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**WORKS**

BY THE

**REV. JOHN CUMMING, D.D.**

*Minister of the Scottish National Church, Crown Court,*  
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27, SOUTHAMPTON ROW, RUSSELL SQUARE, & 21, PATERNOSTER ROW.

A. HALL AND CO., PATERNOSTER ROW.

EDINBURGH: J. MENZIES.—DUBLIN: J. ROBERTSON.

1863.

LONDON:
BEED AND PARDON, PRINTERS,
FATERNOSTER ROW.

PREFACE.

I HAVE been often and earnestly requested to print the necessarily superficial, but natural, and I humbly believe useful, exposition of the Chapter or Scripture Lesson which I give every morning service. On re-commencing the regular reading of God's Holy Word, I have resolved to make the attempt.

I do not pretend in such expositions to give learned critical or strictly doctrinal disquisition for the instruction of divines; all I offer is an explanation of what occasionally perplexes the ordinary Christian reader, and a *résumé* of such elucidations of passages of Scripture as are not generally familiar or accessible. I attempt no fine writing, no learned criticism, no elaborate comments. I submit to the reader simply what seems suggested by, or explanatory of, the passage under review, while I endeavour to obviate difficulties, reconcile what appears contradictory, and impress what is beyond all dispute practical and plain. It is to Scripture Readers, City

Missionaries, and plain firesides, and men of business and hard work, that I address myself.

If the great acceptance with which they have been listened to in the sanctuary attends them in print, I venture to hope that they will not be without fruit, by the blessing of God.

GENESIS.

CHAPTER I.

GENESIS. THE PENTATEUCH. SCIENTIFIC AND POPULAR TERMS
GOD. SUBLIMITY OF GENESIS.

It is only possible, in the course of such incidental remarks as I make on the Scripture Lesson for the day, to give a few prefatory explanations of the Book which we have now begun to read. It is called in our common Bible, "Genesis." This was not its original name. The Jews call each of their Books by the initial words of each Book. For instance, the initial words in this book are *Bereshith bara Elohim*; and therefore the Jews call the Book "*Bereshith bara*," using the two first words, *Bereshith*—In the beginning; *Bara Elohim*—God created. But each Book in the Old Testament is now called, not by the name given it by the Jews, but by one borrowed from the Septuagint, or Greek version of the Old Testament, made three hundred years before the Christian era. Neither nomenclature is of Divine origin. The name, "Genesis," however, which is its Greek name, and not its Hebrew, is very expressive. It means "Creation," or "Generation," or, if you like it, "the origin of all things."

This Book, and the other four that succeed it—Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy,—are called, collectively, by the name of “The Pentateuch.” These five Books have been so called for ages—“The Pentateuch,” or “The five works.” This word is not Hebrew, again I may remind you, but Greek, and means, “Five works,” or “Five accomplishments.”

The Jews divided the Old Testament into three divisions—Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms;—including under the division “Prophets,” the twelve minor prophets, and also the larger prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; and including under the division “Psalms,” the Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes; and under the division “Moses,” the Pentateuch, and the other historical books that immediately follow it.

That this book is inspired of God, we gather, first, from its internal character, and from external evidence; and, secondly, from the express declarations to that effect in the New Testament writings. When Paul wrote to Timothy, “All the Scriptures”—*ἅντα τὰ γραφῆ*—“are given by inspiration of God,” he alluded primarily to the Old Testament Scriptures, which every Jew had in his hand—Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets. This Book, too, might be shown to be inspired, from its intrinsic contents, its sublime character, and marvellous information. Just take a fabulous, or legendary, or traditional account of the creation of man from the Greeks, or from the Romans, or from the Chinese, or from any modern heathen nation, and you will see how absurd, how puerile, their records are; and afterwards com-

pare them with the severe and sublime simplicity of this Record, and you must come to the conclusion that it alone bears on its face the superscription of Deity, and that man could not have originated a Record at once so simple and so sublime, commending itself so truly to the most enlightened mind, and vindicating itself in all respects as worthy of God.

The objections that have been raised against it are, of course, in details; and in details such objections may fairly be met. For instance, such a statement as "God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven," is found fault with. Now, this is not a scientific description, but a record of a simple fact; it is speaking optically, not scientifically. The Bible is written in popular language, to teach mankind religion; it is not written in scientific terms, to satisfy the successive discoveries of scientific men. And when it calls the firmament "heaven," there is evidently meant the atmosphere. For instance, in 2 Peter iii. 10, which is our lesson for this evening, we read, "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise." One at once understands that to be the atmosphere; and one can easily see how consistent such a prophecy is with what science has discovered as the component parts of the elements of the atmosphere. And when Moses here describes the clouds as distinct from the ocean, and the earth, and the atmosphere, and calls the clouds "the waters above the firmament," he speaks in popular language, but here, as everywhere, in perfect consistency with scientific discoveries

Another passage has been objected to, viz. his describing God creating the sun and moon as if he made these at the time the earth was arranged. Now, I do not believe this is here taught; and I shall endeavour to show, in the course of my sermon, that the earth is much older than the common interpretation of the Mosaic record allows. I think that the sun and moon were made long before our earth. But the language of the sacred penman does not teach that God then made the sun and moon: for the words here in the original are not those usually rendered "made" and "created;" they might be translated, as it has been shown by the best Hebrew scholars—in fact, they must be so—"Let the lights in the firmament of the heaven be for the purpose of dividing the day from the night." You will observe, the word for create is *bara*. The other word that is used for making is *aasa*; but the sacred penman does not in this instance use either of these words. He does not say, "Let these lights be created," using *bara*, or "Let these lights be made," using *aasa*; but *yehi*—"Let them be for the purpose of dividing the day from the night." In fact, the passage recognizes their previous existence, and only assigns them a new and resuscitated function—to give light, the one by day and the other by night. And again, what is still more remarkable, the 16th verse says, "And God made two great lights." Now the fact is, that "lights," the word here used, is not the same word as that used in the 3rd verse, "Let there be light." The word there is *owr*, light; but in the 16th verse it is, "He appointed two great *maucroth*," which means, "light-carriers," "linkmen," "torch-bearers;"

and the whole passage plainly means, that he constituted the sun and moon to be torch-bearers, to enlighten, the one by day and the other by night. No description, therefore, while the language is popular, can be more consistent with the discoveries of science.

Thus, in the simple record that is here given, we have the creation of all things by God, and finally man in God's image, or moral likeness, having dominion over all things. One sees the traces of that dominion still. More or less the animal creation is subject to man. His lordship may pass into tyranny, but still it exists. More or less every creature stands in dread of man. The expression here employed, that "God created man in his own image; male and female created he them," is evidently anticipatory. The first chapter gives a *résumé*—a short epitome—of the contents of the second, and alludes to a transaction in the second, reserving for the second chapter a full record of all the facts which it implies.

We read that God gave man "every herb bearing seed, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, for meat." Permission to eat animal food was not given until after the Noachian Deluge, when a new covenant was made, and man was then permitted to eat of the beasts of the earth.

Looking at the whole of this chapter, we see the simplest language employed—language strictly popular, intelligible in all lands, but in perfect harmony with the highest scientific discoveries. Open your Almanack for 1852, and you will find it states that the sun sets, the sun rises; yet this is absurd, scientifically speaking, and is less warrantable

in a semi-scientific work. And so, our Bible speaks of the sun setting, and the moon rising. All such phraseology is scientifically wrong, but it is popularly right, and conveys in the fewest and most intelligible words what is meant to be conveyed, a religious truth.

One more remark upon this chapter, which is interesting. The word "God" is in the plural number, and the word "created" is in the singular number. Now, this is very remarkable; it is a violation of grammar; and if it occurred only here, one might say it might be an accidental violation of grammar; but, if you go through the whole Bible, you will find the same thing, "Elohim," plural Hebrew, used with a singular verb. And in Ecclesiastes it is strictly, "Remember now thy Creators," though translated very justly and very properly, "Remember now thy Creator." Now, the Jews argue that this implies more than one Person in the Godhead, and Christian divines have justly thought that it is an intimation of that great and precious truth, a triune Jehovah.

We notice another very remarkable fact. In the second verse we read this statement: "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." Now, the Hebrew word there translated "moved" is rendered in Hebrew lexicons, "fluttered like a dove;" and thus, this second verse might be rendered, "The Spirit of God kept fluttering after the manner of a dove upon the face of the waters." Hence, when you recollect that the Spirit descended upon Jesus after the manner of a dove, or, as a dove descends, you will see that you have the same allusion in re-

ference to the Spirit in this verse. And this is not the interpretation of Christians only, but also of Jews. So soon did the Holy Spirit begin his work on earth.

I may notice, too, that Longinus, one of the most celebrated critics and judges of rhetoric of ancient Greece, pronounces the third verse to be the sublimest thing in this or in any other language: "And God said, Let there be light," and the response from every part of the universe is, "There was light." The more intimate our acquaintance is with the Mosaic record, on the one hand, and the legendary and distorted traditions and fables of the heathen, alluding to the origin and nature of all created things, on the other, the more we shall be persuaded of the inspiration of the one, and the human origin of the other. The more earnestly, moreover, we feel on religion, the less shall we be disposed to quarrel with what the philosopher calls unscientific words used to set out divine truths. Had scientific words been used, peasants might have been uninstructed. But now peasant and philosopher equally understand.

CHAPTER II.

SIX DAYS LITERAL. CREATION A PROCESS. WEEKS OF SEVEN DAYS. TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL. LOCALITY OF EDEN. LABOUR IN EDEN. ANIMAL CREATION. GEOLOGY AND MAN.

I MAY take this opportunity of noticing that the excellent, though not perfect work to which I referred in my last (Hitchcock's "Religion of Geology"), is to be had at a very low price, being published as one of a cheap series; I allude to it again with the greater pleasure, because I am anxious that you should see from it, as a popular *résumé*, though not without its defects, the light that geology casts upon religion. I may mention, too, that some questions have been asked of me on this subject, and among the rest, whether the earth was always in a state of darkness before the light was created. I answer, the verse expressly states darkness was then on the face of the deep. There was chaos, or darkness, over all the face of the earth, prior to the present configuration—that is, the absence of light: at the beginning, God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." The light may have existed thousands of years before the creation of our earth, but it was now darkened: it was a distinct creation of God, and was afterwards concentrated, or made to gather together in the sun;

and the sun—an opaque body in himself—became the radiating centre, or the mirror to reflect these rays upon the world. Evidently, the earth had lapsed into chaos, whether having light or not previously; certainly there was no light, at least on earth, immediately before God pronounced the words, "Let there be light, and there was light."

I think, also, that the "heaven" alluded to is, throughout, not the heavenly bodies at all, but simply the space that is now filled by our atmosphere, which Peter says will pass away with a great noise, and which now surrounds and wraps the globe, and which is part and parcel of the economy in which we live.

I believe that the six days were six literal days. I know that some geologists have endeavoured to prove that each day was not a literal day of twenty-four hours, but a vast geological period, as it is called. I do not think this is plain, fair dealing with the Word of God. It seems to me that the two first verses describe the original creation of all things out of nothing, and that between the act recorded in the two first verses, and the processes of the six days that followed, there may have intervened millenia—thousands or millions of years; but I do think that each day of the seven days afterwards enumerated, was strictly a literal day. Whenever we find that the literal interpretation of a passage perfectly harmonizes with the rest of the analogies of Holy Writ, or rather is not plainly impossible, we should cleave to that literal interpretation; that is, unless there be good reason to accept the passage in a figurative sense. And, in the next place, the allusion in the

fourth commandment appears to me decisive, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day." Now, let any unprejudiced mind peruse that commandment, and he will come to the conclusion that the earth and the heaven—meaning by the heaven the atmosphere surrounding this earth—were all created in the course of six literal days, and that God rested on the seventh day.

The chapter we have now entered on describes the completion of this process—"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." God might have called the earth, in all its beauty, and furnished with all its elements and apparatus, into existence by one single fiat. He who could turn water into wine, who could turn a little bread into enough for five thousand, had only to speak the word, and the earth would have sprung into its orbit, beautified with all its terrestrial clothing. But he did not do so; he was pleased to arrange, not by an act, but by a process. And this seems to be the method of God's dealing in all things. Great good is achieved in nations, not by a sudden start—by a vast revolution—but by a gradual and progressive reformation. The human heart seems to undergo change, and to be converted and made fit for heaven, not by a sudden stroke, but by a progressive process. Summer comes on gradually and slowly. In fact, God takes time for all his work; and, in general, we do not see, in the course of our own experience, anything done well by fits and starts. So, God was pleased to take six days to arrange our present

economy. Why—wherefore—I cannot explain; the fact is asserted, and that fact is in perfect harmony with the analogies that we see around us.

To show that this process of creation in six consecutive days is the original of the custom that prevails in the world, of dividing time into weeks, I would just ask any one to suppose Genesis extinguished, and the facts of the creation in the Mosaic page obliterated, and then to say how he accounts for the almost universal division of time into periods of seven days, or a week. I can understand the occurrence of the division of time into years, from the quasi-motion of the sun, and into months from the motion of the moon; but how do you account for time being divided into periods of seven days? Is there anything more natural in seven than in fourteen or twenty? And how do you account for this fact, that when the French, in one of those paroxysms to which as a nation they seem liable, obliterated the division of time into seven days, as being a memorial of Christianity, and substituted, about A.D. 1790, decades, or periods of ten days, the nation instinctively rushed back into its ancient habit, and that the French have now weeks of seven days, just as we have? There must be something in this. It looks like a surviving influence projected from Genesis, into the natural habits of mankind, retaining, where there is no Christianity, the traditional recollection of God's ancient institution, that in six days God created heaven and earth, and all the things that are therein.

I may notice, that there seems to occur a mis-

translation in that passage—at least, I think so—where we read that there had been no rain. I allude to the 5th and 6th verses, “The Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.” The Hebrew conjunction “but,” is frequently translated “nor,” — “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, and any likeness,” &c.; but we very properly translate it, “*nor* any likeness,” &c. And therefore, the sixth verse of this chapter may be read thus, and in far greater conformity to the text, while it alters the meaning entirely, “The Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. *Nor* did there go up a mist from the earth, to water the whole face of the ground.” The assertion is, not that a mist did go up, but that a mist did not go up; in other words, that there was no provision for that peculiar economy until afterwards, when man was introduced, and that provision began.

It is recorded, that there was “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” Many persons have speculated about what it can mean. Sceptics have tried to mock at it, and Christians have sometimes been puzzled by it. Was it a literal tree that was the medium of these moral effects? Or is there any tree still, to eat which is to learn what is good or what is evil? I think not; I do not gather there was anything in that tree more peculiar in physical character than in any other tree in the Garden of Eden, except in its selection. The reason of it was

this :—Man must, even in Paradise, have some visible and sacramental symbol, to show him that he was a creature under law, and dependent upon a higher Being; and therefore God said, This tree shall be that sign and symbol. You touch it, and you will not find that anything will rush from the tree and smite you, but that you have broken the law of your being, and the allegiance that you owe to God, and the consequence of it will be that you shall surely die; and on the other hand, if you shall not touch that tree, you will live in holiness and happiness for ever. God might have said, There is a river; if you drink of that river, you shall surely die. Or, there is a little inclosed ground; if you enter that inclosure, you shall surely die. It was meant simply to make man feel that he was a creature, and to let man prove, by his allegiance to God, that as a creature he would stand, or by his disobedience to God, that as a sinner he could fall. It has been thought—strange to say—that the fig-tree was the “tree of knowledge of good and evil.” It is certainly remarkable, that the fig-tree has been selected as the exponent of evil among mankind, and in Scripture we read of the fig-tree generally in a bad sense; and it is remarkable, that a bad character among the ancient Greeks was called a sycophant, which means “a man that shows figs,” thus indicating that there was some bad association connected with the fig-tree; and other proverbs associated with the fig-tree were used by classical and heathen nations, generally having a bad reference. Hence, some persons have argued, that this tree must have been “the tree

of knowledge of good and evil." But that is to assume, that there was something morally bad in it which we cannot prove. I do not think there is any evidence to show that it was a tree selected in consequence of any inherent or peculiar qualities, but simply as a symbol of a creature's allegiance to God.

We read, in the next place, "A river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads." This has puzzled many persons, since it seems as if the one (Eden) had been very far separated from the other (the garden). But perhaps the strict meaning is, that the river sprang up out of the Garden of Eden, and thus watered it. It does not necessarily mean that it came from one distant place (Eden, into "the garden," another distant place); but that it sprang up in Eden, and went to water the whole garden.

Where Eden was, is a question, I think, we shall never be able to solve. It is quite plain that the Noachian Deluge very much altered the whole geographical aspect of the earth we live in, and that the last traces and remains of that garden are swept away. And you will recollect, that this account by Moses was written between two and three thousand years after the facts recorded; and Moses alludes, in the course of his narrative, to what was its geography while he was writing, and therefore he speaks of the name of the first river being Pison—"that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;" hereby describing what existed in his own days, when he, an historian, was writing, and what existed in Paradise when it was in its full

bloom, and beauty, and perfection. It has been thought, however, by most Christian geographers, who have turned their attention to the subject, that Eden was situated somewhere extending from the Indus, on the east, to the Nile on the west, embracing the fairest part of Asia, and a good part of Africa: and containing the countries now known as Cabul, Persia, Arabia, Abyssinia, and a portion of Egypt. It has been thought, that that was the district in which this fair spot was situated, and in which man was placed, in order to cultivate it.

We learn from the expression, "The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it," that labour is honourable, and that it is compatible with a state of innocence. The curse in labour is the excess of it: labour itself is enjoyment. You will find that the horse feels it enjoyment to put forth its strength; and so, man felt it enjoyment to put forth his energies in rearing the flowers that God had planted in the midst of Eden. The curse is not labour, but the excess of labour. It is a very absurd notion that prevails, that labour is a sort of mean thing: it is a most honourable thing; it was a feature of Adam in his innocent and Eden state; and the poorest labourer is just as honourable as the greatest noble, if he be a Christian. We must not estimate men as we do the cinnamon-tree, the whole of whose value is in its bark, but by the heart that beats beneath, and the intellect that thinks, and the life that shines out in obedience to the will of God.

Adam gave names to all the creatures in the garden, and these names are in the Hebrew tongue either

expressive or suggestive of the properties or qualities of these animals. Of course, there is a difficulty in conceiving how all the genera and species of all the animals of the earth could have been gathered round Adam. We know not how long he retained his innocence; we know not how this was done, or whether these genera or species could be reduced to a much less number. We all know that zoology has discovered, that animals which seem to us distinct are often connected with each other: for instance, the lion, the tiger, and the common house cat, all belong to the same great class. Very probably, the animals were generically very few, as they might be now reduced to very few great divisions, and these were gathered round Adam. But if there had been millions, an infallible historian records the fact, and therefore it is true. Here is the difference between miracles recorded in the Bible, and the Romish miracles. They state that Francis of Assisi preached to animals, and that the cattle on a thousand hills came round him, and listened to him. Well, if that were recorded in the Word of God, I should believe it, because it would be stated by a confessedly infallible historian; but when it is recorded by a fallible historian, and the evidences of it as a miracle are utterly insufficient, then I cannot accept it at all. But here we have the fact stated by an inspired writer, who was infallible in writing; and therefore we know that, however difficult, it was possible to Omnipotence; that, however incredible, it is actual—for history—inspired history—records it.

It is very remarkable, too, that geological discoveries demonstrate very satisfactorily that man was

last created. We notice, that of all the races of animals, and fishes of the sea, and fowls of the air, which were dynasties succeeding dynasties, which had been destroyed thousands of years before, man is, scripturally and geologically, the last. If man had existed before these, we should find the remains of man, his skull, his thigh and leg bones, mixed up with the remains of other animals, and sometimes man's remains below them; but we never do so. The remains of prior animals are found five or six miles below the surface; but the remains of man are only found in the upper alluvial deposits, which are not above one hundred feet in thickness; and geology has thus demonstrated that man's dynasty, or man's race, was the last created: in other words, science is the echo of the declaration of Moses, in the book of Genesis.

One other fact is worth noticing here, and it is, that man was created the crowning and the most noble of all the animated races. You are aware that certain writers of a very sceptic stamp, and among the rest, the author of the "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation," one of the most unscientific and mischievous books that have been written, holds that the earth, the stars, and the planets, were first each a fire-mist, which became more solid, until, in time, it developed itself into the earth on which we now tread, the stars and planets that we see; that man was formerly, probably, the lowest zoophyte,—probably a crab, or an oyster,—at least the very lowest of created animal life; and that gradually he became developed into his present state of perfection. Now, there is nothing so triumphant as the conclu-

sions of geology on this very subject. Geology demonstrates in the most convincing manner that there is no such thing as transmigration or transformation of species; that there is no such a thing as an animal of a lower grade developing itself into an animal of a higher grade. It shows that whole races have suddenly been destroyed, and that a creative fiat must have interposed, and created another race; and it shows that each race was created in its highest perfection, and that the course of the past has been, not the development of a lower into a higher grade, but the degradation rather of each particular race. Such a disclosure as this is very valuable, and it has been most clearly made. It shows the absurdity of supposing such a similarity between, for instance, an uran-utang and man, as to warrant the supposition of a development of the one into the other. If any one could show an uran developing himself into a man, or catch him half-way done, or if during the last six thousand years one instance of such development could be demonstrated to have taken place, the development theory would have some foundation. But when you find that the uran of 1851 is just the same as he was 1800 years before, that he has improved in no shape whatever; and when you see man in all his perfection progressing, advancing, developing long latent and mysterious powers—it must be evident that the gap between the loftiest physical organization and man is gigantic and unquestionably inseparable. Man therefore is best described, when it is said, not that God formed man out of the highest of His created beings, nor that He allowed the highest of them to develop itself into

man; but that he formed him "out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." That is the most philosophical, the most scientific, and, what is better, it is true.

How interesting, then, that this record, which infidels have tried to sneer at, is becoming illustrated by every successive discovery of science; and that it is beginning to be found out, that those plain people who read God's Word, and simply believe it, are the true philosophers; and that those people who are using long-sounding words, and talking about things they know not of, under the pretence of science, are the ignorant, and the fools, who say in their hearts, "There is no God." All lights are gathering round the Bible. Nature testifies more and more to Christianity. Scepticism is founded on ignorance.

CHAPTER III.

IS GENESIS FIGURATIVE? THE SERPENT. WOMAN FIRST SEDUCED. ADAM NEXT. EFFECTS OF FORBIDDEN FRUIT. GOSPEL OF EDEN. WOMAN'S CURSE. EVE—ITS MEANING. FLAMING SWORD. CHEATHAM.

It has been assumed by certain commentators on the Scripture, especially of what is called the German school, that the serpent here is purely figurative, and was not the literal reptile so called, and so universally known. Now, it seems to me that there is an unanswerable objection to any such hypothesis; for if the serpent was figurative, Adam was figurative; Eve was figurative, and sin too must be figurative, the fall must be figurative, and the whole must be an allegory and a myth. But since this cannot be conceded, for reasons that need not now be recapitulated, it follows that the serpent here spoken of was the reptile known to us all, and strictly so called.

That this serpent was in the first instance an extremely beautiful object, and, as here described, the most "subtil," that is, the most suitable, from its superiority to other animals, to be made the vehicle of the designs and the assaults of Satan;—this is what those who take the literal view of the subject have almost universally concluded. But a great deterioration has passed upon the serpent. Some

think it moved upright with great dignity and majesty. We know there is vast difference in the comparative intelligence of animals, and Satan was sure to select the ablest. Who does not know that the dog is more intelligent than the cat, that the horse is more intelligent than the ox? And it may have been, that at the head of all the brute creation in intelligence, making the nearest approximation to the human race, yet at an impassable distance, was the serpent.

It has been urged as an objection to the strict historical nature of the narrative, that the serpent should have uttered articulate sounds. There is no evidence that the serpent ever had the faculty of speech, but there is evidence in Scripture that God has made animals the vehicle of voice, and so we may infer that Satan may have had the power, not omnipotent, but great and equal to do this. It is not an impossible thing. We read that the ass of Balaam spoke in human speech through the power of God. It may be that the serpent was for the time gifted with vocal power under the power of the archangel fallen, who had still an archangel's power, though associated with it a fiend's depravity and wickedness. But, whatever be the explanation of the fact, the fact is asserted in the inspired Record, and we know upon other grounds that what God relates here is true, and upon this ground alone, that God has said it. But it is perfectly legitimate for us, by analogies and by bringing together probabilities, to vindicate, if such vindication be needed, not to Christians, but to others, not only the way, but the words of God to man.

That the serpent did not speak merely of himself, or by any intelligence with which he was originally endowed, is evident from the fact that his speech indicated reasoning, subtlety, logic, combined with wickedness, which can only be accounted for by the hypothesis that Satan—the archangel fallen—took possession of the serpent, and made that animal, the most subtle in itself, the most fit for his purpose, the most likely to deceive Eve, because she had learned that the serpent was the most subtle, and the most gifted of the brutes of the field; this animal Satan seized and made the vehicle of his assault upon our first parents, and succeeded, through this device, in seducing them from their allegiance to God. We read that the serpent approached first the woman. She was then, as she is now, not the weakest in intellect, but the most susceptible of impression, and in her innocence perhaps the least suspicious of evil; and most likely, therefore, by a bold and yet subtle assault, to be carried away. If he had approached Adam, there would have been needed much stronger reasoning, less appeal to the tenderness and supposed mercy of God, which so skilfully characterizes the subtle logic that he employed on this occasion. “Yea, hath God said?” Are you sure of this, now? Are you sure that, if he did say, “Ye shall surely die,” you are putting the right meaning upon it? Now, how subtle was this! how fitted to throw Eve off her guard, and while off her guard, to become his victim! The woman, instead of saying to the serpent what she did, ought to have said what the Bruiser of his head did afterwards, “Get thee behind me, Satan. It is written, Thou shalt not

tempt the Lord thy God." But she did not yield to the first, in morals the ever purest, impression. When you are going to take a step in politics or in science, think twice, thrice, four times, before you take it; but in moral things the first blush of the subject is generally the true one. Eve, instead of instantly resisting Satan, when he would have fled from her, held communion with him. "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden." What business had she telling him so? He had no right to have such information, and she had no commission to give it. "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said," (that was good,) "Ye shall not eat of it," (that was good,) "neither shall ye touch it," (that was good,) "lest ye die." Here she falters; she lost or left out part of the penalty in her repetition of it. God's sentence was, "Thou shalt surely die" (*moth tamoth*), "Dying thou shalt die;" that is, "Thou shalt surely, terribly, disastrously die." But she said, "Lest ye die." Here she was letting go a fragment of God's Word, and letting go, in that fragment, an element of strength, persistency, and triumph. Well, then, the serpent said, when he had so far persuaded her, "Ye shall not surely die." You observe, he saw that he was listened to; that he was not repelled; that the real and only successful process of "resisting and he shall flee" was not adopted: and therefore, having carried the outside fortification, he now approached nearer and closer, and assailed her still more vigorously. The serpent said, "Ye shall not surely die." You observe, he quoted God's Word incorrectly. "You may find

it otherwise, and something good, not evil, may happen to you; but you shall not surely die;" thus assuming to be a messenger from God: for even Satan is transformed into an angel of light. "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened." Instead of a calamity overtaking you, "ye shall be as gods," or "God;" for I told you that *Elohim* (God) is generally used in the plural number (gods); and therefore, "as gods," should be translated, "as God himself;" that is, you may take a step in that upward and glorious progression which is the destiny of an immortal being, and instead of sinking as you fancy, you shall be "as God himself, knowing good and evil."

The expression, "knowing good and evil," would seem to indicate that Eve had some idea of what evil was, and that there was, therefore, as I shall explain to you in the course of my sermon, evil prior to the creation of man. And, therefore, it may be presumed that she had been informed of such an occurrence before. And the very penalty, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," implies that Adam had some idea of what death was; for how could it be a penalty that they should dread, if they had not some idea of what death really meant?

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise," she forgot the prohibition. Many things taste sweet, but they may not be right. Many things look beautiful, but they may not be lawful. Eve, therefore,

instead of falling back on God's prohibition, "Thou shalt not," looked at the attractions of the thing, not at the testimony of God who made it, and made her senses the arbiters of right and wrong. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food; and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise," believing what Satan said, "she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." You observe in her utterance of this last sentence, she had lost all recollection of God's prohibition. She accepted and believed Satan's prophecy, and she saw, too, that the tree was good for food, and, therefore, reckless of the interdict of God, she ate of it. Men do things without thinking whether God has said, "Thou shalt," or, "Thou shalt not;" judging only of the pleasure of the thing and forgetting that the blossom often that looks the most beautiful, and smells the most fragrant, contains in itself the most deadly poison.

Adam took of it also. It seems remarkable that he did not hesitate. Nothing is said about his hesitation; and it was, no doubt, under her influence and eloquent persuasion, or, very likely, from the warm attachment that he had to her, that made him so easily capitulate. It is the fact still, that woman's power is not as ours is—masculine, or mainly intellectual; but, yet, she wields a power, more subtle it may be, less felt and seen it may be, but not less surely successful. And many husbands who think they are the governors, are practically the most thoroughly governed. And so Adam, without protesting, without one recorded

word of doubt, obeyed his wife, and took of the fruit, "and he did eat."

And then "the eyes of them both were opened," and they discovered what they never thought of before, "that they were naked," and they heard God's voice, once so lovely,—no longer musical, but the reverse,—saying, "Where art thou?" What has become of you? Adam gave as his apology what he at first saw, that he was naked, and therefore had run to hide himself. And God, desirous he should see there was something wrong, said, "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" Whenever you see anything wrong in a man's mind, you should always try to ascertain whether the cause of it is not what God attributes as the cause of Adam's disorder, "Hast thou eaten of that which I forbade thee?" Trouble has a visible or invisible, but real, connexion with sin.

Now, what was Adam's excuse? Just what we should have expected. The whole of this is so exquisitely true to nature, it is so completely what we should have thought to be our own habit, or temper, or practice, in similar circumstances, that we must see that, if this were not inspired, Moses must have been infinitely more than man. Adam said not, "O God, I have sinned, I have broken thy law, have mercy upon me;" but, "The woman thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Surely this was very cowardly on the part of Adam. It was not only so, but it indicated also a terrible degeneracy. He threw the blame off

his own shoulders, where it justly rested, and put it on the shoulders of poor Eve; as if she alone was guilty, and he purely innocent. And what seemed designed to lighten her load was meant at the same time to dishonour God. He therefore said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, gave me." Why didst thou give me such a woman? If thou art angry with me for eating this, remember "the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, it was she gave me of the tree." And thus he threw the blame partly upon Eve, and partly upon God; but as to himself, he, self-righteous man, deserved no condemnation. Is not this human nature still? God, mercifully silent here, where censure was so deeply deserved, spoke to the woman, traced it to her, and said, "What is this that thou hast done?" Now, just notice how completely the woman was the reflection of the man. "And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." I am perfectly innocent, I deserve no censure, I could not help it; it was "the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." I am not to blame, says the young man, it was my position, my habit, my temper, my circumstances, ten thousand things except myself; the character of man being, that he does not care where the guilt lies, so that he can throw it off his own shoulders. God bore and forbore, and graciously silent still, he turned to the serpent, and said, "Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go,"—the very curse indicating indirectly, but really, how the serpent had moved before,—“and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee

and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Here is the first promise of the Gospel. It sounds along the centuries. We translate the seed, "it;" whereas it should be "HE," since afterwards it is rightly translated "his." In the Douay translation it is translated, "She shall bruise thy head;" and there is a foot-note that states, "She, the woman." Now, every person who knows the Hebrew Grammar is aware that the word here used is *Hu*, which must be either masculine or neuter. It cannot be feminine. It must be masculine here, and it ought to be translated "he." And if we take the Septuagint version, which was made three hundred years before the birth of Christ, and therefore quite irrespective of any subsequent or present controversy, we shall find the word rendered *αὐτός*, that is, in the masculine gender, "he shall bruise thy head." So early was the Gospel preached. So soon does Romanism commence its assaults. I know not whether it be part of that enmity or not, but is it not true that the reptile which the human race most thoroughly and universally loathes, is just the serpent? I do not know why it is, but it is the universal feeling. Whether it arise from the peculiar structure of the reptile, or from a dead traditional recollection, having its birth in the record contained in this chapter, I know not, but the fact is as I have now stated it.

The curse is now pronounced upon Adam and Eve. "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception ; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children ; and thy desire shall

be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, "Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Woman bears witness to her participation of the curse. Had it never alighted on her, she had never endured the greatest of all pains. Yet does she rise toward equality with her husband, and to superiority over her sufferings, where Christian influence is greatest. In the recent discovery of chloroform, and its peculiar triumphs here, we have a foreshadow of her ultimate emancipation—a proof, at least, of science given to man, to tell him how possible is painless childbirth, how probable its return. Poor man still earns bread with hand or head, and in either case with the sweat of his brow.

Then Adam, it is said, "called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living." I think the ordinary idea of this change of name, is an erroneous one. Most persons think he called her Eve because she became the mother of the whole human race. But God said before this, "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth;" and she would have been the mother of all living, if she had retained her innocence. And, therefore, that does not warrant the change of name from Isha to "Eve.

the mother of all living." He called her first *Isha*, that is, "Manness," or "Woman," as we express it. But he says, "I will no longer call her *Isha*, but *Chavah*," which means "a mother," or "the living one," or "the life." Now, why was this? I am convinced that the true explanation of it is found in the fact, that the promise here made was not "to seeds, as of many, but as of one," that is, as of Abraham's, and because of Abraham's also of Eve's. I believe that Adam accepted the glorious promise, "He shall bruise thy head," as the foundation of his hope, and in it he saw that in the course of coming centuries a Messiah should be born—the Reclaimer of Paradise, the Destroyer of the serpent, the Son of Mary, Jesus, our only Redeemer, Prince, and Saviour; and that it was with reference to Him, therefore, and not with reference to all humanity, that he changed the name of Eve, and called her, instead of *Isha*, *Chavah*, or Eve. This glorious hope was worthy of a new name.

We read here, that "He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims and a flaming sword, which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." This has been the subject of very great and very protracted inquiry. And when you notice that the cherubim placed here, play so great a part in the subsequent history of the human race, you must see that there is more significance than meets the eye in the fact that "He placed cherubims at the east of the garden of Eden." We read in the book of Exodus, xxv. 17—20, that Moses was to make, according to the commandment of God, "a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be

the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. "And thou shalt make," says God, "two cherubims of gold, of beaten work shalt thou make them, in the two ends of the mercy seat. And make one cherub on the one end, and the other cherub on the other end: even of the mercy seat shall ye make the cherubims on the two ends thereof. And the cherubims shall stretch forth their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and their faces shall look one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubims be." Now, Moses knew of this last fact when he wrote this chapter, and he knew also the other fact, that God is represented in the Psalms and elsewhere, as "Thou that dwellest between the cherubims." We know also, that the mercy seat may be translated "propitiatory;" and the apostle says, Christ is our propitiatory or mercy seat. It does appear to me, therefore, that the cherubim were placed here in order to teach man, by a foreshadow and a prophecy, the coming restoration, when the mercy seat should be erected in the tabernacle, and find in the fulness of the times its antitype in Christ, the true propitiation, not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world. And, on the other hand, you will recollect that the cherubim were in the temple, overshadowing the mercy seat, and that it was towards the mercy seat that the Jews worshipped, and that it was there, also, that the glory, the Shechinah, rested. You will recollect that the word "Shechinah" comes from the word *Shakan*, which means, to place, plant. And if this passage were literally translated, it would be, "He shechinated at the east of the garden of

Eden cherubims." And thus we find another allusion to the mercy seat in the tabernacle, which was a type and shadow of the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Let us also recollect what Peter says: "Which things the angels desire to look into;" and at the same time remember that the cherubim looked down on the mercy seat which was between them: and thus you have an explanation of Peter's remarkable allusion. Another reason, too, which shows that these cherubim were meant to indicate some reference to the Gospel, may be gathered from the passage where it is said that Cain, after he "went out from the presence of the Lord, dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden," which would seem to indicate that the Cherubim were to Adam and Eve what the mercy seat with its cherubim was to the Jews, and what Christ, who is everywhere, is to us,—the great sign and symbol of an Atonement, a visible pledge that a Saviour would come in the fulness of time, according to prophecy.

But, you ask, What was the flaming sword? It was perfectly distinct and separate from the cherubim. It is not said that the cherubim had a flaming sword in their hands, but it says that "he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword, which turned every way upon itself," as it should be rendered. The flaming sword was to them the symbol of the Paradise they had lost; and the cherubim pointed them to a paradise that was yet to be regained through the death and the atonement of the Lamb.

I must revert to the expression, "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil :

and now lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and live for ever." This expression ought to be understood—if not literally, yet truly, interpreted—"Adam has made the attempt to become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and by taking also of the tree of life, and eating, attempt to live for ever." If Adam had taken of the tree of life, he would not have lived for ever. If he had not eaten of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," he would have had access to this tree, and have been immortal; but, since he had forfeited the thing signified—obedience, and its consequences—eternal life, to lay hold upon "the tree of life" would have been just like those of modern times,—Romanists and Tractarians, who lay hold on baptism, and think they obtain regeneration by using the mere sacramental sign; or, that they obtain communion with the body of Christ by eating the bread and drinking the wine, which are the mere symbols of that communion. This would have been to trust to the sacramental sign, when he had lost the thing that was signified; it would have added to his sufferings, not removed them.

How truly does this history commend itself to our reason, to our conscience, to our hearts—how truly it looks like the real—how little like the fabulous: how sublime is its record beside any other account of the introduction of sin, and death, and all our woe! Let us be under a sense of what man has made himself—let us gratefully adore that sovereign love which has interposed to save. O Lord, create us again to good works!

CHAPTER IV.

EVE A MOTHER. BIRTH OF CAIN. THE OFFERINGS OF CAIN AND ABEL. DEATH OF ABEL. ARRAIGNMENT OF CAIN. SIN CUMULATIVE. CAIN-MARK. POLYGAMY.

IN the chapter which I have now read, we have another and a new phasis in that intensely interesting history which is contained in the word of God alone, and for which we are indebted to inspiration alone. We have seen Eve as the innocent inhabitant of Eden, when all around was beauty, and all within was happiness. We have followed her next, as an exile from Eden, a wanderer on the earth, and a sufferer; and we now find her in a new relationship, and, to her, a strange and a mysterious one—she brought forth, it is said, her first-born, and she said, in the ecstasy of her heart, “I have gotten a man from the Lord.” Here, on this occasion, was the realization of that which was stated by our blessed Lord, when he said: “A woman when she is in travail, hath sorrow,” (“in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children,”) “because her hour is come; but, as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.” Eve, on the birth of Cain, exclaimed, as I have said: “I have gotten a man from the Lord.” There was, I think, a double joy here; there was the joy of a mother over

her first-born, and there was the joy of a Christian mother under the belief, though the illusive belief, that this Cain born to her now was the promised Messiah. There is no reason in the world why she should have so distinguished Cain, except the mistaken idea that Cain was the promised seed, of whom the promise was given in Eden, that the woman's son should bruise the serpent's head. Eve thought that she was that woman, and that Cain was that promised son, and that now she would be reinstated in her lost inheritance, replaced in Paradise, and be happy once again. And therefore, she said, as it might be translated, "I have gotten the man Jehovah," which is a perfectly correct and just translation, and evidently allusive to the promise of the Messiah, whom she expected.

In contrast to Cain, when Abel was born, she called him "frailty and vanity." She did not look upon him as so momentous and impressive a gift. She regarded Cain as really the promised Messiah, and Abel as "frailty," or "vanity." How bitterly mistaken was poor Eve! Cain, instead of being a deliverer from sin, was in fact the first murderer; and Abel, instead of being the worthless thing that she thought him, proved the first holy and faithful martyr. Many a mother thinks she has an Abel, when she has a Cain; and some a Cain, when it turns out an Abel. It depends, perhaps, less upon original character, more upon subsequent training, whether it shall be the one or the other. At all events, whilst grace has its mighty, its all-important part to play in the formation of character, it remains yet true,—“Train up a child in the way he should

go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Cain and Abel were born with equally depraved hearts. Both equally needed the regeneration of God's Holy Spirit. One lived and died without it; the other lived under it, and entered into the joy for which it prepared him.

We read of Cain and Abel's offerings. Both of them plainly acknowledged that it was dutiful and right to give worship unto God. Both, too, we may observe, acknowledged that there was but one true and living God, and that to him alone they ought to give worship. Now, so far both coincided; but it is evident that the one worshipped the true God in a way that was not acceptable, and that the other worshipped the same true God in a way that was acceptable. Wherein lay the cause of this difference? Wherein lies the great diversity in the offerings, which made the one to be so accepted, and the other to be rejected? The first reason was doubtless in the offerers themselves. Cain was an unholy, an ungodly, and an unrighteous man; Abel was a holy, a good, and a righteous man. It is not the offering that makes the offerer accepted; it is the offerer who is accepted first, and the offering that is accepted next. But there was also in the nature and meaning of the two offerings a very great difference. The offering of the one was the sacrifice of a living animal, the shedding of its blood, and the burning it upon the altar as an oblation to God. The sacrifice of the other—if such it might be called—was a garland of flowers, or a basket of fair and fragrant fruit. One would have said *a priori*—that is, if one were ignorant of the result—Cain's offering must certainly have

been accepted ; for what can be more acceptable than offering this bouquet of beautiful flowers, and this basket of fair and fragrant fruit, and dedicating them to God, and saying to God, in a hymn of adoration, " O Lord ! I give thee these. Thy smile has given every tint to every blossom ; thy breath has given its fragrance to every flower : and I devote these to Thee, thou Creator, thou Preserver of all, as the expression of my gratitude,—as the medium of my worship."

One would have said, such surely is just the offering that will be accepted. And when Abel brought his offering, and plunged the knife into the heart of an innocent lamb, shed its blood upon the altar, and then asked God to accept it, one would have said, Surely, Abel's offering will be rejected. Naturally, one would have said so. But then the world was not in its natural state, man was not in his natural state ; sin had crept in ; there was a great chasm between the creature and God : a new mode of access is needed ; and there was indicated to Adam in Paradise, by the skins of the animals in which he was clothed, the necessity, the duty, and the acceptableness of animal sacrifices. And therefore, the difference between these two offerings lay in this ;—Cain recognized God as the Creator and Preserver of all, but nothing more ; Abel recognized God, along with Cain, as the Creator and the Preserver of all, but he added another article to his creed, enunciated at the Fall, that man had sinned, that without shedding of blood there could be no restoration of man ; and therefore, in prospective faith Abel by his offering already rested on the

Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, and thus through faith found acceptance where Cain found none. In other words, the one was a deistic offering, the other was an evangelical and Protestant sacrifice. The one looked upon God simply as Creator and Preserver, and on man as innocent; the other looked upon God as a God who hated sin, and upon himself as a sinner, and regarded expiatory sacrifice as the only medium of obtaining mercy, and thus prayed for pardon, mercy, and acceptance. The result is in the record, that the one was accepted, and the other not. How, we may inquire, was it accepted? how did Cain and Abel know that it was accepted? I informed you in my last, when I read the preceding chapter, that the shechinah was placed at the gates of Paradise, and the flaming sword that turned upon itself in all directions. And that this was the holy place is rendered very probable from the fact that Cain, when he left the presence of the Lord, went to dwell at the east of Eden, which was the very place where the cherubims, and the mercy-seat, and the shechinah were, which were afterwards placed in the temple, where they were recognized as the types of the great atonement made by the Lord Jesus Christ. And, as we read that, when the sacrifices of old were accepted, fire fell down from heaven and consumed them, it may have been that a ray from that shechinah lighted upon the sacrifice of Abel and consumed it; and that Cain's remained, or faded away, as blasted and withered flowers. But whatever was the mode, it is stated that the one was visibly accepted, and the other was indisputably refused.

But what was the consequence of this? The right consequence ought to have been that Cain, humbled on seeing his error, should have confessed it, and worshipped as Abel did. But human nature had undergone its sad deterioration; envy had expelled love, and jealousy peace; and therefore, seeing his brother Abel was the friend of God, and in the matter of his service visibly accepted by Him, he rose up, not against himself, who really was to blame, but against his unoffending brother Abel, who had only done that which was right, in contrast to his brother, who had done that which was wholly wrong. All sin is persecuting. Self-righteousness hates. Not only does man impute his own faults, as Adam threw his upon Eve, and Eve did upon the serpent; but when he sees others more prospered and accepted than himself, the Cain spirit produces the Cain-mark and prompts him to rise up against the righteous, because his own works are evil, and his countenance to fall, and his spirit to grow chafed with that which ought to humble and subdue.

God spake to Cain, when he found him in this state, and asked him, "Where is Abel thy brother?" a question suggestive of guilt rather than a reply. I do not think it is altogether fair to pronounce Cain to be a murderer in the strict and severe sense in which we employ that epithet. Murder, I think it is admitted by all jurists and judges, means pre-meditated or deliberate design to take away the life of another carried out into act. I do not believe that Cain yet knew that the blow he dealt his brother would destroy life. Cain had never seen death or understood its awful significance; he had never

seen, as far as we can learn, a dead man, or a dead child; and although there must have been about a thousand people in the world by this time, according to calculations fairly and justly made, yet there is no evidence that a single death had occurred, or that Cain had witnessed dying by violence or old age, infirmity or decay. It is not, therefore, probable that Cain deliberately and designedly took away the life of Abel, or even set out with him for this end. And, in the next place, the language of the passage seems to convey that there had occurred criminal anger and bitter quarrelling between them. I am not extenuating or justifying the crime of Cain,—far from it. I am simply asserting what were the facts and what is the aspect of his crime. It seems that “they talked together in the field.” In other words, there was hostile and recriminating conversation between them. Abel may have been most meek in his remarks and yet not blameless; but Cain, no doubt, must have been most violent in his language. When two persons dispute the quarrel, the one who loses his temper most gives evidence of his being most in the wrong. And as Cain was utterly in the wrong, there is no doubt that his language was alike the most violent and provocative to evil. It was in the excitement of such recriminating conversation that Cain rose up and slew his brother Abel. Now, I think this would be construed by modern judges and juries to be manslaughter and not murder; and so far, therefore, our estimate of the crime of Cain is modified. Still he slew his brother because his brother’s deeds were holy, and his own the opposite.

If we admit there was not deliberate and premedi-

tated murder, there was the awful and greatly guilty crime of homicide, which is perhaps murder in its least terrible phasis.

When God asked the question, "Where is Abel thy brother?"—a clause on which I addressed you some several months back—Cain added lying to the first crime. This is a matter of course: whoever commits one crime needs to perpetrate another to conceal it, and another to conceal that, sin always bringing forth an inexhaustible progeny. He lied, and said he did not know; and not only lied, but broke forth into an expression which indicated how utterly brotherly love had been quenched on the altar of his heart—"Am I my brother's keeper?"—that is, "What is he to me? what do I care if he should die? What do I care what becomes of him?" And yet it is the language of many a man still. What do I care if the Hindoos go to destruction? What do I care if my next-door neighbour starve, without a fire and without a coat? Every man is responsible for his brother's condition, and so long as we have sixpence to spare, and our brother needs a penny, so long we are responsible for that brother not wanting the penny that he stands truly in need of.

We read, then, that God pronounced upon Cain a very severe sentence. The earth was to be doubly cursed to him; it should not yield to him of its abundance, but he should wander and be a vagabond in the earth. Cain's reply was, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." Perhaps that may be justly translated, "My sin is greater than can be forgiven;" for the word translated "sin" sometimes

means "punishment," sometimes "a sin offering," and often simply "sin."

But before I allude to this, I must refer to that passage where God says to Cain, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him." There seems, at first sight, a sort of break or interruption in the order of sentiment contained in that verse; but if you will just put the words, "And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door," in a parenthesis—and they really ought to be so placed—you will see that the verse reads perfectly correctly: "If thou doest well," that is, if thou observest all my commandments, "shalt thou not be accepted? And unto thee" by the law of primogeniture, "shall be Abel's desire, and thou shalt rule over him;" that is, if thou doest well, the relationship between Abel and thee shall be as it was meant from the beginning. But then, "If thou doest not well," which we must either take out of the bosom of the text, or else place in a parenthesis,—“if thou doest not well,” the opposite of this will occur; thou wilt lose the obedience of thy brother, and “sin lieth at the door.” Now there are two interpretations of that. One is, sin lieth at the door like a wild beast, ready to destroy; or, if you suppose the Greek word *ἀμαρτία*, which is the translation of the corresponding Hebrew word, as used in Leviticus, it would mean, that “as in offering lieth at the door;” that is, the lamb, the type of the true sacrifice, which you may use, and worship me in the mode in which Abel has worshipped me, and meet like him with true and en-

during acceptance. Thus far it is explicable; and if you will put the words I have referred to in a parenthesis in your Bible, the meaning of the passage will be obvious to you.

Then Cain said, "My punishment is greater than I can bear," or, my sin is greater than can be forgiven. "Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me." The homicide, or rather fratricide, was thus conscious of his guilt, and aware that the just punishment of that guilt was, that he should be slain himself. But God resolved that it should not be so. Not that God pronounced that his guilt did not deserve such a righteous and just retribution, but that he had other objects and purposes in view with him. The answer to Cain therefore was, "Whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him." That may not mean, perhaps, that there was struck a visible brand of any sort, but merely that God took special notice of him, and that none should be suffered to kill him.

"Cain," therefore, went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden." And then we read of his building a city, and calling the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch. How strange it is that civilization began with Cain! Civilization is a word that comes from *civis*, a citizen, and *civis* is a citizen because he dwells in a city. Now, Cain was the

very first builder of cities ; and it needs but a very partial acquaintance with the cities of the world to know how many of the footprints of Cain are on them, and how much, as in Paris this day, they are characterized by the spirit of Cain. I would not go so far as the poet, and say that—

“ God made the country, but man made the town ; ”

for wherever there is a corrupt heart, there corrupt things will be done ; but it is certain, that where numbers of people are crowded together in a city, there crimes seem to reach their intensest form, and human nature to degenerate and to be degraded the most.

Lamech, a son of Cain, takes to himself two wives. How early we see, step by step, corruption creep in. The primitive law was, Eve was made for Adam—one wife for one man ; and we know from existing statistics, that the male and female population are pretty nearly equal. There is, I know, from various causes, a slight excess in the female population, yet the general law of the structure of society is, that polygamy should not be. It is scripturally wrong. It is physically and statistically so. But here we find Lamech, the son of Cain, breaking the primitive law, and taking to himself two wives. And this is recorded, not as bearing the approval of God, but as an historical fact, indicating the commencement of a practice which was not in the beginning.

We read that “ Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech : for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If

Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold." The explanation of this seems to be, that Lamech, in self-defence, had slain some aggressor; and then he said, not conscious of the full extent of the sin, or crime, or guilt, to say the least of it, that he had committed, "I have slain a man to my wounding;" that is, "I have slain him in conflict, and am wounded. Well, if on anybody slaying Cain he shall be avenged sevenfold, surely if anybody slay me, I shall be avenged seventy and sevenfold; for if Cain was spared when he slew his brother, not in self-defence, but out of passion, surely much more shall I be spared, for I have killed a man in self-defence."

We next read of some of the descendants of Cain, one of whom was "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron." We read in heathen legends of Vulcan, the god of iron, whose name is evidently a derivation of Tubal Cain. Since we read of artificers "in brass and iron," there must have been fires to smelt the ores. It has been a very curious question among nations, what was the origin of fire. One says it was stolen from heaven; another, that it was accidentally discovered. Here certainly it must have been discovered in order to smelt the ores.

Here, too, we see the commencement of music. The first architect was Cain, and the first musicians were his descendants. "Jubal was the father," that is, the founder, "of all such as handle the harp and organ."

Now, these short sketches of the early history of mankind are very instructive. They are so simple, so plain, and they so commend themselves to our

hearts and feelings, that we have only to read them in contrast with any of the fabulous accounts of the heathen, to see what is distorted tradition, and what is the Word and the inspiration of God.

What a flood of light does this book pour on that very part of the history of our race where without it our darkness would be midnight!

CHAPTER V.

THE GENEALOGY, AGE, AND DEATH OF THE PATRIARCHS, FROM ADAM TO NOAH. THE PIETY AND TRANSLATION OF ENOCH. SIGNIFICANT NAMES.

THIS chapter reads as if it were a tombstone—it seems to be almost a series of epitaphs—but epitaphs briefly told; the very brevity with which they are told more strikingly indicating the vanity of the life of man. Almost all that is recorded of each of the antediluvian patriarchs whose names are given in this catalogue, is, that he lived, that he had a family, and that he died. These are the landmarks of the biography of each man. The varieties are incidental: these are the prominent and standing characteristics. There is something almost melancholy, or, if not melancholy, at least impressive in this; that, however long each lived, death did come. One lived 700, another 800, another 900, another 1000 years; but the common issue is appended to the biography of all, and each, whatever his dignity, his rank, his age, his wealth, his circumstance, his piety, or his crimes, “lived and died.”

We read in the commencement of the chapter, that Adam had a son in his own likeness. “Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his

name Seth." "In his own likeness," moral and physical: moral, subject to the sinful passions of man; and physical, subject to the ills and aches of mankind, and also inheriting that diseased moral condition which Adam and Eve had introduced when they "brought death into the world and all our woe." Each man's son is more or less in his likeness; and each generation has the generic character of all that has preceded it.

This great age of the patriarchs is remarkable. Some have tried to explain it away, and to show that the years were, not solar, but lunar ones; in other words, that they were months, and not years. But this is untenable; and the proof is clear and conclusive, that their ages were numbered by solar years, and that they lived to the protracted ages here recorded. There may have been reasons for this. The first may have been, that the earth had just been brought into a new condition. Although the earth may have existed hundreds of thousands of years before Adam, yet the earth was then brought into a new condition. Two at first were placed on it; and, from the protracted age of the patriarchs, the births being many and the deaths being few, the earth came in a short time to be rapidly populated. It has been shown, by those who are competent for the investigation, that the earth, at the time of the Flood, had a population not less than that which it now has upon it. I mean, by taking into consideration the long lives of the patriarchs, the number of children that were born to them, and the fact of a death occurring only in four, five, or six hundred years, the calculation has been made, by those who are competent to

do so, that the population of the globe, at the time of the Flood, must have been very large indeed. There is another reason why the age of the patriarchs may have been so long, namely, in order to preserve and perpetuate God's truth whilst there was no written revelation. They had then no Bible, that is to say, no written documentary proof of God's great purpose, or of the gospel preached to Adam and Eve in Paradise. But by reason of the very great age of the patriarchs, there was but one link between Adam and Noah, and that intermediate link might tell Noah, what he heard Adam say; and thus one alive at the end of two thousand years would be as thoroughly, from personal knowledge and intercourse, acquainted with the truth as we should be now in a life of a very few years. There was a time, therefore, when only tradition did exist; we do not deny that tradition existed then; and we do not object to tradition now, except when tradition refuses to submit to the proper judge, namely, the written and inspired record. But there was tradition then; and only by tradition, except in so far as God interposed, could they tell what the gospel was, and what man's hopes and destinies also were; and the protracted age of the patriarchs, rendering few links necessary in two thousand years, may have been permitted, partly that the truth, not yet written, for reasons into which we need not now enter, might be transmitted more clearly from sire to son, and that thus all might be thoroughly acquainted with it. But still, while all these may have been ends, I think the great reason existed in the fact, that the effects of the Fall were not instantaneous, but gradual. And when we read,

at the time of the Flood, of God shortening man's life to one hundred and twenty years, we are again taught that man's age, even after sin had smitten his frame with all its sicknesses and sufferings, was, as we know, very protracted. And this long age of nine hundred years, or a thousand years, was that to which men lived after sin was introduced, though it was gradually shortened as sin seemed through and by man to gain the mastery. After the Flood it was shortened once more, and this last shortening was to one hundred and twenty years. There is no evidence from the Bible that man should not live, humanly speaking, and by the laws of his physical organization, at least one hundred and twenty years. Life is now as a matter of fact very much shorter, since we find numbers dying at 20, 40, 50, 60, 70. But perhaps a great deal of this may not be God's law, but man's fault. God has placed us in a world where certain conditions are requisite to a healthy life; and it will be found that, where those physical conditions are attended to, and along with those, moral conditions too,—for nothing so wastes and wears physical existence as sin in the life, and the consciousness of it in the conscience,—a long life will be the result. I say, were it not for many things existing in this world, arising from a high state of civilization, human life would still be protracted to a much longer period. At least, the last shortening did not reduce it to seventy. And, as I told you in a former explanation, that complaint in the Psalms, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow,"—this complaint was

uttered by Moses in the wilderness, in a state of suffering; and by it he says, that, instead of their living, as it was appointed, to one hundred and twenty years of age (for he himself lived to that age) their years were reduced in this wilderness state to seventy, but implying that, out of that wilderness state they would be the usual number. Thus there was a gradual shortening of human life after the Fall, until after the Flood it was reduced to one hundred and twenty years.

Evidently, in those days they must have made great progress in science. A man's apprenticeship to a business must then have been not less than a hundred years; and, at five or six hundred years of age he was only reaching the maturity of his knowledge, and enjoying the result of his previous investigations. Everything in those days must have attained a great state of perfection. What we arrive at now in the course of several generations—one generation storing up its discoveries for the next to operate upon—they arrived at in individual biographies, the discoveries of one hundred years serving to one person as the means of new inductions and discoveries during the next hundred years. But it is equally plain that, as there must have been vast knowledge, there must also have been gigantic wickedness and gigantic crimes. Everything then must have been upon a gigantic and impressive scale. And perhaps it was in mercy that God shortened human life. It is, perhaps, in mercy to mankind, in kindness to the individual, that human life, in its present abnormal and diseased state, is made so short as it is, and that the days of the years of our life are few and full of evil.

There is also indicated here a new genealogy. It is not, you observe, a statement of Abel's descendants. There is no record of them; and very remarkable it is that Cain is altogether omitted here. We step into the records of a new race, and that race springing from Seth—the son substituted to Eve, and called by her Seth, from the word “substituted,” of which it is the Hebrew, in consequence of God's having taken Abel. You have, therefore, here not Abel's generations, but those of Seth substituted in the room of Abel, whom Cain slew. And it is this record which constitutes the family from which the Lord Jesus Christ was to spring of the house of David, and of Abraham's or the woman's seed.

We read of one patriarch in this group signalized for his great piety, and for his glorious destiny “Enoch,” it is said, “walked with God.” What a brief but beautiful memoir! He “walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.” Then he must have been agreed with God; for how can two walk together except they be agreed? He must have been of one mind with Him; he must have lived under a deep and constant sense of responsibility to Him, and thus he has been celebrated for his piety and his consistency. And the reward, or, if not the reward, the issue of it was, “God took him;” that is, he was translated—he did not taste death. This is a beautiful exception amidst those who died. If the records of this chapter had been without a break in “he died,” it would have been almost darkness and despair. But this incident, starting from the darkness like a ray from the presence of God, illuminates the whole, and tells us that there is a pathway through or beside the grave, and that life has been

brought to light through the knowledge of Christ Jesus. It is thus that the darkness of this chapter is illuminated by one bright light, and that bright light given to teach man, that when the aged die it is not the end of them,—that there is something far beyond. It was in its place, too, a pledge and a foretoken of Him who, when He had overcome the sharpness of death, should open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

I think I explained to you before, indeed I am sure I did, the remarkable fact—in which there may be substance, or which perhaps may be fancy; but I think it is not fancy, but fact,—that the names that are given in this chapter, when literally translated from the Hebrew, contain a prophecy of the gospel of Christ. I told you that every name in this chapter has a meaning; and I think I said, when preaching from a text in Malachi, that all the names convey a great and blessed truth. Adam is the first name, which means “Man in the image of God;” Seth, “substituted by;” Enos, “frail man;” Cainan, “lamenting;” Mahalaleel, “the blessed God;” Jared, “shall come down;” Enoch, “teaching;” Methuselah, “his death shall send;” Lamech, “to the humble;” Noah, “rest” or “consolation.” It is thus that, if you take the whole of the names, you have this truth stated by them: “To man once made in the image of God, now substituted by man frail and full of sorrow, the blessed God himself shall come down to the earth teaching, and his death shall send to the humble consolation.”

This is just an epitome of Christianity, a comment on Isaiah ix. 6, and on John iii. 16.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WICKEDNESS OF THE WORLD PROVOKES GOD'S WEATH, AND
CAUSES THE FLOOD. NOAH FINDS GRACE. THE ORDER,
FORM, AND END OF THE ARK.

It appears from the chapter I have read, that the human race, in the course of 1500 years—the period that had transpired since the creation of man—had fallen into that degree of depravity and crime which is briefly but graphically delineated in the chapter. “It came to pass,” it is said, “when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” You can see that there is a contrast here. The one verse describes a certain class under the epithet “sons of men,” with their daughters; the other verse describes another class, called “the sons of God.” Now, it seems to me, that the one class were the descendants of the corrupt and depraved Cain, and that the other class were the descendants of Seth, or those who believed in and worshipped the living and the true God. It appears from this, therefore, that these sons of God, who knew better, yet in the face of their own convictions, selected for wives the daughters of the lineage of Cain, or wives morally

depraved, and solely because of their personal beauty, or outward attractions,—in their place, proper enough, but in this instance, accepted for, and superseding that real because moral beauty, which in the sight of God is alone of great price. In other words, it was the unsanctified and the unchristian, married to the Christian and the sanctified, and the result was then what the result ever has been, the corruption and the increased degeneracy of both, and the spread and transmission of the influence of moral evil throughout the whole of the creation in which it takes place.

"The Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." This verse has a parallel expression in the Book of the Prophet Nehemiah, where it is said, (ix. 30,) "Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy Spirit in thy prophets." And, therefore, I conceive that when God said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man," he did not mean that the Holy Spirit had begun to change the heart of any, and had withdrawn from that process, but that in the prophets, speaking through and by them, he had ceased to remonstrate with man, as it is explained in the passage from Nehemiah which I have now read—"thy Spirit in thy prophets." And "yet," he says, "his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." This has been thought susceptible of two interpretations. One is, that the 120 years here mean the period that should elapse from this point, or when Noah should begin to build the Ark, until the flood should come; that the 120 years was the respite or the day of grace to the antediluvians, preparatory to

that overwhelming judgment which should sweep them all away. Others again think, and it seems to me that it is fully as natural so to think, that this is the general declaration of what should be the limit of human life in this dispensation; for, you observe, God says, "He also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." It does not say, "Yet an hundred and twenty years shall elapse between this and the moment when the flood shall come," but it is spoken generally: "Yet man's days shall be an hundred and twenty years." And if you connect this with the fact that men lived 700, 800, 900, and even 1000 years before, it does seem more natural to adopt the latter interpretation, and to understand that this was the new fixing of the length of human life, and that the days of our years, therefore, as divinely arranged last, are 120. Occasionally, we do meet with men who reach that age, and some even exceed it—this is evidence of the possibility of reaching it. And, as I have said before, there may be defects in our social, national, domestic habits, our excesses in eating and drinking, and especially the frightful oppression on the brain superinduced by commercial anxiety, that reduce it to some fifty, sixty, or seventy years; but I see no scripture ground for concluding that man's life is to be less than 120 years long; for at that age it seems to have been last fixed. And I may add, that Moses, the very writer of this book, lived 120 years—the author of the book thus illustrating the sentiment of the book.

It is said, in the fourth verse, "There were giants in the earth in those days." Some have thought that that means giants in physical stature; but it

seems to me that that is merely equivalent to the last clause in the verse—"men of renown," and that it denotes men of headstrong and impetuous passions, giants in crime, depravity, and rebellion against God, and not physically of greater stature than ourselves. The only thing that would lead us to suppose that they were so is tradition,—as we fully admit, not a very safe organ; but in the Greek and Latin poets there is a constant reference to a period in the world's history when men were of gigantic stature. We must conclude that there was some reason for this; for tradition has generally foundation in a positive truth, and not generally in an absolute untruth.

We read, that on God looking down on this wickedness, "it repented him that he had made man on the earth, and that it grieved him at his heart." We must take this statement in connection with another passage, "God is not a man, that he should repent." In one passage it is said, God cannot repent; in this passage it is said, that God did repent. We must, therefore, clearly understand that this is God speaking in the language, and placing himself within the range of the feelings, of man. It is just a foreshadow of that great event—the Incarnation—God speaking in the language, and in consonance to the natural feelings, of mankind. And, therefore, wherever it is said, God repented, you are to understand by it, not that he changed his mind, but that he changed the mode of carrying out his mind; not that he himself changed, for it is said that he changeth not, but that he changed what seems to be to us the natural sequence of what he had previously done, and adopted what seems to us a different course from

what, in other circumstances, we naturally suppose he would have adopted. It is, therefore, a change of mode, and not a change of mind; and yet God, as the great archetypal Father of the universe, merely condescends here to express himself in language that will come home to every one in similar circumstances—"It grieved him at his heart, it repented him that he had made man."

God says, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them." Now, here again you have a proof that the brute creation suffers from the sin of man. Who was it that had become corrupt? Not the animals, for they remained as God made them; they are irresponsible: but it was man who had become corrupt. Does it not then seem unfair and unjust to punish the brute creation, because man, the king of creation, sins? And yet, it is remarkable, that throughout the whole Bible we find the same principle carried out. We read that "Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor," and stoned them with stones. Here is a sin committed by one, and all connected with him is made to suffer. And, if we find throughout, from the very beginning, that wherever man sins, there creation suffers, may we not very fairly infer, that when man shall be reinstated, all creation shall be reinstated too? We see

so continually the brute and the irresponsible creation suffering from the sin of man, that we may very justly infer, I think, and we are borne out by express passages of Scripture, that the whole creation will be recovered with man; and that, therefore, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the child shall play on the cockatrice' den: and all nature, delivered from its groans and its travails, be reinstated in its first estate.

We find one great exception to the universal corruption here—Noah, who “found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” “He found grace.” And there is immensely more meant in this than meets the eye. He “found grace.” It does not mean, therefore, that Noah was a sort of second Adam—one who had not shared in the universal corruption; but that he had triumphed over it, and triumphed over it on new grounds. He obtained from God that grace which Adam had not at the first, for Adam had only creation grace, but in virtue of grace in Christ Noah stood and walked with God.

I may notice that the eighth verse of this chapter terminates the first Hebrew division of the Bible, or parasha. The Jewish Bible is divided into fifty-two sections, or parashas, as they called them. One parasha was read each Sabbath. And this being the first parasha, or the first division, the first five, and a portion of the sixth chapter, down to the eighth verse, were read on one Sabbath, which shows that the Jews publicly read a very large portion of God's holy Word. The new, or second section, therefore, begins at the ninth verse, which the Jews read on the ensuing Sabbath.

God then instructs Noah what he was to do. Noah

by grace was saved, and "by faith," says the apostle, "he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." He was just and justified through the righteousness of Christ alone. He is told to build an ark. The word used for the ark of the Deluge is *Tebah*, a different word from that used for the ark of the covenant, which is *Aron*, though both words are called by our translators by the same term, "ark;" and it happens that, in the Septuagint version, the word "ark" is used indiscriminately in both these places; but in the Hebrew, as I have said, they are called by different names.

It will be evident to any one looking at the dimensions of the ark, that it was not made to withstand storms, or to brave the winds like the modern ship. I should think it had nearly a flat bottom, the roof being sloping; for it says, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: the length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it." It is evident, from the whole structure of the ark, as far as we can gather it, that it was very much like a square box; but the roof sloped a little. From the minute descriptions that are given afterwards, namely, its being a cubit towards the roof, it would appear, that what I believe architects call the king

post must have been a cubit in height, and that from it the sides sloped, very slightly, but all that was necessary. It was not made to buffet the waves, or to struggle with the wind, but simply to float upon the waters; and when the waters subsided, then the flatness of its bottom would be its advantage, since it would settle upon Ararat without tilting over. The size of the ark, as far as we can gather from the dimensions here given, and as it has been calculated, must have been about 547 feet long, 91 feet broad, and 54 feet high; and according to the calculation of those who understand the matter, it must have had a tonnage of about 81,000; in other words, it must have been equal to twenty of the largest 120 gun ships. This being so, it must have been large enough for all the materials it was requisite for it to bear. It is said, that he was to make it of cypress wood. It has been found that cypress wood in those countries, I do not know whether it has ever been tried here, is the least liable to be worm-eaten, or to corrupt and rot by the action of the wind and weather. And it therefore follows that cypress wood was the most proper to be employed. And then it is said, "with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it;" or in literal words "nest;" or in more modern phraseology, "cabins." And it is said, "Pitch it within and without with pitch." The word "pitch" is in Hebrew, what is evidently the origin of our word "cover." And that very same word, which we render "cover," is constantly employed in the Bible with reference to sins; "Thou hast covered all their sins," that is, thou hast

forgiven them. And, therefore, there may be some connection between these two circumstances.

The question has been asked, How could they have a window, when they had not glass? We know that transparent substances were known before the discovery of glass; but the Jewish Rabbins say, that the window of the ark was made of a vast transparent precious stone. This is not scripture; it is only tradition, and therefore it must be received for exactly what it is worth.

The first idea that occurs to one, as we read the account of God's treatment of the animals, is, that it looks like partiality; for it is quite evident that no fish came into the ark, for what would be destruction to the rest of the brute creation would be life to them; but very probably fishes may have suffered in some other way. There may have been a slight alteration in the earth's axis; or some of its inner contents exploding may have destroyed fishes; for one knows, that when great forces are exploded in the sea, as I myself saw parts of the *Royal George*, exploded near the Isle of Wight by gunpowder, fishes are destroyed. And we may therefore conceive, though there is no record of it, that fishes were destroyed by some shock that convulsed the earth; and thus there would be impartial destruction dealt to all.

It may be asked, How could Noah entice the creatures to come into the ark? The answer is, that the same God who brought them to Adam to give them names, could make them come to Noah for this purpose. It may be asked, How could Noah keep

such a menagerie in order? The same power that told him to do all, enabled him to do all. But, observe, there was no excess of miraculous power; for obviously all that human means could do, was done; and then, Divine power did what human means could not do.

But I shall have another opportunity of looking at these subjects more minutely, if spared to another Sabbath.

CHAPTER VII.

NOAH, HIS FAMILY, AND THE LIVING CREATURES, ENTER THE ARK. THE BEGINNING, INCREASE, AND CONTINUANCE OF THE FLOOD.

WE read here of the arrival of that era of judgment which was pronounced, or rather, denounced by God himself, in the previous chapter; and upon this strong ground, that all flesh had so corrupted irretrievably, its way, that the day of mercy must close, the sun of privilege set, and "judgment must be laid to the line, and equity to the plumb line Judgment is God's strange work, but a work which will come, as sure and as soon as he has said that it will come.

First of all, God issues his invitation to Noah, to come himself and all his house into the ark, and upon this ground.—"For thee have I seen righteous teaching us a lesson that is very frequently inculcated in Scripture,—that the ruler's goodness bring down blessing upon his subjects; that the parent righteousness is a shelter so far, of a temporal king to those who are within his home. You observe,—and it is very remarkable,—that upon the very ground that Noah was righteous, his family was admitted into the ark. It is upon this ground that we, c

at least such of us as believe that infants ought to be baptized, think this sacrament, thus administered, to be justifiable; not condemning adult baptism, but defending infant baptism. Here is the fact, that upon the ground of the personal righteousness of Noah his children were admitted into that ark; and we think that upon the ground of the corresponding righteousness of the parent, the children may be admitted into the visible church; and we think too that such ground is strong, and that it justifies the practice, which we believe to be a scriptural and a right one.

And in the next place, we read that he took into the ark clean and unclean beasts. It has been asked, How was this distinction known previous to the institutions of Levi, in the Mosaic economy? Moses tells us what animals were clean, and what animals were unclean, that it might be known that the former were to be eaten, and the latter not. But how is it that, when no animals were used for food, the distinction is here made of clean and unclean? This is one of the corroborative proofs of the fact that I stated before,—that animal sacrifice was instituted in paradise. I have said that the probability was, that Adam and Eve were clothed in the skins of animals slain in sacrifice. And here it would appear that those animals were clean and unclean, not for food, but as fit and unfit for sacrifice. The distinction here is,—animals which were fit for sacrifice, and animals which were unfit for sacrifice. This distinction in the Mosaic economy, or the last more radical one is,—animals fit for food, and animals unfit for food.

You may notice another indication of deeper thought underlying the passage, namely, that the animals which went into the ark were taken by *sevens* of every clean beast, but by *twos* of every unclean beast. How is it now, that he took of the clean by sevens, that is, three pairs and one over, and that he took of the unclean simply by pairs? The answer, or at least the inference, must be, that the seventh clean animal was for Noah to offer up in the ark, in his daily sacrifice to God, in whom he believed, and through whom he looked for happiness and peace. I say, there is nothing in the narrative to show that the odd one was not for sacrifice; and it seems the more probable, when we remember that Abel worshipped by expiatory, or animal sacrifice, and that Adam did so, the moment that sin was introduced.

The flood, we are told, was to be forty days on the earth. "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights." It is singular that this number occurs so often in sacred history. The Ninevites had forty days respite; Moses and Elijah fasted forty days; Jesus was forty days in the wilderness,—as if there were some hidden meaning, or some reason for it, which we cannot penetrate.

Noah entered into the ark, and his wife, and his sons, and their wives, and the animals, and the flood broke out. God's judgment waited for the shelter of his own, and as soon as they were safe his judgments came.

Noah found that all the animals,—the beasts of the earth and the birds of the air,—forthwith obeyed

him. They recognized in him a portion of the ancient sovereignty with which man was first invested, and obeyed him as their king, discrowned in Adam, but to be crowned again in Christ.

It is recorded, that "all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered." Now, you are aware it has been a great dispute, not only amongst geologists who believe the Scriptures, but among the most enlightened Christian commentators, whether the deluge was universal or only partial; and many of those who are the most competent to pronounce an opinion, assert that the deluge was not universal, that there was no necessity for its being universal, and that a partial deluge, covering the limits of the population that was then on the earth, agrees with all that is here stated. I may mention that Dr. King, a minister of the Secession body in Glasgow; Hitchcock, the American divine and geologist, and others, very eminent for their piety, as well as for their scientific knowledge, all hold that the deluge was not universal. Well, I must say that I would go with them if I could, but it does seem to me that the language of Scripture is so strong, that in holding this interpretation I should seem to myself to be making Scripture dovetail with science; and I would rather wait for more light and more information before I adopted it. The argument of Dr. King on this passage,—“all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered,” is, that the “all” there, is used in Scripture often in a limited sense. Thus, “all countries came to Egypt for corn.” That cannot mean that all the countries of the earth came when Joseph was raised to power,

but, some of many countries. And so it says that all the cattle of Egypt died in the plague; and yet there is the record that some cattle still survived in Egypt. He thinks, therefore, that "all" is used in a restricted and limited sense, and need not be taken to be "all" in a strict, or absolute sense; and he thinks that this satisfies the Scripture narrative. But there are certain considerations that seem to indicate the reverse of this. There are certainly difficulties on either side. One I may state. Animals, we find, are acclimated; that is, the animals belonging to Africa will not live here; animals living in New Zealand cannot be acclimated here. Every country has its own races and peculiarities of animals; so that they all live and die there, and do not migrate to different countries, in different latitudes, and possessing different features. Objectors say, naturally, When all the animals were collected and let out, how did particular animals find their way from Ararat to the plains of America, or other distant parts? We know, they say, that your answer is, It was a miracle; but one does not wish to account for anything by a miracle, if it be possible to account for it otherwise; for a miracle is God's strange work, not his every-day work. Another difficulty is this: the mammiferæ alone amount to 700 species, including elephants and other animals of vast size, and they think it impossible that two of each could have been contained in an ark even of so vast dimensions as those of which we have shown the ark of Noah to have been; and therefore they say, that only a certain number of animals, covering a limited geographical section of the earth, were

collected; and that, consequently, the flood only covered a certain portion of the habitable globe. But we also ask, Why did Noah take birds into the ark at all? They could easily have stretched their wings, and found a resting-place on the parts of the earth uncovered with water. Or, why take in such birds as the raven and the dove, which are found in every country, and need not, consequently, have been thus specially preserved if the flood were not universal? And therefore, there would seem to be indications, from some of the birds taken into the ark, that the deluge was universal, and that these birds would have become extinct unless they had been preserved in the ark. The language, too, is very strong:—"All the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered." And besides, Ararat, which is some 16,000 or 17,000 feet above the level of the sea, was evidently covered, because the ark rested from the subsiding sea upon its summit. And if it rose to the height of 17,000 feet, it is not very much to believe that it covered the snowy mountains of India, which are 28,000 feet above the level of the sea. At any rate, there is evidence that it covered one of the highest mountains; and the natural inference is, that it covered the rest of the mountains of the earth. And therefore, if there be reasons for thinking that it was not universal, we are not without reasons for believing that it was universal. And the strong language of Peter, when he says, "The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished;" and his comparing with that perishing the process to which it shall be subjected, when it shall be dissolved by fire,—would lead any person who is not biassed by geological

discoveries and physical difficulties to say, that the plain meaning of the history of the deluge is, that it was universal. The existing change in climate, and change in a thousand things, that then took place all over the earth, indicate that the deluge made some vast alteration in the physical condition of our globe, in the air which we breathe, and the exterior geography of the earth. This seems to be the opinion that many have formed, who have looked deeply into the subject. At the same time, I think it is quite right to admit, that all those references to it that you have seen in books, affecting to prove that the deluge was here and there, by the appearance of certain debris, or detritus, or drift, as it is called, have all turned out, on maturer information, not to be correct. I do not know that there is a single physical trace on the surface of the globe to show that the deluge has been. There is nothing to disprove it, or to show its impossibility; but there is nothing on the face of the globe to prove it. The drift, as it is called, on the surface of the earth, seems to be connected with great prior epochs; it does not seem to have anything to do with the flood of Noah. But because there are no physical traces upon the earth of the flood, it does not therefore disprove it. We have the simple history that it was. And, unless this flood really burst the earth into fragments, of which we have no evidence, I do not see that it could have left any traces. Let a very great flood come and cover the earth, and for a year or two you will see the mud and the deposit; but in a few years it will all have dried up and be covered with verdure, where the cataract had previously rushed along. And, unless

the flood was some violent rending into fragments of the earth, we have no reason to expect that there would be left any great surface manifestations of it. If there was a gradual rising and subsiding of the water (and we can calculate that it rose about 186 feet per day, and subsided at the rate of 100 feet a day, which would prove a very gradual increase, and gradual subsidence), then there is nothing to show that there should be expected still, any physical traces of it. There is plenty of collateral proof of it to be derived from the traditions of the heathen. There is not a heathen nation, ancient or modern, that has not some account of a deluge. Every schoolboy, acquainted with Ovid, and with the Greek and Latin poets, knows how many allusions there are to the flood that overflowed the earth.

To a Christian who believes the Scriptures, their testimony is enough. One wants only to adduce such facts in order to endeavour to satisfy minds of a sceptical and doubting turn. I only ask you to read farther, and particularly to peruse what Hitchcock has written upon the subject. He believes that the deluge was not universal. You can read his reasons, which are perfectly consistent with true piety, though not satisfactory to me; and you can come to that conclusion which seems to be best borne out by fact, and fair interpretation of the sacred record.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WATERS ASSUAGE. THE ARK RESTS ON ARARAT. A RAVEN AND DOVE SENT OUT. NOAH, BEING COMMANDED, GOES FORTH OF THE ARK, BUILDS AN ALTAR, AND OFFERS SACRIFICE; WHICH GOD ACCEPTS, AND PROMISES TO CURSE THE EARTH NO MORE.

God promised of old to his people, what he performs still in the experience of his saints, "I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee." The fulfilment of this promise is registered in these words, "And God remembered Noah"—the head of that dynasty with which he was associated; but it shows that God's regards are over all his creatures. He remembered also "every living thing," from the eagle perched upon the highest point inside the ark, down to the meanest reptile that crept upon its floor. "God remembered Noah, and every living thing."

We read, that he "made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged." God might have said, "Let the waters be instantly absorbed," and it would have been done; but every one must be struck with the fact, who reads the Bible, that where means are available, as usually they have been so, God always employs the available means to accomplish given results. In other words, there is no

profusion or prodigality of miraculous interference in the Word of God. If you read the miracles said to have been achieved by the saints of the Romish Church, it will strike you that miracles seem to be their ordinary element, their very breath, their very life—there is profusion, prodigality, miraculous exuberance. But when you read God's holy Word, you must be struck with the fact, that there never is an interposition of Almighty Power suspending any one ordinary law, unless there be a necessity absolute and complete for it.

Then, in the third verse, we are told, "The waters returned from off the earth continually." It is in the Hebrew, "They added to return to return;" that is, there was a gradual subsiding. "And after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated, and the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat." Now this mountain of Ararat is at least, according to the statements of the most recent visitors, 17,000 feet in height; that is to say, rather more than three times the height of the highest mountain in Scotland. Well, then, if the waters of the flood rose to such a height that they covered its summit, and by subsiding, enabled the ark to rest quietly upon that summit, I cannot see how it is possible to escape the conclusion, which Hitchcock in his work on Geology denies, however, that the waters did cover the whole habitable globe, round and round. The assertions of Scripture are so broad and so strong, that I cannot see how to escape their force. And then, the language is repeated: "abated from off the earth,"—"the waters prevailed upon the

earth." Now, let any honest, impartial reader of this chapter say what would be the impression upon his mind; and I am sure it would be, that the flood there described was universal. And, as I stated before, if the flood was not universal, if it was topical, why did Noah take into the ark creatures found in every climate of the earth? For instance, the raven, I believe, exists almost everywhere; the dove certainly is found in eastern, western, northern, and southern latitudes. What was the use of preserving a bird that must have lived everywhere? And, when the dove went out of the ark, why did she return to it? If you let out a dove between this and Boulogne, you will find that it will fly to the nearest dry land, probably to its own dovecote, as carrier-pigeons, it is well known, do. If this flood had not been universal, when the dove was let out, with its immense rapidity of wing it would have soon reached that part of the globe that was not covered by the flood; but she "found no rest for the sole of her foot:" and the presumption, therefore, is, that the whole face of the earth was covered by this deluge.

Noah, when he rested upon the mountain,—and what comfort must it have been to feel the solid ground beneath his feet, which he, no doubt, thought at first was a rock; but a little waiting, which we often need, convinced him that it was a rest,—sent forth a raven, which, it is said, "went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth." You ask, How do you account for this? I answer, The raven, being a bird which feeds upon flesh and carrion, must have found plenty of food floating on the waters; and it could have found sufficient rest

on the bodies of dead animals: for any one may have seen a carrion crow standing on a dead animal carried down a mountain stream. It is thus apparent that the raven could have found food of the coarsest kind, everywhere and anywhere; and one can easily understand how a carnivorous bird must have found something to feed upon, and to rest upon, on the waters of the deluge. But when he sent forth the dove, which feeds upon seeds and vegetable matter, it was obliged to return. This is perfectly literal, and shows at once what was Noah's reason for sending forth this dove. It "found no rest for the sole of its foot, and returned." But the second time it was sent forth, it returned with an olive leaf, which showed that the waters had very materially subsided.

They had been subsiding for 150 days when the ark rested on Ararat. Now we know that this mountain is 17,000 feet high,—its crags being covered with perpetual snow; but we know that the olive grows in much lower and warmer climes, and therefore, the evidence of the olive branch was, that the water must have been within a few feet or yards of the ground.

And you will notice, too, the interesting fact, that they waited always seven days. This is an indirect indication of the observance of the Sabbath still. It was always upon the Sabbath that he sent forth the experimental voyager upon its wing, to ascertain whether the waters had subsided. How ancient is the Sabbath! It is not a Jewish ordinance, it is an institution for all humanity; it is the resting day of the weary, the refreshment day of the spiritually thirsty and

hungry—a blessing to all; the extinction of which would be an irreparable calamity, not to Christians only, for they could find a Sabbath in their hearts, because the God of the Sabbath is there; but it would be an irreparable calamity to all the rest of mankind, who would find seven days' work exacted for six days' wages, or no more than they receive now for their labour of six days.

We read, that the waters completely dried up, and God told Noah, "Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth,"—all which language indicates the universality of the deluge. "And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark." Then Noah built an altar, and the Lord was pleased with his offering, and said, "I will not again curse the ground any more." It ought to be, "I will not add to curse the ground," which is the strict rendering of the Hebrew, and means, I will not inflict an additional curse upon it. And, therefore, we have the earth, and the air, and water of the globe exactly the same now as they were immediately after the deluge. And then, the word "for," which occurs immediately afterwards, and seems illative in our translation, ought to be "though." "And the Lord

smelled a sweet savour;" that is the use of language appropriate to man, used in reference to Deity—"and the Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; *though* the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." He saw that it was so before the flood; he saw that the heart was not changed by the flood. And this is "the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us." The flood found man's heart wicked when it came, and left it so when it departed; and so it is with that heart which is brought to the font. Baptism with water does not change the heart: the true baptism is that baptism of the Holy Spirit which gives the answer of a good conscience toward God. "Neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done;" that is, with a flood of water. "While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

These last ordinances of summer and winter, and seed-time and harvest, still remain. The decree that fixed them four thousand years ago, still lasts; and in their stated recurrence the Christian sees that God's word is the real law of nature, and that what philosophers too often quote as the characteristics of matter, which must continue to the end as they were in the beginning, are the simple decrees of God, which He may repeal or alter at any moment. Nature hangs on the will of God. The long chain of causes and consequences which we see, is fixed to a staple which is fastened to the throne of God. Let us never so far forget these truths as to place creation in the

room of the Creator, or creation's laws in the stead of the Word of God

Let us also feel truly thankful, while deeply humbled, that, notwithstanding man's depravity and unthankfulness, God still maintains His decree, and gives us, in His mercy, "seed-time and harvest."

He will do so till His dispensation ends, and a new and better genesis passes over creation

CHAPTER IX.

GOD BLESSES NOAH. ANIMAL FOOD ALLOWED. PUNISHMENT OF DEATH.

THERE is addressed to Noah, in this chapter, a very needful encouragement against the possible or the feared rising of the beasts of the earth to destroy so small, and, in their infant circumstances, so helpless a community. When Adam was created, all the beasts of the earth were brought to him, and he called them by their names, and thus gave proof that his government over them was plainly a government of love; but after the fall, man, endowed still with some remains of his pristine sovereignty, had to control and govern the animals by skill or by power, and so defend himself from their assaults. The beasts of the earth are now under a new feeling in reference to man. Once they revered Adam because they loved him; now they flee from Adam, or, changing the word, from Noah, because they fear him.

The very fact, therefore, that the beasts of the field, even the most formidable of them, unless under the pinching feelings of intolerable hunger, shrink from man, is just a remaining memorial of this covenant made with Noah, as real as is the rainbow that spans the sky, and silently promises there shall not be

another flood. And it is a very striking fact, that man, whose physical strength is the least, comparatively, should present so formidable an aspect to the beasts of the field. So much is this felt, that it has been said that the lion will shrink from that man who has the nerve, physical and moral, to look him directly in the face,—the eye not retreating or wincing;—that, in short, the lion feels what God imprinted at the flood, and shows this by shrinking from man, because the fear of man and the dread of man is upon him by the very constitution of God.

We read in the next place of the permission to eat animal food. It is not an injunction, it is simply a permission to do so; yet even here there is an exception made, that man should not eat the blood of the animals he destroys for food. There are various reasons for this. One is what God asserts, that the blood is the life of the animal; and I may add, the celebrated John Hunter—the most distinguished physiologist of his day, and whose discoveries, so far as I am able to ascertain from persons who are better acquainted with the subject than I can pretend to be, are still deferred to—says that the blood in the human body is quite different from any other material substance of or in it; that it is itself a vital fluid; and so far, it would appear that the discovery of science in the nineteenth century is just an illustration of the statement of God four thousand years before, that “the blood is the life.” But it may be asked, Why apply this restriction to the animals, the beasts of the earth? Partly to prevent creating savage, cruel, or, if I may use the expression, sanguinary feelings in the human creature; but no doubt it must have

been forbidden mainly because of the particular use to which the blood was to be turned under the ancient, but then subsequent, Levitical economy. In the 17th chapter of Leviticus, and at the 10th verse, there is the following law,—“And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood.” That is one reason, and the reason given to Noah. But now here is the special reason; and recollect this institution was made four hundred years after the permission given to Noah—“And I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood.” It was, therefore, partly on account of the physical fact to which I have alluded, but mainly, I believe, because of the sacred and expiatory purposes to which the blood of the animals was turned, that this injunction was given to Noah, and continued, with fresh sanctions, under the Levitical economy. And the injunction in the Acts of the Apostles to “abstain from things strangled, and from blood,” I hold to be partly temporary. As far as physical reasons are concerned, it is obligatory from the nature of things; but as far as the moral uses of the blood are involved, that restriction is now withdrawn. It was given under the last remains of the Jewish economy, just to prevent the Gentile giving offence to the Jew; and

in order that, as far as possible, Christians should become all things to all men in order to save souls. But I do not believe that there is any moral obligation resting upon us in connexion with it now. I do not believe that there is any absolute moral law, or moral reason, strictly preventing this practice. On physical grounds, and other grounds not purely religious, you may act upon this injunction or not, at your own discretion.

There occurs in this chapter a very solemn injunction in reference to man. Let us mark what God said here. He first encouraged man against the possible violence of the brute creation; but man's experience of man before the flood, when violence governed the earth, and bloodshed was the stain of every day, taught Noah that he had not only the beasts to fear, but, more formidable by far, that he had to fear his own kin,—his own race and family. And, therefore, God here arms man against the violence of man, and shows, by attaching its dread penalty, in what abhorrence he held the crime of murder. Now, I made the remark in expounding one of the miracles, that what is called capital punishment may justly be inflicted for the crime of murder, according to the Scriptures. I do not see any evidence that capital punishment should be inflicted for any crime but that of murder—basing my views, not upon any legal grounds of expediency, but simply upon Scripture. I find I was found fault with because I said that this passage sanctioned capital punishment; and it was said in the public papers I refer to, that I felt pleasure in advocating that opinion. Such is not the fact. I would rather

there were neither capital punishment nor crime. I am here, however, as the interpreter of God's Word; and it is my duty, as I trust it is my delight, to ascertain, as far as God may enable me, what is here, and what is right by finding it here, and to leave others to adjust the expediency or in expediency of specific measures. Now, I cannot, as an honest reader of this passage, come to any other conclusion than that the 5th and 6th verses of this chapter do positively sanction the penalty of death, as the just and legitimate penalty for murder—"Surely your blood of your lives will I require." That is a very remarkable expression. "The blood of your lives," as if all lives constituted one vast community, and as if the man who took the life of a brother, took away his own—as if murder was also almost suicide,—the language is strikingly expressive. In other words it means, that man cannot injure a fellow-man without the injury rebounding and injuring himself. "Your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it;" that is, that the beast which destroys a man shall be put to death. It is not the fear of hydrophobia that makes the owner destroy a dog that has bitten a man, but because there is an instinctive feeling of humanity, that if an animal kill a man, the first duty is to go out and destroy it. Whether this be a traditional remain, or an instinct in the human heart, I do not decide; but so it is. And God here says, that the brute, the lion, the tiger, the dog, the eagle, the vulture, that destroys a man—that beast, that bird, ought to be destroyed also.

He says, in the next place, "Whoso sheddeth

man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed : for in the image of God made he him." It was argued in the critical remarks to which I have already referred, that there is a new and totally different translation of this passage. Now, I have been at some trouble in searching out if this be the fact. I have read the Septuagint Greek version, and I have referred to the original, and have also perused a book by Cheever, an American divine, who has written with great talent upon this subject ; and the conclusion I have come to is, that the authorized translation is the most exact, strict, and accurate that can possibly be given. If rendered literally, it would be as follows—"He shedding man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." That, you perceive, is no substantial difference at all,—it is a distinction without a difference. And the only possible deviation, according to Michaelis, the very celebrated German commentator and critic, is, that it might be rendered, not "Whoso," but "Whatsoever sheddeth man's blood." And the reason he gives is, that thus God has comprehended, not simply man, but also the brutes of the field, by saying, "Whatsoever"—whether brutes or men—comprehending the previous text in these words—"sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his or its blood be shed."

But what is meant by the expression "require"? I answer, the idea is unquestionably that of punishment. I will give you one single illustration of it. In Genesis xlii. 22, you will find these words, "And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child"—that is, speaking of Joseph—"and ye would not hear? there-

fore, behold, also his blood is required;" that is, we shall be punished for having murdered him; and understanding evidently by that punishment, being put to death. And next I call your attention to another passage—Deuteronomy xviii. 19—"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will *require it of him*." This you will find explained in Acts iii. 22, 23—"For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you." Well, now, here is Peter's explanation of Deuteronomy—"And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that prophet"—alluding to the very words—"shall be destroyed from among the people." Here then you have the plainest evidence that the expression, "I will require it of him," means simply, "He shall be put to death for so doing."

But then, you ask, what is meant by the reason or expression, "For in the image of God made he him"? I have looked at the various commentaries upon the passage, and the result of all that I have read is just this, that the magistrate is the representative of God, and so far discharges the functions of God; and, therefore, being made officially in the image of God, and representing God, and wielding a part of His sovereignty deputed to him his earthly minister, he is the proper party to execute the punishment that God has pronounced. This is what it evidently contemplates; but I mean to turn your attention to it again, for the sake of some important relative questions; for I believe that there is growing up in this

day a feeling, which I think is very infidel in its tendency, that all government is merely a state convenience, founded on conventional expediency; and hence, loyalty, and love, and deference to the powers that be, wherever they are, is dissolving and passing away. Amongst other modern notions, a favourite topic is, that there ought to be no such thing as capital punishment, even for the crime of murder; the horrid abuse of this penalty in the past giving too plain occasion for this feeling. It is also very generally believed that punishment is to be inflicted in order that others may not do the same crime. That is a very low idea of this subject. The high view is, that the magistrate is God's minister for wrath, that he bears not the sword in vain, and that he executes the sentence that God has pronounced, not mainly because it will deter others—though that is a consideration—but because it is just and due and right in the sight of God. The sublime thoughts that the Bible gives of all the relationships, responsibilities, and duties of life, cannot be too much pondered, too deeply studied, especially in a time when men are averse to defer to the Bible, and are assigning self-security or self-interest as the only reason for acts that rest on grander foundations. I do not speak of the accompaniments of the execution of this awful sentence. I do not commit myself to anything connected with it, nor do I discuss it at all. I am here simply as the interpreter of a passage; and its meaning I must not hesitate to declare. I am just as certain that this is the true one, and the only one, as I am of any interpretation of any other passage of the Word of God.

CHAPTER X.

THE GENERATIONS OF NOAH. THE SONS OF JAPHETH; AND OF
HAM. SONS OF SHEM.

It seems to us a most unprofitable lesson to read a long catalogue of names, the very sounds of most of which are harsh to our ears, and the connexion and the importance of which we do not at first see. But we must recollect, that every portion of the Bible was not written that each man might be personally profited by the perusal of each section of it. Portions of the Scripture which are not personally instructive to us, are yet generally important and most useful. For instance, this catalogue now, which seems to us of no personal, practical value—at least not spiritually instructive—is of immense importance, as the means of our showing the unity of the family of mankind, the origin of their dispersion—still more minutely recorded in the chapter that follows—and the fact that all the earth was peopled, and its nations distributed, according to the sovereign purpose of Him who worketh all things according to the good pleasure of his own will.

The names of these nations, of course, have been, by the lapse of years and the change of languages, very much modified; but still, the traces of the

ancient divisions are discernible in the very sounds of modern names. Last Sabbath evening I showed you that Shem, and Ham, and Japheth were the three forefathers of the families of the earth, and that those distinctions which God made, and those special predictions which Noah uttered, have been strictly and exactly fulfilled to the very letter, downward to the present time.

There is a tradition,—I do not know of what value it is, and most traditions have a basis of truth, though themselves very distorted,—that Noah geographically divided the whole globe, and scattered the whole families of the earth according to the geographical sections that he, inspired by Divine wisdom, was pleased to chalk out. Some have said, How can it be that America has been peopled? But no one who casts a glance on that vast empire can fail to see that the inhabitants are essentially European; and you can see that Tartary, the opposite coast, or part of Asia, and the opposite part of America, are so near, that nothing can be so easy, or probable, as a transit from one to the other. And what is most remarkable, the geological strata contiguous to the coast of Asia, and the geological strata of the American coast opposite to it, are so identical, that the two seem to have been originally connected. And whether connected or not, we know that as soon as navigation had made any progress, storm, tempest, or wind might easily carry the seeds of a population across the sea from Asia to America. We find traces of ancient Asiatic languages amongst some of the natives of the back woods. And so much has been decided, and by none

more strikingly than Dr. Wiseman,—so much has been proved of the identity subsisting between the populations of Asia and the original populations of America, that there can be no doubt that the one is descended from the other, and that America has been filled by the same great law by which all the rest of the sections of the earth have been populated—by the descendants of Noah.

A very acute and able writer, (Bush,) in some remarks on this subject, gives a list, according to the best geographical information, of the scattering of the distant tribes. He gives first the descendants of Japheth, then the descendants of Ham, or Canaan, and then the descendants of Shem. (*See Bush on Genesis*, p. 168.)

He gives the whole of the descendants, as they have been geographically traced, each from one of the three great forefathers of the human race. And it is most remarkable, as I showed last Sunday evening, how strictly and exactly the predicted characteristics of the races have continued. You have the descendants of Shem in the Asiatics; you have in Japheth the father of the great European nations, or Saxon nations; you have again in Ham, or Canaan, the father of the African race. It is predicted that Japheth should dwell in the tents of Shem. Just ask who are the lords and masters of India; ask under whose sceptre all Asia, literally in some parts, substantially in all parts, at this moment bows. It is under British rule—it is under Saxon rule; it is the descendant of Japheth literally dwelling in the tents of Shem, as every sovereignty in India can at this moment tell you.

Again : you ask, in the next place, How is it fulfilled that God should enlarge Japheth,—the language of ceaseless progress, prosperity, and power? Now just listen to what newspapers, statesmen, all persons who speak on the subject, are constantly remarking. They say, the Saxon race seems to be the alone indomitable race, destined yet to overspread the earth, and subjugate all to its power, and leaven all, as we believe, with its religious principles. How is it that you find no race stands before them? The great empire of America is chiefly Saxon; for it is our descendants who are mainly there,—either ours or the Germans; and you will find that our own population are everywhere holding a position in the world almost unparalleled; and it should only be our prayer, in the language of the poet, that—

“Wheresoe’er Great Britain’s power is felt,
Mankind may feel her mercies too.”

Therefore, while I refer much to our enlightened religion, it is also true that God’s prediction respecting Japheth is at this moment being fulfilled, and that wherever the Saxon race is—I take them as the flower and the cream of the descendants of Japheth—there their empire is enlarged, their prosperity progressive, and the pledge of victory seems to precede their van wherever they locate themselves.

Again, if you take the descendants of Ham, or Canaan, what is their state? what has been done to put an end to slavery! This country has devoted millions for the purpose, out of the noblest of feelings; but what has been the result? I have been told that, notwithstanding all our efforts, as magna-

nimous as they are worthy of us, the poor African is yet the slave—literally the “bondsmen of bondsmen”—of Japheth and of Shem. We have slavery still existing, and no power, I believe, will root it out till the end—the judgment lies where God has laid it—till this dispensation shall be finished. We must sit and watch with deep and growing interest God’s open predictions fulfilling around us, and recognise his hand in them. I do not say that any prediction on God’s part justifies an act of ours against which there is a positive precept. The reverse is true. There has been a great deal of the most miserable nonsense talked upon this distinction; and to my amazement so distinguished a writer as D’Israeli, who has lately written the Life of Lord George Bentinck, the late eminent statesman, has actually said in that book—and I am surprised that nobody has exposed his errors—that the Jews did a meritorious act when they crucified the Lord of glory, and that they were justified in doing it, because God had predicted it. Now, the answer to that is not a metaphysical one, but simply to refer Mr. D’Israeli to the Acts of the Apostles, where Peter said—“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God”—stating God’s prophecy—“ye have taken, and by *wicked* hands have crucified and slain,” thus adding man’s guilt. According to D’Israeli, we must suppose, that because God has given a decree or a prophecy, it is our duty to try to fulfil it. It is not so, it is ours only to execute duties. On the same ground some persons persecute the Jews. The Popes in the middle ages used to extract their teeth, and still

more gladly to extract their money; and persons said that they were doing right, because God had predicted it. But God will fulfil his prophecies; it is ours to love our brother as ourselves, and to show lovingkindness unto all men. And so with regard to the descendants of Ham, men have kept them in slavery, and they have said—"It is predicted to be so." It is our duty to execute the precept, love one another; God will attend to his own sovereignty and his own government. Let us always keep this distinction before us—that we have nothing to do with trying to fulfil the prophecies; nor, if we do fulfil them, do we escape guilt, if guilt be in the act of the person who does fulfil them. Our business is to believe truths, and to obey precepts, and in all things to fear God, and do his commandments.

We do not overvalue, we undervalue this blessed book. What certain divines call bibliolatry is simply deference to God's holy Word; and their contemptuous abuse of it is *simply evinced* by the phrases they employ.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE LANGUAGE IN THE WORLD. THE BUILDING OF BABEL. THE CONFUSION OF TONGUES.

It appears from the statement made at the commencement of this chapter, what we should just have expected from the great age of the antediluvian patriarchs, that the whole earth was of one language. Language does not change so much in the course of the individual life, as by the succession of individuals, or of successive generations, in the current of which it alters in its idioms, its phrases, its pronunciation, and often in its whole character.

It is highly probable that this original language was the Hebrew; and one reason why it is concluded that it must have been so is, that all the names in the Book of Genesis, and the names especially prior to the Flood, are all significant in the Hebrew tongue, but have a significance and definite meaning in no other tongue whatever, and obviously are not translations. In fact, it has now been clearly established that there was one universal language, and that all existing languages are more or less offshoots from it. Those who have very closely investigated this subject, have universally come to this conclusion. I will read two or three extracts that I have

gathered. Humboldt, who is not at all partial to the Mosaic history, states, "However isolated all languages may at first appear; however singular their caprices and idioms, all have one analogy among them." Another very celebrated German linguist, and scarcely a believer in Christianity, states, "The universal affinity of languages is placed in so strong a light, that it must be considered by all as demonstrated. This does not appear explicable on any other hypothesis than that of admitting fragments of a primary language yet to exist through all the languages of the old and new world." Frederick Schlegel holds that speech was originally delivered to man by God. Herder asserts that men did not voluntarily change their language, but that they must have been rudely and violently divided from one another. And Sharon Turner, in a series of papers in the Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature, states that "The universal attraction and repulsion of languages, leaves no alternative in explaining them, save the adoption of some hypothesis similar to that declared in the Mosaic records." And Niebuhr says, "They who deny these, and go back to a single pair, must, to account for idioms different in the structure of languages, suppose a miracle, and adhere to the confusion of tongues." And Dr. Wiseman, in his Lectures on Science in Connexion with Revealed Religion,—a book of very great merit, and very great research,—makes the remark, that at length all linguists, the most sceptical and the most credulous, have come to one unanimous conclusion, that all languages have affinities enough in them to indicate a common origin, but they have differences

enough to show that some great dislocation occurred in their history. Now that is the conclusion, you observe, not simply of a few Christian inquirers, but of the most eminent students of languages, and of the most patient investigators: in fact, what the sceptic has made merry with as a fact discreditable to our Scripture, turns out to be a truth which we can prove by careful and patient induction; and so we see, in this as in other things, that every century, as it comes round, casts fresh light upon the Scriptures, and shows that the Bible is ahead of science a thousand years, and that never is science ahead of it. There is one illustration of this. If you take modern languages, you can almost always trace words more or less Hebraistic running through them. For instance, this tower was called Babel in consequence of the confusion of tongues. Now, the word in Latin for a stammerer is *balbus*; and the word in Greek for a barbarian is *βαρβαρος* (*barbaros*), but by substituting one liquid for another, which is a very common change in languages, we should have had *βαλβαλος* (*balbalos*), originating in Babel; and numerous other words may be traced up to this fountain, all coming forward as witnesses of this great fact. It seems to me, therefore, plain that all known languages may be reduced originally to one, and that their differences are to be accounted for only on the supposition of the great infraction of them recorded in this very chapter, and on this very occasion.

The words which are here used, "Go to," is a common expression, and means "Come"—"Come let us sing unto the Lord," that is, begin to do a thing.

It appears that they raised the high tower, in order that they might get a name, and lest they should be scattered. In looking at the fourth verse, the semicolon which is put after "heaven" ought to be after "name;" and then it runs thus: "Go to," or come, "let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven, and let us make us a name; lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The "lest we be scattered abroad" does not depend upon making a name, but building a tower whose top should reach unto heaven.

The expression, "the Lord came down," is simply an accommodation to the usages of man, and is classified with "God repented," &c. "And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them;" that is, no wickedness or depravity will be restrained from them.

I may notice, too, that the 6th and 7th verses are proposed by critics to be properly put within parentheses, and if so, you would see it would read better. "(And the Lord had said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.") The 5th verse, "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded," and the 8th, "So the Lord scattered them abroad," are the narrative; and then, these two verses, the 6th and 7th, are thrown in to explain the

origin of the reason of God interfering to scatter them.

The traces of this Tower of Babel are still existent, it is supposed by many travellers. I may read a very short extract which will show you that there are remains of it still existing. I copy it from some short notes on this chapter, by Bush, an American commentator, and who gives the following account of the remains of this tower:—"Accordingly, in the midst of that far-famed city" (Babylon), "as we learn from the Greek historians, there rose an enormous tower, dedicated to the god Belus, bearing on its summit his temple or sacellum. It was composed of eight square towers or stories, of successively diminishing size, piled one upon the other with an ascent of steps on the outside winding up to each tower, and of very ample breadth. By comparing together the two accounts of Herodotus and Strabo, we learn that each side of its base measured a stadium or furlong (500 feet) in length, and that it was also a stadium in height, which makes it considerably higher than the largest of the Egyptian pyramids, though standing upon a much narrower base. From the same authorities we learn that it stood in the midst of a court or enclosure which was two stadia square. The question, then, arises, whether a building of such vast bulk was the entire work of Nebuchadnezzar, after having previously removed the remains of the work of Nimrod; or whether it was or not, in reality, the original structure, repaired, and finished, and beautified. With Prideaux, and other sensible writers, we think there can be little doubt how we ought to

decide the point. As the original edifice was probably for the most part solid, such a vast mass of sun-dried and kiln-burnt bricks would not fall to decay, like a Grecian or Roman temple of modern masonry, nor would time render it incapable of being very effectually repaired. That it was so repaired there is the strongest reason to believe, and consequently that the tower described by Herodotus was not the original Tower of Babel here mentioned, but that tower re-edified from its ruins, and freshly adorned by Nebuchadnezzar. Whether any traces now remain of this prodigious structure, and if so, where they are to be sought for, is a question of somewhat difficult solution. Three distinct masses of ruin in the region of Babylon have been claimed by different writers as entitled to this distinction; viz. *Nimrod's Tower*, at Akkerkoof; the *Mujelibes*, about 950 yards east of the Euphrates, and five miles above the modern town of Hillah; and the *Birs Nemroud*, to the west of that river, and about six miles to the south-east of Hillah. Niebuhr, Porter, and Rosenmüller concur with the traditions of the country in fixing upon the latter as the probable site of this earliest great work of man. 'The Birs Nimrod,' says Mr. Rich, 'is a mound of an oblong form, the total circumference of which is 762 yards. At the eastern side it is cloven by a deep furrow, and is not more than fifty or sixty feet high: but on the western side it rises in a conical figure to the elevation of 198 feet, and on its summit is a solid pile of brick, 37 feet by 28 in breadth, diminishing in thickness to the top, which is broken and irregular, and rent by a large

fissure extending through a third of its height. The fire-burnt bricks have inscriptions on them, and so excellent is the cement, that it is nearly impossible to extract one whole. The other parts of the summits of this hill are occupied by immense fragments of brickwork of no determinate figure, tumbled together, and converted into solid vitrified masses, as if they had undergone the action of the fiercest fire.' In regard to this latter appearance Sir R. K. Porter has no doubt that the effect was produced by fire acting from above, and that it was probably lightning. The circumstance is remarkable in connexion with the tradition that the original tower of Babel was rent and overthrown by fire from heaven. At any rate it cannot now be seen without bringing to mind the emphatic prophecy of Jeremiah li. 25, 'I will stretch out my hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a *burnt mountain*.' It may be remarked that very striking testimonies to the event here recorded are to be found in several ancient profane authors. Josephus quotes from one of the Sibylline oracles the following words :—' When all mankind spoke the same language, some of them elevated a tower immensely high, as if they would ascend up into heaven ; but the gods sent a wind and overthrew the tower, and assigned to each a particular language ; and hence the city of Babylon derived its name.' Abydenus, as quoted by Eusebius, uses similar language :—' There are who relate, that the first men, born of the earth (giants), when they grew proud of their strength and stature, supposing that they were more excellent than the gods, wickedly attempted to build a tower where Babylon now stands. But the

work advancing towards heaven, was overthrown upon the builders by the gods, with the assistance of the winds : and the name Babylon was imposed upon the ruins. Till that period men were of one language ; but then the gods sent among them a diversity of tongues. And then commenced the war between Saturn and Titan.' Finally, Eupolemus as cited by Alexander Polyhister, affirms, ' That the city of Babylon was first built by giants who escaped from the flood ; that these giants built the most famous tower in all history ; and that the tower was dashed in pieces by the almighty power of God, and the giants dispersed and scattered over the face of the whole earth.' "

Thus then, if we take the remains of the languages as we now find them, we find common affinities, indicating a common origin, and testifying also to some great dislocation ; if we take next the geographical remains of Babel, as these are described by the historian and the traveller, we see these indicating the fact of there having been some great disaster produced, as Sir R. Ker Porter says, probably by lightning ;—if we next take the traditions among all nations, all converging to one point, we shall have the physical world, ethnography, physiology, and tradition, all concurring in pointing to this event, and showing that the original, the truth, the inspiration, is here ; and all nature throughout her varied provinces bears witness by pointing back to it that it is so.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TENT AND THE ALTAR. DIVINE MANIFESTATIONS. ABRAM'S SIN.

WE have here the first commencement of a selected or an elected Church commissioned to go forth and flourish in the midst of an alien world, surrounded by hostile elements, and in the face of a people that were from nature opposed to it. The promise is, that all the families of the earth should be blessed in Abram. The marching order is, "Go forth to a country which I will show thee;" and obedient to this, the message of his God, Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken to him, at once, and Lot went with him. Why Lot went with him it is difficult to say. There is some reason to believe, that Lot, through the instrumentality of Abram, was brought to see that evangelical light which had begun to dawn, though the subsequent career of Lot shows an affinity to the world, and an attachment to its profits and its sins, that would seem to indicate at least not great maturity, if, indeed, the reality of Christian character.

We read that he took with him, not only Lot, but the souls that he had gotten in Haran; that is, not his children by nature, but those whom his ministry

and efforts were blessed to—the souls that were his reward, and whom he had brought to the knowledge of the living and true God after his own conversion, and with whom he was called to go forth into a land that God would show him.

It is also added, “And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh.” That expression, “passed through,” might be rather translated, “sojourned in,” passed to and fro; that is, did not settle in any one spot, either to build a city, or to raise a permanent habitation.

It is added, “The Canaanite was then in the land.” This remark, of course, is made by Moses the historian, and it is meant by the contrast to show the earnestness and the intensity of Abram’s piety; that although the hateful Canaanite, hateful from what he morally and wickedly was, and from what he had made himself, was in the land, yet in spite of him and in the face of him, he erected an altar wherever he pitched a tent, and openly and fearlessly worshipped God.

And we read that when Abram had come into this land, the Lord appeared to him. There has been a great deal written upon these appearances of God, and the strong conclusion of most of those who have directed their attention to the subject, has been, that this was the Second Person of the glorious Trinity. It would be too long a matter to enter into the evidences of this, but to my mind they are irresistible, and they prove as strongly as any such point can be proved, that it was our Blessed Lord assuming the form of humanity before he was Incarnate, showing how truly his delights were with the children of men by

his thus anticipating his sojourn among them before the era appointed for his incarnation and death.

We read next, that Abram "removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east : and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord." Wherever the patriarch went, there he felt it alike his duty and his privilege to acknowledge the true and the living God. When the inhabitants of Shinar found a plain that seemed to them suitable for a permanent abode, they set about building a tower, that they blasphemously said would reach the heavens and defy God ; but Abram, under a better and a purer inspiration, wherever he went, thought of no resting-place for a permanency, for he pitched a tent, not built a house ; and he felt that wherever he pitched that tent, there he should raise an altar and worship God. What rebuke to some Christians, who have, not a tent as Abram had, but a house to live in, living amid greater light, and yet without the altar ! Wherever Abram's tent was pitched, there Abram's altar was raised. Wherever man is, there he should recognise God. And the sequel of this history proves that it was he whose tent and altar were never separated, whose happiness increased like a river ; and it was he, as we shall see in the sequel of this story, who went out with him, who pitched the tent, but omitted to raise the altar, who lost his family, and almost lost his soul.

We read in the 10th verse, that there was a famine in this land of Canaan. This seemed very unlike a land of promise ; it must have been very discouraging to Abram at first to find that the land he was

sent to with the idea that it was a land fit to live in, and, as the Israelites were told subsequently, overflowing with milk and honey, should yet be so barren, that the very first providential incident that he should meet with was a famine. And yet, he overcame by faith, and in spite of dark things, and in the absence of encouragements, he trusted in God; for in the language of the Apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews, he looked for a city that hath foundations. He had no desire to return back; for if he had, he might have returned; but he had a confidence in his God, and therefore a certainty that his destiny must be right. If we are sure that God is in all, controlling all, governing all, we may be sure that the issue must be what infinite wisdom will select, what infinite love will prescribe; and, therefore, confidence in God is the secret of all happiness, and the source of all peace. Just be persuaded that, not only God is, but that God acts; not only that there is a God in the world, but a God making all things work together for good to them that love him, and you have in that conviction a spring of inexhaustible peace. And, on the other hand, if you have the idea which, alas! some practically entertain, that God made the world, and set it a-going, and left it to make the best of its way; why, with such a conviction, one cannot have a moment's safety, or a moment's peace. It is just the absence of God from all our conclusions, our schemes, and our plans, that gives us disquiet and involves them in confusion; and it is the recognition of God—"Thou, God, seest me; and thou, God, art in this place, working out thine own grand purposes,"—

that enables one to brace oneself for duty, and to enter upon the path set before us, however dark, however clouded, however unpromising, knowing that the end will be glory to God and happiness to us.

We come, in the close of this chapter, to one of the darkest traits in the whole history of Abram,—his language to Pharaoh respecting Sarah. In the first place, I have to remark of it, that there is no such thing in the whole Bible as a perfect man, excepting the Man Christ Jesus; and perhaps it is well that it is so, in order that we should see that the finest specimens of humanity were flawed, that the most beautiful instances of Christian character were not perfect; alas! they have all imperfections, some of them great imperfections. But if the writer of this book had been an impostor, palming a book upon the world, as a gift from God, in order to aggrandize his country, as a Jew, and to make his characters appear in their brightest lights, like a dramatist, he would have kept all the discreditable shades in the background, he would have passed them by; and therefore the minute faithfulness with which the scriptural penmen record their own sins, and faults, and failings, is, to my mind, one of those latent, but irresistible proofs of the inspiration under which they wrote. And then, you will notice in the next place, when a human biographer describes a man, he constantly brings forward the bright spots in his character, and tries to tone down the darker ones; but when the penmen guided by the Holy Spirit wrote, they did not describe a profile, keeping one side of character in the clear

sunlight, and the dark side in the shade; but they describe man exactly as he is—Abraham as he was, David as he was, Peter as he was, and in no other way. If they pronounced eulogia on their sins, and tried to portray them as virtues, that would be a very different thing; but generally there is censure, and where there is no censure, there is the naked record; and as we read the record in the light of the holy law with which it is inseparably connected, we learn to condemn the sins that are in God's servants, making the sins beacons for us to avoid, and the graces efforts for us to imitate. And there is, as every one knows, a peculiar value in the records of the sins of great characters. Who does not know that the sand-banks in our channels are made less formidable by retaining the wrecks that have struck on them? A wreck sinks, and the top-mast only appears,—a buoy is put there to warn others of it. And so, these defects that appear in great characters, these incidental shipwrecks that are not fatal, or tending to the ultimate and irretrievable danger of the voyager in this momentous drama we call human life, are the buoys, the floating buoys, that warn us where the wreck is, and tell us where we may make a shipwreck far more disastrous than theirs.

I am not going to praise Abraham in this. The Roman Catholic can quote this to justify some of his morality, but by this plan he might quote Peter's denial of Jesus: it is not urged upon us as a precedent; there was truth in Abraham's words, untruth in Abraham's design. We have the simple fact that Abraham did tell the truth. He said that she was his sister, and so she was his step-sister; and so far

what he said was true. But it is a well-known fact that the *suppressio veri* is very often the *suggestio falsi*, that is, that the suppression of a part of the truth is often the suggestion of what is positively false. And though it be quite true that when Abram said that she was his sister, he spoke what was literally true; yet when he said, "She is my sister," it was meant to imply she is not my wife, and thus to enable him to escape from being killed by Pharaoh, should the monarch desire to have her. You see at once that he meant to convey to Pharaoh that she was not his wife; and therefore, there was falsehood in reality, and it was a defect in the father of the faithful. In order to see what Abraham thought of the act, I refer you to the 20th chapter of Genesis at the 11th verse, where Abraham says, "Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake." This was because an Eastern prince, if he saw one woman in the land more fair and beautiful than another, felt that it was one of the rights of sovereignty in ignorant and unenlightened lands to seize such; and here in this 20th chapter, at the 11th verse, we have Abraham's not defence, but statement of the facts of the case:—"Because I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place;" you observe the Christian character of the man—"and they will slay me for my wife's sake. And yet indeed she is my sister;—she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife." This is his own simple explanation of it; he does not justify it, but he puts you in possession of the facts, and leaves your verdict to be that which God's holy law plainly

suggests. And, it is singular, there are other incidents of this kind in the Bible, not stated in the way of justification. In Acts xxiii. 6, if I mistake not, there occurs an instance: "But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." That was true, but it was not the whole truth: he was more than a Pharisee, he was also a Christian, and an apostle; and candour seems to demand that he should have stated the whole truth respecting himself. These are incidents that occur to show how much there is to forgive in the best of men, how charitable we should be in reference to one another, and how thankful we should be that we have one, the Perfect Man, "God manifest in the flesh;" the model that rebukes, and the atonement that forgives.

But Abraham, I doubt not, found out, in God's goodness, not in his judgment, how absurd, how wicked, how imprudent to try by one evil to avoid another expected or feared or contingent. Abraham here acted from expediency. I believe that one of the most wretched doctrines of the day is what is called the doctrine of expediency,—an amazingly popular doctrine, and which, when carried into practice, is to look not at law or duty, but at what is expedient for the nonce. Now, it seems to me to be a law everlastingly just, that whatever is right is expedient, and that whatever is wrong never can be expedient, and that what seems to us the most expedient thing for the present, if not right will be found

in the issue to be the most inexpedient in all its issues. Now, what was Abraham's fear? He anticipated that the wretched caterers to the passions of the eastern monarch would come and seize his wife, who was then beautiful, although of the age of sixty years—human life lasting very long at that era, and only gradually shortening and degenerating—and he said, "When they see her," for whatever was their character, they revered marriage, "they will kill me in order that Pharaoh may have her as his wife." That was his fear. "Therefore, I will say, or hint, or imply, that she is not my wife, by saying she is my sister; and then I shall escape being killed." Well, Pharaoh took this Sarah, supposing her to be Abraham's sister, and unmarried. She was only in his house for a very short time, probably a few hours, when he came to know that he was about to live in the violation of a solemn compact. And when he discovered that she was Abraham's wife, one would have thought that he would have ordered the patriarch to be destroyed for acting thus deceitfully; but he gently remonstrated with Abraham, and that gentle remonstrance of a heathen king must have cut the heart of the patriarch to the very core. "Why did you say she was your sister? you did me injustice although you have deceived me. You anticipated real evil to your wife; but in bringing her back unharmed, is evidence that if you had told all, I should have treated you as I treat you now, with courtesy and kindness, and the greatest consideration." The evils that we fear are often imaginary, and when we take plans that are sinful to avoid those evils, we sometimes plunge into greater

ones; and at other times we learn that we were afraid where no fear was. Had Abraham told the exact facts of the case, he would have met with no less kindly and considerate treatment, and his character would not have been stained by a reproach which has been forgiven, but never will be, in this dispensation, forgotten.

Truth is real safety, falsehood is never so. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things will be added. All things will befriend the man who is the friend of God.

CHAPTER XIII.

RICHES NOT NECESSARILY SINFUL. SOCIALISM. EARLY SYMPATHIES. CHOICE OF LOT. PRINCIPLE. THE JEW.

WE have here one of those expressive and beautiful incidents that form lights, as it were, in the history of the past, enabling us to see the path of true prosperity ever to be the path of true and of Christian principle.

Abraham, or Abram, the first name by which he was known, was very rich. So far it is no sin to be rich; and hence, the notion that prevails in many parts of the continent of Europe, that war against the rich is a duty, is a most unchristian sentiment. There is no more merit in being poor, than there is sin in being rich. One may be very, very rich, and yet very Christian and very humble; and another may be very, very poor, and yet very proud and very unchristian. It is the man that lends weight and worth and tone to the circumstance; it is not the outer circumstance that makes or mars the man. A very mean heart may be adorned with a coronet, a very noble spirit may sweep a crossing. Abraham was rich; and yet Abraham, rich as he was, employed his riches to build an altar wherever he pitched a

tent, and showed, when a collision came between a brother, what a beautiful and Christian spirit actuated the father of the faithful.

Abraham was rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. The silver and the gold, of course, were not in currency. There is no reason to believe that the gold had been in the mint, and stamped into coins for currency: it was in the mass—in the ore; and it was substantial property. But cattle was the great sign of riches in ancient times; and in the case of Job—perhaps an older patriarch still, at least a cotemporary of Abraham—his cattle constituted the entirety of his property. We use the word pecuniary, derived from the nature of ancient wealth, to signify wealth—pecuniary circumstances. Now, the word pecuniary comes from the Latin word *pecunia*, and that word comes from another Latin word, *pecus*, which means "cattle;" and therefore, when we speak of "pecuniary circumstances," it is, literally translated, "cattle circumstances;" because cattle was money, and money was cattle, in ancient times; and whilst the substantial thing has changed, the name, as in many other cases, still remains.

Abram returned "to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there." In other words, he returned to the ancient church, for church it was, where first he had worshipped when he went forth a pilgrim and a stranger, not knowing whither he should go. And who does not know that the place where we ourselves have been baptized, around the walls of which

are the green and the hillôcked graves of our fathers, is the shrine of many a beautiful and holy recollection? And who does not feel, when he returns to that spot, however mean the fabric in the midst of it, however bare the graves of "God's acre," as the Germans call it, around it, it is yet suggestive of many a holy and many a sublime thought? Thus we can sympathize with Abram, when he returned, after many wanderings, to the first altar he built, and the first green knoll on which he bowed the knee and worshipped.

Lot went with him, also rich in cattle, and herds, and tents; but the land, it is said, was not able to bear them. They were dependent upon the soil for all their sustenance, and, of course, when they increased in numbers, the soil and the pasturage were not adequate to their cattle, nor the corn equal to their nourishment, there being then no foreign imports. This is one explanation; but it may have been, that it was not want of room, nor want of food, but want of temper, that made the land unable to bear them. Many a nation would have much greater harmony within and without if it had only much more temper. But we infer from several incidents that occurred, that Lot was a quarrelsome man; and a quarrelsome man is a far greater impediment to peace in a country, than any failure of its substantial productions in pasturage and in corn.

And hence, from this, or from some other cause, there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and of Lot's cattle. There is one most significant touch given in this record, which is exquisitely beautiful: "The Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled

then in the land." This seems a very dry remark in itself; but in connexion with the quarrel of the uncle and nephew, it is a very vivid one; because two Christian men were quarrelling about pasturage, and food, and cattle, while the Canaanite, the heathen, who hated them and their religion, just as the Pope does us—warming his hands at the contentious quarrels that we Protestants kindle—was then, as the Cardinal is now, in the land.

But when there arose a quarrel between the two who was it that ought to have given way? Abraham was the elder—he might have exacted deference; and Lot was the younger, it was, therefore, his duty to give way. But who first gave way? The man who always built an altar wherever he built a tent, was the man who gave way; and he who built no altar (for there is no record that he did) where he built a tent, was the party who stood up and fought, as he thought, most manfully for his rights.

The moment that Abram saw this, he said unto Lot, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." This single sentiment is the most beautiful commentary upon the text, "If any man will have thy cloak, let him have thy coat also." It is not the mere mechanical surrender of the coat to a man who takes your cloak, for that may be done without any Christian feeling at all that is true charity; but it is the subjection, and, if needs be, surrender, of our own

rights, that may really be so, in order to promote peace, and put an end to strife that is injurious to the gospel, and that can minister no good to the edifying of any. Now, Abraham, the greatest Christian, the senior, who might have exacted all, at once surrendered and gave up all, and showed at once the finest specimen of Christian principle and of Christian courtesy. What is courtesy? Just our giving up our own right, which we might exact, in order to oblige a brother, and giving it up, let us recollect, not to one whom we admire, or love, or think deserves such a sacrifice; but giving it up to one whom we see to be in the wrong, and who we know deserves no such sacrifice from us; forgetting and merging the minor feeling in the great result of doing good, and promoting peace among mankind.

Now, mark Lot's conduct. If Lot had had the courtesy and the Christian conduct of Abram; if he had been what he ought to have been, he would have been moved and subdued, and in prostrate humility have sunk to the earth before Abram, and have said, "This is too much, I did not expect it;" but he did not even thank him, so rude was he—for Christianity and courtesy are related; he did not give up the best part of the land, so grasping was he. In the words of the chapter, "Lot lifted up his eyes," not to thank Abram, not in thanks to God for giving him such an uncle and such a friend, but he "lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where,"—beautiful streams,— "before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose

him all the plain of Jordan ; and Lot journeyed east : and they separated themselves." What a selfish, unholy, uncourteous trait in the character of unhappy Lot ! He chose the plain of Jordan, for what reason ? Just because it was well watered. So we have people who, to get cheap things, would sacrifice truth and love and patriotism. He did not think, Shall I there have an opportunity of building an altar ? Shall I come into contact with good people, and good neighbours, and pious friends, and a faithful minister, a faithful patriarch, who will do me good, and my family good, and make us holy and happy together ? He put aside all thoughts about the main thing ; he thought only of the richest soil, the best trout streams, the green hedges, and the prospects of the most abundant harvests ; and was actuated by these alone, in spite of clear convictions that there was no fear of God in the midst of the land where these were—for it is added, that "the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly,—a remark thrown in to show that Lot knew it was so. In the face of all that, he resolved to pitch his tent there. Now these patriarchal men were just specimens of human nature in one phasis, and they have each his exact counterpart in human nature still. A man selects a house, or a district to live in, and he is never at the trouble to inquire, Is there a faithful minister near it ? Are there good people with whom I should like to be associated ? but the first thing that he looks at, is at the beautiful garden, and its convenience and comfort ; and he takes it, just as Lot took the land, because it is fertile and well watered, not because he has opportunities of

making himself wiser, and happier, and better. I do not say Lot's elements should not be entertained by us, but that they should not be supreme and guiding in all our doings. The right course is to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"—making religion the main, the guiding thing; and it is a fact, my dear friends, just as certain as that suns rise and set, if you do so, that "all other things shall be added." It is a law that all things illustrate, that if you set out to seek the world in order to gain it, you may lose it, and to a dead certainty you will lose your soul; but if you set out to save your soul, and to honour God, and to do his will, you will be astonished to see how every secondary thing will leap into its place, and contribute to your comfort. And what is true in the case of individuals, is true in the case of nations. Let nations seek first to do what is God's will, promote his glory, maintain his cause, and God will prosper them. Let them fight against him, and against his will and his cause, and God will not honour them. "Them that honour me, I will honour," has been illustrated from Abram and Lot downward to the present hour.

We find, in the next place, that God, even then, and on earth, honoured Abram for so doing; for the Lord appeared unto Abram, who had made so munificent a sacrifice, and said unto him, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." Abram had given up his temporal right, and God repeats to him the pledge of an eternal inheritance. He surrendered

the place that was well watered before the Lord, and God instantly comforts him by the sure pledge and prospect of a better land, a brighter city, and a more happy rest. And He says also, "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered." Now we believe that promise remains yet to be fulfilled. The Jew has a right to Canaan, and Canaan a right to the Jew; and that the strict language of this promise remains yet to be fulfilled. I cannot think that after God's using the words, "I will give it to thy seed for ever," we are to dilute them. God's promises rather go beyond what we conceive than come short; and, therefore, we believe the giving it to his seed for ever, denotes that God's ancient people will be re-constituted a holy nation, a peculiar people, a royal priesthood, in the midst of their own land. It cannot be surely for nothing that a Jew's heart still vibrates to Jerusalem as the needle does to the pole; that his magnetic pole is still Jerusalem; and that Jerusalem remains in the hands of many people and of many tribes; but tribes and people who are at war with themselves, and evidently in it only just as we put people in an empty house to keep it till the inhabitant enters, or till the rightful owner takes possession of it. And again, the investiture is here given to Abram, for God said, "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee;" that is, he gave him the investiture of it, showed it to him, and thus assured him that it was so.

What a beautiful chapter, now, is this we have

read! What a specimen of courtesy in Abraham's conduct! what a proof of Christian meekness! what evidence that when the heart is right in the sight of God, the life will be all courtesy in reference to mankind!

If we be Christ's, we are also Abraham's children, and heirs of the promises. O Lord, our heavenly Father, make us thy sons by adoption; and if sons, heirs—heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, through Jesus. May we look above all carnal, rational, and earthly elements, and seek communion with Thyself, and endeavour to see and estimate all as Thou dost. Amen.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANCIENT KINGS. WAR. INVASION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH.
THE ROMISH MASS. JEWISH TRANSLATION.

THOSE who are described as kings of different nations, were not similar to, or identified with, the kings of modern European nations. A king in those days was like a Highland chief, or an Arab shiek—the head of a clan, or band of followers, who were his subjects, and more than subjects—earnest friends, in virtue of the patriarchal arrangement. We are informed that war broke out among these nations one with another. Strange it is, that, after the judgments of the flood, God's past retributive dealings should be so utterly forgotten, and man's obligations to him should have so soon passed away from their minds, as to have left them at war with each other. But, as long as man is in a state of war with God, so long he will be found in a state of war with his fellows; and the only way to put an end to war in modern times, just as it was the only way in ancient times, is, not to beat the sword into the ploughshare, or the spear into the pruning-hook—not to destroy the army, or to burn the navy, or annihilate weapons of war; but to spread those divine principles of truth, and love, and joy, which, like seeds cast into a nation's heart, will grow up into harvests of lasting and real

peace. War originated in the ambition of princes, and in the restlessness of the people; and the issue of it was, what it always is, and has been, where not warranted—disaster and misery.

We read, next, of the invasion of Sodom and Gomorrah. Sodom and Gomorrah, we gather from a previous chapter, were two prosperous commercial capitals. You recollect that Lot chose the plain of Sodom because it was well watered, fruitful in its soil, numerous streams to turn the busy mill-wheels, as they swept onward to the ocean; and he selected it, not on account of its religion, but its commercial advantages and its agricultural value. Those kings could see the same advantages that Lot saw; and they resolved to make war upon Sodom and Gomorrah for the sake of the precious spoils that they contained. We find that Lot was in the midst of Sodom. He chose it, in spite of its wickedness, because of its riches; and the issue of a choice made in the face of the will of God was, that he lost his religion and lost his property and capital together. He is an illustration of that maxim by contrast, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added." Reverse that—seek the other things first, and the kingdom of God next, and the probability is, that you will lose both. Lot went there with his capital to make more, and he lost his labour, lost his property, and, in addition, grieved and vexed his God, and became a captive amid the heathen nations.

Now, mark the generosity of Abraham on this occasion. Just recollect what Lot had done when there was a quarrel between Abraham's herdsmen

and Lot's herdsmen. The senior, that is, the uncle, Abraham, who might have made his choice, gave way; and, with exquisite courtesy, as well as Christian principle, said to Lot, "Let there be no quarrel between us: if you will go to the right, I will go to the left; if you will go to the left, I will go to the right—take your choice: only let us have peace, at the sacrifice of any preference, while it is not at the sacrifice of vital principle." Lot did not defer to Abraham as he ought to have done, subdued by his great kindness; but he instantly snatched at the advantage, seized the offer, turned to Sodom and Gomorrah, entered into this capital, because the plains were well watered, and the place was prosperous in his sight. Abraham, when he heard that Lot was taken captive, might have said, "He made his bed, and he may lie in it: he took the choice, and he must take the consequences of it; he went to Sodom against what right principle dictated—let him now reap the bitter fruits of what he has done." That was man's way, but that was not Abraham's way; for the instant he heard that his ungrateful nephew, Lot, was taken captive, that instant, unsolicited, and forgetful of his past conduct, he determined, at all hazards, to rescue him. He summoned together the patriarchal militia, according to his own taste, and in his own way, there being then no opposition or other parliamentary obstruction, and marched three hundred, that being the whole force he could gather together, in order that he might rescue his ungrateful nephew, Lot, from the hands of the Canaanites, and those who had taken him captive. Now, some would say that Abraham

ought not to have done so—that he ought to have tried, first, diplomatic arrangements—protocols—with these Canaanite nations; but these Canaanite nations would have struck first, and diplomatised afterwards. And if Abraham had done so, he would have lost the magnanimous memorial that he has left in the sequel. War was warranted by the circumstances; it was in one sense aggressive, and yet in another respect it was justifiable. Savages had taken his nephew, and he was bound to deal with those savages just as one would deal with wild beasts—do the best he could to rescue a precious life from their fangs. And the very instincts of nature, instead of being outraged, all concur in saying that there was nothing unjustifiable or improper in Abraham's snatching the means that were within his reach, and rescuing his nephew, Lot, who had been taken from him.

We have an authority and message from God himself, justifying, in this respect, the conduct of Abraham. In Isaiah we read, "Who raised up the righteous man"—that is, Abraham—"from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made him rule over kings? He gave them as the dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow. He pursued them, and passed safely, even by the way that he had not gone with his feet." Thus, by the mouth of Isaiah, God justifies the conduct of Abraham on this occasion. We then draw this inference—that all war is not essentially unchristian, in reference to nations, when their privileges are assailed by the aggressor on the one hand, or their blessings are threatened to be snatched away by the invader on the other hand. War itself is deeply to be

deplored—generally, to be deprecated; it is the fruit of sin; it is the shame of humanity. But we see from God's Word that there are crises when a nation may justly arm to vindicate its rights that are trodden down, or to repel the foe that would steal those rights or privileges from its possession. Of course, such a solemn thing as war needs to be deeply pondered—it ought to be truly justified in the sight of God as well as in the sight of man; but it is altogether an outrage, I think, upon common sense, as well as upon the Word of God, to allege, as many do allege, that it is impossible to be a Christian and yet be a soldier; and that no Christian ever walks the quarter-deck. On this subject there is a fact which is better than a thousand arguments, and it is this: I am satisfied that as warm Christian hearts as ever beat are under blue jackets, and that many of our most pious men are soldiers. This is matter of fact, and being matter of fact it confutes the statement, that a soldier or a sailor cannot be a Christian. There are in these professions Christian men, as there are in any other profession upon earth; and if war be bad—and it is bad in itself, and to be very much deplored—yet I very much doubt whether there may not be worse and more demoniacal disputes carried on in lawyers' offices than are settled on the battle-field: the mode of conflict may differ, but the spirit of it may be worse in the latter case.

Having noticed the account of the war upon Sodom, and the captivity of Lot, I call your attention to a very remarkable passage in this chapter: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he

blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram." I have looked into three well-known translations of the Word of God last week. The first I looked into is the Douay translation of the Old Testament Scriptures; and on examining this passage in the Douay translation, which is a translation from a translation of the Latin of Jerome, a father who translated the Scriptures in the fourth century, and which is authorized and employed in the Roman Catholic Church, I found that the eighteenth verse was thus translated; and I wish you to notice it: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: *for* he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram;" and then the note given in the index on this chapter is this: "Here we have the figure and the type of the mass. Melchizedek being a high priest, did a priestly act in bringing forth bread and wine, and offering up the bread and wine as a sacrifice to God." Now in our translation it is, "Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: *and* he was the priest of the most high God." In the Douay translation it is implied that the bringing forth bread and wine was a priestly act; in our translation it is implied that the bringing forth bread and wine was a hospitable act—a refreshment to a weary and way-worn warrior. Our translation is justified by the Hebrew; the Romish is not. To be certain, I purchased a new translation recently issued under the authority of the chief rabbi of the synagogue in this capital. This translation is by one of the first Hebrew scholars of the day, and is the authorized translation of the Jewish synagogue, and used now, I believe, by every Jew. I must say, that

in every passage that I have read, it justifies our translation, and in many points it exceeds our translation in beauty and in accuracy. In this passage it is translated exactly as we have it: "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: *and* he was the priest of the most high God,"—not *for*. If it had been *for*, it would have justified the Romish, and implied that the bringing forth the bread and wine was a priestly act. And therefore the Jew, who understands his own language, of course, better than anybody else, justifies our translation. I give you an idea of the beauty of this translation, and its value as a Jewish one. I will read to you the first few verses of Genesis, which I read that you may see how faithful is our translation, and yet how very beautiful is this. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. But the earth was desolate and void. And darkness was upon the face of the murmuring deep"—(that is most accurate, and very poetical). "And the Spirit of God"—a capital S is used—"and the Spirit of God was hovering upon the face of the waters;"—that is much more correct than our translation. It implies that the Spirit of God was fluttering like a dove, as I told you before, upon the face of the waters. The Jewish translation is, "The Spirit of God was hovering." "And God said, Let there be light: and light was. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And it was evening and morning, one day. And God said, Be there an expanse in the midst of the waters, and

let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the expanse, and divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse, and it was so. And God called the expanse heaven. And it was evening and morning, a second day," or, as we translate it, "the evening and the morning were the second day." I would just wish to turn your attention to the fourteenth verse of the third chapter, where you will see that our translation is justified by this one. "And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me. And the eternal God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field. Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. And I will set enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; *it*,"—the seed, not the woman,—"*it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" It is thus that in those passages where disputes have arisen about the accuracy of our version, the Jewish translation justifies our own. There is here no type, or hint, or prophecy of the sacrifice of the mass; and I may give another reason for it, namely, that in the Latin Vulgate, from which that translation which Jerome made is taken, the Latin translation is, "And Melchizedek king of Salem *protulit panem et vinum.*" Now, if it had been intended to convey the idea or type of the mass, the verb would have been different, namely, *obtulit*; but it is not. It is *panem et vinum protulit*, which means that he brought forth from his house bread and wine, the refreshment to the weary warrior Abraham; and then

he says, "He blessed him. Blessed be Abram of the most high God."

Our translation, with all its faults, is the nearest possible to a miracle. It is most faithful; and not the least decisive proof that it is so, is the continuous approximation of the Romish version to ours, not in meaning only, but also in words.

CHAPTER XV.

ABRAHAM'S VISION. HIS DOUBT. HIS DESCENDANTS. SACRIFICE. THE PATRIARCH'S DEEP SLEEP. APPARENT CONTRADICTION.

God here introduces himself to Abraham, the father of the faithful, and his own obedient and believing servant, in a vision. God, who "at sundry times," says the apostle, in the patriarchal, the Levitical, and prophetic dispensations, and in "divers manners," by dreams, by visions, spake to our fathers, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son; so that we are to look for God's will, manifested to us, no more in visions, or in dreams, but only in the written page of his own holy word. It is final and complete.

He had given Abraham the promise that his children should be countless as the sands by the sea shore, and that a great and illustrious family should spring from him. Abraham, not doubting the fact, but not seeing how that fact could come to pass, hesitated and queried, as is often the case with us; for we, too, believe that a thing will be, but we stagger because we cannot see how the thing will be, whereas we ought to feel, what Abraham ought to have felt—for, believer as he was, he was not a perfect

believer,—that the God who has promised the result, will in his own way, in his own time, and by his own instrument, accomplish that result.

The reason that made him ask the question, How? was, that he had no heir, no son born to him, and there was only Eliezer of Damascus, whom he might adopt, and thus, through an adopted son, and not from his own, literally might spring that family that should be countless as the sand on the sea shore, and the stars in the firmament. This word Eliezer, I pause to observe, is the original form of the name which we call Lazarus; and I do think, that in the beautiful and instructive parable of Lazarus and the rich man, which I have elsewhere explained, there is something like an allusion to the incident and the name recorded in this chapter. This Eliezer, the steward in Abraham's house,—born in his house, not an imported slave, but born in it,—was an especial favourite with the patriarch, raised to a high position, exercised great influence in his household, and occupied a prominent place; and therefore there may have been an under-current, if I may use the phrase, of allusion to Eliezer in Abraham's house, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, especially when we read that Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom—a yet closer, though kindred relation, than that which we read Eliezer or Lazarus occupied as steward in Abraham's house. I do not mean that it proves any doctrinal or practical truth; all it shows is the unity of Holy Scripture, and the authenticity and genuineness, so far at least, of its records.

God's promise to Abraham is then made in much more explicit terms:—"And he brought him forth

abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." If one were introduced for the first time, in a frosty night, to a starry sky, and if one were never to see it again, I think that the splendour of so magnificent and majestic a vision would never be forgotten. I know nothing more beautiful, nothing more grand, nothing that seems to set forth in more bold and brilliant colours, the greatness, and the majesty, and the providential presence of Deity, than the starry sky, when those sentinel stars which we see, and which are but the outposts of the vast army encamped in infinite plains, come forth to give only an idea of the yet greater, and brighter, and more multitudinous hosts that lie and repose beyond, waiting for, and ever obedient to, God's behests. Abraham was now brought forth, and bidden to gaze upon this magnificent and glorious sky, and then he was assured that those stars that he saw were for a pledge of the number of his descendants. After all, the number of stars that we see is not so very great, and, therefore, it is not an absurdity, as some have alleged, that his children should be countless as the stars. Probably the stars in the firmament are the nearest in approach to the infinite in number, because we cannot conceive any space in which there are not some bodies, and some created things; we believe that there are no empty chambers in the universe—that no space is left desolate; and believing that, the stars that are, vastly exceed the children of Abraham, but the stars which are visible to the naked eye, do not exceed the children of Abraham. And after all,

this very promise seems only to be gloriously fulfilled in the passage on which I shall comment in the evening—"I saw a great multitude that no man could number"—like the stars in the firmament—"out of every kindred, and people, and tongue."

Abraham believed God, and God counted it to him for righteousness. We have a reference made to this very fact in the 4th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, at the 18th verse: "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded, that what he had promised he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Now, I do not think that it is meant to be conveyed, either in this passage in Genesis, or in the reference to it in the Epistle to the Romans, that Abraham's belief of God's promise was the righteousness that justified Abraham in the sight of God; for we read, in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that Abraham was a Christian long before this, and therefore previously justified. He became a Christian

the moment he took a footstep to leave Ur of the Chaldees, for it was by faith that he left it, looking for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. I believe, therefore, that this righteousness counted unto Abraham, was an isolated and very special and prominent act in Abraham's biography, and that the Apostle's comparison is not between Abraham's ground of justification and the Christian's; but what he says seems to me to teach, that just as Abraham, without anything but God's word, believed that word, and expected the result would be what God said, so a Christian, with nothing but God's word, believes that, resting upon Jesus, we shall be saved,—in other words, believes on Christ, and is sure that he will be saved. The faith that Abraham exercised in this instance is a perfect fac-simile illustration, or counterpart of the faith that we exercise in a yet higher matter, if possible, and in reference to an ulterior and yet more glorious destiny.

Abraham also asked the question, "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" At first this looks like impertinent curiosity, and yet it was not so. Some questions are impertinent, as was the question of Zacharias, in Luke i. 18: "And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years," when he was struck dumb. Another of an opposite character, as in the case of the Virgin Mary, in Luke i. 34: "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" which was a question of a perfectly pertinent nature, and which was accordingly answered. Again, Peter's question, "What shall this man do?" was imperti-

nent, and therefore the answer was, "What is that to thee? follow thou me." Therefore we are not to look at this question of Abraham's as the expression of weakness of faith, but as the expression of curiosity, which in some cases may be sinful, but in others perfectly right in the sight of God; and, in his case, it was evidently proper.

God then convinces Abraham, or rather makes more impressive his promise by a sacrifice. The ancient mode of confirming a promise was to slay an ox, and to divide it across the spine, and the persons then passed between the halves of the victim, and made their covenant in the middle of them; and the meaning of it was, that if they failed in keeping their covenant, they imprecated from their God utter destruction, in the same manner as that animal had been destroyed. This was used on this occasion to show that all truth comes through sacrifice,—that all God's promises have reference to the one grand sacrifice. And more vividly to impress upon his heart the act, and the certainty of what God would do, God confirms his covenant by a promise and an oath, not because it needed it, but because we need it, in order to be more confident and assured.

We next see that the impressive sign passed before Abraham, indicative of the presence of God. Abraham was overpowered and deeply impressed by it. "It came to pass, that when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces;" and also it is stated in the twelfth verse, "And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him." As in the case of

Job (xlii. 5, 6), when God passed by; as in the case of the apostle Peter, when Jesus wrought a special miracle; as in the case of Isaiah (Is. vi.), of Daniel (Dan. x. 8), and of John, in the Apocalypse, the sight of Deity producing such overpowering impressions.

The only difficulty in this chapter is, where it is said that they "shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years." Now it is stated in the book of Exodus, that this period should be four hundred and thirty years; and therefore it looks as if one prophecy contradicted the other, and as if both could not be true. But, the answer to that is,—and it is perfectly clear,—if you calculate the period from Isaac's birth, it is exactly four hundred years; if you calculate the period, as is here done, from Abraham's departure from Ur of the Chaldees, it is exactly four hundred and thirty years. In the one book it is calculated from the birth of Isaac, and in the other, from the exodus of Abraham; by looking at the different points from which each of the writers dates, we see that there is perfect harmony between the two prophecies, and that these incidental apparent discrepancies are only stronger proofs of the truth of the historians who gave the accounts.

CHAPTER XVI.

**PATRIARCHAL SLAVES. SARAI'S ADVICE TO ABRAHAM. HER
QUARRELLING WITH ITS CONSEQUENCES. HAGAR IN THE
DESERT. THE ANGEL OF THE LORD. ISHMAEL. THE ARABS
OF THE DESERT.**

It shows how far the influence of facts has extended down the ages, when we recollect that the name Hagar is derived from the same word, and indeed, is the origin of the name Hegira, from which the Mahometans calculate their chronology. Hagar means "flight," and Hegira, so called because the date of the flight of Mahomet is to the Mahometan, for all chronological purposes, what the birth of Christ is to the Christian world.

Hagar, it is plain from the record before us, was an Egyptian slave, and a slave born in the house. Slavery did then exist. At the same time, it ought to be known that slavery in those days had intermingled with it many beautiful traits, and under the circumstances in which it was practised, was certainly far more justifiable, as it was far more tolerable, than it can possibly be made in any recent times. The slaves of the patriarchs were, next to the children of the patriarchs, beloved and treated with attention and respect, rather than as chattels

and as goods, as they have been where slavery has existed in subsequent times.

We see here one of the earliest instances of the practice of polygamy, and the results of it certainly are not calculated to show that it is, or can be, a blessing. Sarai believed God's promise that a child should spring from Abraham, which should be in the lineage and family of Him who was to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel; but Sarai then, just like ourselves now, confounded God's promise with God's precepts—a very frequent confusion in modern times; not a very just but very frequent confusion. God has given a promise that this shall be so, and foolishly and unwarrantably we set ourselves to fulfil it, and in trying to fulfil God's promises, with which we have no business, we forget God's precepts, which are the declarations of the duties that absolutely devolve upon us. Now, here Sarai, under the idea that she was honouring God, and helping God to fulfil a promise, forgot express precepts, or at least subordinated real and great duties to supposed ones, and violated a plain commandment, in order, as she thought, to help God to carry out one of his ancient promises. We should never forget that when God gives a promise, it is his prerogative to fulfil it. We need not trouble ourselves about the fulfilment of what God has promised, or prophesied, or predicted—to attend to them, is his own great prerogative. What he asks us to be anxious to carry out, are his plain and obvious precepts. But such is the tendency, the corruption of man, that he likes to put the precept into the background, because it is contrary to flesh and blood to obey it, and he professes to help

God to carry out his promises, because that gratifies his own conceit, and gives him a momentary excuse for palpable disobedience to a plain and obvious requirement.

Abraham, therefore, married Hagar,—for she was his wife—a secondary wife, I admit, but still legally a wife, not a concubine,—that is, by the laws and usages of those days, his wife. It was not adultery, but polygamy.

Sarai, having given this bad advice, which she ought not to have given, was the very first to quarrel with the results that her own advice had precipitated. In fact, Sarai seems, throughout the whole of this, to have acted as a peevish, disappointed, passionate, irritable woman. Although it was she who gave the prescription, yet she was the very first to find fault with the issue of that prescription. How truly does the great ground-work of human nature—the primeval granite, if I may so speak—emerge in every age and century, and show that from Adam's days down to the present hour, poor man is the same in all the essential characteristics and features of his nature. The language she employed was most unjustifiable: "My wrong be upon thee;" she imprecated a malediction upon her husband, and then she said, "I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes,"—the natural result—"the Lord judge between me and thee." But Abraham, who seems to have been in constitutional temper highly amiable, and through grace, truly unselfish, as we have seen in his dealings with Lot, had learned in patriarchal times the lesson that a soft answer turneth away wrath. No one has ever yet

fully felt the overwhelming eloquence of a soft answer to an irritated opponent. If you retaliate in the same terms with which you are assailed, you not only do what is unchristian, but you exasperate the passions which you ought, or wish to try to allay; but when the passionate person hears in your answers, not "reviling for reviling," but a mild, and gentle, and Christian remark, it acts like oil upon the troubled waters—his passions are laid, and he is ashamed as well as subdued. Abraham, therefore, said to Sarai, in his own mild and forbearing way, "Behold, the maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee;" just as he said to Lot. And when Sarai dealt "hardly with her, she fled from her face."

Such were the results of polygamy in the first instance in which we read of it—suffered, we are told by our Saviour, on account of the hardness of the human heart—for, be it remembered, there are many faults recorded in the Scriptures that are not to be construed by us, or proposed by God, as precedents for the present; yet how often do we find that the unsanctified man when he reads the Old Testament, picks out the flaws and defects, the infirmities and the sins of the patriarchs, and tries to justify his own sins by the light of these! He quotes not Abraham's excellences, so many and so beautiful, but Abraham's defects, few and far between, but real, as precedents or apologies for his sins. Our blessed Lord has told us that this was suffered, but not applauded, and that the original law of marriage is, one man and one woman; and the numerical balance of the human family shows that it ought to be so,—the express word of God declares that it

must be so ; and in Mahometan and other countries, where this great primal and Divine law is violated, one has only to read their every-day history, and to watch their physical and national decline, to see how pernicious and destructive it is. The result of it in this instance was, that Sarai, after being betrayed into a culpable expedient, was next betrayed into expressions of impiety, next into undutifulness to Abraham, and lastly, into cruelty to Hagar ; and no doubt these facts are recorded to show us that polygamy, in the first instance that it occurred, instead of being a blessing, was a curse to that family, and that such it will ever be found to be, wherever it has had its advocates or its subjects.

We next read that the angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar, when she was driven forth by her mistress into the wilderness. I may mention, that this expression "Angel of the Lord," occurs very frequently in the Old Testament,—it is, literally translated from the Hebrew, "Angel Jehovah," or, "sent Jehovah ;" and when we recollect what Jesus said, "God hath *sent* his only begotten Son," and what is predicated of this angel, the inference is, that this angel of the Lord was none other than our blessed Lord, in the language of theologians in his anthropomorphic appearance, that is, in some created form, before he was made man. Now that this being was greater than a created angel is plain from what he said to Hagar in the 9th verse : "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands ;" and in the 10th verse : "And the Angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not

be numbered for multitude,"—the very language applied to Abraham by God. "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael, because the Lord hath heard thy affliction." That this angel, therefore, was not a created being, but the uncreated Jehovah, appears to me plain. He requires her to return to her mistress, from whom she had escaped without warrant, which was her duty; and then he predicted the character of that son that shall be born to her—that he should be, literally translated, "a wild ass man," like the wild ass of the desert, untamed and untameable. We have a picture of this animal in Job xxxix. 5: "Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwelling. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing;" that is, a wild, untamed, and untameable animal.

The prediction respecting Ishmael is, that he should be like the wild ass described by Job, untamed, untameable, living in the desert; that his hand should be against every man, and every man's hand against him. The Bedouins of the desert, or the Arabs, are the lineal descendants of Ishmael, and you have only to read their history, a short sketch of which I have now before me, to see how this prediction has been fulfilled—it is here stated, that "the manners and customs of these Arab tribes, except in the article of religion, have suffered

almost no change during the long period of three thousand years. They have occupied the same country and followed the same mode of life, from the days of their great ancestor down to the present times, and range the wide extent of burning sands which separate them from all surrounding nations, as rude, and savage, and untractable as the wild ass himself. Claiming the barren plains of Arabia as the patrimonial domain assigned by God to the founder of their nation, they consider themselves entitled to seize and appropriate to their own use whatever they can find there. Impatient of restraint, and jealous of their liberty, they form no connection with the neighbouring states; they admit of little or no friendly intercourse, but live in a state of continual hostility with the rest of the world. The tent is their dwelling, and the circular camp their city; the spontaneous produce of the soil, to which they sometimes add a little patch of corn, furnishes them with means of subsistence, amply sufficient for their moderate desires; and the liberty of ranging at pleasure their interminable wilds, fully compensates, in their opinion, for the want of all other accommodations. Mounted on their favourite horses, they scour the waste in search of plunder, with a velocity surpassed only by the wild ass. They levy contributions on every person that happens to fall in their way; and frequently rob their own countrymen with as little ceremony as they do a stranger or an enemy; their hand is still against every man, and every man's hand against them. But they do not always confine their predatory excursions to the desert. When booty is scarce at home, they make incursions into the territories of their neigh-

hours; and, having robbed the solitary traveller, or plundered the caravan, immediately retire into the deserts, far beyond the reach of their pursuers. In spite of all their enemies can do to restrain them, they continue to dwell in the presence of all their brethren, and to assert their right to insult and plunder every one they meet with on the borders or within the limits of their domains. Even in the ordinary sense of the epithet 'wild,' there is no people to whom it can be applied with more propriety than to the Arabs, whether used in reference to their character, modes of life, or place of habitation. We have seen something of Arabs and their life, and always felt the word *wild* to be precisely that by which we should choose to characterize them. Their chosen dwelling-place is the inhospitable desert, which offers no attractions to any other eyes but theirs, but which is all the dearer to them for that very desolation, inasmuch as it secures to them that independence and unfettered liberty of action which constitute the charm of their existence, and which render the minute boundaries and demarcations of settled districts, and the restraints and limitations of towns and cities, perfectly hateful in their sight. The simplicity of their tented habitations, their dress, and their diet, which form so perfect a picture of primitive usages, as described by the sacred writers, we can also characterize by no more fitting epithet than 'wild;' and that epithet claims a still more definite application when we come to examine their continual wanderings with their flocks and herds, their constant readiness for action, and their frequent predatory and aggressive excursions against strangers, or against each other.

Plunder, in fact, forms their principal occupation, and takes the chief place in their thoughts; and their aggressions upon settled districts, upon travellers, and even upon other tribes of their own people, are undertaken and prosecuted with a feeling that they have a right to what they seek, and therefore without the least sense of guilt or degradation. Indeed, the character of a successful and enterprising robber invests a Bedouin with as high a distinction in his own eyes, and in the eyes of his people, as the most daring and chivalrous acts could win among the nations of Europe. The operation of this principle would alone suffice to verify the prediction of the text. But besides this, causes of variance are continually arising between the different tribes. Burckhardt assures us, that there are few tribes which are ever in a state of perfect peace with all their neighbours; and adds, that he could not recollect this to be the case with any one among the numerous tribes with which he was acquainted. Such wars, however, are seldom of long duration. Peace is easily made, but broken again upon the slightest pretence. The original word for *dwelt* (*pw shakan*) properly signifies 'to dwell in tents,' or 'to tabernacle,' whence a portion of the Arab tribes are denominated *Scenites*, 'tent dwellers,' answering to the modern Bedouins, in opposition to those who inhabit cities. The meaning undoubtedly is, that he, (*i.e.* his descendants,) shall pitch his tents near to, and in sight of his brethren, and shall maintain his independence in spite of all attempts to conquer or dispossess him. There is some doubt as to the latitude in which the term 'brethren' is here to be understood, some

taking it in a more restricted sense for the other descendants of Abraham, viz., the Israelites, Midianites, Edomites, &c.; while others, as all mankind are brethren in a larger sense, consider it as equivalent to saying, that the race of Ishmael should still subsist, notwithstanding the universal enmity of all nations, as an independent people in the face of the whole world. From the general tenor of scriptural usage, we think the former the most probable interpretation. It is unquestionable, as an historical fact, that they have ever been mainly surrounded by the above nations, or their posterity; and nothing is more notorious than that they have never been effectually subdued. Although continually annoying the adjacent countries with their robberies and incursions, yet all attempts made to extirpate them have been abortive; and even to this day travellers are forced to go armed, and in caravans or large companies, and to march and keep watch like a little army, to defend themselves from the assaults of these roving freebooters of the desert. These robberies they justify, according to Mr. Sale (*Prelim. Dissert. to the Koran*), by alleging the hard usage of their father Ishmael, who, being turned out of doors by Abraham, had the open plains and deserts given him by God for his patrimony, with permission to take whatever he could find there. On this account, they think they may, with a safe conscience, indemnify themselves as well as they can, not only on the posterity of Isaac, but on every one else; and in relating their adventures of this kind, deem themselves warranted, instead of saying, 'I robbed a man of such a thing,' to say, 'I gained it.' Indeed, from a view of the character and

history of this remarkable people, during a period of 4000 years, as compared with this prediction, we may say, with Dr. A. Clarke, that 'it furnishes an absolute demonstrative argument of the Divine origin of the Pentateuch. To attempt its refutation, in the sight of reason and common sense, would convict of most ridiculous presumption and excessive folly.'

Now, is it possible to suppose that, if Moses were an uninspired writer, he could have made so lucky a guess? Is it possible that he could have given a minute description of an event a thousand years remote, which should be fulfilled, not in the mass, but literally, strictly verbatim fulfilled? It is a fact at this day, that the wilderness is the dwelling-place of the descendants of Ishmael. They do not, like other races, form cities. The Arab of to-day is the same that he has been for 3000 years. He will not be associated with civilization—he will not accept the offers that are given by his brethren—he will not leave his patriarchal desert—he has literally his hand against every man, because he lives by spoil, and every man's hand against him, because his extermination is the only safety of contiguous society—he is the "wild ass man," living in the desert, upon the scanty pasturage, and yet satisfied. What proofs do modern facts give, that holy men of old wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost!

CHAPTER XVII.

GOD'S APPEARANCE TO ABRAM. ABRAHAM'S IDEA OF ISHMAEL.
THE COVENANT. WORSHIP. CHANGE OF NAME. ABRA-
HAM'S ROYAL DESCENDANTS. ABRAHAM'S JOY.

It appears that this vision of God to Abram, proclaiming himself "the Lord, the all-sufficient One," occurred about thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, and when Ishmael must have been, therefore, about thirteen years old. It would seem that by this time Abraham had settled down into the absolute conviction, that Ishmael was really the promised seed; and that, through him and in him, as the progenitor of the Messiah, the nations of the earth should be ultimately blessed. He did not expect that any other son would be born to him; and, therefore, he believed that God would fulfil his promise made to him of old in and by Ishmael, and by him only. At this very time, however, God appears to Abram, and makes to pass before the eyes of the patriarch another vision, and indicates, at the same time, the birth of that son in whom and through whom the promises should be fulfilled.

The expression in the second verse, "I will make my covenant between me and thee," might be trans-

lated rather, "I will *fix* my covenant between me and thee;" for, in truth, this is the fifth time in which God had given a promise of this covenant. It was, therefore, not the creation, on this occasion, of a new covenant that had not been revealed, but the fixture of a former, or the assurance of Abram of the absolute certainty of the economy of that covenant which God had revealed to him on a previous occasion.

When God thus appeared to Abram, Abram fell upon his face before Him. All visions of God manifested in the Old Testament scriptures seem to have produced upon the spectator of the vision this deep and solemn impression; and only did Moses escape, apparently, this subduing influence when he was "hid in the rock," and all God's glory passed before him, and God proclaimed himself "the Lord God, merciful and gracious." The falling on the face, was falling on the knees and the two hands; it was the position of absolute prostration—adoring worship, homage, or reverence of God.

When he did so, God condescended to talk with Abram—"God talked with Abram." He was called the friend of God, and as such God talked with him, we are told—as a friend speaks to a friend.

He told him on this occasion, in the fifth verse, that his name should be changed. The original composition of his name was, *ab*, father; and *ram*, high or eminent. The first syllable of the word *hamon*, which means a multitude, seems to have been incorporated into the original name, and to have produced the word Abraham—that is, Abram-hamon, by contraction reduced into Abraham. The

old name was "high father;" the other and new name was "father of a multitude,"—produced by incorporating the word *hamon*, a multitude; and thus showing that Abraham was to be the father of a great multitude. This change of name frequently occurs in Scripture; and one cannot understand it, except it be as a memorial or a memento of the special event which occurred when that change took place, or of the great truth which that change was meant to shadow and show forth. In every age, God has not been satisfied with merely revealing to man an abstract truth,—he has always incorporated with it some material, visible, or palpable memento. Thus, when they crossed the river, the stones erected were to be a memorial. Then in the New Testament Church, in which we worship in spirit and in truth, two sacraments, or symbolical rites, have been established, not only because God saw that more were not necessary, and that less would not do, but also that these two were suggestive, commemorative, and instructive to man. We read on a subsequent occasion, that "Jacob," or "Yacob," was changed into "Israel," because he was a man that had power with God. We read, in the New Testament, of Cephas turned again into Petros; and we read of Saul the persecutor changed into Paul the apostle: evidently to bring before those individuals the events, or the facts, out of which the change of their names originated, and to be constantly before them, a pledge of what they should be. Hence it is a very beautiful trait, I think, that when our children are baptized, we give a name to them. The meaning of baptism, however, be it observed, is not giving a

name to a child. Sometimes ignorant parents have asked me to come and "name our child." I have answered, "That is not my duty; it is yours." Naming a child is the parent's duty, not mine; and whether the parent gives that name when young or old, it is a civil arrangement,—it is not a Christian thing at all; yet it is very beautiful that the name should be associated by baptism with serving God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—the true God; so that, whenever a person in future years remembers his Christian name, he may always be reminded of Christian obligations—not be reminded that he was regenerated in baptism, which would be to remind him of a falsehood, but be reminded that he was dedicated in baptism to the worship and service of the living and the true God. Therefore the association of the name with the sacrament of baptism is in full harmony with those Scriptural instances which I have already cited, to indicate that wherever that name is subscribed to a document, or sounded, or named, there may be heard the under-tone of our early devotion to God, our unabjured responsibility before him.

We read, in the next place, of the promise made to Abraham—"I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee." Abraham was the patriarchal forefather of the twelve tribes of Israel. This promise is fulfilled in the fact, that the ancient kings of Edom were all sprung from him; and at this moment, the kings of Babylon, Egypt, and Arabia, and the Saracens of modern times, all

trace their origin to Abraham; and kings literally, in superstition or in enlightenment, look back to Abraham as the father of a royal and illustrious lineage.

God says to Abraham, "I will make with thee an everlasting covenant." That covenant commemorated and pledged everlasting blessings. The mode of the covenant was changed; the things pledged in the covenant continue. Paul reminds us of the covenant, in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the vail; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." For finding fault with them, he saith, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand

to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." The covenant was the same; the mode of its administration is only changed. And why does God promise, or swear, or covenant to man what he will do for man? Why does he, in the language of Scripture, covenant to give man certain things? Not surely that God needs to do so, but that man's confidence is strengthened by God doing so. God gives the promise, not for his own sake, but for our sake. We are so much the creatures of sense and sight and feeling, that we need something to remember—something to see or to touch—in order that we may heartily and thoroughly believe.

He says that part of this covenant as far as the Jews were concerned, was, that he would give them this land of Israel for an everlasting possession: "I will give thee this land for an everlasting possession." Now, what does this mean? Can we any way figuratively translate this? I cannot con-

ceive that we can. God says, that all the land of Canaan shall be for an everlasting possession. It is at this moment the Jew's estate—his patrimony; it is his property. The nations are merely there to keep the empty lodging till the Jew is ready to return. The Turk, the Frank, and Arab, are mere housekeepers to the ancient dynasty of God; and as soon as the Jew is ready to return, and the land is ready prepared, the present keepers of the house—the present temporary tenants—will be dismissed; and God's royal priesthood will show that the promise to Abraham is real: "Canaan shall be to thee for an everlasting possession."

In the tenth verse he says, "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you, and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised." You have here a striking proof of the sign of the thing being called by the thing itself. It says, "This is my covenant;" *i.e.* circumcision is my covenant; but circumcision was not the covenant,—it was merely the sign of it. And so you will see throughout the Scripture, repeatedly, that the sign of the thing is called by the thing itself. Thus, for instance, the passover was the angel passing through Egypt, and destroying the first-born of every family where there was no blood upon the lintel, and sparing the first-born where there was. But the flesh of the roasted lamb eaten by the family is called "the Lord's passover." For instance, the ancient Jew, when he commemorated the passover, which was the angel in his flight, said of it, "This is the Lord's passover." And now, by the same usage, the same language

is transferred to the Lord's Supper—"This is my body," not meaning literally that this is the body of Christ, but the symbol or the memorial of it. Just as the Jewish celebrant said, "This is the passover," while he did not mean, "This is an angel flying through Egypt, and killing the first-born," but merely, "This is the memorial of it;" so anybody guided by the analogy of Scripture would never dream of the monstrous dogma of transubstantiation, or conclude that when our Lord said, "This is my body," he used an expression different, materially different, from that used by the ancient Jewish celebrant when he said, "This is the Lord's passover."

Abraham laughed when God made the promise to him in the seventeenth verse; for it is said, "Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed." But this is not the language of scorn or unbelief; for it is plain throughout the Scripture, in many passages, that laughter is used in the sense of joy. Thus: "Our mouths were filled with laughter"—that is, with joy. It is not implied that Abraham laughed in incredulity, but it may be translated—he leaped or danced for joy at the admiration, the wonder—the unexpected and wondrous fact—that a child should be born to him at such an advanced age as is specified in the text. And when we read in the Gospels that "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad," I have not a doubt that there is in that very text some allusion to Abraham's laughing.

Abraham, when he heard that Isaac was to be the promised seed, to be born of Sarah, and to be

the father of many kings, and of the promised Messiah, concluded that Ishmael would now be cast off, or slain, showing that rashness and hastiness of judgment which he had exhibited in more instances than one. We saw his besetting temper in the instance when God gave a promise, and when Abram and Sarai could not believe how God could bring it about; and here we see it again, when God promises that Isaac shall be the progenitor of the promised seed, and that Ishmael shall not; and especially when, again, Abraham offers up a prayer for Ishmael, saying, that he hoped that he would not be cut off, but that he should be spared, and blessed, and become a blessing, and God then blesses Ishmael also.

Each parent may still pray, in a loftier than Abrahamic sense: "Oh, that my child may truly live before God; live to God, and live with God for ever!" The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of this life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PATRIARCHAL PICTURE. HOSPITALITY. PROMISE OF ISAAC. INCREDULITY OF SARAH. EXCELLENCE IN SARAH. JESUS AND ABRAHAM'S ONLY PRAYER.

A JEWISH story is related of Abraham, probably apocryphal, but not uninstructional as a lesson of toleration. It is as follows :—

“When Abraham sat at his tent door, according to his custom, waiting to entertain strangers, he espied an old man, stooping and leaning on his staff, weary with age and travel, coming towards him, who was a hundred years of age ; he received him kindly, washed his feet, provided supper, and caused him to sit down ; but, observing that the old man eat and prayed not, nor begged for a blessing on his meat, asked him why he did not worship the God of heaven ? The old man told him that he worshipped the fire only, and acknowledged no other God ; at which answer Abraham grew so zealously angry that he thrust the old man out of his tent, and exposed him to all the evils of the night and an unguarded condition. When the old man was gone, God called to Abraham, and asked him where the stranger was ? He replied, I thrust him away because he did not worship Thee. God answered him,

I have suffered him these hundred years, although he dishonoured me, and could'st thou not endure him one night, when he gave thee no trouble? Upon this, Abraham fetched him back again, and gave him hospitable entertainment and wise instruction. Go thou and do likewise; and thy charity will be rewarded by the God of Abraham."

We learn that this appearance of the Lord to Abraham, recorded in the first verse of the chapter, was after a considerable interval of some twelve or thirteen years. Apparently, this manifestation or apocalypse of God to the patriarch had been suspended just because of the sins of unbelief and precipitancy by Sarah and Abraham, into which we have fully entered on a previous reading. Sins separated then between God and man, just as they separate now.

This chapter is a beautiful combination or collection of pictures—a sort of picture gallery. It opens with one truly ancient and Eastern in its aspect. It is mid-day; the sultriness of the sunbeams is intolerable; the air within the tent is heated and almost unfit for being breathed. The aged patriarch, gray with the snows of a hundred years, is seated on the threshold of his Arab tent, enjoying the fresh breeze that swept by; and no doubt, also, prepared to show the rites of hospitality, according to ancient habits, to all strangers and pilgrims who might pass by. Whilst he sat there, three men—apparently so,—two of them really angels—passed by, or, rather, drew near to his tent. That two of them were angels is plain from the declaration of the apostle Paul, in the 13th chapter of Hebrews, where he says

that some have entertained angels unawares, evidently alluding to this incident; but that one of these personages was the Son of God, in that previous form or manifestation in which he frequently appeared to his saints of old, is, I think, unquestionable, from the language that follows in the sequel of this chapter. Some have tried to make out that these were the Three Persons of the Trinity. I think that there is no foundation for this interpretation. Two of the three were unquestionably angels, and the third was no less, as I shall prove from the sequel of the chapter, than the Son of God. Whilst Abraham was thus seated, he saw these three strangers approach, apparently weary and wayworn, and, as his heart dictated, he bade them come in and share the comforts of his tent. He addressed them with offers of cordial hospitality, and with feelings of great liberality; and, in order to show that he did not attach very great importance to what he gave them in the exercise of his hospitality, he calls it a "little water" and a "morsel of bread," as much as to say, the favour of your partaking will be a favour conferred upon me. In offering such an hospitality, it will not be I who am offering a service to you, but you that will oblige me. So it is that real courtesy always exists wherever there is real Christianity. The formula under which it is expressed may vary, but the principle is the same. The coins in France bear the image of a president, a monarch, or an emperor; in Austria, of a monarch; and in England, the image of a queen; but it is the same gold in all the countries. The currency is variable, evanescent; the substance is always and everywhere the same.

Wherever there is real Christianity, there there must be real courtesy; in other words, the highest Christian must be essentially the most accomplished gentleman.

Abraham addressed one of these personages plainly as if he saw that he was One who was entitled to very special respect; for, while he saw three, he particularly addresses one as "My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight,"—language which we cannot suppose Abraham would have employed if he had not been aware that some personage of loftier than angelic dignity was present in the midst of the three.

He offers, first of all, a little water to wash the feet. This was one of the ancient Eastern rites of hospitality. Shoes or boots were not then worn: sandals only for the soles of the feet were in use; and travelling over the hot sands under a burning sky, in those countries, the feet of course were covered with dust, and the traveller weary and fatigued; and hence the first act of hospitality, and the most welcome, was to offer a refreshing ablution of the feet, which was never dispensed with, but always exercised.

Next he offers a morsel of bread. This does not mean bread alone. We know that bread was regarded as the staff of life; in fact, Scripture speaks of the whole "stay of bread," and the whole "staff of bread" being taken away; and therefore, when they were offered bread by Abraham, they were offered in that word the epitome or compendium of all that was necessary to recruit, feed, and refresh man. He offered them what he called a morsel of

bread and a little water, and they showed their appreciation of his hospitality, not by a hesitating acceptance, but a cordial response, when they said, "So do, as thou hast said."

Sarah was next ordered to take a little refined flour, and to knead a cake. This seems very derogatory to the dignity of a princess. Abraham was greater than an Arab sheik, and it seems inconsistent that the lady of that house, occupying so lofty a place, should be ordered to do a thing like this—it shocks all our ideas of etiquette and social usage, and scarcely meets our ideas of what is connected with the rites of hospitality. But it was no inconsistency; for it is the custom still in Eastern countries for persons of very great rank to take this part in exercising hospitality. Ladies in some countries are taught to sing and to dance, and in others to bake and brew: it is doubtful which education is best. Common sense, perhaps, would be in favour of the Eastern habits. However, this is a matter I do not meddle with. Sarah thought it no degradation, and therefore made no delay. There is another reason for requiring to bake bread on an emergency: bread will not keep in warm climates, as it does with us, and therefore bread had to be made almost immediately before it was used; and I am told that in Hindostan it is still only baked for the day, and is only fit to be used for the day on which it is baked.

And he sent out also for a calf, tender and young, and gave it to a servant to be prepared for their food. This is also a practice in Eastern countries still, since meat cannot be kept as in our northern latitude: it must be killed on the day in which it is

used. And Abraham, to show the respect and reverence for One whom he called "Lord," and his hospitality and courtesy to the two whom he saw to be angels, stood by whilst they enjoyed the rites of hospitality, finding his enjoyment, and so showing a deep and true courtesy, in their enjoyment, refreshment, and gratification.

These three strangers then said to Abraham, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" In some accounts of Eastern travels, I read that it is regarded as a point of rudeness to ask, "Where is thy wife?" or to ask even after the health of a man's wife; and therefore this must have seemed to Abraham a very strange return to his courtesy, that one should make this inquiry; but it must have seemed to him still more perplexing to hear these strangers call her, not *Sarai*, but by the new name that was conferred by God in the exercise of a special prerogative—*Sarah*. That was her new name. Abraham must have wondered where these three strangers could have got information of this change of name of which Sarah had been the subject. His answer was, that she was in the tent—that is, in the woman's tent; for in Eastern countries, the women's rooms are all separated from that part of the house where the men are: the two sexes do not mix together as in European and in northern countries; and in saying this, he virtually said, "She is in her own proper place—she is just where she should be;" and therefore, in this respect, she was an example to every mother and head or mistress of a house in subsequent times. "Teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers

at home, good, obedient to their own husbands." Titus ii. 4, 5.

In the tenth verse there is the first unequivocal intimation that one of these personages must have been more than a created angel; for it is said, "And *he* said," without naming the personage. "I will certainly return unto thee; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son." Then you go down to the thirteenth verse, and you find that this personage who spoke to Abraham is called by the incommunicable name "Jehovah:" "And Jehovah said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh?" And then again, in the seventeenth verse, the same Being is alluded to in these terms: "And Jehovah said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" And then again, at the twentieth verse, "And Jehovah said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down." And then it appears that "the men"—that is evidently two of the three—in the twenty-second verse, "turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom; but Abraham stood yet before Jehovah,"—thus evincing that one of these must have been Jehovah. Two departed towards Sodom, and One remained, who is called here Jehovah, to whom Abraham prays, and with whom he carries on that sublime and precious, yet prayerful controversy which is recorded in the close of this chapter.

When this promise was made, Sarah overheard it through the curtains of the tent, and laughed; and laughed so loudly, that the echoes of her laughter reached the ears of those who talked with Abraham. We read in a former part of this book, that Abraham

laughed ; but he laughed for joy, or, as our Lord translates it in the gospel, "leaped for joy." But here, Sarah laughed in incredulity ; and thus, therefore, you see that the outer act may not be always the exponent of the inner feelings ; and this teaches us how slow we should be to judge of what we see, unless we know that the outward act is the exponent of an inner thing ; for many things one looks at as sinful may not be really so ; and many traits that seem to us beautiful and Christian, may be the reverse when we come thoroughly to trace, analyze, and examine them.

The answer of one of these beings—that one called Jehovah, no doubt—is, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord ?" It should not be rendered *any thing* ; there are some things that are too hard for the Lord—for instance : "God cannot lie," that is impossible. But here it is the Hebrew word "*dabar*," that is, "Is any word, (*i. e.* promise,) spoken by the Lord too hard for the Lord to fulfil ?" The meaning of it is, "Has God said anything in his holy Word, or promised anything which he himself has not power thoroughly to fulfil ?"—a very proper and a very decisive reply.

Poor Sarah, evidently catching a gleam of the majesty of the person who thus spoke, recollecting what she had said, and utterly overcome with fright,—"*for she was afraid*," thereby implying that she saw in this being somebody much higher than a created angel,—hastily replied in her fright, (not, as I believe, uttered not a premeditated and deliberate falsehood, yet, like Eve, she tried to cover one sin by another,) "I did not laugh ;" she denied that she laughed. And then the Lord, this being to

whom she had thus replied, in decisive but gentle rebuke said, "Thou didst laugh;" thus silencing Sarah, and reprimanding her sin. What a model for us in our replies! Better not to resort to recrimination; far better to refer the thing to the verdict of conscience. You may depend upon it, that when a person has a conscience left, a great deal of recrimination will only harden that conscience, while a simple, short, and not offensive rebuke, uttered quietly but firmly, will penetrate, and excite feelings and reflections, and, if needs be, repentance, that nothing else will do. This was one of Sarah's sins, and throughout the whole of her biography she does certainly exhibit very marked defects. I need not remind you that every character recorded in the Old Testament has great defects, and that Scripture clearly records them. It is a most silly thing for persons who call themselves rationalists, to allege, that because Abraham, and Sarah, and Lot, and David, did commit great sins, therefore God sanctions sin. They did commit great sins; but they are not set before us as perfect beings, which would have been untrue, but as average specimens of average Christian character, showing their great defects in order that we might avoid them, but showing also that they had very great excellences for us to imitate. God records their sins in his history; he rebukes their sins in his law. And a very strange thing it is, that when men of depraved minds read the history of Abraham, or of Lot, or of David, they contrive to draw a veil over their excellences, and they select their greatest defects and faults for their special admiration and imitation, or, if reckoned

more convenient, of sceptical objection. Let us look at the characters of these men as a whole, and remember what the Bible is ; it is, on one side of it, the portrait of Deity, and on the obverse the portrait of humanity in all its phases, and that portrait a correct and a true one. The excellences in human character are not brought forward in broad and illuminated relief, but truly and exactly ; in all these characters there are traces of defects ; just because they are actual and real, not romantic and imaginary. Their sins are beacons, their excellences precedents ; look only at the latter : remember also that the portrait is a faithful one, and of man as a whole ; and remember too that it is that which gives to this book such irresistible proof of being the inspiration of God. Now whilst Sarah's great defects are mentioned, one would wish to remember that she was not without great excellences ; and hence the apostle Peter, referring to this very occasion on which we have been now commenting, speaks of Sarah in terms of great praise. For instance, in the 3rd chapter of the 1st Epistle of Peter, speaking to wives, he says, " Be in subjection to your own husbands ; that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives ; " and then he says, " Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel ; " let not that be their pride, " but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner, in the old time, the holy women also, who

trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands, even as Sarah obeyed Abraham," alluding to this very passage, "calling him lord; whose servants ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement;" alluding to this very circumstance, being afraid, losing one's balance, one's self-possession, by some sudden shock of terror or alarm,—not to be thus afraid, but to cultivate those principles and practices which are alike the ornament and the beauty of the Christian character.

The two angels departed, and Abraham was left with Jehovah alone. I reserve for my discourse that beautiful petition in the close of the chapter, which I will bring before you elsewhere. God said that Abraham would command his children and his household after him. In other words, he exhibited that trait of character, that regard for home, which made him to be so fit for a higher sphere. What a man is at home, that he really is; and wherever there are displayed anger and violent temper at home, mismanagement, misconduct, and miscontrol, there is no hope of any consistent or beautiful character and conduct abroad. If good conduct in the lower sphere fits for entrance on a higher, good use of the lower degree is the best qualification for a right use of the higher. The prayer, at the close, for Sodom, shows Abraham to have been a man of profound humility, yet Christian boldness, and of perseverance in prayer. He was the first City Missionary on record. His litany deserves our most earnest study.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOT'S SIN. INDIRECT LIGHT OF CHRISTIANITY. THE MAGISTRATE OR MERCHANT IN THE GATE. ANGEL'S ANSWER TO LOT. A MOB. EXPEDIENCY. SONS-IN-LAW. LOT'S WIFE.

WE find, in the chapter I have read, a specimen of the depth of depravity to which human nature falls when left to itself. Lot's escape from Sodom was incomplete without an escape from his own heart. Some one made the remark, when he saw a criminal suffer for his crimes, "Here should I be if it were not for the grace of God;" and these awful specimens of depravity, a depravity occasionally breaking out where least expected, given in the word of God, are recorded, not to encourage such crimes, for they are recorded in too holy a manner, and with too sacred an object, but to show you to what an awful depth the human heart, when left to itself, can precipitate its possessor; our worst foes are within. Since these sins do not probably occur now, some may infer that human nature is vastly ameliorated and improved. I believe that the reason why there is so much excellence amongst those who are not spiritual or regenerated men, is owing to the reflex or indirect influence of the gospel of Jesus; for whilst there is a light that sanctifies and saves, there

is also a reflected light that moralizes, civilizes, and improves. And in this great country of ours, and in other countries, where pure and undefiled religion is predominant, the high-toned morality that characterizes them springs very much, where the gospel is not individually felt, from the reflex influence of its spiritual light. The Royal Exchange owes much to the sanctuary; the palace owes much of what dignifies and adorns it to the Christian Church; and there is not an individual in this great land of ours, from the child upon its mother's knee to the queen who sits upon the throne, who is not better and happier for the fact that Jesus died, and that the Bible was inspired. Lot's foulest sin seems to have originated from that wretched and distorted expediency which, not seeing how God can fulfil his purposes, and concluding there is but one way to do so that is possible, sets about to help God to do, what God alone has pledged, and God alone will perform.

When we open this chapter we find a spectacle somewhat analogous to that which we noticed in the previous chapter. Abraham was seated at his tent door, ready to exercise the rites of hospitality; Lot is found sitting at the gate of Sodom. Now, one does not know whether this was because Lot had become a magistrate in the midst of Sodom, and therefore was dispensing justice at the gate,—for the gates were so used in ancient times; or whether it means that he was, and this most probably is correct, a merchant selling goods, and making the largest profits whilst the opportunity offered. When we recall the traits of his previous character, and his

selection of the well-watered plains of Jordan, because they were well watered and productive, and a city near, we trace an avaricious element running through his whole biography; and the probability is, that he sat at the gate to make larger profits, and to sell goods in order to increase that fortune which he was amassing in Sodom, and intended to bequeath to a family he had "made," in order that they might be rich and renowned also.

Whilst thus seated, he saw strangers come, and with the characteristic feeling of Orientals, and more especially of ancient Orientals, he offered them all the privileges of hospitality, and entertainment. It is worthy of remark, that the reply of the angels on this occasion was different from what it was to Abraham—very different. When Abraham in the previous chapter asked the angels to come in, they accepted his hospitality at once; they said, "So do as thou hast said;" but when Lot asked these angels to come in, they said, "Nay; but we will abide in the street all night." There must have been some reason for the different reception of the same courteous and hospitable invitation, given by the nephew; no doubt they intended in this remark to rebuke Lot, by delicately insinuating that he had deliberately selected an unholy and corrupt city for his residence, and that his home was not what it should be. They conveyed gently but faithfully to his heart a rebuke as they substantially said, "Whilst we embrace thankfully the hospitality of Abraham, we have some hesitation in accepting that not less courteous, but not equally pure hospitality, which you offer us." How strikingly consistent is the con-

tinuity of the narrative in this single instance! How true to life, to fact, to truth! Afterwards they consented when they had conveyed the rebuke, and he set before them that simple entertainment which it was customary in those days to provide.

We read the account of the criminal mob, and how extremely like it is to the conduct of the mob in the present day, and how conclusive a proof that the mob in the nineteenth century, and the mob of Sodom, described here, are in spirit the same. They said to Lot, instead of thanking him for the benefits that he had spread around him, and all that he had done to increase their traffic and add to their good, "This fellow came in to sojourn,"—we gave him a room and entertainment, while really and truly they did not; for they welcomed the seller to benefit themselves, the buyers, and Lot came to benefit himself; it was in the way of trade he came, and thus only they made him welcome; they really received him into the market, and yet they professed to make it hospitality and pure affection,—“and he will needs be a judge.” He came here to sojourn, and he sets up now to be a judge, as if we were not as old inhabitants, and as pure, and honest, and fair as this stranger, whom we admitted into the town for his comfort, not our convenience. “And they pressed sore upon him.” And then we read that the angels assisted Lot, and smote with blindness the mob that was without,—an infliction almost typical of what a mob becomes when left to itself. Nothing is so blind as a mob, nothing is so bad that it will not perpetrate. I do not mean by the mob, a people; Christianity makes a people; fallen and corrupt

passions made a mob. In France there is, I fear, a mob, but not yet a people; in America and Great Britain there is a people who are almost strangers to the very sight of a mob. Such is the blindness of an excited mob, that, if one had one's choice, better smart under the rod of the autocrat on the throne than obey the dictation of the mob in the Agora. Lot's attempt to propitiate them was so far praiseworthy. In what he had said to them there was much of courtesy, much of gentleness, much of conciliatory temper and conduct; and yet there was much that was most sinful. He tried, like some modern politicians, to get rid of one sin by perpetrating a second. He acted on what is called in modern times *expediency*, that is, perpetrating a little sin in order to avoid a great sin; whereas the proper way is to commit no sin at all. Expediency says, we cannot manage these priests, and therefore we will endow them; we cannot gain this end without doing that evil, therefore do it; whereas the true course is to do what is right; and you may rest assured that the noblest expediency will follow in its wake; we may do expedient things that are wrong, but we never can do right things that are inexpedient. In the long-run the highest principle is always the highest expediency. I admit it is not immediately so, but it is always ultimately and really so. In other words it is the old law of mathematics,—the straight line is always the nearest way from one point to another, and the circuitous line, however beautiful or smooth, is always the farthest; and you run the risk, in travelling it, of an eccentric influence that may carry you to ruin.

The angels, after smiting the mob with blindness, called upon Lot to escape. They said, This city is incurably corrupt, escape from it. And then we read that Lot addressed his family like a priest, like a prophet, like a Christian, like a father; but we read also that his sons-in-law,—what a rebuke to his past conduct, which had sanctioned that relation, and which induced him to take up a home in that city, which led to that relation,—his sons-in-law, whom his daughters married because they were rich and great, laughed at him, and mocked at what they supposed to be his folly. Poor Lot himself was so infatuated, that for a moment, it appears, he lingered; and the angels, it is said, took hold of him and hurried him out, God being merciful to him. I fancy that his lingering was not altogether love of Sodom; but the poor man's heart was so broken, his expectations so shocked, his hopes so crushed by all that he saw, that I believe he was bewildered and paralyzed. You have noticed, in the midst of our crowded thoroughfares, a person crossing the street while a carriage approaches on his right hand, and another on his left, and a waggon is coming behind; the man loses self-possession, falls down, and, unless picked up, is sure to be killed. Lot seems to have been so bewildered by the unexpected results of his conduct, that he sat down, stupified and unconscious, to perish in the midst of Sodom. The angels, the Lord being merciful to him, took him by the hand and thrust him out. God thrusts out of danger many a reluctant one still. Here, poor man, his characteristic infirmity broke out—he could not take God's law at once, but again he edges in his

own corrupt and miserable expediency: "Do not let me go to the mountain, but let me go to the little city Zoar." Just so the sinner still struggles with God for a little bit of self-righteousness to take to heaven, instead of taking God's way, which is always the truest.

We read next, of Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt. Looking back, she disobeyed God's word, took her way, not his. There is much dispute about this, and the sites of Sodom and Gomorrah; the greatest light that has been thrown upon it has been by Lieutenant Lynch, who set out to investigate the whole state of the country about the river Jordan and the Dead Sea. In the course of his remarks, he states that they found at the south-eastern extremity of the lake a large pillar, composed of saline substances or particles, which the persons resident there declared was Lot's wife, the pillar of salt. That it was not so is Lieutenant Lynch's conviction, though it was popularly so said. He says, "On the eastern side of Hashim-Usdum, one-third of the distance from its north extremity, a pillar of solid salt was discovered, capped with carbonate of lime, cylindrical in front, and pyramidal behind. The upper or rounded part is about forty feet high," (and that alone would be conclusive that it was not Lot's wife,) "resting on a kind of oval pedestal, from forty to sixty feet above the level of the sea. It crumbles at the top, and is one entire mass of crystallization." The Dead Sea, which is the lasting and unmistakable memorial of the awful ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah, is also described by this enterprising traveller. He describes it as being a very remark-

able place. At one place, 696 feet was the greatest depth, and at another part it was 1128 feet in depth,—an immense depth; that the water is of so great density, or specific gravity, that “a horse swimming in the sea turned a little on one side, but did not lose his balance;” and that persons tried to swim in it, but they were so buoyant that they floated like pieces of cork; that there is no vegetation about its banks, but that they are covered with saline particles. Lieutenant Lynch observes: “The inference from the Bible, that this entire chasm was a plain sunk and overwhelmed by the wrath of God, seems to be sustained by the extraordinary character of our soundings. Between the Jabbok and this sea, we found a sudden break down in the bed of the Jordan.”* The three gentlemen who set out on this most interesting voyage, came unanimously to the following conclusion: “We entered on the sea with conflicting opinions—one of the party was sceptical, another, a professed disbeliever in the Mosaic narrative; after twenty-two days’ close investigation of the Dead Sea, if I am not mistaken we are unanimous in the conviction of the truth of the Scriptural account of the destruction of the cities of the plain. I record with diffidence the conclusion we have reached, simply as a protest against the shallow deductions of would-be unbelievers.” Now it is very interesting, that men with that tendency should have received such a conviction from such an investigation. The discussion about the wife of Lot being turned into a pillar of salt has been very frequently repeated, and with no very satis-

* Lynch's Narrative, Bentley, p. 379.



THE SALT, OR DEAD SEA.

factory results. I do not believe that the pillar that they discovered was what the popular tradition reports it to be; yet singular enough, Josephus, the Jewish historian, states in his *Jewish Antiquities*, that he saw the pillar of salt into which Lot's wife was turned. I have no doubt that he saw what was popularly stated to be so. And two of the Christian fathers, Clement and Irenæus, both state that in their day the pillar was standing. Now I have no doubt that it was the traditional pillar, yet I can scarcely believe that she was literally turned into a pillar of salt; though I can believe that when she was struck dead, the saline particles encrusted her; all the surface of the ground in that district denotes volcanic agency; and I have no doubt that she was covered with that substance; but the statement mainly is, that she was there arrested and destroyed; and when we read in Scripture that salt is a type of perpetuity,—for instance, a "covenant of salt" is a Scripture expression of an everlasting covenant,—we can easily see that it is not improbable that Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt, means that she was made a perpetual instance of the judgment that falls upon them who, having put their hands to the plough, look back, and wilfully disobey God's word. Their last estate becomes worse than their first.

Mr. Bush upon the whole of this subject, makes the following remarks, and gives some interesting accounts of various travellers;—"The name 'Dead Sea,' is supposed to have been given to the lake in consequence of the desolate appearance of all things around, and the absence of animal and vegetable life; for the waters being intensely salt, and the soil

around deeply impregnated with saline matter, no plants or trees will grow there, and the saturation of the air with saline particles and sulphureous and bituminous vapours is also unfavourable to vegetable life. It is a necessary consequence of this, that no wild animals resort thither for food or drink, nor are flocks or herds led to its shores. The absence of fish also in its waters prevents even the resort of those water-fowl, whose presence gives some animation to lakes less peculiarly circumstanced; and, altogether, the general aspect of nature in this blighted region is dull, cheerless, and depressing. The unusual stillness of so large a body of water is quite in unison with the general desolation, to which it not a little contributes. This is doubtless owing in a great degree to the shelter of the mountains which inclose it, and shut out the strong winds; but part of the effect may perhaps be attributed to the heaviness of the water. 'It was nearly dark,' says Mr. Stephens (*Incid. of Trav.* vol. ii. p. 212), 'when we reached the top of the mountain, and I sat down for a moment to take a last look at the Dead Sea. From this distance, its aspect fully justified its name. It was calm, motionless, and seemingly dead; there was no wave or ripple on its surface, nor was it hurrying on, like other waters, to pay its tribute to the ocean; the mountains around it were also dead; no trees or shrubs, not a blade of grass grew on their naked sides; and as in the days of Moses, "brimstone and salt; it is not sown, nor beareth, nor any grass groweth thereon." Where the waters occasionally overflow their usual limit, a saline crust is left upon the surface of the soil,

resembling hoar-frost, or snow.' The water itself, like that of the sea, is of a dark-blue colour, shaded with green, according as the light falls upon it, and perfectly clear. It is much saltier than the waters of the sea, and has also an unpleasant bitterness. An American missionary who visited the spot, says, 'The water looks remarkably clear and pure; but on taking it into my mouth, I found it nauseous and bitter, I think beyond anything I ever tasted. My clothes were wet by the waves, and as they dried I found them covered with salt.' As the lake has no outlet, Reland, Pococke, and other travellers have supposed that it must throw off its superfluous water by some subterranean channel; but although it has been calculated that the Jordan daily discharges into it 6,000,000 tons of water, besides what it receives from the Arnon and several smaller streams, it is now known that the loss by evaporation is adequate to explain the absorption of the waters. Its occasional rise and fall at certain seasons, is doubtless owing to the greater or less volume which the Jordan and the other streams bring down from the mountains."

The whole biography of Lot reveals the unforeseen issues of an original deviation from the paths of duty, holiness, and love. Sin and sorrow and troubles followed him at every stage. His history is stained deep and dark. The brand plucked from the burning retains indelibly the fire-mark. "Search us, and try us, O God, and know our hearts, and see if there be any wicked way within us, and lead us in the way everlasting." There can be little doubt that he was a child of God; yet, as such, a brand

plucked from the burning—almost lost, yet altogether saved. This instance is a singularly instructive one. Lot's is a biography awful yet suggestive: God's mercy abounds over man's transgression. It reveals how rich is the forbearing mercy of God,—how awfully a saint walking carelessly may fall. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." "Guide us by thy counsel. Hold us by thy right hand."

CHAPTER XX.

ABRAHAM'S SIN. PATRIARCHAL JESUITISM. ABIMELECH. A
CHRISTIAN REBUKED BY A HEATHEN.

WE have again to learn in the history of Abraham, the lesson that needs to be deeply impressed upon us, not in order merely to humble man, but to exalt the Saviour of man, that there is none, not even the most perfect character, recorded in the annals of inspiration, except One, who was spotless and without flaw, or fault, or sin, in thought, word, or deed, in the sight of God. It is also a very important evidence of the reality, and even inspiration of the history where those things are recorded, and of the divine influence on the men who recorded them, that they consented to do so. Mere Jews, delighting to exalt and magnify their nation, would not thus have recorded the repeated sin of him who was their illustrious founder. It was their boast that they were Abraham's children, and if they had had their choice, they never would have recorded Abraham's faults. But the Bible is God's book, its records are impartial and true, and it describes, not man as romance writers delineate him, but just as he is! and God's

best men, as herein laid bare, show the remains and traces of many imperfections, proving how much there is in the best of men for us to forgive, seeing there is so much in God's sight that needs his forgiveness.

What aggravates the sin recorded in this chapter is, the fact that this was the second offence of the same description perpetrated by Abraham; and he seems in this matter to have sinned almost on a principle, previously laid down and concerted between him and Sarah. He began his journey into Egypt and the realms of Abimelech, we are told, after having told Sarah, that wherever he wandered from his father's house, "This is thy kindness that thou shalt show me; at every place where we shall come, say, He is my brother." Now I explained, in my remarks on a previous lesson, that when he went into Egypt, and said so, that so far it was true—she was his sister in the sense in which Lot is said to have been his brother. Lot was his nephew, and Sarah was his half-niece; and of course the relationship subsisting between her and Abraham was what would not be tolerated now, though with other similar things, it was tolerated in the infancy of nations, as we are told by Him who came to fulfil the law, and to rectify our views of the law, for "the hardness of their hearts." While it was true, in the then acceptance of the word, that she was his sister; yet, notwithstanding this, he stated that she was his sister in order that they who were addicted to polygamy, and might wish to marry her, and thus make Sarah a secondary wife, might not kill Abraham to get her. Sarah at this time was

ninety years of age, and yet she had the remains of her pristine beauty : showing that human life was then much longer than it is now,—whether owing to the ordinance of God, or to the abuse of health by the mischievous practices and bad habits of man, it is difficult to say, but so it was ; and therefore Abraham called her his sister to save his life ; because if they saw that she was his wife, in those days when that relationship was most revered, they would have killed him, that she might be a widow, in order that they might marry her ;—a strange state of society, where men, in order to avoid one sin, would perpetrate another, and think that the justification of the lesser sin was by committing the greater, and that thus there would be, according to their calculation, little or no crime. Abraham, in order to avoid the possibility of being murdered, said that she was his sister, that thus they might marry her legitimately, or at least that they might not destroy him in order that any one charmed with Sarah's appearance might take her for his wife. In other words, in the whole of this transaction he did not look at duty, but at expediency ; he wanted, by a skilful management, to secure friends that God would have secured for him if he had walked in the path of principle, and done what was right. And it is quite certain too, that Abraham was not alone to blame, but that Sarah connived at it, and even sanctioned the deception ; for though it was true to the ear, it was false to the heart, because when he said, " She is my sister," he meant indirectly to convey that she was not his wife ; and we know that the *suppressio veri* is often the *suggestio falsi*. Concealing a portion which is true, in

order to create a conviction of something that is false, is alike unchristian, unscriptural, and dishonest.

Abraham thus prevaricated to save his life, and so far to help on what he thought were the grand purposes and designs of God. He believed that he was to be the forefather of the Messiah, and he thought that if he was slain such a grand promise could not be fulfilled! and so, poor man, he tried in his folly to help God to fulfil his promise. He thought that the fulfilment of the promise was so precious a thing, that any sin would be forgiven which should lead to so desirable and blessed a result. Jesuitism is thus seen to have been very ancient. Such was the imperfection of a Patriarch's life, such the depravity still remaining in the heart of the Father of the Faithful.

We read next of the conduct of Abimelech when he discovered that Sarah was Abraham's wife. Abimelech is composed of the words *Abba-Melech*, that is, *Father-King*. And it seems to contain the germ of the true idea of kingship, that it should not be merely the despotism of a ruler, but also the affectionate care of a loving father. The father and the king should be welded into one, in order to constitute the perfection of a Christian ruler. Abimelech's words show his acquaintance with the ruin of Sodom; for he said, "Wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?" showing that he recollected that God had destroyed a guilty one. And he said, "Wilt thou also lay upon its ruins a city that has not thus sinned?"

God said, "I have withheld thee from sinning." How humbling is that to all! Who knows, whatever class or party he belongs to, how much he is indebted,

not to his own force of principle, but to God's providential restraint, in keeping him from sinning? It may be written over the periods of our life in which we take the greatest credit, and the achievements of which we are most proud, "I withheld thee from sinning." The most innocent in this assembly who does not know the Gospel, or love or fear God, little knows how much he is indebted to the unseen and unacknowledged restraint of God's providential care for the position he now fills, and the character which he now sustains, and the faultlessness which probably he prides himself on and glories in.

God told Abimelech that Abraham would pray for him. This did not mean that Abraham, as an interceding saint in heaven, would pray for Abimelech, but would pray for him as a prophet upon earth. "I will," says the apostle, "that prayers and intercessions be offered up for all men;" and the apostle also says, "Pray for us." But because a Christian on earth prays for a brother upon earth, that does not prove, to say the very least of it, that a saint in heaven does pray for a sinner or a sufferer upon earth;—it may be so, but this does not prove it.

In the next place, Abimelech's address to Abraham, when he found out Abraham's prevarication, was extremely beautiful—in fact, one would say that Abimelech's character eclipsed by its beautiful splendour the conduct and the character of Abraham. How often do we find still, on the Royal Exchange, that the merchant who does not pretend to Christianity has a keen and delicate sense of honour and integrity, that ought to make professing Christian

men blush beside it! How often do we find an honour, a manliness, an integrity, in unconverted men, that are not displayed by many who make very loud professions, wear a very solemn countenance, and go three times a day to the house of God? I do not mean to say that this proves that those excellent men of high-toned integrity do not want Christianity: it only proves that if we be Christians we should not come behind them. Excellent as these traits are, yet, in order to be saved, they need to be taught not to lean upon them, as they too probably do, but upon Him in whom the greatest saint and the greatest sinner must equally and altogether trust for mercy, sanctification, and forgiveness. Abimelech addressed Abraham in language extremely quiet, courteous, affectionate, almost Christian. He might have been exasperated at the deception practised upon him. He might have spoken to Abraham in language of severe recrimination and unmitigated reproach, but he did not do so; he restrained his anger, and I have no doubt that Abraham felt most deeply humbled by seeing so mild, so beautiful, so forbearing a response to so sinful, so wicked, and so unjustifiable prevarication.

This reiterated sin, as I have said already, seems to have been adopted by Abraham as deliberate policy; but, although it occurred for the second time, it does not occur again. No doubt he was brought to see it in its right light, and probably by the rebuke administered by Abimelech he was made repentant for it. And Abimelech, too, reproached Sarah in a very delicate but sharp way. He said, "Behold, I have given thy brother"—therein was the sarcasm. "You, Sarah, connived at Abraham's sin, by calling yourself his

sister, and you called him *your brother*. Well, Sarah, I have given *thy brother* a thousand pieces of silver; behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes unto all that are with thee, and with all other;" that is, "you are safe enough now." And it is added very truly, "thus she was reproved." He did not say one word of reproof more than, "thy brother." He thus showed her that he saw through the deception she had attempted; and he wished to show at the same time that she, a professing Christian, was thus capable of deceiving one who made no pretension to Christianity; and thus the least enlightened rebuked the loudest professor, and Abraham and Sarah went home humbler persons that night than when they left their dwelling in the morning.

May we have the faith without the faults of Abraham. May the Spirit so sanctify and enlighten us, that we may learn to discriminate, and follow Abraham as far as he followed Him who said, "Before Abraham was, I am."

CHAPTER XXI.

BIRTH OF ISAAC. HIS CIRCUMCISION. SARAH'S LAUGHTER. THE
DISMISSAL OF HAGAR. ISHMAEL'S THIRST. GOD IN THE
DESERT. GROVES AND CATHEDRALS.

WE now come to the actual history of the fulfilment of an ancient promise made to Abraham, often renewed, and in circumstances of great and impressive solemnity. We learn, from what the historian records as fact, how faithful God ever is, and ever has been, to the least and greatest of the promises which he himself has given. These promises seem to involve impossibilities; but, just because they were promises, nothing can be impossible for God to do, or improbable to expect, which, in his own blessed Word, he has actually made promise of. He said, that Sarah in old age should have a son; and that son, in the fulness of the time, was born unto her, and his name, we are told, was called *Isaac*; that is, *laughter, merriment, or joy*, or it may be called *good news*, as if it were an anticipatory accent of that real good news which, in the fulness of the times, sounded from the skies, when angels sang, "Unto you is born this day a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

Abraham took Isaac, and admitted him, by an outward rite, into what we believe was the outward and visible communion of the people of God, or enrolled his name amid the worshippers of God by a rite or ceremony which I have ever felt corresponded in that dispensation in its application to the ceremony, or sacrament, or rite, of baptism in the Christian Church.

We read again, in the 8th verse, that Abraham was a hundred years old when this child was born unto him. The child, then, was not the offspring of nature, according to the laws of nature, but the unexpected child of grace, and the exponent of the fulfilment of a promise, given by the God of grace to Abraham.

Sarah says, in the 8th verse, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me." You recollect that when the promise was made, Sarah, in her tent, overheard the promise, and laughed at it; the thing was so incredible to her, that she laughed at the very announcement of it, as impossible and absurd; and she now says, with great emphasis, referring to her laughter, "With incredulity," she says, "I laughed, in unbelief; but God has made me to laugh in reality. I find that my laughter before was the laughter of unbelief; my laughter or my joy now is that of delight, and gratitude, and faith in God, for He has made even me, incredulous as I am and was, God has made *me* to laugh and be glad, as well as Abraham, the father of the child."

She next exclaimed, "Who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should have given children

suck? for I have borne him a son in his old age,"—repeating the cause of her laughter, and explaining how remarkable it was, and how truly it became her, to recognize this son Isaac, not as nature's gift, but as grace's special and peculiar boon, as a fact above nature, and therefore a miracle.

Ishmael persecuted Isaac. Ishmael was the son of the bondwoman, or the secondary wife of Abraham; for you must recollect that Hagar was as truly Abraham's wife as was Sarah, being then what was called a secondary wife, publicly recognized, and married to Abraham under a state and a dispensation in which, according to the language of our Lord, this was tolerated for the hardness of their hearts. Things were permitted in the infancy of society which have been prohibited or stopped in its maturity. In fact, society in the mass has been very much like the individual,—things are permitted or overlooked in childhood, which are neither permitted nor overlooked in maturer years; and it is quite plain, from reading this Book, which gives us the biography of humanity, as a whole, that arrangements were tolerated, if not applauded, in the earliest stages of society, which were not so in its ripener and its maturer years. In this matter of Abraham's marriage to two wives, it was God who tolerated it; it is the law of God that makes it sin now, and when the great Legislator speaks, all dispute or doubt about the morality or immorality of an action is put an end to. Ishmael, it is said, mocked at Isaac. Thus, whilst God states the fact of polygamy, he states the consequences, the perplexities, the ills of it. Here Ishmael, who was then about

fourteen years of age, found that he was likely to be supplanted, and Hagar saw that she might not now occupy the prominent place which she thought she had secured in preference to Sarah. Conflict, antagonism, envy, jealousy, broke out. Ishmael naturally vindicated and took the part of his mother Hagar, who had probably been despised by Sarah, whose temper was not of the happiest kind constitutionally. The son of the bondwoman, seeing his mother Hagar not treated kindly, mocked at Isaac, the son of promise; and the consequence was, that Sarah came and said, "Cast out the bondwoman." If Abraham had been an unsanctified man, he would have said, "Sarah, you were the person who recommended her introduction: why should you now advise her being cast out? If she has been unkind to you, you ought to remember that you proposed her admittance; and, therefore, you must put up with the results that follow from my having done what you recommended at the beginning." But she saw her fault—the inconveniences, the practical inconveniences, of her early recommendation—and, taught by better experience, she now says, "Cast out the bondwoman." Abraham hesitated; it was painful to do so; but he was told by God that it was right before Him, and his doing so was not cruelty to Hagar, but a legal necessity, in order to exclude Ishmael from the inheritance, that Isaac, the son of promise, who was the right inheritor, might possess that inheritance. He therefore gives to Hagar bread, and a bottle of water, or, as it in all probability was, a *sheepskin of water*, being the skin of an animal that

was then used instead of modern glass ; and in a sultry climate, and to travel over a long desert, a larger quantity of water than any sized bottle that we can imagine could hold, was necessary for her.

The poor mother thus driven forth, set out toward the wide wilderness without the utterance of a murmur or complaint, taking the lad with her. The water in the bottle was soon spent ; the pangs of hunger and thirst came on ; she laid the child, or the lad, under the shrubs. He was a youth, a stripling, probably fourteen years of age. " And she went, and sat her down over against him, a good way off, as it were a bowshot ; for she said, Let me not see the death of the child." The lad began clearly to faint first. It is not the strongest that endure the longest fatigue and the greatest exhaustion ; for she remained strong, when the lad, probably from his rapid growth, from his constitution not being formed, and settled, and vigorous, fainted from hunger and thirst in the midst of the sultry desert. I think the picture is worthy of a master's pencil ; that sketch, that beautiful picture, where she hid her eyes, and sat at a distance, that she might not gaze at the expiring agonies of the son for whom she had suffered so much, and whose exile and banishment she pitied so truly.

But in this state " God heard the voice of the lad." How beautiful is this, that in that desert the cry of that lad reached the ear of the Lord of Hosts ! God was watching over him. We think a desert is destitute of Deity because it is destitute of civilization ; but it is not so. God is as much in the desert, and sees and hears every sound amid its

silence, as he is in the throng and the bustle of the populous city. You recollect the beautiful instance in the history of Mungo Park. When travelling in a parched and sunburnt and scorched desert, after he had given up all for lost, and felt that he must lie down and die; just on the spot where he sat down, he saw a little flower, with its tints as beautiful as under the shelter and the shadow of his own Scottish hills, and as fragrant and sweet as if it had grown in the most beautiful garden in the choicest spot of his own land; gazing at it, he thought, if God condescends to feed with his dews this flower, and to pencil these tints, and to give it life and vitality here, where few eyes can see it, then there is a God in the wilderness; also, He that takes care of a little flower will not forget and forsake me. And he took heart again, and set out on his march, and was strong to do and to dare, because the thought of a present and protecting God was realized by him.

I need not refer to the promise that God made to Ishmael, as I have explained it already: "I will make him a great nation;" and he grew in the wilderness, and became, as you are aware, the founder of the Arabs. It appears that at this time Abraham was in the kingdom of Abimelech, and that Abimelech and his subjects had done some mischief to Abraham, because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away, and Abraham came to him and reminded him of this act, and asked for such compensation as was proper; and Abimelech made the right apology, and explained that it was not done with his consent. Wells of

water, in eastern and hot climates, are of course of very great importance; and hence, to stop the wells of a country, or to lead away the water from the wells of a country, is an act of the greatest hostility to its population.

We read that Abraham made a grove, after this expression of amity with Abimelech, and called there on the name of the Lord. It is very curious to notice how the first sanctuaries seem to have been woods, forests, and groves. And it is equally remarkable to notice how, after they were used for true and spiritual worship, they came to be employed exclusively for idolatry—so much so, that in the rest of this blessed book you will hear God often commanding them utterly to pull down the groves, because those groves had been made places where idols were worshipped. The brass serpent was made by God's command, its healing virtue was given by God himself, and the people were divinely told to look at it. But after it had served its purpose, the same people tried to make a god of it. In this instance men took that which was true and good originally, and made such a bad use of it that God commanded it to be ground to powder as *no-hushtan*, "a thing of vanity, and as nothing." These grove sanctuaries came to be desecrated, and therefore he commanded them all to be pulled down. One can see in these groves the first idea of a cathedral. Let any one stand in a lofty avenue of oaks, with their branches intertwining and interlacing, and he will see the nave of a Gothic cathedral. The tracery on the roof, the groined arches, the columns, and the pillars with their picturesque capitals, all is but man trying to embody in

the stone what nature has so magnificently developed in her forests, and to perpetuate a grove of stone as a memorial still of the first sanctuaries in which men worshipped.

“Against the clouds, far up the skies,
The walls of the cathedral rise,
Like a mysterious grove of stones.”

Longfellow.

Hence, also, the Druids and the Druid temples, all were instances of the early purpose to which groves and forests were applied, that is, for worship; and when one thinks of the silence and the solemnity of primeval forests, one can see how naturally man would have recourse to them to worship; but when we see how sadly they were abused, one feels how easily the best things may be perverted, and God's own divine institutions turned into objects of sin and of folly.

But blessed be God, neither in this mountain nor in that, neither in grove or cathedral only, is worship acceptable to God. He is worshipped truly, and the worship is accepted, wherever he is approached in spirit and in truth.

CHAPTER XXII.

GOD'S COMMAND. THE PATRIARCH'S OBEDIENCE. THE JOURNEY TO MORIAH. THE LAMB SLAIN FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.

I would offer a very few remarks upon the intensely interesting sketch which is contained in this chapter; a sketch, however, that is a shadow of a far greater and more glorious event, consummated in the fulness of the times, when "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have eternal life."

Let us ponder how painful to Abraham, and unexpected, must have been the command addressed to him here by his God, "Take now thy son, thine *only* son Isaac, whom *thou lovest*, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering." It was after, you recollect, he had been told that in old age there should be born to him a son, and after he had thought for a season that Ishmael was that son, and, disappointed in him, had received Isaac as the son of promise, his only son, and the only one that was born to him, and the only apparently possible channel through whom and by whom might be sent the Messiah, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. After dis-

appointment on disappointment, after darkness deepening into darkness, at last Isaac the son of promise is born—the patriarch's joy is perfect, his expectancy is at its highest pitch, all is sunshine without and brightness within. But in the midst of this, the voice of Him who made him leave the land of Ur, and go to the land that He would show him, sounds from the skies, and says to him, "Take now thy son;" and, as if to make it more emphatic, "thine *only* son;" and, as if still more to convey the greatness of the sacrifice, "thine only son *Isaac*," whose very name is joy, and whose birth has been to thee a spring of joy—"take thy son, thine only son Isaac;" and, as if still further to deepen the pain of the requirement, "whom thou *lovest*, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and"—without any expectation of popular applause, or any credit for patriotic devotedness, or any assignable reason except my command—"offer him there," by slaying him "for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." What a mysterious command was this! One would have thought that Abraham would have said, Is it possible that this can be God's voice? Does it not seem as if God contradicted himself? Does it not look as if he made a promise only to break it, or perform the first part of his promise only to lead to the utter failure of that which was the burden, and the subject, and the object of the promise? He might have said, and with reason, What will the world say of me? What will Sarah his mother say? What excuse shall I offer? What will all mankind say, as they read this strange and awful history? But the answer was the obedience of faith. Abraham knew that the God that

gave Isaac was the God that required the sacrifice, and he felt, if he did not say, "the Lord gave him, and the Lord takes him away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

The expression which is here employed, in the first verse, God did *tempt* Abraham, has been sometimes misconstrued. We associate with the word *tempt*, inducement to sin, but that is not the meaning either of the original Hebrew or of the Greek in the New Testament, when and wherever it is employed; for the word *tempt* is the same word as *try*—it is the word used in the 139th Psalm, "Search me and *tempt* me, O God;" by which you do not mean, *tempt* me to sin, but you mean, as it is there translated, "Search me, O God, and *try* me"—make experiment, make proof of me—"and see if there be any wicked way in me." But, you say. Why did God thus try or tempt Abraham? Not that God needed to know what was in Abraham's heart, or that God needed to gauge what was the depth of Abraham's devotedness, but that the church in future ages needed to have a standing memorial of what great things faith could dare, what dear things faith could surrender, what painful things faith could go through, that we might be Abraham's children by faith, leaving all we love behind, facing all we fear before, for this reason only, and for no other, that God bids us.

Abraham, took the wood and the burnt offering; and he went to the place which God had told him of. And on the third day he lifted up his eyes, and saw the place; and he told his servants to abide at the foot of the mount while he went up. He then laid the wood upon his son Isaac, took the fire in his

hand, and a knife, as if he had already a lamb for a sacrifice; and then Isaac said, as if acquainted with the nature of patriarchal worship, "My father; and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood;"—I understand that; but there is some great gap in this day's proceedings—there is some want in this day's worship; I have seen each day more than this;—"where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" There are the signs of sacrifice, but where is the substance? There is the form, but where is the life? There is here the ritual; but we need something to make that ritual real—"where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said," in awful, but to Isaac mysterious accents, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering; so they went both of them together." Isaac, beautiful in his silence, as Abraham was strong in his faith; the one, all the patience that submits to pain and complains not; the other, all the heroism that engages in an awful sacrifice, a painful duty, and hesitates not. "Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord (for he had done all that was required) called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know," and I have made it known, "that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up

for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh, as it is said to this day. In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen," or, "in the mount of the Lord it shall be provided." And that provision is described, Isaiah liii., when we are told, "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." "On him the Lord hath laid the iniquities of us all: he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

To Abraham was repeated the promise to which he had frequently listened before—that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed.

God rewards in time noble and obedient sacrifices. He reigns, and sees what his servants do, and dare, and suffer for him. His word is, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you." "Them that honour me I will honour."

ABRAHAM brought his son to the mountain top. Isaac said, with perfect innocence, but with natural truth and justice, "Here is the fire, and here is the wood,"—that is, here are all the elements of a sacrifice,—“but where is the lamb?” or the victim to be consumed by the fire, and presented to God as a burnt offering. The reply of Abraham was mild, yet decisive, and in some degree not communicative,—it was, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb;” as if he had said, “That is no matter of ours; it is ours to find the fuel; it is ours to ignite it from the flame; it is God’s to provide what God will accept, a burnt offering, or a lamb for a sacrifice,”—“My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.”

That provision was fulfilled on Calvary, a crag or a swelling part of Mount Moriah, on which Christ was crucified, the Lamb for the true sacrifice and burnt offering.

What a blessed thought! Jehovah-jireh—the Lord will provide. What a blessed pledge to true Christians who fear! What an encouraging promise to

weak ones who faint! This is one feature in the character of God—He will *provide*. It is remarkable enough, that some of the most beautiful and pregnant characters of God, arose in ancient times from what may be called by the world accidental, from what may be called, in a right sense, incidental circumstances.

The epithet in the text, and others, arose from what may be called incidental circumstances; but they were the means of developing or making known new traits in the character of God,—traits which are to his people, in every age, as bright beams shining in a dark place,—making more plain, or at least more bright and beautiful, the way that leads to heaven, and happiness, and glory

What is meant by this expression, "The Lord will provide?" It has its special application to the provision of the lamb; but the special application is only the basis of a general one, "The Lord will provide." Whatever be the want that is deepest, the Lord will fill it; whatever be the trial that is bitterest, the Lord will provide something in it, or through it, or by it, that will make it good to them that feel it. In other words, it is a provision that will in all times be seasonable, that will in the worst emergency be effectual; and all that God asks of us is just to believe it, and to act upon it, and be at peace. If I might translate this, which is a scriptural proverb, into another, which may be called a secular proverb, it would be, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity;" "the Lord will provide;" or "in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen"

I need not say, that some have viewed it, and

especially ancient commentators, in another light. They have thought the words "Jehovah-jireh" ought to be translated, "in the mount the Lord shall be seen." In our marginal translation it is, "the Lord will see, or provide;" and in our version it is, "In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen;" but it may, I believe, be accurately enough rendered, "In the mount of the Lord shall be seen;" and if that be a prophecy, then the fulfilment of it occurred on Calvary, when Jesus, the Brightness of the Father's glory, was nailed to the cross; and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." On that very mount he was crucified; on that very mount the true Lamb suffered—the real burnt offering was made; and God was seen to be, and proved to be, just, while he justified through Him the chiefest of sinners that believe in His name.

But taking the words, as I have said, in their broad and wide sense, in what respects may we expect that the Lord will provide for his people? This last is the literal and the strict meaning, and it is only the short epitome of a thousand analogous promises, scattered over the Bible like stars over a winter sky. "The Lord will provide." What will he provide for his people? He will provide for them, at least, daily bread. He bids them ask for it; and can God bid his people ask of him anything that he will not give? I do not believe it. Wherever God inspires a prayer, there, there is a purpose to answer. Whenever a special prayer is by some strange and mysterious accident, as you call it, or association, that you cannot get rid of, brought home to your heart, and you are taught

and led to pray that prayer, it is a pledge and an earnest that God will answer it. He inspires the prayer he means to answer, and the very fact that you pray for a special blessing, is in itself a pledge from Heaven that God will bestow that blessing. Now, he bids us pray, "Give us this day our daily bread;" and as sure as we pray it, so sure he hears it, and we may say, when we have prayed it, "The Lord will provide all that is good and expedient for us."

He will provide for us, too, support in the midst of our trials. Nobody is without trials. That man would be a phenomenon who had none. He who has fewest trials has fewest signatures upon him that he is God's child; for "what son is he whom the Lord chasteneth not?" If we were without chastisement, we should not be sons." And our trials, instead of being discouragements, ought to be regarded by us as special hints, as secret revelations from God, that he has purposes of love and good concerning us. In these trials, the bitterest, the longest and the heaviest, he will either provide an escape for the excess that we cannot bear, or he will perfect, in the midst of them, divine strength, and say, "My grace is sufficient for you; my strength is made perfect in weakness." Either in lightening the load, or in giving strength to bear it, "God will provide."

But the statement of this, it requires modification. He will not always provide what we wish; he will always provide what is better—what his wisdom sees to be best for us. Many a time we have wished for ourselves that which would have been, if granted, our ruin. I believe, that when we enter into heaven, we

shall thank God as much for the prayers that he never answered at all, as for the prayers that he answered most liberally and most readily. In other words, we shall then discover, that we asked many a thing which, if granted, would have been our ruin, however natural and suitable it appeared at the time, and that God, in infinite, and condescending, and fatherly love, withheld; and what he withheld, will be to us a ground of as great and as rich praise, as what he gave. How pleasant, how delightful to know, that it is for us to ask—it rests with Him to give—"the Lord will provide!" He does not make you cease to ask what really you feel you need. We often mix two things that ought never to be linked. Our simple business is to go to God, and ask *bonâ fide* anything that we think or feel that we want. We are not to limit our petitions; we are not to say, "Oh! I will not ask this, lest it be not good for me." That is no business of mine; I am to ask of God whatever I think I need, and to leave with him the sublime prerogative of giving or withholding, just as to him seems best. My simple privilege is to ask all that I think I need; his great promise is, that he will provide that which we really need; not giving that which we think we need, but which is not good for us, nor withholding from us what we do need, but which we have not asked, but providing for us just that, nothing less nor more, which is most expedient for us.

If this be true, then, in temporal things, I need not say that, with reference to God's people, it is true in spiritual and eternal things. "The Lord will provide." I must not look at any church, priest, minis-

ter, or sacrament for the provision; I can look at nothing short of the great fountain itself—"The Lord will provide."

And what will he provide for the believer? He will provide for him the pardon of all his sins. He has provided for him the purchase of it; what he will now provide, is the application of it. In Christ is redemption, in his blood efficacy to cleanse us from all our sins; but from God is that application of it to our special and individual cases, that makes us feel that all our sins are blotted out, and all our iniquities forgiven.

God will provide for us sanctification. The same God who takes away the guilt of sin by a Saviour's blood, takes away the power and the pollution of sin by the Saviour's Holy Spirit. I need not only pardon, that I may have a *title* to heaven, but I need to have provided for me sanctification, that I may have a *fitness* for heaven; and it is no more in the power of a priest to pardon me, than it is in his power to sanctify me. Both are the results of divine power. It is one of the royalties of Christ to pardon and to sanctify, and none else can; and He who provides for me pardon and sanctification, will provide for me also peace. Can you suppose that God will make his enemies have peace, and leave his friends without it? I cannot believe it; on the contrary, "being justified by faith, we have *peace* with God." In a lecture which I tried to analyze in another place (Hanover-square Rooms) this morning, it is said, that Protestants have a gloomy religion, and that "Catholics"—that is, Romanists—have a bright and a joyous religion. My dear friends, this is not fact,

and ought not to be so in our illustration of that fact. I am sure, that throughout the whole New Testament, which I hold to be the Protestant's religion, joy, not sadness, is insisted on. It is said, "Rejoice, and again I say, Rejoice." And again, "The kingdom of God is righteousness"—that is, character,—"*and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.*" Wherever, then, there is real Christian joy in the mind, real Christian happiness in the heart, it there is the fruit of Christianity. The same God who provides a title to heaven, provides happiness as an earnest of heaven in the possession of that title. Hence, that man who is not happy must be unhappy from something else than Christianity; and he who is really happy, can be truly happy from nothing else than Christianity. The first action of the gospel is to make man happy; and its secondary, but successive influence, is to make man holy. The law of God tries to make men happy, by making them holy; the gospel makes you holy, by making you happy. By the law, you go through holiness to happiness, and that is ever true; but by the gospel you go through happiness to holiness—the good news creating joy first, and then gratitude for the good news creating holiness next.

The same God who provides for us this, will provide for us all the elements of progress to heaven. God never sets any one a warfare at his own charges. If he puts you on a journey, he will carry you on in that journey. If he puts you on the race-course, he will enable you to run with patience the race set before you, looking unto Jesus, not only the Author, but the Finisher of your faith. He, therefore, who

provides for your pardon, will give you the elements of progress; and by a mysterious, but an actual process, he will make all things work together for good to them that love him, and are called according to his purpose. All winds waft the ship that lays her head towards the true haven; and all winds and tides help that vessel, that steers by the right compass and the right chart, to the haven that God has prescribed as the home of the pilgrims of the earth, and the voyagers of the sea. "God will provide."

Having noticed the things that God will provide for us, let me state next, what are the grounds of this conclusion. It is quite sufficient to read, "God will provide." Whatever God promises is true, though we do not see how he can make it true. We are very apt to fall into this mistake. We read a promise, and then, instead of saying, "Well this must be, because God has said it," we say, "How can this be?" or "How will God bring it to pass?" And very frequently, because we cannot see how it may be, we very stupidly infer that it never can be. We have nothing to do with the possibilities of the thing; we have only to do with the revelation or the non-revelation of the thing. The question ought not to be, How can this be? but the real question is, Has this been said by God? and, if it has been said, it is his to do it, and ours to believe it, knowing that faithfulness has guaranteed that not one jot or tittle shall fail till all be fulfilled; and "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

But God gives us an insight into the inner machinery, and that insight informs us, that one ground

of his providing all that we need, is his own love. He so loved us, that he gave Christ to die for us. How much more will he perform those promises that he has made, through Christ, to us? If his love gave great things, surely it will give small things; if his love provided the price of our redemption, surely that love will provide the means of the application of that price for our personal acceptance before him.

But not only his love, but his power, is at the basis of these promises. What he wills, he has the power to do. Man sometimes has not the will to do us good; and sometimes, when he has the will, he has not the power to do us good. But God has the will, for he has declared it; and God has the power, for he is omnipotent; and therefore, what he has promised to provide, that his power will provide, and all his promises will be seen at last, as they are seen now, to be Yea and Amen, irreversible and true, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is thus that we see what God will provide, and we see the grounds, too, on which he will provide. What makes us very often have doubts and suspicions about this? First, we sometimes lose our hold and persuasion of the reality of this, because we think of the world, and all that is in it, without God. We think it is still a sort of chaos—all things knocking against each other by ceaseless accidents, without any governing and presiding power; and therefore we conclude, that it cannot be that this promise will ever be fulfilled. But just recollect, that God *governs*; not only that God *is*, but that God *acts*; not only that God sits upon his throne, but sways the sceptre of his supremacy over all

creation; and so minute is that superintendence, that not a hair can fall from the head, or a sparrow to the ground, without his permission. If I believe this, I can see that the God who promised, eighteen hundred years, or three thousand years ago—still living, still governing, incapable of forgetting, possessed of omnipotent power—will make good, in fact, the promise he has recorded in his holy word.

Another reason why we doubt it is, that we are very precipitate and hasty. We often say, because we have not got to-day what we need, therefore we shall not get it at all. But that is a very great mistake. God bids us wait on the Lord. All that he has promised us, that he will provide—the day, the hour, the month, the year, he has not specified. He asks only confidence in his love, and confidence in his word, while he bids you look for the fulfilment of that word some time, and the very time that is most for your good, not the time that you may most prefer.

And another reason why we doubt God is, that we are more or less distrustful. We are very apt to say, "All this is very nice, all this is very well to talk about, but it will not do to trust in." It *will* do to trust in. God means that we should repose on his shortest and simplest promises, as we do upon the Rock of Ages, or the foundations of the globe itself. It is true, "God will provide." He will provide, not what you think is best, but what he knows is best; and he will do it now, just as much as he ever did it before. Not one prophet, patriarch, evangelist, apostle, testifies that one word or promise of God has failed; and no one yet ever lived who said,

as the result of solemn experience, that God's word has failed.

That man who exercises simple and earnest trust in this blessed promise, will be kept in perfect peace. It is truly delightful to be able, in the path of duty, in the scene of sorrow and suffering, in the prospect of trials, afflictions, bereavements, to roll our burden on the Lord, and to feel and know that he careth for us. Such a persuasion will not weaken, but strengthen our efforts and activity. It is not a reason for indolence or apathy, but an incentive to duty. They who trust most, invariably toil most. Hope, based on confidence in God, is an element of success. Faith is the victory that overcometh the world. It is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." It lifts the heart of the believer above the frail, the fleeting, and the earthly, and brings it into contact and communion with unseen but glorious realities. Let us begin life, and enter upon every duty, and undertake every office that opens to us in the providence of God, assured that, if we trust in him, he will provide for us. This is his promise; this is his very nature,—he cannot deny himself: "Them that honour me, I will honour." "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things will be added." We may not obtain many things we would like, but we shall obtain all things that are truly expedient for us. The Lord is a Shield and Sun: he giveth grace and glory, and will withhold no good thing from them that love him.

Let us go forth into the unsounded future, and

looking forward to all that betides us in that future, with this deep, inner persuasion written on our hearts, that God will provide grace and glory; that he will withhold from us no good thing; for all his promises in Christ are Yea and Amen.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SARAH'S DEATH. LIMIT OF LIFE. ABRAHAM'S SORROW. ARRANGEMENTS FOR BURIAL. EASTERN COURTESY. BUSINESS AND CHRISTIANITY. MONEY.

WE have here the close of one of the most interesting, and in many respects touching biographies recorded in the word of God. Sarah reached the extraordinary age,—extraordinary according to our present experience,—of “an hundred and seven and twenty years.” I stated before, that it seems extremely probable that the last shortening of human life was at the Flood, namely, the reduction of it to the limit of one hundred and twenty years; and that, for many centuries after the era of the Flood, life seems to have lasted, in favourable circumstances at least, to that extent. Our experience now reaches to scarcely above half that period; but, whether this be owing to our defective sanitary arrangements, or to our modes of life, or to the fact, that the highest civilization and the most savage barbarism seem to approach and touch each other, I know not; but the fact is so. There is no scriptural reason for believing that the limits of human life are less now than one hundred and twenty years, or that old age should begin so early as sixty years. In the ninetieth

Psalm, as I have elsewhere stated, is the description, not of the normal, but the abnormal state of man. Moses says, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow." But he there describes, not what is the universal law, but what had become the special, bitter, painful, and exceptional experience of the wilderness condition, in which they had long been; thus showing that life was really longer usually, but that such were the grinding necessities of their condition, as pilgrims in the desert, that, in that wilderness, and there only, it had reached only threescore and ten years, instead of its past and wonted maturity.

We read of Sarah's death in "Kirjath-arba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan;" and of Abraham coming to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her, the partner of his sorrows, his sins, his joys, and his trials—who had joined with him in his equivocation, shared with him in his repentance, and now preceded him to that true rest, of which Canaan was the dim and the imperfect type and earnest. Abraham, however, showed that he wept as though he wept not, just as on previous occasions he rejoiced as though he rejoiced not, knowing that the world and the fashion of it passeth away.

We therefore find him proceeding, according to the necessities of an Eastern climate, instantly, or with scarcely an interval of a day, to bury his dead. He accordingly makes inquiry for the first holding that he can find in the promised land. How expressive and remarkable is his first property there—a tomb. He was promised Canaan as his rest—he

was a sojourner in search of it; and the first portion of it that he could call his own was not a palace, a castle, or a temple, or a home—but a grave; teaching us, and teaching him, that Canaan could not be *the* ultimate and promised rest; for in the true Canaan there are no graves, nor death, and no dead are buried; for there is no weeping, nor dying there; and, therefore, inspiring in the patriarch's heart the sentiment that he needed in the midst of Canaan, to feel now as truly as he ever felt it before, "This is not my rest—this is not the real Canaan—there remaineth still beyond it and above it a rest for the people of God."

We next read of his address to the children of Heth, and his dealing with them for the purchase of a tomb. First of all they offered him any of their own sepulchres, but these he would not accept. 'The sepulchres were cut out of the solid rock; the remains of them are to be found to this day, and indeed the very spot where Sarah was buried can be distinctly and clearly traced out now in the land of Canaan. I say, most of these sepulchres were cut out of the rock, and these people offered Abraham any of their own; but any of these he would not accept. He wished for a separate one, according to Eastern customs and Eastern predilections: and he required it, not gratis, but for money, and accordingly applied to Ephron, the son of Zohar.

Now, this Ephron was a specimen of genuine Eastern courtesy; he had his eye to the price of the tomb; but, like all easterns, he expressed himself as if that were a mere trifling matter. An Eastern comes now and says, "I am your slave." He speaks

of himself in the most humble terms, and of you in the most exalted; you have in Ephron a type of Eastern character to this day, when he said, in an off-hand style, "Nay, my lord, hear me: the field I give thee, and the cave that is therein." And when Abraham answered, "I will give thee money for the field," he said, "My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver;" but you see how beautifully he adds, "What is that betwixt thee and me?" We must not stand on such a trifle; I am most desirous to oblige you, whose dignity and character are entitled to so much. But Abraham, with all the exactness of the most rigid man of business, combined with all the courtesy of the most finished European gentleman, and yet with all the beautiful and characteristic delicacy of a true Christian, said, "No; I cannot accept this; I require it as my property, and I am ready to give you so much for it." And he set us here a precedent for our imitation. We sometimes say, I do not like to deal with such a man as if he were a rogue, and to insist on signature, and seal, and witnesses, and all the legal etiquette of bargain-making. But Abraham did insist upon it; he required witnesses; he had deeds, signed and sealed, and documentary evidence. And I have found, from my little experience, that it is always the best way to do these things in the most business-like way. There is no defect of Christianity or violation of duty in so doing, and there is an immense saving of much painful, anxious, and irritating after-dispute that may incidentally occur, even among friends. I am quite sure, that the most perfect business transaction need not be the least Christian

transaction ; and that, however much confidence you have in a brother, it is always the best way to have the transaction signed and sealed in the presence of "the children of Heth," that you may have it for an everlasting possession, without dispute, without cavil, and without law-suit.

The expression that Abraham employs is a very peculiar one—"bury my dead out of my sight." What a testimony to the change that has passed upon all, that that face which reflected our sunshine, which reciprocated our sorrows, which was the mirror of many a bright and beautiful recollection, even a husband, a son, must bury out of sight ! Sin has entered, and death by sin, and therefore death hath passed upon all.

When he required this sepulchre, he offered so much *money* we are told—shekels of silver—and this money was weighed. This informs us that silver came so early as this period of the world to be currency. I mentioned, I think, before, that the earliest money was cattle. Hence, the Latin word *pecunia*, from which our expression *pecuniary transactions* is derived, comes from *pecus*, which means *cattle*. And it is very singular that in the Greek language every word that is used for *purchase* or *property* is a derivation from some other word denoting an animal. Thus, the Greek word *ἀγοράζω*, which means "to bargain," is derived from a Greek word that means a lamb. Again, *πώλω*, to sell, is derived from the word used for a colt. Again, the Greek word *κενομαι*, to profit, comes from a word signifying an ass. Again, the Greek word *προβας*, revenue, is derived from the Greek word *προβατον*, sheep or cattle. In short, all

the words in Greek and Latin that mean property transactions, buying and selling, are derived from cattle, and the earliest figures that were struck upon ancient coins were figures of cattle. A man was said to be possessed of so many thousand oxen or sheep, and when they entered into a bargain, they gave so many sheep, or so many oxen to the person from whom they were purchasing. Here, for the first time, we have silver introduced as currency,—that which, in fact, is still the currency of the greatest portion of the nations of the earth,—gold being restricted to very few countries, as the representative of property—mainly, I believe, in this country ; whereas on the continent it is, I believe, chiefly silver.

The sepulchre was thus secured, and Sarah was buried at Mamre,* the place where they had often worshipped, “and the field, and the cave that is therein,” being amid the fields and trees that constituted the grove which was Abraham’s first temple, and Sarah’s last resting-place ; and these “were made sure unto Abraham,” that is, by documents, “for a possession of a burying-place by the sons of Heth.” Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord !

* A Spanish Jew, Benjamin of Tudela,—visited the place about six hundred years ago, and states that he saw Sarah’s grave, and also Isaac’s, Rebekah’s, and Jacob’s. He states, that close to them are tons of the bones of the children of Israel.

A more recent writer states, that the tombs of the patriarchs are covered with rich carpets, furnished by the sultans of Constantinople.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ELIEZER'S CALL TO ABRAHAM. THE STEWARD'S DIFFICULTY.
MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN. PREPARATION. DRAWING
WATER. RACHEL. LABAN'S AVARICE. LOVE AT SIGHT.

IN offering a few necessarily superficial remarks upon the exquisitely touching, beautiful, and ancient portrait I have read, you must recollect that it refers to times when modern modes and modern etiquette were altogether unpractised and unknown. It will be a question, of course, for you and all to consider whether there were not excellences in those old patriarchal days worthy of our imitation, and defects in what we think the more excellent way, that might properly be exchanged.

I have to remind you, that in the previous chapter we had the touching and melancholy portrait of the death of Sarah; her burial in a tomb purchased by Abraham from the people of the land of Heth; and in this chapter we have the record of another incident, very beautiful, and in many parts exquisitely picturesque, full of instruction, and fitted to do good to those who will fully, diligently, and prayerfully weigh it.

But I must first explain, that the person here

called the *servant* in Abraham's house, was not a slave or a menial, as it might be supposed from his description. It was the custom then, and it is the custom even now, to call the highest officers of the prince servants. The prime minister of our country is, and calls himself, the servant of the Queen; and this person, high in office in the house of Abraham, a prince as well as a patriarch, is called his servant, whilst he was, in fact, his treasurer—Eliezer of Damascus,—who had the control of all the good things and the great things of Abraham's house; and this will show that this was not a slave that he sent to transact so important a matter, but an officer of distinction, and of very high standing in the house of Abraham.

He made this servant swear, in a peculiar but ancient formula, that he would take a wife unto Abraham's son; a wife—not of the daughters of the Canaanites, into whose land he had entered, and whose dispossession was the subject of ancient prophecy—but that he would take a wife to his son, of a Christian people, and on no account out of the families of a heathen and depraved people, however wealthy, as the Canaanites were.

The servant accordingly took the oath, after an ancient and primitive form, and he said, what would have naturally occurred to any one, "Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land"—she may have a will of her own; it seems a very strong measure for me to recommend Isaac, which I will do with all the eloquence which I can command; but I cannot forget she has not seen him, and my recommendation may, therefore, not be

successful; my eloquence may not be sufficiently persuasive to overcome a natural reluctance,—“peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me into this land,” and then, what will become of my oath and my obligation to you? Abraham well knew that the arrangement was made in heaven, and that these steps were merely making it actual in the history of his family upon earth.—“If the woman will not be willing to follow thee,” then you have done your duty; no blame can fall on you. Duties are ours, just as they were Eliezer’s. The issues and the events are God’s; and if men would only trouble themselves more about instant duties that are obviously present, and vex themselves less about contingent possibilities that are not yet come, they would be far more useful to each other in the march of life, and more happy in their own hearts.

It is then said that Eliezer “took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand; and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia.” He felt that, while the thing might be in its arrangement divine, yet it was his duty to take what would make upon Rebekah, or the future and possible wife of Isaac, the deepest and most attractive impression. He therefore goes with ten camels laden with bracelets, and earrings, and jewels, and changes of apparel, as the rest of the passage shows, in order that the future wife of Isaac, whoever she might be, might see that Isaac was not a poor man, and that he was prepared to bestow all the treasures of his house upon her whom he should have the happiness to make his wife.

He then “made his camels to kneel down without

the city by a well of water, at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water." It is a singularly beautiful thought, that the Hebrew word for a *well*, and the Hebrew word for the human *eye*, is the same. It seems most beautiful to call the well or the spring the *eye* of the earth. Just as the tear rushes from the eye when sorrow smites the heart, so the water rushes from the earth when smitten by Him who now wields the rod of Moses, though not seen. "Eye of the earth" is the Hebrew or poetical word for a spring or a fountain, and that explains the beautiful language of Jeremiah, "O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears!" that is, I wish it were, what it means, a spring; I wish I could just weep enough to express the depth of my sorrow at so great and sad catastrophes.

It must appear to us exceedingly strange, that the women of the higher classes of the East should go to draw water at the well, and even carry it home. "I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water." Now, in eastern countries, ladies, I believe, of distinction, go out, or formerly did go, to draw water; among the Bedouins or Arabs of the desert, this is certainly still the case. And this, too, seems strange to us, that the humbler classes carried the water on their heads, whilst the higher classes carried it upon their shoulders; and I believe that one reason why the Arab females walk so erect is from carrying water upon the head. The higher classes carried it upon the shoulder, as a mark of distinction or of rank, as you will see it is noticed

of Rebekah, that she carried her pitcher upon her shoulder; she was of a higher family and of more distinguished birth. The servant recognized the arrangement as divine, and evidently did in the choice of a wife for Isaac what the apostles did in reference to the successor of Judas—they cast lots, and the lot fell on one; so here he makes an arrangement—not a precedent for us, because, unless we have a miraculous commission, we have no right to make miraculous appeals to God. Besides, there was then no written Bible as there is now, and therefore then God spoke to his servants directly from his throne, instead of giving directions as he does now, through his inspired servants in his written Word. And this was the arrangement urged by Eliezer, "Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also; let the same be she which thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac;" then I will understand that this is the person divinely elected by God for the son of my master Abraham."

It came to pass, then, "before he had done speaking," that among the eastern females who came out to the well to fetch water, there came amongst others Rebekah, "who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcar, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother," and therefore the cousin of Isaac, and the niece, of course, of Abraham.

"The damsel was very fair," and this made a favourable impression, and the servant ran to meet her; and as she was the first to come, he resolved

to put to the test the arrangement that he had made divinely with Him who gave success to the enterprise that he was on. "He ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. And she said,"—with instant and perfect courtesy and kindness,—“Drink my lord; and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink,”—and here was the proof to him that she was the accepted and the predestined one,—“she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking,”—which was more than he said, and therefore was more satisfactory to him. “And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels.” And recollect there were ten camels, and she had to descend each time into the well. I recollect reading, that at the well at Cairo they have to descend one hundred and fifty steps before they can reach the water. They have not our plans for raising water by the pressure of the atmosphere, or by rope or wheel; but the more common way is to go down the steps; and you can see how great was Rebekah’s lovingkindness when she put herself to so much personal toil and drudgery to oblige this stranger, with his camels, from a distant land.

“And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring, of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold,” and put them on her. Now, a female of modern times would have shrunk from that; but may it not be, that what we call our

most distinguishing and delicate etiquette, may be only the beautiful outside of a great deal that is wrong within? and may not there be in this unsuspecting simplicity, this unsuspecting deference, beating below, a purer heart than in modern times, where there is exhibited more of apparent deference, but really less, it may be, of true, pure, and lofty principle? I do not say it is so; I submit the contrast to you, for you to infer which is best.

He then said to her, "Whose daughter art thou?" That would be thought a very impertinent question now, but it was meant to be a very civil one, and it was received by her as neither indelicate nor rude; and she answered, with all that simplicity which is so beautiful, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcar, which she bare unto Nahor;" and she said, in the overflowing kindness and hospitality of her heart, "We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in." Recollect, that in those days there were no hotels and inns; and hence the force of that remark of the apostle, that a bishop should be given to hospitality—that a bishop's or a minister's house should be for hospitality. It then had an emphasis which it has not now; but still the substance may remain, although the formula, under which these feelings and duties were expressed, may be changed. And Eliezer instantly said, "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham!" He asked God's guidance; he gave God the praise. Whatever begins with prayer, will be sure to end with praise. People who pray for a blessing before they begin an enterprize, will close the enterprize they have begun with praise for it.

And we then read, that "Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban; and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. And it came to pass, that when he saw the earring and bracelets, he said, Come in." now, as far as I can judge of Laban's conduct, I must infer he does not seem to have been a specimen of the noblest and the finest character; I think that he thought the marriage was desirable for the earrings and the bracelets—that is, for the dowry—more than for the family into which his sister was to enter; for it was when he saw the earrings and the bracelets that he said, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels." It is not a beautiful trait in Laban's character; it indicates, I fear, an avaricious heart. It is like showing more respect to a rich man in a church, than to others. Afterwards, "he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that were with him. And there was set meat before him to eat." But this servant in the house of Abraham was evidently a man intensely devoted to his work, and master, and mission; he would not even eat until he had explained the whole matter. In fact, from the commencement of the chapter to its close, we cannot but notice how intensely and sensitively devoted he was to his master's service, honour, and happiness; and it was because his master put confidence in him, that the servant requited it. The true way to get men to love you, is to love them; the true way to get servants to serve you, is to put confidence in them; but if you are always suspect-

ing, you will be always suspected; if they that serve see only the more repellent points of society, they will be repelled, and society will be destroyed, just by the absence of that which is its cohesion and its cement—confidence in one another.

It is a singular fact, that this veiling of herself by Rebekah, gave rise to an almost universal Eastern usage. The women are kept secluded, and in public veiled, and thus no opportunity is afforded the husband of seeing his future wife, till introduced to her at marriage. All he knows of her beauty or excellence is from the lips of her maid, or nurse.

The picture, which is exquisitely beautiful, closes by Isaac bringing her to his mother Sarah's tent; and she that was given to him in the Lord, was loved by him, and he was comforted. They that marry should marry in the Lord.

THE BLESSED OF THE LORD.—A LESSON.

“And Laban said, Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; why standest thou without?” —GENESIS xxiv. 31.

I HAVE made some necessarily superficial remarks on the long but beautiful chapter from which these words are taken. I noticed in the course of my remarks how, in all the minutest, as well as in all the most momentous interests of human life, the divine order is laid down. “In the Lord,”^a was the essential of marriage. “In the Lord,” was the peculiar and distinguishing feature of death. We read, too, that the servant who went to make the arrangements related in this chapter, not only recognized God in all things, but did so by direct and special prayer. If you read the chapter, you will see how Eliezer, the treasurer of Abraham’s house, looked to God for direction, and, without some significant intimation from on high, he felt that he could neither walk surely nor prosper in the cause that he had in hand. At the same time, you will see that while he regards God as the author of all, and prayer as his duty and his privilege, he employs all the means that God had placed in his power, to enable him to win and master the desirable result. And the issue we read in the chapter, was complete and undiluted

success. The enterprize that begins in asking the blessing of the Almighty is sure to end in success from on high. What begins in Him will be blessed by Him, and whatever is undertaken in defiance of his will, or in disregard of prayer for his presence, direction, and blessing, may seem to have a momentary prosperity, but in the issue it will bitterly and disastrously disappoint. It is God that blesses, and without his blessing the greatest results are small, and with it the least apparent results are blessings indeed.

I noticed that Laban gave the invitation to the servant of Abraham, apparently not because he saw something in him that truly proclaimed him a Christian, but because he saw much with him that made him desire to have him as his friend, his relative, or his ally. I admit the words pronounced by Laban were not from the purest of motives, but what he said in his avarice we may apply truly, and feel that the blessed of the Lord are blessed indeed, and that they that are blessed of him ought to be welcome to our homes and hospitality.

Let me, in looking at these words, viewed as a Christian invitation, notice first what it is that constitutes real happiness in the sight of God—it is being blessed of the Lord. It is remarkable, in reading the Bible, how seldom any circumstantial or external excellence is pronounced the ground of a blessing, and how frequently those pure and spiritual features which the world cannot take notice of, are viewed by God as alone entitled to the blessing. "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven." The world cannot understand that;—it can understand, "Blessed

is the rich man, the great man, the wise man, the healthy man ;" but it cannot understand that in sickness there may be realized the greatest blessing,—that in the bitterest sorrow there may be felt the greatest sunshine,—and that when all is black and ominous around, there may be a light, and a joy, and a peace within which the world can neither give nor take away. God singles out spiritual characteristics as the subjects of his blessing, never those external and circumstantial things which flit and pass away with the evanescence of the flowers of summer, leaving less than these of satisfaction behind them.

Nor are they pronounced blessed here who belong to some external ecclesiastical community. God's blessings are pronounced no more upon ecclesiastical distinction than they are upon political, or civil, or circumstantial position. The Churchman has no monopoly of blessing ; the Dissenter can claim no exclusive spiritual right. God looks through these—the outer and the evanescent distinctions, and he stamps the signature of his own benediction where he has impressed the image of himself, whatever be the name by which the subject of it is known, or whatever be the form in which the object of it worships. "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord."

Such ones may be blessed, too, who are cursed of men. Many of God's saints have been cursed by synods, cursed by popes, cursed by general councils ; but the curse has never cleaved to them, because God had previously blessed them. All the Balaams of the world cannot curse where God hath blessed, and they cannot bless if God has cursed. The blessed of the Lord may be cursed from all the

points of the compass, but they are blessed notwithstanding, and their blessing no man taketh from them.

But who are they that may be said to be emphatically blessed? First, they who are justified in the sight of God. "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven, to whom the Lord imputeth no iniquity." No man is really happy, unless he has some humble reason for believing that his sins are blotted out. As long as he has the persuasion that his sins cleave to him, so long he must make the inference that the curse follows him. The shadow does not more surely follow the body in the sunlight, than the curse follows and cleaves to sin upon the soul. Man was made holy and happy; sin brought the curse, not God; and wherever there is the curse tasted in its bitterness within, or stamped and branded on the man without, there we have the echo of sin, the shadow of iniquity, the absence of all blessing; but when sin is blotted out through precious blood, and the sinner is justified by a finished righteousness, God, not man, says, "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven, whose iniquities are blotted out, and unto whom the Lord imputeth no transgression." He then walks the world satisfied that he walks in the light of God's countenance, and he lives, and labours, and worships, and dies in perfect peace, because he has seen the Lord's salvation.

He who is thus blessed must not only be justified, but also sanctified. If it were possible to take away the guilt of man's sin, but not to destroy in man's heart the love of that sin, man would not be happy. We must not only have a righteousness without, so

that we shall suffer no curse, dread no judgment, and be certain of acquittal at the last tribunal ; but we must also have that happiness, that peace, that joy within which are the direct fruits of a heart renewed and regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God. Wherever there is sin loved by the heart, casting its shadow on the conscience, there, there must be misery ; but as soon as the curse of sin is felt to be removed by the " Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world," and the power, the pollution, and the preference of sin is extirpated by the Holy Spirit changing the heart, and renewing man's nature, then such a one has all the promise of peace within, all the certainty of progress without, and may be addressed from the church below, or from the church above, " Come in, thou blessed of the Lord."

We have a string of benedictions pronounced by him whose mouth was ever eloquent with blessings, and ever silent in cursing. " Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God." The very words are music, the innermost thoughts are blessed, and the characteristics of those who are here delineated are the characteristics of those who are blessed of the Lord, and therefore blessed indeed.

Now in what respect does this blessing light upon those who are thus blessed? In what respect are they blessed? First, they are blessed in their souls. There is no blessing on man's body that does not begin as a root and a spring in man's heart. We must be blessed in heart before we can be blessed at all. And when the blessing is pronounced upon the heart, then it will effloresce and cover with its fragrance the whole life. Anything added to the body may make it appear more beautiful before men, but it does not make the soul that is within more happy; but the blessing that is pronounced upon the soul casts its sunshine out upon the countenance, and the whole man is blessed and happy indeed upon whose soul there is struck the benediction of Him whose blessing maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow.

In the second place, those who are thus blessed in the Lord are blessed in their trials and in their sorrows. It seems strange to suppose that there can be a blessing where there is bitterness of heart within and weeping eyes without; and yet there may be a blessing there, and many have been heard to say, that their happiest hours were their saddest, and that when the world saw nothing but darkness, and their spirits tasted, in one respect, nothing but bitterness, there was an intermingling element of joy and sunshine stricken through the cloud that overshadowed them, that made them count it joy when they fell into much tribulation, and in the midst of their heaviness feel joy unspeakable and full of glory. Unblessed sorrows are the greatest curses, whereas the most poignant and bitter trials,

when blessed, have blossomed with the richest blessings.

Those who are thus blessed, are blessed in their mercies and in their prosperity. You can understand how a blessing is needed when a man suffers; but it is very hard to learn that a blessing is as truly needed when man prospers. Nay, unblessed sorrow, bereavement, affliction is a very sad thing; but unblessed prosperity is a far more hardening and disastrous phase of human experience; and, therefore, if we pray that God would bless us when we are in our sorrows, we ought to pray with yet more fervour that he would give us his blessing when our sun is in its meridian, when all is happiness within, and all is brilliancy and bright hope without. Unblessed sorrows harden, unblessed prosperity hardens still more. How delightful is it to know that God has said, "I will bless thy bread and thy water!"

And those who are thus blessed are blessed in their labours. "Thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands," is the promise, "and happy shalt thou be: and it shall be well with thee." Labour that is not blessed may be productive of profit, but it is not productive of happiness. The labour that is blessed and owned of God will be made to conduce to unspeakable, and lasting, and glorious results. A little blessed of God is most sweet; a great amount unblessed by him will not give satisfaction. The bread that is earned by honest toil, and blessed by the labourers' God, tastes sweet to him that eats it; the vastest riches accumulated by the spoils of the poor, or obtained by plans that will not bear the inspection or endure the light and the judgment of God, never

have been known in the experience of mankind to leave any lasting happiness behind them, or to create any happiness, joy, and peace within.

Let us then labour, and pray that God's blessing would light upon the labour of our hands, and thus, in the language of his own promise, "Happy shall we be, and it shall be well with us."

They that are thus blessed of God, in the next place, are blessed in their relationships. There is no more painful trial than unsanctified relationships—all at cross purposes, all jarring, disagreement, discord; and there is nothing that contributes more to the harmony of a house, or to the brightness of the fireside, than when all that dwell within are of one mind, and feel that the blessing of the Lord is in the midst of them, making the poorest rich, and the saddest happy, and consecrating the whole household a church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who are thus blessed of the Lord, are blessed throughout all eternity. The commencement of their everlasting state is, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

And those, in the next place, who are thus blessed of the Lord, may test the reality of their having that benediction by what they do for, or distribute amongst, others, to whom the knowledge of that blessing has long been strange. He who is most blessed of God is always the greatest blessing to those that are about him. The greatest receiver of spiritual things is always the greatest giver; and the more he gives the more he gets, till he learns, by blessed and practical experience, "it is more blessed

to give than to receive." Hence the beautiful psalm is the picture of the blessed man, "God be merciful to us, and bless us, and cause thy face to shine upon us." Why? That we ourselves may be happy? No, that is not the main end; but the psalmist adds, "That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." That is, "God bless us, that we may be made blessings." Do not make us like the barren sand, that absorbs the rain, the sunbeams, and the dews, and produces nothing; but make us like the good soil, that responds to the sun and the rains of the sky, and bears much fruit, and glows and shines with golden harvests, a blessing and a benefit to all mankind.

Thus, we see who they are who are invited by a Christian in these words, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord." But Laban adds, "Come in, why standest thou without?" Now, to what should we invite such? First, we ought to invite them to our friendship. Our permanent friends should, if possible, be Christians. The sweetener and the cement of the purest friendship is the grace of God. The friendship that is denuded of, or exhausted of that grace, may have much to recommend it in the estimate of the world, but it is destitute of that which will make it cohere, impart real delight, and outlast the grave, and be resumed when suns shall rise and set no more.

In the next place, we ought to say to such blessed ones, Come into our family. The companions of our homes, the inmates of our houses, ought not to be those only who have the most sparkling wit, the most accomplished minds, the greatest wealth, the

greatest rank; but prior to all these adventitious, circumstantial, and perishing distinctions, ought to be this great requirement,—that they give evidence of being blessed of the Lord, and are blessings by grace to all that are around them.

It is such, too, that we ought to invite to our communion-table. They that are blessed of the Lord, whatever denomination they belong to, are welcome to that table. Ministers may exclude them by proscriptive distinctions, that have no counterpart in God's Word; they may be cursed by popes, priests, councils, and synods; they may, even by themselves, be pronounced unworthy; but, yet, if they know that they are blessed of God, by having some of the blessedness of him whose sins are forgiven; if they are sure that they are blessed of God, by having their hearts respond in this way—"Lord, thou knowest that we love thee," such give evidence that they are blessed of God, and such should be welcome to our communion-table, to show forth the death of Him who loved us, and died for us, and rose again.

And, lastly, such as these, thus blessed of the Lord, will be invited at the last day to come unto that table that never shall be ended; to come into that home, in whose roof-tree joys shall nestle continually, and into the presence of Him at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.

Are you thus blessed? Are you thus forgiven? Are you thus renewed by the Holy Spirit of God? If so, it matters little, comparatively, what church you prefer, what form of worship you adopt; you have the main thing; you can be easily forgiven the circumstantial and the accidental; for whom God pronounces a

Christian, is one indeed ; whereas he who is proclaimed so by sects, and systems, and parties, may have indeed a baptism which is outward in the flesh, but may nevertheless be destitute of the inner and true baptism, which the Holy Spirit of God alone can bestow, without which we cannot see the kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER XXV.

ABRAHAM'S MARRIAGE. HIS DEATH. NONE PERFECT. JACOB'S
SINS. ESAU'S APOSTASY.

You will just remember the connection between the chapter I have read, and the previous chapters which we have read on successive Sabbath mornings.

We find Abraham in this drawing near to the close of his life, and about to enter the house appointed to all living. Some have supposed that this Keturah was the secondary wife of Abraham, for such was the relationship that Hagar sustained. Some have even thought that she was actually Hagar; but, if not Hagar, that she was at least a secondary wife in Sarah's days, and was not married to Abraham at the time indicated here, as it would appear from our translation, but long prior to this period. In fact, the translation might justly be, "Abraham *had taken* a wife," or "*had* a wife, and her name was Keturah."

We then have the children that sprang from her, on the one hand,—from Ishmael the son of the bondwoman, Hagar, upon the other,—and we have

the generations of Isaac, the son of Sarah, and the heir of the promises, on the other hand.

All these were the commencements of great nations; and to no book can you go, but to the Word of God, in order to find the springs of races, the secrets of their diversities of character, and the reason of the success of one, the degradation of another, and often the extinction of a third.

It is not true, that every portion of the Bible is equally edifying to every person. Every portion of the Bible has its own definite use, value, and importance; but because a chapter may not be edifying to me as an individual, it does not follow that it does not play a very important and momentous part in the economy of God, and cast a light where all else had been shadow, and give a solution where all besides had been perplexity and misapprehension. We must ever regard God's Book as a picture of all mankind as they are by nature and by grace; a picture of what God is in himself, and what He feels towards us; and we must see in it, not what man would often prefer to see, but what is fact, what is truth, and what conduces on the largest scale at once to the glory of God, and to the good of those to whom it is brought home.

In this passage, we have the explanation of the history of the origin of great nations. We have the first divergence of two remarkable septs or sections of the human family, namely, the descendants of Esau, or Edom, as he was called; and the descendants of Isaac, of whom sprang the Lord Jesus Christ, according to the flesh.

Every character whose biography is given in Scrip-

ture,—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,—have all sins, often grievous sins. They are impartially written by the Spirit of God. And the reason of this is, that the Bible is not a mere profile of any character, but a portrait of the whole face, aspect, and character of man. If I had been a Jew, anxious simply to make my nation look great, and had it in my power to do so, I should have painted Abraham a perfect character; but the very fact, that Abraham's sins are as distinctly specified as Abraham's virtues, is evidence that no partial Jew, full of national conceit, sketched that character, but that he was sketched by Him who describes man as he is, and yet tells man what he should be. And hence, when we read here of Isaac having a preference for Esau, the least beautiful and interesting of his sons, for very mean reasons, while Rebekah had a preference to Jacob; and when we read again of Jacob getting the birthright, not by fair play, but in some way by deception, let us recollect that these things are not recorded for us to imitate, but rather for us to avoid. There are lights at harbours to guide the ship safely into the haven; and there are beacons at sea to warn the ship off the shoals and rocks on which she may be wrecked. Now, there are in God's Book beacons as well as guides; precedents that we are to imitate, as well as recorded perils, sins, and errors, that we are carefully to avoid. We must judge of duty, not by character illustrating or violating it, but we must judge of duty by what God says. His holy law is the standard; the man who comes short of that, we are not to imitate, in as far as he comes short of it; but rather to deplore his

error, and to strive by grace to avoid the rock on which he made shipwreck.

We thus see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, portrayed just as they were, their sins and their excellences, their faults and their perfections; we have also laid down the great law of imitation of them, which is, just as far as they followed Christ. We are neither to imitate their sins, nor to worship them for their excellences, but to follow them in their good doings, as far as they were good, and to avoid their errors and their sins, as far as they were so; and to thank God that we know more clearly and more fully, by life and immortality being brought to light in the gospel, than they did, the things that belong to our peace, and beautify and ennoble the character of man.

We behold in Esau the founder of one great tribe, and in Jacob the founder of another. In Jacob we see sins as well as in Esau: but we find a great sin in Esau, for which he is reprehended by the apostle—he sold his birthright. What was his birthright? It was, that he was the eldest son of the family, that he was entitled to the largest share of the inheritance; that it was the highest honour and dignity. He came home from hunting hungry, and, in the recklessness of his character, he sold that which he could sell, that which was his highest honour and his greatest excellence, for a little food that was given him by Jacob.

My dear friends, let us never sell that which we believe to be true for anything upon earth. Our birthright, blessed be God, is an open Bible,—let us never part with it; freedom to worship God as

in our consciences we believe to be right; let us never surrender it. If we give up an open Bible, freedom of worship, our social, our national, our Christian privileges and prerogatives, you may write upon our altars, and upon our real greatness, "Ichabod, Ichabod, the glory is departed." Let us hold fast what we know to be true; let us give up any prejudice, or anything that we prefer that would please and propitiate a brother, but let us never surrender on any terms, or for any prospect, these great truths, that God's Word alone is the light to our feet, the lamp to our path; that Jesus alone is our sacrifice and our Saviour; and that there is to us a way to heaven without obstruction, without let or hinderance, through the shed blood, and the finished righteousness of Christ the Saviour.

Other mothers than Rebekah give birth to sons of very contrary and conflicting characters. Sin has disarranged and disordered nature; but grace can turn Esau into Jacob, and both into the likeness of Christ.

Esau's great and irrecoverable loss lay in his exchanging a great and precious spiritual privilege for an earthly and merely sensual gratification. Are there no Esaus among ourselves? Are there not men in every age ready to surrender precious truths, and solemn obligations, and vital interests, to mere party, to political expediency, to worldly preferment? I fear there are political Esaus, and literary Esaus, and ecclesiastical Esaus in the nineteenth century. Let me impress on all such the very solemn thought, 'What shall it profit a man, if he gain the

whole world, and lose his own soul?" An interest in the Saviour is safety; obedience to him is peace; likeness to him is joy; faith in him is salvation. These are weighty truths that have no equivalents on earth.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FAMINE IN CANAAN. ISAAC'S ORDERS. EXPEDIENCY. WORLDLY
AND CHRISTIAN LOGIC. BAD EXAMPLE. ANCIENT WELLS.
THE TENT AND THE ALTAR. ESAU'S SINFUL MARRIAGE.

In the previous portions of the book from which we are reading, Canaan was pointed out to Abraham as the promised land; and he received from God the oath, the promise, and the pledge that, as such, he should inherit that land.

It must have been most discouraging to Isaac, who was an heir of the promise, when he came into this promised land, to have, as he entered and crossed its very threshold, to battle with famine, and the possibility, or rather the probability, of absolute starvation. It is stated, "There was a famine in the land." Poor pledge surely of the fulfilment of promise!

Often God inflicts chastisement the sorest, when he is about to bestow the richest blessing; and it is when the sunshine bursts through the cloud, and the day brightens after the rain, and food comes after famine,—it is, in short, in the cessation of all human means, so that man, if he saw not beyond, would despair, and in the instant and unexpected

descent of blessings, that we learn to see God's hand where we did not see it before, and to bless Him for making man's extremity his kind opportunity.

"The Lord appeared unto Isaac, and said, Go not down into Egypt." There is a great deal of practical wisdom here. The tendency of man, when he is in extreme want, is to have recourse to improper means to relieve it. The tendency of the Israelites, on a famine occurring in Canaan, was not to trust where they should, but to go to Egypt for help; but such a plan then, and now, is found in the long-run to be the least successful way. The most successful way is to keep at the post where God has placed us, and ever to feel assured that the post of duty is, not simply the post of safety, but the place of the enjoyment of the greatest available happiness. It is always safe to remain where God has placed us; it is always perilous to set sail upon what seems expedient to us, instead of steering by the chart, the compass, and the pole-star that God has given us. And, therefore, God said, "Go not down into Egypt,"—however tempted to do so. Trust, and wait.

Then he repeats, what? A promise of spiritual blessings, in order to cheer him in temporal distress:—"I will be with thee"—and if God, the all-sufficient, is with one, one need fear no evil—"and will bless thee." Even prosperity, without God, is not a blessing; whereas affliction, with God, is a blessing. God's presence, God's power, God's blessing, make the darkest nights bright; and the absence of ~~that~~ blessing makes the brightest days dark. And therefore an ancient Christian could say,

"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places."

Next, he assures Isaac. Unpromising as the present state is, yet "unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father." Therefore, do not judge of my liberality by present appearances; do not think that I have forgotten you because a famine has overtaken you. Most thoughtless, worldly men reason thus: I am in great trouble; there is a great famine, therefore God is angry with me. A Christian reasons in a direction just the reverse. He says, God is my father; I am in great trouble; therefore that trouble will do me good, whether I see it or not. The worldly man reasons from what he suffers, and thereby infers that God is angry;—the Christian reasons from what God is—our Father—and he infers, therefore nothing can betide me that will not do me good. A Christian plants his foot on the rock of the fatherhood of God, and then he sees light and darkness, sunshine and shadow, adversity and prosperity,—all conspiring and co-operating to bless him, and to do him good.

Then "Isaac," we are told, "dwelt in Gerar;" and here, it is recorded, a painful episode occurred in his

biography, almost the same that twice occurred in the life of Abraham. He feared danger, and he did what too many still do—had recourse to a falsehood to escape it. But you have always found—every school-boy can tell you—that a falsehood told to avoid a contingent danger, is the very way to rush into a greater and a worse than you ever feared. And here, too, let us see how inveterate human nature is, and how contagious a bad precedent is. Isaac repeated what his father did, imitating his example, and forgetting his lessons.

My dear friends, let every parent here learn and recollect that his child's memory may forget the lessons that it was taught, but his child's habit will not forget or give up readily the impressions from your example that it has seen. It is not a father's lesson that teaches, it is a father's life. It is not what one says, but what one is, that is so impressive in one's home. And therefore, Abraham's good lesson was here forgotten, and Abraham's twice-seen bad example in this case was accurately copied, as if it had been a stereotype and a fixture for ever.

This Abimelech seems not to have been the same whom we hear of in Abraham's history; it appears to have been the name applied to the kings of Canaan, in the same way as the name "Pharaoh" was applied to the kings of Egypt, and "Cæsar" to the emperors of Rome. This Abimelech discovered that Isaac had deceived him, because he saw a familiarity between Isaac and Rebekah, that indicated they were related to each other in closer bonds than those of friendship; and he rebuked him for what he had done.

Isaac's sin was forgiven, and God's promise did not fail on account of it; for it is said, that "Isaac sowed in that land," where the famine had been, "and received in the same year an hundred fold." Thus God in judgment remembers mercy. He took, in this instance, God's way, and he received, in doing so, God's blessing.

We read in this chapter, and elsewhere in this book, a great deal about wells. We can scarcely understand this, as inhabitants of a city, or even as inhabitants of a western or northern country. But in these eastern climes, wells are more precious than wine; and to stop a well is one of the greatest acts of inhospitality, and to dig a well is one of the greatest charities that a king, even, can confer on the people of those eastern lands. And this explains what the Psalmist said (Psa. lxxxiv. 6, 7), "Who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God,"—that is, through the long valley which they had to traverse in approaching the temple of God, in a sultry climate, a well of water was most refreshing, and the pilgrim who dug it bequeathed it to those who were to come behind him. So, Christian men erect schools, as wells in the world's wide desert, and they that had drunk from broken cisterns, or dropped down by the way, are refreshed, and journey on.

In this instance, such was the inhospitality of the heathen inhabitants, that they went and stopped up the wells which Abraham's and Isaac's servants had digged; that is, they did not make use of them them-

selves, which one could understand, but they put an end to them by filling them with earth, lest others should profit by them. So the Pope neither reads the Bible himself, nor allows others to do so. People are in the world who are so envious of another's blessings, that they would extinguish them, and so careless of their own profit that they deprive themselves that others may be also deprived.

Isaac, however, did not fight about the wells ; but as they stopped up one, he just went and dug another. He did not quarrel about any particular well, but went and instantly prepared another, willing, as long as there was room and provision for him and his, as much as lay in him, to live peaceably with all men.

"Isaac builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there." Now, it is proper here to observe, that whilst Isaac copied a bad precedent in his father's life, he was not insensible to his good, his bright, and holy acts and examples also. You remember, we read in a previous chapter, that wherever Abraham pitched his tent, there he built an altar. Isaac has caught this beautiful trait, and so, where he pitched his tent there he raised his altar. Wherever the tent is spread, there the altar should be built. Wherever there is a home, there there ought to be the recognition of God. Wherever there is a family, there there ought to be family worship. The tent will be more beautiful ; its stakes will be more strong, because the God in whom we live and move, and have our being, and from whom our blessings come, is recognized, and worshipped, and looked to beneath its shadow.

Is there an altar in my tent? Have I a God adored, and loved, and recognized in my home? Religion, my dear friends, is not a thing for the four consecrated walls of a sanctuary only, but an element suitable and serviceable for every home. It is more beautiful in homes, the first churches, than in churches so called. No matins or vespers in a church should be substituted for family worship. In the home, the father is the priest, the head of his family, and he ought to have the altar raised where God has allowed him to pitch his tent.

We read that the inhabitants saw, in the next place, that Isaac and his family were getting strong, and therefore they asked him to enter into a compact with them, to spare them, which he readily did. God's blessing made him rich and strong, and the people saw it.

Esau, who was rejected, and had sold his birth-right, begins here to develop all the traits of that character that that first act indicated; for "he was forty years old when he took to wife Judith," not, as Isaac took Rebekah, a child of God, but "the daughter of Beeri the Hittite;" and, not satisfied with one, he married also "Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite," both of the colonies and tribes of the heathen Canaan, not yet cast out. He sinned twice by bigamy, and by marrying idolaters. And then, it is added, with exquisite eloquence and touching pathos, which signifies more than the words seem to express, "which were a grief of mind unto" the "pious Isaac and to" the Christian "Rebekah,"—a fact found still in many a household, and painfully disturbing many a happy family.

THE PROMISED REWARD.

"And the Lord appeared unto Isaac the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father : fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake."—GENESIS xxvi. 24.

ISAAC seems to have been of a desponding temper of mind. God therefore, apparently in condescension to his weakness, frequently renews his promise of a gracious presence, and encourages him, by cheering exhortations, to go on and accomplish the great mission which had been assigned him. He appears to him in the commencement of the chapter, when he said, "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Paul tells us what seed this was: "Not unto seeds as of many, but unto one seed, that is, Christ, were the promises made." Abraham and Isaac were selected to be the pro-

genitors of Jesus, according to the flesh, in whom alone the promises are yea and amen; and by his spiritual, not natural, offspring are these promises to be realized. To be Abraham's children according to the flesh, is worth little; to be Abraham's children by faith in Christ, is to be the children of God, joint heirs with Christ, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven.

To Isaac desponding, then, and depressed by the trials, the controversies, and the disputes he had gone through with Abimelech and others, God renews the consolatory exhortation or promise, "Fear not, for I am with thee." God's people have their times of fear, as well as Isaac. No man looks into the future without fears; few can anticipate a month, a year, much less the rest of life, without misgivings, doubts, perplexities,—sinful they may be, but real. It is to those, then, who fear,—that is, to the children of Abraham by faith, yet more truly than to the children of Abraham, according to the flesh,—that the promise is made, "Fear not, for I am with thee."

The basis of not fearing is the promise, "I am with thee." You may fear, if you look into the future without God's promise; but hearing in it the music of that promise, and assured of the certainty of its fulfilment, you may look into the darkest future, and yet not be afraid. This promise is the staff and the rod with which we go into the valley of the shadow of death, and fear no evil.

Try to realize the presence of God as the presence of a personal and actual Being. We are too apt to think when we pray, that we shoot words into the skies, or speak to empty space. We think of God

as the God of the earth, the God of the stars, the God of fixed laws, and the God of uniformity; and we so mix Him up with what philosophers call laws and second causes, and what the eye sees to be nature, that we lose a sense of his personality as our very Father, our very Friend, our very Guide. We may feel, respecting God's presence, if we be his, as if his hand were laid upon every shoulder, as if the sunshine of his presence illuminated every footstep, and as if we heard Him with the outer ear, as Isaac heard Him in the stillness of the night, saying to me, to thee, to each, to all, "Fear not, for I"—not a law of nature, but a living, personal Friend and Father—"am with thee."

But is not God with everybody, whether he be a child of Abraham or not? Is not the 139th Psalm true, whether we be Christians or not? Is it not true of every man, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me?" That is his essential presence, and in that sense he is as much present with the apostate church, as he is with the apostolic church; he is as much present with the fiends in hell, as with his friends and worshippers on earth. As far as God's essential presence is concerned, He is everywhere; for there is no place where He is not. But the presence that is here promised, is that which Moses described when he said, "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence." It is a special presence, a paternal presence, a providential and a

protecting presence,—the presence of a Father with a child, not of a foe with a foe; the presence of a Father to protect us, of a Sun to enlighten us; the presence of God, in all his attributes of power, of omnipresence, omniscience, goodness, mercy, grace, love. In all these respects God is with his people, and with them even to the end.

This presence, which belongs to the people of God as contradistinguished from that presence which fills all space, is with them, in all its beneficent influences, as truly as God's omnipresence is with all creation in physical and ceaseless contact. In all places God is present with his people,—in the closet, in the family, in the sanctuary, in the tents of Mesech, and in the tabernacles of Kedar; on Pisgah, on Sinai—wherever they are, wherever God's providence may carry them, wherever the arrangements of the world may necessitate their going; on the field of battle, on the ocean's bosom, in the cradle, in the sepulchre, for ever and everywhere,—God is present with his people. This is not a conjecture, but an absolute certainty. We may be as sure of it as that we exist. Respiration and inspiration are not more certain than the paternal, friendly, protecting, preserving, providing presence of God with his believing people.

And He is with them, too, at all times, as well as in all places. In youth, in middle age, in old age, "in all time of our wealth, in all time of our tribulation, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment," "fear not, for I am with thee."

Let us mark well the personality of this—"I am with *thee*,"—the humblest Christian as well as the highest. However obscure in this world, yet you

are seen, known, protected, and preserved by God. All his angels encamp about you, all his attributes envelop you. God is as truly with the humblest child that believes in Him as He is with the cherubim and the seraphim that are in the sky, or with the saints in glory that surround his throne.

"I am with thee." What a blessed thought! We may forget Him; He forgets not us. We may sometimes think we can hide ourselves from Him, but He will follow us. "I am with thee." And the reality of that is not contingent upon the response of gratitude that we give to it, but upon the promise which often, in spite of us, is yea and amen in Christ Jesus.

Believers fear often, and need such a promise as this. "Fear not," says God to Isaac, "for I am with thee." What is it that you fear when you look into the future? Do you fear the failure of provision for yourself and for yours? Sometimes you think, "My health may fail, my resources give way; and how shall I find bread for me and mine, and raiment to put on?" Fear not. To fear is to doubt the faithfulness, the love, the omnipotence of God. "Thy bread shall be given thee, thy water shall be sure." "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" We have no business to calculate, as we gaze into the future, contingencies that may never occur; our business is, to fill the present with active duty, and trust in Him whose promise is absolute and irreversible, "Fear not, for I am with thee."

Do you fear disastrous consequences from the

pursuit of duty? Man often knows what this is. He feels, "If I do this, which my conscience tells me to be right, then I shall incur that which my experience proves to me will be the consequence. My dear friends, do not long balance between what is certain duty, and what are probable contingent consequences. God prescribes the duty; He promises his presence with them that do it, and we shall find that the best expediency is taking Him at his word, and going into the future trusting in his presence,—“Lo, I am with you.” The duty is ours; the issue is with God. His Word prescribes the one,—his Providence will take care of the other. Man is too prone to leave his own sphere, which is present duty, and to pry into God's province of future consequences; whereas our most happy way and our safest way is, to hear the Word of duty, and then to set out in obedience to that, knowing that God is looking after us, and will be with us, and will make all that may betide us in the path of duty work for our good and to his glory.

Do you fear the condemnation and the curse of those sins of which you have been guilty? There is not a conscience in this assembly whose accusations do not out-number its excuses. There is not one in this assembly who is not constrained to say, “My heart condemns me; and God is greater than my heart, and knoweth all things.” Shall I, therefore, fear, because memory reminds me of my sins, and conscience condemns me for my sins? No, you are not to fear. Not because your sin is not sin,—not because sin is not hateful; but because you rest upon the great Sin-bearer, who has borne your sins,

like the scapegoat of old, away into the wilderness; and now unto you who believe in Him, there is no condemnation, because you are in Christ Jesus. You are not to think sin less sinful, but you are to think of Christ as infinitely more sufficient than ever you supposed Him to be before, and to feel perfect fearlessness of sin's issues, because the great Sin-bearer has been your Substitute, and Sacrifice, and Saviour.

Do you fear the power, and the seduction, and the influence of sin in the world? Many Christians, true Christians, shrink from coming to the Lord's Table, because they say it is taking upon themselves obligations to serve, to honour, and to glorify the Saviour. It is so; but it is not *making* these obligations, for they are on you already; it is only *accepting* and acquiescing in them as yours. If you refuse to communicate, because you are afraid that you may stumble here, or err there, or in some other respect do injury to that great cause which you have espoused as the dearest and the highest,—these fears indicate, perhaps, true grace, and yet they indicate at the same time, want of clearness of apprehension of the promise of God, "Fear not, for I am with thee." God never sends a soldier a warfare at his own charges. Wherever he prescribes a journey, he perfects his strength in the traveller who has to walk it. Whenever He sends you into battle, He gives you the armour, the shield, and the promise, to cheer and to comfort you; and He who has commanded you to serve Him, has said, "Sin shall not have dominion over you,"—"My grace is sufficient for you,"—"My strength is made perfect in weak-

ness." It is yours still to face the duty that meets you, to remember the promise that is given you, and be satisfied that He who has been with you in the past, will not forsake you nor leave you in the future.

"Do you fear, in the next place, trials and tribulations, and conflicts and distresses, as you pass through the world? You will have them; this is not our home, this is not our rest. It is just as natural that we should have losses, and griefs, and troubles, as that we should have life itself. He who has fewest has the faintest signatures of relationship to God; and he who has most tribulation, if a believer, has in that tribulation, not the evidence that God hates him, but the bright and significant tokens that he is a child whom the Father chasteneth. Do you, therefore, fear and dread troubles? You will have them, but in them you have the promise, "I am with you,"—"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee,"—"Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness,"—"I will bring the blind by a way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight." And lest you should suppose that this Divine and precious presence would be exhausted by the lapse of years, or by the fear of them to whom it is promised, He says, "The

mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

Do you fear, in the next place, death ? It is natural to shrink from it, but it is unchristian to fear it. The distinction is palpable and clear. Death is unnatural ; death, therefore, we recoil from, and properly ; for it is as true an instinct to shrink from death, as it is an instinct to desire life. But while a Christian shrinks from death, he does not at the same time fear it ; because its sting, that which was its weapon, that made it most formidable, is taken away ; its victory is now apparent, not real ; you are never its prisoner, for life is rather the prison, and death is the gaoler that opens the prison door, and lets the prisoner go free. But we have no reason to fear death : because of Him who through death overcame him that had the power of death, we may exclaim, in anticipatory triumph, " O grave, where is thy victory ? O death, where is thy sting ? "

Do you ever fear, in the last place, to approach unto God himself ? Christians even sometimes do. We have a besetting notion that God is an awful, offended, angry Being. We approach Him as if it were with reluctance that He heard prayer ; as if it were only by constraint that He admitted us to his presence ; and thus, more of the element of awe than of the element of confidence mingles with the feelings of most Christians as they approach God in prayer. But, my dear friends, it ought not to be so. We are as welcome to Him as a child to a parent, as an infant to its mother's breast. He waits for us,

and we may be as certain that if we approach Him in the name of Jesus, we are heard by Him, and sympathized with, and made welcome, as we are of any one fact, or of any one relationship in the wide world. Let us then draw near to God, in all the exercises of devotion, as unto a Father who pitieth his children, who knoweth our frame that we are dust, and as the grass and the flower of the grass, and whose loving-kindness and tender mercies are upon all that believe in Him.

Thus then, we have the promise, "I am with thee," and the prescription, "Fear not." What is true of every believer is true of the whole Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is the Church? The company of believers. The promise that is made to one, is a promise, therefore, that is made to all. And if you will trace the history and the successive annals of the true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will find God's presence at every stage, working unexpected deliverances, shielding from peril, persecution, proscription, and death. From the Jordan to the Mississippi, the Missouri, the Tiber, and the Thames, God has been with his Church. By the martyr's flame and by the missionary's grave, wherever a saint has suffered, or a preacher of the truth has spoken, there God has been present to sustain the one, and to sanctify and bless the utterance of the other. The very existence of the Church of Christ is the result of God's pledged presence with it. If it had not been for his presence, it would have been extinguished long ago. Policy has tried to circumvent it; power to crush it; but neither has succeeded. A spark in the waves; but it has not

been quenched—a flower in the desert, and yet it is not trodden down or destroyed. It has been in circumstances where no human thing could live, and yet it has prospered. And in every chapter of its history, in every phase of its varied and wonderful experience, we have abundant evidence that God has been with it. The flame, when it consumed its martyrs, consumed not the principles for which they suffered; and the very smoke that rose from their funeral pyres wafted the truths they taught from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Most true is the promise claimed as the monopoly of the Apostasy, but pledged as the privilege of the Church of Christ, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Let us see, my dear friends, that we are not strong in our strength, but in the strength of God. Let us not fear; not because we have influence, but because we have the presence of God. Let us feel how appropriate is that Psalm, which the great Reformer sang, “God is our refuge in strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early.”

Is this God your God by your deliberate election, by your deliberate declaration, when no ear could hear but God's, and no eye could see but God's?

Can you say, He is mine, and I am his? If you can, it is evidence that He has called, for your answer is but the response to his previous call. Your following is the evidence that He draws you. Your choice of Him is the proof that He has chosen you. And happy are the people who have chosen the God of Abraham to be their God; his presence shall go with them, and finally, when heart and flesh shall faint and fail, it will only be to be introduced into his more immediate presence, where there is fulness of joy, and where there are pleasures for evermore.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ISAAC'S CHARACTER. HIS REQUEST TO ESAU. REBEKAH'S SINFUL
CONNIVANCE. JACOB'S HYPOCRISY AND DECEPTION. THESE
BEACONS NOT PRECEDENTS. THE BIRTH-RIGHT. DECEPTION
DETECTED. ESAU'S SORROW. HIS HOPELESS CRY. ESAU'S
HOPE.

THE chapter I have read is one of the most painful passages found in the whole of the Old Testament history. It is from beginning to end a scene of duplicity, of falsehood, and of sin. The record is here, but not the approbation; man's sin is here, not God's approval of it. The simple facts are stated with the faithfulness of impartial history; it is left for the sequel of that history to show the sure retributions that overtook those who were accomplices or partners in the sinful transactions enumerated, as well as those who played the chief part in them.

The biography of Isaac seems to be that of a quiet, a domestic, and retiring old man. All the excellence that distinguished him seems to have consisted in his being warmly attached to Rebekah his wife, a lover of his home and its quiet joys, and in the devoted attention he always showed to his children; but he seems to have been endowed with very

little mental energy or social influence. In no transcendent respect was he distinguished among the patriarchs of ancient history. He was a link in that chain from which the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, was to descend, and apparently no more.

It appears here, that when old age overtook him, and "his eyes were dim, so that he could not see," he called his son Esau, and said that he wished to have some food prepared for him before he died, such as he knew was agreeable to his taste, and so savoury, as it is called, and, as is often the character of Indian and Eastern preparations, as might suit the worn-out and jaded palate of an aged and a dying man. Perhaps he had in early days studied his palate too intently.

We are told that Rebekah heard the order given to Esau by his blind and aged father, and instantly resolved to practise a deception for securing the blessing to Jacob, of which she herself was the first in subsequent history to repent. She told Jacob, whom she loved, to go and personate Esau, whom she rather disliked, and to pretend to be the elder brother, and, having ministered to Isaac, thus to carry off the blessing. It seems singular that Isaac should have most loved Esau, for Esau was the least religious of the twain; while it seems natural that Rebekah should most have loved Jacob for his otherwise amiable and religious characteristics and features. And it appears, too, that Rebekah was quite aware that the blessing was not to pass by the elder, Esau, but was to light upon the younger, Jacob, according to ancient and inspired prophecy; remembering that this was God's end, and that it

was her duty by any means to try and accomplish that end, she practised a deception, in order, as she in her folly dreamed, to make true God's promise—that is, help God to execute his purposes.

Now, the mistake she committed was twofold. First, we are not warranted in doing evil, that contingent good may come; and, secondly, we are not warranted in trying to help God to fulfil prophecies at all. God gives the prophecy, He takes charge of it before it is fulfilled, and God will see to its fulfilment. What we have to do with the Bible is to believe its truths, to obey its precepts, and to leave God when and how he pleases to fulfil his own sovereign and faithful prophecies. But poor Rebekah thought that God could not fulfil his promise unless she helped him, and like a thorough Jesuitess—for in this respect she was so—she thought evil, however great, was perfectly lawful, if it only helped the occurrence of good that was most desirable. She went and told Jacob to tell a lie, to be guilty of the basest hypocrisy, and to leave on record a picture, whose great lesson is at least this, "The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it?" Romanism is as old as patriarchal days

The only difficulty,—and I confess it is real one,—is, how to reconcile such duplicity, such falsehood, and such hypocrisy in a mother and a son, with the unquestionable fact that they were the children of God, and believers in the promises. It is only a proof what an amount of alloy there is mixed with the purest gold,—how true it is that even the best, left alone for a moment, will stumble. Let us watch, and be sober. Instead of being to us a precedent,

however, that we ought to imitate, it is to us a warning that we should seek Divine strength at every moment to be perfect in weakness, as well as a beacon to point out to us the shoals on which fair ships were made almost total wrecks.

The first difficulty seems to be the possibility of the deception occasioned by the one son clothing himself in the skin of a young kid, and so personating the other. The first reason of the success of such a resource probably was this,—not only was Isaac's taste worn out with years, but his sensibilities also. The fingers, as every one knows, are the foci (if one may use the expression) of the keenest sensation; but when old age comes on, and especially the age of one hundred and seventy, which was Isaac's then, all the sensibilities of eye, ear, and fingers, become blunted. There is not the same keen perception by the eye, nor by the taste, nor by the fingers, of external things. And hence we can suppose that Rebekah, with all the skill and the tact of which she was so capable, may have so arranged and adjusted the dress of Jacob, that Isaac, blind, and his senses dull with years, may very easily have mistaken him for Esau. It seems, however, that the old man's hearing was more acute than his sight and his feeling; for when Jacob spoke, he said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

Jacob himself concurred with Rebekah in personating Esau, and said, what he knew to be an utter falsehood, "I am thy son Esau." Isaac, believing him, bade him come near, and so pronounced upon him the blessing.

And also it is said, that Rebekah put upon him

the "goodly raiment" of her eldest son Esau. It ought to be remembered, that the eldest son, in patriarchal times, inherited the priestly office. Recollect, the Levitical priesthood was not yet instituted; the head of the house was therefore the priest of the family. The first churches were in tents, the first priests were the patriarchs. The eldest son inherited the priestly office, and the "*goodly raiment* of her eldest son Esau," is the very same word in the Hebrew and the Septuagint Greek as is applied to the robes of Aaron and the sons of Levi; and it would therefore seem that it was a priestly garment that was put upon Jacob, that thus the father might be more easily deceived.

Next we hear the patriarch pronounce the blessing: "God give thee of the dew of heaven,"—in an eastern clime most precious, since, from an early part of the spring till the autumn there is no rain, and the dews water the ground: it was therefore the symbol of fertility; "and the fatness," or productiveness, "of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine. Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee. Be lord over thy brethren." This was fulfilled in the family of which he was a link; and it will be still more thoroughly fulfilled when God shall give Christ the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

We next read of Esau coming in, and his father discovering, amid trembling and sorrow and dismay, that he had pronounced a blessing, which he could not reverse, upon the younger son Jacob, instead of Esau the elder; although it was the express promise of God that Jacob should have the blessing and that

Esau, who was the legitimate and ordinary inheritor of the blessing, should be deprived of it.

Yet, in estimating this transaction, it seems to us a very difficult thing that God should give a promise that Jacob should have the blessing, but should permit the use of such wicked means for the fulfilment of that promise; yet we must always distinguish between what God does, and what God simply tolerates. We tolerate in this country the worst errors of the Roman Catholic creed; but we do not, or at least we ought not, to patronize, or encourage, or support them. It is one thing to tolerate in a province what is wrong; it is quite a different thing actively to support, maintain, and promote it. Now, God tolerates in his own great province much that is evil; but he is the author of nothing that is sinful. In fulfilling all his purposes, we sometimes see instruments used, in themselves objectionable. Cyrus was called the battle-axe of God. He helped to achieve the great purposes of God, and yet God did not approve of Cyrus. Napoleon Bonaparte, in the last century, was raised up for a special work at a special crisis, to do God's purposes. He did God's work; but God did not approve of the man, his motives, or his acts. Again, as to the party who tried, in 1848, to do away with that system at Rome under which piety dies and all religion is a nonentity,—many of the men who headed that movement were in themselves and in their motives and their ends objectionable; and yet they were suffered by God to inflict his righteous judgments. So, at the Reformation, when we are told that Henry the Eighth was the author of our religion,—which is most

absurd : for he lived a Papist, and he died a Papist ; he burned people one day for believing in transubstantiation, and the next day he burned them for denying it,—we answer, that if he had been the main instrument of the Reformation, that would not prove that the Reformation itself was wrong. The doctrines of Luther are to be tried by the Bible ; and the life of Henry the Eighth is to be tested by the decalogue ; but we are not to say that truth is a lie, because a bad man supports it, any more than that a falsehood is truth because a good man may be implicated in its patronage. We are to test all things by “the law and the testimony ;” nothing more is needed, and nothing less will do ; and therefore when men say, It is inexplicable how God can allow such things, it is difficult to understand why God tolerates bad instruments to fulfil his own great results,—we are thrown back upon the very beginning, why did God admit sin at all ? Who can explain this ? Ever since men began to think, they have puzzled and perplexed themselves in attempts to explain it, and outside the Bible they are as near the solution of the mystery as when they first began to think about it. The Bible explanation is plain and succinct. It does not give ultimate reasons ; it does not go into depths that we should not be able to wade in. It simply asserts the fact, that God made all things holy, good, and beautiful ; but that man committed sin, and marred God’s work. Sin is not a part of creation, nor a creature of God. It is no part of the world ; it is a discord that has intruded into its once glorious harmony ; it is a blot that has fallen on its once beautiful face. And blessed be God for his

reiterated promise, that the discord shall be dissolved, the blot shall be wiped away, and that Nature, under her regeneration, shall be more beautiful than Nature ever was, when she came first, in virgin beauty, from the plastic hand of her Creator.

Esau, after discovering his loss, asked earnestly for the blessing already given, and said, "Bless me, even me also, O my father," and implored it fervently with tears. The Apostle Paul alludes to this incident when he says (Hebrews xii. 16), Take care, "lest there be any profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Several persons have written me, asking me to explain this text, thinking it is here taught that a person might earnestly seek for repentance, and yet not find, or be refused it. It says, "That afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance." What repentance? Not repentance in himself, but repentance in his father, Isaac; that is, he could not prevail upon Isaac to repent, *i. e.*, to change his mind—withdraw the blessing from Jacob, and give that blessing to himself. It is not that Esau could not find the grace of repentance for himself, for it was then true, "Ask, and ye shall obtain," but that he could not get his aged father to alter his mind, and give the blessing to him, "though he sought it carefully with tears."

We then read that the father gave the residue of

a blessing even to Esau; but, in our translation, I think it is not correctly rendered. It says, "And Isaac, his father, answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth." Now, that would be almost the blessing of Jacob reduplicated on Esau. It is singular, however, that the preposition "*from*" is by some mistake or misapprehension left out in our version; the passage ought to be rendered, "Behold, thy dwelling shall be *far from* the fatness of the earth, and the dew of heaven *from above*; and,"—instead of living by the fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven,—“by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother.” The only good part in this blessing is the end, “When thou shalt have the dominion,” that is, when all things shall be righted, “thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck,” and the descendants of Esau, by grace, shall be raised to an equality of privilege and blessing with the descendants of Jacob, and those that are his.

We have next the account of Esau's character. Esau appears in this chapter, as a worldly man, much more beautiful in his character than Jacob. Esau seems to have appreciated the blessing, to have wept sincerely over its loss, and to have acted, up to a certain point, with a tenderness and forbearance that make the natural man contrast very much to the disadvantage of the spiritual man. But at the close of the chapter his true character comes out; for there it is said, he resolved to slay his brother Jacob—envy, revenge, ending ultimately in an attempt to murder him.

Then Rebekah comes again before us. She finds

that the son for whom she had obtained the blessing is ready to flee, and the son whom she had deprived of it prepared to become a fratricide, and her life becomes, as she well deserved, a burden to herself.

If you will trace Jacob's history, as we shall on successive Sabbath mornings, you will see that whilst no sentence is pronounced upon him in the chapter before us,—that is, whilst no immediate retribution follows the lying and disingenuousness of Jacob; yet we shall find come out in the rest of Jacob's remarkable biography a minutely retributive punishment; you will hear, in his sorrows in his latter days, the echoes of his sins in his earlier days. When he was told that his own beloved son Joseph was murdered, and when his coat was brought to him stained with blood,—a deception practised on a father by his sons,—he recollected, amid these retributions into which God precipitated him, the sins of his youth, and no doubt bitterly did he sorrow over them, as fully as we know he obtained forgiveness and absolution from them.

Let us remember that sin committed by a Christian has in this life frequently its retribution, even if it may be forgiven; and that where God shows us character in its worst traits, he takes care in the sequel of the history of that character, to show that man never stood stronger by sin, and that a Christian never lost anything by faithfulness to God and to duty.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GOD'S PROPHECY. MAN'S SINS. JACOB'S SELECTION OF A WIFE.
JACOB'S FLIGHT. THE DESERT. HIS DREAM. THE TRUE
BETHEL, OR PILLAR OF THE TRUTH. JACOB'S VOW.

IN the previous chapter we have seen faithfully sketched the painful and humiliating picture of Jacob, when he bereaved, by stratagem and subtlety, Esau of that to which he was entitled as the first-born, the blessing and the birthright. We have also noticed that the blessing pronounced by blind and deceived Isaac on Jacob, upon the supposition that he was Esau, whom he personated, seems to have been irreversible, not in itself perhaps, but because it was the promise of God from everlasting, and therefore an arrangement that could not be reversed.

I stated then the difficulty that one feels on referring to ancient prophecies of things that will be, how it is possible to reconcile with justice and holiness, the equivocal, the objectionable, and the sinful means, by which these prophecies are ultimately fulfilled. Throughout the Word of God, we very often notice that God utters a prophecy, and that it is fulfilled by instruments in all respects objectionable and bad. No fault lies at the door of

God, he is not the author of evil—all the sin is man's: the prophecy came from God, the fulfilment of it is sure to be, just because it is the prophecy of God; yet God does not approve all the means used in hastening its fulfilment. A bad man might say, I am instrumental in fulfilling a prophecy—Does not this part vindicate my conduct as the person who so fulfils it? If the conduct be good, it is so on this ground alone; if the conduct of that person be bad, no aid, designedly or otherwise given, makes it good. For instance: it was the ancient prophecy, that Jesus should be crucified; but because Pontius Pilate and Herod and the Jews crucified the Lord of glory, they could not, and they will not, plead at the judgment-seat, Our hands are clean, and our souls are innocent, because we did what God predicted would and must be done. Our best reply is what we find in the Acts of the Apostles, when Peter, addressing the very Jews who crucified the Lord of glory, says, that it was God's fore-ordained purpose that Christ should die; but yet he adds what proves their criminality, "Ye by wicked hands have taken and crucified him;" thereby showing that the sin is not altered, because that sin was predicted and is overruled to the fulfilment of a prophecy. I endeavoured to show an illustration of this on a previous occasion, when I stated that in the Middle Ages it was the habit of the Romish authorities to persecute the poor Jews, to extract their teeth, and in some cases to burn them, and in various ways to visit them with penalties and judgments, on the miserable plea that that people were predicted to be so treated and to be a scorn, a hissing, and a

by-word, and to have no resting-place for the soles of their feet. Such defence is infamous; our duty is to believe God's prophecies, and to be satisfied that they will be fulfilled exactly and fully, but always to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God, irrespective of any consideration but duty. It is our duty to obey plain precepts; it is God's prerogative to see to the fulfilment of his own prophecies. Let us not confound the two things; and if we do sin, in order professedly to accomplish what God has prophesied, our sin is still sin, and our success in accomplishing our object is no mitigation: it is sin the worse, that we do it amid the light that ought to teach us to know better than to act so.

We read that Isaac charged Jacob, on whom now the blessing had fallen, and from whom it could not now be taken away or alienated by Esau, to go and marry a Christian wife of a Christian family, as became him, just in the same way as Isaac himself was guided to marry a wife of a Christian family, according to the instructions and the directions of Abraham. This was necessary and dutiful, and is still obligatory on us in many respects, some of which I showed you in a previous exposition.

We then read that Jacob went forth on the errand indicated by his father, as well as in obedience to the advice of his mother, and partly by the necessity of his position,—to seek a good wife. He was persecuted by Esau, and obliged to be a refugee for life; Esau had resolved to slay him, and Jacob was conscious that he had bitterly offended against Esau, and had acted deceptively and fraudulently; and that Esau's persecution was well deserved by him;

for he had treated him most cruelly and wickedly. Fleeing, therefore, from Esau, he goes out to "a certain place, and tarries there all night." The sun has set; he is far from the confines of civilization, or a city and its hospitalities: he takes the stones of the desert, and makes a pillow, and sleeps. There, too, he dreamed, and that dream is a mirror and a revelation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. God appeared to him at the top of the mystic ladder, the type of Christ's mediation, renewed the promise that he had made to Abraham and Isaac; and so, instead of visiting him for his sins, because God's ways are not our ways, he visited him by a promise of unexpected and undeserved mercy. To the meaning of this vision I will elsewhere refer.

"Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." Very often it is so with us still. We are often in circumstances where God is, and our insensible hearts knew it not. We are placed often in afflictions, where we think only pain is, and we find out afterwards that God was. It needs the circumcised heart to feel, and the anointed eye to see God, and to realize his presence, and to feel that he is where the world neither sees, nor feels, nor knows, nor seeks him.

He rose up early, and took the stone, we are told, and set it up for a pillar, anointed it with oil—that is, set it apart, or consecrated it—"and he called the name of that place Beth-el," which means literally, "house of God," the former name having been "Loz," that is, "a place where almond-trees grew;" and thus, by his communion with God, from a

natural he turns the place to a Divine purpose and consecration.

I have thought there is here a useful parallel passage. Some persons have tried, I think with some force, to establish that a very remarkable passage in Timothy, namely, the 3rd chapter of the First Epistle, at the 15th verse, which has been very much misconstrued, has a direct allusion to this very passage; and if it be so, it would completely do away with an interpretation that Romanists have put upon it for sectarian purposes. Paul, writing to Timothy, in his First Epistle, iii. 15, says, "That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." You are aware that that passage has been pleaded by certain divines as a proof that the church is the ground and pillar of the truth—i. e., that we are to seek first the church, and the truth in her afterwards—and that we cannot reach truth except by the church, and that to find the right church is the very first pursuit that we should go after; and having found Rome, we must take her teaching as infallible. Now, in the first place, I might give the ordinary answer, that this church was the Church of Ephesus, of which Timothy was the minister; and because that individual church was the pillar and ground of the truth, surely that would not imply that it never could lose the truth. The Seven Churches of Asia were seven "grounds and pillars" of the truth, and yet the truth left them, and they fell, and are now desolate.

But I believe that this passage in Timothy is allusive to Jacob's dream, and the probable reason of it

would be the identity of language—"The house of God, which is the church of the living God"—that is, in Hebrew, Beth-el, the pillar and ground of the "truth"—"he set up a pillar, and anointed it;" and the words of Paul paraphrased would run thus: "If I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the true Beth-el, which is the true pillar, in opposition to the mere shadowy and ceremonial one which Jacob set up, of the truth." You will say, however, that *truth* cannot in every passage be thus construed as contrast to shadow. I answer, we have an illustration and instance of this use in the Gospel of John: "The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ." Now, truth came by Moses as well as by Christ; but the meaning is, that the shadow and ceremony of it came by Moses, while truth, the substance of it, came by Christ. So the allusion would be: "That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the true Beth-el, in opposition to the mere ceremonial or dreamy one which Jacob saw; which Beth-el, the Christian Church, is the *true* pillar, or the reality and antitype of that which Jacob raised in the desert." This is not a common interpretation, but it seems a probable one; and if it be a true one, it would do away with the difficulty that some have raised on the passage from St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy,—not that there is any real difficulty, still less Romanism, in the passage, even if this view be not accepted.

At the close of the chapter, at the twentieth verse, the idea unfortunately seems conveyed that Jacob made a sort of mercenary bargain with God: "If

God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God." But that is not the exact rendering, as it does not convey the idea of the original. The meaning of it is: "*If* it be true, as God has promised,"—not doubting it, but accepting it,—"*if* God will thus keep me, give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; if the Lord thus be my God,"—that is to say, if he be such a God as this,—“then the least return that I can make for all this, is to accept him as my God.” In other words, he accepts God as a promise-making God first, and then, on the ground and footing of that, he pledges himself to be his child, his follower, and a believer. “And this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be [Beth-el] God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely devote the tenth to the acknowledgment of thy sovereignty, and of my allegiance to thee.” His vow was the expression of feelings created by the previous goodness of God.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PATRIARCHAL SINS. JACOB'S JOURNEY. ANCIENT WELLS.
RACHEL A SHEPHERDESS. A MOTHER. JACOB'S INTERVIEW
WITH RACHEL. LEAH INSTEAD OF RACHEL. POLYGAMY.

It is most important you should bear in mind, as we proceed in the course of our perusal of these successive lessons from the Word of God, that they do not always consist of examples for us to imitate, but of facts occurring in the actual history and development of human nature, teaching us, first, what nature is, left to itself; and, secondly, how sovereign, how unmerited, how persistent is the forbearance and the mercy of God.

One is pained to read so many instances of sinful acts and relations occurring in the course of this book; but if no such instances had been recorded in it, in the case of its subjects, it would not have been a true and full portrait of humanity, but a flattering and beautiful sketch, not just and exact to the original. You must not, therefore, suppose that because sins are recorded occasionally as facts, but without censure, the sinners guilty of them are therefore set before us as models for us to admire or

imitate. The history is written impartially, as history should be written, and some of those that we read of in it are beacons, whose whole circumstances we are to avoid ; some are signs and models, whom we are to imitate, and to whom we are to approach.

In this chapter the depravity, which I alluded to before, in Laban, comes out only more fully, whilst Jacob, who sinned by supplanting his brother, is seen to meet with retributive judgment, in Leah being given to him by Laban instead of Rachel. The deceiver is deceived ; the biter is bit : he is caught in the snare that he prepared for others.

We shall, therefore, see, in the course of this history, that whilst sin may be forgiven, and is forgiven, in the sinner, yet the bitter, not penal, but, it may be, chastening and paternal consequences of it, are reaped and encountered even in this world.

In the first verse we read, that "Jacob went on his journey." It is, literally translated, "lifted up his feet from the road," an expression which denotes the joy with which he set out. Recollect that he had just escaped from the persecution of Esau ; he had just seen a beautiful apocalypse of God at Beth-el ; and, refreshed by the scene that he had witnessed, and the Divine pledges that he had heard, he lifts an elastic foot, having a happy heart within, the source of a light foot without, and journeys toward "the people of the east."

We read that there was a well, and "a stone was upon the well's mouth." In eastern lands a well is a most precious possession ; and in order to guard it from the sands of the road, and from decaying vegetation being whirled into it by the wind, heavy

stones are placed upon the mouth of each well, to be partly a protection, and partly to keep the water cool, and partly to show the wayfaring man where the well is situated.

In the third verse it is said, "They rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep." Now, this seems inconsistent with the tenth verse, "Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth." And in the eighth verse, "They said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth." Does it not seem, then, that in the third verse the fact is recorded to have been done, and that in the eighth verse it is stated that it had not been done? The answer to this is, that in the third verse the ordinary usage is specified, and in the eighth verse the fact of the usage being practised on this occasion is recorded. The usage is, "Thither were all the flocks gathered; and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth,"—that was the way to get at the water—"and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place." That is a description of the usage. Then the subsequent statement is an assertion of the fact that they did so on this occasion.

We then read that Jacob said to the shepherds, "My brethren, whence be ye? And they said, Of Haran are we. And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him. And he said unto them, Is he well?"—or, literally translated,—“Has he peace?” And hence, the *salaam* of the Indian is well known; and that Arabic or Hindostanee word is a surviving echo of

the Hebrew *shalom*, which means "peace." And hence, "Into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house"—make your *shalom* upon it, or let it have peace.

They then told Jacob, "Behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep." Now, it seems to us strange that Rachel, who was the daughter, I may almost say, of a prince, should be a shepherdess; but not more strange than that Rebekah, who was the daughter of a king or sheik, should carry water from the well. These were usages that were thought perfectly compatible with dignity of position; and thus some things which seem *outré* and strange to us, were not only perfectly understood and appreciated in ancient and eastern countries, but subject to no misconstruction.

We read then, that "while he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep: for she kept them." In the tenth verse, there is something very beautiful; it seems allusive. You will notice how often Jacob alludes in it to his mother. "And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his *mother's* brother, and the sheep of Laban his *mother's* brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his *mother's* brother." He recollected that Rebekah his mother went through on her journey to meet Isaac before. He recollected that he was the favourite of his mother, that she loved him, while his father preferred and loved Esau. And whilst the beautiful and tender recollections of home, and of her who was the pillar, the ornament, and the glory of home, rushed into the wandering patriarch's

heart, he associated all he saw with a "mother," as the uppermost thought, feeling, and affection, in his long sorrowing and depressed heart.

After this we see something very touching in Jacob. In the overflowing exuberance of the moment, a thousand recollections and associations, thrilling, as it were, and making his heart-strings vibrate, the patriarch, in the expression of the most pure and beautiful humanity, which shows that under all Jacob's sins there was a real, feeling, human heart, "kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept." I know not a more eloquent and beautiful text in the whole Old Testament history.

Then "Jacob," it is said, "told Rachel that he was her father's brother." I may mention that those words *father* and *brother* are very often used in the Old Testament Scriptures simply in the sense of kinsmen. Jacob said that he was her father's kinsman, "and that he was Rebekah's son," and therefore her cousin: "and she ran and told her father."

"And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month. And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought?" This seems a fragment of a dialogue. I suspect that Jacob had heard from home that he must not venture to come back, that Esau's hand was still lifted up against him, and that he must try to live, if he could earn anything, with

Laban in the country of his mother's relatives and friends; and therefore, we read that Laban spoke of his serving him; and, with his characteristic reference to price, he told him that he must serve him; but though he was his kinsman, he should not serve him for nought, and therefore he should have wages.

"And Laban," it is said, "had two daughters," Leah and Rachel, the one being the less beautiful, the other being "beautiful and well-shaped," as it might be rendered. "And Jacob loved Rachel, and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter." Now, still in eastern countries it is the general custom, and in ancient times it was the universal custom, for the husband to give the dowry to the wife. Hence, when a man had many daughters, he was accounted very rich; for every man who married a daughter gave a large dowry in exchange for the daughter. Jacob had no estates, but he had that which is the poor man's capital—his thews, his sinews, his health and strength; and he said, "I will give you what is all my stock in hand; that is, my strength, my energy, my service. I will give you seven years' labour," which would amount to a very considerable sum in wages. He did so; and then we read how Laban, with a deceit that was scandalous, and a wickedness that indicated the depravity of his heart, gave him Leah instead of Rachel. And this is easily explained by the fact, that in ancient times, and according to eastern habits, at the close of the wedding-day the bride was conducted to the husband veiled; and in the darkness of the night, as we are told, he could not see whether it was Leah or Rachel.

When he discovered the deception, as he soon did,

thus practised upon him, he remonstrated with Laban, and Laban said that it was the custom of the country to marry the firstborn before the younger. He should have told him that before;—but he did not do so. “It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.” And on reading some Indian sketches, I find that this is very much the custom still—that scarcely will a father give his second daughter in marriage till the eldest daughter has been previously married.

Jacob's love, however, was too real to be easily put off, and he served other seven years to get Rachel for his wife. Always recollect that there were secondary wives tolerated by God,—as he himself has said of divorce,—for the hardness of their hearts. Polygamy was then existent, and in this case there was something like bigamy. It was tolerated; but, whilst the fact is stated, its baneful results to mankind and to the honour of God are recounted also. Its sinfulness is developed in history, in the Old Testament. It is declared in the New in words. Because it was suffered, it was not therefore applauded. God suffers in this world what he does not approve of. War, sickness, famine, sin, murder,—all these things are, and yet God reigns. The reason is, this is not the promised rest, this is not the millennial state that is to be;—this is the era of warfare and probation; and these things are suffered under the providence of God, whilst they are condemned in themselves by the Law, and in the Word of God.

CHAPTER XXX.

PORTRAITS OF HUMANITY. VARIOUS USES OF THE BIBLE. JACOB'S DECEPTION.

It must be confessed that the picture of much of patriarchal life is a very humbling one. One is constrained to admit that the morality of some of these patriarchs, in many instances, was of the lowest possible character, whether from ignorance or otherwise. One can only account for the record of what they were, being thus minutely given, and what they did, being thus specifically written, upon that ground which I have so often endeavoured to explain—that God presents in his Word, in giving the history of men, not a *profile* view of humanity—that is, the best side of the face—but a full portrait of humanity, just as sin has left it, and Satan frequently inspired it; and, alas! how much evil yet remains even in good men. At the same time, you will recollect that the history of the sins of these men does not imply that God applauded their conduct, or presents these sins for our imitation, or does anything else than what a faithful historian does—tell truths, and what a true witness is bound to do—assert facts just as those facts were and are. If we wish to know what God's

estimate of conduct is, we must read his holy Law. If we wish to see what man is, when left to himself even for a little, read some of the miniatures and portraits that are contained in the lives of the patriarchs. And I must say, one is sometimes puzzled and perplexed, when Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob are set before us as the fathers of the faithful, and as saints, as one discovers so much alloy and guilt, so much sin mingling with their purity, and so much and so painful acts of immorality in many of the sketches that are given of those who derived all their taint from Adam, and all the excellence that neutralised and overcame it through Christ the Saviour, in whom, in spite of all, they yet believed, and to whom they strove to be conformed day by day, amid difficulties and trials we have not.

Let us recollect this also, that those histories which to us sound least delicate have their own distinct and important uses. Every part of the Bible is not equally edifying to every person, nor is every portion of the Bible equally suitable even for being publicly read,—not from being bad, or suggestive of what is bad, but from altered phrases and usages, and from the mixed ages and relations of a public assembly. It does not imply that because we accept a whole Bible, in all its integrity and inspiration, that every part is fitted for every scene, and for all places, and for every person. Parts of the Bible that are least useful to the individual are most important as links in history, as illustrations of otherwise hidden, obscure, and unknown circumstances—as evidences of what man's heart is, and what man's nature was; and portions which are instructive to

the aged are not suited to the young; parts for men are not equally for women; and others that are suited for the young, are not equally instructive to the aged. Portions that are fit for private reading are not so fit for public reading. At the same time, God's solemn records of human sins read before all, are very different from private confessional conferences. God's holy Word is just like a collection of medicines of various kinds: one medicine is for one purpose, another for another. It does not imply, that because one part may not be instructive and personally useful for me and you to-day, that it had no profit for instruction in other circumstances, or that it will have no efficacy and value in reference to other circumstances, or yet future contingencies and changes.

One lesson certainly we learn from the whole of the lives of these Patriarchs, and that is, the sad and melancholy results of what was suffered in that age; namely, polygamy. In every instance—and it is worthy of the notice of those who find fault with the Bible because it records the polygamy of the Patriarchs—as if history were sinful because faithful—in every instance where that polygamy is shown to have existed, the issues and effects of it are recorded also, as most calamitous and sad. Here you have Rachel and Leah leading a life of misery and envy, wretchedness and bondage; and in every instance in which you find more wives than one, you find that the issue was just what might be expected, and what God has unequivocally declared—misery to the subjects of it, mischief to society, and the source of innumerable sins in the sight of God.

There is no question that the history of humanity in the Bible is the history of a progression ; not the progression of humanity left to itself, as if it could achieve its own perfection, but the history of a progression in humanity as influenced by the lights, and motives, and effects of the Gospel, till we come to those perfect and beautiful types of it presented by the Apostles, the Evangelists, the Saints, and the Martyrs in the New Testament Scriptures.

We must always recollect, too, in reading these patriarchal facts, that every mother in Israel longed to be the mother of a son, because inspired by the constant hope of Him who was the burden of every prophecy, and destined to be "the Light to lighten the Gentiles," and to be "the glory of his people Israel." Hence, for a wife to have no children in ancient Israel was a reproach ; even for one to be the mother only of daughters, was reckoned then—however profitable a daughter was when the husband gave, as usual, a dowry for her—a reproach. And hence, to be the mother of a son, and, as it is stated in the 20th verse, to be the mother of six sons, was regarded as one of the highest blessings and distinguishing honours that could be possibly conferred upon a mother.

We see here Jacob's management in reference to the cattle. Laban was an avaricious, miserable, and, if one might use the expression, selfish wretch. His whole conduct was that of a low, mean, grasping miser, anxious to make the most of everything that came within his reach, and ready to coin even his daughters, or the highest morality, into gold. He made a bargain with Jacob, and Jacob, evidently join-

ing with him in this respect, made a cleverer bargain with him. That bargain, if Jacob did not know that the plan he adopted would be the means, when it was presented to the cattle, of impressing, through the senses of the females when with young, upon all the young cattle the likeness that he wished ;—if he did not know it, then his bargain was not so criminal ; but if he knew that that impression could be created on the mothers which would make the young they should bring forth what would mark them his, he was guilty of the greatest cheatery, dishonesty and sin. And even if he did not know that, yet the last part of the plan is indefensible. "He put not in the feebler, so that the stronger were Jacob's, and the feebler were Laban's." This was cheating, dishonesty, and deception, in patriarch or heathen. But then, when you see these things occur in these men, do not such things occur still ? Have you never met with anything of the kind on the Royal Exchange, in the counting-house, before the counter, in business and trade ? Not that the occurrence of it justifies it. But it shows man is what man was. Dishonesty is dishonesty, if all the kings of the earth should uphold it and practise it. Dishonesty is dishonesty, if all the prophets and patriarchs of the Old Testament were to be guilty of it. And we are not to palliate dishonesty and crime because it is predicated of an ancient patriarch.

We have in this chapter another picture added to the gallery of pictures of what men are. These pictures of what human nature is will draw to a close, and be succeeded by proofs of what the Lord is. I suspect we know not all the depths of the human

heart; and the mere glimpse that we get occasionally is but the lifting of a little of the veil, that we may see what is still behind; and we ought, therefore, only the more earnestly to pray that God would be pleased to give to each a new heart, and to hasten that blessed epoch when there shall be sunshine without one cloud, purity without alloy, piety without hypocrisy; and all things restored, not only to their pristine physical, but to their first moral and spiritual, harmony with God and with his will

CHAPTER XXXI.

LABAN'S CHARACTER. HIS SONS. CHANGE IN LABAN TOWARD JACOB. JACOB'S RETURN. JACOB'S EXPLANATION TO HIS WIVES.

THE character of Laban still continues to show itself of the same avaricious and grasping stamp that we found it to be at the beginning of his history. Age does not appear to have mitigated his worst characteristics. The sons of Laban, who seem to have inherited the temper and the spirit of their father—the same love of money, and the same regret at any profit escaping themselves—were among the first, knowing what an avaricious heart they had in their father's bosom to appeal to, to make the remark, "Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory." The word *glory* is the translation from the Hebrew of the word *Kabod*, and means properly, *weight*, *mass*, or *substance*. Men have been in the habit of feeling in all ages that money alone has weight and worth, and is enduring substance; and so what man thinks has the most weight and worth upon earth, though he so thinks erroneously, is transferred to express that

which is truly worthy of the name—glory everlasting. Jacob soon noticed in Laban's countenance the effect of the suspicions and evil sentiments conveyed into his heart by his sons. He noticed that Laban's countenance had not that bland and friendly tone that it had before, or "was not toward him as before." In other words, he suspected that he was about to try to find out the occasion of a quarrel, or a pretext for one. It would be a very interesting analysis to trace out in this world's history how many quarrels have been kindled by reason of artificial causes being found out, or struck out, and so the quarrel courted and provoked for the quarrel's sake. It appears that Laban tried to seek out the occasion of a quarrel, in order that in the excitement he might take back as much of the property as he could that Jacob had, honestly or dishonestly, earned. God put an end to the quarrel by directing Jacob to leave that place, and to return to the homestead of his fathers, and to his kindred and his people. Jacob immediately "called Rachel and Leah to the field," to make this communication. This one text reveals the fact that he treated Laban no longer as a friend, but as a foe, for he did not dare to return as usual, and meet Rachel and Leah at their father's home. He sent a messenger instead, to request them to come out into the field, to tell them there the new crisis that had occurred, from Divine intimation, in his history, and the necessity of escape from their father, Laban. He narrated the whole facts of the case, as appears from the fifth and sixth verses, that the daughters might see it was not his fault; and he told them with honest truth, "Ye know

that with all my power I have served your father ;"—and he might have added, " And this is all the thanks I get for it." " Your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times ;"—ten times, as used here and in similar cases, denote simply a multitude of times ;—" but God suffered him not to hurt me." He then alludes to the bargain that he struck with Laban in the previous chapter—a bargain not constructed with all the liberality which Jacob ought to have displayed, but the results of which Laban was perfectly willing to acquiesce in, whatever those results might be.

We read next of God's appearance to him, and of God's promising to be with him. And Rachel and Leah then said, " Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house ?" Though they were daughters, yet the affection of a daughter could not conceal from their eyes the duplicity, and even the dishonesty, of a father ; and therefore they say, not, however, to the world, but to their husband—and it is one thing for a child to blazon a father's sins before the world, and another to admit them to her own husband on the proper occasion, and on clear and necessary grounds—and therefore Rachel said, " Are we not counted of him strangers ? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money." You remember, that when a young man married a young woman in Eastern lands, he gave the father a sum for the daughter. Jacob gave Laban a sum for Rachel ; but Laban not only took that, but made Jacob pay more, by exacting labour and sacrifice from him. So that what they said might be rendered, " Our father has made a complete

job of us ; he has made so much per cent. by us ; he has virtually sold us in the market ; he has coined us into currency ;—we say it in pain and in sorrow, but to you, Jacob, we are obliged to confess it.” “ For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that is ours, and our children’s ; ” but plainly he wants to get it back again, and leave us penniless. Our best way—our only way—is to leave him as fast as we can. The result of this domestic or family discussion was, that “ Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels : and he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods.”

But one fact now occurs which seems at first sight, and perhaps even after we have made every explanation and allowance, still almost inexplicable—it is that Rachel stole away her father’s images. How can this be explained ? First, we have the proof that Laban was an idolater, or, if not an idolater, and knowing the true God, he worshipped the true God by images. This is equally idolatry. You will often find the plea made by those who worship, not only before images of saints, but images of Divine Persons—We are not guilty of idolatry, because we worship not the images, but the Being represented by the image. But it is singular that the idolatry generally denounced in Scripture is not the gross idolatry, or worship, of the wood and stone *per se*, but the worship of the true God through the media of images, and paintings, and statues, which God has not ordained. The idolatry so oft denounced in Scripture is not merely the idolatry of the heathen, which is gross, but the habit of worshipping God by images, or in ways not sanctioned by Him. Hence, “ Thou

shalt not make any graven image, or any likeness of any thing in heaven above : thou shalt not bow down and worship it;" and therefore, to worship God by or through any image of any sort, is not to worship in spirit or in truth, but to worship in the practice of an idolatry, clearly and repeatedly reprobated of God. It is better that no images of Deity should be made and set up in Christian temples. I think that the paintings of our Blessed Lord, even by a Murillo, a Rubens, a Salvator Rosa, a Carlo Dolci, or a Correggio, however beautiful, are still sinful in the eyes of God when introduced as part of the furniture of the house of prayer; and seeing they are, in the churches of this country, generally the most horrid daubs, one is pained to look upon them, and must feel they are not only bad theology, but in bad taste also. It seems to me, too, that when the second commandment is written upon the wall—"Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath; and thou shalt not fall down and worship it"—a monstrous inconsistency to place an image beside it of the Second Person of the blessed and adorable Trinity. In an early century of the history of the church, so much was this felt, that when a curtain was hung up in the church, on which were painted certain pictures, the minister pulled it down and rent it; and very rightly, too,—so revolting did it seem, even in those days, to minds who remembered God is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. And wherever these things have been introduced, we have found there the thin edge of a wedge introduced that rends to pieces the Protestant Church. And, in the present day, we

cannot be too plain. The polarity of thousands is Rome-ward; the moral atmosphere is more or less infected with a superstitious taint; and never were we more called upon to be witnesses for truth in the face of all error—not bitterly, not acrimoniously—but firmly—affectionately, and temperately, it is true, and yet firmly.

Rachel stole the images of her father. Now various explanations have been offered of this. One explanation is, that she wanted to take away what was the cause of her father's sins; but I think it is scarcely possible to imagine this to be the explanation. If I went into a Roman Catholic chapel, and took out from it its superstitious images, the police courts would judge me guilty of theft, though I might assign for a reason that I wanted to take away from the Roman Catholic priest what justly make him guilty of the sin of idolatry. Another explanation is, that she believed in the superstition of her father,—that she thought that Laban divined by his images, and knew what would be an auspicious day and an inauspicious day—where any absent one was, and how another lost relative could be found; and, therefore, she took away those images, that the old man might not find out the course that the refugees had taken, and thus recover, by successful pursuit, all his property. But another ground, and I suspect the real one, is that these images were made of silver and gold, and that she, somewhat avaricious like her father, sinned in this instance, as in others, by taking all the images that she could, as she knew that her father was ready to take away by reprisal all that he had given her. If this be the true solution,

it reveals a painful trait in the character of Rachel, that makes us see how all the saints, even the choicest and the best, were flawed, and unfit for being models, and how we must fall back upon that Perfect One—who was man, and in the likeness of man, and yet was holy, and harmless, and undefiled. I think you must be struck by this, in reading God's Word, that there is not a saint in it to whom imperfections do not cleave; but against Jesus not even his foes could breathe a true charge, or urge a real fault; and in Him alone the Argus-eyed police of Jerusalem, bribed and hired, could not detect the least inconsistency, or prove the lightest crime.

There is next the account of Laban's pursuit after them, and of the denial of the possession of the images by Rachel, whose tact never failed in any emergency. We must not blame Jacob, the husband: he did not know of the theft; Rachel, the wife, alone was in fault. She secretly stole them, and told not even her husband; and, therefore, he was not guilty of any conspiracy with her in the theft. In the 30th and 31st verses you will see an answer returned by Jacob which seems to puzzle a little—"And now, though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house"—as if thy childhood were not overcome, and you were homesick—"yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?" Now the answer of Jacob, in the 31st verse, seems strange, "And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me." It is only in the 32nd verse that we find the answer to Laban's question, "With whomsoever thou findest

thy gods, let him not live." But the 31st verse is an answer to a previous question of Laban's; namely, the question contained in the 26th verse, "And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword?"—why did you go away like a thief, like a criminal, not letting me know? The answer to this is given in the 31st verse, "Because I was afraid, for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me." It was no compliment to Laban, but it was the honest conviction of Jacob's heart, from his experimental acquaintance with Laban's character. And then the 32nd verse is the answer to the question about the gods; and it shows that Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them, or had possession of them. Rachel denied that she had them, and refused to be searched. They were not discovered by Laban, as Rachel, the real delinquent, refused to be personally examined; and Laban was therefore obliged to feel and conclude that his gods were not stolen by these parties. Well, then, the least that he could have done after thus discovering their innocence, would have been to make apology. When he did not find the stolen property which he had said that these parties had taken away, the least he could do was to make an apology; but he did not do it. Like human nature still, he evidently smoothed it over, and proposed a covenant for future conduct, instead of an apology for past uncharitableness; and the rude arrangements for that covenant for future doings were made according to the custom of those days.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JACOB A REFUGEE. CONSCIENCE MAKES COWARDICE. ANGELS MEET JACOB. JACOB'S PLANS OF PROPITIATING ESAU. MESSAGE TO ESAU. HIS PRAYER. HIS PRESENTS TO ESAU.

JACOB, as we ascertained in a previous chapter, dissatisfied with his services and his pay in the house and family of Laban, the father of Rachel, as indeed he had reason to be, is now a refugee alike from the home of his father-in-law, and from the wrath of his brother, justly excited by Jacob receiving his birth-right by deceit, and thus dislodging and displanting him. In such circumstances, Jacob felt, as most feel, that when the conscience is ill at ease, the heart is rarely very heroic. Jacob felt he had done wrong before God, and unjustly toward man; and conscience, so accusing, makes a coward of him that feels it. God, whose mercies abound, even where man's sins abound, whose ways are not our ways, and who in judgment remembers mercy, seems to have met Jacob, and often, in spite of his sins, often over his sins, to have sustained and comforted him; yet not forgetting, but condemning his sins, and leading Jacob not only by his grace to repent of

them, but in his providence bitterly to feel and see the retributions to which sins necessarily lead, even in this present life, and in the best of men. "The angels of God met him." This is an angelic function. They are ministering servants to them that are the heirs of salvation; and on God's errands, and executing his behests, they came to Jacob, dejected and depressed, for purposes of comfort, encouragement, and cheering. And he called the name of the place where he had been thus encouraged and re-invigorated, MAHANAIM; that is, "The place of God's hosts," or "multitudes," or "angels." He thus made each stage in his journey a shrine of recollections. Knowing that he had to pass through the country of Esau his brother, and anticipating, from the exasperated state of Esau's feelings, that there was very little likelihood of his having a quiet and unobstructed route through his wild territory, he falls upon the good and Christian policy of trying to propitiate, instead of making ready to fight, his brother, and thus to secure, if possible, a peaceful and quiet route through the country which Esau, the powerful sheik, governed. You will notice in his arrangements a great deal of cunning, or rather of policy, in Jacob; though perhaps there was cunning too, for there were many grievous defects in his character; he seems to have had a great deal of shrewd policy, and a right estimate of what men were, and how men are to be dealt with, in order to manage them successfully. He says, in the fourth verse, to his servants, "Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau." He gives Esau a title of dignity. Now, the fact was that Jacob, the younger, had got the

blessing—Esau had lost it; but Jacob addresses Esau just as if he had obtained what he was entitled to as the elder—the blessing, and that he, Jacob the younger, had it not. He covered his own designs by a compliment to Esau; and men still will often be complimented into temper when they will not be coerced into it. He says, Go and tell “to my *lord* Esau, thy *servant* Jacob”—not thy *brother* Jacob, still less thy brother who has got the blessing that he took away from you by deceit—“thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and men-servants, and women-servants.” Why does he tell him this? Not evidently by way of parade of the riches that he had amassed, but as a reason why Jacob should not seem, by appealing to Esau, to be going to ask him for anything. Esau, as Jacob foresaw, would say, He is complimenting me as an apology for what he has done before; he is disposed to merge all recollections that he has got the blessing; no doubt he wants money: he would not come to me except he was in straitened circumstances; and therefore, I suppose, all this compliment is preliminary to asking the loan of a sum that he wants for his journey, or begging in destitution and in need. But the answer of Jacob to this is, Tell him at once that I am not come to ask him for anything, for I have oxen, and asses, and flocks, and men-servants, and women-servants; I am come for one thing only, “that I may find grace in thy sight;”—that is all I ask. The messengers returned to Jacob, and said, “We came to thy *brother* Esau”—they used different language, not thy *lord* Esau—

"and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him." They did not state the reception that they met with ; but Jacob guessed what the four hundred men were likely to be after, by the light of his conscience, which told him that he had done wrong, and therefore that he might fear ; and you know quite well, that when a person has sin within, he puts a construction on everything that happens, in the light of his sin. For instance, when the disciples were tossed on the waves, they knew that they had done wrong, and so, when Jesus came, they thought, at first, it was a spirit, not from any likeness in Jesus, but from their own fears, "and they were afraid," and they could scarcely believe that it was he. When a man has done wrong, he believes that everything that betides him in providence comes to him, not as a mercy, but as a retribution for his sins.

Jacob now divided the people that were with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands. He anticipated battle ; he made ready for the worst ; but if he did so, one would suppose that, instead of dividing his forces, and allowing them to be beaten in detail, he ought rather, according to the usage of Napoleon, to have concentrated all his forces, in order to strike a blow that would be most successful by being most powerfully concentrated. But he was no soldier, but a shepherd ; and, therefore, his blunders in military strategy can be easily excused. If he did not anticipate battle, he might have thought that he had no means of success, if battle took place, and that an appeal, *ad misericordiam*, to the compassion of Esau, would be more serviceable ; he therefore sends one band forward to see

how they might be treated. If he had sent all forward, he felt, no doubt, that all would be destroyed; but if he sent forth half, then, if they were destroyed, it would be a warning to the others to escape as fast as they could, and seek safety in flight.

Before making all his arrangements, he addressed God in prayer, in words truly beautiful and holy—"O God of my father Abraham,"—that is, a covenant God—"and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee"—pleading God's promise; then he adds, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant." I am most unworthy; I have done nothing to deserve it, I have done everything to forfeit it; I am a miserable sinner; I can only appeal to thy great mercy, who hast set purposes to accomplish in thy providence, to deliver me from the wrath of my brother Esau, whom I have justly offended. He pleads God's promise, "I will surely do thee good." This is a very just precedent for us.

He then sends a present—a very handsome present—to Esau. Remember that the age was a pastoral age, and property was cattle. I explained before that the very word *money* in Latin, and in some degree in English, has a reference to cattle as its origin. *Pecunia*, which means money, from which our word *pecuniary* is derived, comes from the word *pecus*, cattle; and on ancient coins we find the picture of an ox in *alto-relievo*. He sent Esau a very handsome present, and he arranges his present so that one present should come after another, till Esau

should suppose that there was no end to the property that he was to receive from successive companies coming up, telling him the reason why they had come from Jacob, and the liberality which they were commissioned to exercise. All ended far better than he had expected.

We read next of his retirement and sequestration for a little, and of that remarkable scene in the close of the chapter—an actual scene, not a vision—wherein he wrestled with some mysterious being—how, we cannot say—who said, “Let me go, for the day breaketh.” The Hebrew word meaning *to wrestle*, like the corresponding Greek, literally implies to raise the dust. It might have been said that Jacob *dusted* with this Being, wrestling being so called in consequence of its raising the dust. This is so both in Hebrew and in Greek. And Jacob said, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.” What intense desire for a blessing! “And he said unto him, What is thy name?”—not that he was ignorant of it—“And he said, Jacob,” which means a supplanter. Then this Being changed this name, which arose from a discreditable occurrence, and gave him a more noble and aristocratic one in its place—“Israel,” literally “a man with God,” or, “a man with power with God.” Here is the origin of a word that has lasted to this day, and that will last while human speech is spoken, or while human recollection survives, or this dispensation runs. This change of name often occurs in ancient history. You will recollect that in this most interesting history of the patriarch that we have been reading, Abram was altered to Abraham, in consequence of a change of circumstances, and

Sarai was altered to Sarah, from another change of relation and circumstances. So Jacob here is called Israel, by which name he is oftener known in after times.

Jacob said, "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name." And this Being did not tell him what his name was, to satisfy a useless curiosity, but he did what was much better, he blessed him. In the blessing he read the name of its Author. God does not always give what we ask, but he gives what is better than we ask. Paul said, "Remove the thorn from me;" but Christ replied, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Jacob soon found out that this Being was a Divine Being, and he called the place Peniel, that is, "the face of God;"—"for I have seen God face to face." It was the common impression that for any one to see God was to be destroyed, and therefore he adds, "and my life is preserved."

As he travelled on, he halted upon his thigh. He was wounded, perhaps, to be a memento through life of that mysterious struggle,—a sacramental sign and seal of communion with God. The statement in the 32nd verse is merely the recital of a fact among the Jews, not a law, about eating the sinew of the thigh. Jacob's limb was dislocated, no doubt; and the Jews, of their own will, kept up a practice which God did not authorize, but which they practised. Remember that the Bible always states the historic facts without always giving those historic facts as precedents for us to imitate, or as instances of principles in themselves good.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JACOB'S FEARS. HIS MEETING WITH ESAU. HIS ARRANGEMENTS.
NATURAL AMIABILITY. CHRISTIAN CHARACTER. THE ALTAR
AND THE TENT-MONEY.

THOSE who were present in the course of my expository remarks of the previous chapters will recollect the cause of the bitter quarrel that broke out, and long subsisted, between Esau and Jacob. Jacob had deprived him of his birthright by stratagem, and thereby provoked a resentment, which he had experienced more than once in its most formidable aspect and intensest degree. Jacob naturally anticipated, that, having to go through the land of which Esau was the sheik, or chief governor, or ruler, he would meet what he felt he too well deserved—opposition, and probably destruction, to himself and to all his. He therefore made arrangements, in the chapter which we have previously read, alike politic and proper, to give very valuable presents to Esau, in order to propitiate him. He also resolved to send messengers beforehand, using the language of the profoundest deference and respect to Esau, and of the profoundest humility in reference to himself. He also arranged to divide his whole followers into

sections, so that, if Esau should be found hostile, he might fall upon one, which alone would perish; and his falling upon the first, though destructive to it, would be a signal for the second and the third to take to flight, and save themselves as they best could.

We find in the chapter, what Jacob did not anticipate, that Esau, instead of receiving him with all the hostility that he had most justly provoked, welcomed him with a kindness, a cordiality, and an expression of brotherhood, that did Esau the highest credit, and must have made Jacob feel humbled in the sight of God, and ashamed of his suspicions, in the presence of his brother. Jacob, it is said, lifted up his eyes, and saw Esau come with four hundred men, who, he was told, accompanied him, and who he at first thought were ready to fall upon him, and destroy him; and accordingly he made arrangements to meet them. He put the handmaids foremost; then Leah and her children; then Rachel, the most beloved, and Joseph, the most cared for, last, or in the rear, that they might, if possible, escape whatever hazard might occur, or whatever destruction might overtake the rest. He then approached to Esau, trying fair means first, and bowed himself seven times. I may just state, that seven is used in Scripture in a vague or wide sense: it is used in the sense of a great many times, and does not always denote the exact numeral seven. It is used here, probably, to denote several, or a good many times, and so to express the profound respect he felt. And he came near to his brother; and what must have been his amazement as he discovered that Esau, who was justly offended,

who had been defrauded, whose resentment had been provoked by the most gratuitous outrage upon what was his privilege, his property, and his right—who had shown on previous occasions the deep indignation he felt—ran to meet him, embraced him as a brother, fell upon his neck and kissed him ; and they both wept—the one from excess of love, the other from a sense of sorrow, that he had acted so badly in the past, and now met with treatment so superior to what he deserved or expected in the present.

Now, recollect all along, that Jacob, with all his faults, was the Christian ; and that Esau, with all his excellences, was not a Christian ; and then learn this lesson—that the natural man, unsanctified and unregenerate by the Holy Spirit of God, very often displays beautiful traits of character that must make the most eminent Christian blush, while the Christian often exhibits traits of temper most unworthy of his name. We have Esau, in this scene, who did not pretend to have any religion, showing a spirit of love and forgetfulness of wrongs that was perfectly lovely ; and here we have Jacob, who was a Christian, though with great faults, and flaws, and drawbacks, exhibiting, in some parts of his life, a conduct inconsistent with what becomes the living epistles of Christianity. Some men are formed with a constitution so amiable, that none but the Searcher of hearts can see whether that amiability is the result of nature or of grace. Other men are cast in a mould so rough, and endued with a temperament so explosive, that one often hesitates to decide that they are Christians at all, although there are reasons behind, and not seen by

the outward world, that show they are, notwithstanding, under the most powerful influences and action of the grace of God. You can conceive, that when two men are brought together, one constitutionally amiable, the other constitutionally irascible and irritable, that there may be more of the grace of God in the most irritable than in the most amiable, though it appears less in the one than in the other, because grace has, in many a case, an inner work to do, in eradicating and repressing what is bad within us; and often it is so absorbingly employed and so exhausted in this weary inner labour, that it does not yet show its outer influence in whatsoever things are fair, and lovely, and just, and of good report. The more that we acquaint ourselves with the differences of human nature, and the varieties of human character, and the influences which the grace of God has to resist as well as develop, the less we shall be disposed to judge severely—the more we shall be prepared to pray and wait for that great and final day, when Esau shall be seen as he is, and Jacob as he is, and we shall know just as we are known.

You will notice, again, when Jacob came up to Esau, from whom he had met so unexpected a reception—a reception so much better than he anticipated—that they all bowed themselves before him; and Jacob, though he had the blessing, therefore the precedence, and therefore the dignity, yet, in speaking to Esau, merged his own privilege, which he had unjustly, but truly and irreversibly obtained, and gave Esau the rank, the expressions of deference and dignity, which properly belonged to himself; and therefore he said, “These are to find grace in the

sight of *my lord*"—not my brother; as if Esau, being the elder, still had the birthright, and ought to be recognised as such. Then Esau said, "I have enough, my brother." I do not want more of your money, your possessions, your property; but Jacob prayed him that he would take his blessing, that is, the presents he had brought. In Eastern countries still, it is a mark of deference from an inferior to a superior to give presents; but it is a mark of rudeness, almost of discourtesy, sometimes of hostility, to refuse the present that is thus presented to you.

In the 12th verse Esau says to Jacob, "Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee." Jacob refuses, and thus apologizes: "My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me, and if men should over-drive them one day, all the flock will die. Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly." Now, some think that this was not perfectly sincere on the part of Jacob; others think that it was justified by the circumstances of the case. Esau was so gracious, that he offered to be his guide unto Seir, and to conduct him without any trouble or inconvenience over his part of the country; but some think that Jacob suspected Esau after all, and that, though Esau had fallen upon his neck, and shown so great kindness, yet Jacob had a lingering suspicion that it was not sincere, but was merely outward, and that he ought not to put himself too much in Esau's power, lest he should betray him. Others think that Esau, being a man who did not profess religion; and Jacob being a Christian, ever building an altar where he

pitched his tent Jacob, felt that he ought not, although he was his brother, to be unnecessarily mixed up in his fellowship in the sight of the world. But, at all events, Jacob did excuse himself, and said that he was not prepared to go so fast as Esau might go; and therefore he ought to have such time as the flocks, the cattle, and the mothers big with young rendered necessary.

Jacob went onward to Shalem, and there he pitched his tent; and it is said, that where he pitched his tent he erected an altar; that is, wherever you have a home, there you ought to have a recognized God. Wherever man builds a house, he ought to recollect he should have in it an oratory; wherever man is, whatever man does, a sense of a present God and a recognition of his sovereignty ought to be his duty. Wherever, therefore, there is a family, there ought to be family worship. How can we expect family blessings, unless, as a family, we ask them? As individuals, we ask individual blessings in prayer; as a family, we should ask family blessings in prayer; as a nation, we ought to ask national blessings in prayer. In all the associations in which man is cast, either by nature, or by grace, or by Providence, or by fact, there he ought to try to hallow them by asking the blessing and the presence of God.

I may just explain, at the close of the 19th verse, what is meant by he bought the land for "an hundred pieces of money." The words translated "an hundred pieces of money," might be translated, "an hundred lambs of money"—a very singular expression; but you will easily understand it, when you

remember what I said before, that Latin for money comes from the Latin word for *cattle* ; hence, *pecunia*, *pecus*, cattle ; and hence, these might have been a hundred pieces of money, with a figure of a lamb in *alto rilievo* struck upon them, to show what money originated from ; and we know that in early Greek and Roman times, coins bore a similar impression, as we may see in ancient coins preserved at this day.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

**SHECHEM'S AND DINAH'S SIN. SHECHEM'S SUBSEQUENTLY
HONOURABLE CONDUCT. SIMEON AND LEVI'S VENGEANCE.
JACOB'S GRIEF.**

It is not every portion of sacred writ that is instructive to all. Some records of the sins of men are better read in private than in public or in the family. Dinah evidently was in the habit of going out to see and be seen. This led to her loss of that which is the highest natural excellence and virtue. No daughter should go beyond the range of a mother's eye, or indulge desires and passions which are holy only within the limits God has assigned. Shechem acted afterwards in such a way as was fitted to repair as much as possible the wrong he had done. In most similar cases possession leads to entire alienation. In his case it did not. If we except his first act, his conduct was generous and noble. But that which was first ought to have been last. Dinah's brothers not only were grieved, as they ought, but they cherished feelings of deep revenge. Shechem's proposals were most proper; his affection for Dinah most deep; his readiness to suffer rather than lose her most praiseworthy; and so far he did all that

man could do to compensate for the wrong. Simeon and Levi, the brothers of Dinah, acted an atrocious part. Their conduct was indefensible. It was not love to a sister whom Shechem loved, and desired to make his wife, but a bitter, unforgiving, and unchristian spirit of revenge.

Jacob felt it bitterly, and saw that his name, and character, and family, were seriously injured; not so much by Dinah's first fall as by her brothers' subsequent ferocity in avenging what Shechem was ready to repair.

Passion indulged has no limits. It is as letting forth of water. Lord, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

CHAPTER XXXV

JACOB'S FORGETFULNESS. IMAGES AND IDOLS. DEVOTION AND FASHION. A CONSECRATED PLACE. THE NURSE'S DEATH. MASTERS AND SERVANTS. JACOB CHANGED TO ISRAEL. DEATH OF BELOVED RACHEL. ISAAC'S DEATH. HIS CHARACTER. RECONCILIATION AT THE GRAVE'S MOUTH.

JACOB, having forgotten the vows that he had made in his earlier days, is here reminded by God what those vows were, and called upon to return and go back to Bethel, and there fulfil the vows that he had so spontaneously and so heartily made.

It appears that at this time, and even in this land, and notwithstanding all the lessons they had learned, and the mercies they had tasted, there were idols, or strange gods, in the midst of them, as well as earrings in their ears. It does not imply that it was sinful to wear these if they were proper in themselves; but it was the custom to have earrings in their ears, and having idols upon them, and also images upon their nose jewels, to look to these, not merely as ornaments, but as objects of adoration. I saw, myself, almost a combination of this last autumn, when I strayed into the Church of the Madeleine, in Paris. I saw what was meant to be a bracelet for

ornament, on an apparently devout lady's arm, made use of as *beads*, by which she offered her prayers in the sanctuary ; thus combining devotion and fashion—prayer and ornament—in a way that perfectly illustrates the ancient patriarchal custom, that of having their earrings for idols, and their ornaments for images, that they were in the habit of worshipping. Jacob ordered all these ornaments and earrings to be put away ; not because they were ornaments, but because they were idols.

“ So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Beth-el.” You will recollect the change on this occasion. In the 28th chapter it is said, that the place where the angel wrestled with him was called Luz, a word which means a place of almond trees, where almond trees grow ; but Jacob changed its name from Luz, which was a mere geographical name, and called it Beth-el, the house of God, a new and sacred name, in remembrance of the scene that had swept before his vision on it, and thus consecrating the place and warranting him in no more calling it by its own ancient, but by a new and more sacred name. Holy reminiscences make holy ground. God's name is a sanctuary ;—“ he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el,” which is, the God of Beth-el. The original was the house of God, but he gives it another name, “ The God of Beth-el,” implying that it was not the place that gave it sacredness, but it was the name of God that gave it its hallowing influence.

We then read, “ that Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died.” It is the habit in Eastern countries, and in some parts of our own country, to venerate a nurse,

and properly so; but in ancient times it was especially so, so that, if you read the writings of Terence, the Latin comedian, you will find there that the nurse of the family was a very important personage. Deborah evidently accompanied Rebekah in all her wanderings; and when she died, she was sorrowed over as a loved, but now lost domestic; and so great was her loss felt to be, that the very place where she was buried was called "The oaks of weeping—Allonbachuth," on account of the great sorrow that took place at her burial. There is something very beautiful in this. Now, the servant is too much treated as a mere machine, and the master as the mere governor of the machine;—the servant receives so much, and the master pays so much, and thinks that he is to exact as much return as he can for his wages, and then, when they have exchanged their duties, there is an end of all the connexion. The consequence of this is a great deal of depravity prevailing in both extremes of society. A family—master, and mistress, and servants—ought to be a congregation and a church; and while every one is to occupy his proper place, and to show the deference and to discharge the duties that belong to that place, yet there should not be so much of the mercenary and so little of the affectionate in their intercourse and communion with each other. There is a duty besides wages that the master owes to his servants, and there is an allegiance besides work that the servant owes to his master; and in proportion as the Christian element pervades our families, in that proportion will right feeling, true deference, and high-toned courtesy,—for that is its real character,

—prevail among us. It is very beautiful to see this royal family—for Jacob was a sheik, or a prince, or a king, or by whatever royal dignity you like to call him—descending to show its true humanity by weeping over the loss of a faithful and attached domestic.

God appeared to Jacob, and said, "Thy name is Jacob, and that reminds you of something that is bad; but thy name shall be Israel, that is, one who by prayer has had success with God." God then renewed to him his covenant; "and Jacob," we are told, "set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink-offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Beth-el." You remember that the place is called in the 28th chapter, Beth-el, and also Peniel, "for I have seen God face to face." You will recollect that the Being who wrestled with Jacob is called an angel; but you will notice in this place that this angel was plainly God; for "Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he," that is, God, "talked with him;" and, therefore, that angel was not a created angel, whom he worshipped with any sort of religious homage, but God himself; and we have this told us very distinctly in one of the prophets, namely, in Hosea, where it is said that Jacob "took his brother by the heel, and by his strength he had power with God; yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him; he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us; even the Lord God of hosts, the Lord is his memorial." Now so says the prophet Hosea in

the 12th chapter, that the name of this Angel was the Lord God of hosts, and not, therefore, a created being.

Then there is a recapitulation of Jacob's calling the name of the place Beth-el. We then read of the loss of the beloved Rachel. You remember her words in a previous chapter, "Give me children, or I die;" her wish was granted, and her death was the result of the fulfilment of her wish. It is not always the highest mercy when God grants our wishes; it is often the greatest mercy when he withholds them. We know not what is good for us. When we ask in the language of remonstrance and complaint, repining or disappointment, and obtain, we never obtain a blessing with what we ask. "Thy will be done," is our best prayer. Rachel called the name of her child Benoni, "the son of my sorrow;" but Jacob, lest the dark shadow of the death of the departed Rachel, and the deep distress that he felt for the loss of one for whom he served seven years, and so loved, should be perpetuated as a presence ever sad and sorrowful, by the name of his son, changed his name from Benoni, which his mother had given him, as expressive of her sorrow, and called him Benjamin, "the son of my right hand," that is, who shall be a joy and a support to me—evidently a change of name to dissociate and detach the growing son from the painful and melancholy history of his birth. "Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Beth-lehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave;" a monument to commemorate one he so loved, for whom he so sacrificed, and whose sufferings for him were so great, and whose sins were forgiven while recorded,

and whose excellences are still perpetuated for the instruction of the daughters of Israel.

We read also of the death of Isaac in the 29th verse—"Isaac," that is, the father of Jacob, "gave up the ghost." It is very singular that we read so little of Isaac in after years. He seems to have become blind long before this, to have been detached almost from all intercourse with the world, and to have spent his declining years in perfect solitude, or in domestic quiet. "He was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days;" and it is recorded here, similarly to another case on which we commented on a previous occasion, that Esau and Jacob buried him: the two brothers who quarrelled while their father lived, gathered together round his dead dust, and quenched all their enmities and animosities in a flood of tears, as they bore his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ESAU AND THE DUKES OF EDMOM.

THIS chapter is a minute account of the descendants of Esau. It is the inspired proof of the fulfilment of prophecy. Esau enjoys the temporal prosperity which was promised, while his brother was in this respect far less favoured. This is the closing description of Esau and his, in any other character than as enemies to the people of God. In this life Esau enjoyed his good things. The wealth of Esau led to Jacob's separation from him, and so far aided the fulfilment of God's promises. There is nothing in the chapter specially instructive to the ordinary reader. It is a genealogical list of great value in its own department. It forms an important part of Christian evidence. Portions of Scripture personally uninteresting are yet in another department of indispensable value. Edom is here the name given to Esau, that is, "Red," denoting his sanguinary disposition, and it describes the character of his descendants, and their conduct toward the children of Israel. The Duke of Edom was the Dux of the Romans, and the Emir of the East in the present day. The

Edomites lived under a patriarchal form of government.

The descendants of prosperous Esau sank into obscurity, and soon perished from the face of the earth. The descendants of Jacob still live in every land—disowned but deathless. Names are recorded here which are still read, but not loved.

Let our names, O Lord, be recorded in the Book of Life, for Christ's sake !

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JOSEPH. HATED OF HIS BRETHREN. HIS TWO DREAMS. VISITS
- HIS BRETHREN. THEY CONSPIRE HIS DEATH. REUBEN
SAVETH HIM. THEY SELL HIM TO THE ISHMERLITES.

BUSH, in his notes, remarks on this chapter, "We here enter upon one of the most remarkable and interesting portions of the whole mass of sacred history. The life and fortunes of Joseph, embracing, with the exception of two chapters, the residue of the book of Genesis, or about one-tenth of the whole, form a story of unrivalled attraction, whether we consider the simplicity and beauty of the narrative, the touching pathos of the events related, or the vastly important moral lessons which it teaches. Viewed as an illustration of the doctrine of a particular Providence, bringing to pass the grandest results from the most apparently trivial events, nothing can be more significant or striking. It has all the effects of a pictorial delineation. While the recital flows on with all the charm of a highly-wrought tale of fiction, we are still assured of the *truth* and *reality* of every incident, and feel that we are contemplating an epitome of the dispensations of that overruling Power, which is 'wonderful in counsel, and mighty in operation;' which

controls the free and voluntary action of intelligent creatures, even when prompted by a spirit of malevolence and rebellion, so as to render them subservient to the accomplishment of those very plans which they are intent upon defeating, while the guilt of the agents remains resting upon them in all its unabated aggravations. But while this is, doubtless, the most important aspect in which the history of Joseph is to be viewed, it is still worth while to observe, that, merely as a human composition, as a specimen of simple, graceful, eloquent, and pathetic narrative, it is universally conceded that it has no parallel. We find in it all that gives beauty to the finest drama: a perfect unity of design, a richness and variety of incident, involving the plot in obscurity, yet gradually drawing to its intended development, and the whole issuing happily, rewarding pre-eminent virtue with appropriate honours and blessings, and visiting iniquity with deserved humiliation and punishment. It is a story which persons of all ages, and minds of all orders, peruse with equal interest; and the degree of secret moral influence which the spotless example of Joseph has exercised upon countless numbers of the readers of the Scriptures, can never be appreciated till the day of the revelation of all things. We behold in him one, who, in every period of life, in every change of condition, in every variety of relation, secures our confidence, our respect, our love. In adversity we see him evincing the most exemplary patience and resignation; in temptation, the most inflexible firmness; in exaltation, the most unaffected simplicity, integrity, gentleness, and humility. Whether as a son, a brother, a servant, a father, a mas-

ter, a ruler, we behold him exhibiting a deportment equally amiable and praiseworthy; and the respect which we entertain for the sagacity of the statesman and the penetration of the prophet, mingles with our profound admiration of the purity of the saint. But we leave it to the sequel to disclose, in all their richness, these interesting traits of biography and history."

The beginning of this chapter is an account of Jacob dwelling in the land in which his father was only a stranger, and was able to pass through. There is here given an account, not of his past generations, in the sense of his forefathers, but of his children or descendants, and of the events which befel those children in the course of the history that immediately follows. As the most prominent, as well as the most excellent of all his sons was Joseph, his history is given at greatest length, and his portrait sketched with the greatest minuteness. This biography is intensely interesting.

It begins by stating the fact, that "Joseph brought unto his father the evil report of his brethren." We cannot suppose that this was a reprehensible habit of bringing little tales of little doings to his father, but that the brethren of Joseph, whose whole history indicates the truth of what I suppose now to have been their character, lived in the practice of gross and scandalous sin, and that Joseph, having a purer taste, a loftier nature, and Christian principle, to regulate and guide him, brought to his father, what must have pained him, but what was needful for their correction, and for his safety, an account of their crimes and their misconduct, in order that the con-

sequences might, if possible, be averted, and they influenced for the better.

We read next, that "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age." The expression here translated "old age" is supposed to be used, not in its strict and literal, but in a figurative sense. "Age" is generally synonymous, in Old Testament Scripture, and in patriarchal times, with "wisdom," and "the son of old age" is an expression occasionally used to denote a wise and an accomplished son. That there is reason for this interpretation is obvious from the fact, that Benjamin was also the son of Jacob's old age, and the son of Rachel, the same beloved mother; and therefore, that Joseph being the literal son of his old age, could not be a reason for that distinguished affection which was bestowed upon him, and not upon Benjamin. We must therefore suppose that the phrase "the son of his old age" is meant figuratively to convey, that Joseph was a son of extraordinary wisdom, indicating precocious talent and remarkable piety, and therefore that he naturally caught the attention, and engaged the special affection, of his aged father Israel.

But whilst it was natural for the father to love the son for his great piety, it was indiscreet in that father to show that he entertained that peculiar affection for him, in the eyes of the rest of his family. It is generally the case, that when parents show, not false, but excessive love to one child, the rest of the children become jealous of that affection, and feel towards the child who is peculiarly beloved, animosities that ought not to be cherished in the

bosoms of brethren. The father, Israel or Jacob, might have loved Joseph peculiarly,—which he could not help,—but he ought to have suppressed the manifestation of that excessive love, as far as he could. Instead of that, Israel or Jacob evidently acted most imprudently when he gave to the son whom he loved most, a distinctive badge or mark of that affection, called in this passage “a coat of many colours.” “He made him,” it is said, “a coat of many colours.” It is doubtful if the word “colours” be the exact rendering of the original. It is translated in other portions of Scripture “pieces.” We do not know whether dyeing was then known, or whether varieties of colour given to cloth were yet common. Probably, all that is meant here is, that Jacob made him a coat of many pieces,—for that would be the strict and literal translation,—as a mark of love, and thus, it would not mean a coat of variegated colours, but a coat made of choice pieces of cloth, which we can understand to have been a very precious thing; whereas a coat of many colours would not seem to have any real beauty: it would rather be grotesque than otherwise.

We then read that his brethren seeing,—just as might have been expected,—the excessive partiality that Jacob showed to his son, envied him, and hated him only the more, “and could not even speak peaceably unto him.” The natural tendency in every age, of excessive partiality shown to one child, has been to produce jealousy and envy in the minds of the others; and in this case, that jealousy and envy rose to such a pitch, that not only did they not

love Joseph, but they could not pay him the ordinary compliments of courtesy—"they could not speak peaceably unto him." And if Jacob had reflected, as he ought to have done, he would have seen that, having children of different mothers, the prospect of mutual animosity and jealousy would be much more likely, if he showed any discriminating partiality to one more than to another.

We read then, that "Joseph dreamed a dream," in which he saw his sheaf arise, and the sheaves of his brethren "stood round about, and made obeisance to his sheaf;" and also another dream, in which he saw "the sun, and the moon, and the eleven stars" make obeisance to him. Both of these dreams had the obvious interpretation, that his brethren, his father, and all his relatives should one day give deference, and make obeisance to him; in other words, that he should be exalted to some lofty distinction or honour, and that they, like subjects, should pay the marks and expressions of fealty and subjection to him.

Now Joseph, I think, did wrong in telling them his dreams, unless he was commanded by God to do so. Nobody likes to be told beforehand that they will be subject to one who is their younger, and their inferior; and if it was not his duty to tell his dreams, certainly it was not expedient to do so. As it was, they added to and aggravated that feeling of envy, discontent, and dissatisfaction which his brethren nursed, and which began to gain great power in their hearts and conduct. We read, that while "his brethren envied him, his father observed

the saying," and evidently understood that the dream was not a random guess, or a mere fanciful conjecture, but an inspiration from on high.

Some are still of opinion that God does speak to man by dreams. I do not see that there is anything improbable,—certainly, one does not see that there is anything impossible in that; and when one knows that, in sleep, the physical powers are laid prostrate by being steeped, as it were, in stupor, one can conceive that the mind is more unfettered, more disentangled of its physical and material ties and restraints, and is in a state to hold communion more perfectly with the unseen, the heavenly, and the eternal. In these, its best states, God may speak to it. And this, perhaps, may explain a great deal of the reputed effects of what is called mesmerism. I can understand that, through that influence,—which is a plain matter of fact,—the operator may so lay, or prostrate, or subdue the physical powers, that the inner inhabitant shall be less obstructed and shackled by the material organism around it; and that, so unshackled and unfettered, it may see farther, comprehend and better understand, than in ordinary circumstances. Who does not know that he has had brighter thoughts at midnight, in a dream, than in his waking hours? I know that I have composed better speeches and better addresses in dreams than ever I did when I was awake. I know that I have had clear apprehensions of things and thoughts during sleep, which I would like to have committed to paper. And you know the same: it is nothing peculiar.

It does, therefore, seem that the mind is more

unfettered, more disentangled from earthly and material restraints in sleep, and that it may then see, and God reveal divine things more clearly; and there is nothing impossible, nor improbable, in supposing that God holds communion directly with mind, and conveys his truths and his purposes to it, when, where, and how he pleases. The only danger would be, if you were to take your dreams and act upon them, in spite of God's written Word. We must never forget that we must bring the dream to the Scripture, not the Scripture to the dream; and if Scripture condemn what the dream dictates, dismiss the dream, for it is not from God; if Scripture sustain, warrant, and authorize what the dream indicates, it is a providential admonition from on high, and you should act upon it accordingly. In these patriarchal days, however, dreams, in the absence of a written revelation, were the usual vehicles of divine instruction; and hence the apostle says, "God, who at sundry times,"—that is, in the patriarchal and antediluvian times,—“and in divers manners,”—dreams was one of them,—“spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.”

When Joseph came to his brethren, we find that their very first feelings entertained towards him were very different from what he had reason to expect, or what his brethren owed. He thought he was going to brothers: he found that he was approaching fratricides. Their animosity in secret had grown to such a height and strength, that their first impulse was to kill him. “They said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh;” and therefore, when he came,

they were prepared, and ready (at least, the majority of them), to kill him. He was sent by his father to serve them, but instead of welcoming, they received him in a way that brothers should not receive a brother. One, however, more tender and feeling than the rest, that is, Reuben, heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands ;" that is, he attempted to do so, "and said, Let us not kill him, shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness." And it is evident that he did not mean or wish that he should pine away or die in the pit, but he thought that he should have some unknown and quiet opportunity of taking him out, and restoring him to his father ; for we read in the twenty-ninth verse, that "Reuben returned unto the pit ; and behold Joseph was not in the pit : and he rent his clothes. And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not ; and I, whither shall I go ?" which shows that Reuben meant in the end to deliver Joseph ; but he was greatly guilty, for he voted with the majority in getting rid of him for the present. His conduct was criminal, yet his heart was more sensitive than the hearts of his brethren.

"And it came to pass when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours,"—or of many pieces,—"that was on him ; and they took him, and cast him into a pit ; and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat bread ; and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and behold a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead, with their camels bearing spicery, and balm, and myrrhe, going to carry

it down to Egypt. And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites." He thought that would be a better way than killing him. I do not believe this was tenderness on the part of Judah, but that he was anxious to make the most he could by Joseph. He therefore resolved not to kill him, which would be the most cruel, and what he thought was the least profitable way; and, like a genuine merchant or tradesman, over-covetous, he was ready and anxious to make the greatest profit or largest per-centage, as well as to get rid of a disturber he hated; and therefore he said, "Sell him to the Ishmeelites;" and they did so, and received twenty pieces of silver, and the Ishmeelites took Joseph into Egypt.

We then read how, when one commits one sin, by a law lasting as the stars, one must commit another to hide it. No man commits only one sin, when he sins at all. It needs additional ones, in order to conceal a previous one, or to render void or arrest the consequences of it. These brethren, having got rid of Joseph, whom they did not murder, but sold to the Ishmeelite merchants, killed a kid, and dipped Joseph's distinctive coat in its blood, and sent it to their father, and assured him, by the use of the most infamous lie, and with a cruelty that one can find no expression strong enough to embody, that they had found the coat, wishing him to believe, that, in their efforts to rescue Joseph from the fangs of a wild beast, the coat was all they could secure. But it is evident that the very bringing the coat to the patriarch might have raised the aged father's

suspicious; because, if the thing were really as they said, there would have been needed no strong corroborative proofs. A person who is conscious that he is speaking truth, does not generally support it by oaths, or strong statements, or elaborate proofs, because the deep consciousness within, that he is uttering truth, makes him feel that such support is not necessary or expected; but when any man uses oaths, as the world does, or even strong asseverations, as, sometimes, we all do too much, it looks as if there was a consciousness of the want of truth, and an anxiety to make up for it by loud asseverations.

The poor patriarch, we read, was deeply distressed—almost reduced to despair; for he said, he would go down into the grave mourning. But the issue was very different from what he anticipated, as the sequel will show. Man plans: God reigns and rules.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FAMILY HISTORY OF JUDAH. TAMAR DECEIVETH JUDAH.

I EXTRACT, from the very valuable notes of Bush, the following elucidations. In this chapter, which arrests for a little the history of Joseph, Bush says, there is much peculiarly sad and sinful.

“The story of Joseph is interrupted at this point, for the purpose of introducing some particulars in the family history of Judah, which are mainly important as having a bearing on the genealogy of our Lord. The Saviour was to derive his origin from the tribe of Judah, and the Spirit of inspiration sees fit to afford us the means of most exactly authenticating his human extraction, even though some links in the chain were far from being of a reputable character. But we learn from this, that Christ derives all his glory from Himself, and not from his ancestry, and that his condescension is the more to be admired the lower he descended in the scale of worldly honour, in taking our nature upon him.

“Verse 1. ‘It came to pass at that time.’ That is, not at or about the time of Joseph’s being sold into

Egypt, but in a larger sense, in the interval between Jacob's return from Mesopotamia, and the events recorded in the foregoing chapter. For it appears, on examining the age of Joseph, as shown in different passages of the history, that he was about thirty-nine years old when Jacob and his family went down into Egypt. And it is stated, (Gen. xli. 8—12.) that Pharez, the son of Judah, whose birth is mentioned at the end of this chapter, had at that time two sons born to him, Hezron and Hamul. But as Joseph was seventeen when he was sold into Egypt, this leaves only the space of twenty-one years for Judah to beget three sons, to have them grow up and be married, and their wife, Tamar, to have sons and grandsons. This period is evidently too short for the occurrence of all these events, and we are therefore necessitated to refer the commencement of them at least as far back as to about the time of Jacob's coming to Shechem, (Gen. xxxiii. 18); but the incidents are related here, because there was no more convenient place for them. In like manner, according to Aben-Ezra, the phrase, 'at that time,' (Deut. x. 8,) is used in the same large and indefinite sense; for the historian having mentioned (ver. 7), that they came to Gudgodah, goes on to say, that 'at that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant,' whereas it appears elsewhere that this separation took place on the second year from their coming out of Egypt, which was forty years before their arrival at Gudgodah. Le Clerc also remarks, that several instances occur in the New Testament, where the phrases 'then,' 'in those days,' 'at that

time,' must be taken with very considerable latitude of meaning. Apparent difficulties and discrepancies of this nature arise of necessity from the very structure of the Mosaic books, which are by no means a systematically connected history of the world from the creation to the times of Moses himself; but rather a series of detached accounts, with one grand bond of connexion running through them all, viz., their relation to the chosen seed and the promised Messiah. Whatever is written, we may assure ourselves is true, and might, no doubt, be shown to be perfectly consistent, were we sufficiently acquainted with all the circumstances.

"Verse 25. 'By the man whose these are,' &c. It is obvious that Tamar might before this have exposed Judah, had she been so inclined. But she defers it, probably under a secret prompting of the Spirit of God, till matters come to a crisis when she can make the disclosure to the most effect. In this, however, it does not appear that she was influenced by vindictive feelings toward Judah, or that she had any wish to hold him up to public abhorrence, but simply to vindicate her own conduct; while God, in the meantime, was carrying on His purpose to bring the offender, by this means, to a penitent confession of his fault. In fact, Tamar appears to have managed the affair with great delicacy. Instead of boldly summoning him into her presence, and requiring of him to stand forth as her accuser before the judges, she does not even name him, nor seek an interview, but sends to him the pledged articles, leaving it to his own conscience to rebuke him before God. It is well when injured innocence can rest

satisfied with the vindication of itself, without pursuing the offending party to the extreme point of justice or revenge. In many cases, much may be left to the inward self-inflicted corrections of an ingenuous mind.

“Verse 26. ‘Judah acknowledged them, and said,’ &c. Heb. *וַיַּכֵּר*, *yakher*, *knew*, *discerned*, *recognized*; the same word in the original with that which occurs above (ver. 25), and is rendered ‘discern.’

“‘She hath been more righteous than I;’ that is, less culpable. The conduct of neither had much to commend it on the score of *righteousness*, nor does he, perhaps, intend to say that she had *in this matter* committed a less sin than himself, but that *his wrong doing in another instance had been the occasion of hers, at this time*. This fact gave her the advantage; it attached more blame to his conduct, in common estimation, however it might be in the sight of God, than to hers. He had broken his word to her, but she had kept her faith with him, living patiently, in a state of widowhood, year after year, till she saw no prospect of her hopes being realized. ‘God will find a time to bring his children on their knees, and to wring from them penitent confessions; and rather than he will not have them soundly ashamed, He will make them the trumpets of their own reproach.’—*Bishop Hall*.

“‘He knew her again no more.’ This seems to be inserted as a sort of seal and assurance of the sincerity of Judah’s repentance. A genuine sorrow for sin is inconsistent with again relapsing into it.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FORCE OF CHARACTER. THE GODLY ARE BLESSINGS. A BAD WOMAN. JOSEPH PUNISHED. CHRISTIANITY IN A PRISON.

IN a previous chapter we read, in pure and holy language, of the sin of Judah, and in this chapter there is presented a beautiful contrast in the persistent and Christian character, and victorious virtue of Joseph. Recollect, in studying this chapter, that he was sold a slave into Egypt. Though exalted to honour in the house of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, he was still a slave,—an exalted and dignified slave; but still a slave purchased by Pharaoh's officer, and liable to be sold by him when it suited his convenience, again. It shows, therefore, what excellence must have been inherent in his conduct, when, in the worst, or least propitious of circumstances, that excellence could break forth, and his character and conduct so commend him to the approbation of his master, that he was exalted to the highest and most influential position in all the household and kingdom of Pharaoh. Such is the force of real and intrinsic worth!

We read, too, that the whole house of Potiphar was blessed for Joseph's sake. Here; then, is proof, and

it is not a solitary one, for it is repeated often in Scripture, that a good man in a household, in a kingdom, in a province, in a court, proves a blessing to it: conducting away judgments, and conducting down blessings. We know not how often the few and the far-between good men that pray, and serve God in secret, may have warded off the judgment that our nation has deserved, and drawn down the blessings that we had justly forfeited. Sodom was spared whilst a Lot was in it; Jerusalem was safe whilst the Christians were in it; and only after Lot had escaped from Sodom, and the Christians had fled from Jerusalem to Pella, did the judgments of God descend, overwhelm, and bury these guilty capitals. How desirable, then, it is that Christian men should be everywhere in social life! How important that they should command our armies, and be at the head of our navies; that they should be in royal courts, and similar high places, that wherever there is an element of power, there there should be a Christian heart to love it, and a Christian hand to wield it! So God will bless courts, nations, and kingdoms, for the sake of the Josephs, or the good men that are in them.

How beautiful was that exclamation of Joseph, on which I shall address you afterwards, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" What an overwhelming incentive to good is in that deep conviction! what a powerful preventive of evil!

We have here a picture, purely but truly drawn, of the profligacy of the wife of Potiphar; not, I fear, solitary in the world's history. When an angel falls, that angel becomes a fiend. *Corruptio optimi pos-*

sima, is a proverb well known to the readers of ancient writers—the corruption of the best thing is always the worst. When a man falls, he becomes bad enough, God knows; but when a woman falls, she becomes worst of all. It seems as if the depth to which one falls were proportionate to the height on which the creature originally stood. In man, such seduction is vile; in woman, it is inexpressibly evil. When Potiphar's wife failed to seduce, in order to gratify vile desires, her impure passions, ungratified, kindled into fierce and impetuous revenge. She would kill, because she could not corrupt. So different is lust from love; and therefore she speaks in language that was fitted to provoke and irritate Potiphar, in that when alluding to Joseph, she says, "He hath brought in an Hebrew,"—this contemptible Jew, this foreigner,—“to mock us, and turn us into unutterable contempt.”

Let us always remember that sins are never single; they follow one another, or exist together. The roots by which they cohere may not be seen by us, but real and actual they unquestionably are. He who does a sin at first, must commit many more to hide it, unless from his lowered position he repent, and be forgiven. There must be the falsehood to screen it, and the hypocrisy to mislead and deceive those who do not suspect it.

We next read, that after Joseph's experience of this evil treatment, notwithstanding his incorruptible virtue, he was cast into prison. Most unjustly so. It was the wife of Potiphar who ought to have been in prison; but very often the innocent suffer for, and at the instigation of, the guilty, in this world. If

this were the dispensation of retribution, then virtue would always conquer, and vice would be always punished; but as this is a world where there is light and darkness, there is just retribution enough to show us that God reigns, but yet confusion enough to show us that this is not the day of judgment; so we find that the innocent suffer for a season, and the guilty escape.

I can conceive nothing more painful to Joseph than to be accused of crime of which he was consciously innocent, and visited with punishment undeserved; and yet under that accusation to conduct himself with the quiet, silent, beautiful reserve which he displayed on this occasion. I know not anything more difficult to bear than false accusations, except undeserved punishment; and it needs a great deal of grace to suffer and be silent; and that man will indeed have to be thankful to God, who passes through the world without some mud being flung at him. But often when you cannot answer the accusation that is evil by a thorough reply, from want of opportunity, you can live it down; and I believe one of the most effective replies to a calumny is living down evil; but it needs a great deal of grace, a great deal of patience, and no little magnanimity to do it. It is only a few heroes in the world, or martyr Christians in the church, who can bide their and their Father's time. Joseph did it. He said nothing; he was satisfied that there was a God, who would right what was wrong, and avenge his reproach, and bring forth his righteousness like the noon-day. He suffered, and was silent—that vivid mark of the most exalted Christianity.

He was cast into prison, a supposed criminal, as a punishment he did not deserve; but even there it was impossible that his superior and supernatural excellence should be hidden. It was irrepressible everywhere; but it seems, from the gaoler treating Joseph with such unexpected leniency, and placing so much in his hand, that the gaoler did not do so of his own prompting, or altogether from what he saw of Joseph, but that Potiphar had the strong impression (as, indeed, the very facts of the case, if one might enter into them fully, would demonstrate), that Joseph was falsely accused, that his wife was the guilty one, and that he conveyed this, his own impression, to the gaoler; for the gaoler acted, in his treatment of a prisoner slave, in a way that can only be explained upon the supposition, that the gaoler's instructions from his master were, to receive Joseph as a prisoner, that outward appearances might be saved, but to treat him as a friend and innocent servant, as Joseph truly and properly deserved; and so the gaoler did treat him. At the same time, it is said, that in prison "the Lord was with Joseph, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed all to Joseph's hand." God was with him in the palace; God was with him in the prison; God was with him when he was looked upon by Potiphar as all that was great and good; God was with him when he was accused and charged with the greatest crime; God was with him when he was cast into prison. Man changes; God never. God is with his own in palace and in prison, in light and in darkness; for he has promised, "I will never leave thee; I will never forsake thee."

Joseph was happy in a dungeon, because his conscience was at peace. His "feet they were bound with fetters: he was laid in irons;" but his soul was free, and it reposed sweetly and securely in the sunshine of the countenance of God. After all, true religion is peace. Sooner or later it gives a satisfaction which more than compensates for outward trouble.

CHAPTER XL.

JOSEPH IN PRISON. THE BUTLER AND BAKER SHUT UP WITH HIM. THEIR DREAMS. THEIR FEARS. JOSEPH'S INQUIRIES. HIS INTERPRETATION. FULFILMENT OF INTERPRETATION. THE BUTLER'S INGRATITUDE.

We have here another beautiful episode in that truly interesting biography, on the minute particulars and facts of which we have so recently entered. It appears that Joseph was still in the dungeon in which Potiphar had placed him for the crime of which he was accused and supposed to be guilty, but of which he was altogether innocent. It happened soon afterwards that the solitude of that dungeon was at least relieved by the imprisonment of the chief butler and chief baker, two of the great officers of the royal household, who had given some offence to their master.

The word here rendered "butler" is translated in Nehemiah "cup-bearer;" and perhaps this is the just and proper translation of it in order to convey what it meant in ancient times. It was the duty of the butler simply to have the charge of the wine cellar, and to present the wine at the banquet, which in this case was unintoxicating, for he squeezed the grapes into the cup which he offered

to his master. This was his dignity and duty; it was a responsible office, and one which was very valuable for its emoluments in those days.

The next officer was the baker, whose office was to prepare the bread and meats for his master. These two persons were cast into prison along with Joseph. Neither of their names are given, nor are their crimes specified. The very silence of Scripture here is remarkable. They are merely introduced as facts that occurred in providential history, in order to bring out a new feature in Joseph's character, a new fact in Joseph's biography. Their names are of no value; their crimes might gratify our curiosity, but could convey no instruction; they are therefore omitted. Often one has reason to see the inspiration of the writer in his silence, even as we see it in his eloquence or utterance.

We read that these two, for some crime, real or supposed, were cast into prison along with Joseph, and we can well conceive how differently the prison felt to these three persons. The two criminals, really guilty, felt it to be a prison; but Joseph's conscious innocence lighted up the darkness of that prison with more than the splendour of a royal palace. It is not darkness, nor bars, nor bolts, nor three-feet thick walls, that make a prison; it is the prisoner's consciousness of crime that constitutes a dungeon; and where that consciousness of crime is not, there, as in the case of Bunyan, and as in the case of saints and martyrs, of whom the world was not worthy, all the misery of a prison is felt comparatively light. The severest pains feel gentle when there is a conscience at peace with God, and the

lightest injury feels painful and poignant when the heart is not right with Him.

These two heathen men, the butler, or cup-bearer, and the baker, dreamed dreams. This, one would suppose, is so perfectly natural as not to deserve notice; but it seems that the dreams made an impression upon each so extraordinary, that each formed the opinion that it must be the symbol or the hieroglyph of some extraordinary meaning; it was the depth of the impression of the recollected dreams that made them so anxious to ascertain what was their meaning, for meaning they were sure they had. Their hearts were depressed, their countenances were sad; they felt that more was meant than met the eye in the night vision, and they were, therefore, anxious to understand it.

The dreams, too, convey an appearance of perfect likelihood, the moment that one reads the account of them. How very natural that the cup-bearer should dream of wine, and of presenting it in a cup to his master. How perfectly likely that the baker should dream of making bread, and presenting it to his master. Generally our daily duties are woven into our night dreams; and what the heart has nearest and closest to it, is what is most frequently reflected to us from the land of dreams in the silent watches of the night. Although we read of other dreams so directly the creation of the Spirit of God, that one can see that they had no connexion with the employment of the persons, but were independent vehicles of divine lessons which God desired to convey.

- Joseph, when he saw them in the morning looking

so sad, with that thorough courtesy which is ever the creation of Christianity, asked, in deep sympathy, and no doubt with real sorrow, "Why are you looking so sad? Is there any service I can do you? Is there anything I can do for you? Let me know." These two saw such thorough honesty in that youth's inquiry, that they at once had confidence in him, and told him that they had each dreamed a dream, and that they were perplexed by the desire to know the meaning of it. You say, Why so perplexed? I will tell you. The unknown is always most feared. When we know the worst, we can, as it were, prepare ourselves to meet and master it. But when the unknown is before us, our own consciences, not at ease, and our own imaginations ever ready to fancy where there is no fact to guide it, and no footing for it to move on, expect that all will be disaster, because all is unknown. An unknown God is ever a God feared. It was to the Unknown God that the altar for the worst sacrifices was erected of old.

Joseph presented himself as the interpreter of these dreams, not on account of any wisdom, or peculiar inspiration that he had, but simply by reason of that communion and correction from God, which as God's minister he was privileged with. He said, "Do not interpretations belong to God?" Is it not the prerogative of Him who sends the dream, to send also the interpretation of the dream? I ought to notice that in ancient times dreams were one of the modes used by God for conveying his mind to man. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners," sometimes in dreams, and sometimes in visions, "spake"

in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days "put away all these forms as the usual channels of his mind, and "hath spoken unto us by his Son;" that is, in his own holy, perfect, and completed Word. But in those days dreams were Scripture, and interpreters of dreams were the expositors of Scripture; and therefore, these two men, believing in a God, at all events having confidence in the significance of dreams as supernatural intimations, asked Joseph to interpret theirs; and he gave the interpretation, and taught them also a lesson they needed to know, that the Author of the interpretation was, not the gods of the Nile, but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob.

The butler or cup-bearer first of all narrated his dream. Now the remarkable part of his dream was, not the natural history of it, but the rapidity with which he saw the bud come into the blossom, the blossom into the fruit, the fruit into the clusters, and the clusters into the ripe grapes. The thing that struck the butler with amazement, as most significant, was the speed of the process. It was as if it all at once budded, blossomed, bore fruitage, ripened, and then was by him squeezed or pressed into the cup of Pharaoh. Joseph interpreted it at once. Now his interpretation could not have been a guess. Why should he guess that the "three branches" are three days? Why not three months, three years, three hours, three centuries? The very interpretation that he gave, and the decision with which he gave it, showed that he was inspired from on high;

and the fulfilment of the prophecy was proof that the interpreter was right.

You have in that interpretation, "The three branches are three days," a very important function, I may observe, of the word "is" or "are." It is evident that the word "are" is used in the sense of "signify"—"The three branches are, or signify, three days." Now does it not seem natural to understand these words, "This is my body," in the same way as you understand this clause in Joseph's interpretation, namely, "This signifies my body"? Nobody would imagine that Joseph meant that these three branches were transubstantiated into three days; and no one but one who wished to justify the decisions of councils previously and fallibly given, would ever think of changing the words "This is my body" into "This is transubstantiated into my body."

Having rendered this service to the butler, Joseph asked, as the only favour he desired, that the butler would think of him when he was raised to prosperity. He had sown spiritual good. He asked a little temporal, in return.

Then the chief baker also came, no doubt concluding that since the butler's dream had had such a favourable interpretation, his also must have a favourable meaning, and he said, "Behold, I had three white baskets on my head." In eastern lands bread and most other things are carried on the head; and in the North I can recollect the time when bakers carried their baskets of bread on their heads, which no doubt was a vestige of an ancient custom. He said, "In the uppermost basket there was of all manner of bakemeats for Pharaoh; and

the birds did eat them out of the basket upon my head." Joseph then gave him the interpretation of this, and doubtless with sorrow; but then it was his duty not to accommodate his interpretations to individual tastes, and like the ancient oracles, to tell what would please most those who could pay most, but to speak what was truth, whether palatable or painful; and therefore, he said, "Within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thy head from off thee, and shall hang thee on a tree; and the birds shall eat thy flesh from off thee."

Next we have the simple record that this was literally and strictly fulfilled; and then it is added in language most eloquent, because so simple, and so descriptive of what man is,—the recipients of the greatest mercies often feeling the least grateful, and almost illustrating the common aphorism, that the way to lose a man's friendship is to do him some service,—“Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him.” But Joseph still knew of One who said, “A mother may forget her sucking child, yet will not I forget thee”

CHAPTER XLI.

PHARAOH'S DREAMS. THE NILE. THE SEVEN KINE. THE SEVEN
EARS OF CORN. BUTLER'S RECOMMENDATION OF JOSEPH.
JOSEPH'S INTERPRETATION. USE OF LANGUAGE. EGYPTIAN
MANNERS.

WE read in the previous chapter, that the two chief servants of Pharaoh dreamed, and received the interpretation of their dreams from their fellow-prisoner, Joseph. We find in this that kings must sleep as well as the meanest of their subjects, or the lowest of their servants; and that the dreams that visit weary workmen and servants during sleep, are not strangers to royal minds, when reposing after the exercise of their talents, exhausted with the cares of the state, any more than to the mind of the working man after the toils of the field.

He thought this dream, that "he stood by the river." The very mention of the word is evidence of the locality. "The river" was the name in Egypt familiarly given to the Nile, the great source of its fertility and its prosperity, and its hope of plenteous harvests, and national wealth. It appears that seven lean kine, according to the simple narrative, which I need not recapitulate, came out of the banks, or the rank sedge or grass upon the river's bank, where the

crocodile is now found watching for his prey ; and that these seven lean cattle devoured the seven fat cattle. The ox is still found upon the ancient monuments of Egypt as the hieroglyph of agricultural produce ; and Pharaoh therefore could easily see that the dream which was so connected with oxen or cattle, was in some way connected also with the agricultural prospects and harvests of the land. He dreamed a second dream, and in this dream he saw seven ears of corn, very thin and blasted with the east wind, and these devoured (although the word should not be *devoured*; for it is a different word to that applied to the cattle, and it means, *superseded—consumed*) the seven full ears that appeared beside them. Now, it has been found, that what is called, botanically, *triticum compositum*, was the common wheat in Egypt, and of this very wheat some specimens have been found in California. In this kind of wheat, one stem rises from the land, and seven, eight, or nine different ears all start up from it. This is a sort of wheat which we have not, unless the specimens of mummy wheat recently imported should be of this kind. It is necessary that we should understand this peculiarity of Egyptian wheat, in order to comprehend what seems so unnatural—seven ears of corn growing up from one root, or parent stem.

This was but a dream—often a meaningless thing. And why, you would say, should Pharaoh be troubled by a dream ? You can understand an ignorant butler, or an uneducated baker dreaming, and thinking that the dream had some mysterious import ; but how can you suppose that an educated man, disbelieving eternity, surrounded by loyal and brave men, should at all

be troubled by dreams? It is a singular fact, that the most infidel men are invariably the most superstitious. Of this, Herod is an instance. You would see, if you knew them as well as they know themselves, that those men who talk so proudly against the very existence of a God, are the very men who are most given to all superstitious notions—to dreams, to magic, to fortune-telling, and to all the absurdities that are too familiar and too dear to numbers of mankind; and Pharaoh showed that even he, who was really a heathen, and did not believe in a personal God, although he may have believed in the idolatries of Egypt, was just as superstitious as the lowest of his subjects; and believed, though in this instance truly, that a dream so strange, so deep in its impression, and so repeated—the different imagery of which, however, conveyed the same common impression—must have a meaning that he must be at the bottom of.

In order to find out what its interpretation must be, he had recourse to the accustomed interpreters, whose celebrity was great. The magi, or the magicians of Egypt, had a twofold character. They were, first of all, priests who ministered at the altars of their gods. Among these, for instance, was the priest of On, that is, the priest of the sun. They were also wise men, or philosophers, who gave their opinions upon questions of state or policy, and who even ventured to tell fortunes, or to interpret dreams. To these wise men, or magi, therefore, as the accustomed authorities, the king had recourse; but he soon found that they were utterly unable to explain his dreams. They could not guess what they could mean, all their arts were nonplussed, they could

not give him any interpretation at all natural or satisfactory.

At this crisis the butler makes his appearance, and shows his character to be that of an ungrateful and miserable sycophant. You recollect that in prison Joseph asked him the little favour, that when he escaped, he would remember him in the presence of his master; but not one syllable did he utter to his master about poor Joseph, for whom he cared nothing, and only when there was a chance of bettering himself, and of making the king feel that his servant the butler could do him a benefit, did he say, in a crouching and craven tone, "I do remember my faults this day, I got what I deserved when I was cast into prison." His greatest fault, that of ingratitude, he did not remember; his other fault, for which the king punished him, he professed at least that he did remember. He therefore excuses himself that so unworthy a person should approach so sacred a majesty. He said nothing in favour of Joseph in order to do Joseph good, but merely told the king that Joseph was a clever interpreter of dreams, in order that the king might be thankful to him, the butler, for giving him this information, rather than to Joseph, who should succeed in interpreting his dreams. The butler told the king the reason why he knew that Joseph was so good an interpreter was, that he had interpreted his and the baker's dreams, and that the result showed the accuracy of his interpretation.

It is very important to notice the language he used on this occasion, because it throws light upon disputed passages of Scripture: "Me he restored

unto mine office, and him he hanged." Now Joseph did neither the one nor the other. How then can it be said that Joseph hanged the baker? It is a frequent formula used in the Old Testament Scriptures to denote that the person predicted or proclaimed the thing, or said that the thing would be. For instance, in Ezekiel the expression is used, "I am come," says the prophet, "to destroy this city." But how could a single man destroy it? He meant, "I am come to proclaim the approaching destruction of this city." Again, the commission given to Ezekiel is, "Remove the diadem, and abase him that is high." That was not a command to Ezekiel literally to do it, but it was a command to Ezekiel to proclaim that the crown should be taken from his brow, and that the high should be abased. So God says to Ezekiel, "I have set thee up to root up and to pull down." That means, to predict these occurrences. Now that is another explanation of the text I referred to when speaking of leprosy, "Whose sins ye forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins ye retain, they are retained." That is, whose sins ye proclaim to be forgiven through faith and repentance in Christ Jesus, these are forgiven; and whose sins ye declare not to be forgiven, because of rejection of the remedy, these sins are retained. And, therefore, in this passage the apostles were invested, not with the power of forgiving sins, but with the privilege of preaching how, and on what ground, sin could be forgiven.

We read that Joseph, thus commended, was rescued from prison, and brought into Pharaoh's presence. All this seemed to be the mere result of man's volition; it was every inch of it the preparation of God.

There is one thing here worth noticing, very humbling to man, very glorifying to God. When you read history, not as man writes it, but as God's amanuenses write it, you can discover that while man on the lower platform seems to be the sovereign power that is directing all, he is in God's hand but the humble instrument, guided, overruled and restrained as God may please.

You will notice, that when Joseph came into the presence of Pharaoh, he shaved himself. Now that seems a very useless remark ; but you will find that these little remarks in the Bible which seem to us very unnecessary, are, when we come to get more light, strong presumptive evidences of what we do not doubt, the authenticity, genuineness, and date of the document. Now, no ordinary writer getting up a story would have said this ; but when you remember that all eastern nations wore then, what they almost all do now, the beard, and that the Egyptian was almost the only exception, you can see how the act of shaving was necessary before entering the presence of royalty, since it would have been like going into the presence of a prince now with a hat on, to have appeared in Egyptian society with a beard ; and therefore, it is very appropriately said, that according to the custom of the country, and to show deference to Pharaoh, Joseph, after being long in prison, shaved himself before he approached his presence. Now that single word opens up a whole chapter, and shows us that the incidental narrative bears under it the evidence of the genuineness and the authenticity of the document.

When Joseph was spoken to, we read that he took

no credit to himself, but at once gave God the glory. He said, "It is not my talent, my cleverness, my skill, my experience; it is God who makes use of me as an instrument, in order to interpret." He then tells him why the dream was twice repeated, namely, to show the greater certainty of it.

It is next mentioned that Pharaoh, by way of reward, gave Joseph in marriage "Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On. And Joseph went out all over the land of Egypt." Whether she became a Christian, or not, we cannot say; but that Joseph, a Christian, accepted her as his wife, is matter of record. The priest of On means the priest of the sun, which, with the moon, the stars, the Nile, and the beasts of the Nile, were all in succession employed by the Egyptians as the gods that they worshipped.

A very valuable work ("Egypt and its Monuments," by Dr. Hawks), illustrative of Scripture from hieroglyph monuments of Egypt, gives some remarkable proofs of ancient Egyptian habits. Among the rest, "Pharaoh gives to Joseph his ring. This was an act of investiture, such as is not entirely foreign to the usages of Europe in the middle ages;" and he gives the forms of rings, as these are found on the monuments of Egypt, showing that they were employed to convey authority. With reference to the fact of Joseph's being arrayed in vesture of fine linen, he states, that fine linen, proved to be so by careful chemical analysis, is found at this day, wrapped round mummies; and that some instances of cotton have been also found amongst these monuments. Pharaoh also put a gold chain about Joseph's neck.

There are frequent engravings on monuments, all showing royal personages putting chains round the necks of persons whom they invested with authority, and raised to eminence. It is also stated, that Pharaoh changed Joseph's name to an Egyptian name. Our version gives it, Zaphnath-Paaneah. The Septuagint gives it, Psonthom-phanech, and Josephus, Psothom-phanech. Egyptian scholars recognize in it the Egyptian word, Psotomfeneh, meaning, the "salvation," or the "saviour of the age." It is also said, that Pharaoh married Joseph to Asenath. The meaning of this name has been doubted; but the most frequent interpretation is, "one belonging to Isis." She was the daughter, we are told, of Potipherah, priest of On. The word *priest*, in the margin of our version, is translated *prince*; but the priests of Egypt being set over cities, were frequently the princes of the day, and were used as councillors by the king. Dr. Hawks also alludes to the fact, that during the seven years of plenty, Joseph collected the fruits of the earth, and laid them up, and quotes the following fact, "At Beni Hassan, in the tomb of Amenembe, there is a painting of a great storehouse; before the door of which lies a large heap of grain, already winnowed. The measurer fills a bushel, in order to pour it out into the sacks of those who carry the grain to the granary. The bearers go to the door of the storehouse, and lay down their sacks before an officer, who stands ready to receive the corn. This is the owner of the storehouse. Near by, stands the bushel with which it is measured, and the registrar who takes the account. At the side of the windows, there are characters

which indicate the quantity of the mass which is deposited in the magazine;" and some inscriptions are found, actually giving the name of Joseph, in the Egyptian language, in reference to distributing the corn out to the people.

It is most interesting to see how all recent discoveries confirm the facts of the Bible, and how things doubted by sceptics are brought out with a clearness and a fulness in the providence of God, that show to demonstration, that when there are found difficulties in the Bible, it is not that the Bible is wrong, but that we must wait till God gives us more light.

GENESIS XLII.

FAMINE IN CANAAN. CORN IN EGYPT. JACOB'S SONS SENT TO EGYPT. THEIR RECEPTION BY JOSEPH. HIS INCOGNITO. HIS STIPULATION TO HAVE BENJAMIN AS A PLEDGE. CONSCIENCE. EFFECT ON JACOB. HIS BOWROW.

SUPPOSE the chapter I have read were a mere human composition, I am sure there would be pronounced respecting it a universal judgment, that it is one of the most graphic, exquisite, and touching pictures that were ever embodied in any language or descriptive of any circumstances. Were it regarded as an uninspired record, I am sure it would be admitted that the great master of human nature, one who knew it so deeply, and had studied it so profoundly, the gifted Shakespeare, never sketched a scene so true to nature in so simple language, with so exquisite but expressive touches as are recorded in this beautiful and interesting episode.

We read that there was a famine in the land, that Joseph, raised to power through his great skill, his good conduct, his apparent sympathy with God, and God's apparent protection to him, by Pharaoh, king of Egypt, pursued so cautious a policy, that his plans were followed by the most successful results. He saw, through prophetic inspiration, approaching famine,

and he proposed therefore what would enable them to subsist in the years of famine. Other nations did not know of the approaching famine; they misused the plenty of the seven full years, and therefore they pined and suffered under the famine of the seven poor years; and those that were able had therefore to leave their own country, and to seek food of another. It is always a bad state when one nation is dependent on another for its bread. It would be the greatest calamity if our own country were to cease to grow what is sufficient for its own maintenance; because when we are dependent on another land, when war comes with its blockades and restrictions,—and war actually was waged between the nomad tribes around the valley of the Nile—the people of Canaan, and the Egyptians,—then the scene that is recorded here will only be enacted over again.

However, they had no help; Jacob must starve in Canaan, or he must beg, borrow, or buy from Egypt. It was under the pressure of the increasing famine, that he said to his sons, in language perfectly natural, "Why do ye look one upon another?" Why should we lie down and starve? we must bow our proud spirits or die; we must submit to beg, borrow, or buy, as we can; and therefore, "get you down into Egypt, and buy for us from thence; that we may live and not die."

The whole of the ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt. "But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren." You can constantly see this feature running through Jacob's character. Benjamin and Joseph were the sons of the beloved Rachel, and to these two Jacob felt

special fatherly affection. Joseph being, as he believed, torn in pieces by the wild beasts, he was naturally afraid lest Benjamin going with the very ten, who, he suspected, had at the least not taken sufficient care of Joseph, even if they had not made away with him altogether, might perish also. Therefore, he sent not Benjamin with them, "lest peradventure mischief befall him."

By and by we find they are arrived in Egypt, and anxious to buy corn among the Egyptians; "for the famine was in the land of Canaan." Joseph, unknown to the ten, was the governor over the land; "and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the earth." Recollect, at this point, what was his dream when a mere boy, namely, that the sheaves of his brethren bowed to his sheaf; and that they said, What does this dreamer mean? Shall he predict that we, his elder brethren, though of a different mother, shall indeed bow down to him, and give him honour, as if he were something great? If they had been told that the very plan that they pursued to avert this greatness of Joseph was the very plan which, in the providence of God, would be employed to bring it about, they would have declaimed against the possibility of such an occurrence with undisguised and unanimous contempt. And yet the very thing they laboured to avert, was what they brought about. The honour that Joseph predicted would be his own, was the honour he had now actually given him; and these ten brethren, bowing down to him here, show that Joseph's dream was not the fancy of a sick man, but the inspiration of God himself.

"Joseph," it is said, "saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them ; and he said unto them, "Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. And Joseph knew his brethren ; but they knew not him." You ask, Is this probable? It is true, because it is here asserted ; but it is probable, when you consider the time that had elapsed. The ten brethren were still in their shepherd's dress ; for they were shepherds. Joseph was no longer the boy of seventeen years of age, with the many-pieced coat, as he was when they last saw him (for the translation, "many colours," is not correct), that his father gave him, but was now elevated to great rank, and clothed in splendid apparel, being the prime minister of the most powerful prince, and in the most cultivated country in the world—Egypt. He was now about forty years of age ; and we well know that the features of a person undergo their greatest alteration from seventeen to forty ; and although they knew him well, and remembered him well, when he was seventeen, they could not recollect him when he was forty, or trace Rachel's son in Pharaoh's prime minister. But they were not so altered as he was ; they were in the same clothing they used to wear, and we know that what one wears in this world, has a great effect on what one appears ; and, besides this, they were ten of them together, and if he had failed in recollecting that very evasive and fugitive thing—the human likeness—in one, he would have easily recollected it in another ; and thus he was satisfied and able to discern that these were his very ten brethren, though they could not recognize him.

Then it is said, "Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come"—that is, he spoke to them in his official capacity as the prime governor of the realm, not wishing to unveil himself, or make himself known yet. Some say that there seems here something like disingenuousness. I think not. There was reason for what he did, because if he had said, "I am Joseph," then what would his brethren have done? They would have been so shocked and so ashamed of their past treatment of him, that, instead of taking corn to their father, they would have fled rather than face him, and carry back the tidings of their criminality, and lies, and deception; and therefore Joseph kept them gradually approaching him, until the time came when he could disclose himself in such a manner as would be best for Jacob, best for Benjamin, and best for them all; and so that, whilst sorrow should be excited in the ten brethren by the recollection of their sin, gratitude and joy should be caused in the old patriarch's heart by the fact, that Joseph no longer "was not," but was again found.

Well, they said to him, "We are no spies; we are come here to buy corn." But you say, "How could Joseph be warranted in saying they were spies?" I will tell you. The valley of the Nile was the richest corn-growing district in the world, even as it might be now, if there were better men to sow and reap it. All around the Nile country there were roving bands of nomad shepherds, who fed cattle. Recollect that, partly owing to the habits of the Egyptians, a shepherd was hated by them: but chiefly that certain shep-

herd kings, prior to this period, as we have proof in Scripture, and evidence on the Egyptian monuments, governed Egypt with a rod of iron. These were the Philistines who came from Canaan. Now these very ten brethren came from Canaan, where the tyrants of the Egyptians had retired after they were driven out of Egypt; they were also, as I have said, shepherds, who were perhaps otherwise hateful to the Egyptians. It was, therefore, natural for him to say, "You are stragglers from these bands, come to see our weak places, and to plan what you can do to invade the land, and plunder our granaries." They replied, "We are true men, thy servants are no spies."

Then they said, audibly because irrepressible,—and how must Joseph have been touched as he listened,—“Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man, in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father,”—what good news these were to Joseph: he did not know perhaps, till now, that Benjamin was alive,—“and one is not.” They gave no account of where he was, no statement of his death; they dare not think of this, but simply said, “One is not.” And Joseph, I have no doubt, unable to suppress the deep and overwhelming emotions of his heart, was able, in spite of his feelings, to reiterate his own statement, the very reiteration showing that he said it in order to suppress and conceal his deep yearnings to embrace them, and say, “I forgive you”—“Ye are spies.”

But he adds, “I will put an end to the whole controversy; ye shall not go, except your youngest brother come hither. Send one of you, and let him

fetch your brother. And he put them all together into ward three days." But then he recollected that during these days of confinement their poor father Jacob was starving probably; and he said, "I will not keep you all: I will detain one as a pledge, and the rest shall go and take corn to your father, and bring your brother Benjamin back to me."

Now it was for them to risk the life of Benjamin, or to starve; in either case, it was calamity; but if Joseph had revealed himself, he would never have seen Benjamin nor them again; for I have no doubt they would rather have done anything than expose their own past criminality to their father.

Let us notice what they said in verse twenty-one,—they had not the remotest idea that this was Joseph, nor the dimmest recollection of him, and, therefore, he could have said nothing that could have made them suspect,—“They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother.” How should this deed, done twenty-three years ago, come into their minds? Calamity was heaped on calamity, trouble upon trouble; they could not get corn without grieving their father and risking Benjamin; and they asked themselves, What is the cause of this calamity on calamity, and trial on trial, and all God’s billows rolling over us? Their conscience solved the perplexity; it has unextinguished recollections; it reminded them that they had sold Joseph as a slave, and that he had no doubt perished; that some of them were ready to kill him, and that it was only by the intervention of a more humane brother, that he escaped a cruel death in order to be sold as a miserable and wretched

Egyptian slave. All this flashed in their minds, and they said, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us." What a witness is in the conscience of man to the nature of sin and the righteousness of the retributions of God, and how true is it, "The sinner's sin," except it be forgiven, is sure to "find him out." These ten had not yet repented, they were not yet forgiven.

"They knew not that Joseph understood them." They said it aloud; and how must he have been affected when he heard it? "He spake unto them by an interpreter." He spoke to them in the Egyptian tongue, and not in his own language, lest he should discover himself; and he spoke through the medium of an interpreter, who translated the Egyptian of the prime minister into the Hebrew of the applicants for corn.

But all this time Joseph's feelings were too deep and earnest to be easily kept down. It is said, in exquisitely beautiful language, "He turned himself about from them, and wept." His heart was breaking. Sympathy and sorrow, not revenge, were there. He hid the tears which he could not repress; and when he had wiped those tears away, he "returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes."

He then gave them corn, and put their money into their sacks. All these things were designed by Joseph so to perplex, as to bring to their minds the recollection of their sins, not that they might despair,

but that they might feel them, acknowledge them, and be forgiven.

When they discovered the money restored in the case of one of the sacks, as they came to an inn, they were still more struck with a sense of retribution following them, saying, "What is this that God hath done unto us?" Their sin, twenty-three years old, haunted them at every step.

I may notice, that the word "inn" did not then mean what it does in modern times. It was simply a shed by the river side, where the cattle fed, and under which the traveller or the pilgrim was enabled to eat what he had with him, and rest protected in the heat of the day.

Then they told their father all that had happened, repeated what they and the lord of the country had said, and the stipulation which he had made, in order to their getting any more corn during the famine for the land of Canaan. "And it came to pass, as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack."

It is singular that the word "sack" is very much the same in almost all languages—in Hebrew, in Greek, in Latin, in Spanish, in French, in Italian. It is one of those ancient words that have crept into nearly every tongue, and continued, for what reason I do not know.

When Jacob, their father, heard this story, and the condition of getting corn, he said, what was so natural and so touching, "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not"—a most delicate and beautiful way of alluding to what he supposed to be his cruel death, when they brought his robe, covered with

blood, and said the wild beasts had killed him; but lest his feelings should be harrowed beyond bearing, it is always, "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not"—for he remains as a hostage—"and now ye will take away the only memorial of my beautiful and beloved Rachel—ye will take Benjamin away. My heart," as if he had said, "is ready to break; all these things are against me." On this text I will address you in my sermon.

Then Reuben, evidently intending to comfort his father, but very wrongly, said, "Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee." How absurd, supposing he had failed to bring back Benjamin, to have his own sons slain by their grandfather! It was a sort of consolation that Jacob must have flung from him as no consolation at all; for he said again, "If mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave."

He who wrote this, either was a genius without any comparison or companion in the history of mankind, or, what we are sure of, he wrote as he was moved by the Holy Ghost, and wrote actual fact, while inspired to do so. Our own hearts tell us this is no fiction.

CHAPTER XLIII.

JACOB'S RELUCTANCE TO LET BENJAMIN GO. JUDAH'S REASONING. JOSEPH'S RECEPTION OF THEM. HIS FEELINGS AT SEEING BENJAMIN. HIS HOSPITALITY.

THE chapter I have read ought not to be disconnected from the previous chapter, for it is its apposite and beautiful sequel. It discloses, however, new scenes in that remarkable interview, some of the details of which we have learned, and others we shall read in the rest of this interesting book.

It is recorded in this chapter, that the sons of Jacob had come back, and stated the express stipulation laid down by Joseph, unknown to them as Joseph, that they should bring their brother Benjamin with them, while he would keep Simeon as a hostage until Benjamin arrived. When they brought this intelligence to the venerable and aged patriarch, his heart almost broke; it was more than he could bear. He recollected that Rachel's first son, Joseph, had been torn by wild beasts, as he supposed, through the neglect of his brethren; and he now feared that Benjamin, the only surviving son of Rachel, as he believed, would meet with the same fate; and he therefore, excusably enough, hesitated and delayed, and put off the dread and painful sacrifice to the very last moment. But "the famine," it is

said, "was sore in the land;" and what will not a man give for his life? Death stared them in the face. It was, risk the life of Benjamin, the most beloved, or incur the certain starvation of himself, his children, and his children's children. This was no light alternative.

It is said, "It came to pass, when they had eaten up the corn which they had brought out of Egypt, their father said unto them" at last, "Go again, buy us a little food;" but not a word about the stipulation which Joseph had made. He was anxious to avoid the terrible necessity, and he wished to see if his sons would go, and risk an application for the food which they could not do without, leaving Benjamin behind. But Judah, who seems thoroughly to have comprehended the character of Joseph, though he did not know that he was Joseph, and who seems to have been a person of business and practical habits, made substantially the remark, "It is of no use bidding us go, without Benjamin with us. This will only be to send us on a fool's errand; for the special stipulation of the man, the prime minister, was this, He did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you." He understood that Joseph meant what he said, and he left it for his father to decide—starve with all your children in Canaan, or send Benjamin; for unless with him we cannot see Joseph; and then he said, "If thou wilt not send him, we will not go down"—it is of no use.

"And Israel said, Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me?" He did not know well what to say. His grief was inexpressible, and he did not know where to

lay the blame: but he felt that blame ought to be laid somewhere. "Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell whether ye had yet a brother?" Why did you let him know that you had a brother? Judah then repeated the simple story, than which nothing can be more beautiful, or more truthful. "The man put the question, Have you another brother? and you, Jacob, are a Christian; you would not have us say, in the exercise of a tortuous or lying diplomacy or management, that we had no brother, when we had one. And besides, how could we tell, when we told him the plain truth, that his very next request would be, Send for your brother Benjamin: for without him ye shall not see my face again? How could we expect or anticipate such a demand, when he simply asked the question, Have you another brother? and when we answered, We have one?" And Judah said, "Send the lad with me,"—make no farther delay—"and we will arise and go; that we may live and not die." And then he said, "I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever." It seemed that Judah thoroughly appreciated Joseph's character. He saw an honesty, a justice, a tenderness, a compassion about this strange prime minister of Pharaoh that made him feel that Benjamin would not suffer injury at his hands, and that induced him to offer himself as absolute surety for the safety and the return of the beloved Benjamin to his aged father. All the while, it is worth noticing, Benjamin was passive and silent. And then Judah said, with much good sense, "Except we had lingered, surely now we had returned

this second time." Had it not been for this foolish delay, which does not mend the matter in the very least, we might have returned from Egypt with our sacks filled, and you would have had plenty of bread, and to spare, instead of pining through hunger to-day. It is therefore of no use your holding out any longer. You must give in.

Well, their father Israel at last consented. "If it must be so now, do this; take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds." Now his consent is extremely characteristic. You would have thought he would have said, "Since I must do it, I must." But when the sound reasoning and the good sense of Judah showed him that the thing was duty, the aged patriarch, the instant he recognized duty, bowed, not reluctantly, but cheerfully before it; and he resolved that if the thing was worth doing at all, it ought to be done generously, nobly, well. When you see a thing that ought or is expedient to be done, either do not do it at all, or do it thoroughly. Either let it alone altogether, or refrain from doing it with a grudging or reluctant spirit. If you see a path clearly pointed out in the providence of God, commit yourself to that path, and, like Jacob, make as pleasant as you can what you feel to be sacrifice, and act as generously as you can, where duty clearly dictates unswerving and unflinching obedience. In this spirit Jacob acted. Therefore, the patriarch said, "Take with you such fruits as the land has." In the 11th verse he says, "There is no bread, nor corn for us; but there are some fruits still, a little

balm, a little honey," because there might be flowers for bees when there was no corn—"a little spice too, and myrrh, and some nuts, and almonds." These still remained, and therefore he said, "Take of these as a present, and show by these to the prime minister your good-will. And in order that this mistake about the money, which I hope was not deliberate dishonesty, may be rectified, take back the returned money in your sacks, and take fresh money, in order to pay for the corn that you are to bring with you. Take also," he says last, "your brother; and arise, go again unto the man." And when he gives this last sacrifice, not an exaction now, but a free-will offering, because he thought once it might be avoided, but now he sees it is duty, he adds the prayer—"God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." That does not mean, "I am thoroughly bereaved;" but it is like when she of old approached the king, and said, "If I perish, I perish;" that is, "If it be God's will, I do submit." So Jacob says, "If it be God's will that Benjamin shall perish also, then it is God's will, and I shall submit." It is the breathing of the sublime petition, "Our Father, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."

The men took presents and set out; "and when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the ruler of his house, Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready; for these men shall dine with me at noon." What the ruler of the house can have thought, when he said so, it is not easy to conceive. He must have fancied that his master was deranged. An

Egyptian to ask Hebrews to dine with him, when such intercourse was an abomination—an Egyptian prime minister, distinguished by his position, asking these nomad mendicants to dine with him—what strange overturning of all the decencies of life is this! What becomes of all the etiquette of that court, where such a thing had never occurred in the memory of man! But still, he had the good sense to think his thoughts to himself, and to obey promptly and thoroughly his master's command.

In the 18th verse it is said, "The men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in." You observe that their consciences were wrong ever since their first sin against their aged father Jacob, and his beloved son Joseph; and everything that happened to them, conscience made them to conceive to be, in the purposes of God, a righteous and penal retribution. When the compass loses its proper polarity at sea, the whole course of the vessel must be altered by it; and when the conscience loses its right direction, its response to God, its deference and inclination to his law by its conscious violation of the highest duty, then the heart is filled with fears, the prospects of life are followed by uncertainty, and all the dispensations of providence are suspected to be judgments, when they may be rich and sanctifying mercies. So they said now, "This looks very fine, our being introduced into this great man's house, these magnificent rooms, which look to us poor Hebrews so very grand; but you may depend upon it, it is for some wicked purpose. He wants to make

slaves or prisoners of us, or to do us some harm." That man whose conscience is right with God, walks through society loving all, suspecting none. That man whose conscience is wrong with himself, and wrong in its relationship to God, walks through society dreading and suspecting every man. It is only the Christian who regards every man as a brother, till he find him out to be a foe. It is the unconverted who regard every man as a foe, till they discover at length that he is a brother.

When they came into Joseph's house, they were very much afraid; and they therefore took the best course they could, by speaking to the steward of the house; and how very true to nature is that simple touch in the 10th verse, "They came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they communed with him at the door"—at the entrance hall. They wanted to get out of him some explanation of this mysterious treatment, and to ascertain whether his master was a person who was a little eccentric, or really laying a trap for them, and wishing to do them some harm. And they explained to the steward, lest it should be supposed that they had tried to conceal what had occurred, the money in their sacks. This was their preparatory conduct. The steward answered, no doubt from a thorough practical and personal knowledge of his master's heart and disposition, that he was incapable of injuring them; and that this mystery to them would, when it was evolved and explained, show that "the God of their father had given them treasure in their sacks." It is plain that Joseph had kept his Christianity in Egypt, and that this steward had heard and learned of the God of Abraham from the

lips and the life of his great master. In other words, Joseph was not one of those men who in the nineteenth century say, "Do in Rome as Rome does, be a Romanist; and in Constantinople as Constantinople does, *i. e.* be a Mussulman; and do in Paris as Paris does, *i. e.* be a worldling, or anything you like;" but he was one of those who say, "In all matters of dress, or ceremony, I will conform to the custom of the country; but my religion is too sacred a thing, too vital a heritage, ever to be laid down or lost sight of. It is inseparable from me as my immortality. With it I live and in it I die." And the servants showed here that they had received the right impression, and had been Christianized through the instrumentality and the instructions of their master.

We read next, that they were all introduced to Joseph; and Joseph spake to them, and said, in language so true to nature, "Is your father well, that is, the old man of whom ye spake?" Overdoing his attempt to disguise his recognition of his own relation to him, and by the very sweep and extent of the distance of his language revealing the effort to cover what was real.—"Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive? And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive." And then they fulfilled unconsciously what Joseph predicted, and what they once resented, "They bowed down their heads, and made obeisance."

And then "he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son," that is, Rachel's, "and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son."

I know nothing so true to nature as the 30th and 31st and following verses, and certainly no language so expressive of true human nature as this description of Joseph. He had under his robes of office a true human heart. "And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there. And he washed his face, and went out, and refrained himself, and said, Set on bread. And they set on for him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians which did eat with him, by themselves: because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination unto the Egyptians. And they sat before him, the first-born according to his birthright." And he showed his great affection for Benjamin by sending him up "messes," that is, if you like, dishes from his own table, as special expressions of his attachment and love. "And they drank," and even amid their suspicions and their fears, their misgivings and their doubts, they had an interval of happiness; and they "were merry with him."

In Scripture we find portrayed, truly and justly, humanity in all its phases—its nature, its ruin, its restorations, its weaknesses, its strength, its trials and gains, and joys and fears—as it never was or has been depicted on earth. The Bible is the portrait of man, the revelation of God, and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

CHAPTER XLIV.

DETECTION OF THE DIVINING-CUP IN BENJAMIN'S SACK. SHOCK
FELT BY THE PATRIARCHS. THEIR RETURN TO JOSEPH.
INTERVIEW. TOUCHING APPEAL OF JUDAH.

You will ask, perhaps, at the commencement of this most eloquent and touching story—not the less eloquent and touching because it is recorded by an inspired penman—why Joseph, unknown to his brethren, because yet unrevealed, should have insisted on the cup, his own special cup, being put into the sack of Benjamin? What was the patriarch's main reason for dealing thus with his brethren? What object did he propose? The answer is, Joseph had not seen his brethren since they sold him as a slave, and he was anxious to know whether their attachment to the last child of the beloved Rachel, Benjamin, was at all different from the equivocal attachment that they bore to him, Joseph, her other child, whom they sold as a slave to merchantmen going into Egypt. If, when the cup was found in the sack of Benjamin, his brethren had fled, and left him to bear the consequence, Joseph would have seen that years had not sanctified to them their troubles, nor given them repentance for their sins; but that they were still of the same selfish and domineering temper which made them say, "This Joseph shall

not reign over us," and which determined them to sell him to Egyptian task-masters out of spite, rather than for profit. The steward was directed by Joseph. therefore, to put his own silver cup into the sack of Benjamin.

It is said, "as soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away." That morning broke upon them in joy; the day of that morning closed on them in sorrow and in suffering. Many a bright day ends in dark clouds, and when the morning comes, we frail, ignorant, and infirm, know not what the evening shall be. The sun that rises on bridals, sets often on burials also.

Joseph's steward rose up and followed the men, and overtook them; and he put the question, "Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good?" You are Christian men; you profess to be followers of the God of Abraham; by your fruits I will test your creed. The prescription of Christianity is, "Overcome evil with good;" the practice of you, its professors, has been, that you have seemingly tried to overcome good with evil. "Wherefore have you done this? Are you aware that you have taken the cup whereby my lord divineth?" That expression, "divineth," has been open to different interpretations, not so much on the meaning of the subject itself, as on the special use indicated by so singular a use attached to the cup—"the cup wherewith my master divineth." Now on many of the hieroglyphic inscriptions on the Egyptian monuments, there are specimens of varieties of cups, exquisitely chased and carved, and in fact showing that whatever be our boasting and our real progress, that at that day, in

artistic excellence, they seemed to have attained a degree of perfection that has been scarcely reached in modern and more boastful times. These cups, it is ascertained, partly from inscriptions that have been deciphered, and partly from allusions in ancient writers, were used by Egyptian magicians, and even by Egyptian great men, in order to divine, or find out, by a sort of magic (it may have been a stupid process, but they believed it to be a prophetic one) what would be the destiny of any one individual, or what would be the way to find anything that had been lost. It was a sort of palmistry. But it was remarkable, that the Hebrew word that is here translated "divine," may be translated "to make trial of," or "to test." "This is the cup which my master maketh trial of," or, by a sort of figurative application, "makes use of." And therefore, it may mean, that it was not a divining-cup, as used by the Egyptians, in their superstition, which would have been most improper in the case of a Christian—for Christian he was—like Joseph, but that it was simply a cup that he used at table, suited to the high official rank of the personage to whom that cup belonged. Others think that the steward merely calls his master's cup a "divining cup" as that was the use of such cups.

When he overtook them, and told them what had occurred, with all the feelings of conscious innocence they exclaimed, "God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing." Now the exclamation was almost evidence of their innocence. It is not so difficult to distinguish innocence from guilt. That thing called the human countenance, may, by long-practised deceit, so adjust itself, that it shall express

the opposite of what is within ; but when there is no such long-practised deceit, it is the dial on which one can read the outer action of the machinery within ; and very much by the "human countenance divine," one can ascertain what is the innocence or the guilt that is felt and apprehended within. At all events, this exclamation was very forcible, from the fact of its having been made when they were first charged with the offence. I have noticed in courts of justice that the judge will ask the question, "How did he conduct himself when charged with it?" The first expression when the charge is made, is generally strongly indicative of the innocence or guilt of the person by whom that expression is given. Now, they said with instinctive abhorrence, "God forbid that thy servants, so deeply indebted to you, should do such a thing as this !"

And besides, they were able to plead good previous conduct. I dare say many of you are aware, that in Scotland, when a criminal is tried, generally speaking, it influences the evidence on the side of a specific charge, when he is what is called "habit and repute," that is, when his past character and conduct have been of a very equivocal description. But when the past character has been spotless, and where it can be proved, or "led," as it is called there, then there is the strongest possible presumption that such a one would not be guilty of such a crime. The eleven patriarchs pleaded, "Behold, the money which we found in our sacks' mouths we brought again unto thee." Here is a proof that we are honest men ; and if we did so in a case in which we were afraid even of the shadow of suspicion, how much more likely is

it that we are innocent in a case where the crime would be so great, and the ingratitude so base, as would be implied if the charge brought against us were a true and a right one.

Well, the steward said, "Now also let it be according to your words;"—I accept them:—"he with whom it is found shall be my servant." That sounds a very slight punishment; but it is, rightly translated, a slave—an abject bond-slave, over whose life and property I shall have complete jurisdiction—"and ye shall be blameless." This the steward did, in order to bring in Benjamin apparently guilty, so that by the detection of his seeming guilt he might discover, for Joseph's information, what were his brethren's feelings towards the only surviving son of Joseph's mother, Rachel.

Every man at once took down his sack, perfectly conscious that there was no truth in the charge; and the steward searched, and began at the eldest, that there might be no suspicion of his knowing where the cup was, and left off at the youngest: and to the horror of the brethren, and the confusion of Benjamin, it was found in that sack where they least wished it to be found; for rather would they have had it found in any of their sacks, than in his whose detection and punishment would bring down their father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

On this, it is said, "they rent their clothes,"—that is the eastern form of expressing sorrow,—"and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city," to give to Joseph such explanations as they could. And Joseph said unto them, "What deed is this that ye have done? wot ye not that such a man as I can cer-

tainly divine?" or, as it is in your marginal Bible, "that I can make trial of, or test character."

Now, recollect Judah's part in this. Judah pledged himself to his aged father, that if Benjamin did not return he was ready to suffer all the consequences; and that implied that he would do everything that man could do to protect Benjamin, and bring him back in safety. Now he exclaimed in language so natural, "What shall we say unto my lord?" We are struck dumb; how shall we clear ourselves? The thing is so extraordinary, that I do not know how it is possible to clear ourselves of what conscience prompts me to believe Benjamin is not guilty of, and what must have taken place owing to some providential overruling or inscrutable accident, which I can neither divine, explain, nor unravel. But then he said, "But the real lesson of all this is, that God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants." That does not mean the iniquity of stealing the cup, for that he did not apply to at all; but it means their past iniquity; for you will recollect, in our previous lessons, that whenever they met with perplexing circumstances, apparently destined to end in sufferings to themselves, they always remembered their treatment of Joseph. That sin, like a dark shadow, always fell on their consciences; and in all their merriest moods they could hear the sad and melancholy undertones of their transgressions against Joseph; and whenever a providential cloud darkened their sky with its shadow, they recollected what Judah said before, how they heard Joseph's cries and listened not to them, but sold him a bond-slave into Egypt.

Next you will notice here, what I will not call the cunning, but the skilful tactics of Judah, who, you recollect, was pledged to bring Benjamin back. He said, "We are all my lord's servants; do not let the whole load fall upon Benjamin, but distribute the burden over the whole eleven, and let us share with Benjamin in Benjamin's punishment." And then Joseph said, "God forbid that I should do so"—his object would not have been answered by this—"but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father." But that commission was the saddest and most sorrowful of all.

Then a speech, or oration, if you like, is made by Judah; and, I venture to say, it is the most touching, most eloquent, most masterly appeal that ever fell from the lips of man, in all the annals of ancient or of modern oratory. I have never read anything, as a mere piece of literary composition, as a speech or appeal to a great man on behalf of great sufferings, so touching and so beautiful. It is like a delicate flower,—one dreads to breathe upon it, or to handle it, lest one should spoil it. The greatest things man can neither describe, nor speak. Grand character must be left in its grandeur, untouched in its simple magnificence. To attempt to delineate, is to gild refined gold, and to try to add fresh perfume to the violet. And this is just one of those eloquent appeals which one can say nothing of; we must leave it in its own simple, stirring, touching pathos, to find its echo in every heart. We cannot but feel, that either the whole of this was the inspiration of God and the facts of history, or Moses was, as I have said

before, the most wonderful and most eloquent speaker, the most accomplished statesman, the most able ruler, that ever appeared in the annals of mankind. But the story is so real, that we know it is fact. It is so touching, that we know inspiration is in it; and it is so instructive, that we thank God that such things were written for our learning. I read this speech once more.

"Then Judah came near unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother? And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more. And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. And our father said, Go again, and buy us a little food. And we said, We cannot go down: if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother be with us. And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons: and the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces: and I saw him not since:

and if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Now, therefore, when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life; it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servant shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave. For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. Now, therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren, For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father."

Any remarks by way of illustrating so pure and earnest eloquence are not only unnecessary, but would be in the worst possible taste.

CHAPTER XLV.

JOSEPH'S DISCLOSURE OF HIMSELF. THE FEELINGS OF HIS BRETHREN. JOSEPH'S TENDERNESS. THE FAME OF IT. PHARAOH'S DELICATE AND MUNIFICENT CONDUCT. UNION.

WE come to another scarcely less beautiful and touching episode in the interesting history, which Sabbath after Sabbath we have been reviewing. It crowns the whole story. This chapter is Joseph's disclosure of himself—the unknown governor at Pharaoh's right hand revealing himself unexpectedly, though scarcely for the moment believed, to be the actual Joseph, the eldest son of Rachel, the brother of Benjamin, whom his brethren sold as a slave into the land of Egypt. It seems that the touching address made in the previous chapter, where Judah expostulated with Joseph in so eloquent and affecting terms, had made a very deep and even an irresistible impression upon the heart of Joseph. It was fitted to do so. After he had listened to it, such was the effect of its appeal, that he "could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he said, Cause every man to go out from me;" that is, all of the land of Egypt. "And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known" unexpectedly, and amid deep and tender emotions, to his

amazed and wondering brethren : the scene was too solemn for strangers to be allowed to stand by.

It is said that "he wept aloud;" and the Egyptians even could not understand how tears should ever channel the cheek of a man who had all the wealth, honour, and resources of Egypt at his disposal ; they knew not the story.

"And Joseph said unto his brethren," when he was left alone, "I am Joseph." What a startling preface ! Lest, however, the communication should be too overwhelming, he diluted it by referring them to another thought, "Doth my father yet live ?" And his brethren, struck dumb, as well they might, partly by the recollection of their guilt, partly by the suddenness of the revelation, it being scarcely credible and yet evident, "could not answer him ; for they were troubled," or overwhelmed, or harassed, as it might be rendered, "at his presence."

He then said, "Come near to me"—do not stand at a distance—my dignity is lost in my affection. Under these splendid robes which deck the governor of Egypt, there is a true human heart, there is the heart of Joseph a brother, that still beats true to his father, his home, to Benjamin, to Judah, and to all his brethren, "They came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." Yet that last clause was not meant to upbraid them, but only to prove his identity. "I am Joseph;" and the rest of the statement shows that he would rather, if he could, have passed by the recollection of their sin ; but it was necessary he should say so, that he might identify himself, almost a sovereign, with the shepherd-boy of seventeen,

some twenty or thirty years ago, that they then sold as a slave into Egypt; whose features they had no doubt forgotten.

Lest the very allusion to their sins might overwhelm them, and the sudden discovery of a brother connected with the poignant recollection of their own base criminality should utterly prostrate all nerve and ability for duty—he says, “Now, therefore, be not grieved,” as they evidently showed they were, “nor angry with yourselves.” He saw that enough now was revealed, and more than enough, to make them angry with themselves. If he had spoken to them in wrath, that would have made them angry with him; but on reminding them not of the choice but necessity of their past sins in reference to himself, he felt that their grief needed to be rather modified and restrained than stimulated, and therefore he said, “Be not angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither;” for there was a purpose in it higher than yours. I do not extenuate your sin; but there was a higher arrangement contemplated in all that has happened; it was God who sent me hither in spite of your evil purposes, to preserve the very life of them, some of whom wanted to kill me, and all of whom consented to sell me for a slave. “For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years,” as he had told Pharaoh before, “in the which there shall be neither earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth.” Why that posterity in the earth? Because the forefathers of the great Messiah were here; and had their lives not been preserved, and their children, and their children’s

children, humanly speaking, their genealogy had been altered. All things were contributing to one great end by coercion or by free purpose.

So he adds in the 8th verse, "So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God;" that is, you were not the ultimate cause, though you were, under God, the permitted instruments: you sinfully promoted what you did not intend; "and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." But then in the 9th verse, seeing that they were overwhelmed by the recollections of the past, and the disclosure of the present, he tries to divert their feelings, and their thoughts, and says, "Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt; do not tarry," merely recollecting your own sins, or wondering at the disclosure that you have now witnessed; but hasten back to that father who fears for Benjamin, who is alarmed for bread for his household. He is an old man, and cannot wait long, or stand much. Hasten back to him, and think of his safety, and let him partake of the good news I have told you, that your actual brother Joseph, whom he thought to be torn by wild beasts, is now alive; and you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt that you have seen. Not that he said so in order to express any feelings of vanity and pride, of which he had none; but go and tell Jacob, as if he had said, what will gladden his heart, that I whom he thought was lost am at Pharaoh's right hand, and am raised to power and rank and splendour. He set them on active duties in order to turn their minds from sorrow and a sense of guilt.

And after this long remonstrance, of which perhaps this is but an outline, his brethren consented to talk with him ; that is, they ventured to ask him new questions, which he was ready to answer, every one of which disclosed their sins.

The fame of this extraordinary interview passed through all Pharaoh's house ; and they stated to Pharaoh the news so strange and unexpected that "Joseph's brethren had come." And then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say unto thy brethren, This do ye, lade your beasts, and go, get you into the land of Canaan." And then we read that he gave them waggons, and raiment, and food, and asses laden with provision, and everything they could need. Joseph might have done all this by his own authority ; but there was here exhibited a trait of the most beautiful courtesy in Joseph's master, when he interposed, and said, "You Joseph have power to do this ; but that the boon may seem more valuable by being from me, and suggested by me, your royal master, you do these things, and give them royal provision for their journey home and back again ; and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land."

Thus, one faithful son was the reason of the prosperity and the preservation of all his brethren, in spite of their many unfaithful designs. And Pharaoh said unto them, "Regard not your stuff"—those things you have brought with you,—which indicates that they were very poor. He says, "Regard not those paltry things that you have brought with you." Fling away the old rags, the tattered shoes, and the little provision you have made for your journey ; and

take what I will give you as more suitable for me to give, and more useful for you to receive. "And to his father he sent after this manner; ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way." So Joseph, we are told, "sent his brethren away." To each man he gave changes of raiment, which would indicate that their raiment was torn and worn out, and that they needed new apparel for their journey.

Joseph gave them this seasonable advice, "See that ye fall not out by the way." Joseph anticipated that the first thing that they would do after conversing upon the extraordinary revelation would be to upbraid one another. Judah would say, "I told you it was wrong;" and Simeon would say, "You recollect I was against this;" and another would say, "I opposed it." One would say, "If you had not done this," and another, "If you had not done that we had not been in such a state, and then this strange scene would not have taken place;" and thus they would have quarrelled by the way, and it would have taken weeks to carry the glad tidings to the old man's heart. And, therefore, he said very appositely: "See that ye fall not out by the way." There is no time for quarrelling: there is only time for action. And so, when Christians and missionaries convey the glad tidings of the gospel to those that need to know them, they may depend upon it the same advice is needed still. It is our way—we need counsel. There is no time for quarrelling: they must not expend their energies in internal fever, but in external carefulness and usefulness.

When they arrived they told Jacob all the words of Joseph. He was at first doubtful, but then he was satisfied, and at last said, "I will go and see him before I die." The word is changed from Jacob into Israel, which means, of course, the same person.

The thoughts of that little band it is not easy to imagine: self-upbraidings, shame, sorrow, repentance, yet not unmixed with joy and gladness, alternately coursed their hearts. It was a sad yet joyous story to the aged Jacob—sons so guilty and a son so generous—events so wondrous, and providential leadings so gracious. It was proof that truth is more startling than romance.

CHAPTER XLVI.

OLD JACOB SETS OUT TO SEE JOSEPH. HIS PIETY. DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT.

AFTER the news so unexpected to Jacob, that Joseph was alive, to the nature of which I directed your attention last Lord's-day morning, when Israel exclaimed in the joy and excitement of his heart, "It is enough : I will go and see Joseph before I die," we read in this chapter, that the patriarch in fulfilment of his purpose "took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beer-sheba ;" and the very first thing that he did, partly as the expression of a glad heart, partly as the expression of a thankful heart, and partly as his daily offering of adoration and praise and worship never withheld to the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, was to offer "sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac." In ancient days by the institution of Levi, the sacrifices were figures, types, or foreshadows of the one Sacrifice that was to be ; and the Israelite looked through the shadow to form some apprehension of the glorious substance. Now that the substance has come, the shadows have departed just as the shadows disappear when the sun mounts his meridian throne, or as blossom withers when fruit is ripe ; and we now look back upon a

sacrifice finished and complete, and that has been, just as Jacob looked forward to a sacrifice no less finished and complete that was to be. His faith was prospective, resting on an atonement which was to be, which his sacrifices helped him to see from afar and comprehend. Our faith is retrospective and rests on a sacrifice that has been, and on which we lean or trust, it having been clearly brought to light in the gospel of Christ Jesus.

We read next, that "God spake unto Israel, and said, Jacob, Jacob." He did not call him Israel, which was his covenant name, but finding him a wanderer in the desert, he called him by his former name, more significant of need, "Jacob, Jacob." And he instantly replied, "Here am I." Then God manifested himself, and said, "I am God;" literally, "I am El," the Almighty God. No danger need affright you. No foe need alarm you; Omnipotence is in my arm; love is in my heart. What shall separate you from my love, which is in Jesus Christ the Lord? "Fear not to go down into Egypt." Do not be alarmed to go into a land of darkness: for the promise is, "I am with you, and I will there make of thee a great nation."

The aged patriarch had heard of Egypt only as a land of idolatry; and he shrank in horror from going where that Name which was so dear to him might be profaned, and that worship which he loved would seem impossible. He needed, therefore, God to make this special manifestation to him, and to say, "So far from fearing that you will fall there, remember that you are the seed that I am sowing over all the land of Egypt to form a mighty host, which shall

march forth amid miracles, victories, and mercies, until they or theirs are settled in the land of Canaan, the type of that rest that remaineth for the people of God."

How interesting is this fact, we find so often in the Bible, that God's people never are placed in special trials without God manifesting to them a special grace. It is a fulfilment of the old promise, which is ever new, for it is never old or obsolete, "I will be with you; I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee," or, as I have told you these words ought literally to be translated, "I will not ever leave thee: no, never will I forsake thee." It is the strongest and the most condensed expression that can be employed, and denotes the fulness and faithfulness of the promise of God to be with his people always. In all time of their tribulation, in all time of their wealth, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, He who addressed Jacob in this chapter, addresses them, and says, "Fear not; I am with you. When thou goest into the valley of the shadow of death, my rod and my staff shall comfort thee. I will never leave thee, I will never forsake thee."

Then God says, "I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes." What a beautiful expression or image is that! It is, "Do not be afraid that you shall die in a strange land, where a stranger's hand shall compose you to your last sleep; but be sure that that very Joseph, on whom your heart has so long and so warmly rested, will yet close your eyelids, and see to your burial, when you shall be borne to the rest that remaineth for the people of God."

Next there is a list of all the family of Jacob. I have often thought that it is a pity the Hebrew proper names are rendered as we do. Whenever in our translation a name begins with J, it begins in the Hebrew with the letter *Yod*, or Y; and the names thus spelt in the Hebrew are most musical, whilst in our translation they are extremely rugged. Thus Jacob is in the original *Yacob*; and Jeremiah, *Yere-miah*; and Joseph, *Yoseph*. All these words lose their music in our translation, and the ruggedness of what is not the proper echo is all that we retain.

When Jacob arrived in Egypt, "he sent Judah," or Yudah, "before him unto Joseph, to direct his face unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen." That was a lovely and fertile spot, where it was expected that he and his sons would settle.

And, when he met the beloved Joseph, whom he thought to have been torn by the wild beasts, he thus gave expression to the depth and the fervour of his feelings, "Now let me die." I have now nothing more worth seeing. The last, deepest yearning of my heart is gratified. I have no wish to taste any more of this world's pleasures. Or, as Simeon of old said afterwards, after a yet sublimer sight, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

We have then Joseph's special directions to his father and brethren, as to how they should comport themselves before Pharaoh. Ancient shepherd kings had invaded and conquered the land of Egypt many years before this era. They had been expelled by the victorious troops of Egypt, and driven, partly to Canaan, and partly to the surrounding hills; and

amongst the Egyptians there was a sort of national prejudice still surviving against the very profession of the men whose names were associated with foreign conquerors ; and for a long period after, even the profession or trade of a shepherd was as hateful as the recollection of the defeats they had sustained from the shepherd kings in former days. And therefore, Joseph said to them, " Tell him you are shepherds ; but seek what I have by my diplomacy secured, a part of this land where you may prosecute the trade that you love, and not give any offence to those who are in the land of Egypt." And such ought to be our conduct. If the Hebrews had mixed with the Egyptians, the worship of each was so different, that there would have been constant collision. And therefore, Joseph so arranged it, that there would be offence to neither party. And so it should be with us. If I were placed amid Hindoos, I would not insult their religion. If I were placed amongst Mahometans, I would not turn into ridicule their religion. Whatever religion a man has, it is his all ; I pity him for his error, I pity him for his misfortune ; I will try to show him the more excellent way ; but I will only dislodge the error that he has, which I will not spare, by the appliance of the better truth, that he knows not ; and if I attempt any other process to beat down the error, I am likely to do what is uncharitable, and what has always turned out unsuccessful. Now Joseph said, My brethren shall be in the land of Goshen, a spot whose moral light shall be like a Pharos amid the rest of Egypt ; and there the Egyptians shall see without our needlessly offending or molesting them, that while we enjoy all the rites of Egyptian hospitality,

respect their sincerity, deplore their errors, we will not insult them, but teach them, if we can, the more excellent way, but will do nothing to cast insult, or what might be construed as insult, upon the sad errors that they sincerely, but unfortunately hold.

How wonderfully, step by step, is the hand of God seen directing the way of his ancient people—pardoning their sins, yet chastening them with great though paternal severity, lest they should think that He connives at sin, or that because He overrules it for good, He ever ceases to hate it—watching over the seeds of the future Israel with unsleeping eye, and unfaltering care. “Truly God is good to Israel,” is an acknowledgment every reader of these interesting memoirs must frequently make.

The same Providential superintendence of God's people is still carried on. He still makes goodness and mercy to follow them. But in this inspired record, we see not only the outward leadings, but the inward impulses. A portion of the curtain is lifted up and we are able in these narratives to see the council chamber of God, and to follow His purposes as they pass from the heavenly presence into human action. These biographies are visible proofs of God in the affairs of men. We have the truth enunciated again and again in the sacred Scriptures, but here we have it practically, personally, and nationally set forth. We see that God is by the domestic hearth, by the solemn altar—near the highest throne. We discover that all space is holy ground, and all life religious service. “Thou God seest me,” may be uttered by man always, and every where.

May it please God to manifest Himself to us as our Father, to give us an ever deep, reverential, and joyous sense of his presence, to walk with Him in all our ways through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory everlasting. Amen.

CHAPTER XLVII.

JACOB'S ARRIVAL. JOSEPH'S LOYALTY AND DEFERENCE. PRESENTATION OF HIS BRETHREN TO PHARAOH. THEIR TRADE. DEFERENCE TO AGE. THE DAYS OF OUR YEARS. THE PATRIARCH BLESSES PHARAOH. THE WORSHIPPER LEANING ON HIS STAFF.

WE now arrive at the earnestly and anxiously anticipated interview, on which the heart of the patriarch had been so long set,—with his long-lost, and now recovered, Joseph; with him, too, he was to meet with those who were able to nourish him in a season of famine, and in all but universal distress.

Joseph, though the chief minister of Pharaoh, yet felt that his was a subject's place, if that was a first place; and therefore, when his father, and his brethren, and their flocks and their herds, came out of Canaan, and appeared in the land of Egypt, he felt it a duty that he owed to his sovereign to tell that sovereign that they were in the land. Pharaoh was a heathen sovereign; Joseph was a Christian prime minister; but because they differed, and differed most vitally, in religion, Joseph did not feel that that released him from the allegiance and deference which a subject ever owes to his sovereign, whatever that sovereign's religion may be. The way to make strangers to our holy faith better, is to show that our religion makes us better also. The most effective

missionary influence is the mighty missionary influence of truly Christian, holy and consistent men. Love to God makes us more, not less, loyal to our Queen. "Joseph took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation?" Now, recollect, they knew that the occupation of shepherds or herdsmen was hateful to Egyptian tastes. This national antipathy was owing to historic recollections, and not to the trade itself. They had a dislike to what it reminded them of. But you will observe how truthful these brethren were in what was unpalatable. They at once candidly stated to Pharaoh, "Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers." They did right. Truth is the right way. You will always find that, as in mathematics, a straight line is the nearest way from one point to another, so truth is always the straightest and speediest way to success. They did not, therefore, deny, lest they should offend the monarch, what they were. Their courtesy did not conceal their Christianity. Some men would have been so courteous, that they would have tried to conceal an unpleasant thought or fact from royal hearing; but they felt that truth must be spoken, whether kings or peasants were the auditory; and they have left us an example, that in this matter we should follow their steps.

They stated candidly, too, why they had come into Egypt. Their end was not to do Egypt any benefit, and they did not pretend so; they honestly admitted that they were starving; that they wanted food, and

that they had come just to obtain it. This was candid.

Pharaoh stated to Joseph substantially this: "Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee. Now to show how much I appreciate the great services you have rendered me, I will let your brethren and your father enjoy the blessings and the benefits that I can bestow upon you. The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell. Take the sunniest and most fertile spot in it, the land of Goshen; and if thou knowest any men of activity among you, as idleness can do no good, then make them rulers," not, as it is here rendered, "over my cattle," but "over the herdsmen of my cattle." There were rulers over the cattle already, and the dignity assigned to the brethren of Joseph was to be the chief herdsmen, or the heads of the herdsmen of the land of Egypt.

"Joseph brought in Jacob, his father, and set him before Pharaoh." It is worth while to observe, that when his brethren came before Pharaoh, they stood; but the aged Jacob sat before him. The king's good feeling, and Joseph's appreciation of that feeling, made him let Jacob sit before Pharaoh. Joseph told Jacob to do so; and Pharaoh, venerating age and gray hairs, saw that, whilst there was a deference due to great dignity, there was what there is still, a higher deference due to gray hairs, especially when those gray hairs are the anticipation of a crown of glory.

Pharaoh then "said unto Jacob, How old art thou?" Evidently, he wished to make Jacob feel

at his ease. Now, none but a truly great man can make an inferior feel perfectly at ease in his presence. It is always the mark of real dignity, that it makes the lowliest and humblest at ease before it. Pharaoh showed what a delicate appreciation of his position he had, when he put Jacob at his ease by talking to him upon a subject about which old men like to talk—their old age, and what they have seen and recollect, and what scenes they have gone through. Jacob replied, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers." I have often taken occasion to remark to you, that the age of man before the Flood was 700, 800, 900, and in one case, nearly 1000 years. The age of man, immediately after the Flood, came to be 150, 170, and even 200 years; and since the days of the patriarchs there seems to have been—not, I suspect, by God's law, but probably by our misconduct, or owing to sanitary causes that we cannot understand or explain—a shortening of human life. I do not believe that three-score and ten is the limit that God has assigned to our life. I know you will think of the Psalm, "The days of our years are three-score and ten; and if by reason of strength they be four-score years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow." But you will recollect that Psalm was written in the wilderness; it states and laments an exceptional circumstance. Moses says, "Our wilderness condition is so harassing, that our life is reduced to three-score years and ten." Moses himself lived to the age of 120 years; and therefore, in Psalm xc. he

is not describing the normal length of human life, but what it had been reduced to for a season by a special state of suffering in the wilderness. The insurance offices have noticed that, owing to better sanitary arrangements, which ought to be extended to the poorest dweller in St. Giles's as well as to the occupant of the most splendid palace in the west,—human life has been lengthened within the last fifty or sixty years somewhere about five or six years on the generation. And if there were less anxiety, less mental excitement, less commercial and political competition, less pressure of thought upon the brain, there would be fewer gray hairs above it, and a longer period would, in all probability, be the measure of our lifetime. It is a very strange, but a very true thing, that the extremes of barbarism and civilization seem, in this manner, to meet; so that, when men reach a certain point of civilization, they seem to come under the disadvantages of extreme barbarism, as far as the wear and tear, and length of life and health, are concerned. However, each of us is immortal till our work is done; and this is our greatest comfort; when our work is done, then may our petition be, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

Jacob blessed Pharaoh; that is, he prayed that every blessing might rest upon him as a sovereign, and that he might receive, above all, the highest blessing—that of knowledge of eternal life.

We next read of Joseph's statesmanship in the land of Egypt; how he dealt with the people, by giving them bread for their money, and for their cattle when their money failed, as long as the famine

lasted ; and, at last, giving as much seed as was requisite for sowing the land, in the prospect of the exhaustion of the seven years of famine, so that there might be sufficient for their wants. It seems, at first, severe dealing, but the people showed, by what they said to Joseph, that he was not an exacting master. "Thou hast saved our lives ; let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants."

The time drew near when the venerable Israel, or Jacob—for by both names he was known—must die. Long as he lived, yet he must die. I think it is one of the most—I will not say melancholy, but impressive passages in the Word of God, where we read, after the ages of the patriarchs, and Methuselah among the rest, the words, "And he died." They all came under the curse. There was no discharge, save in one case. "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die," was actual in all.

Jacob made Joseph swear that he would bury him, not in Egypt, but in Canaan. Canaan was the land of promise ; it was the earnest, the pledge, and the type of the everlasting rest ; a stage in life's journey ; and it was meant to teach a lesson, that just as the patriarch desired that his dead bones might rest in the promised land of Canaan, so it should be even more earnestly our desire that our souls should enter into that true rest, that everlasting Canaan, that remaineth for the people of God.

You ask why he made him swear ? The reason, probably, was this : that in case Pharaoh, or whoever governed, should bid Joseph not to do so, he might be able to say, "I have not only promised, but I have sworn to do it."

In the 31st verse, we read, "Israel bowed himself upon the bed's-head." It is very singular that that clause has been made a source of much mistake and misinterpretation. You remember that in the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, on which I commented the other year, where an account of Jacob is given, it is said that he, "when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." Now this passage in Genesis is the only one where there is anything that corresponds to Paul's statement in the Old Testament record of Jacob's life. Then why is he said to lean on a "bed's-head" in the one passage, and on "a staff" in the other? There are two Hebrew words, which, if spelt according to their consonants, that is, without points, would be precisely the same, namely, *מַטָּה*. We may pronounce the word either *mittah*, "a bed," or *matteh*, "a staff," according to the vowel-points; the same Hebrew word meant "a bed," or "a staff," according to the pointing. If you point the word one way, it means "a staff," if another way, it means "a bed." And hence it is, that the dispute, which is not yet determined, has arisen, as to which interpretation is correct. In what is called the Rhemish Testament, or the Roman Catholic Testament, which is a translation from a translation, it is said, "He worshipped the top of his rod;" and in the foot-note it is said, that Jacob's staff had an image on the top of it; and that here we see a proof of that relative veneration which is due to images and relics. If you look at the Greek word used by St. Paul, you will see that there is no foundation for this absurd translation. The Greek is, *ἐπὶ τὸ ἄσπερ*, which means, "upon his staff;" and

there is no record in Genesis, and no hint in the Greek, that Jacob had any image, or anything of the sort, that he used, to remind him of God. It was the picture, true and lifelike, of an old man leaning upon his staff, and worshipping God—not an image which, in his case, would have been an idol; and therefore, to say that it means adoring the top of his staff, is most extravagant and absurd. The whole misapprehension in our version, or whatever it may be called, arises from the different punctuation of the Hebrew word; and in the Romish version, from a determination to invent a reason for error. It was a staff, and not a bed, is plain from this: that the orientals had nothing that could answer to our bed's-head. They slept on a carpet, upon the floor; and therefore, no doubt, it ought to be rendered, that he arose and worshipped, leaning upon his staff, as the apostle has stated it in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

It was after the event alluded to in this chapter, that Jacob was taken ill, and therefore there is no reason to believe he was at this moment on a sick bed at all.

His heart prayed, though his knee was unbent. Age may stiffen the joints of the body; chains may fetter the limbs; sickness may confine to a lonely chamber; but no outward restraint can reach the heart, or prevent it praying.

God looks at inner feeling, rather than outer form. He forgives the absence of the bowed knee, if there be only the bowed soul. "God is a spirit, and those that worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE DYING PATRIARCH. JUDEA FOR THE JEWS. OLD AGE.
JACOB BLESSING JOSEPH'S SONS.

It appears that the tidings reached the patriarch Joseph simply by popular report or rumour—for the Hebrew answers to the French *on dit*—that his aged and venerable father was about to go the way of all the earth; and the moment that Joseph heard that one he so loved and revered was about to leave him for the rest that remaineth for the people of God, he rushed to a sick father's bedside, and brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, with him, in order that they might see that noblest of spectacles, how a Christian can die, and might be refreshed by the scene of the departure of so great worth, and go forth, strengthened as well as blessed, to go and do likewise.

We read that some one told the aged patriarch, Jacob, as he lay upon his last pillow, that the son he once thought was torn by wild beasts, and who, in his last moments, was his greatest comfort upon earth, was about to come and see him; and the very tidings that such a son, so beloved, and so worthy of such a parent, was approaching his bedside, gave new vigour to the old man's body, and new inspira-

tion to his heart ; and he raised himself, we are told, upon his staff or bed, as here it may have been. This was the spectacle of an aged patriarch, of a century and a half old, raising himself upon his staff, and looking, with an ecstasy that only a parent could feel, at sons gathered round him, to whom he was soon to address his last farewell.

Jacob said unto Joseph, the moment that he saw him, " God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz, in the land of Canaan, and blessed me." We have read that incident before ; and the venerable patriarch, as if his great heart were overwhelmed by a sense of God's past goodness, in restoring to him his long-lost son, who he thought was dead, brings before him, in the rush of grateful recollection, all the good that God had done him ; and even before he spoke to Joseph one word, he breaks forth, in adoring praise, " God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz"—that is, the place that became afterwards Bethel—" in the land of Canaan, and blessed me. And he made me this promise, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people, and will give this land to thy seed after thee, for an everlasting possession." Promises were the joy of Jacob's heart. Now, I believe that the promised land still remains to be inherited by Jacob's children. Palestine is pledged to the Jews, and it is ceaselessly promised throughout the Old Testament Scriptures as an everlasting possession. They are now dispossessed ; the Jews are now a family without a home, a nation without political cohesion or laws, a people without a ruler. The Moslem has his mosque where the temple of Solomon was ; and the victim and de-

votee of superstition has altars where the glory once burned between the cherubim ; but you may depend upon it that the Gentile is simply an occupant of the deserted land, keeping it ready for the restoration of God's favoured and long-blessed people. Palestine is promised to them as an everlasting possession. They are homeless, because not yet in it ; and heaven and earth may pass away, but this pledge shall not pass away. They have no footing here, that they may hurry there.

I have often repeated, on reading these chapters, how plainly one can see the multiplying signs of their restoration. It is rumoured that Palestine will soon be the scene of new arrangements, new interferences, new movements, arising from the autocracy of Louis Napoleon. Everything indicates that God's Spirit is moving amid the dry bones ; and that we are now about to pass into scenes, and years, and trials, perhaps, as far as we can judge from God's Word, unprecedented in the history of the past. But how delightful is this, that, if we be God's people—if we love him, and are in Christ Jesus loved, sanctified, and blessed—then, come trouble, come trial, come distress and perplexity of nations, nothing shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ! The nation has lost a Wellington, the soul never loses Jesus.

Jacob said, that he should regard as his own, Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who had been born to him in the land of Egypt, and who had therefore not been seen by Jacob before. "As Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine."

And then, in the 7th verse, just as if he could not

mention God's great mercies without alluding to his own great loss, he says, in very touching, because very simple words, "When I came from Padan, Rachel"—for whom he waited and toiled seven years, the mother of Joseph and of Benjamin, whose likeness he no doubt saw in Joseph's two sons, and which likeness made them only the more intensely beloved by him—"Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan, in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath." This death, he thought, looked as if it had been wrath; but he knew it was not so, but mercy. She finished her journey sooner than he: she was taken sooner home, that was all the difference. And now he felt he was to join Rachel, as Rachel has joined God, and so are they now for ever with the Lord. "And I buried her there, in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem." That was evidently to induce the patriarchs to look to Canaan as their home upon earth, because the dead dust of Abraham, and Isaac, and Rachel, and the world's gray fathers, was, and now is, all there. What a thought is it, that, at this moment, the dust of patriarchs is still sleeping beneath the green sods of Jerusalem, or, at least, in Palestine! and what a magnificent scene will that be, when the trumpet shall sound, and the dead dust of the world's gray fathers shall be quickened, and of the world's young striplings also, and both together shall feel that mighty transfiguration, when this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible shall put on incorruptibility! What bright hopes are a Christian's! What glorious prospects may the youngest saint, as well as the most aged patriarch, fall asleep in the sure persuasion of!

"The eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see." Age came upon the good Jacob, or, as he is here called by his new name, Israel. All of us feel that the youngest is growing older, and the aged are already grown old; that no power can keep one hair black, when it begins to grow gray; no force can clear away the mists that begin to gather on the eyeballs in old age. Old we must become. Oh, when old in years to be old in grace, what a blessed and happy combination!

It is then said, in a picture extremely beautiful, "And Joseph brought his sons near unto Jacob; and he kissed them, and embraced them. And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo! God hath showed me also thy seed." I thought thou wast dead, torn by wild beasts; and God has not only enabled me to see thee, but thy children. And it must have been a most delightful thought to the patriarch's heart, that those children were walking in the fear of the Lord, adorning the doctrine they professed, so that he could depart in peace, rejoicing in the Lord, his rock, and the rock and refuge of his children, and his children's children. Joseph then took them both, and placed them before him.

Joseph, who acted from nature, wanted the elder to be blessed first; but the patriarch, who acted from prophetic inspiration, blessed the younger first. This has been frequently the case throughout the Word of God, as we have seen in reading these ancient and inspired histories. Nature makes the elder in this world the chief; but grace often passes by the elder, and lays hold upon the younger. But yet elder and younger may have that grace which patriarchs

cannot bestow, and which princes cannot take away—Faith in a Saviour, reliance on his atonement and sacrifice, belief in his name, loving him, and bowing to him; that is the blessing that maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow.

Jacob, however, said to Joseph, "I know what I am doing. Though I am very blind, yet I have an inner light, which is clearer than any outer one; and therefore I am not acting accidentally, but by design, or 'wittingly,' as it is called here. "And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh."

And then he said, "Behold, I die!" And he did not regret life or refuse to die. In old age, death is scarcely dying. It is just the evening twilight, mixing with the morning twilight, with scarcely a night between. It is simply the soul leaping from the decaying house, and instantly feeling itself present with the Lord. And, therefore, just as the trees in autumn become most magnificent under their autumn tints, when they are about to drop all their foliage on the earth, so a dying Christian feels the greatest joy, and is radiant with the brightest hopes, and gives, like Simeon, expression to the richest songs, when he is about to leave the house that perishes, for a house not made with hands, eternal in the skies. "I die; but though I am torn from you, God shall be with you." What a blessed compensation! When God takes away the earthly father, what a magnificent exchange if he gives us the heavenly one! If the aged Israel is taken to his rest, oh, how gloriously is the gap filled up when the God of that Israel becomes the God of his sons, and his sons' sons! And so a day comes when he and they shall meet

and mingle where there are no more tears, nor sorrow, nor separation, nor crying.

In these narratives there is a pilgrim-like air. We feel its influence as we read. May we never forget, wherever we dwell, or whatever rank we hold, that we are pilgrims, and strangers, and sojourners, looking for a better country and eternal mansions !

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE BLESSING OF THE TRIBES. THE DEATH OF JACOB. HIS SELECTION OF A GRAVE.

It is extremely difficult, in the course of the few expository remarks that your time permits me to give on the lesson that we read, to present a full and satisfactory analysis of the varied and significant predictions here pronounced upon the tribes of Israel. It does happen, too, that our most noble translation, for such unquestionably it is, in this chapter, is not the most happy in its rendering some expressions of the original Hebrew—not the most happy in this sense only, that it does not convey, so clearly and so distinctly, the ideas of the original. I alluded before to a translation, that has been executed by Dr. A. Benisch, professor of Hebrew to the Jews' and General Literary and Scientific Institution; lecturer, *pro tem.*, to the Western Synagogue, St. Alban's-place, published with the approval of the chief Rabbi. He is a Jew—one who has no partiality to Christianity whatever; on the contrary, one who believes that the Messiah has not yet come. He has simply, as a Hebrew scholar, executed a translation of the whole of the Pentateuch: and I must say, that, in some passages, as far as I am competent to judge and com-

pare, his translation is more correct than ours. At the same time, there is not the least difference in any one vital point; and his translation tells more, I think, against the Jew, and altogether, I may say, in favour of the Christian's belief, that the Messiah, predicted in the Pentateuch, has already come. I will just read this 49th chapter, as it is rendered by him. This, I may repeat, is a Jew's translation from the original Hebrew; and, therefore, the sceptic cannot possibly accuse him of any partiality to Christianity, or of any tampering with the original in order to support the Christian view:—"And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the remoteness of days." Now, "remoteness of days" is better than "last days," because this latter expression is generally employed to denote the end of this dispensation, whereas "remoteness of days" is more applicable to the end of the Jewish dispensation, or the period of the existence of the twelve tribes. "Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father. Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my vigour, and the beginning of my manhood, superiority in dignity, and superiority in power. Thy precipitancy is like the waters; thou shalt not be superior, because thou wentest up to thy father's place of repose; then profanedst thou my couch by going up. Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of violence are their swords. O my soul, come not thou into their secret deliberation; into their assembly, my glory, be not thou united; for in their wrath they slew a man, and in their self-will they lamed an ox." Our translation is,

"They digged down a wall;" but the Jew translator is right, and our translation is wrong. The Hebrew word for a wall is *shor*; the Hebrew word for an ox is *shur*; the difference between the "o" and the "u" consisting in the position of a point. There is no question that our translators have mistaken it. "They digged down a wall," means nothing; but the ox or the bull are always used in Scripture to denote princes. "Strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round"—that is, princes of Bashan (Psa. xxii. 12); and the expression, "They lamed an ox," is applicable to their conduct with regard to the great prince Joseph, whom they tried to prevent getting that destined dignity which he ultimately attained, and which they impeded slightly, but failed to prevent altogether. "Cursed be their wrath, for it was powerful; and their fierceness, for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. Judah, thee thy brethren shall praise; thy hand is in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's sons shall prostrate themselves before thee. A young lion is Judah; from the prey, my son, thou goest up: he stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as a fierce lioness; who shall rouse him?" The next verse I wish you particularly to notice; for there you will see how the Jew translator is at one with our translators on the most vital portion of the prophecy. Certain recent Jews have tried to interpret "Shiloh," not as derived from the Hebrew word "to be at peace," but as a pronoun, and to render it "to him;" but every effort that they have made in that direction, and they must know it, has proved abortive; and the most splendid demonstration that such is the case,

is the translation of this Jew, an accomplished scholar, who translates the verse as follows: "The rod shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and his be the obedience of peoples." The Jew, you observe, translates the verse substantially as we do, because, as a scholar, he could see no other alternative, knowing that the efforts of those who have tried to interpret it otherwise, have failed. The rest of the chapter is rendered by him as follows:—"Binding unto the ass his foal, and to the vine-branch the son of his she-ass, he washed in wine his attire, and in the blood of grapes his raiment; his eyes are red from wine, and the whiteness of his teeth is with milk. Zebulun towards the coast of seas shall dwell, and he shall be for an haven of ships, and his border shall be unto Zidon. Issachar is a bony ass, crouching between the folds; and he saw that repose was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and he inclined his shoulder to receive the burthen, and became a servant unto tribute. Dan shall pronounce judgment on his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper in the path, that biteth the horse-heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. I hope for thy aid, O Lord. Gad, an assailing troop shall assail him, but he shall assail the heel. Out of Asher cometh his fat bread, and he shall give dainties for a king. Naphtali is a hind set forth; he giveth sayings of pleasantness. A son of faithfulness is Joseph, even a son of fruitfulness by a well; daughters tread on the wall, and they embittered him, and were numerous; and the archers were hostile to him. But his bow abideth

in strength, and the arms of his hands remain supple and vigorous, by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. From thence he became the feeder, the stone of Israel; from the God of thy father, who shall help thee, and the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the murmuring deep, that croucheth under, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors, even to the boundaries of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that is a Nazarite among his brethren. Benjamin is a wolf that teareth, and in the morning eateth his prey, and at even he divideth the spoil. All these are the twelve tribes of Israel; and this is it that their father spake unto them when he blessed them, every man, according to his blessing, he blessed them. And he commanded them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people. Bury me with my fathers, in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite—in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham obtained with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying-place. There they buried Abraham, and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac, and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. The purchase of the field, and of the cave that is therein, was from the children of Heth. And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and expired, and was gathered unto his peoples."

It is a most beautiful and exact translation; and

if ours could be adjusted by it, we should gain something and lose little. It is but natural to expect that our translation should have some defects; for it was the last only of a series of approximations. The first Bible was Wickliffe's; then there was the Geneva Bible; then the Bishops' Bible, from which the excessively awkward version of the Psalms, in the Prayer-book, is taken; and lastly there appeared our translation, which was executed in 1611, by a collection of the most able Hebrew and Greek scholars that ever lived in any age. But they were men; they had much to do; criticism was not then so mature; and, in many parts, they have come short of doing full justice to the original. But where they have come short in the Old Testament, they have done so lest they should seem to render a passage too clearly and unequivocally Christian, and thus lay themselves open to the charge of the Jew, that they had exaggerated a prediction of the Messiah. And so in the New Testament. If all the faults of the translators were corrected, it would only more clearly and unequivocally speak Protestant, evangelical Christianity. So that the error of our translators (and I speak this really advisedly, and not rashly) is on the side of not boldly enough speaking precious evangelical truth. And thus, you will find, where there are two renderings, that the marginal translation is much more distinct and decided than the translation which they have incorporated in the text.

Having made these remarks, I proceed to expound briefly some of the predictions contained in this chapter. First of all you will notice, that the whole of these prophecies refer to the existence of the children

of Israel as tribes, which they ceased to be partially after the captivity, and, in the last and remaining case, after the birth and resurrection of our blessed Lord. There is much, I admit, of difficulty in this chapter, and some things that we cannot easily explain, though I think more light is cast upon it by the translation I have referred to, than by any commentary that I have yet seen.

The first Jacob referred to is Reuben. He was his eldest son—"my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength;" that was, his dignity; but yet, says Israel his father, though you are my first-born, and therefore entitled to the highest dignity, your moral conduct has disfranchised you. Chronologically, you are entitled to the highest place; but morally, you must occupy a much lowlier one. He excelled in age, but he degenerated in conduct. Deborah reproached this tribe for its pusillanimity, and thus illustrates its character:—"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Water may be moved easily by the wind, and when its embankments give way, it rushes forth, to use the Hebrew translator's words, with "precipitancy" and violence, doing great damage. It implies that the passions of Reuben, like water long pent up and restless, and bursting forth ultimately beyond all their bounds, should only do mischief. Hence we read afterwards, that the birthright was given to Joseph, the priesthood to Levi, and the kingdom to Judah. But Reuben, the eldest, "unstable as water," was degraded and cast down below the youngest. Righteousness exalts; sin degrades.

We read, in the 5th verse, in the language of the

Hebrew translator, "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of violence are their swords." Their cruel conduct is related in Gen. xxxvii. 27. They were the foremost in selling Joseph, and getting rid of the brother that their father loved. They slew Shechem, a man of distinction, and they lamed, or cut off the sinew of an ox, not a wall—a distinguished individual, now pre-eminently so—Pharaoh's prime minister—that is, Joseph; and they tried to prevent his elevation; they impeded it slightly for a day or two, but did not prevent it.

Next we have the prediction respecting Judah. The meaning of Judah, is "praise;" and the patriarch uses his name to describe what he should enjoy, "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise." "It is evident," says the apostle (Heb. vii. 14), "that our Lord sprang out of Judah." Caleb and David were of the tribe of Judah. Our blessed Lord is called, "the lion of the tribe of Judah." You will find this distinction of the tribe in Numb. xxiii. 24: "Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion; he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink of the blood of the slain." Vineyards and wine, in great abundance, are his. In Isaiah lxiii. 1, the spiritual significance is given: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?—this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I, that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me." Verse

12 should be, "Red as wine, and teeth white as milk." Our translation conveys an erroneous impression.

Then we read in the 18th verse, "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon." Now, the geographical position of the tribe of Zebulun extended from the Mediterranean sea on the west, to the sea of Genesaret on the east; and the prediction is, that they shall be a seafaring people, and that prediction was fulfilled exactly 300 years afterwards, for we read in Deuteronomy xxxiii. 18, "And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the people unto the mountain: there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness; for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand."

Of Issachar it is said that he "is a strong ass couching down between two burdens." You will observe that each tribe is described by an animal as its symbol; just as various families have still birds or lions as their crest or their arms. That of Issachar was "a strong ass couching down between two burdens." The position of this tribe was in the valley of Esdraelon, between ridges of hills, that rose on each side like panniers, between which was a valley most fertile. This was a patient tribe, occupying a quiet valley, and paying tribute to any extent, rather than go to war, and fight with its neighbours or invaders.

Next we have the picture of Dan. "Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan

shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horses' heels, so that his rider shall fall backward." Judah had the heroism, boldness, grandeur, and dignity, of the lion. Issachar, again, the patience, and it may be, the want of spirit and stupidity of the ass, if that could be applicable to that animal in eastern lands, which is doubtful; and Dan again is to have the skill or cunning of the serpent. Now Samson was one of the most illustrious descendants of Dan. It is said, "Dan shall judge his people." It is written of Samson, "He judged Israel twenty years." But the prophecy is, that his whole conduct shall be that of the serpent, gaining the victory, not by open assault, but by cunning. It is recorded of Samson, as if to illustrate this (Judges xvi. 27—30), "Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport. And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines, for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

Then we have the picture of Gad: "A troop shall

overcome him ; but he shall overcome at the last." We read that this tribe was harassed for many years by the Ammonites. We read of this in Jeremiah xlix. 1, "Concerning the Ammonites, thus saith the Lord, Hath Israel no sons ? hath he no heir ? Why then doth their king inherit Gad, and his people dwell in his cities ?" But we read in 1 Chronicles v. 18—22, that ultimately Gad overcame : "The sons of Reuben, and the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh, of valiant men, men able to bear buckler and sword, and to shoot with bow, and skilful in war, were four and forty thousand, seven hundred and three-score, that went out to the war. And they made war with the Hagarites, with Jetur, and Nephish, and Nodab. And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all that were with them ; for they cried to God in the battle, and he was entreated of them, because they put their trust in Him. And they took away their cattle ; of their camels fifty thousand, and of sheep two hundred and fifty thousand, and of asses two thousand, and of men an hundred thousand. For there fell down many slain, because the war was of God. And they dwelt in their steads until the captivity."

Asher is thus spoken of in the 20th verse : "Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties." Asher means "fertility," or "fatness ;" and Jacob says that his land, a section of Canaan, shall be what his name signifies, "he shall dip his foot in oil." (Deut. xxxii. 24.)

"Naphtali is a hind let loose ; he giveth goodly words." Now the characteristic of this tribe, like that

of its symbol, was timidity. It is said in Judges iv. 8: "And Barak, one of the tribe of Naphtali, said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, I will not go." Then the "goodly words" occur in the song of Deborah (Judges v.).

The patriarch seems to have showered all his choicest blessings upon the tribe of Joseph; and you will find his prediction confirmed in Deut. xxxiii. 13: "And of Joseph Moses said, Blessed of the Lord be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath."

Afterwards it is said, "Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil." Saul was of this tribe; and no doubt he, like many of his descendants, was stained with rapacity.

Thus we see that these predictions were minutely fulfilled many hundred years afterwards, and, therefore, that dying Israel spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. He closes his life in benedictions; his last words are blessings upon those around him. He had the spirit of prophecy. The future embodied what he predicted.

He expressly desired to be buried "in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan;" that land on which his heart was set; that land which was to him the mirror of the better country, "which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite, for a possession of a burying-place. There they buried Abraham, and Sarah his wife," and there their dust still remains. "There they buried Isaac, and Rebekah

his wife," and they, too, rest there in the hope of the resurrection; "and there," he adds, "I buried Leah." Perhaps he dared not allude to Rachel, for that was too tender and painful a recollection.

"And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed,"—the last agony was on him—"and yielded up the ghost," that is, the soul that God gave him. "The dust returns to the earth as it was; and the spirit returns unto God who gave it." And the evidence that he instantly rejoined Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and those whose bodies were buried in the land of Canaan is the expression, "and was gathered unto his people." These words cannot mean, "he was buried," because the next chapter contains the solemn and impressive account of his burial; but it means that his soul instantly rejoined the happy and rejoicing company of them whose dead bodies were awaiting the sound of the resurrection trumpet below the earth, in Canaan; but whose rejoicing spirits were amid the joys and the blessings of that land which never shall be moved, and of which the earthly Canaan, in its loveliest day, was but a dim and imperfect type.

CHAPTER I.

JOSEPH'S AFFECTION. JOSEPH'S ARRANGEMENT FOR BURYING JACOB. NATIONAL OBSEQUIES. LOOKING TO JESUS. FEARS OF THE BROTHERS. JOSEPH'S LOVE. HIS DEATH.

I AM sure that we shall almost regret, that in the course of our Sabbath morning readings, we have come to the close of so exquisitely beautiful and touching a narrative as that of Jacob and Joseph, so true to nature, and so suggestive of practical guidance in all the ways and wanderings of our life below. But the sweetest tale must have its close; the longest life has its end; the brightest day has its shadows and its evening. We shall have in the course of another week to enter upon the more stirring procession of Joseph's descendants from the land of Egypt, into that land into which his bones were carried as a pledge that God would visit them, and bring them into the midst of it, and plant them a great nation. Now, when Jacob was dead, it is said, "Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him and kissed him." This was proof of filial love. Nothing is said of the conduct of the rest. They stood by. Joseph the most dutiful son felt most poignantly the loss of the best of fathers. Sin corrupts the heart, and hardens the feelings. The holiest will always be the most sensitive. They who

are truest in their relation to the Father of all, will feel the deepest and purest affection to the earthly parent, and in all other earthly relationships.

Joseph commanded the physicians, according to the custom of that country, to embalm Jacob. At the same time he asked, like a loyal subject, though occupying a subject's first place, permission of his royal master to go with his father to the tomb of Machpelah; and, according to the oath he had taken, as well as the promise he had made, to bury him in the land that was the type of the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

We find in this chapter the first instance of a national funeral, on a scale of unprecedented pomp, pageantry and splendour, worthy of the occasion, and dutiful as became Egypt, and acceptable, we read, to the Christian man Joseph, and the rest of his household, as a mark of respect to the remains of Joseph's dead and venerated parent. I have heard persons object to such national expressions of sympathy as are recorded in the chapter we have read, or were recently displayed at the funeral of Wellington. But no objections can weigh one feather against a precedent in Scripture, inspired by the Spirit, sustained and sanctioned by Christian men, and plainly recorded here, not as a fact that we are to avoid, but as a precedent that on all similar and parallel occasions nations are to follow. And most remarkable it is that not only is this warranted here, and the foolish, though perhaps sincere objections of some persons disposed of at once, but throughout Scripture a mean national burial is spoken of as a judgment and a posthumous punish-

ment. For instance, we read in the book of Jeremiah xlii. 18,—“ Thus saith the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall lament for him, saying, Ah, my brother! or, Ah, sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah, lord! or, Ah, his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.” That was a mark of national indignity, meant to express either its indifference to what he had done, or their positive rebuke to the acts that stained his history or memory. We shall also find that our Blessed Lord, so far from condemning what is due on such great occasions, expressly, or at least by implication, sanctions or applauds it. For instance we read in Matthew xxvi. 6,—“ When Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious perfume,” as we ought to render it, “ and poured it on his head as he sat at meat.” Well, when the disciples saw it, they acted like some advocates of a spurious economy in modern times; for they said, “ To what purpose is this waste?” Recollect it was an alabaster box full of precious perfume, and might have been worth a hundred pounds. “ This ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.”

Now this last remark seems very rational; and many would accept it in a modern newspaper as a very sensible remark. But hear what our Lord says, and you will see that what is man's economy is often not true economy, and that what seems God's prodigality is often the truest economy. Jesus said, “ Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good

work upon me." And yet this is Jesus who came to preach the gospel to the poor, who came to minister especially to the poor, who visited their homes, sympathized with their sorrows, raised their dead, restored their broken circles, lived among them, died for them.—"For ye have the poor always with you ; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial."

It was the highest expression of reverence and esteem she could give, and Jesus hailed it ; and the disciples' remark, "This perfume might have been sold for much, and given to the poor," was neither seasonable, suitable, nor just, and therefore Jesus adds, "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her," that is, deeply to her credit to all generations. We thus then see that for a subject or a prince to receive from his country such a burial as that recorded in Jeremiah, is a mark of ignominy and reprobation ; but that, as in this case recorded in the fiftieth chapter of Genesis, a national funeral, worthy of the occasion, was the duty of a nation to accord to the father of its greatest benefactor, who "saved much people alive," for that is the expression of his great services. And whether the "much people" were saved alive by being protected from a foreign foe, or by being saved by supplies of corn in a season of oppressive famine, is of no great consequence. It was a duty that the land of Egypt owed to its distinguished benefactor, and I hope that our country will never listen to the spuri-

ous economy, "Might not this have been given to the poor?" and thus fail in the only expression of a rational sense of gratitude and love which a country can pay to the remains of its most distinguished and illustrious benefactors.

But others will say, "Why lay out any thing upon the body?" I think such language approaches very much to infidelity. I do not like private fine funerals, I am here speaking of national honours. I have heard some persons say, "What does it matter to me where my body is thrown, whether in a ditch, or elsewhere?" If you be Christians, are not your bodies temples of the Holy Ghost? The body is the shrine of Deity; it is redeemed by precious blood as truly as the soul that dwells in it. It too shall hear the roll of the resurrection trumpet, and shall rise, and join that grand procession of all ages, and tribes, and kindreds, and tongues, which constitute the manifested group of the redeemed and ransomed sons of God. It does matter, therefore. A Christian burial, in the case of individuals, with all the solemnity and pure severity that is proper, is scriptural. And in the case of illustrious benefactors of a nation, all that it can do should be done to express how poignantly it feels an irreparable loss, and how profoundly it appreciates distinguished and unprecedented services.

You will observe this national funeral was so truly great, that there were in the solemn procession cavalry, infantry, and the grandees, or, as they are here called, the "elders" of Egypt. I suppose a great many thousand persons must have accompanied the remains of the illustrious patriarch all the way

from Egypt to Atad, which was the first place they came to on the boundaries of Canaan, the promised land, where they deposited his body, that he might there rest, in the hope of a blessed resurrection. Canaan was the cathedral of the patriarchs. Jerusalem was the rallying centre of the hopes and sympathies of the Jews. The whole Jewish economy was a platform on which Jerusalem and Canaan were regarded as the most sacred places, typical of those on a higher level. Whenever a Jew prayed, he opened his windows, and looked towards Jerusalem. If he prayed on the desert, he knelt down, and looked towards Jerusalem. You say, Does not that sanction turning to the east, as some persons in modern times prefer to do? I answer, if they be Jews it may be suitable enough; but even if they be Jews, it is not ritually correct; for the Jews did not always look to the east, but to the Temple of Jerusalem, whether that was north, south, east, or west. And why did they look at it? Because it was the type of Jesus Christ: for Jesus says, "I will destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jew was not to look to the temple, but to Him who was overshadowed by the temple, and who still remains. And, therefore, wherever a Christian prays,—upon the tessellated pavement of the grand cathedral, or upon a hill-side, or, like the apostle, upon the sea-side, in the camp or the cabinet, or upon the field of battle,—if his heart looks, not to Jerusalem, but to Jesus, he prays in the right spirit, spiritually and in truth.

Again, we read here that after the funeral was

ended, and all the mourning that was great in the land of Egypt had passed away, the other sons of the dead patriarch, the brethren of the affectionate and dutiful brother, felt instantly the shadow of their past great sin creep cold and ominous over their inmost hearts, and suggest the possibility, or even the certainty, that Joseph, their elder brother, now that their father was gone, would instantly avenge the evil treatment that he had received at their hands. They judged him by themselves. They thought that because they were so wicked he could not be so good. They therefore came to him, and I almost fear told what was false. They said, "Thy father did command before he died." If he did so, it is not so recorded: but whether he did so or not, it shows that they saw where their strong position was in dealing with the beloved Joseph. You will notice all their appeal is, "Thy father"—"The servants of the God of thy father," knowing how strong was his affection to that father. They said, "Peradventure Joseph will hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him." Wherever there is sin in the conscience, there is always fear in the heart. "And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall we say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil. And now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father." And Joseph, pained at the recollection of it, and anxious, not only to forgive, but to forget, "wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren

went and fell down before his face ; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants," thus fulfilling the prophecy that he gave, and that they cruelly tried to anticipate, when he saw the sheaves of the brethren falling down in a vision to the sheaf of Joseph. "And Joseph said unto them, Fear not ; for am I in the place of God ? But as for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now, therefore, fear ye not." How Christian was that spirit ! How beautiful and becoming ! It is divine to forgive ; it is fiendish to avenge. And such a loss as they had sustained was a solemn summons to lay all their quarrels, and disputes, and past recollections, in the silent grave of their common father, and to go, and love, and sin no more.

"And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's house ; and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years." Death spares neither father nor son. We read that when his death drew near, he took an oath before he died, that his bones should be carried to Canaan—that is, the pledge of the resurrection—and to be a sign to them that that land was the place of their rest and repose.

"So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old ; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." The common practice with the Egyptians was to bury in stone coffins, or sarcophagi ; but as his bones were to be carried to a distant land, he was put in a case or coffin of wood.

We have now closed the Book of Genesis ; and

what an intensely interesting book it is ! Expunge it from the Bible, and what a blank would be behind ! We learn here the great truths of the existence and the providential government of God. We see here the promises of a Saviour—retribution, mercies, forgiveness, love, man, the soul, God, sin, and holiness. And from this book almost all ancient philosophers, astronomers, and chronologists have borrowed the confirmation of their theories and their facts. And it is remarkable, that, as science makes progress, it casts clearer and brighter light upon this book. It is worthy of notice that the objections once urged against it by the most learned men, are now found to be so frivolous, that he would be pronounced a very illiterate character indeed who would for one moment dare to state them. The lapse of years casts light upon Genesis. The deepest discoveries in the earth below, and the highest disclosures in the firmament above ; the telescope of the astronomer, and the hammer of the geologist, have equally combined to show that this book, where it touches the confines of science, does it truly ; and, more and more, that it has God for its author, truth for its matter, and an everlasting rest for its bright and blessed hope.

Blessed Lord, who didst inspire the writer of this book by thy Holy Spirit, and hast given it for our learning, grant that we may so read, and study, and remember its precious truths, that they may serve to guide, comfort, and build us up in our holy faith. Give us teachable hearts ; write all thy promises upon our hearts ; take the veil from the heart of the

Jew, and his ignorance from the Gentile ; and give us thy Holy Spirit for Jesus' sake. And now to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God, be equal and everlasting glory, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

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“— with solemn words
Upon a thoughtless tongue.”—

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