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THE REVISED VERSION
EDITED FOR THE USE OF SCHOOLS

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THE
SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL

EDITED BY

R. O. HUTCHINSON, M.A.

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE BY THE GENERAL EDITOR
FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE aim of this series of commentaries is to explain the Revised Version for young students, and at the same time to present, in a simple form, the main results of the best scholarship of the day.

The General Editor has confined himself to supervision and suggestion. The writer is, in each case, responsible for the opinions expressed and for the treatment of particular passages.

A. H. MCNEILE.

July, 1911.

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 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|--|---------|
| INTRODUCTION | ix—xxiv |
| I. The Second Book of Samuel | ix |
| The Title | ix |
| How the Book was written | ix |
| The Purpose of the Author | x |
| II. Israel in the Days of David | x |
| Political Conditions | x |
| Religious and Social Ideas | xii |
| III. The Life and Character of David | xv |
| IV. The Use of 2 Samuel | xx |
| V. The Difference between Samuel and Chronicles | xxii |
| Analysis of 2 Samuel | xxiv |
| TEXT AND NOTES | 1—96 |
| INDEX | 97—101 |

MAP

PALESTINE *Frontispiece*

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Cambridge University Press
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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

I. THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL.

The Title.

THE two books of Samuel were originally one. We do not know who the author was. It could not have been Samuel, since most of the events happened after his death. They are however about Samuel, and the fulfilment of his work by David. It is the story of the rise of Israel from a low depth of weakness and subjection, to its greatest height of power and prosperity. The birth of the national spirit, which enabled Israel to form itself into a kingdom and free itself from the Philistines, was the result of a religious revival, begun by Samuel and the early prophets, carried on for a time by Saul, and completed by David.

How the Book was written.

It is a compilation from several documents. Most of these are very ancient. Chs. ix.–xx. are so full of vivid and living detail that we may consider them written by an eyewitness. To these extracts from other old records were added. In later ages fresh material was gathered; sometimes expressions were altered to suit more modern ideas. It was not till after the Exile that the book reached its present form. Its growth had taken perhaps about 600 years. It must be noticed that the compiler joined his documents together with little adaptation. Sometimes there are two accounts of the same event which do not always quite agree. (See notes on i. 6, x. 15.)

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 Frontmatter
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The Purpose of the Author.

The author was a prophet, or religious teacher, rather than a historian. He taught God's nature and will by shewing what He had said and done to men in the past. The section of the Old Testament to which Samuel belongs is called 'The Former Prophets.' It is prophecy teaching by history, or illustration. Our book contains history, but as a history of David's reign it is meagre. On the other hand it is full of priceless religious lessons (see pp. xx.-xxii.), and describes fully those events which throw light on Jehovah's dealings with David and Israel.

II. ISRAEL IN THE DAYS OF DAVID.

Political Conditions.

(a) *Internal.* Israel was a small state consisting of twelve kindred tribes. Their bond of union was their common religion, the worship of Jehovah. Saul was the first leader who was acknowledged by all, but the tribes were still jealous and independent. The government of the chiefs ('sheikhs') gave way slowly to the authority of the king. There was strong jealousy between Judah, David's tribe, and the northern tribes, under the leadership of Saul's tribe, Benjamin. Those east of the Jordan were less excited by these feuds and more conservative. David, by a triumph of his wonderful personality, consolidated these elements into a nation; but in the reign of his grandson, Rehoboam, the north again parted from the south. The royal power in conflict with tribal jealousies, and the independence of great chiefs, are the key to the internal politics of this period.

(b) *Foreign.* Israel was placed among several small states, of race and customs similar to its own; Edomites on the south, Moabites on the south-east, Ammonites on

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 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xi

the east, and Syrians on the north-east. There were also Philistines on the west, and Phoenicians on the north-west. Some heathen clans still lived in Israel, such as the Gibeonites in Benjamin, and the Jebusites in Jebus, which was first captured by David. The relations of these people with Israel were friendly, when they were not at war. Israelites sometimes resided in Philistia or Moab. Foreign soldiers formed David's body-guard. The leadership among these states of Palestine was held by the Philistines, until David wrested it from them.

At David's accession the power of Israel was at its lowest; her armies were beaten; her territory was largely occupied by the Philistines; her strength was dissipated by civil war.

(c) *The kingship.* Tribal government gave way to kingly authority, when Saul became king. But the chiefs retained considerable power. They elected the king. Abner made Ishbosheth king of Israel: David was elected, first by the Judaeans, afterwards by the chiefs of Israel. He was not an absolute monarch. He made a compact with them at his election. He could be opposed and even checked by a powerful noble like Joab. Public opinion and ancient custom also limited the exercise of his will.

The kingship was elective, but it tended to become hereditary, since the royal family naturally grew richer, more numerous, and more powerful than other families. In Judah the kingship remained in David's family.

(d) *The royal tribe.* Tribal jealousy culminated in the feud between Saul's tribe, Benjamin, and Judah, David's tribe. Benjamites like Shimei and Sheba were fanatically hostile to David. Judah however considered that David did not sufficiently favour his own tribe (see on xix. 11 ff.). He offended his clansmen by moving his capital from Hebron, the tribal capital, to Jerusalem. Hebron afterwards was the starting-point of Absalom's

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[More information](#)

revolt. After the suppression of that rising, David evidently pacified Judah by conceding them further privileges (xix. 11 ff.).

(e) *The army.* The king was commander-in-chief. Saul usually led his troops in person. David, after being constrained by his men not to risk his life, left the actual command to Joab, except on special occasions (xii. 27 ff.). A foreign corps, the Cherethites and Pelethites, guarded his person. He instituted two orders of chivalry for knights of special fame, the Three and the Thirty. A militia was enrolled as occasion required. His attempt to organise a standing army (xxiv.) was not successful.

(f) *Justice.* The king was also chief judge. To gain access to his presence the influence of an official was usually necessary (cf. xiv. 2). Absalom implied that imperfect provision was made for the hearing of cases (xv. 2 ff. n.). It was sometimes administered in a rough and ready way. David's award between Ziba and Mephibosheth is an instance (xvi. 3 f. and xix. 25 ff.).

(g) *Administration.* Saul's royalty had been of primitive simplicity. David organised a Court and a Government. He strengthened his own position by many marriages. He established a royal Shrine in Zion, where he placed the Ark. Close by was the royal palace and the barracks for his guards. He appointed officials, civil, military and religious (viii. 15 ff.).

Religious and Social Ideas.

(1) *The idea of God.* The revelation of God came very gradually. So we do not expect to find, 1000 years before the full light of Christ, the same knowledge of God that we possess. Some of the ideas of the Israelites were the same as those held by the other nations. They still thought that each land had its own god, who was the king of its people and fought its battles. 'Jehovah

INTRODUCTION

xiii

of Hosts' was the leader of Israel's armies, as Chemosh was of Moab's. The Ark, the Symbol of His Presence, went with the hosts to war. The army escorted the Ark of the War-God to Zion. Jehovah shewed His anger by sending disaster; His pleasure by temporal blessing. His displeasure might be averted by sacrifice. He abhorred a breach of covenant. In one important respect Jehovah differed from other gods; He was a Holy God, requiring holiness in His worshippers. This was realised by such men as Moses, Samuel and David. But many still thought that so long as His rites were duly observed, He cared little about moral purity.

(2) *Means of revelation.* One way of finding out God's will was by the *Ephod*, a method of casting lots (see note on ii. 1).

Doubtless *traditional laws* had been handed down from Mosaic times, embodying an earlier revelation of God's will and nature, but the Pentateuch, as we have it, did not exist in David's time.

The record of *God's past dealings* with Israel, and *David's own experience* of His justice and mercy, also threw light upon the Divine ways.

It was a period of great *prophetic activity*. Some prophets were wild enthusiasts who whirled and shouted, as dervishes still do in the East. Some, called 'Seers,' gave oracles in a state of trance. Others, as Samuel and Nathan, were inspired to reveal fresh truths about Jehovah, to foretell the future, and to rebuke sin.

(3) *Worship.* Here too the advance from heathenism to the inspired ritual of later Judaism was gradual. In David's time Israelite worship was still in many ways like that of their neighbours. The Presence of Jehovah was localised at certain spots. Before the Ark ('before the Lord') David danced and sacrificed. *High places*, where God was worshipped, had probably been shrines before the Israelites took possession of them. Jerusalem

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became the home of the Ark. Hebron, Gibeon and Olivet were still revered as special seats of Deity.

The recognised method of worship was *sacrifice*. The ancient notion was that God and His people feasted together, and so became more at one. The blood, and in later times the fat, were the portion of the Deity. Sacrifices were occasions of public rejoicing and hospitality. Beef and mutton were eaten only at sacrificial feasts. Usually the sacrifice was offered by a priest, consecrated to the holy work.

(4) *The theocratic king*. Kingship was a religious office. David, chosen as he was by God, anointed by the prophet Samuel during Saul's lifetime, the hope of the party of national reform, regarded himself as God's vicegerent, sent to rule in God's name over God's people. He succeeded so far as he was guided by God's will shewn by oracles and prophets. He realised, as no other did, what Israel's king should be. He is therefore to later ages the ideal theocratic king, and the type of the Messiah.

(5) *The future life*. Death was a dark mystery, before Jesus Christ 'brought life and immortality to light.' There is no word of a future life in David's Dirge (ch. i.). Yet they did not think of the dead as annihilated. Samuel might return to warn Saul (1 Sam. xxviii.), and David spoke of going to his dead child (see note on xii. 23). They thought God cared for the wellbeing and permanence of the nation or tribe, rather than of the individual. Perpetuity for David's house is promised (vii. 12 f.), not immortality for himself.

(6) *The blood-feud*. This was one of the most stringently observed customs. In primitive society it was the chief safeguard of life. A man hesitated to shed the blood of one belonging to another clan, when he knew that every clansman of the dead man would consider it a sacred duty to avenge it. The tie of blood was the

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 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xv

strongest known. According to this code, Joab was right in slaying Abner for Asahel's death ; David, being of the same clan, was wrong in letting him go. But this rough justice was repugnant to David's higher ideal of government and belief in God's mercy.

(7) *War.* Every war was to the Israelites a holy war. Jehovah went before His hosts, to take part as their champion in 'the wars of the Lord' against 'the enemies of the Lord.' Warriors were consecrated men. When on active service they could not enter their homes, sleep in beds, nor go about ordinary work (see xi. 11, note on xxiv. 1).

(8) *The ban.* A conquered nation was often consecrated to Jehovah, i.e. destroyed utterly. Joshua destroyed Jericho, and Saul was sent to annihilate Amalek. In David's time less fierce views were held. With the Philistines and Jebusites he cultivated friendly relations. The Ammonites he apparently reduced to slavery and forced labour at his buildings. Only against Edom (1 Kings xi. 15 f.) and Moab (partially) did he execute the ban. These may have shewn some special hatred against Israel in her weakness.

III. THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF DAVID.

(1) The early part of David's life, as shepherd, courtier, warrior and exile is told in 1 Samuel. During that period he was trained for his future work. As Saul's commander, and still more as chief of freebooters, he acquired his wonderful skill in managing men. During the period of his exile, his camp of outlaws seems to have been the real centre of law and order in Israel.

(2) After Saul's death, Abner and Ishbosheth, Saul's only surviving son, fled to Mahanaim in Gilead, where Ishbosheth was proclaimed king.

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David, meanwhile, was elected king of Judah in Hebron. This was his first step towards the kingship, to which Samuel had anointed him. He sent a friendly messenger to the Gileadites announcing his accession and calling them to join him. For the time however Northern and Eastern Israel acknowledged Ishbosheth.

The position of the latter was precarious. He probably had to make humiliating terms with the victorious Philistines; while Ammon and Moab were hostile and aggressive neighbours. A strong party among his followers was for uniting the kingdom under David. His claims and those of David were certain to clash. A battle took place at Gibeon in which Abner was badly beaten. Joab did not push his victory home, though in the pursuit Asahel met his death at Abner's hand.

The power of Ishbosheth dwindled. He finally quarrelled with Abner, the mainstay of his throne, who at once opened negotiations with David. Michal, Saul's daughter, espoused to David and taken from him, was restored to him. Thereupon David accepted the terms of the Israelite chiefs sent by Abner, and was declared king of Israel. The murder of Abner by Joab, and of Ishbosheth by two of his captains, both of which acts David strongly disavowed, removed all possible opposition.

(3) The Philistines now declared war, alarmed partly by the consolidation of Judah and Israel into one kingdom, partly by David's brilliant capture of the fortress of Jerusalem. In two campaigns David freed Israel from Philistine oppression.

(4) One of his first acts was to make Jerusalem his capital. He fortified it; built a shrine for the Ark, which he restored to Israel; and raised a palace on Zion, with barracks for his body-guard.

He also turned his attention to Moab, Ammon, Edom and Syria. His wars were everywhere successful. He

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xvii

extended the northern border of Israel as far as the Euphrates; established a sort of headship over the nations of Palestine; strengthened himself with alliances; organised the government of the kingdom.

(5) The darkest stain upon David's fair name, his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, came about in connexion with the Ammonite war. From that time his life was troubled by domestic griefs. His eldest son Amnon committed a foul crime, for which he was killed by Absalom. Absalom fled, was forgiven, but treacherously stirred up a revolt against his father. David was forced to flee into Gilead. There the battle was fought, which resulted in the overthrow and death of Absalom. From the smouldering ashes of this rebellion, broke out another headed by Sheba, a member of Saul's tribe. This however was quickly quenched. Apparently tribal jealousy, especially between Judah and Benjamin, remained strong. Peace depended upon holding a precarious balance between the two.

(6) David had conceived a wish to build a temple for Jehovah, but was not permitted to carry it out. He made vast preparation for the building which Solomon was destined to complete (1 Chron. xxviii. f.). His death and Solomon's accession are recorded in 1 Kings i.

(7) David's reign was the Golden Age of Israel. It was the type of the kingdom of the Messiah, 'David's son.' Under his leadership, Israel, from a federation of tribes imperfectly united, and much oppressed by powerful neighbours, became a kingdom with vastly extended borders, 'the head or the nations' of Syria, renowned for power, wealth and civilization. This was brought about by the following means:

(a) David's military skill. Like other great leaders he also attracted to himself a circle of great soldiers.

(b) Much too was owing to his political sagacity. He knew when to be stern, and when to conciliate. Personal

charm and tact helped to smooth over difficulties. He could wait for his opportunity, and at the right moment act with decision. He had also the wisdom to use the advice of shrewd counsellors.

(c) But the chief secret of Israel's success was the religious attitude of the king. Realising his position as theocratic king (see p. xiv.), he harmonised religious and secular authority. All the elements making for righteousness were in accord. King and prophet and priest worked together to make Jehovah's will the Law in Israel. Consequently religion advanced. Religious building is always an expression of religious feeling; and Solomon's gorgeous Temple was the result of the great revival of David's reign. When, on the other hand, David fell, it was the fall of a great religious leader, which often has disastrous consequences. These are drawn out with clear emphasis by the prophetic author of 2 Samuel. And yet David's religion is never more evident than in his penitence.

(8) *David's character.* We are fortunate in possessing a full and lifelike picture of David. We see him now tending sheep at Bethlehem, now prominent among the warriors of Saul's army; now a royal favourite, and now an outlaw; fleeing for his life with a band of outlaws, whose camp is the centre of religion and order; gradually winning his way from his desert stronghold to the throne of Israel; prophet, priest and poet as well as king; rough warrior and tactful politician; fierce conqueror, yet tender friend and father. And his character is as many-sided as his experience.

(a) He had a wonderful power of personal attraction. Jonathan, and at one time Saul, were his devoted friends. Even in adversity men (e.g. Ittai) clung to him.

(b) He was loved because he was loving. His Dirge is full of love. He was unselfish, generous and considerate. But he had the weakness of his qualities. He could not

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 Edited by R. O. Hutchinson
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xix

discipline his sons. He was tinged with Oriental sensualism, cruel when thwarted, resentful when wounded, touchy and impatient.

(*c*) He had the temperament of a soldier; he was personally brave; ready to risk his own life; fierce and ruthless in his anger. Yet even his least humane acts, such as the slaughter of the Moabites and Saul's seven sons, would not be thought cruel in that rude age.

(*d*) On the other hand, he was often an example of mercy and moderation. His followers thought him foolishly merciful. He readily forgave even those who had insulted and taken up arms against him (xix. 18 ff.).

(*e*) He was singularly trustful, because he was himself honest. His confidence in Abner and Amasa, and his lack of suspicion in the case of Absalom, seem almost quixotic. His dastardly trick against Uriah shews how far he had fallen from his true self.

To sum up, David's shortcomings were on the whole those of his race and times; but he was also 'the man after God's own heart,' and 'the darling of the songs of Israel,' a striking model of religious feeling and humanity to his contemporaries.

The characters of Joab and Absalom illustrate by contrast the greatness of David. Joab had great practical ability; he was faithful, upright, and even religious, as morality and religion were understood in those days. But he was entirely a man of his world; a typical Israelite, hard, narrow, unspiritual. Absalom had David's charm, but not his principle. He was David, without David's reverence for God and man.

IV. THE USE OF II SAMUEL.

(1) It contains *trustworthy history*. Most of the records preserved in it are extremely ancient ; they are not disfigured by legendary exaggerations and marvels. The *narrative* is simple, vivid and living, such as would be written by eyewitnesses. The *characters* are true to life ; there is no attempt to describe even David, Israel's hero though he was, as free from human sin and meanness. The *ideas and customs* of the time are faithfully represented.

(2) The chief *ethical value* of the book lies in its teaching by example. Each one of its characters carries its lesson. Joab's hardness repels us, but we admire his fidelity. Self-seeking greed is condemned in the Amalekite who brought the news of Saul's death ; hypocritical treachery in Ishbosheth's murderers ; cruel and undisciplined passion in Amnon ; devilish shrewdness in Jonadab, the son of Shimeah ; cold-blooded duplicity in Absalom. On the other hand how inspiring is the soldier-like simplicity of Uriah ; Nathan's fearlessness in rebuking an impenitent king ; devotion like that of Ittai, Hushai, and Barzillai ; the chivalrous daring of the three who broke through the Philistine lines to gratify David's longing for the water of Bethlehem ; Rizpah's faithful watch over her dead sons. The rich teaching of David's character has already been drawn out.

(3) The book is also the *record of a great crisis in the religious development of Israel* ; shewing how God taught His people, through David, higher ideas of Himself and His laws.

(a) David taught that Jehovah loved above all things justice and mercy. In those days men might be cruel, fierce, treacherous, unforgiving, and still religious. Joab

INTRODUCTION

xxi

in killing Abner, and Ishbosheth's murderers, thought they were carrying out God's wishes. David, on the other hand, felt that blood-revenge and murder were wrong, because God is merciful and just. He could take no pleasure in cruelty and treachery. The rich man in Nathan's parable was condemned 'because he had no pity.' David, in wronging Uriah, had wronged Jehovah still more; he had 'despised the word of the Lord, to do that which was evil in His sight.' In contrast with the custom of his time, he set an example of mercifulness; especially in his treatment of Abner, Saul's family, Absalom, Shimei, Amasa, and most of his foreign foes.

(b) With a deeper insight into the Divine Nature, came more spiritual views of His methods of revealing His will. The use of Urim and Thummim (ii. 1) seems to have died out. Three causes contributed to this: (1) The Ark was recovered. This was the most august symbol of Jehovah's Presence. Having it, men thought less of other symbols, such as the ephod that carried the lots. So in the Procession to Jerusalem (vi. 13), David sought to learn God's will by sacrificing before the Ark. (2) Again the living voice of inspired men, prophets and seers, assumed greater importance. Nathan and Gad are among the earliest of the great prophetic band, whose inspiration forms one of the grandest characteristics of Israel. (3) Another cause was the growth of David's own consciousness of his duty, as Jehovah's viceroy, of governing, as God governs, in righteousness and mercy. He learned to know Him from his own experience of Him.

(c) Out of this better knowledge of God sprang a new faith. David learned to trust himself to God's care. He no longer asked to know the future; he even refused to allow the Ark to accompany him in his flight. His faith in the Divine Presence and Power no longer depended upon symbols (xv. 25 f.). Again, he prayed and fasted for his dying child; but when God declared His will by taking

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 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

the child, he bowed to that will and resumed his usual life (xii. 21 ff.). Such trust and submission were more than the courtiers could understand.

(d) Out of this period of religious revival arose much subsequent legislation. Laws grow out of precedents. Jehovah's disapproval of an act was marked by disaster. This manifestation formed a precedent. So laws guarding the inviolability of holy things might spring out of such events as the death of Uzzah (vi. 7 f.), a disaster quite unexpected. David's unhappy marriage with the princess of Geshur might lead to the prohibition of foreign marriages. The Court Record (ix.-xx.) is a vivid comment on the evils of polygamy. The accounts of the Famine (ch. xxi.) and the Plague (ch. xxiv.), events by which Jehovah manifested His anger at a breach of covenant with heathen, and His disapproval of the establishment of a standing army, are probably from a collection of such precedents.

(e) The record of David's reign is also prophetic, inasmuch as it points onward to the time of the Messiah. David being the typical theocratic king, ruling on earth as Jehovah's viceroy, was the fit recipient of the Messianic promise (vii. 12 ff.), that of his race should spring the Messiah, God's Son.

In the dark days, when nation and royal family sank into insignificance, this hope never died out of the heart of Israel.

V. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAMUEL AND CHRONICLES.

The Chronicler wrote about 300 B.C., long after the Exile, when the customs of David's days (1000 B.C.) had been altered and forgotten. He wished to tell the story of Israel before the Exile in such a way that his

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

xxiii

contemporaries might learn the importance of religious observances. He used the history as a text or illustration for a sermon. The Jews called such literature Midrash, that is, the free adaptation of national records for purposes of exhortation and edification. It was, no doubt, most useful in those terrible days when both the Jewish nation and its religion seemed in danger of being overwhelmed by the pressure of the great empires that laid heavy hands upon Palestine. We may notice two characteristics of Chronicles. (1) The story is made more vivid to the Jews of that time by being associated with *contemporary customs*; just as mediaeval painters often drew the men of the Bible in Florentine or Venetian dress. (2) *The picture of David is considerably idealised*. The difficulties that kept him from the throne, his fall, and the troubles of his later years, are omitted.

ANALYSIS OF II SAMUEL.

- A. David, King of Judah, i.-iv.*
- Ch. i. Tidings of Saul's Death. David's Dirge.
 ii. David, King at Hebron ; Ishbosheth, King
 at Mahanaim. Battle of Gibeon.
 iii. Civil War. Abner's Overtures to David.
 iv. The Murder of Ishbosheth.
- B. David, King of Israel, v.-viii.*
- Ch. v. Capture of Jerusalem. Philistine Wars.
 vi. The Bringing of the Ark to Zion.
 vii. The Promise to David's House.
 viii. Summary of David's Wars and Govern-
 ment.
- C. The Court Record, ix.-xx.*
- Ch. ix. David and Mephibosheth.
 x. The Ammonite War.
 xi. David's Fall.
 xii. David's Repentance.
 xiii. Amnon's Crime and Death.
 xiv. The Recall of Absalom.
 xv.-xix. Absalom's Rebellion.
 xx. Sheba's Revolt.
- D. Appendix, xxi.-xxiv.*
- Ch. xxi. 1-14. The Famine.
 xxi. 15-22, xxiii. 8-39. David's Heroes.
 xxii. Song of Thanksgiving.
 xxiii. 1-7. David's Last Words.
 xxiv. The Plague.