

DEVOTIONAL HOURS WITH THE BIBLE

FROM THE CREATION TO THE
CROSSING OF THE RED SEA

BY

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PREFACE

THERE are two methods of studying the Bible. One is, verse by verse, giving close thought to every word, even looking into etymology and grammatical construction, so that the exact sense of the text may be learned. Such study is important. Many rich shades of meaning are often revealed by intelligent and scholarly exegesis. Commentaries that take us over the Bible in this microscopical way are valuable. We need every particle of light on the Scriptures we can get.

Then another way of studying the Bible is in order to get from it practical lessons for our own daily common life. What does the passage teach us? What Divine instruction have we in it for ourselves? It is the latter purpose that is in mind in this book. It is not a commentary in the usual sense. It is not an exegetical study of the Scriptures that is proposed. No textual criticism is given. There is no discussion of questions of dates, of localities, of authorships,

or archæological researches. Its single aim is to suggest some of the spiritual and practical lessons which may be gathered from great passages.

The book does not attempt to cover every chapter; to do this would make it altogether too long—it deals only with what appear to be leading and representative portions of the Bible.

It is a book for use in the inner chamber where life receives its impulses for conduct, for duty, for service, and for devotion. The Bible is a very ancient book, but it is also a book for to-day. It brings us face to face with God, and its teachings are meant to guide us in all our ways.

J. R. M.

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CHAPTER I
IN THE BEGINNING GOD

Read Genesis I., II.

GENESIS is the book of beginnings. The first chapter is one of the most wonderful portions of the Bible. It takes us back far beyond all beginnings. Its first words are among the sublimest ever written—"In the beginning God." We are now in the midst of a vast universe full of life, but there was a period when there was nothing—not a grain of sand, a blade of grass, a flower, a leaf, nor the tiniest insect—nothing but God. There never was a time, however, when God was not. He had no beginning. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God." The thought is too great for us to grasp. Everything else that we see or of which we know had a beginning. The sea with its majesty began away back somewhere in the midst of the ages of creation, when the

Creator gathered the waters of the globe together into one place. The mountains which we think of as ancient, hoary, abiding, of which we speak as eternal, also had a beginning. There was a period when they were not, and then a time when by some gigantic convulsion they were lifted up.

Everything but God had a beginning. Matter is not eternal. All life is derived. Not only was God before all things, but all things are the work of His hands. God created all things. Nothing came by chance. It is no part of the plan of this book to suggest any scheme of creation. We do not need to vex ourselves with questions as to how things came into being. We do not have to know or understand.

There has been a great deal written by wise men about this. A good while ago people used to think that the "days" in the account of creation were common days and that all things in the universe came into existence instantaneously at the word of God, and in the order given in the first chapter of Genesis. But perhaps nobody understands it now that way. There were godly people in olden days who thought that when science suggested another way, science was denying God's Word. Some old people remember how geology was regarded when it began to make its theories known. But now no one thinks of the days of the creation as literal days.

It would be interesting to go over some of the

theories that philosophers have suggested in later times as to the programme of creation. But whatever the theories may be, science has not set aside the teaching of Genesis, that God created all things. The best science accepts the Christian teaching, that God made all things. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews states the case thus: "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear." "So far as science can settle anything," said Henry Drummond, "this question is settled. The attempt to get the living out of the dead has failed." God was the Creator, however many ages may have been occupied in the vast work, or whatever the order or the processes of creation may have been. That is all we need to know.

At the very beginning of the story of creation we have a wonderful glimpse of the heart of God and of His love for man, His child. Man had not yet been made. Indeed, there was only chaos. "The earth was waste and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Then we have this statement—"The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." A marginal reading is, "The Spirit of God was brooding upon the face of the waters."

The picture suggested in the words is that of a hen sitting on her nest, covering her eggs, brooding over them to bring out the new lives through

the warmth of her own body. Without unduly pressing the words, they certainly suggest that when He brooded over the mere chaos, God was thinking of His children yet to be and planning for their happiness and good. That is the way love always does. It prepares the nest for the little birds. It fills the storehouse for the coming winter.

Through all the great ages of continued world-building we find evidence of this same Divine brooding and forethought. Man was not the first of the creatures made—indeed, he was the last of God's works. In this fact we see a wonderful expression of the Divine kindness and love. If man had been created at an earlier period, he could only have perished. He was not created until a place had been prepared for him. From the beginning he was in God's thought. All through the creative ages before man was made God was preparing and fitting up this earth to be his home. First, there was chaos, a world without beauty, light or life, waste and empty, yet with God brooding over it. Then light broke over the dark world. Then the waters were gathered into seas and lakes and rivers, and the continents emerged — plains, hills, mountains. Then life appeared—vegetable life, animal life, in orderly succession. As the time drew near for man's creation, one particular place was chosen and fitted up to be a home for man—a Garden of Eden,

filled with the rarest things of creation. All this for man not yet made; all the exquisite beauty and variety of scenery, all the wealth hidden away in mountains and hills, all the useful things prepared and stored up in nature, were for man's happiness and comfort.

Think, for instance, of the vast beds of coal laid up among earth's strata, ages and ages since, in loving forethought, that our homes may be warmed and brightened in the late centuries. Think of the minerals that were piled away in the rocks long before there was a human footprint on the sand, to be discovered and brought out for use in remote ages. Think of electricity, stored in exhaustless measures everywhere and kept undiscovered until these modern days, when it has been brought out to perform its vast service for the world. Think of the laws of nature, as we call them, established to minister to man's pleasure and profit. Think of all the latent forces and properties that have been lodged in matter, to be brought out from time to time, at the call of human need. Look at the springs of water opened on every hillside, in every valley, to give drink to man and beast. Note the provision in every climate and every zone, for food and raiment. Look at the medicinal and healing virtues stored away in leaf, in root, in fruit, in bark, in mineral.

It fills our hearts with wonder and praise to think that for uncounted ages, before there was a

human being on the earth, God was thinking of us, that He foresaw our needs and began laying up goodness for us in the storehouses of nature. No one will say that all this was a mere marvel of coincidences—there is proof of design in it; it could have been nothing else but the love of God planning and preparing for His children in long ages to come.

It is interesting to think of the creation of man, at the close of all this vast preparation. When his home was ready for him, then he was created. Man was made, too, in the likeness of God. Here we see his exalted rank in creation—he is not like any other creature. This likeness to God was not a physical likeness, however. We are like Him in immortality, in mind, in will, in heart, in hope and life.

“Trailing clouds of glory, do we come
From God, who is our home.”

This suggests man's pre-eminence among the creatures. Last of all to be made, he was also the noblest, the greatest of all. All the things that had been made were good and beautiful. But when man was made he was distinguished above all other orders of beings by having put upon him the image of his Creator. Man was God's child. Plants and trees and rocks and hills were things; beasts, birds, insects, and reptiles

were living creatures ; but man was a living soul, able to think and choose, to love and obey, to commune with God, to enter into close fellowship with Him, to be God's friend, God's child.

Man's body was made of dust. This showed his frailty ; he was not made from the rocks, or from metal ores, but from the light, driven dust. Yet into this frail body God breathed His own breath and man lived. There is a legend which says that Adam, reposing under a tree, longed for wings, that he might soar to the stars. Then a seraph touched him and he slept and dreamed that he flew up into heaven. But when he awoke he was still lying there under the tree. Then said he to the seraph, "Behold, I flew up through the vault of the sky. Didst thou, indeed, guide me yonder ?" The seraph answered, "This tree has still overshadowed thee, and thy body has rested all the while on this hill. But within thee dwells a seraph able to rise to those glorious worlds."

When God had made man, He gave him power over all things. "Have dominion," He said, "over the fish . . . the fowl . . . and over . . . the earth." Thus man was made to be lord of the creation. Not only was he above all the other works of God in rank and dignity, but he was set to rule over them all. All things were made for man, for his use and service. Man still has great power over the creatures. He uses them for his own purposes, making them help him in his work. The beasts he

employs in his work and makes them serve him. Steam is made to turn his machines, propel his ships, draw his trains. The sea he has mastered, making it, instead of a barrier, a highway to all parts of the earth, on which he carries his commerce. The lightning, whose thunders are full of dread, he has tamed and taught to be a gentle messenger, doing his bidding and serving him in countless ways. The rocks he has made to yield to him their minerals, and from the dark depths of the earth he brings his fuel.

God created man "male and female." It would have been very desolate for man to live on this earth alone. No matter how beautiful the world had been made, beauty would not have satisfied him. Man has a heart and needs love, and only love could satisfy him. There were animals of all kinds in the lovely Paradise which was given to man for his home, but man could not have found the companionship he needs among these. He was made immortal and only a being immortal like himself could answer his longing for fellowship. He was made to love, and only a being capable of loving could satisfy him. It was a mark of God's thought for man, therefore of His love for him, that woman was made to be man's companion. They could talk together of the lovely things about them, they had minds alike and could think together and commune on the great things of God. They had hearts that beat alike, and could love

each other. They could commune together on spiritual things and together enter also into communion with God. We have here, too, the institution of marriage. God saw that man would be lonely, and that it would not be good for him to be alone, so He gave him a wife. A quaint writer says, "The man was dust refined, but the woman was dust doubly refined, one remove farther from the earth." Thus was she fitted to be man's companion, his helpmate, his good angel, his inspirer. God Himself united this first pair in marriage. Heart clasped heart, and life was knit to life.

God bade our first parents to "replenish the earth, and subdue it." He gave the earth to man, but it was yet a possession for conquest, an inheritance that man must win for himself. At the very beginning, in the unfallen life, man was meant to work. He was to cultivate the soil that he might gather its fruits and harvests. He was to find and dig out the treasures hidden away in the rocks and hills. He was to master the forces of nature. The earth was his, but he must subdue it. God made provision for man's sustenance. "I have given you every herb, . . . every tree, . . . for meat." It is not God's intention that any one shall ever want for food. Yet we must not make the mistake that even in man's innocence it was meant that he should have food without work. "If any will not work, neither let him eat," is a

law of Providence which grace does not render inoperative. Sometimes a man says, "The world owes me a living." Yes, if he will by his own toil earn it. The prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," teaches us to live by the day and to be content with the day's portion, trusting God for to-morrow; but it teaches another lesson in the word "our." It cannot be *our* daily bread until we have earned it. So we ask God to give us, with His blessing, the portion which our hands have gathered and prepared for the day.

From the beginning, too, God cared for animals and provided for their maintenance. "To every beast, . . . to every fowl, . . . to everything that creepeth . . . I have given . . . meat." Does God care for oxen and birds and worms? Here is the assurance that He does. Then the Scriptures have other words which tell us of God's thought for all His creatures. Your heavenly Father feedeth the sparrows, said Jesus. We are taught here a lesson of kindness toward dumb creatures. If God is so thoughtful in making provision for them, surely we must be gentle and humane in our treatment of them.

Another of the beginnings of which we learn here is the Sabbath. "God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it." The Sabbath was ordained in the time of man's innocence. It was part of that great system of good which God ordained. It was appointed, not as a yoke or burden,

but to be a blessing to the race. It was ordained for man—both for man's physical and spiritual good. We ought to keep the Sabbath, not only because it was ordained by God, but also because it was ordained for our own good. Our Christian Sabbath is doubly sacred since it comes to us as a memorial of a finished redemption and of a completed and glorious victory over sin and the grave. The Sabbath is a prophecy, therefore, of the eternal Sabbath of heaven and of the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST TEMPTATION

Read Genesis III.

THE story of the first temptation is intensely interesting. We do not need to perplex ourselves with its form. There is enough in it that is plain and simple and of practical value, and we should not let our minds be confused by its mystery. Whatever the broader meaning of this first temptation may have been, every one must meet a like personal experience, and hence this Genesis story has for us a most vital interest.

Every one must be tempted. Untried life is not yet established. We must be tested and proved. It is the man who endureth temptation that is blessed. Our first parents did not endure.

It was in the garden of Eden, with beauty and happiness on every side. But even into this lovely home came the tempter. He came stealthily. The serpent is a remarkable illustration of temptation — subtle, fascinating, approaching

noiselessly and with an appearance of harmlessness which throws us off our guard.

The tempter began his temptation in a way which gave no alarm to the woman. He asked her, "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" The question indicated surprise that God should make such a prohibition. The tempter's wish was, in a quiet and insinuating way, to impeach the goodness of God and make Eve think Him severe and harsh. His purpose was to put doubt of God's goodness into the woman's mind. "If God loved you, would He deny you anything so good?"

The tempter still practises the same deep cunning. He wants to make people think that God is severe, that His restraints are unreasonable. He tries to make the young man think that his father is too stern with him, the young girl that her mother is too rigid. He seeks to get people to think themselves oppressed by the Divine requirements. That is usually the first step in temptation, and when one has begun to think God too exacting, he is ready for the next step.

Everything depends upon the way he meets temptation. Parleying is always unsafe. Eve's first mistake was in answering the tempter at all. She ought to have turned instantly away, refusing to listen. When there comes to us a wrong suggestion of any kind, the only wise

and safe thing for us is immediately to shut the door of our heart in its face. To dally is usually to be lost. Our decision should be instant and absolute when temptation offers. The poet gave a fine test of character when he said he would not take for a friend the man who needlessly sets his foot upon a worm. With still greater positiveness should we refuse to accept as a friend one who seeks to throw doubt on God's goodness and love.

When the tempter finds a ready ear for his first approach he is encouraged to go on. In this case, having raised suspicion of the Divine goodness, he went on to question God's veracity. "The serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die." He would not have said this at the first, for the woman would not have listened then to such an accusation against God. But one doubt makes way for another. She listened now, and was not shocked when the tempter went farther and charged God with insincerity.

The tempter still follows the same course with those he would draw away from God. He tells them that what God says about the consequences of disobedience is not true. He tries to make people believe that the soul that sinneth shall not die. He is still going about casting doubt upon God's words and suggesting changes in the reading of the Bible. He even tried to tempt our Saviour by misquoting and perverting Scrip-

ture. He sought to get Him to trust a Divine promise when He had no Divine command to do the thing suggested. We need to be sure of the character of the persons we admit into our lives as friends, advisers, or teachers. Jesus tells us that His sheep know His voice. They know the voice of strangers, too, and will not listen to them, because they will not trust the words of strangers.

The tempter now goes a step farther with the woman. "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil." Instead of dying, as God had said they should, if they ate the forbidden fruit, the devil said the eating of this fruit would open their eyes and make them wondrously wise, even something like God Himself. The tempter talks in just the same way in these modern days. He tells the boys and young men that doing certain things will make them smart and bright. He taunts them also with the ignorance of simple innocence and suggests to them that they ought to see the world. It will make men of them and give them power and influence. There is a great deal of this sort of temptation all the while. A good many people cannot stand the taunt of being religious or of being afraid to do certain things.

The temptation was successful. "When the

woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, . . . she took of the fruit thereof." She listened to the cunning words of the tempter. Curiosity, ambition, and desire all awoke in her. The one prohibited thing in the garden began to shine in such alluring colours that she forgot the good permitted to her. It all seemed dull and poor compared with the imagined sweetness of the fruit they were not allowed to eat. The commandment of God faded out of her mind as she stood listening to the tempter and looking at the forbidden fruit before her. Then, fatal moment! she reached out her hand and took the fruit and the deed was done. We never know what a floodgate of evil and sorrow one little thought or word or act may open, what a river of harm and ruin may flow from it.

When one has yielded to temptation, the next step oftentimes is the tempting of others. "And she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." Milton suggests that it was because of his love for Eve that Adam accepted the fruit from her hand. Since she had fallen, he wished to perish with her. Whatever the reason was for Adam's yielding, we know that the common story is—the tempted and fallen become tempters of others. The corrupted become corrupters of others. One of the blessings of companionship should be mutual help. Mountain climbers tie

themselves together with ropes that the one may support the other. But sometimes one slips and drags the other with him down to death. Companionship may bring ruin instead of blessing.

However pleasant sin may be, when it has been committed a shadow falls over the soul. "The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees." The first thing after sinning is remorse, and then comes the desire to hide from God. There is a story of a young man who entered the house of one who had been his friend, to carry off costly jewels which he knew to be in a certain apartment. He made his way quietly into the room, found the trunk in which the jewels were kept, and opened it. Then glancing up he saw a portrait hanging on the wall—the face of one he had known in years gone, in this house, but who was now dead. The calm, deep eyes of his old companion looking down upon him, witnessing his dark deed, made him tremble. He tried to keep his back to the picture, but he could not hold his gaze away from it. Yet he could not go on with his robbery. The steady looking of the eyes down upon him maddened him. At length he took a knife and cut the eyes from the portrait and then finished his crime. If even human eyes looking down upon us make it impossible for us to commit sins, how much more

terrible is the eye of God to the guilty soul! But it is impossible ever to get away from the presence of God.

While the man and his wife were thus trying to hide, they heard God's voice saying, "Where art thou?" It was not in anger but in love that the Father thus followed His erring children. He sought them that He might save them. It is ever so. God is not to be dreaded even if we have done wrong. We never should flee from Him. He follows us, but it is that He may find us and save us. Conscience is not an enemy but a friend, the voice of God speaking in love. People sometimes wish they could get away altogether from God, could silence His voice; but if this were possible it would be unto the darkness of hopeless ruin.

It is pitiful to read in the narrative how, when asked regarding their sin, the man sought to put the blame on the woman. "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." That is the way oft-times—when a man has done wrong, he blames somebody else. A drunkard said it was his wife's fault, for she was not sociable at home and he went out evenings to find somebody to talk with. A young man fell into sin and said it was the fault of his companion who had tempted him. No doubt a share of guilt lies on the tempter of innocence and inexperience. It is a

fearful thing to influence another to do wrong. Yet temptation does not excuse sin. We should learn that no sin of others in tempting us will ever excuse our sin in yielding. No one can compel us to do wrong. Our sin is always our own.

At once upon the dark cloud breaks the light. No sooner had man fallen than God's thought of redemption appears. "It shall bruise thy head." This fifteenth verse is the *protevangelium*, the first promise of a Saviour. It is very dim and indistinct, a mere glimmering of light on the edge of the darkness. But it was a gospel of hope to our first parents in their sorrow and shame. We understand now its full meaning. It is a star-word as it shines here. A star is but a dim point of light as we see it in the heavens, but we understand that it is really a vast world or centre of a system of worlds. This promise holds in obscure dimness all the glory of all the after-revealings of the Messiah. As we read on in the Old Testament we continually find new unfoldings, fuller revelations, until at length we have the promise fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ.

This story of the first temptation and fall is not the record of one isolated failure at the beginning of the world's history merely—it is a record which may be written into every human biography. It tells us of the fearful danger of

sin, and then of sin's pitiful cost. What a joy it is that on the edge of this story of falling we have the promise of one who should overcome! Now we have the story of one who has overcome, "strong Son of God," who also was tempted, but who did not yield, and now is the Mighty Deliverer. He overcame the world. And in Him we have peace.

CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF CAIN AND ABEL

Read Genesis IV.

CAIN seems to have been the first child born on earth. The coming of the first baby is always an important event in a home, but the birth of the first child in the human family was an event of peculiar importance. Mothers have many dreams and hopes for their babies. The first mother had her dreams. She seems to have been expecting that her son would be the "seed of the woman" referred to in the promise of the bruising of the serpent's head. When she saw the beautiful new-born child, she said joyfully, "I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah."

The mothers will best understand her glad hope, what expectations filled her heart. She forgot the pain of her travail in her joy that a man was born. It is sad to think how this first mother's dreams were disappointed. Instead of becoming a good man, his life an honour to his

parents, he proved a wicked man, who brought sorrow to his home.

At the beginning of the story of the human family we find both good and bad. Two children of the same parents have in their hearts dispositions that differ in every way. They had different tastes, which led them to different occupations. One became a farmer, tilling the soil, and thus providing for his own necessities. The other, with peaceful tastes, became a shepherd.

The two sons differed still more radically in moral character. Cain developed wicked traits. He was energetic, ambitious, resourceful, a man who made his mark in the world, a builder of cities, a leader in civilisation, but a man of bad temper, selfish, morose, cruel, hard, resentful. Abel was quiet, affectionate, patient. The world now would call him easy-going, not disposed to stand up for his rights, meek, allowing others to trample over him and tread him down in the dust. Cain was the kind of man who to-day wins the world's honours, who gets on, grows rich, is enterprising, becomes powerful and rules over his fellows. Abel was the type of man described in the Beatitudes, poor in spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, a peacemaker, unresisting, bearing wrong without complaint, not striving for mastery. Abel was the kind of man that He was who, at the

end of the ages, appeared as the true Seed of the woman, whose heel was bruised by the serpent but bruised the serpent's head, conquering by love.

Both the sons were worshippers of God, though here, too, they differed. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground for his offering and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock. Some suppose that Cain's offering was unfit in itself, inferring that God had already instituted the offering of blood as the only acceptable worship. We do not learn this, however, from the story; we are told only that the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and his offering He had not respect. Then in the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that it was faith in Abel that made his sacrifice more excellent than Cain's. We learn at least that God must be worshipped in the way He has commanded. We learn also that the acceptance of worship depends on the heart of the worshipper. Cain's heart was wrong and Abel's was right. The publican went down to his house justified because of his penitence and sincerity; the Pharisee received no blessing because there was no faith in his prayer. God cares nothing for forms of worship; He looks into the heart and is pleased only when He finds love, faith, and true devotion there.

“Cain was very wroth.” Why was Cain angry?

Was he angry with God for not showing respect to his offering? Did he think God had treated him badly? If the anger was against God, how very foolish it was! What good could it do? It would be most silly for a man to be angry at the waves of the sea, or at the storm, or at the lightning. Would the waves, the tempest, or the thunderbolt mind his rage? It is infinitely more senseless to be angry with God. Or was Cain angry with Abel because he had pleased God while he himself had failed to do so? It seems, however, from the record that he was wroth with Abel. Why? What had Abel done? He had done nothing save that he was a better man than his brother. Was that reason enough why Cain should be angry? Dr. W. L. Watkinson has a chapter in one of his books on "The Sorrows of Superiority." The birds were against one of their number because the colours of heaven streaked her feathers. Superiority always arouses opposition and produces dislike. We must not expect to make ourselves popular by being great or good. "To show your intelligence and discernment is only an indirect way of reproaching others for being dull and incapable. Intellectual ability is felt as a piece of impertinence." It was Abel's favour with God that made Cain hate him. Joseph is another striking example of the same hatred of the good by the bad. It was not his pretty coat that made his brothers so bitter

against him, but that which the coat represented, the superior qualities which had made Joseph the favourite of his father. Envy is a most unworthy passion. It is utterly without reason. It is pure malevolence, revealing the worst spirit. Cain was angry with Abel because he was good.

We must notice, too, the fearful growth of the evil feeling in Cain's heart. It was only a thought at first, but it was admitted into the heart and cherished there. Then it grew until it caused a terrible crime. We learn the danger of cherishing even the smallest beginning of bitterness; we do not know to what it will grow. Some people think lightly of bad temper, laughing at it as a mere harmless weakness; but it is a perilous mood to indulge, and we do not know to what it may lead. In His reproof of Cain the Lord likens his sin to a wild beast lying in hiding by his door, ready to leap on him and devour him. This is true of all sin that is cherished in the heart. It may long lie quiet and seem harmless, but it is only a wild beast sleeping.

There is a story of a man who took a young tiger and resolved to make a pet of it. It moved about his house like a kitten and grew up fond and gentle. For a long time its savage, blood-thirsty nature seemed changed into gentleness and the creature was quiet and harmless. But one day the man was playing with his pet when by accident his hand was scratched and the beast

tasted blood. That one taste aroused all the fierce tiger nature, and the ferocious animal flew on his master to tear him to pieces. So it is with the passions and lusts of the old nature that are only petted and tamed and allowed to stay in the heart. They will crouch at the door in treacherous lurking, and in some unguarded hour they will rise up in all their old ferocity. It is never safe to make pets of tigers. It is never safe to make pets of little sins.

We never know to what envy may grow if we let it stay in our heart. "It came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." That is what came of the passion of envy in Cain's heart. It was left unrebuked, unrepented of, uncrushed, and in time it grew to fearful strength. Then in an evil moment its tiger nature asserted itself. We never know to what terrible maturity a little sin may grow. It was the apostle of love who said, "He that hateth his brother is a murderer." Hatred is a germ which when it grows into its full strength is murder.

We can easily trace the development of this sin in Cain. First, it was only a bitter and hurt feeling as he saw that Abel's sacrifice was more pleasing to God than his own. But by and by in uncontrolled anger Cain rose and smote his brother to death. We need to guard specially against envy. Few sins are more common. One

pupil recites better than another, and the less successful one is tempted to all manner of ugly feelings toward his fellow. Unkind things are said about the scholar who gets along well. Envy is classed among the "seven deadly sins," and one has said that of all these it most disturbs the peace of mankind. "All the curs in the street are ready to fall on the dog that gets away with the bone." "It is the tall cedar, not the tiny box-tree, which will likely be struck by lightning. The sheep that has the most wool is soonest fleeced. Envy follows every successful man as close as his shadow. While David kept his father's sheep at home he might sing sweetly to his harp in the fields without disturbance, but when he comes to court and applause and greatness caress him, malice and spite dog close at his heels wherever he goes." Let us guard against the beginnings of envy.

The Lord asked Cain to account for his brother. "Where is thy brother?" We all are our brother's keepers in a certain sense. In families the members are each other's keepers. Parents are their children's keepers. The older brothers and sisters are the keepers of the younger. Brothers are their sisters' keepers and should be their protectors and benefactors. Sisters are their brothers' keepers and should throw about them all the pure, gentle, holy influences of love. Each one of us is in greater or less degree a keeper of all

who come under his influence. We are certainly each other's keepers in the sense that we are not to kill each other nor to harm each other in any way. We have no right to injure any one, and we are under obligation to do as much good as possible to all about us.

We shall have to account for our influence over each other and for all our opportunities of doing good to others. One of the most significant words in our Lord's parable of the Judgment is that in which the king is represented as saying to those on his left, "I was hungry, and ye did not give me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not." There is no more serious teaching in the Scriptures than this of our responsibility for the lives of others—not for members of our own families only, but for every one who belongs to the human family.

After Cain had committed his crime he thought of its enormity. "What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground." People do not stop to think beforehand of the evil things they are going to do. They are carried away by passion or desire for pleasure, for power, or for gain, and do not see the darkness of the deed they are committing. But when it is done and they turn back to look at it they see it in all its shame and guilt. If

the young man who is tempted to embezzle would go on and look at himself as a convict in prison, his name blackened, his family ruined, would he do the base thing? The experience of Cain ought to teach every one to ask before doing any wrong thing, "What is this that I am going to do?" Sin brings curse. Even the very ground is cursed when remorse is in a man's heart. Even the flowers, the trees, the birds, and all beautiful and innocent things seem to whisper shame and curse to his conscience.

Cain found his burden too great for him to bear. Sin is always a fearful burden. It may seem pleasant at the moment, but afterward the bitterness is intolerable. A man gratifies his passion for the time and exults, but the result is shame, remorse, penalty greater than he can bear. Cain would have given all he had to undo the crime he had committed, but he could not. He could not bring back the life he had destroyed. His dead brother would not answer his cry of grief. Though one suffers from the law no punishment for his sin, he yet bears punishment intolerable in himself. People say they do not believe in a hell of fire, that a God of mercy would not cast His children into such torment. But sin needs no literal flames to make its hell. It brings its torment in itself. It is not that God is cruel—it is sin that is cruel. We cannot blame God for the punishment which our disobedience brings;

we have only ourselves to blame. Some one said in bitterness, "If I were God my heart would break for the world's woe and sorrow." God's heart did break—that is what the Cross meant. Sin is indeed a heavy burden. Many are driven to suicide by remorse. Some become hardened, all tenderness in them having been destroyed. But it will not be until the sinner gets to the next world that he will know all the intolerable burden of his sin and its punishment. Then there will be no escape from the awful load, no hiding for ever, and no getting clear of the terrible burden. In this world there is always a way of escape from sin's punishment. Christ bore the world's sin, and all who flee to Him will have the load lifted off.

CHAPTER IV

THE STORY OF ENOCH

Read Genesis V.

THE history of the world is not told in detail in Genesis. We have only a glimpse here and there of the life of the first days. But a few names are preserved from antediluvian generations. The people seem to have lived long, but not to much purpose. All we learn of most of them is that they lived so many hundreds of years and then died. The good seed seemed to perish in the death of Abel, but Seth was born in his place, and then men began to call upon the name of the Lord.

Some generations passed and in the scant record we come upon one name that shines brightly in the story. "Enoch walked with God after he begat Methusaleh three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: and all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years: and Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."

God and Enoch were good friends. Their relations were intimate and familiar. The meaning is not that God appeared to Enoch in any visible form and walked with him about the country, as a man would walk with his friend. A little child, however, told the story thus. She had been to Sunday School, and when she came home her mother asked her what she had learnt that day. She answered, "Don't you know, mother? we have been learning about a man who used to go for walks with God. His name was Enoch. He used to go for walks with God. And, mother, one day they went for an extra long walk, and they walked on, and on, and on, until God said to Enoch, 'You are a long way from home; you would better just come in and stay.' And he went in."

The child's idea of the story was very beautiful. It was true, too—at least in a spiritual sense. The figure of a walk is used in the Bible many times for the course of life. When men are said to have walked in the ways of the Lord, the meaning is that they lived righteously, keeping God's commandments. When we read that the people walked in the way of Jeroboam, the thought is that they followed him in his idolatry. When it is said that Enoch walked with God, we are to understand that he obeyed God's commandments, so far as they were revealed to him, and that he lived in communion with God.

It was a walk of faith. Enoch did not see God. We do not know how much he knew about God. We must remember that he lived before the Flood, only a few generations from Adam. The race was in its infancy then, and only a few revelations had been made. There was no Bible. It was long before Moses received the commandments in the Mount. But in whatever way and to whatever extent Enoch had been taught about God, he believed. God was as real to him as if He had walked with Enoch in human form.

We all walk with God in a sense all the while. We never can get away from His presence for a moment. He is closer to us than our nearest friend. Wherever we go He walks beside us. But the trouble with many of us is that we do not realise this presence. We never think of it. Faith is that exercise of the mind which makes unseen things real. God was real to Enoch. His walk with God was as real as if he had seen God's face, and heard His voice and felt the touch of His hand.

We may walk with God as consciously and as familiarly as Enoch did if we will. Christ told the disciples He wished to make them His personal friends, opening His heart to them and giving them His full confidence. But how many of us are living in conscious communion with Christ? We sing Bernard's hymn—

“Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.”

But to how many of us are the words really a true expression of experience? We talk a good deal about God, but how many of us are actually walking with God? An eloquent preacher says, “A missing note of the religious life of to-day is that of personal intercourse with the Creator. We are largely dependent on one another for our spiritual experience.” Never have there been so many religious activities in which Christians take part as at present. There are meetings, societies, brotherhoods, unions and all manner of organisations for the promotion of spiritual life and for the winning of men. But is there not a lack of personal communion with God? We are depending more for the quickening of our spirits and for our religious interest and earnestness on outside activities and on the influence of other Christians upon us, than on our own individual intercourse with Christ.

We need to learn anew to walk with God. We need to train ourselves to more personal communion with Christ, to be more alone with Him. We cannot get our religious life second-hand. None of us can give to another what we have received from God in our own communion with Him. The wise virgins could not give of their oil to their

sisters whose lamps were going out and whose vessels were empty. Sometimes it seems to us as we read the story that these virgins were selfish, unkind, ungenerous, in refusing. But the incident is meant to teach that one cannot give the grace of God to another. Each must receive it directly from God for himself. If your friend walks with God and you follow afar off, in his hour of trial or need he will have the comfort and strength he requires ; but in your time of stress you will find your lamp burning low and your vessel empty, and you cannot run to him for what you need. Each must know Christ for himself.

There are many blessings which come to him who walks with God. One is companionship. Human companionship is very sweet and refreshing. It makes the way seem shorter and easier. How could we live without friends ? Dr. Henry van Dyke puts it thus—

“ And who will walk a mile with me
 Along life's weary way ?
 A friend whose heart has eyes to see
 The stars shine out o'er the darkening lea
 And the quiet rest at the end of the day—
 A friend who knows and dares to say
 The brave, sweet words that cheer the way
 Where he walks a mile with me.
 With such a comrade, such a friend,
 I fain would walk till journeys end,
 Through summer sunshine, winter rain—
 And then ? Farewell, we shall meet again,”

We never can be thankful enough for the companionships of our lives. It would be hard to live without our human friends. We need them, and they bring us cheer, comfort, strength, encouragement all along the way. But human companionships, heart-filling as they may be, are not enough. Then they drop away one by one—we know not what morning the dearest and most needed friend shall be missed from our side when we come out to begin our day's walk. What would you have done if the Great Companion had not been beside you that dark day when the human friend you had leaned on so heavily was called away? What will you do when those who now make the journey so pleasant for you slip away and leave you if, when you lift up your eyes through your tears, you do not see the Master still by your side? Then, even with the happiest and gladdest earthly companionship crowding our path, we need God too. Without Him the dearest human love fails to satisfy.

But no words can tell of the joy and the blessing of Divine companionship. Think of the years when Christ walked with His personal friends, what His presence meant to them. And that short story of the Incarnation is not something past, which cannot be realised now. We may have those days over again, each one of us, with all their sweetness and helpfulness. Christ came down to earth, not to stay a few years only and

then leave us, but to stay unto the end and to walk with each one of us all the way home.

Another blessing that comes from walking with God is the transfiguration of our common life. Many of us miss much of the beauty and the glory of life because we do not know that God is with us. Life is all dark and mysterious, sometimes full of sorrow and disaster, when we know nothing of the love of God. But when His love fills our hearts all the world is changed. Even human love coming into a life changes the aspect of all things. Only the other day a young friend came to tell of the coming of love, and the dear face was shining as if a holy lamp of heaven were burning within.

“A little sun, a little rain,
 A soft wind blowing from the west,
 And woods and fields are sweet again,
 And warmth within the mountain's breast.

* * * * *

A little love, a little trust,
 A soft impulse, a sudden dream—
 And life as dry as summer dust
 Is fresher than a mountain stream.”

If human love brings such joy, the love of Christ brings infinitely more.

Enoch's walking with God was not interrupted by the experiences of his life. “Enoch walked with God after he begat Methusaleh three hundred

years and begat sons and daughters." Some people suppose they could continue to walk with God if they were engaged all the time in religious work; but they do not suppose it possible to maintain a life of unbroken communion when they have to be at work in the shop, in the office, or in the kitchen. But the truth is, we may stay near Christ just as easily when at our daily duties as when we are at our devotions. There is a legend of a monk whose great desire was to see Christ and touch the hem of His divinity. At his place he waited, in prayer and penance, before his crucifix. He had vowed that he would see no human face till his prayer was granted. One morning he seemed to hear a voice which told him that his wish would be fulfilled that day. With eager joy he watched. There came a gentle tap upon his door, and the plaintive cry of a child was heard, pleading to be taken in and fed. But the voice of the cold and hungry little one was unheeded. The saint was busy with his devotions, watching for the vision of the Master, and must not be disturbed. The tapers burned low and the monk grew dismayed. Why did not the vision appear? All he heard was—

“Unhappy monk, thou mayest pray for aye:
The answer to thy prayer was sent to-day;
It lingered long, then sobbed and turned away.”

God is quite as sure to come to walk with us in

the doing of some common task of love and kindness as when we pray or sit at our Master's table. George Eliot makēs Adam Bede, the carpenter, say, "God helps us with our head-pieces and our hands as well as with our souls; and if a man does bits o' jobs out o' working hours—builds an oven for's wife, to save her from going to the bakehouse, or scrats at his bit o' garden and makes two potatoes grow instead o' one, he's doing more good, and he's just as near to God, as if he was running after some preacher and a-praying and a-groaning."

To him who is walking with God all life is glorified. Every bush is aflame with divinity. We do not know what we miss when we fail to see the Great Companion who is ever by our side. A little child was going with his mother over the sea. After a little while he asked, "Mother, where is the sea?" His mother said, "Why, we are on the sea. It is all about us." The child replied, "I see the waves, but where is the sea?" So we go through our days, all bright with the shining of God's glory, and ask, "Where is God?" You remember how the disciples, going to Emmaus, talked with the Stranger who walked with them, about Jesus, telling how bitterly they had been disappointed, not knowing, not dreaming, that he who was walking with them was the Master Himself for whom their hearts were breaking. So ofttimes we walk on our ways in life with sadness, crying out for God, asking, "Where is He?"

Where can I find Him?" while all the time He is closer to us than our dearest friends. How a simpler faith would brighten all things for us and reveal the Master to us!

Another blessing from walking with God is a heavenly atmosphere. We know the value of atmosphere even in human friendships and associations. Every one has an atmosphere of his own. With some people we feel ourselves in an atmosphere that is sweet, exhilarating, inspiring. All our life is quickened by their influence. With others we find a depressing atmosphere about us when we enter their presence. Dr. Arnold used to say, "We too much live, as it were, out of God's atmosphere." They used to build observatories in the heart of cities, but it was found that the atmosphere was unsuitable. It was not clear, but was full of smoke and dust which obscured the vision. Now observatories are built on the highest points that can be found, and the air is pure, so that observations can be made without hindrance. God walks always on the high levels, and those who walk with Him must leave the low vales with their fogs and mists and go up to the mountain-tops.

Another blessing from walking with God is the cleansing of our lives. The influence of pure and good companionship is always transforming. John lay on Christ's breast and became like Christ. When two live together in close and

intimate association they grow alike. Intimacy with God can result only in becoming like God.

Sometimes we want to run ahead of God; we cannot wait for Him. "Enoch walked with God." He waited for God—was not impatient when God seemed slower than he wished. We must trust God when He delays to answer our prayers. He knows when to answer.

Then sometimes we hold back when God wants us to move quickly. Walking with God means that we must never parley nor dally when God moves on, but must move promptly, never falling behind.

So let us walk with God wherever He leads us. The way may not be easy, but that is not our matter—our part is only to walk with Him, without question, unfalteringly. He always leads in the right way—He will lead us home.

That was the way He led Enoch. "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." People missed him one day and saw him no more, but he was not lost; God had lifted him over the river of death, so that he missed dying, and had taken him home.

Christian life here is very sweet. It is a glorious thing to walk with God in this world. But only in heaven can we get the whole of anything good begun here. We are going on into that land where all faith's dreams shall be realised, where all love's visions shall be fulfilled. Nothing beautiful shall

be lost. We shall meet our friends on the other side; dying is but parting for a little while. A child, about to fall asleep, threw her wasted arms about her father's neck and said, "Good-night, dear father; I shall see you in the morning." She was right. We only say "Good-night," and in a fairer land we shall say "Good-morning."

CHAPTER V
THE STORY OF THE FLOOD

Read Genesis VI.-IX.

WHATEVER the physical cause of the Flood may have been, the moral cause was sin. This is made clear in the narrative in Genesis. It was because of the wickedness of the people that God determined to destroy the human race. The wickedness hinted at was startling and abnormal. We cannot understand the connection between the Divine judgment and great natural catastrophes like the Flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha. A large question is opened when we begin to think of this matter. What shall we say of storms, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, which often cause great ruin? Must we say that always there is a moral cause? Jesus seems to have forbidden this in His allusion to the falling of the Tower of Siloam. We dare not say that it was sin that directly caused any great catastrophe in ancient or modern history. We can understand

how cholera and yellow fever are the penalties of the violation of the laws of sanitation. But we cannot find any such connection between the sin of the antediluvians and the Flood or between the wickedness of the Cities of the Plain and the rain of fire which destroyed them. In the case of the Flood we may say that it was purely a miraculous visitation, for we have a distinct statement of the fact.

The Flood was a great parable of judgment. The wicked were swept from the earth—not without warning, for ample time was given while the ark was being built. Noah was also a preacher of righteousness. No doubt, like Jonah at Nineveh, he warned the people of the coming destruction and called upon them to repent. But they heeded not the calls to repentance, and the judgment was not stayed.

The ark was not a ship. It was a great vessel built for floating on the water. It had neither sail nor oar nor rudder, and it would seem that it must have been guided in some supernatural way upon the rushing waters. God is always in His world, and He always keeps His eye upon His children and reaches out His hand to protect, to rescue, and to keep His own. During one of the great freshets in the West, a few years since, when the river overflowed its banks and swept houses, barns, outbuildings, and fences on its wild current, some men in a skiff saw a baby's cradle

borne along in the stream. Rowing to it they found in it, sleeping as quietly and sweetly as it had ever slept in its mother's bosom, a little baby. God had cared for it in all the perils of waters. So God cared for Noah's ark in the great flood which swept from the earth all the human race save the one family.

We are not told anything about the experiences with the ark during the long months, or of the way the great, undirected vessel went on its strange voyage. We can think of the life the family lived while shut in those long months. Perhaps they could see a little of what was going on outside—the rising floods, the destruction of lives, the terror and agony of the people who were perishing. Not a word is told of this, however, in the description of the appalling scenes as the waters rose. A modern newspaper writer would have dwelt at length, in graphic fulness of detail, upon the tragic elements of the story, but the Bible narrative has not a word upon this phase of the subject. Nor have we any description of the feelings of Noah and his family, shut in with the heterogeneous mass of animals that were in the ark. We can easily imagine that the life was far from ideal in its comfort and delight. But there must have been a serene sense of safety in the minds of Noah and his household as the huge vessel went quietly on the floods. Yet was there not also a feeling

of distress as the terrible work of judgment went on? The Chaldean account of the Deluge speaks of the sorrow caused by the great calamity. Tears were shed in heaven and consternation was felt there. Noah, when he looked out upon the great sea which had swept all humanity from the earth, sat down and wept. The sense of desolation must indeed have been indescribable. No mention of this is made, however, in the Scriptural account. The Bible tells its story simply, plainly, baldly.

God remembered Noah. He did not forget him for a moment. For a whole year this rescued family were in the ark. For five months the ark was floating about in the waters amid countless perils before it grounded, but it received no hurt. So in all the wildest storms and floods of life God cares for His children. He is Lord of all the forces of nature. Not a drop of water even in angriest billows ever breaks away from the control of the God who is our truest and most loving Friend.

At length the appointed months had all passed. The provisions in the ark were nearly exhausted. The confinement must have grown more and more disagreeable, becoming almost unbearable. The family in the great vessel had been saved, but what was to be the end? We are not given any hint of the feelings of the imprisoned household during the long months. At length, however, the time of release drew near. The waters subsided

and at last were dried up. Noah and his family must have been happy when they left the ark. They went out at God's command. The earth had been cleansed of its sin. All the works of men had been swept away.

Noah's family were now the only human beings left. They were to begin life in the new. We can think of the feelings of the little company as they went out of the ark and stood once more on the dry ground. They had been spared from the universal destruction and they were grateful. They had been spared for a purpose, too—to start the human race again on a new plane. They must have felt a deep sense of responsibility as they stepped out and remembered that it was theirs now to possess the renovated earth for the God who had spared them for this very purpose. They were now to lead in a new trial of the human race. What would they make of the world which was now committed to them?

They began right. "Noah builded an altar unto the Lord . . . and offered burnt offerings on the altar." Several things were implied in this devout act. It expressed Noah's gratitude to God for the great deliverance he and his family had experienced. It put God first in the new life on which they were now to enter. They acknowledged Him as their God. It was a devotion and a consecration of Noah and his family to God. They really laid themselves upon the altar, their

lives, their hopes, their hearts. Then it was the taking possession of the renewed earth for God, as when the discoverer of a new land hoists the flag of his country and claims the territory for his Government. It was a fit beginning of the new life they were to live. The race which had perished had desecrated the earth with their sins, and now this little company of redeemed ones were pledging themselves to keep the earth clean.

This pious act of Noah has its suggestions also for us. After every deliverance from trouble, from danger, from sickness, from any trial, and after rising from our bed each morning, we should first of all thank God for His mercy. To Him we are indebted for every comfort, every blessing, and we should never fail to express our gratitude. Are we thoughtful as we ought to be in thus recording our gratitude to Him from whom all our blessings come? We, too, should put God first in every new work or effort we make, in every plan, transaction, and undertaking, and at the opening of every new day. "In the beginning God" should be the motto of all our life. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" is our Master's summing up of all practical duty. "Acknowledge Him in all thy ways, and He shall direct thy paths" is an inspiring rule of life with a wonderful promise added. We should renew our consecration to God at each new begin-

ning. But are there not many who never think of God, nor give Him any honour anywhere, at any time in their lives?

We should claim for God all that our feet stand upon. We are sent out by Christ to conquer the world for Him. Every advance we make, every gain of influence, every new success and prosperity we should take possession of for our King.

God is glad to have us recognise and confess Him. It would have grieved Him if Noah had come out of the ark after His great deliverance, set up his home, taking possession of the fields, and begun his work of tillage and building, with no word of thanks, no honouring of Him who had brought him through the terrible dangers. But Noah devoutly recognised the Divine hand, and God was pleased and accepted the homage and the offering. "The Lord smelled the sweet savour." He was pleased with Noah's sacrifice. The Arabs say that in heaven an angel stands to receive earth's prayers and devotions, and that as they come up they are changed in his hands into fragrant flowers. In the ancient worship incense was the emblem of prayer, and as the incense burned upon the fire it gave out sweet odours. True worship is fragrant to God. He smells a sweet savour.

The Lord then made a covenant with Noah, saying, "I will not again curse the ground any

more for man's sake, for that the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every living thing, as I have done." We live now under the benison of this covenant and promise that no more will the Lord smite every living thing, and that "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

This promise must have been a great comfort to Noah and his family as they stood there and looked upon a desolated earth. Terrible had been the experiences through which they had passed. There must have been in their hearts a dread that this catastrophe might be repeated. But here was the promise of God that it should never be. "Neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of the flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth." As the little company of saved ones stood there, this assurance must have been a great comfort to them. Ever since that day, too, this same word has been a ground of confidence to the dwellers on the earth. Floods have left devastation in many places, but there has always been the abiding assurance of a "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" as this ancient covenant has been remembered.

This Divine word is another illustration of the

truth that all nature's forces are under the control of God. He gathers and holds the winds of heaven in His fists. The waters He measures in the hollow of His hand. The Scriptures everywhere represent God as thus directly holding and controlling all the powers of nature, so that no tremendous energy of the elements can ever break from His grasp or go a hair's breadth beyond the bounds He sets for it. Science now explains so many things which devout people in the past have loved to look upon as the very acts of God, that some have begun to wonder whether, after all, our Father really has anything to do with nature. But what is nature? It is all God's handiwork. What are the "laws of nature"? They are nothing but God's ways of working. The powers that work so mightily in earth and air God put there. Can these powers be greater than He who lodged them in His works? We need never fear that any scientific discovery shall show us a world beyond the control of God. We know, too, as Christians, that the God who made all and controls all is our Father, and we are sure that we shall be securely sheltered and guarded in every danger.

The blessing of God maketh rich. He accepted the consecration of Noah and his family and then sent them out to possess the new earth for Him. They were to replenish it, starting a new human family that should be holy and pure. They were

also given authority over the beasts, the fowls of the air, the fish of the sea, and over all life. It is a beautiful thought, that God's covenant with Noah included every living creature. It is strange how God's care extends even to the beasts. Think of God making a covenant with the cattle that roam the valleys, the sheep that graze in the meadows, the birds that fly in the air, and even with the insects that chirp in the fields. We know, too, that this care is real. There are promises in other parts of the Bible which contain the same assurance.

“He giveth to the beast his food,
And to the young ravens which cry.”
“He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle.”

Then our Lord said, “Consider the ravens, that they sow not, neither reap; which have no store-chamber, nor barn; and God feedeth them.” There is a promise even for the flowers. “Consider the lilies, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin.” Yet God clothes them, our Lord says. One writes—

“In the thickest wild, in woodland bowers,
By the wayside everywhere,
The plainest flower of all the flowers
Is shining with Thy care.”

Of course the lesson for us from all this is the one which Jesus taught. If God cares for

birds and flowers, how much more will He care for His own dear children.

God deals with His children in a most simple and gracious way. We see it in His gentleness to Noah and his family after they left the ark. After their terrible experience they would naturally be in dread every time there was a continuous rain. But God assured them that He never would again destroy the earth with a flood. Then, to make their confidence still stronger, He made the rainbow, which probably was then appearing, to be a seal or pledge of His promise. "The bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature."

It is a beautiful thought that God allows Himself to be reminded of His covenant. He says that when He sees the bow in the cloud He will remember His covenant. Every time we see a rainbow we can look at it and think that God is looking at it at the same time and is remembering His ancient promise. The Lord's Supper is another beautiful token of a Divine covenant. Christ wants us to receive it and by it to be reminded of His love and sacrifice and of His blessed covenant of redemption. It thus becomes to us a pledge that all His promises will be sacredly fulfilled. It is a sweet thought that Christ as He looks upon the same emblems

also remembers—thinks of us and of His own covenant of love. Of course all this, as applied to God, is but an adaptation to human forms of expression. God never forgets. He never needs to be reminded of His promises. He requires no mementoes or memorials to make Him faithful. But His condescension to our manner of human thought, so as to make His love the more real to us, is very gracious.

CHAPTER VI

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

Read Genesis XII. 1-10

THE purpose of the Bible is not to give the history of the human race, but to tell the story of redemption. In a sense this begins with Abraham. No doubt there always were good men in the world, although the number of them at times may have been very small. The Flood left only one family for a new beginning of the race, but the new earth did not continue pure and holy. Even Noah, whose life had so pleased God by its righteousness, that he had been spared from the destruction of the race, did not close his career without stain. The story of his fall is a sad one. The spectacle of such a man lying drunk on the floor is most pitiful.

Again the race multiplied and the people swarmed everywhere. The tenth chapter of Genesis tells us of the races that sprang from Noah's three sons and their distribution over the

earth. The story of Babel seems to indicate a Divine overthrow of a great human revolt, an attempt to establish a universal kingdom. The confounding of tongues, in some way not explained, led to the scattering of the people into different portions of the world. It seems to have been a judgment, and perhaps was regarded as a calamity, but no doubt proved to be one of those great providences which mean so much in human history.

From this time the Scripture narrative narrows to the family of Shem, and in this family to the story of one man—Abraham. We are not told of any great supernatural events or experiences in Abraham's life. He lived in Ur of the Chaldees. His people were idolaters. Perhaps Abraham himself as a young man worshipped idols. Tradition has interesting stories of his early struggles with idolatry.

We are told that the Lord commanded Abraham to get out of his country and away from his kindred and his father's house to a land which would be shown to him. We are not told how this Divine call came to Abraham. Was there a theophany, an appearance of God in a human form, such as afterwards occurred before the destruction of Sodom? Or did God come to Abraham in some strange vision, as later he came to Jacob at Bethel or at Jabbok, or to Moses in the burning bush?

We are not told how it was that the Lord gave His message to Abraham. It may have been in some quiet way, with no display of supernatural brightness, with nothing marked or unusual. We are in danger of letting ourselves suppose that when God comes to us He comes always in some startling way, while the truth is that He nearly always comes in common ways. Once He appeared in a bush that burned with fire, but evermore He comes in bushes which are not burning, and we do not see Him and go on with our irreverence, keeping on our shoes.

When Philip said to Jesus, "Show us the Father," he was craving a display of glory, like a Sinai or a Transfiguration. Jesus told him He had been showing Him the Father every day for two or three years. He referred to His own life of kindness, mercy, love, and holiness. Jesus Himself was God manifest in the flesh. It is always so. There is not a day when God does not come to us and show us the splendour of His glory in some sweet human kindness, in some gentle thoughtfulness that is full of Divine beauty and grace, in some deed of unselfishness that is a thousand times more dazzling in angels' eyes than was the fire on Sinai.

Let us not get the impression that God does not appear to men in these days because He does not seem to come to them as He came to the boy Samuel in his sleep, or as He came to

Gideon in the threshing-floor. He is always coming to men. Let us not conclude that God does not any more call us to new duties, to great tasks, to heroic missions, because He does not speak in a loud voice, or deliver His message in some startling way. The world is just as full of God to-day as it was in Bible days. We do not know how God called Abraham. We know only that He called him, and Abraham was sure that He called him.

In some way it became clear to Abraham that there was only one God. Everybody else believed there were many gods. How this truth of one God came to Abraham we are not told. The conviction may have grown gradually and slowly. Jewish tradition, however, represents the patriarch as faithful to Jehovah from his childhood. One story says that he lived in early boyhood in a cave and did not come out of it until he was a growing lad. "When he first left it," says the legend, "looking up at the heavens over him, and round about him upon the earth, he began to think, 'Who could have made all this?'" Presently, the sun rose in splendour, and he thought it must be the Maker of the universe, and cast himself down before it and worshipped the whole day. But when evening came the sun sank out of sight, and Abraham said it could not be the Creator of all or it would not set. Then the moon rose in the east and the count-

less army of stars came forth. 'Surely the moon is the Lord of all and the stars are the host of His servants,' cried Abraham, and, bowing himself before the moon, he worshipped it. But the moon went down, the light of the stars faded, and the sun appeared again on the edge of the sky. Then he said, 'Truly all these heavenly bodies together could not have created the universe; they listen to the voice of an Unseen Ruler, to whom all things owe their being. Him alone will I henceforward worship; before Him alone will I henceforward bow.'

In whatever way the Divine command came to Abraham, the call was clear, explicit, and positive. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee." It was a call to separation. Abraham was living among idolaters and he must go out from the midst of them. His own family were idolaters and he must leave them. It was also a call to sacrifice. He must give up his country and his possessions. All true life must be sacrificial. It costs to live worthily. Jesus required His followers to leave their homes, their business, their property. All Christian growth is by abandonment, by giving up, by forgetting the things that are behind and reaching forth to things that are before. We must sacrifice earthly things if we would gain things that are heavenly. The student who would win the honours of

scholarship must forego many self-indulgences. The Christian who would attain the highest things in spiritual life and achievement must sacrifice many pleasures and amusements which in themselves may not be morally wrong, but which cannot be indulged in if he is going to do his best as a follower of his Master.

Too many people who want to be Christians do not heed this call to get out of their country and from their kindred. They want to have the blessings and the comforts of Christian life without giving up the associations, the friendships, the gains, and the enjoyments of the world. Perhaps it is this that ails the Church in these days. It does not have the power from on high because it does not give up the present world.

Abraham was called also to a life of faith. He had at first no promise of a definite country that would be given to him in place of the country he was commanded to leave. It was only "the land that I will show thee." Some people are disappointed when they do not find in the Christian life the worldly prosperity and the temporal good they desired. The fact is that Abraham never received a country of his own in place of the one he gave up. He was never anything but a pilgrim. Later Canaan was promised to him, but he did not himself receive it. He had to purchase and pay for the little plot of it he needed for a burying-place

for his family. Those who are called to follow Christ are promised an inheritance. They are told that they are heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, that all things are theirs. Yet many of them never receive much of this world.

We too are called to a life of faith. God has a land in waiting for us—a land that He will show us. But it is not earthly acres, houses, money, books, riches, ease, honour, power. We may be called to give up all of this world in going with Christ and may never receive any earthly reward. But we will receive Christ and all spiritual blessing and good here, and then in the end eternal life.

The Lord promised to make Abraham the father of a great posterity—"I will make thee a great nation." This promise was fulfilled. No name in all history compares with Abraham's in honour, in influence, in greatness. Not only is he revered by the Jewish people; he is also the father of a great spiritual seed, including all who call themselves Christians. Then millions of Mohammedans call him their father.

Not only was Abraham to be great himself if he would obey God's call; he would also become a blessing to countless multitudes. This is always the law of spiritual life—blessed to be a blessing. This is God's offer and message to all of us. He wants to bless us, and then He

wants us to be a blessing to others. When He would bless a little child He puts a gift of love into a mother's heart. When He would bless a class of young people or children He sends a teacher full of warm sympathy and earnest interest in souls. When He would bless a community he raises up a good man and touches his heart, that he may scatter benefits among the people.

Always, too, when God blesses us with gifts of whatever kind, He wants us to be a blessing to others. Nothing that we have is ours for ourselves alone; we receive that we may dispense again. When God gives any one money, He intends him to use it to be a blessing to the world. When God bestows upon any one the gift of song, or of eloquence, or the artist's power, He desires these gifts to be used to make men better and happier. Our lives should all be both blessed and a blessing. We should never live for ourselves. We should seek always to live so as to make the world better, purer, happier, sweeter. We need God, and God needs us in order to reach others with His grace and goodness. He would bless others through us. If we fail we check the flow of God's blessing to others.

The Lord extended the promise so that all who were friendly to Abraham would also receive a Divine blessing. "I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse." It is

wonderful how God makes common cause with His people. It is a perilous thing to lift a hand against any of God's people, for he who does so lifts his hand against God. Christ says the same of His followers. To be kind to one of His is to be kind to Him. To harm a Christian is to harm Christ. To neglect a suffering Christian is the same as if Christ Himself were suffering and we neglected Him. We need to beware that we never do injury of any kind to the least of Christ's little ones. On the other hand, all kindness done to a friend of Christ in His name is done to Christ Himself, and is rewarded accordingly. Even the giving of a cup of cold water to a disciple of His does not go without reward.

Abraham believed God and at once obeyed the call that had come to him. "Abraham went as the Lord had spoken." He did not know where he was going, or what country was to be given to him; he had simply the call of God and the promise. But he asked no questions. He did not insist on knowing how his journey would come out, how profitable it would be, and just what he would get in exchange for the land he was leaving. Quietly, without doubt or hesitation, and without question or assurance of anything to come, he rose and cut the ties that bound him to his old home, and was off. That is the kind of faith all of us should have whenever God calls us.

Some people insist upon seeing where they are

going before they will follow Christ. But that is not walking by faith. We should not trouble ourselves to know where we are to be led if only we know that God has us by the hand. We do not need to know what lies over the hill if God is leading us. His guidance is safe, and we should be willing to trust Him and to do precisely what He says, and go just where He leads, without asking any questions. Abraham's life is a picture of a true walk with God.

Having left Ur, Abraham stopped for a time in Haran. His father was feeble and probably unable to travel, and he tarried at Haran until the end came. Haran was only half way to the land of promise. There is a pathetic suggestion in the fact that Terah died there. The old man's eyes never looked on the land of promise. Probably when the company of emigrants reached Haran his feeble strength gave out and he could go no farther. The whole party then had to wait and watch beside the old man until he died and was buried. He had started too late on the long journey. There is a lesson here for the old, that they should not defer too long any good thing they think of doing, any kindness they would show, any piece of work they would do. An old man with trembling hands planted a tree before his door. He said he wanted to enjoy its shade. But long before the tree had grown

to strength so that it could cast a shade, the old man was in his grave. He planted the tree too late.

Abraham never settled down anywhere in this land of promise. He "passed through the land." That was all he ever did. He never stayed long anywhere. Abraham's pilgrim life in Canaan illustrates what every Christian life should be in this world, a journey through it and not a settling down in it. We should be in the world, for we owe duties to it; we have blessings in our hands for it; but we are not of the world and should never allow the world to possess us or engross us. However, that is not the way most people like to live in this world. They would rather settle down and have their permanent possessions here. Still the Bible idea of a life of faith is not to take deep root anywhere here, but to look forward for our true and real home, regarding this life merely as a pilgrimage to it.

God promised the country to Abraham's family after him. "Unto thy seed will I give this land." He would not get it himself, but his children should possess it. The same history is being repeated continually. Parents toil, suffer, and wait, and do not themselves get the reward of their services and sacrifices. They die without seeing the blessings for which they have wrought. Then their children reap the fruit of their parents' sowing and tears. Thousands who live now in

ease and luxury are enjoying the good for which their parents toiled, but in vain. We do not always remember what we owe to those who have gone before us. Sometimes a fashionable and wealthy woman is almost ashamed of her old-fashioned father and mother; but she ought to remember that it is because they worked hard and saved carefully that she is what she is and has what she has to-day.

The artist was making a picture of an old mother who had passed away, using a photograph as a model. He proposed leaving out some of the lines in the photograph, that the picture might be fresher and fairer. But the son said, "No, no; do not take out one of the lines. It wouldn't be my mother if one of them were wanting." Then he told the story of the mother's toils, sacrifices, and sufferings for her children, how she had nursed them in diphtheria, how she had gone without even the necessaries of life that they might not hunger and might not want anything. The lines and wrinkles on the old face told the story of the mother's holy love and were sacred. Every one of them must stay in the picture.

Wherever Abraham went he took God with him. "There builded he an altar unto the Lord." It is good to mark the bright spots in our path, especially where God appears to us. We ought to mark our red-letter days so as not to forget them. Some people are a great deal more apt

to remember their sad days than their bright days. We do not forget the days of our troubles—when the baby died, when we lost the money, when we had the long sickness, when we met the sore misfortune; but we very often forget the date of the great joy, the rich blessing, or the Divine help. The best way to mark these bright places is by some act of homage towards God.

CHAPTER VII

ABRAHAM AND LOT

Read Genesis XII. 10-20, XIII.

THE story begins in Egypt. How did it happen that Abraham was there? Why had he left his promised land? We have the account in full. There was a famine in Canaan. Even the good, living under the Divine guidance, do not have unbroken prosperity. The child of God is not promised exemption from the trials of life; his promise is, grace to meet every hard experience, strength to endure, Divine protection and provision. A famine was a great calamity to Abraham with his flocks and herds. What should he do? In his distress he went to Egypt and there found, no doubt, rich pastures. It is quite certain, however, that he did wrong in fleeing to Egypt in his need. At least there is no record of his asking counsel of God in his trouble, or of his being divinely sent there. It seems to have been a lack of faith that made him turn away from his own land in time of

distress to find provision in a heathen country. A like mistake is made oftentimes by Christian people in modern days. They take the care of their life into their own hands rather than trust it in God's hands. In time of need or trial they have recourse to earthly sources of supply rather than to God. God's call is not always to unbroken prosperity, but it is always a call to truth and righteousness. We must do right whatever our dilemma may be.

Another sad thing resulted from this flight into Egypt. An oak-tree was once shattered by lightning, and in its hollow trunk was found a skeleton with some old military buttons and a pocketbook. The latter bore some pencil scratches, which, when deciphered, told that a soldier, fleeing from the Indians, had jumped into an open cavity where the tree-top was broken off. To his terror, the tree was hollow to the root, and he fell to the bottom, and there, hopelessly imprisoned, he died. His refuge proved worse than the terrors from which he fled. So it is to those who look to the world for shelter. Thus Abraham found it in Egypt. He got entangled in the world's nets and did things that were not right.

He feared that some of the Egyptians might take a fancy to his wife and put him out of the way to get her. So he resorted to falsehood to save himself. The result was a predicament from which he had great trouble in extricating himself, and from which he came with dishonour. We

may learn from Abraham's experience that a lie is never necessary nor justifiable to save us from any danger. God does not need any of our fabrications in protecting us. Truth is the only safety in any case.

No doubt Abraham left Egypt wiser, stronger, and firmer in his hold upon the Divine covenant. He "went up out of Egypt." He went at once after escaping from his wretched entanglement with Egyptian authority. The narrative says he "went up." It was up in more ways than one—from a low moral plane to the higher planes of sturdy heroism and obedience to the truth.

It is said that when Abraham returned he went at once to "the place of the altar, which was there at the first; and there Abraham called on the name of the Lord." The language seems to indicate the thoroughness of his repentance—back to where he first began. Then he called upon God, which indicates possibly that he had not been calling upon God of late, but had been taking his own course. Our repentance when we have sinned should be complete; we should never stop half way. And if we have been leaving God out of our life at any time, we cannot get right again until we have gone back to His altar and started in the new.

God's favour was restored to Abraham when he returned. He continued to prosper. He grew very rich. But riches do not insure one ease or

worldly comfort. Indeed, cares multiply as wealth increases. The Hebrew word for riches means "heavy." Riches oftentimes prove to be a very heavy load indeed. Sometimes in shipwrecks men have tried to carry their gold away with them, but it was so heavy that it sank them to the bottom of the sea. Many are dragged down into the deep sea of perdition by the money which they gather into their pockets.

Riches oftentimes interfere with friendship. We are told in this story of a strife caused by wealth. "There was a strife between the herdmen of Abraham's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle." Lot was Abraham's nephew. He had joined his uncle when he migrated from Ur. He too had been greatly prospered. The flocks and herds of the two men had become so vast that they spread over all the land. There was not room enough for both of them, with all their possessions, in the same neighbourhood. So here we see something of the evil of great wealth. It kindles jealousy and strife between men. Too often riches make men greedy and selfish. They learn to think only of themselves and their own enrichment, and do not remember that others have the same right to prosper. They forget St. Paul's counsel that men should think of each other's good, preferring one another in love, and then strife follows.

This is a good place to take a lesson on the sin and unbeauty of quarrelling. One of the aims of

Christianity is to teach men the art of living together peaceably. Love is the ideal of the true and beautiful life our Lord wishes us to live. Love suffers long and is kind. Love doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked. We may well give heed to Abraham's beseeching. "Let there be no strife . . . between me and thee, . . . for we are brethren." Strife anywhere between any persons is wrong and very foolish, but strife between members of the same family is exceedingly unchristian. The lesson applies not to members of the same families only, but to Christians. We should live together in love.

One of the reasons here given by Abraham why there should be no strife between him and Lot was that "the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land." Nothing would have pleased these heathen tribes better than a bitter quarrel between Abraham and Lot. Nothing pleases the world better than to see Christians quarrelling among themselves. It gives the world an opportunity, with apparent good reason, to sneer at piety. Then it hinders the progress of Christianity. A quarrel in one Church in a community destroys more good than all the other Churches in the community can accomplish. The newspapers eagerly spread the scandal, and evil men gloat over it. Nothing harms religion more than strife among its adherents. We remember that in our Lord's great intercessory prayer it was from discord and division

that He asked God to keep His disciples—"that they all may be one." The Canaanite and the Perizzite are still in the land where we dwell, with keen eye for all inconsistencies in the followers of the Master. We must walk in love and thus prove the reality and the beauty of the Christian life.

It is oftentimes better, no doubt, for people not to attempt to live together in close and intimate relations if they cannot live peaceably. "Separate, that friendship may remain," says an old writer. This was Abraham's suggestion to Lot: "Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me." In making this suggestion Abraham also showed his unselfish generosity, for although he had the first right he gave Lot his choice. This is what the true Christian spirit always inspires one to do. Some people are forever haggling about their rights. If they had been in Abraham's place they would have said to Lot, "If you cannot get along peaceably here alongside of me, you can go elsewhere. This is my country, and I am going to stay here." But Abraham showed a much nobler spirit. He did not want to quarrel—he would not quarrel. He was illustrating two thousand years in advance St. Paul's counsel, "If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men." He was willing to secure peace by giving up his own rights and yielding to those of Lot. We should always be ready to yield our own rights rather than quarrel.

If all people were like this old patriarch there would be no quarrels or contentions, and no need for courts to settle disputes between man and man.

When Abraham had manifested his noble generosity in offering Lot his choice, Lot revealed the selfishness of his heart by grabbing the best. Lot ought to have modestly but firmly said, "I cannot consent to take my choice. This land is yours—God has given it all to you. I am only accompanying you and through your kindness sharing the blessing that is yours. Do you choose the portion that you would have, and allot to me the part of the land, whatever it is, in which you would have me to live." But Lot did not have in him a generous or even a just feeling. He never thought of declining Abraham's great-hearted kindness. He was greedy and quickly accepted the opportunity to get the best. "Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan."

There are several things about this choice which reveal the man who made it. It was a most selfish choice. Abraham had generously offered Lot his choice of the land, and Lot deliberately selected the richest and best, forgetting that he owed all his prosperity to Abraham. The Christian teaching is not to seize the best, even if we seem to have a right to the best. George Macdonald says somewhere that the finest thing about rights is that, being our own, we can give them up if we wish. Jesus teaches us not to pick out the best places at a

feast, but to take humble seats. Lot was selfish, and selfishness is never beautiful. We will always be ashamed of it when we see our acts in their true light.

Then Lot's choice was also worldly. He saw that the Jordan valley was the richest spot in all that region, and he asked no further questions about it. He made no inquiry about its moral character, or if he did he was not influenced when he had learned of the wickedness of the people in the Plain. He would find there the best pasture for his flocks, gather the richest harvests, and would soon grow rich. He looked no farther. No doubt he knew the character of the people in the valley—that they were very wicked. But he overlooked this fact, saw only the fertile valley and rich pasture lands, giving no thought to the terrible moral corruption of the people who would be his neighbours. As we read on in the story we shall see the full result of the worldly choice which Lot made.

Abraham seemed to have accepted a disadvantage when he allowed Lot to take the richest part of the country; but when we look at the two men's possessions in the light of Divine teaching we see that the advantage was really Abraham's. "Abraham dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot . . . moved his tent as far as Sodom." No doubt Abraham's portion was less fertile than Lot's; but fertility is not all. Lot went down into his chosen

valley and pitched his tent toward Sodom. That is, he kept moving nearer and nearer to the wicked city. The next thing we hear of him he is in the city; then he is one of its chief men, for we find him sitting in the gate. We shall see a little later what his worldly choice cost him in the end. There came a time when he had to flee from the condemned city, losing all he had, barely escaping with his life, and even then smirched with the pollution of the foul place. It is not safe to pitch one's tent toward Sodom. We would better live on the barest hills and work like slaves to earn our bread.

After Lot had made his choice, taking for his own the richest portion of the land, God appeared to Abraham and renewed to him the promise of great blessing. In this vision Abraham was given a glimpse of the advantages that were in the rougher, less fertile portion that was left to him. He had God with him, God's favour. He received from God promises of great future blessing—a seed like the dust of the earth for multitude, and an influence reaching over the whole world and through all time. It is better to have a rocky farm and God, than to have the valley of Sodom with God wanting.

CHAPTER VIII

GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

Read Genesis XIV., XV.

LOT had made a "good thing of it," as men say, in getting for his own such a rich section of the land. No doubt he congratulated himself on his fine fortune. We are not told whether he showed any gratitude toward Abraham, or whether he was one of those men who take all they can get, thanking neither God nor their fellow-man for any favour. There is need for cultivating a spirit of gratitude towards those who are kind to us and do things for us.

Soon, however, Lot found himself in trouble. He had pitched his tent in the neighbourhood of Sodom, and one day there was great consternation in the valley when it was reported that Chedor-laomer and his army were advancing over the hills with an irresistible force of warriors. The kings of the cities of the Plain were defeated in battle, their people were carried away as captives, and

their goods as spoil. Among those taken was Lot with his family and his possessions. Perhaps Lot began to see now the mistake he had made. His misfortune had come through his worldly choice.

News of the disaster soon reached Abraham, in his safe place among the hills. Probably he would not have felt called upon to attempt the rescue of the people of Sodom ; but when he heard that his nephew was taken captive he assembled his men and pursued the enemy, and brought back Lot and his goods and also the people of Sodom who had been carried away.

Some men, after having been treated as Abraham had been by Lot, would not have felt called upon to do anything to rescue him, but Abraham, with his large-heartedness, instantly forgot Lot's selfishness toward him and treated him as a brother. We would say that Lot would be lavish in his gratitude to Abraham for rescuing him, but we have no record of a word of thanks from him. The king of Sodom showed his gratitude to Abraham for bringing back his people, but no mention is made of Lot coming to say how thankful he was. Men who do injustice to you or treat you unkindly are the last to show gratitude to you for kindnesses you may do.

Abraham seems to have been afraid after his attack upon Chedorlaomer. He had been easily successful, but he knew that the men he had defeated would probably return to seek revenge.

He did not want to become embroiled with them. In this time, therefore, when he was afraid, God came to him to reassure and comfort him: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield." He did not say He would prepare a shield for Abraham, He said He would be his shield. We need never be afraid of any danger if we are obeying God and living faithfully. He who would do us harm must first smite down God who is our shield.

But there was something else that was causing anxiety to Abraham besides the danger from the hordes of the mountains. A great promise had been given to him, the promise of an abounding posterity, but as yet he had no child. "O Lord Jehovah, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless?" God comes now to comfort him in this great hunger of his heart.

It is interesting to notice the patience and kindness of the Lord in the way He sought now to encourage Abraham. "He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven." It is always a good thing to get people to look toward heaven. God likes to point us there, especially when we are discouraged, for He loves to be an encourager. There is always a bright outlook heavenward, however dark it may be on the earth. There always are stars shining there though clouds may be all about us where we stand. Heaven is a place of hope. God is there, glory and home are there. We should train ourselves to look up and not down.

The heart follows the eyes, and if we accustom ourselves to keep our eyes toward the earth, we shall grow to care only for earthly things ; but if we look up, our life will grow upward, our affections will be fixed on things above, and we shall have our treasure in heaven.

The stars became an object-lesson that night in the Lord's teaching, in helping Abraham to realise the numberlessness of his posterity as God saw it in the future. "Number the stars, if thou be able to number them . . . so shall thy seed be." Once before God had given Abraham a similar promise, using then the dust under his feet as a measure of computation. Whenever he looked down at the ground he would think of God's promise and of the countless family that was assured to him. But now God gave him another sign. This time he pointed him to the heavens. His seed should be as the stars. The stars suggest radiancy, glory. He bade Abraham count them. Modern science makes this promise mean very much more than it did to Abraham. It is said that only five or six thousand stars are visible to the unaided eye, but with a modern telescope there are millions and millions—eighteen million stars, astronomers tell us, in the zone called the Milky Way alone. The promise, therefore, was far greater than Abraham himself knew.

Abraham's response to the Lord's assurance shows a childlike trust. "He believed Jehovah ;

and he reckoned it to him for righteousness." The Hebrew word for believed is very strong. It means that Abraham reposed upon God's word of promise as a child nestles in a mother's arms. It is a wonderful picture of faith. That is what faith in God should always be—a lying down in God's bosom, a resting upon God in deep confidence. There was no human reason for expecting that Abraham should have such a posterity. He was growing old and had no child. Yet God assured him that he should have a seed countless as the stars, and Abraham believed God's word, without question. He would not perplex himself about the time or the way the promise would be fulfilled, but would simply rest upon God, lean upon Him, trust Him, and leave all to His loving wisdom. There was no more doubting on Abraham's part after this.

This is the kind of faith that pleases God. It is what Christ would have us exercise in Him. We cannot see Him, but we may trust Him, because He has assured us that if we believe in Him He will save us, bless and use us, and bring us at last home to glory. He would have us repose upon His promises and trust our life, for time and for eternity, absolutely in His hands. Such faith is imputed for righteousness.

We need to think carefully of the importance of faith. In these days the whole force of Christian teaching is toward activity. The followers of

Christ are urged to be instant in season and out of season in the work of their Master. These are great missionary days. Christians are awaking as never before to the duty of carrying the gospel to all lands, to every creature. Those who are taking no part in this work are not fulfilling their Lord's will and command. Young believers are taught to take up at once some work in the Church. It is here that all Christian teaching focuses.

And there is nothing amiss in thus putting the emphasis on service. We must show our faith in our works. If we believe on Christ we must devote ourselves without reserve to His service. If the world is to be won for Christ every one who is Christ's friend must do his part. Nevertheless it is important that we keep ever in mind the truth that without faith it is impossible to please God, that we are justified by faith, that it is only through faith we are united to Christ and receive power for life and service. Abraham was simply to believe God—that was all. He had nothing whatever to do with the fulfilment of the promises. Nor have we. Faith links us to God, our littleness to His almightiness, and then He does the work—not He without us, certainly never we without Him, but He in us and through us. Let us get a fresh vision of the meaning and importance of faith. The sublimest measure of work without faith will accomplish nothing.

The Lord then said that His plan for Abraham's future would not fail. "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur . . . to give thee this land." God had had a plan for Abraham's life from the beginning. When He called him from his old heathen home, He had all his future in His thought. He intended then to give Canaan to his seed. God has a plan for every life. There is something He wants each one of us to do, something He made us to do, a place we are born to fill. St. Paul puts this in a wonderful way when he says, "Whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, . . . and whom He foreordained, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also glorified." God has a glorious plan for the life of every one He calls from sin. Those who, like Abraham, listen to His call and leave all to follow Him, at last receive the inheritance of eternal life. Those who despise the call and stay in their sins miss all this glorious destiny which might have been theirs, which was offered to them and rejected.

Abraham asked for some token that the promise would be fulfilled. "Whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" We all like to have tokens of love from our friends though we never for one moment doubt their affection. When friends are called to separate for a time they sometimes exchange gifts. A gift is not only a pledge,

but is also a constant reminder, in absence, of the loved one who is ever faithful and true. A young man was going abroad for a long journey, and when he was about to leave home his father gave him a watch, bearing upon the dial plate the miniature pictures of both his parents. He asked his son to carry the watch on all his journey, and every time he looked at it he would think of the faithful, tender love at home. The young man would never have doubted this love, though he had carried no token of it; yet this pledge made the love seem more real and was a great comfort to him when far away from home. The Lord's Supper is a similar pledge from Christ to every Christian in this world. We do not doubt Christ's love for us, but this memorial feast makes the love seem more real and keeps it ever fresh in mind.

In answer to Abraham's request for some token a vision was granted to him. The meaning of the vision is made clear. "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years. . . . In the fourth generation they shall come hither again." Abraham himself would not receive the fulfilment of the promise, nor his immediate descendants. But four generations later the promise would be realised. There would be dark days of toil and sorrow meanwhile, but beyond these dark days bright days would come. God's thoughts are long; He plans for long

periods, for generations and ages future. Because a promise has not an immediate fulfilment we are not to conclude that it has failed. Some of God's wheat grains are long in coming to harvest.

The same is often true of the Divine promises. They are long in being kept. There must be a time of preparation before fulfilment can come. We do not know what we must suffer and endure before the spiritual beauty of which we dream when we consecrate ourselves to God can be realised in us. We are only part, too, of a great company of believers who are to work in the bringing in of the kingdom. Our portion may be small, only a tear or two, only a word spoken for the Master, only a short day of service and then death. It would take generations, the Lord told Abraham, to make ready for the occupancy of the promised land. Let us learn to believe and to wait.

We do not live for ourselves nor for our own age alone; we live for those who will come after us, even generations hence. We may be only foundation layers and may never see the superstructure rising. But no matter. If we can make a good beginning, which after we are gone shall grow to nobleness, will not the honour of the work be ours? Indeed, those whom the world honours most highly to-day are the men who themselves did not see completed the great things they began. This was true of Abraham, of Moses, of John the

Baptist, of Luther, of Washington, of Lincoln. They wrought in faith, receiving not the promise themselves, but only laying foundations for after generations to build upon, sowing seed for future harvests.

CHAPTER IX
ABRAHAM THE FRIEND OF GOD

Read Genesis XVII., XVIII. 1-21

THE faith of Abraham was sorely tried by the long waiting before Isaac was born. The promise was repeated again and again, but still its fulfilment was delayed. Sarah seems to have lost faith altogether when she gave her maid, Hagar, to Abraham to be his wife. It is instructive to note the consequences of this foolish and unbelieving resort. Only think how different the history of the world might have been through the long centuries if Ishmael had not been born. From him came the vast Arab tribes which swarm over the East, claiming Abraham as their father, and the promises made to him as their inheritance. The Mohammedans are Ishmael's descendants, and when we think of their vast numbers, their hatred of Christianity, their bloody wars and persecutions, and all their opposition to the world's true progress, we see something of the evil that has come from Sarah's unbelief.

The lesson for us is, never to doubt God's promise, however long its fulfilment may be delayed, and never to resort to any schemes or devices of our own to hasten a Divine purpose. Sarah's trouble was that she could not wait. Then she thought she would help God. A little girl had been out quite a while. When she came in at length her mother asked her where she had been. "In the garden, mother." "What were you doing in the garden, my dear?" "I was helping God," the child replied. She explained that she had found a rose almost blossomed, and had blossomed it. She had only ruined the rose. There are many people who try in the same way to help God, and try by schemes of their own to hasten the results they are expecting. The consequences to the world in the case of Sarah's impatient and unbelieving interference with God's way show us the peril of taking our affairs out of God's hands into our own. We must trust and wait. We may trust, too, without doubting, for God's word never can fail. We may wait, for God's time is always the right time.

Abraham is called the friend of God. Once God speaks of him as "Abraham, My friend." We have in our Bible chapters a beautiful illustration of God's friendship for Abraham. It was just before the coming of the terrible judgment on Sodom, and God tells Abraham what He is about to do, giving the reason why He thus confides in him.

“The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham this thing which I do?” The language is human. God is represented as a man reasoning with Himself as to what He should do. We see in this word a wonderful revealing of the Divine heart. We think of a man who has a great project about to be wrought out. Thus far he has carried the secret in his own breast, telling it to no one. But he has a friend, one he loves very much, to whom he confides everything, from whom he conceals nothing. One day he says, “I feel like telling my friend about this important thing which I am purposing and planning to do. I love him and trust him, and he loves and trusts me. To keep from him the knowledge of my purpose is not consistent with my love for him.” That is the way God is represented here as speaking with Himself about Abraham. He puts the highest honour upon him. But that is just the glory of the Divine grace—its wondrous condescension. Abraham is lifted up by this Divine act to a sharing of the very innermost counsels of God’s heart. God dealt with him as a man deals with his most intimate, confidential friend. In one of the Psalms we read—

“The friendship of the Lord is with them that fear Him,
And He will show them His covenant.”

We have the same truth taught in our Lord’s words to His disciples, when He says, “No longer

do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known unto you." God is ever ready to disclose to us the secrets of His love. But we must be near to Him to enjoy this privilege. It was to John who lay upon His breast that Jesus revealed the innermost things of His heart. Peter, sitting farther off at the table, when he wished to learn something from his Master, beckoned to John, and John whispered the question in the Lord's ear, and got the answer.

Those who live near to Christ's heart have closer intimacy with Him than those who stay on the outskirts of the disciple household. We cannot dwell remote from Christ, in spirit, in feeling, in character, in service, and learn the sweetest things. He tells us that He will manifest Himself to those who love Him. "If a man love Me he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." Therefore it is to those who love Christ and do His will that He will make known the secret confidences of His heart.

The first reason God gives for His intimacy with Abraham and His revealing of His will to him is that Abraham holds in his hands such great blessing for the future. The Divine purpose was to have a people trained as a holy seed, to whom

He would commit the ordinances of religion. Out of this nation the Messiah in due time would come. Abraham was chosen as the father of this new people. The divine plan for his life was very clearly marked out. He would become a great and mighty nation, and through him rich blessing would descend to all coming generations. We cannot all be Abrahams. Not often does God want a man to start a new nation. But even for the lowliest life He has a definite purpose. There is a place He would have it fill, a work He would have it do. If we are only faithful in the lot to which God assigns us, that is all He asks of us. It is a great thing to be what God made and designed us to be, though it be only to fill the obscurest place in the world. Some people fail God. He depends upon them to do a certain work for Him, and they do not do it. It is a serious thought that something of God's plan in the blessing of the world is in the hands of each one of us, depends upon our being faithful. What a motive this gives for being loyal to God and true to our trust! It will be a sad thing if we disappoint God, or if the interests of His kingdom which He puts into our hands suffer through our negligence or sinfulness. For example, to every father and mother God entrusts the training of their children for Him. If they are unfaithful and their children's lives are marred or come to nothing beautiful, they have failed God in their place.

It was a great distinction that was put upon Abraham in the purpose of God for him—that “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.” We know how this was fulfilled. The Hebrew people, with all their faults and failings, carried blessing into all the old world. The fulfilment is yet going on in the Christian Church in which the blessing of Abraham is still flowing through the earth. Abraham was faithful, did not fail God. The Divine purpose was carried out in his life. All the nations of the world have been blessed in him. No other man has ever had the honour that was Abraham’s, of becoming the father of nations, carrying in his faithfulness that which has blessed all the earth. But in our measure every one of us may be a blessing, if not to all nations, certainly to many people.

“No stream from its source
 Flows seaward, how lonely soever its course,
 But some land is gladdened. No star ever rose
 And set without influence somewhere. Who knows
 What earth needs from earth’s lowest creatures? No life
 Can be pure in its purpose and strong in its strife,
 And all life not be purer and stronger thereby.
 The army of martyrs who stand by the throne
 And gaze into the face that makes glorious their own,
 Know this surely at last. Honest love, honest sorrow,
 Honest work for the day, honest hope for the morrow—
 Are these worth nothing more than the hand they make weary,
 The heart they have saddened, the life they leave dreary?
 Hush! the seven-fold heavens to the voice of the spirit
 Echo: He that overcometh shall all things inherit.”

We should seek to live so that others will be blessed in us. The secret lies in fulfilling the plan and purpose of God in our lives. We can do this only by entire self-effacement. We cannot live for ourselves and bless the world. "He saved others; Himself He cannot save," though spoken in mockery by the enemies of Christ, is a truth which lies at the basis of every life that blesses others. We cannot live selfishly and then be a blessing to others.

Abraham had approved himself to God by his faithfulness. God had trusted him and Abraham had not failed him. "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him." For God to know one is more than for us to know a person. His knowledge is fore-knowledge and choice, and the knowing of the heart, which takes the person into covenant relations. His knowing, choosing, and calling of Abraham were "to the end that he may command his children and his household after him." His mission was not completed when he had lived his own life faithfully and earnestly. He was also to train his family aright, so as to set their feet in the paths of God's purposes. Many otherwise worthy men fail just here. They are good and saintly themselves but they do not command their households after them in the way of the Divine law. Thus it was that Eli failed. He was a holy and saintly man in his own life,

but he failed to restrain his sons from evil ways. Thus the good of his life ended in a measure with himself. To make our life complete we must see to it that those who are given to us to teach and to train shall receive from us the good which has been entrusted to us for keeping and for transmission to posterity. Fathers and mothers are God's messengers to perpetuate the blessings of His grace in the world. It is not enough for them to love God themselves; they must see that their children are also taught to love God and do His will. Few things are sadder in life than the home where the parents are godly, but where the children, through lack of early training and teaching, drift into the world.

We speak much of the responsibility of parents for children. It is very great. But there is also a responsibility of children for parents. "That they may keep the way of the Lord and do righteousness and justice, to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken to him." First, Abraham was responsible for the commanding of his children after him in the ways of God. If he had been negligent or remiss, and they had failed to be faithful, he would have been to blame for the failure. Next, his children must keep the ways of the Lord, "to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." That is, God's promises to Abraham regarding the future could not be fulfilled

unless his children were faithful to their part in the Lord's plan. Many a child wrecks and destroys all the good that a godly parent has built up in this world. We are thus responsible in a measure for the success of those who have gone before us. Without us the things they have begun cannot go on to completion. Every true man begins many things which he cannot complete in his short life, the carrying forward of which must be left to other hands. A teacher's faithful work can come to its full fruitage only through the diligence and earnestness of his pupils. A preacher's work can prove effectual and enduring only through the continued faithfulness in living and doing of those who attend upon his ministry.

Even in business the same is true. A man founds some large enterprise, building it with his own hands to great proportions, and then leaves it to his sons. Its future and final outcome is dependent upon the wisdom and fidelity of those who come after him. The word of God has many promises for godly parents who bring up their families in the ways of holiness and righteousness; but their children have it in their power to hinder the coming of the promised blessings. Only by keeping God's commandments can they secure the carrying out of the Divine purposes and plans which began with their parents. Any child has it in his power to bring failure upon all that his father has lived, suffered, and sacrificed to estab-

lish. Thus children carry in their hands the final and complete success of the lives of their parents.

God still speaks after the manner of men. He is going down to see the true state of things in Sodom. "The Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me." God never punishes without faithful inquiry into the facts of the case. We are not always so careful to know before we judge. We too often form our opinions after hearing only one side. We judge from what others have told us, sometimes from mere gossip, or from appearances. We condemn without knowing all the facts. Indeed, there seems to be in human nature a quality most un-Christlike which is eager to seize upon the smallest reasons for condemning or criticising others. Ofttimes things that seem to be wrong in others, if only we knew all the circumstances, would appear most trivial matters or even really good and beautiful things.

A young man who made a fair salary seemed to his fellow clerks in the bank to be very close and pinching. He stinted himself in his own living, boarding and dressing in an economical way that seemed quite unnecessary for one who had his income. He avoided all social expenditure in which his friends freely indulged.

But the truth about him was that he had an only sister, who lived some hundreds of miles away, an invalid, who was entirely dependent upon her brother for everything—they were orphans. This was the secret of the economy and closeness in personal expenditure which his friends condemned—he was caring for his sister. He pinched himself that he might send delicacies and comforts to her. If his companions had known all the facts they would have honoured his faithfulness and not have called it meanness. Thus they misjudged him because they did not know all that was to be known. Life is full of illustrations of the same mistake in judging. We are apt to blame or condemn from only partial knowledge. Thus we are constantly doing injustice to others.

We may take a lesson from the Divine example in this case of Sodom. Of course the Lord knew the precise moral condition of these cities without making an investigation, for His eyes see into all hearts, and He knows not only acts but the reasons for them and the springs and motives from which they flow. But the representation we have here is after the manner of men, to make it plain and clear to all, that the Lord is always just, never inflicting penalty when it should not be inflicted. Thus men were taught not to doubt the Divine justice in any case.

CHAPTER X

ABRAHAM'S INTERCESSION FOR SODOM

Read Genesis XVIII.

THREE travellers came one day to Abraham's tent door. They were strangers—he did not know them. Yet he treated them with warm-hearted hospitality. That was the custom of the East. Kindness was always shown to the stranger. No man's tent was his own alone—it was his and God's, and its shelter and comfort must be shared with any other of God's family who were passing.

“ ‘ This tent is mine,’ said Yussof, ‘ but no more
Than it is God's ; come in and be at peace ;
Freely shalt thou partake of all my store,
And I of His who buildeth over these,
Our tents, His glorious roof of night and day,
And at whose door none ever yet heard Nay.’ ”

Abraham rose eagerly when he saw the three men approaching, ran to meet them, bowed

himself to the earth before them, and welcomed them into his tent, showed them the most gracious hospitality, and provided for them an abundant repast. At length Abraham learns that one of the men whom he had thus entertained was God Himself, and that the other two were angels from heaven. But at the time he had no thought that they were other than ordinary men. In the Epistle to the Hebrews this beautiful incident is used to teach the duty of entertaining strangers, reminding us that in doing so some have entertained angels unawares.

It is not likely that we shall have such visitors as Abraham had, that heavenly angels shall come to our doors unawares in the guise of book agents, peddlers, or strangers of any kind. Yet the lesson remains, teaching the duty that we should so treat all who come to our door as friends, neighbours or strangers, in whatsoever garb they come, that if it should turn out that they are angels we shall not be ashamed to remember how we received them and treated them. William Cullen Bryant said that his rule was to treat every person who came to him in any way as if he were an angel in disguise. It may not always be easy to do this, but this would seem to be the Christian rule.

Jesus taught the lesson very clearly in His description of the Last Judgment when He said that those who will be welcomed to the King's

right hand will hear the words: "I was a stranger, and ye took Me in," while those on the King's left will hear "I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in." If we knew that the stranger at our door needing welcome, love, shelter, and kindness were Christ, how would we treat Him? Yet He says, "Inasmuch as ye receive one of these least, ye receive Me."

Times have changed since Abraham's day, and we are not expected to entertain every one who comes along as this good old patriarch entertained these men. Yet there is a courtesy which we may show to all who cross our path, a kindly spirit and manner which will at least not give pain, and may give pleasure and help. We should not treat even a beggar or a tramp in a way the remembrance of which will condemn us should we learn that he is really an angel in disguise.

These strangers brought to Abraham a promise that in a definite time a son should be born to him. Thus the patriarch's faith received another assurance to strengthen it. The time of waiting was now almost at an end. The messengers then rose up to depart, and Abraham accompanied them on the way. The Lord then told Abraham what he intended to do to Sodom if he found the wickedness of the city as great as it had been reported to Him. When Abraham heard the words of the Lord, his heart went

out in compassion for the people of Sodom, and especially for Lot, and he began his intercession. "Abraham drew near, and said." He drew near to the Lord when he began to plead. This showed his earnestness, also his great boldness and confidence.

We may get from this example of Abraham's several lessons for ourselves. One is that we ought to draw near to God in spirit when we plead with Him. If we are really in earnest we will do so. We should always have deep reverence in our heart when we approach God, but reverence need not keep us far away from Him. We are His children, and children do not dread a true father nor stand far off when they desire to ask any favour of Him. God does not want us to come before Him as if we were slaves, but as His dear children. "Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help." "Having therefore boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, . . . let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith."

Abraham's intercession also showed a noble heart. Were the people of Sodom anything to him? Lot, his relative, was there, but Lot had not treated Abraham well; he had been ungenerous toward him. Yet Abraham did not cherish malice, and now, when doom is impending over

Lot, he is quick to plead for him. Lot had been drawn away from God into the world, but this did not prevent Abraham's seeking to save him from destruction. Indeed, this only added to his interest and his compassion. We should pray for others even though they have treated us badly. Jesus tells us to intercede for those who spitefully use us.

But a careful reading of this narrative of Abraham's intercession shows that he did not pray merely for Lot. Indeed, Lot's name is not mentioned at all in Abraham's prayer. Of course, it must have been that Lot was in his thought and compassion in all his pleading, but not Lot only. It was for Sodom that he begged, for the saving of the city, not for the saving of his nephew alone. Abraham was a great-hearted man. A little while ago he fought for Sodom, not for Lot only, and rescued them. Now, when they were in far more terrible plight, he intercedes with God that they might be saved. We need to widen our praying, taking in all men.

There is a striking contrast to Abraham's intercession in the prayer of Lot as he fled from Sodom. He thought only of himself, and pleaded that he might not be driven to the mountain, but that the little town of Zoar near by might be made his refuge and spared for his sake. There is not a word spoken for Sodom or its people in his pleading. The characters

of the two men, Abraham and Lot, are revealed in nothing else more markedly than in the reach of their prayers.

As we look at Abraham standing before the Lord, interceding for the cities of the Plain, we are reminded of Christ as our Intercessor. He ever stands before God in heaven and pleads for us. We have a glimpse in one of His parables of His intercession for the impenitent. He pleads that the axe may not fall, that the fruitless tree may not be cut down until He has tried in other ways to make it fruitful. Only the intercession of Christ spares the impenitent from speedy destruction. They are spared through Divine mercy that yet more may be done for their salvation. We have another glimpse of Christ's intercession in St. John's word that if we sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. In heaven He carries our affairs in His hands. When we sin He acts as our Advocate, securing our deliverance.

Abraham pleads God's own righteousness. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He certainly will. We need not fear for a moment that anything He does will be wrong. Some people worry about the fate of the heathen, and ask if God can be just and do so-and-so. A far better solution to such perplexity is Abraham's—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Surely we can trust Him with

all such things, leaving them in His hands with perfect confidence.

Other people have perplexity concerning the apparent want of justness in the allotments of earth. Some good people have little but trouble here, while some very bad people have much prosperity. We have the same truth on which to rest all such seeming inequities. We do not know what is good and what is evil in the way of earthly experiences. What we call trouble may have more blessing in it for us than what we call prosperity. Then the end of life is not in this world. God may not make all things equal before death, but He has eternal years in which to adjust the equities.

Abraham's intercession was humble and reverent. "O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak." The Lord loves importunity in prayer. He delights in the earnestness of His children when they call upon Him. Two of our Lord's parables enforce the duty of persistence in pleading. Christ's own example in the Garden shows us that it is right to pray and pray again. The Lord is never angry with us for being urgent in intercession for others. No doubt He is grieved far more by our want of earnestness than by our importunity. If all Christians prayed for the lost as earnestly as Abraham pleaded for Sodom, would there not be more revivals and more souls saved?

Abraham first asked if God would spare the whole city in case fifty righteous men were found in it. He then asked if it would be saved though only forty-five were found, though only forty, though only thirty, though only twenty, though only ten. To each request came an answer of mercy. If there had been even so many as ten good people in Sodom the whole Plain, with all its cities and inhabitants, would have been spared from destruction for the sake of the ten.

We do not know how many other cities, towns, and communities in the world have been spared along the centuries for the sake of the few righteous people who lived in them. The wicked make sport of the good, yet they do not know how much they owe to them in a thousand ways. Infidels, while they scoff at Christians and caricature the gospel, forget that for the very blessings of their civilisation, the things that brighten their homes, they are indebted to the Christianity which they so despise. The world, even the wicked world, will never know what it owes to its saints. We do not know, any of us, what our debt is to the good, the true, and the holy about us. Our security in our Christian community is the result of the influence of the praying lives round us. As saints diminish in a place, and the wicked multiply, life and property become insecure.

CHAPTER XI

THE END OF LOT'S CHOICE

Read Genesis XIX.

ABRAHAM ended his intercession and the two angels went on their way. In the evening they reached the gate of Sodom. There they found Lot sitting in his place, ready to show hospitality to strangers. When he saw the heavenly messengers approaching he rose and greeted them cordially and warmly. He invited them to stop with him in his house as his guests. Lot understood the laws of hospitality and failed not in practicing them. The men at first declined to stay in Lot's house, saying they would abide in the street, but when they were pressed they accepted Lot's invitation and went in. Lot then made a feast in their honour.

The coming of the strangers to Lot's house became known outside, and during the evening the people of the town gathered about the door, apparently in a wild and boisterous mob.

This shows the character of the inhabitants of the city, and gives us a hint of the wickedness that prevailed there. St. Peter speaks of Lot as righteous, and says that he was sore distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked people among whom he lived, and that he vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds.

Lot is a problem. He is spoken of as a good man and one that preached righteousness. Yet his preaching seems to have had little power to make the people better. His own life appears to have been blameless, and yet it had no influence on the community. The people were not made better by it. It probably is not hard, however, to account for the ineffectiveness of Lot's righteousness and his preaching. He revealed the kind of man he was in his treatment of Abraham. He showed his selfishness in taking advantage of Abraham's generosity and choosing the richest and best portion of the country for his own, choosing the garden valley and leaving the rugged hills for Abraham.

Lot's choice revealed his worldliness, as well as his selfishness. The people of the Jordan valley were exceedingly wicked. Lot knew the character of the towns in this garden spot and yet he overlooked this in his desire for the wealth that he could gather there. Not only did he choose the rich valley, but he soon pushed his way into the depths of the wickedness, for

he took his family into the city of Sodom and became identified with the place, doing business in it, one of the ruling men in the city.

One, to be a preacher of power in an evil community, must keep himself separate from the evil. He must not be a partaker in it. Those who would preach unselfishness must be unselfish. It is evident that Lot was a lover of money, of luxury, of gain. A home may be a blessing and a centre of influence in a community, but to be so it must be a home of prayer, of love and of all goodness. There are evidences that the home of Lot was not kept sacred and separate. Its doors were open to the social life of Sodom. Lot's children made their friends among the Sodom young people. His daughters were married to young men of the place. It is easy to see that his home had not made itself a power for good in the community. It was not known in the city as a home of prayer. It was just like the other homes of Sodom.

All this explains the fact that however good a man Lot was in his personal life, he had no power as a preacher of righteousness. He loved the world and lived in the world and for the world, and therefore could have no influence upon the men of his community. He showed courage ^{at} that night when his guests were so insulted by the wicked mob on the street. He went out to plead with them and to try to

persuade them to depart. He showed loyal hospitality, and was ready to pay any price to protect his guests. But the people only laughed at him and assaulted him. It would have gone hard with Lot—perhaps he would have lost his life—had not the angels, his guests, interfered to save him, bringing him inside, shutting the door and smiting the mob with blindness, so that they were powerless to do anything.

The angels then began at once to prepare to get Lot and his family away from the city before its doom would be visited upon it. First, they inquired about his household. "Hast thou any here besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whomsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of the place." The angels declared further to Lot that they were about to destroy the city. They wished that all of Lot's family might be spared from the overthrow which was impending. It is not enough to secure our own safety; we must also eagerly seek the safety of all who belong to us. Lot hastened out in the darkness of the night and sought the homes of his sons-in-law and, arousing them, told them of the doom that was about to be visited upon the city. "But he seemed unto his sons-in-law as one that mocked." They only laughed at him. They did not believe his message nor heed his warning. It is sad when a good man has no influence even upon his own family.

Lot had not begun soon enough to have his children believe in him and respect his counsels.

A man rose in a prayer-meeting one evening, when the topic was "Home Religion," and asked prayers for his sons. In the early days of his home life he was not a Christian. He did not love God nor honour Him. He never prayed in his home. He lived without God. He indulged in profanity, in bad temper, in strong drink. In that atmosphere his children were born and spent their childhood. After a good many years the father came under the influence of the Spirit of God and gave his heart to Christ. His conversion was genuine and thorough. He became a man of faith and prayer. He put away his evil habits and was an earnest follower of his new Master. Then he tried to bring his family to Christ. But his children had learned the ways which he had shown them by his example, and had so long lived in these ways that he could not win them to the new life he had chosen. They only laughed at his pleadings. He came into the prayer-meeting and told the whole story, asking the Christian people to help him.

If we would have our children safe with us in the shelter of Divine love, we must begin in their earliest years by teaching them the Divine commandments and by living ourselves near to Christ. When they are out in the world, absorbed in its life, it is too late to fly to them in some

time of alarm and beg them to come to Christ. Lot had to go away from Sodom and leave two of his children to perish in its destruction.

At the breaking of the day the angels hastened Lot. "Arise, take thy wife and thy two daughters that are here, lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city." There was no hope now that the city would be saved. Abraham had prayed that if there were ten good people found in it the city would be spared for the sake of the ten. But there were not ten righteous to be found. Yet while the city could not be spared the good who were in it would be gathered out before the doom fell. It was so also before the flood came—the saving of Noah and his family was provided for. It was the same before Jerusalem was destroyed: the Christians were led out of the city and found refuge in Pella. So it will be at the end of the world. Not one believer in Christ shall perish in the destruction that shall come upon the wicked. Christ will send His angels and gather out all His own.

It seems strange that Lot lingered when the angels had urged him to flee. Why did he linger? Did he doubt that the destruction of the city was imminent? No; but all Lot's interests were in Sodom, all the property he had amassed. He was probably very wealthy. If he fled from the city he must leave all this behind him, and his heart clung to it. It is hard for those who love

money to part with it. We have an example of this in the story of the young man who came to Jesus asking the way into the kingdom. He was told to give up all that he had and let it be used to help the poor, and then follow Christ. He longed to make the right choice, but he could not, and the last we see of him he is clinging to his money and turning his back on Christ.

The angels had almost to drag Lot and his wife and daughters away from their home and from the city. Angels are gentle and kindly messengers, but here was a time when gentleness would have been most unkind. It is said that the Lord, being merciful, "the men laid hold upon their hands" and brought them out. If we understood the meaning of our troubles and chastenings, our disappointments, the blighting of our earthly hopes, the severe things in our lives which so often break into our ease and comfort, we should find that many of them are God's angels, sent to save us from ruin. Even violence is kindness when it saves us from destruction. Anything, however painful or stern, that tears us away from sinful attachments and brings us into the way of life is a Divine mercy.

When the angels had brought Lot and his wife outside the city they bade them escape for their lives. The terrible storm of fire was about to burst upon the plain. What the agency of

destruction was is not known. Josephus, giving the Jewish tradition, ascribes it to lightning. An Assyrian legend also says that a terrible thunderstorm caused the destruction. Others say an earthquake was the cause. The Bible account is very striking and simple. "The Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven, and overthrew those cities and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground." This seems to imply a great storm of lightning and tempest. It broke suddenly and the angels commanded Lot and his wife and daughters to flee with all their might. They were not even to look behind them, nor were they to stay or slacken their flight anywhere on the Plain. They were not to rest until they had reached the mountain.

This is still the gospel word. We are in danger and must escape from it if we would live. We must not stay anywhere in all the plain of sin. There is no safe spot, no shelter anywhere, no place where the fires of judgment will not fall. Some people would like to compromise; they are willing to flee from some sins but not from others. There are some professed Christians who like to stay on the borders of their old life. They are continually asking whether they can do this or that, go here or there, and yet be Christians. They want to keep just as near

Sodom as possible so as not to be burnt up in Sodom's destruction. The answer to all such questions is, "Stay not in all the plain." The borders even are unsafe. The only safe place is the mountain, the mountain where Christ's Cross stands.

Lot ventured to make a request, to ask for a special favour. The mountain seemed far away. The flight to it seemed greater than he could make. So he pointed to a little city that was near at hand, and begged that this might be an asylum for him. It was only a little city, and he pleaded that it might be spared from the doom of all the cities of the Plain, just to be a refuge for him. Lot did not show much faith in God in making this request for a refuge near at hand. He certainly had not much of that faith which Abraham had, when he left all and went out, not knowing whither he went, but trusting God to take care of him. Lot reluctantly left Sodom, but he wanted to choose his own refuge. There are a great many who make the same mistake. They want to be Christians, but they are not willing to be brave, heroic Christians, cutting loose from all their old life and following Christ to the mountains in heroic ventures of faith. They are afraid to give up a wrong business which pays them well and depend upon the Lord to provide for them. Such timid faith never reaches anything noble in

Christian life or character. God may accept it, but we are throwing away our own opportunities of doing a great work and of attaining a high character. Little faith wins only little blessings.

Lot's request was granted, the doom upon Zoar annulled, and Lot was allowed to flee there. We should note, however, that God sometimes lets people have their own way, which seems an easier way, when it is not really best for them. He sometimes answers even unwise prayers and gives us what we crave, though it is not what He would give to us if we had more faith and courage and were able for the harder thing. In this very case Lot soon found out that he had made a mistake in fleeing to Zoar, and he was glad enough to leave his unsafe refuge and go at last to the mountain to which the angels had bidden him to flee at first. God may sometimes let us have our own way, though it is not the best, until we learn our mistake by our own sad experience.

Lot's wife looked back. There had been a specific command, "Look not behind thee." The meaning was that the storm of death would move so swiftly that even a moment's delay in their flight would imperil their safety. Why Lot's wife looked back is not explained. Was it curiosity to see the nature of the terrible

tempest that she heard roaring behind her? Or was it her dismay as she thought of her beautiful home, with all its wealth of furnishing and decoration, and all her jewels and garments and other possessions, which was now being consumed in the great catastrophe? Our Lord's use of the mistake of Lot's wife was to teach the peril of waiting to save out of the ruin things we would like to save, lest in doing so we lose all. "He that shall be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not go down to take them away; and let him that is in the field likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife." The inference from our Lord's use of the incident would seem to be that she was appalled at the thought of leaving and losing all her loved possessions and paused in her flight and looked back, with the hope that possibly she might yet run back and snatch some of the ornaments or gems—something, at least, from the awful ruin. In the moments she had lost in looking back she was caught in the sulphurous smoke, stifled, and whelmed in the flowing salt which made her grave for her where she stood.

We should not miss the lesson which our Lord Himself teaches us from the tragic fate of this woman. Dr. Marcus Dods says, "If all who are of the same mind with Lot's wife shared her fate, the world would present as strange a

spectacle as the Dead Sea presents at this day." We cannot win both worlds. Lot's wife could have escaped with her husband and her daughters, but she could escape only by resolutely and determinedly leaving everything she had in Sodom. Her love for her possessions cost her her life. There are thousands of women to-day to whom God's angels are saying, "Escape for your life; look not behind you." They are trying to follow Christ, but their love for the world is so intense that they cannot give it up, cannot renounce it. They must decide, however, which they will renounce—Christ or the world. They cannot keep both.

In Lot we have an example of one who was almost lost and yet saved. In Lot's wife we have an example of one who was almost saved and yet lost. She was lost because she hesitated. She looked back, lingering there until it was too late to escape. There is a picture of an artist sitting on an ocean rock which had been left bare by the retreating waves. There he sat, sketching on his canvas the beautiful scenery—sky, earth, and sea—all unconscious that the tide had turned and had cut him off from the shore and was rapidly covering the rock on which he sat. The tempest, the waves, the rising sea were forgotten, so absorbed was he in his picture. Even the cries of his friends as they shouted from the shore were unheard.

So men grow absorbed in this world, and perceive not the torrents of judgment onrolling, and hear not the calls of friends warning them of their peril. So they stand until overwhelmed with the waves of destruction.

CHAPTER XII

THE OFFERING OF ISAAC

Read Genesis XXI., XXII.

THE record of the birth of Isaac is made as quietly and simply as if it had been an event of very small importance. The birth of a baby is indeed no unusual occurrence. Every moment an infant is born somewhere in the world. Yet there was something about the birth of Abraham's child which made the event momentous. It had been long promised and foretold and painfully waited for. This was the child of promise, included in the Divine covenant, from whom was to spring the posterity numberless as the stars, promised to Abraham. The birth of Isaac was one of the most important events occurring in any century of history. Yet it is recorded in a few simple words, "Sarah . . . bare Abraham a son in his old age." Faith now had its reward.

But little is told of the childhood and youth of

Isaac. The child grew and was weaned. His weaning was celebrated by a great feast given by his father. Almost nothing else is related of him. When he was only a child, Hagar and Ishmael were sent away from Abraham's home. After that, Isaac grew up with his mother, who was very old, and was "moulded into feminine softness," says Dr. Geike, "by habitual submission to her strong, loving will."

The offering of Isaac was the highest reach of Abraham's faith. For many years his faith was sorely tried in waiting for the promised heir. At length the child was born and there was great joy. Great hopes centre in every child in a true home. Every worthy father has large plans and expectations for his boy. But they were no ordinary dreams and hopes which filled the heart of Abraham. "As the stars shall thy seed be," ran the promise. "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," the Lord had said. This lad in the patriarch's tent was the son in whom this glorious future lived. Many a man in business, with great interests in his hands, knows with what expectations he thinks of his son as living after him to continue his name and business. But there was far more than this in Abraham's expectation concerning Isaac. There was fatherly love of the gentlest and truest kind, as the records show. There was a vast property to transmit to his heir. But

besides these human affections and interests there was a new nation to spring from Abraham and this boy was the single link.

There was also a Divine cause represented in Isaac. "Abraham saw My day," said Jesus, "and was glad." The Messiah and Christianity were in Isaac too.

It is only when we think of all that Isaac meant to Abraham and to the cause of God that we can in any sense understand what it cost him to obey this call. The word which appears in the first sentence of the narrative suggests that the purpose was the still further testing and proving of the patriarch's faith. It had been put to the test already through the long years of waiting, and had not failed. Now it must be put to one other test. "God did prove Abraham."

The command by which he was proved startles us. Why did God demand a human sacrifice? We must remember, first of all, that in those days such sacrifices were not considered wrong. On the other hand, the highest religious act a father could perform was to sacrifice his first, new-born son to God. Abraham, therefore, did not think it a sin to offer his son. If any father should now make such a sacrifice, he would be regarded either as guilty of murder or as insane, and would be dealt with accordingly. But in Abraham's time he would have been considered as having paid to God the highest worship he could pay.

But in God's judgment, then as now, it was wrong to make such a sacrifice. God wanted to teach Abraham that he must actually make this offering, but in spirit only, not in outward act. From that moment human sacrifice was for ever disallowed. "God meant Abraham to sacrifice his son, but not in the coarse, material sense. God meant him to yield the lad truly to Him ; to arrive at the consciousness that Isaac more truly belonged to God than to him, his father."

What did Abraham do when this command came to him? Did he hesitate and begin to argue the case with God? No ; he quietly and unquestioningly obeyed what he had become convinced was a Divine command. When he heard his name called he answered, "Here am I." He was ready to do whatever was wanted of him. It was said by some one of Carey, the missionary, that he was a man who could not say No to God. He was called from the shoemaker's bench to preach, then to the mission field, and from service to service, and never could say No. We call a man weak who cannot say No—he has no will of his own. But the man who cannot say No to God is strong. "Here am I" was always Abraham's answer to every calling of his name by God. Whatever the bidding was it must be instantly and quietly obeyed. We talk a great deal about consecration, but do we mean it? Consecration is no mere sentimental good feeling ; it is the surrender of our will to

God without question, without reserve, without shrinking.

To "Here am I" came a call which cut into the depths of his heart. Abraham's God said "Take now," immediately, "thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac,"—not Ishmael, but Isaac. "And get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering." Remember all the Divine promises which centred in Isaac. Remember the posterity which no man could count, the glory stretching away into the future—all in Isaac. "Take this Isaac"—his name is given that there could not possibly be any mistake—"and offer him as a sacrifice." Could there have been any other test so searching as this?

How did Abraham stand the test? Keen as was the pang which the call of God sent to his heart, he promptly obeyed. "Abraham rose early in the morning . . . and took . . . Isaac his son . . . and went unto the place of which God had told him." He did not stop to reason or to question why such a hard thing was asked of him; without a moment's hesitation he set out to do that which God had bidden him to do. That is what we should do whenever God asks a hard thing of us. We would better not perplex ourselves with the why and wherefore—it is enough to know that it is God's will for us. God's will is always good and perfect. If our consecration be sincere we may never withhold anything that God asks of us nor

surrender ought for which He asks with any but the most beautiful submission.

A friend said to a mother whose son had been appointed as a foreign missionary, "I hope that you will be able to give him up for the work." "Oh," said she, "I gave him up to God in his infancy, but never knew until now where God wants him." Every true Christian parent gives his child to God at birth to be His entirely and for ever. What God may want him to do, he knows not. God ordinarily gives the child back to the parent to be trained for Him, but always for Him, and then to be surrendered at His call, without murmuring, either for service in this world, or to live with God Himself and to serve Him in glory. Parents may not make their own plans for their children without consulting God. He knows what He wants them to do, and the parents' prayer should be always that the child may become that for which God made him and redeemed him. George Macdonald says that he would rather be what God made him to be than be the grandest being he could think of.

It is significant that before reaching the place for the sacrifice, Abraham dismissed his servants. He wanted no human eyes to look upon his agony. Perhaps they might have interfered in some way. Certainly their uncontrolled grief would have made it harder for Abraham to do the bidding of God. So he left the men behind, out of sight of

the act of sacrifice he was to make on the mountain.

The incident reminds us of Gethsemane. Our Lord said to the disciples, "Tarry ye here," while He Himself pressed on a stone's cast farther into the heart of the solitude. Alone He entered into the anguish of that mysterious hour. We all need to be alone in our times of great testing. Human sympathy is very sweet, but there are experiences in which even human sympathy will not help us, will only do us harm, and endanger our perfect doing of our duty, in which, indeed, no human friend can ever be near to us. We must meet alone the sore trials, the hard struggles, the great questions of life. Others may stand near us with their cheer, their encouragement, their sympathy, but really they are far away, and we are alone with our sorrow, our struggle or our decision.

Very pathetically reads the narrative of Abraham's preparations for the sacrifice. "Abraham took the wood . . . and laid it upon Isaac his son." Isaac was not altogether passive, either, in this day's events. Abraham did not tell him at first what the journey meant. Until the very last moment he did not disclose to him that he was to be sacrificed. Yet Isaac did his share in the preparations. "So they went both of them together" —together, but with what different feelings! Abraham's heart was breaking. Isaac was awed by the unexplained mystery. Then his father's

anguish must have oppressed him. The journey lasted two days. We may suppose there was little said as the two went on together. The boy's mind was busy. "My father," he said, near the end of the long walk—"my father, behold the fire and the wood; but where is a lamb for a burnt-offering?" It was a terrible question. Abraham answered, not disclosing yet to Isaac what was before him, yet giving faith's true answer: "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering." In all this strange story we see the earthly picture of another still greater sacrifice. Our Heavenly Father gave His only begotten Son to actual death without substitute, because of His infinite love for sinners. In Isaac carrying up the hill the wood for the sacrifice in which he himself was to be consumed as a burnt-offering we have a wonderful picture of Jesus going out to Calvary, bearing the cross on which He was to die for sinners.

Isaac's part in this great transaction is sometimes overlooked. He must have consented to the sacrifice. He said not a word in resistance, made no outcry, did not flee, but quietly submitted to be laid upon the altar without a murmur. Thus the sacrifice was his as well as his father's. He devoted himself to God, made himself over to God in perfect trust. He was the son of promise with great Divine purposes depending on him; if God wished him to die, he was willing to die. By this sacrifice Isaac became indeed Abraham's heir. An

old legend says that Isaac acquiesced in the Divine command and climbed upon the altar to be offered, and that the tears of angels fell upon his face and made him ever after sad of countenance.

The supreme moment was reached without any failure of faith. "Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son." Abraham stands here as the sublimest hero of faith. He knew only one thing—to obey. What terrible pain it cost him to make that long journey to Mount Moriah, then to build the altar and lay his son upon it, then to stretch forth his hand to slay him, no human heart can conceive. Yet he faltered not. We can raise in these days a thousand questions as we study the story, but Abraham raised none. It was not his business to settle perplexities; his business was simply to obey. He knew very well that all Divine promises centred in Isaac, and that if he were cut off the innumerable seed foretold would be destroyed in him. But this did not trouble him. The same God who made the covenant and gave the promise now gave the command which seemed to sweep all away. But Abraham's one duty was to obey. We have a glimpse of his heart in the Hebrews, where we are told that he obeyed in faith, accounting that God was able to raise Isaac up from the dead. Nothing that God commands ever can bring harm or real loss to us. His commandments never cancel His purposes nor clash with them. No painful sacrifice

He ever demands of us can possibly interfere with His covenant of love.

When Abraham had gone thus far in obeying, God withdrew His request. "Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him." Abraham had proved his faith and obedience by going straight forward, up to the very point of actual sacrifice, and God was satisfied. He did not want a literal offering of Isaac upon the altar—what He desired was the perfect surrender of the father's will, and this surrender was now made. This is the true sacrifice always, and the only one that counts with God. God is pleased far more with submission and obedience than with the most costly offering. "To obey is better than sacrifice." The richest gifts amount to nothing if the heart be not in them. The things we try to do for God, in obeying His commandments, even though they fail, are accepted and rewarded. God takes the will for the deed.

The testimony which God gave to Abraham after his trying and proving is very beautiful. "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me." God is pleased when we endure trials well. When He calls us to pass through afflictions, or to endure losses and make sacrifices, His eye is upon us in tender love. He watches us to see how we are obeying Him and trusting Him. Murmuring and rebellion grieve Him, but He is pleased when

we submit to His will, though it be hard to submit and though it cost us pain and tears. When He sees us faithful, patient, and submissive He knows that we love Him and trust Him.

What does all this mean to us? We shall never have precisely this test of our faith, but we may have, we almost certainly shall have, some time in our life, a trying of our faith which shall be a testing of our life. We may be called to lay on the altar one dearer to us than life. He was a friend of promise. His coming to us was the fulfilment of a thousand hopes and dreams. All our future of happiness and good seemed to depend upon him. Then we may hear the command to give him up. At first it will seem to us that we cannot possibly do it. There must be some terrible mistake. Certainly God cannot mean this. He gave us our friend—He would not take him away from us again. All the blessings of our life are in him, and to lose him would be to lose all.

But there is a higher view of life into which we must seek to rise. We belong to God, not in any sense to ourselves. It is not our conception of life that we are to seek grace to fulfil, but God's purpose for us. Abraham thought that Isaac was to live, and that through him he was to become a great nation and be a blessing to the world. Now for three days it appeared as if God's will for Isaac was death, not life. Abraham raised no doubt, expressed no surprise, asked no question, even

showed no anguish. It was God's matter, not his. He had thought that the will of God was for Isaac to live, but if it was sacrifice on the altar instead, it must be right. Abraham was silent.

When we seem called upon to give up the friend upon whom all our happiness depends, let us remember that it was God who gave us the friend, that He knows how the friend can be the very most to us, to God, and to the world, that the problem in God's mind is our good and the blessing of others, that His will is not an arbitrary tyranny, but is the expression of perfect love, and that the very aim we seek will be reached only by quiet acquiescence in that will. Our vision is too short-sighted to perceive what is best for us and others. The only safe thing for us is to let God have His way. If we had our own way instead our life might be hurt and our future darkened.

Faith is the absolute submitting of our life to God so that He and not we shall direct it. Then let us learn that we and all our interests are absolutely safe in God's hands. No harm came to Abraham's hopes through this experience on Mount Moriah. Abraham was a better man afterward. Isaac was a truer and worthier son after having been laid on God's altar. The promise lost nothing in its splendour and glory. We shall never lose anything in any sacrifice we make to God. What we surrender to Him we get back in rich beauty. What plans of ours are broken are

only superseded by God's infinitely better plans, brought into harmony with His perfect will. In the Hebrews it is said that Abraham offered up Isaac, "accounting that God is able to raise up, even from the dead; from whence he did also in a figure receive him back." When we give to God in simple faith the friends and the things we love we receive them back again, and they become more to us than ever they were before.

"Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh"—"The Lord will provide." We may write the same name over every place of sacrifice in our life. Whatever our need or danger, the Lord will provide. When we are convicted of sin, and only condemnation seems possible, the Lord will provide a Redeemer, "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." When we meet sorrow and loss, when everything seems gone, the Lord will provide, and our sorrow will be turned into joy and our loss into gain.

CHAPTER XIII

ISAAC AND HIS SONS

Read Genesis XXIV., XXV.

WITH the birth of Isaac Abraham saw the beginning of the fulfilment of the Divine promise. He was to have a great posterity. For a long while he had no child, but at last one was born to him. Yet Isaac was little more than a link. He had none of the greatness of Abraham. One writer thinks this was partly due to his father's greatness—he was dwarfed and weakened by growing up under the shadow of Abraham. Another writer thinks Isaac's passive weakness of character may have sprung in part from his close relations with his mother. He grew up in the shade of Sarah's tent, and was moulded into feminine softness by habitual submission to her strong will. Both these suggestions are worthy of thought. It is possible for a son to be dominated too strongly and too exclusively by his father's influence, especially if the father is a man of great force of

character and occupies a prominent place in the world. The sons of fathers who have grown rich frequently fail to make of their lives what they might have made if they had been born poor and compelled to struggle and toil for themselves. Life is too easy for them. Sons whose fathers are great in name and in intellectual power are oft-times hampered in the development of their own career. They are apt to live in the shadow of their father's name, to depend upon an inherited distinction rather than upon making their own. There usually is a disadvantage for a boy in having too great a father. Such a father needs much wisdom if he would make his son's chance in the world a fair one, for true greatness of any kind cannot be bequeathed; each man must win his own through his own effort, his own toil and self-denial, his own struggle.

Then it is no doubt true also that many a son's career is marred, perhaps wrecked, by the very love of his mother. Boys are sometimes sneered at by other boys as being "tied to their mother's apron strings." Sometimes the sneer is most unjust. Happy, indeed, the boy who is in all true ways under the influence of his mother, if she be a worthy mother. The boy who is not proud of such a mother and does not make her his confidante in all matters is missing one of the finest opportunities that will ever come to him. Some one was telling a boy of God's help, how all good came

from Him. "Yes," said the boy, very thoughtfully, "yes, but mothers help a lot."

Yet it is possible that Isaac was too exclusively under Sarah's influence. It is possible that he was too tenderly cared for by her, too much sheltered from care and danger, saved too much from thinking for himself, meeting his own difficulties, fighting his own battles, doing things for himself. It is possible that it would have been better for Isaac, would have made a better man of him, if he had been pushed out into the world, if he had had more contact with other boys and young men, if he had had to take more hard knocks and measure his strength more with the strength of others.

One of the best results of college life for a young man is his contact with other young men. It takes the self-conceit out of him—the self-conceit his mother in the very love of her heart has probably done something to pamper. It teaches him respect for other young men's abilities. It brings out the finest qualities in character. No matter how great the educational value of the college curriculum, it is no doubt true, in most cases at least, that the part of college life which means most to a young man is what he gets from college life itself. The best education a boy may get in private, studying alone, never can do for him all that he needs; it may make a scholar of him, but it cannot make him a man.

We are not told of much that Isaac ever did.

He made no mark for himself. He blocked out no course. He dug some wells to get water for his flocks, but most of these were probably old wells of his father's which had been filled up and which Isaac re-digged. After his mother had died his father began to think of getting a wife for him. While his mother lived the question of marriage seems not to have been taken up. Probably it was just as well, for a young wife might not have had an easy lot in Sarah's home. When Abraham took up the question himself, according to the custom of the country, he was wisely solicitous concerning the kind of wife his son would get. He did not want him to marry one of the Canaanite women. They were idolaters, and Abraham was to found a new nation that would worship only the one true God. Abraham's conversation with his servant on this subject is very instructive. The servant doubted whether a young woman would be willing to leave her own country to come to a strange land, but Abraham was sure God would take the matter in hand and would send His angel to influence her.

The story of the journey in search of a wife for Isaac is told most simply and beautifully. It is a story of providence. God had gone before and had prepared the way. The servant had prayed for guidance, asking that when the daughters of the neighbourhood came that evening with their flocks the damsel whom God had chosen for Isaac

should be the one who should give drink to him at his request. So it came that it was Rebekah who met him, and Rebekah proved to be God's choice for Isaac. When Rebekah was told at length the servant's errand, and asked if she would go and become the wife of Isaac, she said she would go with him. So Rebekah became Isaac's wife, and he loved her and was comforted after his mother's death.

For twenty years no child was born to Isaac and Rebekah. They had to learn in some measure the same lesson of faith and waiting that Abraham and Sarah had to learn. At length their prayers were answered. The two sons that were born to them gave evidence from the first of great differences in every way. They were different in appearance, and they developed difference in disposition, in character. It was probably when they were quite young men that the strange transaction between them occurred in which Esau, the firstborn, sold his birthright to his brother. This incident shows well the differing qualities and characteristics of the brothers.

The narrative begins with the natural statement that the boys grew. They were country boys, and they lived a free life in a simple sort of civilisation. There was but little restraint put upon them. They did not have to go to school every day as our boys do. They probably had no athletic games to absorb their vast energies. Their home

life was simple. They lived very much as Bedouin boys live to-day. So they grew into great, stalwart fellows. Boys should always seek to grow. They should grow not only in physical stature and vigour, but also in mental power and in spiritual strength.

The brothers developed their difference in taste and disposition very early. Esau became a hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob showed a preference for a quiet life. If you plant an acorn and a chestnut in the same piece of ground, though the soil is the same, and the same sun shines on both, and the same winds blow over both, they will not both grow up either oaks or chestnut-trees. The individuality of each will assert itself. So it is with boys. Environment may have much to do with the shaping of character, but it does not make character. Your boy with the artist soul will become an artist though he be brought up on the farm among sheep and cattle; and though you keep your boy with the musical soul in the midst of most unmusical influences the music will come out. A great English painter tells of a boy put under his training to be made a painter. One day the boy was found crying bitterly over his blotched work, and when asked what was the matter, replied, "Father thinks I can draw, but I want to be a butcher." God does not want us all to be alike—there is need in the world for every kind of ability—and the truest education is that which

gives God's plan for the boy the best chance to work itself out.

It is said that Isaac loved Esau. The reason given is "because he did eat of his venison." The old man was fond of venison, and Esau took pains to bring it to him from the field. So the father loved Esau because Esau gave him daily food. Are we influenced in our preferences and friendships by anything that panders merely to the physical appetites? Perhaps we are. The nearest and surest way to some people's friendship is said to be through their stomachs. Sometimes a person of very low and unworthy character is received as a friend because he is "so kind," always bringing dainty things for eating. Of course Isaac ought to have loved Esau because Esau was his son, but the reason given for it and for Isaac's favouritism is not a lofty one.

Then Rebekah loved Jacob. Each parent had a favourite child. This was bad. It is always unwise for parents to show preference and partiality for any one child. Jacob himself made the same mistake at a later time in his undisguised preference for Joseph, but he only made trouble for Joseph. It should be the aim of parents to treat all their children alike, showing no preference. If there is special interest manifested in any particular child it should be in the one who is in some way unfortunate, blind, crippled, deformed. In such cases there is need for special love and

help to balance the handicap of misfortune, but partiality because of peculiar endowment or winningness is both unwise and unjust.

A single act sometimes reveals the whole of a life's inner quality. We may read some of the lines of Esau's character in his behaviour that day when he came in from the field hungry and begged Jacob to give him some of his pottage. Jacob was cooking lentils at the time, and the moment Esau smelled the odour of the savoury dish his hunger became ravenous. His appetite mastered him. He was hungry, and he acted like a big baby rather than like a man. We ought to learn to keep our appetites under control and to endure the cravings of hunger with some sort of manly courage. Esau was not a child at this time, but a man probably of more than thirty. Esau was altogether under the control of his lower nature. He was altogether earthly. He had no heavenly aspirations, no longings for God. He was under the sway of bodily appetites. We see the same kind of man again and again, one who thinks of nothing but his meals, what he shall eat and what he shall drink.

But what shall we say of the way Jacob treated his brother's pitiful craving? It was natural enough for Esau in his hunger to ask Jacob for a portion of his supper. What should Jacob have done? What would you say a Christian brother should do in a like case? If Jacob had acted as he

should have done there would have been no story of the selling of the birthright. We cannot commend Jacob's part in this business. It was despicably mean. We should never take advantage of another's weakness or stress of any kind to drive a sharp bargain with him. If a man is compelled to sell a piece of property to raise money to meet an urgent need an honourable neighbour will not use the other's misfortune to get the property at less than its true value. One who has money to lend should not take advantage of another's necessity to exact usurious interest. No one should take advantage of another's ignorance to impose upon him or to deceive him. No boy wants to be called mean, yet nothing is meaner than taking advantage of another boy's weakness, innocence, ignorance, or need, to impose upon him.

The Lord had said before the birth of the boys that the elder should serve the younger. That was God's plan, but He did not want it brought about by any wrongdoing. He never wants our sins in working out His purposes. If Jacob had been told this by his mother he ought to have waited for God to give him the promised honour in His own way. We should never try to hurry God's providences. You can hasten the opening of a rose, tearing the bursting bud apart, but you will spoil the rose. You may force some plan which God is working out for you by putting your own hands to it, but you only mar and stain it. God's

good purpose for you will bring you blessing only if it is worked out in God's way.

Esau's present hunger seemed such a bitter thing that to appease it he was willing to sacrifice a great future good. This was what he did—for one morsel of meat he sold his birthright. We speak of his folly as if the case were exceptional, as if no other one ever did the same. But people are doing this all the while. For a moment's sinful pleasure men indulge their appetites or passions, throwing away innocence, happiness, and a crown for it. A man is hungry and steals bread—selling his birthright of innocence, making himself a thief, darkening all his own future with the shadow of crime, to appease for one little hour the pangs of hunger. Says Keble—

“We barter life for pottage! sell true bliss
 For wealth or power, for pleasure or renown!
 Thus, Esau-like, our Father's blessing miss,
 Then wash with fruitless tears our faded crown.

Our faded crown, despised and flung aside,
 Shall on some brother's brow immortal bloom;
 No partial hand the blessing may misguide,
 No flattering fancy change our Monarch's doom,

His righteous doom, that meek, true-hearted Love.
 The everlasting birthright should receive—
 The softest dews drop on her from above,—
 The richest green her mountain garland weave!”

The bargain was sealed. The price was paid

and accepted. The birthright was Jacob's now, and the pottage was Esau's. His hunger was satisfied for an hour or two, but his birthright was gone. The hunger would soon return, but the birthright never could be his again. He had traded rank, position, power, possession, headship, special Divine and very blessed promises for one morsel of food.

There are several things to notice in the terrible folly of such bartering. One is, that the present is not all. For the instant it seems all. The giving of the passions or appetites immediate gratification, seems bliss. Everything is forgotten but the moment's pleasure or gain. But the present is not all. There are days, years, ages, afterward when the life will go on in shame, darkness, bitterness. Would it not be well to think of this before blackening all the future for one hour's sinful enjoyment? "Better give up my birthright than die," said Esau. "Nay, nay; better die than part with your birthright."

Another thing which intensified the folly of Esau's act was its irrevocableness. He had taken an oath, and the compact never could be undone. In Hebrews this feature of Esau's wickedness is specially marked: "For ye know that even when he afterward desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place for a change of mind in his father, though he sought it diligently with tears." Ah, that is the bitterness of

such sin—we cannot undo it; we cannot get again the birthright which we have sold. Tears will not bring back lost honesty, lost innocence, lost virtue, lost character, a lost Christ.

By his reckless act Esau showed that he despised his birthright. He did not value it. He rated it as worth no more than a morsel of food. Yet it really was worth everything to him. Men and women are all the while despising their own birthright. They are holding in one hand purity, noble character, usefulness, joy, peace, heaven, and in the other some little gratification, some transient pleasure, some prize worth nothing in the end, and are rating these momentary indulgences as better than all the blessed possibilities of their higher nature. Think of selling the right to a fortune of a million for a glass of wine, or a few fading flowers. What fools we are! Shall we not seek to prize and honour the things to be really prized and honoured?

CHAPTER XIV

ISAAC THE PEACEMAKER

Read Genesis XXVI.

ISAAC was a child of old age, his father being a hundred and his mother ninety when he was born. His name means "laughter," thus being a constant reminder of the gladness of his mother's heart when she learned that she was to have a son. It is a good thing to be a joy, to make life a song, wherever one goes. As to character, Isaac was meek, gentle, and contemplative; perhaps not very ambitious, yet diligent, lowly in spirit, peace-loving. Isaac would probably not cut a very large figure in the modern world with its intense commercialism and its fierce driving, but the angels would see quite a number of our Lord's Beatitudes shining in his character and disposition, nevertheless.

After the strange incident of Abraham's sacrifice, when Isaac was bound upon the altar as an offering to God, he must always have considered

his life as in a peculiar sense belonging to God. One who had served as a model for an artist in painting a picture of Jesus on His cross said that ever afterwards the impression remained with him—he never could forget that for a number of hours he had represented the Master in His act of supreme devotion and sacrifice. In a still more real way had Isaac been given to God, and had he given himself to God, and he must always have regarded his life as redeemed—an innocent animal died in his place.

Every one who accepts of Jesus Christ as his Saviour has an experience just as real. He stands before God guilty, condemned. Then an offering is made for him. One takes his place on the altar and dies for him. He is redeemed now, not merely to go free, but to take his place as a living sacrifice; not his own, to do his own will, but bought with a price and belonging therefore to God.

In the chapter we are now reading we see Isaac in a characteristic phase of his life—as a peace-maker. A famine had driven him into the Philistine country. Isaac seems to have repeated two mistakes of Abraham in this journey in the country of the Philistines. He fled to another land to escape the famine, when probably he ought to have braved it out where he was, trusting God to care for him. He seems to have intended to go all the way to Egypt, as

Abraham had done, but before he had gone so far God appeared to him and told him not to go there, but to stop where he was. So he remained in the land of the Philistines.

Isaac then had the same trouble among the people of Gerar that Abraham had in Egypt. His beautiful wife attracted the attention of the men, and Isaac, fearful of being killed for the sake of Rebekah, lied about her, as Abraham had lied about Sarah, saying, "She is my sister." The falsehood was exposed at length to Isaac's dishonour. It seems strange that precisely the same blot should be on the names of two men. We should learn a second time here that the only safe way in any danger is the way of truth. A lie will never make a safe refuge for us.

Isaac was prospered in the land of the Philistines. He sowed there and reaped large harvests—a hundredfold, because the Lord added His blessing to Isaac's labour and to the fertility of the soil. He increased in wealth and prosperity, his flocks and herds greatly multiplying. The result was envy on the part of the Philistines. It is always so. When one has special success, others envy him and become his enemies, oftentimes treating him meanly and wickedly. There is plenty of the same wicked spirit in modern times, and in any community examples of it can be found.

The Philistines showed their envy towards Isaac by filling up the wells which Abraham had digged.

Wells were very important in those days and in that Eastern country. Water was scarce; there were few rivers or streams, and it was necessary to dig wells to get drink either for themselves or for their flocks. To sink a well in the desert was therefore a great benefaction. Some one asked Mohammed, "What shall I do to make my name immortal?" "Dig a well," was the answer. In the desert wastes of the East a well is a great blessing. Neither man nor beast could live but for the wells. The Philistines did great harm, therefore, to Isaac and to the country when they stopped the wells.

The king of the Philistines at last commanded Isaac to go out of his land. He frankly gave the reason for this expulsion—"For thou art much mightier than we." The king was afraid of Isaac; for with the remarkable prosperity that was attending him he would soon be able to overpower the inhabitants of the country and drive them out. That is the way the Philistine king, the enemy of God, in us tries to do with anything good that is beginning to grow in our heart. He would drive it out. There is a great deal of this crowding out of the good in the lives of Christians by the evil that still remains in them. God is not permitted to take full possession of us and to occupy our whole life. Too many professing Christians are careful not to yield unreservedly to the Spirit of God. The world is envious of

Christ, and does not intend to let Him dwell in men's hearts and lives.

In the time of the strifes and enmities which arose we see Isaac's peace-loving spirit. He might have resisted Abimelech's command, refusing to leave the Philistine country. Some people like to contend for their rights. They fight against all encroachments upon them. They are continually in some contention—quarrelling with somebody. They boast of the fact that they never allow any one to impose on them. The world calls this a manly spirit, but Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Here, twenty centuries before Christ came, we find Isaac living out this Beatitude. "Isaac departed"—that is, he moved on when he was told to move on, rather than contend for his right to stay there. We should not fail to get the lesson. We would better suffer wrongfully than engage in contention and strife. This is the way the Master did. He let Himself be a "way," a road, on which others walked to better things. It is thus that He would have His followers live. This is the upward way. In one of George Macdonald's poems a child asks, "What lies over the hill?" and is told of a valley, a brook, a lonely moor, gray clouds, dark rocks, a mountain, at last a stair built of lovely stones—a stair up into the sky. The child is charmed by the picture, and says eagerly, "I will go."

“‘I will go!’—‘But the steps are very steep;
If you would climb up there,
You must lie at its foot, as still as sleep,
And be a step of the stair

For others to put their feet on you,
To reach the stones high-piled;
Till Jesus comes and takes you, too,
And leads you up, my child!’”

Isaac moved on, and now we see him clearing out the old wells which his father had digged, but which the Philistines had filled up. There is continual opportunity for us in this world to open out old wells which have been filled up, rendered useless. The Evil One is always trying to destroy the fountains of good in a community. It is sad to see a church building unused, falling into decay, in which once the gospel was preached every Lord's Day. It is a sad thing to know of a home where once there was a family altar which has been torn down—the old well of grace and goodness having been filled up. It is a holy work to clear out these wells, that again the water of life may flow in them to quench thirst and to make life.

Besides cleaning out and opening up the old wells, Isaac's servants digged also a new well, and found there a fountain of springing water. Wherever we go these days, we should seek to dig a well, to start some blessing which has not been there before. Some one says that he who makes two

blades of grass grow where only one had grown before, is a benefactor. No one should be content to live anywhere, even for a little while, and not do something which will make his stay there a benediction. It is not always necessary literally to dig a well—that may not be the best thing to do. But there are other things that one may do which will make the neighbourhood more beautiful, a better place to live in.

Perhaps one may plant a tree which will grow and cast a grateful shade long after he who planted it has gone to his rest. Thackeray in a story tells of one of his characters whose custom was to keep his pockets filled with acorns when he walked over his estate, and whenever he found a spot that was bare and empty he would plant one of these so that at length an oak would grow up to adorn the place. It was said by a friend of a Christian girl who died when a little past twenty, “Everywhere she went flowers grew in the path behind her.” She was an encourager, an inspirer, a comforter, a bearer of burdens, wherever she was known.

There are countless ways of starting a blessing in a neighbourhood in which one is living. One does not need to have millions, and to found a great free library, endow a church, or open a well, in order to start a blessing. Just living a sweet life is a way of digging a well whose waters will refresh others. To find an unhappy home and change

it into a home of love and peace is to set going a benediction whose influence will go on for ever. To change one unhappy person into happiness, one discontented man into contentment, one anxious woman into quiet peace, to bless a little child, is to dig a well which shall become an enduring blessing. We should never allow a day to pass without doing a kindness which shall make some heart gladder, some spirit braver, stronger, better. Wherever you go, to-morrow, any day, be sure you dig a well.

Although Isaac had moved on to avoid trouble with the Philistines they persistently followed him, and wherever he settled continued to disturb him. Wherever his servants digged a well the herdmen of Gerar would claim it and try to take it. Isaac would then quietly give up the well rather than have a struggle over it, and would dig another a little farther on. His enemies would then strive for that too, and then Isaac would again move on and dig another. All this showed Isaac's wonderful patience, his inoffensive spirit, and how willing he was to make sacrifices for the sake of peace. Some who read this chapter may consider Isaac wanting in manliness; but was he not doing what Jesus long afterwards, in His Sermon on the Mount, taught His disciples to do? "I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee,

and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also."

At last Isaac got beyond the spitefulness of the Philistines. He seems by his inexhaustible patience to have literally worn out their persistent greed. "He removed from thence, and digged another well: and for that they strove not." Isaac then made this well a memorial of his gratitude, for he called it Rehoboth—"room." "For now the Lord hath made room for us," he said. Patience had wrought at length its perfect work. "Patience wears the world out," says the proverb.

Isaac's peaceful spirit was approved in heaven, and the Lord appeared to him at Beer-sheba, blessing him and renewing to him the promise which had been given to Abraham. There Isaac built an altar and worshipped the Lord. There also he pitched his tent and his servants digged a well. Again we have the tent, the altar, the well—emblems of a true and good home.

CHAPTER XV

JACOB'S DREAM AT BETHEL

Read Genesis XXVIII.

NOTHING is more beautiful than an ideal home. Love rules in all its life. The members are as one in their fellowship and association. Each thinks of the comfort, the convenience, the happiness of the others. In the home of Isaac all these conditions seem to have been reversed. The veil is lifted and the life of this chosen family is revealed as sadly divided, rent by strifes and jealousies. There is no semblance of love in the home association. There are no home ties binding the household together. The dove of peace does not nestle there. There is no common interest for which all strive. Instead, they are torn apart in bitter personal aims and struggles, plotting against each other in most unseemly way, deceiving one another. The story told in the twenty-seventh chapter is a pitiful one, and when we remember that it was in the family of sacred promise that all these

unseemly things occurred, it perplexes us. We would naturally expect beautiful and godly life in this family which carried in it the holy seed.

First, we see Isaac planning to give the family blessing to Esau. Yet he knew well that the purpose of God was that Jacob should receive the blessing. Esau had sold his birthright and had also shown himself unfit to be the head of the family. Still his father clung to him and sought to have him receive the blessing of the firstborn.

Rebekah, ever on the alert, having learned of Isaac's arrangement to bestow the blessing on Esau, set about to defeat it. She would stop at nothing and accordingly devised a scheme to deceive her blind old husband. Jacob played his part well, under his mother's instructions, and won the blessing by fraud and falsehood. The result was the intensifying of Esau's hatred for Jacob, and a vow that he would kill him. So Jacob had to flee for his life. For many years he did not see his home again or the faces of his father and mother. His life, too, was full of trouble. He had sought to live by fraud, and fraud followed him into his old age.

The unveiling of the life of this home with its enmities, its strifes, its frauds, and deceptions should teach us again how unfit and unbeautiful is such a life in any home. Everything of happiness was wrecked. We cannot imagine anything gentle or kindly in the life Isaac and Rebekah lived

together in their old age. After their striving and plotting so long the one against the other it is impossible to think of their coming together again in the confidence and mutual affection which ought to be realised in every marriage. Then there grew a bitter feud between the brothers which was never really healed. All the hopes of marriage and home were negatived in this marriage and home. Out of this wreck and mockery of family life comes an appeal for a home life which shall realise all the possibilities of love. There are many homes in Christian lands, homes of wealth and of rank, in which the household life is no better than was that of this old patriarchal family. It is a shame that this confession has to be made. Let us determine to make our homes places of peace, of unity, of purest unselfishness, a place where all the best and sweetest things of love shall be realised.

We take up now the account of Jacob's flight from Beer-sheba. He was running away from home. It was his own fault, too—his and his mother's—that he had to flee. He had got a valuable thing—his blind father's blessing, which included the birthright with all its privileges. But he had sinned to get it, and sin always brings trouble. He had won by fraud and lying what God would have given to him in His own time and way, without any stain or blot, if Jacob and his mother had only kept their hands off and refrained from all plotting and scheming.

Success in life is a good thing, but we must not pay too much for it. Especially, we must not sin to attain it. It is inspiring to see men rise to high positions in life, but we want to know how they rise. Too many people get wealth and position as Jacob got his blessing—at the cost of personal righteousness. Not every fine house in which people live has a heavenly benediction upon it. Sometimes it has been built with the gains of dishonesty and then a curse is written on the walls. An old man, about to die, called his sons to his bedside, and spoke to them of the money he had to leave them. “There is not much of it,” he said, “but there is not a dirty shilling in the whole of it.” A small amount of money, every penny of it clean, is better than millions stained in the getting.

We follow Jacob in his flight, and one evening, probably his second or third evening from home, we see him preparing for sleep. It was not a very cosy place to rest overnight. “He took one of the stones of the place, and put it under his head, and laid down in that place to sleep.” The rough lots in life have their compensations. It seems hard for a boy to have to grow up in poverty, but it is in such a condition, if there is anything noble in the boy, that his life will be trained into strength. Jacob's circumstances were not luxurious that night. He was tired and homesick. His pillow was hard, his bed was cold.

Yet never before had he seen such glorious things as he saw then. Luxury is not necessary to heavenly visions. John saw the wonderful visions of the Apocalypse while in exile on the rocky Isle of Patmos. Bunyan had his marvellous spiritual experiences in Bedford Jail. Stephen saw into heaven and beheld the Divine glory and Jesus standing there when he was being stoned to death by an angry mob. Paul got a glimpse of his crown of glory from a Roman prison.

It was a wonderful vision that Jacob had that night. He had sinned and he must have been most unhappy. He was lonely, too, and home-sick. But he seems to have thought of God and prayed. God is always gracious. He had His watchful eye on Jacob, for the promise to Abraham was now his. "Behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven." This ladder may be viewed in several ways. Its immediate meaning to Jacob himself was very comforting. It told him of God's mercy, friendship, and care, and of a way of communication with heaven. Although he had sinned, God had not forsaken him. There was a way open to God with free communication.

But the ladder was not merely for Jacob. Centuries afterwards we stand at the Jordan, and hear Jesus say, "Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending

upon the Son of man." The ladder is, therefore, a picture of the Incarnation. It shows Christ to us as the Mediator, coming down to earth's lowest depths and making a way for us up to heaven's most glorious heights. The ladder is a way on which human feet may climb; Christ is the way to the Father and the Father's house. "I am the way . . . no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." The angels went up and came down on the ladder; through Christ there is communication with heaven.

The ladder is also an illustration of a true Christian life. At every young person's feet springs such a ladder which stretches away through growing brightness until its top reaches the very glory of God. The figure of a ladder is suggestive. A ladder is not easy to ascend—a true, earnest life is never easy. A ladder must be climbed step by step, and it is thus, if at all, that we must go up life's ladder.

"Heaven is not reached at a single bound,
But we build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit round by round."

We must rise by daily self-conquests in little things. Every fault we overcome lifts us a step higher. Every low desire, every bad habit, all longings for base, ignoble things, all wrong feelings, that we conquer and trample down become

ladder rounds for our feet, on which we climb upward, out of grovelling and sinfulness, into nobler manhood and womanhood. And there is no other way by which we can rise heavenward. If we are not living victoriously these little common days, we are not making any progress in true living. Only those who climb are getting toward the stars. Heaven is for the overcomers. Not that the struggle is to be made in our own strength, or the victories won by our own hands: there is a mighty Helper always on life's ladder with us. He does not carry us up—we must do the climbing—but He helps and cheers us and puts ever new strength into the heart, and so aids every one who strives in His name to do his best, that we may all become more than conquerors, and may at last wear the victor's crown.

The ladder was not empty. "Behold, the angels of God ascending and descending on it." All along life's steep pathway angels minister. They do not reveal themselves to us visibly, but they watch over us with loving faithfulness, guiding us, protecting us, helping us in temptation, whispering in our ears many a good suggestion and ministering to us in countless ways.

The ladder did not stop half way up—it reached all the way to God's very feet. "Behold, the Lord stood above it." No plan of life is complete which does not take in heaven and reach up to God Himself. A picture without sky in it lacks some-

thing. No matter how brilliant life's way is, if it does not bring us at last to God and to blessedness, it is a failure.

The gracious words which God spoke to Jacob must have given him great comfort in his penitence and fear that night. "I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest." When the Breton mariner puts out to sea his prayer is, "Keep me, O my God; my boat is so small and the ocean is so wide." The prayer suits every one of us, especially the young as they step out into life. We are small and weak and the world is wide and full of peril; we must have the mighty keeping of God or we shall perish. This is assured in the word that God spoke to Jacob and speaks to us. Angel companionship is cheering, but here is something far better—"I am with thee." God does not merely stand in heaven and look down on His children as they climb wearily up the steep ladder, waiting there to crown them with glory when they struggle to His feet. He comes down Himself and keeps close beside each one of them in all their conflicts and struggles.

Jacob was deeply impressed by the vision which came to him that night. Awaking out of his sleep, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." The Lord is everywhere. We talk about special providences—but why special? Every day is full of God; no event is independent

of Him. He is in what we call the accidents of life. If we would remember this, it would make us reverent always, for any chance meeting or any smallest circumstance may be God's hand laid on our shoulder.

There is another phase of the lesson. The Lord is in every place, but ofttimes we do not know it. There is no place where He is not. An atheist's child had learned something about God. One day the father, wishing to impress his own creed upon his child's heart, wrote on a piece of paper, "God is nowhere." He asked the child to read the sentence, and she spelled it out, startlingly though unconsciously—"God is now here."

There was still more of Jacob's thought. Not only was God in the place, but the place was near to heaven. "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." He was right.

Wherever God reveals Himself is God's house, and God's presence is there. It needs no fine building to make a Bethel.

"Out of our stony griefs
Bethel to raise."

There is no spot on earth which may not any moment become a real gate of heaven. Wherever a heart in penitence calls upon God, there is opened straightway a path of light which stretches

away to God and makes a glorious ladder on which the soul may climb to eternal blessedness. Wherever a saint is dying, in palace or hovel, on battlefield, or in a wreck on the sea, there is a gate which opens into the brightness of celestial joy. This sad world would not be half so sad if we had eyes to see all the heavenly glory that bursts into it.

Jacob promised God to begin a new life from that hour. "Jacob vowed a vow, saying, if God will be with me . . . this stone . . . shall be God's house: and . . . I will surely give the tenth unto Thee." There are three things in this vow which we should notice. Jacob gave himself to God. This must always be the first thing in a new life. God cares nothing for our formal worship or our gifts so long as our heart is not made His. Next, Jacob set up Divine worship on the spot where he had been blessed. Then Jacob consecrated his substance and pledged himself to give to God the tenth of all that God gave to him. Christians should certainly not give less than the Old Testament believer gave.

CHAPTER XVI

JACOB A PRINCE WITH GOD

Read Genesis XXXII., XXXIII.

THERE are twenty years between Jacob's vision of the ladder and this night at Jabbok. Jacob journeyed from Bethel, about five hundred miles. At the well near his uncle's home he met Rachel, and a beautiful love story began there. He served Laban seven years to get Rachel for his wife, and then was deceived, getting Leah instead. He was receiving in his own experience what he had been practising on others. Then he served seven other years for Rachel. After this he remained six years more, gathering wealth. At last he left Laban to return to his own home. It was on the way that the incident of the Jabbok ford occurred. He had fled from Beer-sheba to escape the wrath of Esau. As he now neared the old home he began to fear Esau's anger and sent messengers to his brother, expressing the hope that he might find grace in

his sight. The messengers returned with the news that Esau was coming with four hundred men to meet him. Jacob was in great distress and cried to God for help. No wonder Jacob was afraid to meet Esau. He had treated him meanly. It was twenty years ago, but the memory had not faded out of Jacob's mind. We forget mean and dishonourable things done to us, if we are forgiving and generous, but it is far harder to forget such things when we did them. Jacob was a better man than he was twenty years before, and this made him more ashamed to meet his brother. Besides, Esau still hated Jacob and might violently contest his return.

Jacob took his fear and anxiety to God. Trouble often drives men to prayer. In time of danger there is no other refuge like the secret of God's presence. It is well if we have a habit of running into this refuge at every approach of danger or sense of need. There are several points in this prayer which we may profitably study as elements in all true prayer. Faulty man as Jacob was, we may learn from him important lessons in praying. For one thing, we should plead God's covenant when we pray. Jacob addressed God as the God of his fathers. God had made solemn covenant with the patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac, and had therefore put himself, as it were, under obligation to Jacob, who belonged in the line of the covenant. If we are believers in Christ we may plead God's

covenant with His Son, in which covenant we are heirs. God's covenant is a wonderful expression of His love and grace. Voluntarily He binds Himself to do what He promises; He puts Himself under an oath or a solemn and sealed pledge to give us the things that belong to our redemption. We may then remind God of His promise given in the covenant.

Another thing in Jacob's prayer was his plea that he was in the way of God's commandment, and therefore might expect blessing. "O Lord, which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will do thee good." We cannot plead God's protection if we know that we are not doing God's will—for example, Jonah, running away from his duty. But Jacob was conscious that he was in the way of obedience. He had not taken his homeward journey at his own suggestion, but at the bidding of God Himself. Besides, he had received a definite promise of protection and blessing on the journey. The Lord had said, "Return, and I will do thee good." This made Jacob very bold and confident in his prayer. We should always be sure that we have God's bidding for everything we set out to do, for every journey we undertake; then we shall have the right to expect and claim God's blessing and help on the road. When the Lord sends us anywhere, however dangerous the way may be, He intends to take care of us and to see us safely through.

We need then only to make sure that God sends us. The path of duty is always the path of safety.

Jacob also shows penitence and humility in his prayer, and gratitude, as he thought of all that God had done for him. One tells of seeing in a French chapel many memorial tablets. One was of an officer, for deliverance in battle. Another was in remembrance of the restoration in health to a child that had seemed to be dying. So Jacob remembered God's great goodness to him. He thought of his own sinfulness and then of all that God had done for him, and the remembrance made him ashamed of his own life. He did not ask then for his own sake, but for the sake of God's mercy. Humility is important in all true prayer. We are not worthy to receive anything from God. We deserve only His wrath and punishment. If we claim what is really due to us we should get no blessing or goodness. Our plea, therefore, is to be, not our worthiness, but our unworthiness. That is what we mean when we offer our prayers for the sake of Christ. Our only claim is the Divine mercy. We are saved by grace—that is, unmerited favour. We receive all blessings in the same way. It is because Christ died for us that we have a right to expect mercy and blessing. We ought not to forget this; it will keep us ever humble, and humility is always beautiful in God's sight. Pride He hates; humility He loves. He dwells with the

humble, but in the proud heart He never makes His home.

Jacob then prays definitely for protection from Esau. "Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother." There is something very striking in the artless simplicity of Jacob's pleading. He is in danger from the long-nursed wrath of an angry brother. He tells God about it, just as a confiding child would tell a loving mother of some danger.

It would seem that one ought never to need to seek protection against a brother. Only love should be in a brother's heart. But here there was hate in the breast of a twin brother. It was bitter, long-rankling hate, and it was very needful that God should be asked to shield Jacob against the approaching danger. We may learn here a lesson on simplicity and directness in prayer. We are apt to pray in formal, stilted phrases ; but we ought to talk to God just as we would talk to a human father or mother. All Bible prayers are direct and straight, requests for the thing that is wanted. In our secret prayers we may lay aside all forms of words, and, getting near to God, may tell Him in briefest sentences what troubles us, what our danger is, or our fear, what we need or desire.

It is night. Jacob has sent a present of flocks and herds to Esau, arranging them in three divisions, hoping to appease his brother. He then sent his family and his flocks over the brook, he himself lingering behind. Then "there wrestled a

man with him." Jacob had been a wrestler all his life, seeking to get on by his shrewdness and cunning. Now he is met at his own strong point. The prophet Hosea tells us that it was an angel that wrestled with him. The Jewish rabbins say it was a created angel, Esau's angel. Christian commentators generally agree that it was a manifestation of God in human form—a theophany. This was a crisis in Jacob's life. There was yet in him much that was wrong. He was wilful and cunning. He wished to prevail with God that night, but he could do so only by being first defeated. Hence God appeared to him as an antagonist, wrestling with him.

Jacob was left alone for his hour of pleading. An interesting statement is made concerning General Gordon when he was in the Soudan. Every morning for half an hour a handkerchief lay outside his tent, and all the camp knew that Gordon was alone with God within, and must not be disturbed. No one dared approach the tent, thus guarded, until the signal was lifted. This tells the secret of Gordon's power. Every one of us needs such morning hours within the closet.

Another suggestion here is that in all the deepest and most intense experiences of life we must be alone. There is companionship, in living, at only a few points. We must meet our sore temptations alone. We may get strength from human friendship, and may be cheered by sympathy, or nerved

by heroic counsels, but the struggle itself we must endure alone. It is so in sorrow. Others may come and sit down beside us, and breathe tender comforts into our ears, or draw our head down upon their bosom; they may hold the lamps of Divine truth to shine upon our darkness and thus may lighten it a little; but through the sorrow we have to pass alone.

So we must die alone. Our nearest and best beloved may sit about our bedside. With holy affection they may try to sustain us. The one we love best may hold our hand; another may wipe the cold beads from our brow; another may sing to us some sweet hymn, or speak for us to God in prayer; but in the act of dying the nearest and dearest must be left behind, and we must pass out alone into death's strange mystery. Human companionship in that hour is utterly impossible. Says Keble—

“Not even the tenderest heart and next our own,
Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh:
Each in his hidden sphere of joy or woe
Our hermit spirits dwell, and range apart.”

This stranger who wrestled with Jacob was no less a personage than the Son of God Himself. He came in human form, with His glory veiled; for if He had come to that sinful, unworthy man in the splendour of Divine majesty, Jacob would have fled away, or would have fallen as dead at His feet. He

came in the plain, lowly form of a man, and then during the struggle of that night revealed Himself to Jacob as a manifestation of God, with power to bless. One lesson for us here is, that while we can have no human companionship in life's deepest experiences, there is no loneliness in which God Himself cannot come to be with us. In the loneliness of temptation, or of sorrow, He comes, with strong help. In the deep mystery of dying, when every human friend has been left behind, we shall find this Friend of friends close beside us. He walks to us on the wild billows of our sea of trial or trouble, when human friends can only stand on the shore and look in powerlessness upon us in our peril.

We should notice, also, that while God came to Jacob in human form, He revealed Himself to him before the night was gone as the Lord Himself, for Jacob said of Him, "I have seen God face to face." Had He been only a man He could not have helped Jacob. All this was a foregleam of the Incarnation. God came down to earth as a man, that He might get near to us in our need and sorrow; then when we trust Him and lean on Him we find the everlasting arms underneath us.

Why did the Lord come to Jacob as a wrestler? The answer is that this was the way He could best bless Jacob. There were things in him that must be got out of him before he could receive the spiritual blessing. The old Jacob must be defeated

and crushed before the new name Israel could be given. And the Lord has not ceased wrestling with men. People often ask why it is that God seems to be contending with them? Perhaps He is. There may be something in them of which they must be cured before they can be richly blessed, and God comes to them as a wrestler, to contend with them, until the evil that is in them has been destroyed.

“When He saw that he prevailed not against Him, He touched the hollow of his thigh: and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was strained.” Of course this Divine Stranger could have crushed Jacob instantly, but that is not the way God deals with men. He struggles and wrestles with them that they may yield to Him, but He does not crush them by His great strength. Why did He touch Jacob’s thigh? The thigh is the pillar of the wrestler’s strength. Jacob had been depending on his own strength all his life. Then God by a touch takes away his strength, that he can wrestle no more. When God contends with men and they will not yield to Him, He often touches the point on which they depend instead of upon Himself, and withers it, that they may rely on Him alone and seek and find their joy and strength in Him. Sometimes it is money, or position, or human friends, or worldly circumstances, or some sinful thing; God contends with them, but they do not learn the lesson; then He touches the thing

that is boasted of, and depended upon, and it is gone.

Jacob got the victory by clinging. He refused to let his antagonist go. It was his unconquerable perseverance that at last won the victory. When Jacob could no longer wrestle he wound his sinewy arms round his antagonist and clung to Him. It is sometimes said that he prevailed with God by wrestling, but really he did not prevail until he ceased wrestling and simply clung to the Stranger. That is the lesson God was teaching him—that not by wrestling but by clinging was the blessing to be obtained. We are not to contend with God and seek to have our own way; we are rather to yield our wills and seek blessing by loving submission.

Then came the great final blessing—in the new name given to Jacob. “He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel.” His name was not changed until his nature had been changed. The old Jacob never could have been called Israel. The change in nature came in the struggle, when the old, proud, self-reliant man was subdued and he became content to cling to God and hang upon Him. The new name stood, therefore, for faith and trust in God, for crushed pride, for lowly humility, for the strength that comes only from God. The new man limped as he walked away; probably all through life thereafter he bore the marks of

the struggle that night, and his lameness was a constant memorial of the rich spiritual blessing that had come into his soul through his defeat. He was never the same man afterward. He left the Jacob for ever behind with his old wili-ness, craftiness, deceit, and was Israel thereafter, a prince with God. Every Christian carries in his later years marks of similar struggles, out of which he came with new blessings. Sorrows leave their marks; so do temptations and great trials.

We do not like Jacob—many of us. At least we do not like his nature, his disposition. Yet probably we are nearer of kin to Jacob than we would care to confess. At least there are ugly things in us—things that spoil the beauty of our character. We all have to come to our Jabbok, to get face to face with ourselves, and face to face with God, where the battle may be fought to a finish, the old nature, the old self, beaten, lamed, crippled, and the new nature, the new self, victorious. It will be well if in this wrestling our name shall be changed, if it shall be no more Jacob, but Israel, a prince of God.

CHAPTER XVII

DISCORDS IN THE FAMILY OF JACOB

Read Genesis XXXIII., XXXV., XXXVII. 1-11

WHEN Jacob returned to his father's house Esau met him with four hundred men. If Esau's intent was hostile, he was appeased by Jacob's generous kindness. Then we must remember that Jacob had prayed the Lord to protect him and his household from his brother's anger, and we believe in prayer. God softened Esau's heart toward Jacob. Jacob had got right with God that night at Jabbok, and now he also gets right with his brother. There is rich instruction in all this even for us who read the story so long afterward.

We saw that the home of Isaac was not ideal, but was rent with strifes and jealousies; the home of Jacob as we see it now was also full of discords. The behaviour of Jacob's sons caused the old man great sorrow. The hand of death also wrought sadness for him. Deborah,

Rebekah's nurse, died. There are old servants who are so faithful and true, who do so much for those with whom they live, that they become almost as dear as if they were members of the family. We should be kind to those who serve us. Then a still greater bereavement came to Jacob. Rachel had been close to Jacob's heart all the years. Polygamy had made his home a most discordant and unhappy one, but the one abiding comfort of his life had been Rachel. On the way from Bethel a son was born to her, but the mother came not back out of the hour of her anguish. She knew, in dying, the mother's joy that a man was born. She had strength to give him his name—Benoni, "The son of my sorrow," and then died. Her disappointment was very bitter. "She was never to feel the little creature stirring in her arms with personal human life, nor see him growing up to manhood as the son of his father's right hand. It was this sad death of Rachel's which made her the typical mother in Israel."

Rachel was buried at Bethlehem and her grave marked by Jacob. Then the family journeyed on. We cannot stop long even for sorrow on our pilgrimage. The baby lived and took his place as the last of the twelve sons of Jacob, completing the number. We now take up the beautiful story of Joseph.

The family of Israel were still living in the

land of Canaan, although they did not own it. It is called the land of their father's sojournings. That was all this land was to any of those old patriarchs—a land of sojournings, of pilgrimage. They had no abiding home in it. They merely pitched their tents here and there, tarrying for a little while, then pulling up the tent pins and moving on. This is a picture of what the world really is to all God's children who are passing through it—a land of sojournings. We have no permanent abiding-place here. Our true home is in heaven. We are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. A distinguished clergyman used to wish that he might die at an inn, because it looked like one going home, the world being but like a great noisy inn and he a wayfarer tarrying in it as short a time as possible, and then hastening away. Not all of us, however, look upon the world in just this way, but if we are children of God, why should we not? It is said that oftentimes those who walk by the lakes of Switzerland are scarcely aware of the lake, are hardly conscious that they are journeying beside it, their eyes are so enchanted by the glorious mountains that rise up, piercing the clouds. So in a sense it is with the Christian in this world whose eye of faith sees heaven's glories.

Joseph was of rarely beautiful character. Because of his importance in the great events of the beginning of the nation the story of his

life is told with unusual fulness in the Scriptures. We would not say that Joseph's early environment was just such as to make a great man of him. He had not much to inspire him to beautiful or noble things. Yet, no doubt, the circumstances amid which he grew up proved in the end full of the best influences for his growth. His home was a quiet one. His father was now at his best. Jacob had not begun well, and he had had many hard lessons to learn, for there was much chaff in his composition which had to be winnowed out. He had to be knocked about rather roughly to get the refining and polishing which he needed. But in his old age he was no longer Jacob the supplanter, but Israel, prince with God. His disposition was softened, his character was improved, his nature was enriched. He was a long time ripening, but at last the late fruit was compensation for all the experiences through which he had come.

Joseph grew up in the patriarchal home in these better, softer, benigner years of Jacob's, and we cannot doubt that the blessings of his father's later evening time had their part in the making of his character. Isaac, also, was an inmate of the home when Joseph was a boy. He was a very old man, more than one hundred and sixty years of age. It is oftentimes a beautiful friendship that is formed between such a grandfather and a young boy. Isaac doubtless would talk to the lad

about his own experiences, about the promises, and not the least salutary of the early impressions upon the heart of Joseph were those which the touch of Isaac's hand left there.

Joseph had not always a sweet and happy home in which to grow up. If his brothers were much in it there must have been bickerings and strifes oftentimes, and much ungodliness. The boy had no good books, magazines, and newspapers as our boys have. An English or American boy of this day would have had a dreary time in Joseph's environment; but the man is the proof of his education, and Joseph came out of his training one of the noblest men that ever was grown on this earth. The lesson is, that circumstances help to bring out what is in the life. God will help us to grow anywhere into His own thought and plan for our life if only we are faithful in our place. Indeed, He knows just where and under what influences you will best grow into what He wants you to be, and therefore you may let Him choose the place and the circumstances.

"Thou can'st not to thy place by accident;
It is the very place God meant for thee."

Jacob loved Joseph more than any other of his sons. There was good reason for this. Joseph was of winning disposition. He was different from his brothers, who were sons of the other

mothers. Jacob could scarcely help having a special fondness for Joseph. His mistake was in showing his preference. He seems not to have tried to conceal it. He showed it openly, for instance, in putting on Joseph a garment which advertised that he was the favourite. The father's showing of his partiality for Joseph worked badly for the boy. There is an old fable of an ape which had a favourite cub that he hugged to death through over-loving. Some parents show their love in like unwise ways for their favourite children, hurting instead of helping them by their over-kindness.

In Joseph's case there was at least this injury done by the favouritism of his father, that it made his brothers hate him more, and thus became the occasion of all the trouble which came upon him through them. The father's foolish mistake was no excuse, however, for the crime of the brothers. We see here again the danger of allowing envy in our hearts to take root. At first only an unkind feeling, if cherished and nursed, it grows with alarming rapidity into hatred, often even into murder. We remember that in Cain envy became actual murder, and in these brothers of Joseph the murder was in their hearts and was even planned and begun. We are all human, with human weaknesses, and not one of us dare say that such and such a result would never be reached in our case, that we never could do such wickedness.

The only safe thing to do with envious thoughts is to crush them at once, to overcome evil with good, compelling ourselves to do some kindness to the person of whom we are disposed to be envious, to drive the wicked feelings out with that love which seeketh not its own, which is not provoked, which thinketh no evil.

We must notice here, too, that it was in a home that this envy grew up, in the hearts of brothers. Homes ought to be places of love. Brothers and sisters ought to love each other and live together affectionately. Yet in too many homes there is sad want of love, at least of the expression of it. There are children who do not live together affectionately, nor always speak kindly to each other. Let us learn from what is not beautiful in this home of Jacob, to make our own home-life more Christlike and heaven-like.

One night the boy Joseph had a dream. It was a Divine foregleam, or intimation, of his future destiny. Both Joseph's dreams were glimpses of the same future. We shall see as we go on with the story how the dreams at length came true. Every young man has visions of his own future, which are more than dreams. God often shows in the first visions of early youth the things which it is possible for the person ultimately to attain or achieve. Many a great artist has had visions in his childhood of the greatness which later in life he achieved. Many boys show at the beginning of

their days glimpses and intimations of what they afterward become.

Joseph seems to have talked rather too freely of his dreams of coming honour and greatness. Possibly he showed or seemed to show a little self-conceit. Yet we may account for this on the ground of his frankness and simplicity of spirit. If Joseph had been older and had had more discretion, he would not have told his dreams. He would have known that other people, especially members of his own family, are not apt to take kindly to a boy's thoughts of his superiority. He was less than seventeen years of age, without experience of the world, and had not learned wisdom and tact. It is probable, too, that he did not imagine the dreams had any real meaning. He was excited over what he had dreamed and naturally and boyishly told the family all about it. So we must not blame Joseph too much for this. All his life he was frank and outspoken, and this quality it was that made him tell at the breakfast-table what his dreams of the night before had been.

The father's rebuke was certainly not very serious, for we are told that the old man kept the matter of the dreams in his mind, no doubt wondering if they would some day come true. His rebuke may have been given with a desire to allay the bitter feeling in the hearts of Joseph's brothers. Be that as it may, we know that ulti-

mately not only the brothers, but also the father himself, bowed down to Joseph in the land of Egypt. Then, too, we know that the brothers never forgot these dreams, and when at last they learnt who Joseph was in Egypt they remembered very vividly these incidents of his early boyhood.

CHAPTER XVIII

JOSEPH AND HIS DREAMS

Read Genesis XXXVII. 12-36

WE see a boy of seventeen journeying alone across the country. He did not know what the end of his journey would be. He was only going on an errand, as he supposed. His brothers were pasturing their flocks sixty miles away. The old father wished to know how his sons fared. So he sent Joseph to carry messages and a basket of good things to them and to bring back word again. Joseph set out in good spirits. Boys are usually fond of adventure and enjoy such expeditions as that on which Joseph was sent. The family would see him off, expecting him to fare well and return again in good time. Not one of them dreamed that it would be more than twenty years before they would see his face again.

We never know when we say goodbye at our door to the friends we love whether or not we shall ever meet them again. If Jacob and Joseph

had foreseen the fact that for such a long time they could not look into each other's face it would have been a most tender parting. We should always say goodbye, even for the briefest separation from our dear ones, with thoughtfulness, for we may never clasp hands with them any more. We should never separate in an angry or impatient mood, with unforgiveness, bitterness, or misunderstanding. We should not say our good-byes coldly, indifferently, but always with love and gentleness.

Suppose that the one who goes out should be brought home dead, or should return to find the one dead whom he left at the door—if the parting were with harsh word or look or thought, how must the surviving one grieve, when sitting by the flower-covered coffin, to remember the last word or look! Flowers then will not atone for the coldness of the parting on the doorstep, nor will they take the pang out of the bereft heart. We should make every parting with home loved ones, every briefest goodbye, sweet enough, kindly enough, for a last farewell, should it prove to be the last, as it may be.

“If thou dost bid thy friend farewell,
But for one night though that farewell may be,
Press thou his hand in thine.
How canst thou tell how far from thee
Fate or caprice may lead his steps ere that to-morrow
comes?”

Men have been known lightly to turn the corner of
a street,
And days have grown to months,
And months to lagging years, ere they
Have looked in loving eyes again.
Parting at best is underlaid
With tears and pain.
Therefore, lest sudden death should come between,
Or time, or distance, clasp with pressure firm the hand
Of him who goeth forth;
Unseen, Fate goeth too."

We never know when we set out any morning what calamity may befall us before the night comes. Joseph had no thought of danger or trouble when he left home to go to Shechem. At last he was near the end of his journey. He expected a kindly reception from his brothers, and was utterly unaware of the fate to which he was moving. So we all go on, unconscious of what lies before us. We spend to-day in gladness, not knowing that to-morrow will bring us tears. We move on through the flowers, heedless of danger, not knowing that at our next step we shall fall into some pit.

We sometimes wish that we could see into the future, that we might choose our way more carefully. Yet the experience of Joseph teaches us that it is better we should not know what is before us. Had he perceived what awaited him he would not have gone forward; but had he returned home, while he would have avoided long

years of suffering and trial, he would also have missed the bright future which lay before him in God's providence beyond the darkness. It would not be well for us to know what is before us. If we knew the hard things, the disappointments, the struggles in the way, we might refuse to go forward ; but then we would miss the good, the blessing, the final victories and rewards of life. It is better to let God lead us and to walk in the dark with Him than to go alone in the light, unled.

Jacob had made a special coat for Joseph, a sort of princely garment, which was a mark of the favour he showed him. That coat was an irritating thing to his brothers. It had very much to do with the kindling of their hatred of him. It was the mark of their father's preference for him. So, when they saw a lad coming toward them, some distance away, they immediately recognised him by his coat, and all their slumbering hatred awoke. They determined to kill "this dreamer." Joseph's dreams and his coat seem to have been the chief exciting causes of the envy of these older brothers. They hated him because their father loved him. Then they hated him still more because of his dreams, which appeared to foreshadow his superiority over them. So when they saw him coming they at once resolved to put him out of the way and get rid of him by killing him.

These brothers went the "way of Cain." Their envy of Joseph grew into murder; for although they did not actually kill him, they intended to do it, and God counts intentions as acts. Envy leads to all manner of wickedness. When we think of it we can see what a base thing it is. It is caused, not by evil in others, but by good, not by harm done to us, but oftentimes by kindness. In its very nature it is murderous and oftentimes it leads to actual murder. We should guard against the beginning of envy in our hearts as we guard against the beginning of fire in our houses. A mere spark left slumbering may soon become a ruinous conflagration.

"Life is too short for hate;
We mingle here but one brief day,
Too brief for what we meant to say
When it is all too late.

Life is too short for hate;
The tree is green that soon shall wave
Its leafy plumes above the grave
In that relentless state."

They decided not to kill Joseph. Instead of a tragedy came a providence. Reuben had a tender spot in his heart. He proposed that they cast the boy into one of the pits that abounded in the region. He intended to rescue him afterward. The brothers agreed to this suggestion. They would not have the boy's blood on their

hands and he would be out of the way as effectually as if they should kill him. Yet this was really only another and more cruel way of killing him. Reuben meant to deliver him, but the others did not know this; they meant to let him starve to death in the pit. But here we see the hand of God at work. Joseph was not to die. He had a great mission to fulfil in the next twenty years, and no plot of men against his life could succeed. "Every man is immortal till his work is done." God took care of Joseph's life.

Having decided what to do with Joseph, they sat down to eat bread. Here we see the heartless cruelty of these brothers. Not far from them, in a dark, cold pit, was Joseph. Perhaps his cries came to their ears while they ate their food. Yet, in their heartlessness, they went to their meal and eagerly devoured it, unmoved by the sufferings of their brother close by. It is strange how envy freezes all the love out of the heart. There is a great deal of such heartlessness all about us. The world is full of want, suffering, and need. Yet how often do we who are more favoured eat our meals with relish, unmoved by the cries of hunger that come in at our windows! Then is it not the same with regard to men's souls? We have Christ and all the joy of His love and grace in our hearts. We sit down to our communion tables and feast richly on the heavenly provisions set before us; but do

the cries of lost ones never break on our ears while we sit there? In dark pits into which they have fallen are many perishing ones with none to deliver them. Is there no pity in our hearts? If we found a dog or a horse fallen into a pit, we would try to lift it out; but we see our brothers perishing in sin's dark pits and we pass by unmoved. Shall we not pray for compassion, compassion like our Master's, that will make us rescuers and helpers of all who are in need or distress?

God wanted this boy in Egypt, and "by chance," as men would say, a caravan now came in sight, on its way to the land of the Nile. This started a new thought in Judah's mind. He proposed that they sell Joseph to this caravan. He told them that killing him would not be any profit to them, while selling him would bring them a little money. Was it conscience, or was it greed of gain? There are in Judah's words hints of a troubled conscience, although the money seems to weigh the more in his suggestion. Sin is always a troublesome thing to get off our hands. Then the thought that Joseph was their brother made the matter worse. Why not avoid the blood stains and at the same time make a little out of Joseph? There would be profit all round in such a transaction. Then they would get Joseph out of the way just as effectually as if they had killed him; for if they sold him he would be

carried down to Egypt as a slave, and that would be the end of him. They would never hear anything more about his superior goodness. His hated coat would never flaunt itself in their eyes again. His dreams would never trouble them any more. The love of money is a root of all evil. For money these men sold their brother. For money Judas sold Jesus. What crimes have men not committed along the ages for money?

The brothers, knowing that some news must be sent to the old father, killed a kid, and, dipping Joseph's coat in the blood, sent it home, innocently explaining, "We found this garment in this condition in the field. Does our father think it is his son's coat?" The old man recognised it and drew the inference the cruel men wished him to draw. "Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces!" So, for more than twenty years, he thought, and all the years were filled with sore grieving.

Sin follows sin. It is always so. Indeed, it cannot be otherwise, for our lives are links of a chain and if we take up one link other links are drawn up with it. As we see Jacob so cruelly deceived by his own sons, we cannot but recall how Jacob himself in his earlier days had wronged his brother and deceived his father. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Sins are like chickens that are sure to come home to roost. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." We must take care

how we treat others, for by and by some one will treat us in the same way. Here we see the wisdom of the Golden Rule: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Jacob in his weeping saw only one side of the events over which he wept. Later on he saw that the cloud which was dark on the one side, on the other was all glorious with the Divine love and goodness. So it is in every Christian life. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The things we struggle against and weep over, which cause us such pain and grief, are parts of God's love and mercy for us.

CHAPTER XIX

JOSEPH IN PRISON

Read Genesis XXXIX., XL. 1-8

A MODERN writer has a story entitled "Hands Off," which illustrates providence in the life of Joseph. It represents a man in another stage of existence looking down upon Joseph as he is in the hands of the Midianites. Being an active, ingenious young man, Joseph succeeded in escaping from his captors on the first night of his captivity, and had just reached the outer limits of the camp when a yellow dog barked and awakened his captors, and Joseph was returned to his captivity.

But the onlooker wanted to interfere and kill the dog before he had awakened the camp. Then Joseph would have reached home in safety and great sufferings would have been avoided. But his guardian said, "Hands off!" To let him see the evil of his interference he took him to a world—so the story runs—where he could try

his experiment. There he killed the dog. Joseph reached home in safety, his father rejoiced, his brothers were comforted. But when the famine came there had been no Joseph to lay up the corn. Palestine and Egypt were starved. Great numbers of people died, and the rest were so weakened that they were destroyed by the savage Hittites. Civilisation was set back. Egypt was blotted out. Greece and Rome remained in a barbarous state. The whole history of the world was changed and countless evils came—all because a man in his ignorant wisdom killed a barking dog and saved Joseph from present trouble, to his future loss and the world's.

We would better keep our hands off God's providences. Many a beautiful plan of His is spoiled by human meddling. Peter wanted to keep Jesus back from His cross. Suppose he had done so, what would have been the result? No doubt, many a time, love has kept a life back from hardship, sacrifice, and suffering, thereby blighting or marring a destiny, a plan of God. We are likely to pity the boy Joseph as we see him enter his period of humiliation, and as we read of his being sold as a slave, then cast into irons. But we see well that if human pity could have rescued him from this sad part of his life, the glorious part that followed, with all its blessed service to the world, would have been lost.

His brothers had sold Joseph to the Midianites.

They bore him to Egypt and sold him in the market there. He was bought for a handful of money by a prominent man, Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's bodyguard. We can imagine Joseph praying to be rescued from the life to which he seemed destined, but his prayer was not answered. We see now why it could not be, for the boy was being prepared for high honour and great service in the future. So we find him in Egypt, beginning slave life. Everything about him is new and strange. The contrast between life in the home of Jacob in Canaan and the luxury of one of Egypt's homes was very great. But it was one of the marks of the noble character of Joseph that he was not dependent upon the conditions in which for the time he found himself. He had the fine art of living sweetly anywhere and of getting the best out of any circumstances.


So we read of him that he was successful, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper. In a little while he was overseer over all that his master had. The narrative makes it clear, too, that it was the hand of God that brought about this great prosperity for Joseph. At the same time we know that Joseph had much to do with his own success. If he had been sullen, indolent, bad tempered, or discourteous he never would have got on as he did. He never sulked nor grew depressed. He never let the spirit of a slave into his heart. He was as eager to please

and make others happy as if he had been in most congenial conditions and circumstances. He was cheerful, hopeful, patient, courteous, kindly, thoughtful, and by these graces and the other good qualities in him he won his way, with the help of God, to favour.

Joseph was at school in all these earlier experiences, unconsciously in training for the great work for which he had been brought to Egypt. For one thing, he learned obedience. No one is ready to rule over others who has not himself first learned the lesson of implicit and unquestioning obedience. In this lowly condition he also acquired much knowledge about the subject classes, by being among them, one of them. This knowledge was of great importance to him later when he himself became ruler of Egypt. He could sympathise with those who were oppressed, who were living in hard conditions.

Another lesson Joseph learned in these slave days was diligence. Many people in his position would have lost interest in life. He had been cruelly wronged; Potiphar had no right to his services; why should he then trouble himself to do Potiphar's work particularly well? Why should he do his tasks cheerfully, conscientiously? Why should he take an interest in Potiphar's affairs? But Joseph did not yield to the influence of such feelings. He attended to all his duties as promptly, as punctually, as

faithfully, and did all his work as well, and as cheerfully and enthusiastically, as if he had been serving in his own father's house. If all young men who are employed would take this lesson, more of them would rise to something better than they now attain. They often think that the tasks assigned to them are beneath them, and so they take no interest in them. The secret of getting up higher is in doing the lowly things just as if they were royal acts. Men who rise never despise any duty that is assigned to them.



“The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight;
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.”

Another secret of Joseph's success lay in the fact that he did not leave God out of his life. We are not told much about his religious life. Nothing is said of altars and sacrifices or of acts of worship. But evidently Joseph trusted God and followed his conscience and the Divine voice in all that he did. He loved God and was faithful to Him. The Lord was with him because he obeyed His commandments. We see his loyalty to God in the time of his temptation: “How, then, can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Two motives appear in Joseph's resistance to temptation. One was loyalty to his

master. Potiphar had trusted him implicitly with all that he had. Could he be guilty of such a base wrong to the man who had placed such confidence in him. To Joseph's mind such an act would have been basest treachery. The other motive which saved him was his loyalty to God. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Now we see Joseph in a new trouble, again enduring cruel wrong, and again because he has done right. He is in prison, but is not a criminal. We may study his bearing in this period of his humiliation. Even this did not break his spirit. He was in training for a great work for God by and by, and the Lord kept near him all the while. His mind was stayed upon God, and God kept him in perfect peace. He was not discouraged—many people would have given up altogether on finding themselves in such a condition, but Joseph was brave and cheerful. There was a fine optimism in him which kept him always sunny and hopeful.

One element of Joseph's nobleness of character in this case appears in his silence under false accusation. His temptress, in her disappointment and anger, charged him to her husband with most dishonourable behaviour. Under this accusation Joseph was seized and cast into irons. But he said not a word to Potiphar to free himself and turn suspicion upon the accusing wife. He seems

to have thought still of Potiphar's honour, and rather than lay a stain upon it he would go to the dungeon under the false charge, leaving to God the vindication of his own honour and the proving of his own innocence. It has been said of Joseph, "For his purity you will find his equal, one among a thousand; for his mercy scarcely one." He could have told Potiphar the whole story, but rather than speak he suffered the dishonouring accusation to rest undenied.

Nothing is harder than to live under false charges which bring upon one suspicion and condemnation, which hinders one's advancement, when by breaking silence one could cast off the false accusation. There are persons who do live thus—bearing reproach and odium to shield others. Joseph had resisted temptation in order to be loyal to Potiphar; now Potiphar thinks him guilty of the very baseness which for regard of him he had scorned to commit. But in all this Joseph kept his heart clean and loving.

Sometimes it costs very dearly to be true to God. Joseph lay now in a dungeon. But his loss through doing right was nothing in comparison with what he would have lost had he done the wickedness to which he was tempted. His prison gloom, deep as it was, was as noonday, compared with what would have been the darkness of his soul under the blight of evil and the bitterness of remorse. The chains that hung

about him in his dungeon were but like feathers in comparison with the chains which would have bound his soul had he yielded to the temptation. Though in a prison, his feet hurt by fetters, he was a free man because his conscience was free and his heart was pure. It is better to suffer any loss, any cost, any sacrifice than to sin against God. No fear of consequences should ever drive us to do a wrong thing. Better be hurled down from a high place for doing right than win worldly honour by doing wrong. Better lose our right hand than lose our purity of soul. Better rot in prison than be eaten up by remorse. It was the prayer of a girl queen, written with a diamond point on her castle window, "Keep me pure; make others great." That is the lesson of Joseph's victory over temptation; anything—dishonour, loss, dungeon, death—before sin.

The result of the way Joseph endured the wrong and the hardship of his prison-life was that he soon rose to influence and honour, even in the prison. "The keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison." There were in Joseph qualities which fitted him for ruling wherever he was. Men seemed naturally to trust him and follow him. He did not seek nor claim power: there are some men who do this; they are ambitious to get authority, to have the pre-eminence. Joseph was

not such a man—he was born to rule. So in the prison, as elsewhere, he was soon over everything.

One day something happened in the big world above Joseph's prison. It was in the palace of Pharaoh. Two of the king's officers had offended him and they were cast into prison. There would have been no need for the record of this bit of court scandal in the Bible were it not that the coming of these officers to the prison has an important bearing upon the after-story of Joseph. The men were committed to Joseph's care—he ministered to them, served them, attended to their wants. This contact with court officers was important also in Joseph's education and training. He learned much from these men which became of use to him when he himself was called to a place near the king.

One night each of these men dreamed a dream. Next morning Joseph noticed that they wore a troubled look. He showed his sympathy with them by asking them what troubled them. We should be ready always to be comforters of others when they are in any sorrow. When Joseph learned of the men's dreams he was at once interested and offered to help them to interpret the dreams. He had not forgotten his own boyhood dreams. May we not infer also that he still believed in these dreams, and regarded them as intimations of his own future? So he became the interpreter of the dreams of the butler and the baker.

It is a mark of Joseph's piety that he honoured God before these heathen men in interpreting their dreams. "Do not interpretations belong to God?" he asked. It is only as we are interpreters for God that we can be really helpful to others. We have nothing of our own to say to people that will do them any good. But when we can explain and make clear some word of God, which throws light upon their life's duties, perplexities or mysteries, then do our words become real blessings.

It is interesting to notice the connection of the dreams of these officers in the prison with the after-story of Joseph. But for these and Joseph's interpreting of them he would not have been called out to interpret Pharaoh's dreams two years later, and would have missed the great work for which he had been brought to Egypt.

When the chief butler left the prison to take his place in the king's service, Joseph asked him to remember him and make mention of him to Pharaoh and secure his release. The butler promised, but the last verse of the chapter says: "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him." That is the way the gratitude of too many people fades out when its occasion is past.

But when we read on into the next chapter we see it was well for Joseph that the butler did forget him for the time. If he had spoken for him to the king, Joseph might have been released from

prison and might have been beyond reach when wanted to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. As it was, however, the butler forgot his friend for two years, until the moment when remembering him would do the most for Joseph and for the world.

CHAPTER XX

FROM PRISON TO PALACE

Read Genesis XLI.

THE story reads like a romance. In the morning Joseph was in prison. He had been there perhaps three years. He knew of nothing that gave any hope of release. In the evening he was wearing the king's ring, was arrayed in vestures of fine linen, had a chain of gold about his neck, and was honoured as next to Pharaoh.

“God is always coming down to us through unlikely paths, meeting us unexpectedly.” We do not know what little things in the life of our common days are links in the mysterious chain of Providence affecting our destiny. We see here how important to Joseph was the coming to the prison of Pharaoh's two officers. Let us walk reverently along life's paths. We know not what most trivial occurrence any day may affect all our course of life unto the end. The touching of Joseph's life by these two prisoners from the

palace was a link in the chain by which he was lifted out.

Yet it seemed for a long time as if nothing would come of this touching of Joseph's destiny from outside. Joseph had told the two men in the prison the meaning of their dreams. As the chief butler went out happy from the prison, to resume his old duties, he parted affectionately from his friend. "Think on me," Joseph had said to him, "when it shall be well with thee." Certainly he would remember, he said. But the record says, "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him."

Two years passed, Joseph meanwhile hoping in prison that his friend's influence at court would avail for his release. Let us learn not to forget our promises to show kindness to those in trouble. Is there some one, somewhere, suffering, shut in, mayhap enduring wrong, to whom once you gave the assurance that you would do something, would send some gift, would speak a word, would be a friend? Have you remembered, or forgotten?

You and I, out in the free air, hear the bird songs, and quaff the nectar of human happiness, and have joy and love for our portion. Let us not forget the Josephs in their prisons. They look for tokens from us to assure them that they are not forgotten. They expect our visits, some proof at least of kindly thought, some effort to give relief or comfort. You have in your heart's full

cup that which will give strength and cheer. Do not think it a small thing to put a little new hope or courage or gladness into a fainting human heart. It is helping God warm this world. It is helping Christ save a soul. Emily Dickinson writes beautifully:—

“If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.”

As it came out, however, it was better that the butler did forget. The time had not yet come for Joseph's release, the time when the man's remembering would have meant most to Joseph. Pharaoh had a dream, a double dream. The dream troubled him. His wise men could not interpret it. Now at last the butler remembered. He told the king of the Hebrew slave who had interpreted his dream. Swiftly ran the messenger to the prison, and Joseph was called into the presence of Pharaoh.

The king tells his dreams. A vain man would have had his head turned by such a blaze of royal splendour about him, but Joseph speaks with the humility of an unspoiled child. “It is not in me; God shall give Pharaoh an answer.” Then Joseph

told him the meaning of the dream. It was God's message to Pharaoh. There would be seven years of great plenty in Egypt, and then seven years of sore famine, and the famine would be so great that it would eat up all the food of the abundant years. Joseph then advised the king what he should do—to find a wise man to superintend the work and let him gather the surplus food of the plentiful years and lay it up in storehouses to meet the needs of the coming years of famine.

This is the hour for which Joseph has been in training for thirteen years. He was not the only man who has had to wait long for his place in the world. It is very interesting, too, to trace the links in the chain of providence leading to Joseph's promotion. First, there were years of training to fit him for the position. During his long waiting his character was matured, so that when the time came for his exaltation he was discreet, wise, patient, strong, and ready for the most difficult duties. The long delay before promotion prepared him for the promotion. If it had come sooner he would not have been ready for it. His slave-life and prison-life, in humiliation, had been schools for his public life in the blaze of royalty. He had been faithful in every duty. He had firmly resisted temptation to sin. He had kept his heart tender and pure as a little child's, amid all the hard experiences of his life and all the corrupting influences of his circumstances. He had learned

perfect self-control, and thus had been prepared for ruling over others. Then he never had forgotten God, nor neglected his religious duties. Perhaps in no other way could he have been so well fitted for the exaltation to which so suddenly he came.

When Joseph had advised the king what he should do the king instantly felt that Joseph was the man to take charge of the great work. Ability and fidelity generally bring one to the place one is really competent to occupy. This lesson is very important for boys and young men. It is not mere happy chance that lifts men to places of honour, nor is it piety alone. God never puts a man into a place which the man is not able to fill. If a man has abilities for usefulness the world will generally find him and find a place for him. It is always waiting for such men. A great merchant said recently that he had had three large-salaried places waiting for months, but could not find the men for them. Scrambling for a place is not necessary, and certainly never is becoming. The true way to live is always to do one's duties well and to make the most of one's opportunities for self-improvement and growth of character. Then the higher places will open as fast as one is ready for them. Life is a ladder, and the only way to get to the top is to take each step from the bottom upward.

It must be noticed here also that Joseph was not ashamed of his God even before this heathen king, and also that his religion was no hindrance to his elevation, but was really the key that opened for him the door of success. Fidelity to God and to duty earlier in Joseph's career sent him to prison, but in the end it brought him to honour. If we seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, He will guide us to the work we have to do. God knows those who honour Him. Here this heathen king becomes the friend of Joseph and the hand of God in his promotion. He is also made to recognise and acknowledge the hand of the Lord. Note, too, that the king wants a servant of this God to look after the interests of his own kingdom. All this illustrates the truth that the Lord is God of the whole earth and controls all affairs. His hand moves and works in heathen kingdoms as well as in the nations that own and worship Him. We need not be afraid of ever getting into any place where God cannot help us, where He has no authority and no influence.

Pharaoh gave Joseph an Egyptian name, one suggested by the great work he was to do. He called him Zaphnath-paaneah. The name means "bread of life." We are reminded of Jesus Christ, who called Himself the Bread of Life because He provided bread for men's lives, thus saving them from perishing in eternal death. Every one of

us should strive to be worthy to bear in a certain way this same name. We should all be bread to others. We should live to do good to all who are under our influence, to be blessings to all whose lives ours touch. There are all about us people with hungry hearts who yearn for sympathy, for love, for comfort, and we may if we will become bread to them by giving out to them of our own life. Joseph became the bread of life to the people, through God's wisdom imparted to him, by telling them of the famine that was coming and then of the plentiful provision God would send before the famine came, so that they might lay up in store for the days of want and not perish. We also can become bread of life to others by warning them of the doom that is coming upon sin and then by telling them of the salvation provided, so that no one need perish in the days of wrath.

The lesson to be learned from Joseph's gathering and storing during the plenteous years is one all should learn. In every one's life there are seasons of plenty, and then there come also years that are empty. It is wisdom's part to gather all the avails of the full years and lay them away in store for the years of need.

Youth is a season of fulness. It brings opportunities for education, for study, for reading, for forming habits, for the culture of character, for the establishment of principles, and for full prep-

aration for life's work or business. A boy may see no use in studying mathematics or grammar or the natural sciences, but some day he will come to a point where this very knowledge, stored away and lying unused all the years, will become available and will be all that will save his life from failure.

A rich man's son may see no reason why he should learn a trade, or business, or profession; he will never have occasion to work for his living. But some time the trade or profession will be the only staff on which he can lean amid the wreck of fortune. A young girl sees no use in studying so hard, and so she wastes her schooldays in novel-reading and trifling. By and by she is thrown in society among intelligent, cultured people. But alas! she has no preparation for such a position. She is ashamed of her ignorance. Every day brings its mortifications. She laid up nothing in the full years, and now, when the hungry years have come, with their necessities, there is no storehouse from which to draw.

So one should lay up knowledge at every opportunity—it will become available at some time. Through the years of joy we should lay up comfort and strength for the empty years of sorrow that will come. All through life's vigorous period we should be laying up in store those things which will make old age happy and beautiful. Religion may seem unnecessary for the young.

They have no sorrows to comfort, no wounds to heal, no burdens to carry, no dark passages to pass through. But it is better to have the lamps ready lighted, even though their beams may appear pale in the sunlight, for the days of darkness which will come. Then how precious the beams will be as they fall from the lamps of truth and comfort which hang in our hearts! And how desolate and despairing we will be in such days if we have made no provision in advance!

This lesson is capable of almost infinite application. Because it has not been learned and followed countless lives break down in their mid-day in the first great stress. The hungry years come on and there is no reserve laid up in store. If we would be ready for whatever may come we must use the opportunities which are given to us. In summer we must gather "driftwood for winter's fires." In harvest we must lay up for want; in wealth we must prepare for poverty; in time we must lay up treasures for eternity. "Spread wide thy skirts," says an old proverb, "when heaven is raining gold."

CHAPTER XXI

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS

Read Genesis XLII.-XLV.

It was a startling revelation to the sons of Israel when from the lips of the great ruler of Egypt there fell the words "I am Joseph." No wonder they could not answer him. No wonder they were troubled at his presence.

There had been seven years of abounding plenty and then the seven years of famine came on. The famine extended to Canaan, where Jacob and his sons lived. They heard that there was food in Egypt, and the father sent his sons to buy provisions. The men were reluctant to go. The name of Egypt had dread for them. It was to Egypt they had sold their brother. That was more than twenty years ago, but there are some things we cannot forget.

Only ten of the brothers went. Jacob would not trust Benjamin away from himself. Joseph recognised his brothers and dealt harshly with

them. Why did he do this? Was it resentment? No; he was proving them to see if they were better men than they were twenty odd years before. They talked in his presence, not knowing that he would understand what they said in Hebrew. "We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear." Joseph was deeply affected. "He turned himself about from them and wept."

Why did he not at once make himself known to them? Instead of this he demanded that one of them should be kept in prison while the others returned home with food for their families. Nine brothers went back to Hebron. At length they appear again before Joseph, Benjamin with them. The Governor asked after their father—"the old man of whom ye spake." He saw Benjamin and his heart yearned upon him. He sought his own room to weep, his heart was so full. He asked his brothers to dine with him. Still he did not reveal himself to them. He let them start home. Soon they were surprised by the coming after them of an Egyptian officer, charging them with the theft of the ruler's silver cup. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Dismay seized all the brothers. They rent their clothes and went back.

"What deed is this that ye have done?" asked Joseph. There was an outburst of penitence. But the brothers did not renounce Benjamin. They

took the guilt upon themselves. Joseph said he could not punish the innocent. "The man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get ye up in peace unto your father." Here was the test. Would these ten men go home and leave Benjamin in the hands of the law? Twenty-two years ago that is what they would have done. Instead of this, however, we have one of the finest scenes in all history. They would not desert Benjamin. The speech of Judah, as he pleads for his brother, is one of the noblest pieces of natural eloquence in any literature, sacred or profane.*

No one can read these pathetic words of Judah's and not see that the brothers have been wonderfully changed since that day when they sold another brother into bondage, and were deaf to his piteous cries. Their hearts had been softened.

Joseph was now satisfied. He saw that they were new men. Grace had been at work in them. They were ready now to stand together to lay the foundation of national life. The time had come for disclosure.

"Then Joseph could not refrain himself." His emotion had been deep at each meeting, and had been growing in intensity from the first. He had maintained his disguise all along, not for want of love for his brothers, but for their sake. His apparent harshness toward them was not resent-

* Genesis xliv. 18-34.

ment, but love trying them, to see if they were still the same in character as when they had sold him, or were now better men. He has put them to the test in various ways and finds that they are changed men. Their love for Benjamin and their willingness to sacrifice all for him assured Joseph of this. He required no further proof of their penitence. His love for them could now no longer be restrained.

Joseph's true nobleness appears in his love for his brothers who had so wronged him. This is the way he repaid their wickedness. Though he lived long before Christ he showed the mind of Christ in all his treatment of his brothers. We should learn the duty of forgiving those who have done us injury, and yet of seeking at the same time their good. We may see also in Joseph an illustration of the way Christ deals with sinners. On His very cross He prayed for His murderers. In commissioning His disciples He told them to begin at Jerusalem to offer salvation through His blood. The first men saved were Jerusalem sinners, men whose hands were red with the blood of their Messiah. Then toward all of us He shows the same spirit of love. To our sin against Him His answer always is love—pained, yearning, pleading love.

When he had sent away from the room all but his brothers and was alone with them, Joseph looked into their faces and said to them, "I am

Joseph." Who can imagine their feelings as these words fell upon their ears? First, there must have been terror mingled with their amazement. Again, all their sin against their brother rose before them. Here was Joseph whom they had so cruelly wronged. He was lord of Egypt, and they were in his power; what would he do with them? Twenty-two years ago they had put him in a pit to die, and then had hastily lifted him out only to sell him as a slave. They had supposed that they were now done with that "dreamer." But here they are before him in utterly reversed position. Is it any wonder they stood dumb in the presence of Joseph, that they could not answer him, or that they were troubled?

But Joseph's heart was too full to prolong the scene. "Come near to me," he said. "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." But he hastened to comfort them. "And now be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life . . . to preserve you a remnant in the earth, and to save you alive by a great deliverance." Then he said, "So now it is not you that sent me hither, but God." Then he bade them hasten to his father with the news and to return, all of them, with their father and their families, to dwell in Egypt, to be near to him. The wonderful scene closes with Joseph's falling upon Benjamin's neck in loving embrace, then

kissing all his brothers and weeping with them in the joy of reconciliation. The barriers are all now broken down. The old sin was forgiven. The long-sundered family was brought together again. Estrangement had been healed by love and peace.

His brothers could not answer; they were troubled. No wonder they were troubled. Remember how they had treated him. All the time since, they had carried the bitterness of remorse in their hearts. Their consciences had given them no peace. Yet they never thought of meeting Joseph again. Now when they suddenly discovered that this great ruler of Egypt was the very brother they had once sold as a slave, they were terror-stricken. Sins once committed remain terrible facts in our lives ever after. They embitter our days and nights. They make cowards of us. Then we must some day face them all.

Joseph sought to allay the distress of his brothers. "Be not grieved," he said to them, "that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life." Of course this did not change their wrong to right, for they had no good intention in selling their brother. But God takes even men's wicked deeds and brings good out of them. It is a most comforting truth that the Lord reigns in this world. All things are under His government. Even Satan's acts God holds in His power, making them in some way to work for His

own glory. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him. The sin of these brothers He used to the preserving of the chosen seed in famine. Out of the wickedness of the Jews in crucifying Christ He brought salvation for the world. Peter's denial He used to make Peter a truer, nobler man. Paul's thorn, "the messenger of Satan to buffet him," He made to be a blessing to the apostle. So it is with all Satan's malice; God takes it and turns its force of evil into power for good. This ought to strengthen our faith in God in the midst of all suffering, and especially when others wrong us. We may commit our wrongs to Him who judgeth righteously.

It has been said that some of the greatest treasures in heaven will be blunders which God's children have made when trying their best to show their love. The soiled and puckered handkerchief the little girl is trying to hem because she loves her mother, has a value away beyond anything a skilled seamstress can do. Many a piece of marred work, marred by one who wanted to help Christ and did her best, will have immeasurable value in God's sight. In looking back over our lives we see many things we regretted as mistakes, but which now appear to have been the best things we could have done. It seems as if the "mistakes" were all the while intended to be there, so thoroughly have they become part of the fabric of our life and work.

Joseph said further to his brothers, to comfort them, "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity. . . . It was not you that sent me hither, but God." God's plans run far on. Away back more than a score of years ago, He was preparing for the great famine, and arranging occurrences and events so that the chosen family, the family of the covenant, in which was the holy seed, should be well cared for in the great calamity. Providence is the same now as then. God looks far on into the years, and when there is a disaster coming we may be sure there is always a Divine purpose working alongside of it, which will secure the safety of those who trust in God. This ought to be a great comfort and a ground of confidence to us in all times of danger. God has not been ignorant of the coming of the peril. He is not taken by surprise as we are. Nor has He neglected to provide in advance such a chain of causes and events as will bring us deliverance and great blessing. We may always trust in the Lord and leave Him to order all our ways. It is a great comfort for us to know that God's plan for our life runs on all the time and is never dropped. The troubles we have He takes up and works into the web, weaving them into beauty. The oyster mends its wounded shell with a pearl; so the sorrows of our lives and the hurts others may give, if we let God have His way, He will transmute into pearls of beauty in our life and character.

The way to deal with injuries we receive is just to give them into God's hands. If we meddle, we may make the injury permanent; but God can make it a blessing to us.

How strong are family ties! Many years had elapsed since Joseph and his brothers had parted; yet the family affection had not been extinguished. Even the cruel wrong they had done to him had not quenched the flame of love in his heart. Nor had Joseph's exaltation to high honour chilled his love for his family. In all this world there is nothing more beautiful than the affection that binds together the members of a true family. It endures the sorest tests.

Let us cultivate more and more the home loves. Let us be true and faithful to each other, though sundered far and even though sundered by misunderstanding and wrongdoing. Let us never forget the old home, and let us seek when together to make the home ties so true and so strong that nothing ever can break them.

The best place to learn the value of home affection is by the grave of buried love. When the time for reconciliation has gone by for ever, then the heart would give all it has to have the bond restored. Says Ruskin, "He who has once stood beside the grave, to look back upon the companionship which has been for ever closed, feeling how impotent then are the wild love and the keen sorrow to give one instant's pleasure to

the pulseless heart or atone in the lowest measure to the departed spirit for the hour of unkindness, will scarcely for the future incur that debt to the heart which can only be discharged to the dust."

CHAPTER XXII

JOSEPH AND HIS FATHER

Read Genesis XLVIII.

EVERY side of Joseph's character is beautiful. Everywhere we see him he bears himself nobly. His childhood was winning. It was a sore test to which he was subjected when he began to endure wrongs; but here the splendour of his spirit shone out in even brighter light than in his childhood. When he was a slave, the manhood in him was free and unshackled. In the hour of temptation his soul remained untarnished. When he was cast into prison, falsely accused, hurled into chains and a dungeon, he was not yet crushed. Instead of letting the darkness into his soul to darken his eyes, the light that was in him shone out and filled his prison with brightness, overcoming the gloom. Instead of yielding to discouragement and despair, he became a comforter of others. He filled the dungeon with the fragrance of love. Then at one bound he passed

from the darkness and the chains of the cruel imprisonment almost to the throne of Egypt.

Many men who bear adversity well fail in prosperity. Many a spirit that shines radiantly in trial fades out in the fierce light of human honour and joy. But the promotion of Joseph dimmed no line of the beauty of his soul. He went as quietly to the great tasks of government as ever he had gone to the lowliest duties when a slave.

Again the experience changed. His brothers stood before him—the brothers who had sold him as a slave. This was a sore trial of his character, but he was equal to the testing. One of the most beautiful scenes in all history is Joseph forgiving his brothers.

We pass now to still another chapter in the life of Joseph, and here, too, we shall find the beauty unsullied, the splendour undimmed. We look at Joseph and his father, and we see that through all the experiences of his life he kept his love for his father warm and tender. There is one incident which at first thought seems to have shown forgetfulness of his old home. When his first son was born he named him Manasseh. "For God," said he, "hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." But he did not mean that the coming of this child into his home blotted out all memory of his father and his father's house. The words reveal the heart hunger of Joseph for

home, love, and domestic ties. He had been torn away from these, and for thirteen years and more had lived unblessed by human affection. Now the hunger of his heart was met by the child he held in his arms. He had now a home of his own, and in the new joy, the years of hungry, unmet love were forgotten, as the earth forgets the desolation of winter when springtime comes with its glory of bursting life and bloom and foliage.

But his father was not forgotten even in the gladness of his own happy home. All through the story of the brothers' visits we have glimpses of Joseph's love for his father. As he pressed on them the charge that they were spies, testing them, learning what was in them, they dropped the words "Thy servants are sons of one man. . . . The youngest is this day with our father." They spoke carelessly, as to a stranger who knew nothing of their home, but their words told Joseph that his father was yet alive, sending a thrill of gladness into his heart.

The brothers went home and came again, and when they stood before the governor, almost his first word to them was the inquiry, "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake?" The brothers saw nothing in the words but the fine courtesy of a noble gentleman; yet under the courtesy there throbbed a tender filial love. When Judah presented his plea for Benjamin, referring again and again to his father at home,

his old age, his loneliness, his bereavement, his love for Benjamin—so deep and tender that he would die if the lad were not returned to him—he little knew what chords he was touching in the soul of the great man to whom he was speaking. It was this picture of the aged, sorrowing father that most of all moved Joseph as he listened to Judah's words. When the plea was ended Joseph broke down, could not refrain himself longer, and said amid sobs, "I am Joseph." Then the very next words were, "Doth my father yet live?" A few minutes later, after the passionate assurance of forgiveness had been given to quiet the hearts of his brothers in their consternation, he bade them hasten to their father—"my father," he says now—"and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not. . . . Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither."

Weeks must have passed while the caravan slowly wended its way to Canaan, and while preparations for breaking up the old home and for moving were progressing, and while the family journeyed again toward Egypt. At last, however, word came to Joseph that his father was approaching, and he made ready his chariot and went to meet him. Who can tell the tenderness of that meet-

ing? The Bible never indulges in sentimental narration, and yet the picture its words present is very touching. "Joseph presented himself unto him, and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while." It had been twenty-two years since Joseph, a lad of seventeen, had gone away from the home door, to carry messages and tokens to his brothers, expecting in a few days to return. He had never seen his father's face since that morning, and the pent-up love of all the years found expression in his greeting.

Sometimes young men who have risen from a lowly origin to places of honour have not cared to acknowledge the members of their own family in the presence of the distinguished friends who stood about them in their new rank. But here, too, the character of Joseph shines in brilliant splendour. The court of Pharaoh was a place of great splendour. Jacob was a plain shepherd, lowly, unconventional in manners, without worldly rank or honour, withered, limping, famine-driven. Far apart in condition were these two men, the Governor of Egypt and the patriarch of Canaan, but the love in Joseph's heart for his father was so strong and so loyal that he never thought of the difference, and he led the old shepherd into the presence of the great king with pride. He told Pharaoh of the coming of his father as eagerly as if Jacob too

had been a king. He made provision for his father, also, in Egypt, and nourished him as long as the old man lived. When Jacob was dying Joseph stood watching by his bedside, the Prime Minister of Egypt by the old shepherd, with beautiful filial devotion. When Jacob was dead Joseph fell upon his face and wept upon him and kissed him. Then followed a funeral like that of a king.

All this reveals the nobleness of Joseph's character. The lesson is plain. Children should honour their parents. Nothing more sadly mars the beauty of a life than anything which shows want of filial love and respect. Children never come to an age while their parents live when they may cease to treat them with affection and honour, in return for their unselfish devotion, self-denial, and care for them in the days of infancy and childhood. These are debts we never can repay save by love that stops at no cost or sacrifice, nor flags in its faithfulness, until we have laid away the revered forms to rest in the grave.

Children, who rise from lowly homes to wealth, honour, or distinction should never dishonour the parents they have left in the obscurity of the common walks. There have been children who have grown distinguished in the world and then have been ashamed of the old-fashioned father and mother to whom they owed all that

gave them power to rise among men. There have been fathers and mothers who, old, poor, broken, and broken-hearted, have not been welcomed to the splendid mansions of their children—children for whom they had toiled, suffered, and sacrificed, without stint, without complaining, in the time of their infancy and early years. They did not know that their unfilial treatment of their own father and mother left upon them a dishonour far deeper than any little social stigma their acknowledgment of them before their friends could have occasioned.

If we are blessed with wealth or with plenty, they should share it who shared their all with us in days gone by, perhaps pinched themselves that we might not want, or that we might be better fitted for life. If we have risen to higher position and greater honour than our parents had, we should bring them into the sunshine that is ours, that the benediction of our favoured life may brighten and sweeten their old age. If they are a little peculiar, or odd in their ways, lacking some of the refinements of our more fashionable life, we should remember that these are only outside disfigurements, and that beneath them beat hearts of love, and dwell spirits that are noble with the nobleness of Christlikeness.

There is another part of the story of Joseph and his father which has its revealings and its lessons. We turn back to Hebron, to the time when the

brothers came home from Egypt, after Joseph had made himself known to them. They told their father that Joseph was alive and that he was Governor of Egypt, but the old man could not believe the tidings. His heart was overwhelmed. For more than twenty years he had mourned Joseph as dead. Now to hear that he was alive in Egypt was too much for the old father. "His heart fainted, for he believed them not."

His sons sought to make him believe what they had told him. They repeated to him the words of Joseph. While he still listened, bewildered, doubting, full of conflicting emotions, the wagons Joseph had sent to carry him to Egypt were driven to the door. Then the asses, bearing the provisions and the good things of Egypt, also appeared. Now Jacob was convinced. His spirit revived. "And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive. I will go and see him before I die." The wagons came and took Jacob away from that land of hunger, with its mere handfuls of the good things of the land of plenty, and bore him right into the heart of the country where his son ruled. He was met on the borders of Egypt by the son who had died to him, but still lived. He was welcomed by him with love's warmest welcome. He was presented to the king, who bade him dwell in the best of the land. There he stayed, close to

his son, nourished by him. No longer did he have merely a few of the good things, sent from far away as tokens of the abundance in store yonder; he dwelt now in the very midst of the storehouses, and had all that he could wish.

We see how beautiful a parable this story makes in its application to Christ's believing ones in this world. Here our joy is very sweet, but we have only little foretastes of the heavenly good things. By and by the wagons will come for us to take us into the very presence of Christ. That is what death is—God's chariot swinging low, to carry home the loved saint. When Jacob got into the royal carriage and it drove away he was sad. He was leaving his old walks and the place of his sorrows, but he was going to his son. He was leaving famine and want, and was going to a land of plenty. That is what dying is to the Christian. We shall leave the place of toil and care to find rest. We shall leave the land of tears and separations to go into the presence of the loved and lost, when

“ The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile.”

The wagons of heaven have been at our doors already and have taken some of ours home.

Some day they will come for us, and we will go away from this earth where the famine is, and where we cannot see our Saviour. But it will not be a sad day to us, if we are Christ's by faith. The wagons will take us to the land where our Saviour lives in glory and reigns over all. He will meet us on the edge of that blessed country and conduct us home.

“Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark;

For, tho' from out our bourne of time and place,
The flood may bear me far
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.”

He will meet us on the borders of the land of blessedness. He will welcome us with tenderest love. He will present us to His Father—not ashamed to own us as His friends, His brothers, His sisters, before all heaven's angels. He will give us

a place near Himself, close to the centre of heaven's glory. There He will nourish us with heaven's choicest fruits, and we shall go no more out for ever.

CHAPTER XXIII

JOSEPH'S OLD AGE AND DEATH

Read Genesis XLVIII-L.

A RECORD in Genesis tells us that Joseph said to his brothers one day, "I die : but God will surely visit you, and bring you up out of this land unto the land which He sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence."

Word was sent to Joseph one day that his father wished to see him. The old man was thinking of his departure from earth. He knew that he must die in Egypt, but he did not want to be buried in that strange land. He wanted to lie in the land of promise. So he asked Joseph to swear to him, in the rude fashion of the times, that he would not bury him in Egypt.

Joseph promised. "Swear unto me," said Jacob. And Joseph sware unto him. It was no mere sentiment that made the old man, as his end drew

nigh, crave to lie beside his father and his wife in the cave of Machpelah; it was his strong faith in God's promise to give Canaan to his descendants. He believed that the promise would be fulfilled, and he wanted his grave to be where the future home of his children would be. Then he wanted his family, though still for the present abiding in Egypt, to have a constant reminder that Egypt was not their home. He knew that his grave in the land of promise would continually draw upon their hearts.

There was another incident. Jacob was sick. Joseph heard it and hastened with his two sons to his father's bedside. Jacob adopted these boys as his own, taking them in among his own sons, kissing and embracing them, then stretching out his thin, trembling hands and laying them on the heads of the lads, while he uttered this beautiful benediction upon them: "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God who hath fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel who hath redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them."

Then we have the death scene. All the sons are there, and the dying patriarch, in prophetic words, unveils the future of each in turn.

It is a solemn moment to a man when he stands by the deathbed of a loved and honoured father. He lives over again all his own life as he watches the last breathings of his sire, and listens to the last words of farewell and benediction. Those

were intensely solemn moments to Joseph. All his honours seemed small as he stood there at that patriarchal bed and felt on his head the touch of the hand now growing cold in death.

At length the feeble voice ceased to speak. The blessings were all pronounced. Then came the dying charge. "Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron." "And when Jacob made an end of charging his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people." What a strange thing is death! He who but a little while ago was breathing out his blessings and his farewells, is now gone away from earth. The old house is empty. The love that thrilled the heart with its tenderness, and flushed the face with its glow and warmth, an hour ago, has passed from earth.

"Life and thought have gone away
Side by side,
Leaving door and window wide—
Careless tenants they!

All within is dark as night:
In the windows is no light;
And no murmur at the door,
So frequent on its hinge before.

Close the door, the shutters close,
Or through the windows we shall see
The nakedness and vacancy
Of the dark deserted house."

So that sacred form looked to Joseph as he stood by the bedside and saw that the breathing had ceased. Strange mystery of dying!

Quickly Joseph set about to do all that love could do to honour the name and memory of his father. The body was embalmed. Then followed seventy days of mourning—according to the custom in Egypt. After this the patriarch's dying command was obeyed, and the twelve sons, with many Egyptian friends, among them men of rank, bore the body away to Canaan, and laid it to rest beside the bodies of his kindred, in the cave of Machpelah.

After the burial of his father the story of Joseph is almost a blank. Only one incident is given. When Jacob was gone, the brothers grew uneasy. They thought that their father's influence had restrained Joseph from seeking revenge upon them for their sin against him, and they feared that now, when this restraint had been taken away, Joseph would visit punishment upon them. The memory of sin dies hard. It had been forty years since this wrong was committed, and for seventeen years the brothers had lived in the sunshine of Joseph's forgiveness, nourished by his love, without a word or an act to suggest aught of resentment; yet here we find the old dread still lingering. Guilt makes cowards of men. Sins against love plant thorns in the heart.

Joseph was pained when he heard of the fears and distrust of his brothers, but his patience did

not fail. "Fear not," he said to them, "for am I in the place of God? And as for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones." His answer was only a new assurance of affection undisturbed by their treatment; he would nourish them in the days to come as he had done in the past. He would share his honour with them. He would provide for them in the land where they were strangers. He would care for their children. So he comforted them and spoke kindly unto them.

After this incident Joseph lived fifty-four years, but nothing whatever is told us of these years. We can picture to ourselves a ripe and beautiful old age, full of honours and full of usefulness. He had saved Egypt, and there is no reason to suppose that he failed to receive the gratitude of the people of the country unto the end of his life.

Old age is a severer testing time of character than youth or mid-life. Many men who live nobly and richly while in their prime fail in their old age. The grace of Christ, however, is sufficient for the testings and trials of the old as well as of the young. We should set ourselves the task of making the whole day of life to its last moments beautiful. Let no one think that he has finished his task of sweet, true living when he has got safely through the years of mid-life into the

borders of old age. No. We must not slacken our diligence, our earnestness, our fidelity, our prayerfulness, our faith in Christ, until we have come to the gate of eternity. God's plan for our life takes in all of it, to its close.

“Grow old along with me!
 The best is yet to be,
 The last of life, for which the first was made:
 Our times are in His hands
 Who saith, ‘A whole I planned:
 Youth shows but half; trust God; see all nor be afraid.’”

At last the time came for Joseph to die, as this time must come to all. “And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: but God will surely visit you, and bring you up out of this land unto the land which He sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.” Then the record goes on, giving the end of the story: “So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.”

Embalming was a costly process. When the body had been prepared it was wrapped in bands of fine linen and placed in a stone or wooden coffin or mummy case. The Egyptian funeral rites are very elaborate. Because of his great service to the country Joseph might have had

a burial with the highest honours ; but he refused all this. It is said that among the ruins of that wonderful land there has been discovered a tomb which it is thought was prepared for Joseph. It is near the pyramid of one of the Pharaohs. It is the tomb of a prince. It bears the name "Eitsuph"—or Joseph—and the title "Abrech," which means "Bow the knee." If this tomb was prepared for Joseph he refused to have his body rest in it. He was not an Egyptian, but an Israelite. Like Moses, afterwards, he preferred to share the reproaches of his own people rather than receive the honours of a heathen nation. Joseph was not buried at all in Egypt. His body was embalmed there, but not entombed. Egypt had long been his home. It had been the scene of all his honours and triumphs. His wife was an Egyptian. His friends were Egyptians. But he was still a loyal Israelite and would be buried in an Israelite grave. This is the first thought which Joseph's dying command suggests. He was patriotic.

But there are other thoughts. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, when the faith of Joseph is spoken of, it is remarkable that it is this command concerning his bones that is mentioned. "By faith Joseph, when his end was nigh, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." How did this show his faith? It showed

that he believed God's promises concerning his people. His faith was so strong that he refused to be buried at all in Egypt; his burial must wait until his people went up out of Egypt to their own land.

Notice the difference in the dying requests of Jacob and Joseph. Jacob, too, refused to be buried in Egypt. He had spent seventeen happy years there, and his family was well settled, with his son honoured in all the land. But he could not die until he had the pledge from his sons that he would be buried beside his kindred. Joseph's request was different. He was not to be buried in Egypt, yet his body was not to be carried to Canaan until his people should go there.

There was a special reason why Joseph made his will in this way. He wanted even his bones to do good after his death. His people would need all the influence that could be put into their lives, in the long, dark years before them, to keep alive in their hearts the memory of the promises, love for Canaan, and the hope of possessing that land. The graves of their fathers were there—that made the country dear to love and hope. But Joseph felt that his mummy left among them unburied, waiting to be carried away to Canaan and buried there, would do more to keep hope alive in their hearts than if it lay at rest yonder in the cave of Machpelah.

Every time they saw it they would remember why it was unburied, and their thoughts would turn toward their land of promise.

By and by it grew very dark in Egypt. The dynasty of the Pharaohs who had been Joseph's friends gave way to a new dynasty of kings who had not known him, cared not for his memory, and were jealous of the growth of the Israelites. Bitter oppression followed. In those days of gloom, who knows how much the unburied mummy of Joseph, with its unspoken words of hope, helped to keep the people from despair?

Then one night there was great excitement in Goshen. The hour of departure had come. Here is the record: "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you." Then followed forty years of weary wandering, and during all this time the mummy of Joseph was in the column or in the camp.

At length there was a funeral one day at Shechem, and those bones, in their Egyptian mummy case, were laid to rest by Joshua. Here again is the record: "And the bones of Joseph . . . buried they in Shechem, in the parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor." When tourists journey in the

Holy Land they are shown at Shechem the tomb of Joseph. It is but a little way from the pit at Dothan, into which his brothers cast him to die. So the great wrong is righted, for the world now honours his grave.

We may take two lessons from Joseph's dying words. One is a lesson of faith. "I die: and God will surely visit you." He would die, but God would live on and His work would go on. "God buries His workmen, but carries on His work." We have only one little fragment to build in the wall. Then we shall die, but the work will go on, for God lives on and His plans and purposes halt not.

The other lesson is, that we should live so that the memory of our life and its influence, when we are gone, shall inspire those who stay behind. The memory of the just is blessed. Joseph's embalmed body, kept among his people, spoke not only for his noble work in the past, but declared ever the word of hope for the future. It said, "This is not your home. You are but tarrying here as strangers and pilgrims. By and by you will go on."

CHAPTER XXIV
ISRAEL OPPRESSED IN EGYPT

Read Exodus I.

AFTER the funeral of Jacob, Joseph and his brothers returned to Egypt. Why did they not stay in Canaan? Was not Canaan the land of promise? Why was it that this chosen family were led off to Egypt, where ultimately they had to meet such experiences of trial and suffering? When we read on and learn of the hard lot of the Israelites in Egypt, their cruel bondage, does it not seem to us that it would have been better if they had not returned after the funeral of Jacob? But when we think of the matter more closely we learn that the period of their stay in Egypt was not a mistake, but part of God's wise plan for the training of His people.

For one thing, Canaan was full of fierce tribes, who would not have allowed any strange people to live and grow up amongst them. The sons of Jacob and their families would have been blotted

from the earth. In the providence of God, therefore, they were led into Egypt, where they could grow up into a great people, protected by the king, through the influence of Joseph. Then, in due time, when they were great in numbers, they came back to Canaan and conquered the land for themselves, driving out the people that had held the country.

Another reason for the removal to Egypt was that if they had remained in Canaan it would have been impossible for them to be kept separate from the nations about them. Yet this was essential. They were not to mix with any other peoples. The exclusiveness of the Egyptians was such that it was impossible for them to mingle in intermarriage or even in social relations.

A still further reason for the transfer to Egypt was that Canaan was a wild country, rude and uncultured. It was necessary that the people of God should be educated, that they might be the teachers of the world, which afterwards they became. Egypt was at that time the most advanced of all countries in civilisation, in the arts, in education. Dwelling in Egypt, the people of Israel learned the things they needed to learn to fit them for their high position and their great mission.

We take up now the story of the Israelites in Egypt. It is something that even names live

for thirty-five hundred years. It is suggestive, too, that out of the wrecks of human things in those ancient times the names that are here presented are not those of kings, poets, philosophers, and conquerors, but those of men who were in the line of God's chosen people. The names of God's children are the only really immortal ones. They are written in the book of life. They may be names of lowly people, but they are preserved, while the names of the great of the same period have utterly perished from the earth.

Long, long ages since a fern grew in a deep valley. It lived for only one summer and then fell into the earth and perished. As it sank down in the indistinguishable mass of decaying vegetation it murmured, "I shall be utterly forgotten. I shall have no record in this great world. My memory shall perish." But the other day a teacher of geology, going about with his class, struck off a piece of rock with his hammer, and there lay the fern, every line of its beautiful leafage and veinage traced in the stone. So it is with the names and the deeds of those who live in this world to honour God and bless their fellow-men. Love never dies. Love's memory never perishes. The things you do in the name of Christ and to give comfort, cheer, and help to others cannot fade out of the universe. Their record is written in imperishable lines in the

book of God and also in the lives into which the deeds have been wrought. Thousands who live in this world obscurely, and die, never thinking that they shall be remembered, will be surprised in the other world to see the record of every beautiful thing they have done, every gentle word they have spoken, every kindly touch they have put upon a human soul.

The story says there were souls in Jacob's family. The Bible talks about people as souls. If you look at your concordance you will be surprised to find how common this is. Three thousand souls were added to the Church. On the ship on which St. Paul was when he was wrecked were two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. We talk about people having souls, but a far better way to put it is that they are souls. We are souls and we have bodies. The children who sit in the teacher's class and look up into her face are souls. They are going by and by into God's presence, and will carry there the marks and impressions which she is making upon them these days.

It is well we should remember that we are souls, wearing the image of God, not worms of the dust, but instead only "a little lower than God," immortal souls. We shall live for ever, and what we do in this world shall never perish. It is worth while that we live every day at our best.

At length Joseph died. He died, but he lives yet in the world. The story of his early days lives, and has for us all the interest and charm of a delightful romance. We read of his noble spirit, uncrushed by adversity, unembittered by injustice and wrong, keeping sweet, courageous, and loving, through all the thirteen years of cruel injury and wicked treatment. Joseph lived nobly, and then died. We grieve when a good man dies. But why should we? If he has filled his years, few or many, with beautiful living, dying is not a disaster. Joseph lived gloriously, and now the influence of his unconquerable life is still going on. Every one who reads his story thoughtfully gets new inspiration for beautiful and victorious living. All that Joseph wrought, all the impressions he made upon human history, yet lives. Good done in the world is imperishable. They tell us that a word spoken into the air goes quivering on and on, for ever. We are certain, at least, that every good word spoken and every good deed done leaves an impression on human lives which shall never die out. Every life that is pure in its purpose and strong in its strife makes all lives better, truer, and stronger.

Not only did Joseph die, but the whole generation to which he belonged passed away. However long one may live, the story always closes with "and he died." Whether beautiful or marred, whether good or bad in our life and character,

we must come to the same end. There are those who do not like to think of this, and never put death into the plan of their life. Then when death comes it finds them unready for it.

Then came a change of dynasties in Egypt, and the new king did not know Joseph, and so had no remembrance of what Joseph had done. Thus it is oftentimes. Nations and communities are ungrateful; the good that men do is too often forgotten. It is not best to count too certainly on the lasting gratitude of the people whom we benefit or try to help. Many times those we serve at greatest cost heap injustice upon us or do wrong to our children. However, the possibility of ungrateful treatment should never check the outflow of our beneficence. Even if men do forget, there is one place where all our good work is kept in mind. Every tear, every sacrifice, every smallest service, Christ remembers. If we but learn to do all our work for Him, though men forget us and wrong us, we shall not fail of the final reward. The world can never rob us of the true reward of faithful service. It may withhold gratitude, but no earthly ingratitude can intercept the Divine benediction. Joseph is no poorer now for the ingratitude of the Egyptians. He helped shape the history of the world. Think of the countless thousands of lives he preserved from famine. His beautiful character has been for many centuries one of the world's brightest ideals.

His influence is felt wherever the Bible is read. What matters it, then, that the new king sought to blot out the name of Joseph and every memory of him? To-day his is one of the most honoured names in all history, and his work in the world will abide for ever.

The new king entered on a course which was intended to check the growth of the Hebrews. He was a wise king, and feared that this growing people would by and by become a formidable power, if allowed to increase in the future as it had been increasing in the past. So he set to work to counteract the alarming increase of the Hebrew people. He did not know that he was contending with the Almighty. Tyrants do not see the invisible Being who stands behind the frail people they seek to destroy. They are continually resorting to cunning and policy to outreach God and carry out their own schemes. They consider it dealing wisely, but the end always proves it to be the most wretched folly.

There is only one place in the Bible where God is said to laugh, and that is when the kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Almighty King. How idle it is for puny man to contend with the omnipotent Jehovah! Men go on with their diplomacy, their scheming, imagining they are carrying out their own ambitious plans to final success; but they really are only like children trying to dam

back the rising tides of the sea by their little embankments of sand. It is the worst of folly to contend with God. The only wise thing to do in any case is to fall in with God's purpose and to work in full harmony with His plan.

Instead of checking the increase of the Hebrews, the effect of the king's oppressive measures was to make them grow all the more. This has been the history of all persecution. It has served only to strengthen the Church and multiply it. The first great persecution of Christians soon after Pentecost, instead of exterminating the little company, only scattered the disciples abroad to carry the gospel into hundreds of new centres. It was like the effort of the wind to put out a fire—it only blows the few coals in every direction to kindle new conflagrations. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

So with all trial. Grace in the heart cannot be crushed out by afflictions. It is like those roots which, once in the soil, cannot be exterminated, but which grow all the faster and thicker the more you beat and dig them and try to get them out. This truth has two bearings. It shows how utterly futile it is to contend with God, for when we oppose Him we really only help to carry out the purpose we seek to defeat. Then, it ought to bring a sense of wonderful security to the Christian who is exposed to wrongs or to trials of any kind. They can never really injure him, if he cleaves

to his Lord. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

We are all in bondage naturally, and until our chains are broken and we are brought out by Christ we are under this terrible taskmaster. Sin's bondage is hard, and it makes men's lives bitter. It grows worse every day and never easier. Unless men are delivered from it in this world it will end in eternal bondage. But God has mercy upon souls in this cruel slavery, even when they have no mercy upon themselves. He has compassion upon those who are bound and crushed by Satan's taskmasters, and comes with deliverance. Jesus is the great Deliverer.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CHILDHOOD OF MOSES

Read Exodus II.

EVERYBODY is interested in a baby—that is, everybody who has a gentle heart. The babies of the Bible are especially interesting. Next to the infancy and childhood of Jesus, perhaps no Bible baby interests us so much as the infant Moses in his basket among the rushes.

We must bring up a little of the story. Pharaoh became alarmed at the rapid growth of the Hebrews. He determined to check their increase. He tried to do this, first, by making the people serfs, reducing them to bondage. He made them toil on the public works. He set taskmasters over them and compelled them to work in building store cities. The intention was, by the burdens put upon them, to wear them out and check their increase. But the more he afflicted them the more they grew. Yet more rigorous was the service made and the more bitter the cruel bondage.

But all availed nothing. They still increased marvellously.

Then a still more inhuman scheme was ordered. Every male infant was to be killed, cast into the Nile. It was while this edict was in force that Moses was born. The prospect was not bright for the child's future. But when God has a purpose and a work for a life, men's schemes do not avail. The king was no match for God.

It is a beautiful story we are to study. The king's own daughter becomes unwittingly the protector of the little child, not only rescuing him from the river, but also training him under royal shelter for his mission as liberator of his people. When Jochebed, the mother, looked into her baby's face she saw that he was "a proper" child, very beautiful. The child's beauty was to play an important part in shaping his destiny. No doubt it influenced the princess, too, when she saw the child in the basket. It is not surprising that he seemed beautiful to his mother. What mother ever saw anything but beauty in her own child? Love transfigures the homeliest features. Every baby born into the world is the handsomest baby ever born—to one woman. God never sends a baby but He sends love to make a nest for it. Yet there was something unusual in this infant's appearance, something which told the mother that he was to have a great destiny. "Cast this baby into the river!" she said. "Never!" So she hid him.

No doubt there were spies watching the Hebrew homes to drag every boy baby away to the Nile. Jochebed would keep the news of the little stranger's coming so close that it never would be known there was an infant in the house. Yet it is hard to hide a baby very long. How she must have trembled every time the child cried, lest some detective might be prowling round the door and should hear the sound and come in. Three months passed. Then she began to feel that she could hide him no longer. He was getting too large. The danger was too great. She must think of some other way to protect him. How should she do it?

Love is fertile in devices. Jochebed decided upon her course, and then she intelligently and very bravely set to work to carry it out. She wove a little ark of bulrushes, making it waterproof with slime and pitch, then put her baby into it and set it down among the flags by the river's edge. She seemed to put it just where the king's watchers and guards would be surest to find the child. What did she mean? Just this—that when she could no longer conceal him herself she would put him altogether out of her own hands into God's. That is the law of Providence—God does nothing for us which we can do for ourselves; but when we can do no more we may turn to God and be sure that He will work for us. Jochebed believed that God had a great purpose for her

child, and she would let God take the whole care of him in the present peril.

Does any mother ever now place her child on the edge of such perils, committing him to God? Yes; there are more cruel rivers than the Nile flowing by our very doors. Only think of intemperance, impurity, evil companionship, the myriad vices amid which every child has to be raised. The Christian mother cannot hide her child for ever in her own home. Some mothers think this is their duty, and they try to keep their children sheltered in their home, not allowing them to mingle with other children. But this is not the true way to bring up a child in order to make him strong and ready for life's tasks and duties. He must meet temptation or he will never be able to live victoriously. He must go out into the world. What can the mother do to shelter him from the dangers and the enemies? She can only build an ark for him, then put him out of her own hands, and ask God to take care of him.

See good Jochebed making this ark for the launching of her heart's treasure. She takes great pains in weaving it to make it strong. Then she plasters it with Nile mud and pitch to make it watertight. No doubt many tears dropped upon it as she worked away, and she wove as many prayers as reeds into the little barque. At last it was finished. Then she took her three-months-old baby and laid him in the ark, and told Miriam,

the baby's sister, to carry the basket down to the river and leave it there at a certain spot among the flags.

Well, that is just what good Christian mothers are doing all the while with their children. They must let them go out to meet temptation. So they build arks out of the promises, the good counsels, the Bible teachings, and the home influences. They line them with many prayers and much love. They consecrate them with tears. Then they put their children into them and push them out into the world, committing them to God.

Now what did God do? He took charge of this child. How wonderfully He arranged everything! All the promises to Abraham and all the hopes of the nation hung upon that baby, born in slavery, with the doom of death pronounced upon it, and now laid actually out of the mother's care in a little basket by the river's edge. Yet all was perfectly safe, for God was watching. "Steer boldly," said Cæsar to his pilot in a storm. "Steer boldly, good pilot, for thou bearest Cæsar and his fortunes." More than Cæsar's fortunes lay in this little basket, and no wave could wreck it, no great beast could crunch the baby or trample it into the mire.

The sister did her part well. She kept faithful watch over that basket, and did not go off to gather flowers, nor sit down to play with her dolls. She attended to her duty. Her baby

brother's life was in her keeping. We shall see, as we read on, what she was to him, not only then but afterward. Many an older sister has been God's good angel to her younger brother. Sometimes noble sisters sacrifice their own pleasure and happiness in unselfishly living for their brothers, that they may obtain an education and become men to be proud of. In many a home there is a boy exposed to danger and temptation, and there is an older sister who has it in her power to be guardian and friend to him, doing for him what Miriam did for her brother. Will the young girls who read these words think what they can do for their brothers?

Was it an accident that the princess came down that way just at that time? She did not know any reason for taking a stroll but for the common one—that she might bathe in the Nile. Yet she was really on an errand for God. She did not even know God, for her religion was heathen, but God knew her, and had her unwittingly do this beautiful work for Him. So we all go on our way each day, each intent on his own purposes, but all the while God is using us to help carry out His greater purposes. Any daily walk we take may accomplish an errand for God, may touch some life with blessing or decide some destiny.

Had the mother thought it all out? Did she know the habits of the princess? Did she put her baby in the ark and place it carefully so that

Thermuthis would be the first to see it? Then did she depend upon the appeal the child would make by its helplessness to her woman heart? So it would seem. When the princess had the ark opened the baby was crying, and this cry touched her compassion. She would have been an unnatural woman if she had remained unmoved, or if she had bidden her maidens cast the baby into the river.

We cannot but admire Miriam's beautiful doing of her part in this wonderful life drama. Some one has said of her and her words, "A little girl by one speech changed the history of the world." She was watching faithfully, and the moment the little basket was brought to the princess this artless Hebrew maiden was close beside her. A picture of the scene represents Miriam standing with her hands behind her back, looking into the basket as innocently as if it were all a perfect surprise to her. With wondrous artlessness she suggested that she would run and find a nurse for the child among the Hebrews.

What woman should she call to nurse that baby—what one but the baby's mother? How the little maiden must have hastened! How the mother's heart must have leaped when she was called to become nurse to the little foundling! And now we see the princess of Egypt unawares committing the beautiful baby she had found back into his own mother's hands to be nursed by her.

We can imagine the feelings of Jochebed's heart as she took her child into her bosom again. She did not need to hide her baby now. The princess of Egypt had adopted him and the protection of the throne was over him. No one dared touch him.

When God took charge of the training of this child for his great mission the first teacher He sent him to was his own mother. No one can ever take the true mother's place in the training of a child. Some things God gives twice, but He never gives a mother twice to a child. It was especially important that Moses should be brought up in his earliest days by his own mother. He must be trained as a Hebrew, with Hebrew sympathies, with the knowledge of the true God. If he had been brought up from the first in the palace of Egypt, with Egyptian teachers, he never could have become the deliverer of his people.

At length, however, the child was removed from the mother's care, and taken to the palace to occupy his place as the son of the princess. His mother must be his first teacher, but she could not teach him all he needed to learn for his life's mission. So God arranged at the proper time to have him taken to another school. He would have to wrestle with Egypt by and by, and deliver his people out of Pharaoh's hands. He would also have to take a great company of slaves, form them into a nation, train them for self-government, and fit them for a glorious mission. To be prepared

for all this work Moses was placed in a position to learn the best of the world's wisdom. He never became an Egyptian, however, but remained a loyal Hebrew. A legend relates that when only a child the king one day put upon his head a royal diadem in token that he was really adopted into the royal family and that the crown would be his, but the child cast it contemptuously on the ground and trampled on it. This is only a legend, but it suggests the spirit which always lived in the heart of that child.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE CALL OF MOSES

Read Exodus II. 11-25, III.

THE training of Moses took eighty years. For a great mission the preparation must be wide and thorough. Perhaps many of us would do larger and better work and leave a more abiding impression in the world if we took longer time to prepare for life.

Moses received the first part of his training in a slave home on the Nile, with his mother for nurse and teacher. Mothers do not know the opportunity they are missing when they allow any other one to have the chief care of their children. It matters not how well qualified the nurse or governess may be, nor how faithful, how gentle, how devoted, the child needs the mother first. She has something that no other woman can give her child. "God could not be everywhere, and therefore He made mothers," said the Jewish rabbins. God comes first to the child through its

mother. She is a new incarnation, as it were. Her love is God's love interpreted in the only way a child could understand it. A nurse may do blessed work, but still the child needs the mother, and there will be something wanting in the child's training if there is no mother's influence in it.

No doubt it was a plain and humble house in which the child Moses was nursed and brought up. His parents were slaves. But there was love in the home. There was faith. There was loyalty to the God of Israel. There was prayer. Poor as the home was, and empty as it was of adornment, it was the best place in the world for the nursing of this child.

"There's a something that makes a palace
Out of four little walls and a prayer."

We know nothing of Jochebed save that she was the woman God had chosen and prepared to be the mother of the man who was to lead the people of Israel out of bondage, then train them for national life, be their teacher, their lawgiver, and lead them to the promised land. This was one of the most stupendous tasks ever given to any man. God never gives the privilege of being the mother to such a man to any but the truest, strongest, noblest, and most faithful woman.

The quality of the training which Moses received from his mother is seen in Moses himself. She

had him in her home only a few years, and yet she put into his mind and heart teachings which shaped all his after life. If there had been as little religious instruction given to him in his childhood as is given by many Christian mothers in these Christian days would it have made him the loyal Hebrew which he became? After these few early years with his mother, Moses, until he was forty, was constantly under Egyptian influences of the strongest kind. He was brought up in the king's palace as the son of the king's daughter. He had Egyptian teachers. His religious instructors were Egyptian priests. He attended the best Egyptian schools and was trained in all Egyptian learning. No doubt Moses, as the adopted son of the princess, received the best education that could be given to him. In all these years, therefore, he was constantly under Egyptian influences.

Yet he never became an Egyptian; he never forgot that he was a Hebrew. His mother had done her work so well that thirty-five years of Egyptian teaching and influence could not undo it. Mothers may take encouragement from this splendid outcome of the work of Jochebed. Let them fill their children's minds and hearts with the best teachings and influences, training them to love God above all and to be faithful and true to Him at whatever cost, and then it will matter little what the after influences may be, and the children will remain faithful and true unto the end.

But the mother of Moses could not give her son all the education he would need for the great mission which was God's plan for his life. She was only a plain woman, without the culture of the schools. She could not teach her son the arts and sciences, the philosophies and the wisdom of the world, all of which he must know to be ready for his work as leader and prophet of his people. It was providential that the child fell under the shelter and influence of the princess, where he was fitted unwittingly in the largest possible way for the great part he was to play in the making of the Hebrew nation.

But the training of Moses was not yet complete. He was not yet ready for his great work. He thought he was. We do not know how it came into his mind that he was to be the deliverer of his people. The desire may have grown slowly. In the scant records, however, we come suddenly upon the fact that his heart was burning with the wish to help his people. "It came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown up, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he smote the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand." The next day he went out again and sought to reconcile two Hebrews who were

quarrelling, and was defied. "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" Moses probably expected his people to accept him as their head and rise up against their cruel masters, but they were not ready for it. Then his effort showed that he himself was not ready. His act was brave, patriotic and chivalrous, but indiscreet. He had to flee from Egypt to escape the king's vengeance.

The mistake Moses had made in trying to avenge his people God used, as He often uses our mistakes, for the advancement of His cause. Moses was led into the wilderness, where he entered on the third part of his education. For forty years God was his teacher. He had lessons to learn which neither his mother nor the universities could teach him.

Moses was a shepherd. He was a great deal alone and had much time for quiet thought and meditation. We all need silent times in our lives. Some photographs require long exposure to fix them on the plate. Some Divine impressions one can receive only through long experiences. We need to dwell in the presence of God for years to get the holy beauty fixed upon us. While he went about his homely duties he was maturing for the great work he was soon to do. Pride, self-confidence, revenge, and hot temper were dying in him. He was learning that self-control which gave him the honour

in after years of being called the meekest man.

One day Moses had a strange experience. As the old shepherd was leading his sheep in the desert he came suddenly upon a bush which seemed to be on fire. From the bush came a Divine voice calling him to become the leader of his people. "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people . . . out of Egypt." This call startled him. The fire of his old bravery and heroism had died down to cold ashes. In his long seclusion he had lost his spirit, his enthusiasm, his confidence. So his reply to the call was, "Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

We may look at the persistence of Moses in seeking to be excused from his mission. First, he urged his lack of fitness. "Who am I that I should do this?" He knew Egypt, its power, the stubbornness of the king and how he would tighten his hold upon the Hebrews and refuse to let them go. What could he, the old shepherd, without an army, without influence, do with the proud, haughty king? The Lord met this objection with one word. "Certainly I will be with thee." Moses alone was not to do this stupendous task—God and Moses were to do it. Moses could not do it himself—no man, no company or com-

bination of men could do it. Yet God would not do it alone; He needed a man with whom and through whom He could work. And when God says to any man, the frailest and feeblest, "Certainly I will be with thee," there is nothing the man cannot do.

When a great conqueror was dead some men who had heard of his exploits came and asked to see the sword that had wrought so marvelously. They were astonished when they saw it to notice how small it was. "How could this common blade win such victories?" they asked. "Ah," was the reply, "you have not seen the arm that wielded it." When we read of the achievements of Moses after his eightieth birthday, and learn that he had nothing in his hand in all his work but a shepherd's rod, we must remember that the secret of power was not in the rod, but in the hand that held it.

But Moses had another difficulty to present. His people would not accept his leadership. He remembered how, forty years before, when he wanted to be their leader, they had demanded, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us?" They would ask now for his authority. What should he say to them? "Tell them," said the Lord, "I AM hath sent me unto you." Say to them, "Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Israel, hath sent me unto you." Then He

gave him also certain signs that would be his credentials, proving to the people that he was divinely sent to lead them out of bondage.

Still Moses hesitated. Another element of unfitness presented itself to his mind. "O Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken unto Thy servant; for I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue." He may have had some impediment in his speech, or he may only have lacked fluency in speaking. Whatever the defect was, it seemed to him to unfit him for the mission to which God was calling him. It would be necessary to speak well in order to impress Pharaoh. But the Lord promptly met this excuse or difficulty by saying to him, "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh a man dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? is it not I, Jehovah? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt speak."

God is able to use the weak things of life, even the faults and imperfections of men. When He calls a man to a mission He knows the gifts and talents necessary in fulfilling it, and will always give them. If it requires eloquence, eloquence will be given. But it may be that a man can better honour God with a halting, stumbling speech than if he were gifted with human eloquence. We are sure at least that God will make no mistake in qualifying His

servants for the mission to which He calls them.

Thus the difficulties Moses presented were met, but still he was unwilling to accept the Divine call. He had no further definite excuses to offer, but he broke out despondently, impatiently, almost petulantly, "O Lord, send, I pray Thee, by the hand of him whom Thou wilt send." This was little short of a final and absolute refusal to go. "Send some other one, any one it pleases Thee to send. But I cannot go."

God never gets angry as men do. Yet the record says that the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Moses for his continued and persistent refusal to go on the errand on which he was bidden to go, to do that for which he had been born and trained. The Lord's reply was, "Is there not Aaron thy brother? I know that he can speak well. . . . Thou shalt speak unto him, and put the words into his mouth, . . . he shall be to thee a mouth, and thou shalt be to him as God." There are two views as to the meaning of this reference to Aaron. One is that it shows God's patience and kindness in meeting the fear and timidity of Moses. Moses was conscious of his lack in speaking, and Aaron, his eloquent brother, was promised to make up his lack. This was a grateful relief to a man who felt unequal to the task assigned to him.

The other view is that the coming of Aaron into companionship with his brother, to share his work, was a distinct taking away of part of the mission and part of the honour of Moses. If he had cheerfully accepted the call of God he would have had honour unshared by another. But as it was, he lost part of the glory of his mission.

There is something painful in this part of the story of Moses. Great man as he was, one of the greatest who ever lived, he appears at this point of his career in sad light. His hesitation in accepting his call is a blot on his name. When God calls us to any task or duty, small or great, we should accept it without question, without fear or doubt. Whatever we ought to do we can do. God knows what He is doing when He marks out a mission for any one. He will never give us a task we cannot do, nor send us on a mission without qualifying us for it.

For every one of us God has a life plan, something He made us for. Moses almost missed filling his place in the Divine purpose. Suppose he had continued to give reasons why he could not accept his call, and God had taken him at his word and chosen some other man in his place, consider what it would have meant for Moses. He would have gone back to his shepherd life in the wilderness for the remaining years of his life and would never

have been heard of in history. As it is, no other man in all the world's records has greater honour or influence than has Moses.

“Had Moses failed to go, had God
Granted his prayer, there would have been
For him no leadership to win;
No pillared fire; no magic rod;
No wonders in the land of Zin;
No smiting of the sea; no tears
Ecstatic, shed on Sinai's steep;
No Nebo with a God to keep
His burial; only forty years
Of desert, watching with his sheep.”

May we not fear that many Christian people repeat the sad story of Moses in declining to do the work for which they were born? When you have been summoned to some service, some mission, or some great task, have you never said, “Who am I that I should do this work?” When you have been called to do some important work, have you never said, “I have not the gifts for this”? Are there not men who in youth heard a call to the Christian ministry, but who begged off for some reason? Instead of spending their lives in the glorious work of winning souls, building up men in Christian character and comforting sorrow, they are devoting their lives, with all their fine powers, to some little secular business—the care of a farm, a clerkship, an agency. You are called to do Christian work in some definite form—in the

Sunday School, in the Church. Do you promptly accept the call? Or do you give reasons or excuses why you cannot do it? Do you know what honour you are declining? There can be no excuse that will relieve us from anything that is our duty. We may sincerely think we cannot do it, but if it is our duty we can do it.

There is another suggestion here—talking is not the only way of doing God's work. Moses was a poor speaker; Aaron was a glib talker, the man the people heard gladly. Moses was oftentimes cast in the shade by his brother's brilliant eloquence. But Moses was the man of power. There are men in every community who talk finely, but whose words are only sounding brass, making no impression, because character is wanting. Then there are other men who lack eloquence, but whose plain, simple words have measureless power, because of the true and worthy lives of those who speak them. Let not those who have slow, stammering tongues be discouraged. See to what splendour, power, and honour Moses attained in spite of defective speech. Aaron could speak better, but was not Moses worth a hundred Aarons?

In studying the story of Moses the fact should deeply impress us that his life, with all its greatness and its mighty achievements, came perilously near to being a failure. It startles us to think that with only one more word of hesitation and unwillingness he might have been left with his

sheep in the wilderness and the honour of the great mission for which he was born and trained given to another.

At Baalbek, in a quarry, lies a great block, hewn and shaped, almost detached and ready for transportation, dressed and carved for its place in the Temple of the Sun. Then in the temple is an empty space. The column meant for this vacant space lies in the quarry, ready for its place, but never filling it. Moses was almost such a failure.

And are there not many lives, made for places of great influence and honour, but which lie among the wastes and ruins of the world? The only way to make one's life glorious is to accept the Divine purpose and to plan for it, and without hesitation, excusing, or shrinking obey the call of God and do the will of God.

CHAPTER XXVII

MOSES AND PHARAOH

Read Exodus V.-XI.

It was hard to get Moses to accept the leadership of his people. He almost missed the glory of his life by urging his unworthiness and unfitness. But when he had accepted his mission he gave himself to it without reserve. He never again raised the question of his ability. He never shrank from any service required of him. He never failed in any task or duty.

Moses and Aaron stood before Pharaoh and delivered to him the message of Jehovah, "Let my people go?" "Who is Jehovah," was the insolent reply, "that I should hearken unto His voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, and moreover I will not let Israel go."

Pharaoh charged Moses with keeping the people from their tasks, and the taskmasters were then commanded to make it still harder for them. They were to withhold straw from the brickmakers, com-

elling them to gather straw for themselves, while the number of bricks required was not lessened. Thus the demand made upon Pharaoh only added to the burden and hardship of the people. In their anguish they cried to Moses in bitter complaint. Moses took the matter to God. God rehearsed His covenant promise that He would surely bring the people out. But they could think of nothing save their cruel wrongs and great sufferings.

One of the dangers of trouble is that in our distress we fail to hear God's words of comfort, that we think only of our own affliction and pain. There is a picture of a mourner sitting on a rock beside the sea which has swallowed up her dear ones. She is bowed in deep grief. Behind her is the Angel of Consolation, touching the strings of his harp. But the woman is so absorbed in her sorrow that she sees not the angel nor hears the music of comfort. So it is oftentimes with those in grief. The comfort is brought to them but they hear it not. If the people of Israel had listened in their bitter trouble to the promise of God they would have been braver and stronger to endure a little longer in hope of the relief that was coming.

Then began a series of plagues or judgments while Pharaoh fought stubbornly against God. These plagues were meant to reveal to Pharaoh the power of Jehovah and to compel him to let go his hold upon God's people. The waters were turned into blood; frogs swarmed everywhere—in

people's houses, in their beds, their ovens; lice, then flies filled all the land; a grievous murrain caused great loss among beasts; boils afflicted the people; a fearful storm of hail wrought destruction upon crops and property; locusts covered the whole country, eating up all the herbs and trees which the hail had left; thick darkness was over all the land for three days.

At the first Pharaoh seemed entirely indifferent to these judgments. Then he began to be affected by them for a little time, but as soon as the plague was withdrawn he would harden his heart. After the plague he offered to let the people go to worship their God, but they must not go out of the land. This condition Moses could not accept. Pharaoh then agreed that they might go out of Egypt but not very far away, but when the flies were gone he withdrew his permission altogether. When the storm of hail was working such destruction Pharaoh confessed that he had sinned, but his penitence was of brief duration. When the devastating plague of locusts was announced, Pharaoh said the people should go, but the men only. This condition, however, could not be accepted. When the darkness lay upon the land Pharaoh said to Moses, "Go ye, serve Jehovah; only let your flocks and herds be stayed." The answer to this was prompt and positive. "Our cattle also shall go with us; there shall not a hoof be left behind." Pharaoh then said to Moses, "Get thee from me,

take heed to thyself, see my face no more." Moses said, "Thou hast spoken well: I will see thy face again no more."

It should be noted that the Israelites did not suffer in the plagues. When the plague of flies was threatened, Jehovah said, "I will set apart that day the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there. . . . I will put a division between My people and thy people." After the plague upon the beasts of Egypt we are told that Pharaoh sent, "and, behold, there was not so much as one of the cattle of the Israelites dead." In the storm of rain and hail the record is, "Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, there was no hail." In the time of the darkness in Egypt "all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings."

God always makes a distinction between His own people and those who do not accept Him. It may not seem so. Christian people suffer in the same calamities with those who are not friends of Christ. In the great conflagration there is apparently no distinction made. The houses of Christians are not spared, the fire does not leap over them and burn only the homes of unbelievers. In the desolation of the earthquake, when a city is destroyed, good men's homes are not left standing while the houses of wicked men topple in ruin to the ground. In the sweep of contagion

over a community there seems to be no favour shown to those who love God and live lives of faith and service. Life's common sorrows and troubles seem to knock at all doors alike. The good are not exempt. Indeed, it sometimes appears as if the wicked fare better than the righteous, have fewer trials.

How, then, does God make a distinction between His own people and those who do not own Him and worship Him, who do not obey Him and live to honour Him and bless others? We may say at least that when God's children suffer with the ungodly they do not suffer as the ungodly do. The latter have no comfort in their sorrows or losses. They are not sustained and strengthened in enduring them. When their property is destroyed in the flood, the conflagration, or the earthquake, they have nothing left; their loss is absolute. When they are bereft, when loved ones are taken from them, they have no consolation; no Divine comfort is with them.

On the other hand, the children of God, in precisely the same troubles or afflictions, have joy of which the people of the world have no experience; they have light in their homes. In their losses they have compensations. A man had put all his money into the building of a mill. Just when it was completed there came a great freshet and the mill was swept away. As the owner stood on the bank when the floods had subsided,

grieving over his loss, he saw something shining in the sands. The wild waters which had swept away his mill had laid bare a vein of gold. The disaster which had beggared him had made him rich.

So is it always with the earthly losses which befall the godly when they endure them with faith and trust in God. Earthly losses uncover spiritual treasures. Pain which hardens the impenitent heart softens the heart of him who is abiding in Christ. Bereavement leaves the Christian lonely, but he is comforted by the Divine love and sings and rejoices in his grief. "To them that love God we know that all things work together for good."

Let us not say, then, that God makes no distinction now between His own people and those who love and obey Him not. We do not know what protection from physical hurt and danger comes continually to those who are Christ's. The ninety-first psalm is filled with promises of Divine care, sheltering and blessing to those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty. We do not know from how many dangers of which we know not we are preserved every day. God's eye is always upon His people. The very hairs of their heads are all numbered. Then when sorrow or trouble befalls them, they are held in the everlasting arms and the love of God ministers

to them healing and comfort. The same troubles come to the saint and the sinner. Yet there is always a difference. God does indeed make a distinction between the world and His own. If sorrow comes to both, it is different—to the Christian it is illumined by hope. If death comes to both, it is not the same to both—to God's child it is but the opening of the gate into the Father's house.

Much is said in the account of these plagues about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. It perplexes many people to think of God hardening one's heart. It must not be thought, however, that God was responsible in any sense for Pharaoh's refusal to let the Hebrews go. Nor must we imagine that it was impossible for Pharaoh to yield because God hardened his heart. The whole responsibility was Pharaoh's. He could have yielded and obeyed God when Moses came to him with the Divine demand. God never compels any one in any moral decision or choice.

But we know that the effect of resisting God always is to make the heart less tender. The conscience becomes less responsive as it resists, and at length is hardened so that it no more suffers remorse when sin is committed. "Wilful sin is always a challenge to God, and it is avenged by the obscuring of the lamp of God in the soul."

Nine plagues had been visited upon his land and people, but still Pharaoh yielded not. Now

the announcement was made that there would be one more judgment, the most terrible of all, and that then Pharaoh would yield. "Afterwards he will let you go hence: when he will let you go, he will surely thrust you out hence altogether." The appalling character of the last plague would be such that Pharaoh would no longer hold out.

Preparations were now to be made by the people of Israel for leaving Egypt. The Lord's assurance had been realised. "No word He hath spoken shall ever be broken." The people were to go out, and they should not go empty. "Speak now in the ears of the people, and let them ask every man of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold." The word "borrow" used in the common version is most unfortunate and has caused immeasurable perplexity. It has given occasion to sceptics to sneer. We know that borrowing always implies the obligation of returning, and in this case there was no thought or intention that the things borrowed should ever be returned. For the people of Israel, God's people, to be divinely instructed to borrow from the Egyptians with no intention of returning what they had borrowed would have been most unworthy and wrong.

But no such meaning is to be attached to the word. It is rendered correctly in the Revised Version. The people were instructed to "ask"

the Egyptians to give them certain things. It is difficult to understand how the translators made such an unfortunate mistake, since they translated the same Hebrew word elsewhere always "ask." "He asked water, and she gave him milk." "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life." "Thou hast asked a hard thing."

The Hebrews had been serving the Egyptians long without wages; what they were taught to ask now was their simple right. As they were about to leave the country they asked their neighbours, the Egyptians, to make them presents, as the custom in Oriental countries is even at the present day. The result was that they went away with gold and silver and other valuable articles freely given by the Egyptians, who evidently sympathised with the Hebrews and also had a high regard for Moses. These gifts no doubt were used afterward, perhaps contributing toward the building and adorning of the Tabernacle.

Moses then told the people of the terrible woe that was to come upon the Egyptians. "All the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die." There would be no exceptions—no household would be spared the calamity. From the palace to the meanest hut every family would have its dreadful sorrow. Even the cattle would not escape. This would be the last judgment of God upon the Egyptians, to compel Pharaoh to let go his

hold upon the Hebrews. It is most interesting to notice that the Lord said—"I will go out into the midst of Egypt." It was a Divine judgment, not a mere ordinary calamity. This death of the firstborn in all the land of Egypt, suddenly and simultaneously, was not a mere coincidence, was not due to any pestilence or contagion. It was the hand of God that produced it. It was a direct Divine act, a judgment upon Pharaoh, to bring him down before the Lord in submission.

Here, as in all this struggle between the Lord and Pharaoh, the people of the Hebrews were unharmed. "Against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast." This shows that it was not merely an epidemic that swept through the land, for then the Israelites would have suffered as well as the Egyptians. "That ye may know how the Lord doth put a difference [*i.e.*, make a distinction] between the Egyptians and the Israelites." It is always so. The Lord knows His own people, knows where they live, knows them in any company or crowd, never overlooks the least or lowliest of them, and always distinguishes between them and the people of the world. "The Lord knoweth them that are His."

Though Pharaoh had received such a fearful warning concerning the death of the firstborn—announced to him in advance, no doubt, to give him an opportunity to repent—yet his heart was

not softened, but only grew harder. We would say that he, as king and father of his people, should have submitted in order to save them from the terrible calamity that impended, and which he was assured would surely come unless he yielded to God. But even this motive of compassion for his people did not make the stubborn king relent. He persisted in his struggle with Jehovah though he was assured that unless he let the people go the firstborn in all his land would die at midnight.

We should not forget that the same resistance to God is repeated in a measure in every one who year after year hears God's calls of mercy and grace and refuses to yield to the Divine love. There is a passage in the Gospel of St. John which reads strikingly like this story of Pharaoh: "But though He had done so many signs before them, yet they believed not on Him: that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake,

"Lord, who hath believed our report ?

And to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed ?

"For this cause they could not believe, for that Isaiah said again,

"He hath blinded their eyes, and he hardened their heart;
Lest they should see with their eyes, and perceive with
their heart,
And should turn,
And I should heal them."

To us the lesson is that we should listen to every voice of God, to every appeal and command, never resisting, always submitting gladly, cheerfully. Only thus can we make sure of God's blessing. To resist, to refuse to obey, is to have our hearts made harder and less open to future appeals. And the end of final resistance and rejection is the utter hardening of the heart until it is past all feeling, and past all hope.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE INSTITUTION OF THE PASSOVER

Read Exodus XII.

THE time had come for the departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. The struggle with Pharaoh had been long and bitter. He had resisted and refused to let the people go. Now the time had come when his resistance would break down. When in every house the firstborn would be dead, in the palace as well as in the labourer's hut, the king would hold out no longer, would even demand that they leave his land at once. The Passover was instituted as a memorial of this great event. It would be their last supper in Egypt. Then it was to be observed annually ever after, to keep in mind the great deliverance.

The leaving of Egypt was a new beginning for the Israelites. It has been said that history was born that night. The national life of the Hebrews began with the Exodus. They were to call this date their New Year. They were to reckon time

from the Passover thereafter. In like manner the Christian world counts time from the birth of Christ. We write our dates Anno Domini—in the year of our Lord. There were a great many hundreds of years before the beginning of the Christian era. The world is very much more than nineteen hundred and eight years old, but we count only the years of our Lord.

In personal life the same is true—we begin to live only when we become Christians. What went before does not count. The real birthday of the Christian is the day of his new birth, the day he became a Christian. No one truly begins to live until the chains of his bondage are broken and he goes out free. All the time before he leaves Egypt is lost time. An old man above fourscore years, when asked his age, replied that he was just six months old. He said that while he had lived more than eighty years in this world he had been a Christian and had really lived only six months. His other years had been time thrown away. No other anniversary should be kept so sacredly, with so much joy, as the anniversary of one's conversion.

The arrangements for the Passover were very definitely prescribed. Each family must take a lamb for itself; one household could not take it for another. No one can take Christ for another. We have to carry our own sins to God. It must be by our own faith that we receive

forgiveness. All religion is personal. No one, not even a saintly mother, can believe for us, do our duty for us, or carry our load. "Each one must bear his own burden." Every family must have its own lamb. No one could come under the protection of some good neighbour's faith. Every home makes its own home-life. If it is happy, the happiness must be made within its own doors. If it is loving and sweet, the love must be in the hearts and lives of the inmates. Every home must have Christ for itself.

We should not overlook this lesson. A man said, "Oh, my wife is religious for us both." But if a man depends upon such vicarious religion as this, he will find that his wife will have to go to heaven for them both. There is a pleasant thought here also about family life—"a lamb for a household." The family is one. Parents and children stood that night about the table and were sheltered behind the same blood. Every family should be one in Christ with loving fellowship, all the members trusting in the same Saviour and gathering beneath the shade of the one Cross.

The lamb chosen should be without blemish. It would not do if it were imperfect. The people were not to bring in a lame, crippled, or blind lamb. God wants the best. We should always bring to Him the best we have. We should give

Him our heart when it is warm, tender, and unstained, not waiting until it has grown cold in the service of the world. We should give Him our hands when they are skilful and strong for work, not waiting until they are cramped, stiff, and unfit for beautiful service. We should give Him our feet when they are swift and ready to run upon His errands, not waiting until they have become crippled with age. We should give Him our lips when the eloquence and the song are still in them, and not wait till our voice is broken and has no music in it.

Do we never bring to God things that are blemished, keeping the best for ourselves and laying on His altar things we do not longer prize? Do we never give to Christ only the poor remains after we have served ourselves with the best?

Dr. Wilton Merle Smith tells of buying a ring for his wife. He found one which was very beautiful, with a stone that was rare and rich. The salesman then showed him another ring almost identical with the first, and said, "I can sell you this one for just half the price of the other." The rings were so alike that none but an expert could tell the difference. Dr. Smith asked why the second ring was offered for so much less, and learned that there was a minute and almost imperceptible flaw in the stone which only an expert could detect. "No," he said, "I

do not want that. Would I present to the woman I love best a flawed stone?" Should we offer to Christ a flawed offering, a blemished life, an imperfect service?

The lamb was to be killed and the blood put upon the posts of the door. The lamb died in place of the firstborn. That night in Egypt the firstborn of every family would die at midnight. The firstborn of the Hebrews would be saved, but only if redeemed, a lamb dying instead. It is said that on the roof of a little church in Germany stands the stone figure of a lamb which has an interesting history. When some workmen were engaged on the building, many years ago, one of them fell to the ground. His companions hastened down, expecting to find him crushed to death. They were amazed, however, to see him unhurt. A lamb was grazing just where the workman came down, and falling upon it, he crushed the little creature to death, while he himself escaped injury. He was so grateful that he had an image of the lamb cut in marble and placed upon the building as a memorial of his deliverance. The lamb saved his life by dying in his place. Each one of the firstborn sons of Israel was living the morning after the Passover because a lamb had died in his place. Every one who is saved can point to the Lamb of God and say, "I am saved because Jesus died in my stead."

It was not enough to kill the lamb—if they had done this and nothing more the people would not have been saved from the death-angel. The blood must be put upon the doorposts. The angel would look for this mark on each house, and if he did not see it he would not pass over that house. It is not enough that Jesus, the Lamb of God, died for us on the cross. This He did, and the offer of salvation through His redemption is made to every one. But we must make personal application of His redemption to ourselves, by having His blood sprinkled upon us. This we do by the personal acceptance of Christ as our Saviour. This is to each one of us the vital point in the whole matter—not that the blood has been shed, but that it is found upon us. St. Paul speaks of the possibility of making the Cross of Christ of no effect. This we would do if after Christ has suffered for us we reject His redemption. The acceptance of Christ makes us safe because He died for us.

There is something else here. The Hebrews were not only to put the blood upon the doorposts, but the family were then to gather inside the house and stay there until God should call them out. If any of them were found outside they would not be protected by the blood. "None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning." We must take refuge behind Christ's Cross, and we must abide there, staying

in the shelter. It will not do for us to run out whenever we please. We must live a life of continual faith in Christ, trusting constantly in His blood for our redemption, abiding in Him and yielding to Him unbroken obedience.

The second part of the duty and blessing of that night was the eating of the flesh of the lamb. While the plague was sweeping over the land of Egypt the household in every Hebrew home was gathered about the table, eating the midnight meal. While Christ by His blood shelters His people from the penalty of sin, He also provides a feast for them. This suggests many a beautiful thought about the Christian life. On the dark night of the betrayal, while the enemies of Jesus were preparing for His arrest and crucifixion, He and His disciples were sitting in the upper room, enjoying a feast of love together. Christ is always bread for our hunger as well as refuge from our sin. A feast means joy, 'gladness—all Christian life should be full of song and praise. Even in sorrow we may have songs to sing. A Christian life is not merely protection from penalty, freedom from condemnation, a life sheltered from the storm; it is a life of joy, of peace, of love, of song. We are not forgiven criminals—we are children of God, we have fellowship with God, all things are ours. We are not exempt from sorrow, but in our sorrow we have comfort. We have trials and afflictions, but in all

of them there is blessing for us. Then the road, however hard and rough it may be, leads home.

The blood on the doorposts was to be a mark of safety. "When I see the blood, I will pass over." It was very important, therefore, that the blood should be upon the doorposts in plain sight. There was no other safety. It would not be sufficient for a man to say, "I belong to the people of Israel, and God intends only to slay Egyptians. There is no need of my troubling myself to put blood on my doorposts. My home will be safe. My firstborn will not be harmed." Would this man's house have been passed over by the destroying angel? No; God had appointed a way of deliverance, and if any of His people had refused to accept that way, thinking that some other way would do as well, or that they were safe without any mark, they would have put themselves outside the protecting walls of the covenant.

Men may say of Christ's blood now: "I will trust myself in God's hands, for He is merciful; He is my Father. But I will not look to Christ's blood for salvation. I can see no need for that." He who would say this rejects God's way of salvation, and there is no salvation in any way but that which He has appointed, through Jesus Christ. We cannot say we trust in God's mercy while we reject His Son. Christ is the mercy of God to the world. The angel looked that night

for the blood, and only the houses marked by it would he pass over. No matter how good the people inside were, if they had disregarded God's appointment and had taken some way of their own, there would have been death within their home at midnight. The blood must be on the doorposts and the people must put it there with their own hands. It is so now—God's angels look for the blood. Where that mark is found they give protection and blessing. Where that is wanting there is nothing to shelter from wrath.

The Passover was to be a perpetual memorial. The people were never to forget the deliverance of that night. Lest they might forget it the Passover feast always reminded them that they had once been in bondage and that they had been delivered by great power. It also reminded them that they were a redeemed people, since their first-born were saved from death that night by the dying of the paschal lamb in their place.

The Lord's Supper is a like memorial to us. It tells that once we were in sin's bondage, that now we are free, and that our redemption cost the blood of the Lamb of God.

CHAPTER XXIX

CROSSING THE RED SEA

Read Exodus XIII. 17-22, XIV.

AT midnight the firstborn in all the land of Egypt died, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on the throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon. There was a great cry of anguish throughout all the land of Egypt. There was not a house where there was not one dead.

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and commanded them to rise up and get forth from Egypt with all their people. "Take both your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone." The people of Egypt were urgent that the Israelites should be sent away in haste. "If they are not, we are all dead men," they said. The Egyptians were disposed to be kind also to the Israelites, and responded generously to their requests for gifts, jewels of silver and gold and raiment. The children of Israel took their journey, gathering together, perhaps two millions

in all, and began their march. It was four hundred and thirty years since the little company had come down to Egypt. God's covenant with Abraham had been fulfilled. "Know of a surety," God had said to him, "that thy seed shall be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance."

When Pharaoh had thrust the people out of his land, God took charge of them. He chose the route they were to take. The shortest way would have been through the country of the Philistines, but that route was avoided because they would have had to fight their way, and they were not trained soldiers and might be afraid and turn back again to Egypt. God never leads His people by any way that is too hard for them. He has compassion on our inexperience and weakness.

It is mentioned in the narrative that the bones of Joseph were taken by Moses when the people moved. They had been kept unburied, because they were to be laid to rest in the land of promise. The people had Divine guidance—the Lord Himself led them, even directing their movements so as to draw Pharaoh's pursuing army to destruction.

The narrative is full of instruction. It shows us that God is in all our life. We do not think

enough of this—indeed, we sometimes forget it altogether. It will do us no harm to read of the Divine part in all this story. Pharaoh repented that he had let Israel go, and soon was in hot pursuit. The Lord did not hinder him, but so directed the Hebrews that they were safe.

They were in great terror when they found that the Egyptian army was closing in behind them. Moses quieted them, bidding them not to be afraid, but to stand still and see the salvation of Jehovah. "Jehovah will fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." We need not be afraid to believe this record. This is history written from the Divine side. We see only the human side, and write our history from what men do. Here we see God proposing, planning and active in all things. There always are these two sides in life. We think we are directing our affairs, but One we see not is the real Master.

"God is on the field when He
Is most invisible."

Some men may tell us that the world has now got quite beyond belief in such a narrative as this. But this is God's world as truly as ever it was, and God is on the field as actually as He was that night by the Red Sea. There is no conflict here with science.

There comes a time when prayer is not the duty. Moses was called to get up off his knees, and lead the people forward. They thought they were hopelessly shut in between the mountains and the sea, with Pharaoh's army behind them. But they did not see the way of escape before them, through the sea. They did not need to cry to God for deliverance—they needed only to go forward.

They had a heavenly escort—the angel of God, first before them, and then behind them. It is always safe to follow the guidance of an angel of God. God never sends a heavenly messenger to lead us into unsafe ways. This angel was revealed in the form of cloud and fire. Sometimes God sends us angels that wear robes of sorrow. It was wonderful guidance which God gave to His people in their marches out of Egypt. By day the pillar of cloud sheltered them, and then by night the same cloud was fire, to fill their camp with brightness. By day it was shelter, by night it was light, and always it was guidance.

This was supernatural guidance, but we have God's presence just as really, though in no visible pillar, to lead us in life. God guides His people by His word, by His Providence, by His Spirit. If we truly want to be led and are willing to follow unquestioningly, we shall never be left long in perplexity as to the way we should take.

Our guidance is given to us only as we will accept it and follow it. God does not compel us to go in the right way. Nor is the guidance given in maps and charts, showing us miles and miles of the road at one glance; it is given only step by step as we go on. "Order my steps" is a Bible prayer, and we sing—

"Lead, kindly Light! amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on ;
The night is dark, and I am far from home ;
Lead thou me on :
Keep thou my feet, I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me."

At a certain time the angel changed his position and went behind the people. The pillar of cloud also removed and took its place behind them. Sometimes it is not guidance that we most need. Sometimes we must stand still, and then God goes behind us to shelter us, when there is danger back of us. He always suits Himself to our needs. When it is guidance we need, He leads us. But when we need protection, He puts Himself between us and the danger. There is something very striking in this picture—the Divine presence moving back and becoming a wall between Israel and their enemies.

There are some mother-birds that cover their young with their own bodies in time of peril, to shield them, receiving the dart themselves.

Human love often interposes itself as a shield to protect its own. On the cross Jesus bared His bosom to receive the storm, that on His people no blast of the awful tempest might strike. Not only does Christ put Himself between us and our sins; He puts Himself also between us and any danger. Many of our dangers come upon us from behind. They are stealthy, insidious, treacherous, assaulting us when we are unaware of their nearness. The tempter is cunning, shrewd, watching for opportunities to destroy us. He does not meet us full-front. We need a guardian behind us, to shelter and defend us. It is a comfort to know that our Saviour comes behind us when it is there we need the protection.

The pillar stood between the Egyptians and the Israelites. But it was not the same to the two camps. The same cloud was darkness to the Egyptians, gloom, hostility, confusing and hindering them, and to the Israelites light, friendly, favourable, showing the way. To His own people God is light, protection, shelter, blessing, but those who are not reconciled to Him, who are fighting against Him, do not find these favouring things in Him. To the unreconciled the thought of God brings terror and alarm. The truth that God sees into every heart brings to the Christian a sense of security, and fills him with peace and confidence; but the same truth makes the unreconciled sinner tremble. God's providence in

like manner has this double aspect. The Christian sees love everywhere. He knows that all things are working together for good to him because he is God's child. He sees his Father ordering and shaping all events with loving wisdom, and he is never afraid. Every flower breathes love. When he cannot understand what God is doing he trusts and waits. But to him who does not have God as his friend this same Providence is a dark mystery. He has no sense of safety, no assurance of protection, no consciousness of love anywhere in the universe for him. Death also to the unbeliever is a dark cloud, filled with terrors, but to the Christian it is a glorious blaze of Divine love, a pathway of light through the valley into the heavenly glory. It will be the same also in judgment. To His own people Christ will then be all glorious, and His appearance will give unspeakable joy; but to the ungodly His presence will bring terror.

As the people went forward they found an open way. God had cut the path for them through surging waters. Thus God always opens ways for His people when they are following His guidance. He never asks us to take paths which do not lead at length into blessedness. He never leads us into traps that we may be destroyed by enemies. Sometimes we think we are shut in, and that no way can be made for us out of our difficulties; but we have only to wait for God,

and at the right time He will open the door for us. We have only one thing to care for—that we do God's will and obey His commandments. All else belongs to Him, and He will never fail us.

Thus God always changes dangers into walls of safety for those who obey Him and go firmly in the path of duty. So it is continually in life. Things we dread, when we go quietly forward in Christ's name to meet them, become helpers and protectors. We need never be afraid of anything into which our Master leads us, if we are faithfully following Him. "All things are yours," all things become your helpers. The storms waft your barque toward home. The sickness that shuts you in teaches you new songs. The sorrow that makes life dark for you enriches you with heavenly comforts.

"When you see a sky of blue,
Think that sky was made for you.
When the breeze bends down the trees,
You just know that that's your breeze.
Every drop of dew
Falls upon a rose for you."

While the Lord was leading His own people in the light, helping them on, He was making it hard for their enemies. On one side of the cloud an eye of love looked down upon the people of God; on the other side it was the eye of an

offended Judge that looked out on those who were fighting against God and trying to destroy His people. It makes a world of difference with us on which side of God we are. From the one side love streams; from the other side wrath bursts. A great fort in war times is a protection to those who are inside its walls? Amid the roar and crash they can lie down and sleep in peace. But those outside the fortification find no such protection from it. The walls that shelter those within frown upon those without, and from its guns the deadly fire belches. So God is the refuge of those who have fled to Him for safety, but it is a terrible thing to have God against us, to be on the wrong side, among His enemies.

The Egyptians at last saw that it was a resistless power against which they were contending, and that they could only be destroyed if they followed further, and they sought to retreat. But it was too late. They had gone too far in fighting against the Almighty.

The destruction of the Egyptians was complete. They had seen the Israelites enter the parted sea, and supposed they could go in the same open way. But where the former found safety, the latter found death. The path which God opens for His own people is not a safe path for His enemies. It was not made for them. The very Providence that protects the former destroys the latter. There are many promises to those who believe

in Christ and follow Him; but not one of these is for those who believe not on Him. The angels who protect the one destroy the other. The waters which are a defence for God's own children become a flood to overwhelm His enemies. Let no unbelieving person venture into the way marked out for God's own children, hoping while unrepentant to find the same protection and blessing that they have found. Life is full of illustrations of this truth, but its most striking application is to death. The believer finds the way open. "Why, there is no river here!" exclaimed a dying Christian. God opens a path through the waters for His own. But not so for the unbeliever; death's waters roll over him and whelm him in their blackness.

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