsistent with His love—and sometimes reject the very gospel to which they owe their lofty conceptions of the Divine heart, because it speaks solemn words about His anger and its issues.

But surely these two thoughts of God's love and God's wrath are not inconsistent, for His wrath is His love, pained, wounded, thrown back upon itself, rejected and compelled to assume the form of aversion and to do its "strange work"—that which is not its natural operation—of punishment. When we ascribe wrath to God, we must take care of lowering the conception of it to the level of human wrath, which is shaken with passion and often tinged with malice, whereas in that affection of the Divine

nature which corresponds to anger in us, there is neither passion nor wish to harm. Nor does it exclude the co-existence of love, as Paul witnesses in his Epistle to the Ephesians, in one verse declaring that "we were the children of wrath," and in the next that God "loved us with a great love even when we were dead in sins."

God would not be a holy God if it were all the same to Him whether a man were good or bad. As a matter of fact, the modern revulsion against the representation of the wrath of God is usually accompanied with weakened conceptions of His holiness, and of His moral government of the world. Instead of exalting, it degrades His love, to free it from the admixture of wrath, which is like alloy with gold, giving firmness to what were else too soft for use. Such a God is not love, but impotent good nature. If there be no wrath, there is no love; if there were no love, there would be no wrath. It is more blessed and hopeful for sinful men to believe in a God who is angry with the wicked, whom yet he loves, every day, and who cannot look upon sin, than in one who does not love righteousness enough to hate iniquity, and from whose too indulgent hand the rod has dropped to the spoiling of His children. "With the froward thou wilt show thyself froward." The mists of our sins intercept the gracious beams and turn the blessed sun into a ball of fire.

The wrath "*cometh.*" That majestic present tense may express either the continuous present incidence of the wrath as exemplified in the moral government of the world, in which, notwithstanding anomalies, such sins as have been enumerated drag after themselves their own punishment and are "avenged in kind," or it may be the present tense expressive of prophetic certainty, which is so sure of what shall come, that it speaks of it as already on its road. It is eminently true of those sins of lust and passion, that the men who do them reap as they have sown. How

many young men come up into our great cities, innocent and strong, with a mother's kiss upon their lips, and a father's blessing hovering over their heads! They fall among bad companions in college or warehouse, and after a little while they disappear. Broken in health, tainted in body and soul, they crawl home to break their mother's hearts—and to die. "His bones are full of the sins of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust." Whether in such extreme forms or no, that wrath comes even now, in plain and bitter consequences on men, and still more on women who sin in such ways.

And the present retribution may well be taken as the herald and prophet of a still more solemn manifestation of the Divine displeasure, which is already as it were on the road, has set out from the throne of God, and will certainly arrive here one day. These consequences of sin already realised serve to show the set and drift of things, and to suggest what will happen when retribution and the harvest of our present life of sowing come. The first fiery drops that fell on Lot's path as he fled from Sodom were not more surely precursors of an overwhelming rain, nor bade him flee for his life more urgently, than the present punishment of sin proclaims its sorer future punishment, and exhorts us all to come out of the storm into the refuge, even Jesus, who is ever even now "delivering us from the wrath which is" ever even now "coming" on the sons of disobedience.

IV. A further motive enforcing the main precept of self-slaying is the remembrance of a sinful past, which remembrance is at once penitent and grateful. "In the which ye also walked aforetime, when ye lived in them."

What is the difference between "walking" and "living" in these things? The two phrases seem synonymous, and might often be used indifferently; but here there is evidently a well marked diversity of meaning. The former is an

expression frequent in the Pauline Epistles as well as in John's; as for instance, "to walk in love" or "in truth." That in which men walk is conceived of as an atmosphere encompassing them; or, without a metaphor, to walk in anything is to have the active life or conduct guided or occupied by it. These Colossian Christians, then, had in the past trodden that evil path, or their active life had been spent in that poisonous atmosphere—which is equivalent to saying that they had committed these sins. At what time? "When you lived in them." That does not mean merely "when your natural life was passed among them." That would be a trivial thing to say, and it would imply that their outward life now was not so passed, which would not be true. In that sense they still lived in the poisonous atmosphere. In such an age of unnameable moral corruption no man could live out of the foul stench which filled his nostrils whenever he walked abroad or opened his window. But the Apostle has just said that they were now "living in Christ," and their lives "hid with Him in God." So this phrase describes the condition which is the opposite of their present, and may be paraphrased, "When the roots of your life, tastes, affections, thoughts, desires were immersed, as in some feculent bog, in these and kindred evils." And the meaning of the whole is substantially—Your active life was occupied and guided by these sins in that past time when your inward being was knit to and nourished by them. Or to put it plainly, conduct followed and was shaped by inclinations and desires.

This retrospect enforces the main exhortation. It is meant to awaken penitence, and the thought that time enough has been wasted and incense enough offered on these foul altars. It is also meant to kindle thankfulness for the strong, loving hand which has drawn them from that pit of filth, and by both emotions to stimulate the resolute casting aside of that evil in which they once, like

others, wallowed. Their joy on the one hand and their contrition on the other should lead them to discern the inconsistency of professing to be Christians and yet keeping terms with these old sins. They could not have the roots of half their lives above and of the other half down here. The gulf between the present and past of a regenerate man is too wide and deep to be bridged by flimsy compromises. "A man who is perverse in his two ways," that is, in double ways, "shall fall in one of them," as the Book of Proverbs has it. The attempt to combine incompatibles is sure to fail. It is impossible to walk firmly if one foot be down in the gutter and the other up on the curb-stone. We have to settle which level we shall choose, and then to plant both feet there.

V. We have, as conclusion, a still wider exhortation to an entire stripping off of the sins of the old state.

The whole force of the contrast and contrariety between the Colossian Christians' past and present lies in that emphatic "now." They as well as other heathen had been walking, because they had been living, in these muddy ways. But now—that their life was hid with Christ in God; now—that they had been made partakers of His death and resurrection, and of all the new loves and affinities which therein became theirs; now—they must take heed that they bring not that dead and foul past into this bright and pure present, nor prolong winter and its frosts into the summer of the soul.

"Ye also." There is another "ye also" in the previous verse—"ye also walked," that is, you in company with other Gentiles followed a certain course of life. Here, by contrast, the expression means "you, in common with other Christians." A motive enforcing the subsequent exhortation is in it hinted rather than fully spoken. The Christians at Colossæ had belonged to a community which they have now left in order to join another. Let them behave as their

company behaves. Let them keep step with their new comrades. Let them strip themselves, as their new associates do, of the uniform which they wore in that other regiment.

The metaphor of putting clothing on or off is very frequent in this Epistle. The precept here is substantially equivalent to the previous command to "slay," with the difference that the conception of vices as the garments of the soul is somewhat less vehement than that which regards them as members of the very self. "All these" are to be put off. That phrase points back to the things previously spoken of. It includes the whole of the unnamed members of the class, of which a few have been already named, and a handful more are about to be plucked like poison flowers, and suggests that there are many more as baleful growing by the side of this devil's bouquet which is next presented.

As to this second catalogue of vices, they may be summarised as, on the whole, being various forms of wicked hatred, in contrast with the former list, which consisted of various forms of wicked love. They have less to do with bodily appetites. But perhaps it is not without profound meaning that the fierce rush of unhallowed passion over the soul is put first, and the contrary flow of chill malignity comes second; for in the spiritual world, as in the physical, a storm blowing from one quarter is usually followed by violent gales from the opposite. Lust ever passes into cruelty, and dwells "hard by hate." A licentious epoch or man is generally a cruel epoch or man. Nero made torches of the Christians. Malice is evil desire iced.

This second list goes in the opposite direction to the former. That began with actions and went up the stream to desires; this begins with the sources, which are emotions, and comes down stream to their manifestations in action.

First we have anger. There is a just and righteous anger, which is part of the new man, and essential to his

completeness, even as it is part of the image after which he is created. But here of course the anger which is to be put off is the inverted reflection of the earthly and passionate lust after the flesh; it is then of an earthly, passionate and selfish kind. "Wrath" differs from "anger" in so far as it may be called anger boiling over. If anger springs in temper, keep the lid on, do not let it get the length of wrath, nor effervesce into the brief madness of passion. But on the other hand, do not think that you have done enough when you have suppressed the wrath which is the expression of your anger, nor be content with saying, "Well, at all events I did not show it," but take the cure a step further back, and strip off anger as well as wrath, the emotion as well as the manifestation.

Christian people do not sufficiently bring the greatest forces of their religion and of God's Spirit to bear upon the homely task of curing small hastinesses of temper, and sometimes seem to think it a sufficient excuse to say, "I have naturally a hot disposition." But Christianity was sent to subdue and change natural dispositions. An angry man cannot have communion with God, any more than the sky can be reflected in the storm-swept tide; and a man in communion with God cannot be angry with a passionate and evil anger any more than a dove can croak like a raven or strike like a hawk. Such anger disturbs our insight into everything; eyes suffused with it cannot see; and it weakens all good in the soul, and degrades it before its own conscience.

"Malice" designates another step in the process. The anger boils over in wrath, and then cools down into malignity—the disposition which means mischief, and plans or rejoices in, evil falling on the hated head. That malice, as cold, as clear, as colourless as sulphuric acid, and burning like it, is worse than the boiling rage already spoken of. There are many degrees of this cold drawn, double distilled

rejoicing in evil, and the beginnings of it in a certain faint satisfaction in the misfortunes of those whom we dislike is by no means unusual.

An advance is now made in the direction of outward manifestation. It is significant that while the expressions of wicked love were deeds, those of wicked hate are words. The "blasphemy" of the Authorised Version is better taken, with the Revised, as "railing." The word means "speech that injures," and such speech may be directed either against God, which is blasphemy in the usual sense of the word, or against man. The hate blossoms into hurtful speech. The heated metal of anger is forged into poisoned arrows of the tongue. Then follows "shameful speaking out of your mouth," which is probably to be understood not so much of obscenities, which would more properly belong to the former catalogue, as of foul-mouthed abuse of the hated persons, that copiousness of vituperation and those volcanic explosions of mud, which are so natural to the angry Eastern.

Finally, we have a dehortation from lying, especially to those within the circle of the Church, as if that sin too were the child of hatred and anger. It comes from a deficiency of love, or a predominance of selfishness, which is the same thing. A lie ignores my brother's claims on me, and my union with him. "Ye are members one of another," is the great obligation to love which is denied and sinned against by hatred in all its forms and manifestations, and not least by giving my brother the poisoned bread of lies instead of the heavenly manna of pure truth, so far as it has been given to me.

On the whole, this catalogue brings out the importance to be attached to sins of speech, which are ranked here as in parallel lines with the grossest forms of animal passion. Men's words ought to be fountains of consolation and sources of illumination, encouragement, revelations of

love and pity. And what are they? What floods of idle words, foul words, words that wound like knives and sting and bite like serpents, deluge the world! If all the talk that has its sources in these evils rebuked here, were to be suddenly made inaudible, what a dead silence would fall on many brilliant circles, and how many us would stand making mouths but saying nothing!

All the practical exhortations of this section concern common homely duties which everybody knows to be such. It may be asked—does Christianity then only lay down such plain precepts? What need was there of all that prelude of mysterious doctrines, if we are only to be landed at last in such elementary and obvious moralities? No doubt they are elementary and obvious, but the main matter is—how to get them kept. And in respect to that, Christianity does two things which nothing else does. It breaks the entail of evil habits by the great gift of pardon for the past, and by the greater gift of a new spirit and life principle within, which is foreign to all evil, being the effluence of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Therefore the gospel of Jesus Christ makes it possible that men should slay themselves, and put on the new life, which will expel the old as the new shoots on some trees push the last year's lingering leaves, brown and sere, from their places. All moral teachers from the beginning have agreed, on the whole, in their reading of the commandments which are printed on conscience in the largest capitals. Everybody who is not blind can read them. But reading is easy, keeping is hard. How to fulfil has been wanting. It is given us in the gospel, which is not merely a republication of old precepts, but the communication of new power. If we yield ourselves to Christ He will nerve our arms to wield the knife that will slay our dearest tastes, though beloved as Isaac to Abraham. If a man knows and feels that Christ has died for him, and that he lives in and by Christ,

then, and not else, will he be able to crucify self. If he knows and feels that by His pardoning mercy and atoning death, Christ has taken off his foul raiment and clothed him in clean garments, then, and not else, will he be able, by daily effort after repression of self and appropriation of Christ, to put off the old man and to put on the new, which is daily being renewed into closer resemblance to the image of Him who created him.

ALEXANDER MACLAREN.

THE REVISED VERSION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

MANY of the smaller changes in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, which may in themselves seem trifling, have been introduced, as the Revisers tell us in their Preface, for the sake of uniformity, to render such parallel passages as are identical in Hebrew, by the same English words, so that an English reader may know at once by comparison that a difference in the translation corresponds to a difference in the original. The translators of 1611, as is well known, were careless of uniformity in rendering; and the fact that the Books of Samuel and the Kings fell to the share of the First Company, which met at Westminster, while the Books of the Chronicles were undertaken by the Second Company, which met at Cambridge, affords a further explanation of the diversities of rendering in many passages of these books which are word for word the same in the original.

THE FIRST BOOK OF THE KINGS.

i. 18, 20. In the ordinary printed Hebrew text, verse 18 *b* begins וְעַתָּה אֲדַנִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ, *and now my lord the king*; and verse 20, וְאַתָּה אֲדַנִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ, *and thou my lord the king*