



Bodleian Libraries

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

This book is part of the collection held by the Bodleian Libraries and scanned by Google, Inc. for the Google Books Library Project.

For more information see:

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dbooks>

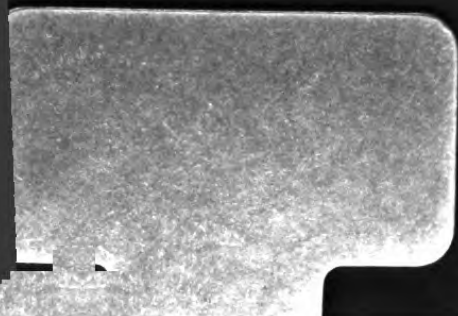


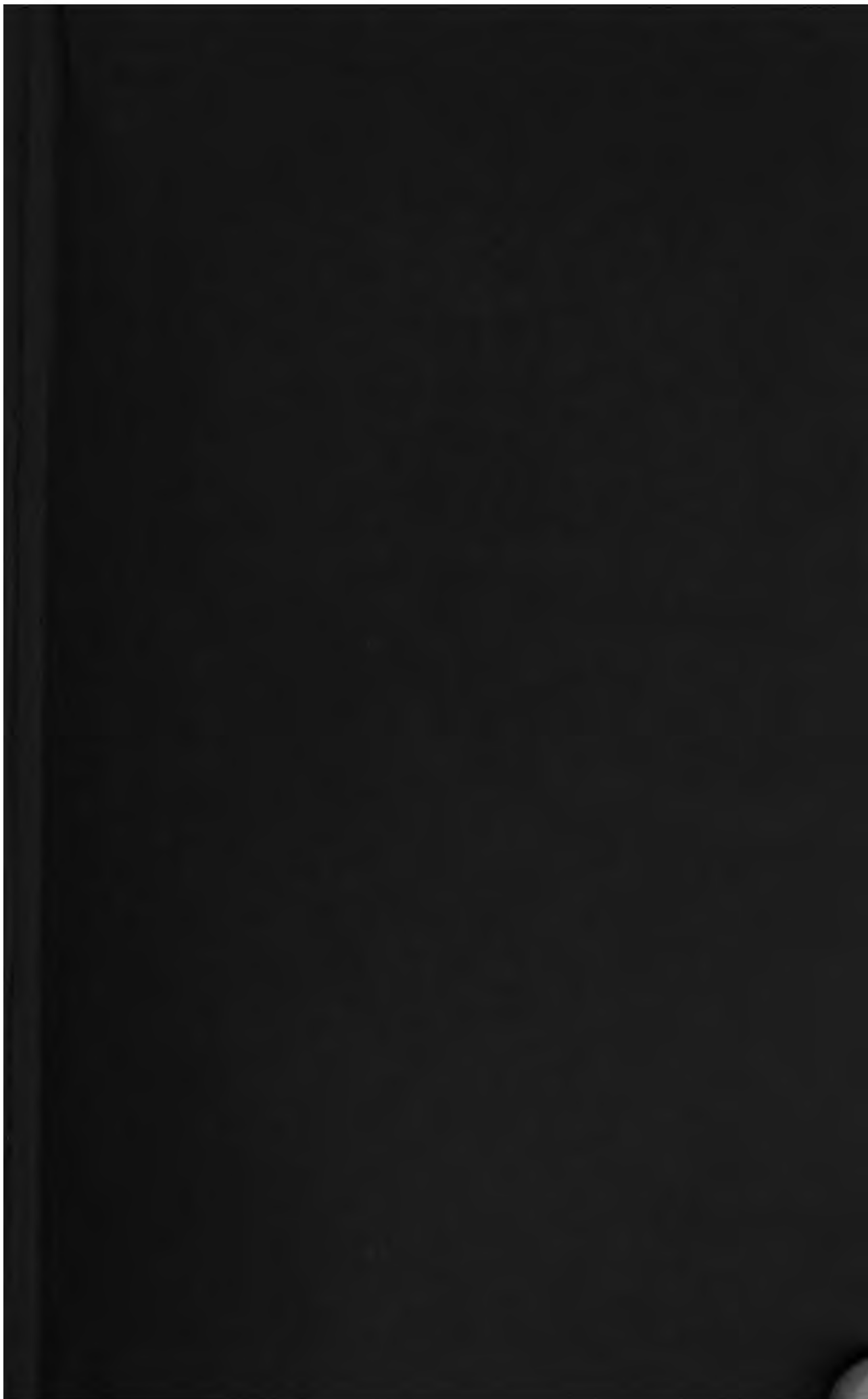
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 2.0 UK: England & Wales (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0) licence.

THE HISTORY OF ISAAC
AS RECORDED IN THE BIBLE
BY THE
REV. BARTON BOUCHIER.



0094746-







THE
HISTORY OF ISAAC,

As Recorded in the Bible.

BY THE

REV. BARTON BOUCHIER, M.A.,

RECTOR OF FONTHILL-BISHOP, WILTS.

AUTHOR OF "MANNA IN THE HOUSE," "MANNA IN THE HEART,"
"THE ARK IN THE HOUSE," ETC., ETC.

LONDON:

BINNS & GOODWIN,

(OF BATH) GLOUCESTER STREET, REGENT'S PARK.

E. MARLBOROUGH & CO; HOULSTON & WRIGHT.

1865.

101 2 8



TO THE MEMORY
OF HIM
BENEATH WHOSE ROOF
AND AT WHOSE FAMILY WORSHIP
THE GROUND-WORK OF THIS
HISTORY OF ISAAC
FIRST SUGGESTED ITSELF,
GEORGE DIXON, ESQ.,
LATE OF BLENCOGO AND OF
CARLISLE, CUMBERLAND,
THIS VOLUME
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED
BY HIS FRIEND AND RELATIVE,
THE AUTHOR.

FONTHILL-BISHOP, WILTSHIRE,
JUNE, 1864.

Printed by Binns and Goodwin (of Bath),
Gloucester Street, Regent's Park, London, N.W.

P R E F A C E.

ISAAC was essentially a man of peace. The beginning of his life was, indeed, marked by a scene of bitterness and wrong; but Isaac was an unconscious agent, and had neither part nor lot in the matter; and, indeed, his whole life seems to have been a life of quietude and avoidance of turmoil. It is very possible that his being an only child, and the child, too, of his parents' old age, may have unconsciously tended to nurture this disposition and love of ease. And even in after years, when the herdmen of Isaac and the herdmen of Gerar strove together about that which was the usual source of disputation in those early days, when pasturage and wells of water were the chief ingredients of wealth, Isaac, with his characteristic love of peace, gave way to the encroachments and

wrong of his opponents, till he had at length reached a neutral spot, where he could live without disturbance.

It is a singular coincidence, that after so many generations have passed away, there should again be disputation and strife about the most eventful incident of this patriarch's life—that the wondrous narrative recorded in the 22nd chapter of Genesis, should be treated as a myth and a fable, and resolved into a mere question of Syrian superstition and legend. And that now, at the close of nearly 4,000 years, a flood of light should be poured out on God's word, and that which men, through every age, had deemed most holy and typical of the Lord, and which Jesus Himself had sanctioned and sealed with his own authority and testimony, should "in these latter days" be thrust altogether aside, and classed among what irreverent men have not hesitated to call "Mosaic rays of ritual and legend."

The writer of this present History may, indeed, say, in the words of the Psalmist, "I have been young, and now I am old," and he may, therefore, be supposed to be acquainted with the language of earlier years, as well as that of more advanced ones, and he has no hesitation in saying, in spite

of the sarcasm attached to the confession, that he prefers "the repetition of conventional language, and the traditional methods of treatment of holy things" to the rationalistic handling of modern times. He could almost find in his heart to say of the language, which speaks of this their "free handling in a becoming spirit," in the very words of Isaac, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." There is the semblance of reverence, but the reality is not what it assumes to be.

In the following Biography, there is no controversial spirit; but the writer, without turning to the right hand or to the left, has just simply given utterance to what he believes to be the meaning of God's word. He has, it is true, no kindred feeling with that spirit of unhesitating credence, which is ready to cry out—"Errare mallet," where the interests of truth are concerned; but it is no timidity, no blind adherence to conventionalities, no unfettering of conscience to seek out the good old paths, and walk therein, and so find rest and peace to our souls. It is no dereliction of the truth handed down to us to "avoid such profane and vain babblings," as have been of late uttered under the shelter of names professedly and pro-

professionally high and eminent, and turn aside from “those oppositions of science falsely so-called,” and which we must in sorrow say, that “some professing have erred concerning the faith.”

It is an appropriate warning, which an old writer gives to those of his own day, and which is no less applicable to those of our own, showing in fact, that there is no evil new under the sun, and that, “as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.”

“Præ omnibus cavete, ne, germinante indies arbore scientiæ, sola sterilecat Arbor vitæ: * * Vigeant χάρισματα, sed emineat χάρις. Quid enim prodest peritum esse, et peritulum?”

REFLECTIONS

ON THE

HISTORY OF ISAAC.

CHAPTER I.

“And God said unto Abraham, ‘As for Sarai, thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her. Yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; Kings of people shall be of her.’—GEN. xvii., v. 15, 16.

THE history of Isaac, the second link in that covenant engagement which God made with Abraham, “that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed,” has been strangely overlooked and slurred over. “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” is the Lord’s own declaration of that threefold cord of the patriarchal dispensation which assigns to each of those holy men an equality of rank and position in the Lord’s purposes of mercy to a fallen world. In point of *time*, there was no doubt priority;

Abraham was antecedent to Isaac, and Isaac to Jacob; and so, too, as regarded the moral fitness of things, there were both distinction and precedency; the father was before the son, and the son below the father. Yet still, in God's spiritual and eternal covenant, there was neither priority nor precedence. If Abraham be called the father of the faithful, so is Isaac, and so is Jacob; and in this respect, "none is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another."

And yet the history of Isaac has been little thought of, its interesting incidents in the Word of God little sought out and gathered up into a continuous whole; and we have been content to look upon this patriarch as gliding so peacefully and calmly through life with so little to disturb the equal current of his days, or attract the notice of the reader, that the biographer and commentator have alike, in some measure, passed it by as undeserving of any lengthened notice, or at the furthest have only inserted them as episodes in the lives of his father or his son. We have histories of Abraham and lives of Abraham—we have histories of Jacob and lives of Jacob. Legend and fable have alike added their stores to the

memories, and strewed their flowers over the graves of Abraham and Jacob; but with strange and almost unfilial neglect, Isaac has had no additional wreath of man's weaving, nor am I aware of one continuous history of Isaac. And yet, though assuredly Holy Writ does not dwell with such lingering detail on the various incidents of his life, as it does on those of his father and his son, yet there is much recorded that will abundantly repay our search; and it is just worthy of a passing notice, that the longest chapter in the Book of Genesis (xxiv.) is altogether taken up with one incident alone of this patriarch's life.

It is therefore my intention, if the Lord will, to devote a little while to the consideration of those particulars which the Bible furnishes of the life and character of Isaac. There can hardly be a question that of all the Old Testament types of the future Saviour of the world, Isaac is the most illustrious; not so much in the number and variety of opposite resemblances, as in their character and importance. And even if this resemblance were confined only to the one scene on the mount "in the land of Moriah," it would still distinguish this patriarch as the most significant type, not only of the

crucified, but still more strikingly of the risen Redeemer also.

But the verse which heads this preliminary chapter shows us that even before he was born—before he was conceived in his mother's womb—Isaac's birth was the theme of prophecy and expectation, as well as the result of miracle; and, as such, a fitting type of Him to whom all the prophets gave witness, and in whose birth "the Lord created a new thing in the earth," unprecedented and unheard of before or after, that as from "one as good as dead, there sprang as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea-shore innumerable," so, "behold a virgin should conceive and bear a son, and should call his name Immanuel." I do not say that God never foretold the birth of any save of Isaac and of Jesus. Even in the case of Isaac's own sons, it was said to their mother—"Two nations are in thy womb, and the elder shall serve the younger;" and to the wife of Manoah was a promise given of a Deliverer for Israel, "Thou shalt conceive and bear a son, and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." Still more remarkable was the declaration of the Lord, by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah, of the

raising up of Cyrus, whose very name, as well as the purpose for which he was raised up, were distinctly declared more than a century before his birth, and nearly two centuries before the accomplishment of the work given him to do. It was the same too, with "that" child born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, only that the far longer interval of 340 years elapsed between the prediction and its fulfilment. And still more remarkable than all, was the birth of the forerunner of the Saviour, announced 700 years before by Isaiah, and about 400 by the prophet Malachi, as well as by an angel sent from God to announce the approaching birth to the aged parents. So that I do not mean that, in the single fact of Isaac's birth being beforehand declared of God, nor even that his own conception in the womb of one as good as dead, was a solitary instance of the Lord's dealings and dispensations among the children of men; but I think that in the declarations and promises of God himself to Abraham, we find abundant evidence that in his birth, as well as in his prefigured death, Isaac was indeed an illustrious type of Him whose progenitor, according to the flesh, he was.

The future destiny of Edom and of Israel was

represented by the struggle of the children in Rebekah's womb; but the mutual envy of Edom and of Israel has long since departed: Edom has ceased to envy Judah, and Judah to vex Edom.

Samson, though in some respects a type of Him that should be the Lion of the tribe of Judah, was yet only a very partial and feeble deliverer of Israel, and a melancholy instance of the moral helplessness of man. He could carry the gates of Gaza on his shoulders, but was weakness itself in the lap of Delilah; and, though we doubt not that through abundant grace he obtained mercy at the last, yet still is he better fitted to point a moral than adorn a tale. And though our Lord himself declared of the most illustrious of them all, that "among them that are born of women, there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist," yet we at once feel and acquiesce in the appropriateness of John's own designation of himself—that he was but "as a voice crying in the wilderness."

In what, then, does the superiority of this our patriarch consist? Evidently, that his predicted birth related to no local, no partial, no solitary purpose—that in that birth was involved the

everlasting purpose of Jehovah, the counsel of the Blessed Trinity, before the foundations of the earth were laid, that generations antecedent to Isaac, from the first father of the human race, and every generation that has been born since, or shall be born hereafter, are alike interested in the event. "In thy seed shall *all* the nations of the earth be blessed," was the Lord's promise; and what is the Apostle's comment on the words, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made, He saith not, 'And to seeds as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed,' which is Christ." It is because Isaac is the second link in that chain of mercy which has been from everlasting to everlasting, which reaches from the throne of the Almighty in heaven to the humblest chamber of the poorest penitent, or the deepest dungeon of a martyr on earth, and which will never be lost throughout the countless ages of eternity.

And how remarkably is this purpose shadowed out in the change of name of both the parents of Isaac. Man indeed, often, changes his patronymic at the bidding, or caprice, or pride of another; but that change is to preserve the remembrance of the past—to prevent a great or honoured name from drifting down the stream

of oblivion. It looks to the past rather than the future; it has respect to the memories of the buried dead rather than the future prospects of the living; it tells of the departed, but has little or no reference to the character or destiny of those to come. How different is the case of Abraham and Sarah! How truly might the language of the prophetic Psalmist have been applied to Abraham—"Forget also thine own people and thy father's house," when the Lord first said to him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." Of him, indeed, might it have been said, in the words of the same Psalmist, that he was indeed a solitary stranger in that land which was covenanted to him and his posterity; that he, too, went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people: or, as the martyred Stephen still more emphatically describes it, that he had of that promised inheritance, "no, not so much as to set his foot on." The change of name, therefore, from Abram to Abraham had no reference to the past; it looked to the future glory of Him who should come not only to be the glory of his people, Israel, but a light to lighten the Gentiles. Abram might indeed be, as the name implies, "A high

father," but the name, and the privilege, and the blessing need not, in that case, have reached beyond his own tent and the members of his own family. Ishmael and Isaac might have owned and felt its truth ; but had it rested there, it would have gradually become obliterated and his memory forgotten.

But Abraham, "A father of a great multitude," looked to future ages and to future peoples—"Thou shalt be a father of many nations." But was this promise restricted, or meant to be restricted, to its literal accomplishment in the many nations that did descend from Abraham's loins, the Ishmaelites, and Midianites, and Edomites, and Israelites, and other people as well? No ; the promise and the covenant bore no such niggard meaning ; it had no such restrictive limits, no such temporary reference. Ishmael and Israel, it is true, still remain ; but where are Midian and Edom? Where is the King of Hamath, and the King of Arpad, and the King of the City of Sepharvaim, Henah, and Ivah? We may again take up the words of holy Paul, and say—"The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, 'In thee shall all nations be blessed.'"

And as with Abraham, so with Sarah, "Thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be." A slight change, no doubt, to the natural eye, the mere substitution of one letter for another; but what a glorious and blessed truth is revealed in that exchange, trivial as it seems! Well may we Gentiles glorify God for His mercy, as it is written—"For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." And again he saith, "Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people." It is not Abraham alone that is empowered to call her Sarai, "my princess,"—it is not in Isaac only that the royal title finds its appropriate adaptation. Henceforth and for ever, Sarah, "a princess," shall her name be. Her name, her title, her rank extends over the whole world, and though herself obedient to her lord, and owing fealty and submission to Abraham as her husband, yet does Peter declare of all holy women, that they are her daughters as long as they do well. And as we pass through Abraham and Sarah—the earthly channels of God's gracious covenant—and look alone to that spiritual seed in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed ("and that seed was Christ"), we cannot but see how Sarah's sovereignty as "a princess,"

how her royal line and title has extended through countless generations; and all believers in that promised seed—in Him that was to come and has come—are still styled of the Apostle not only a holy, but a royal priesthood—a holy nation, a peculiar people; no longer separated into clans and families, and nations and peoples, but one people, one nation—one undivided family and Church, united in Christ Jesus their Head.

I fully acknowledge that, in a great measure, all that has now been said, belongs as much to Abraham as to Isaac, and to Isaac's son as well; and that, when the Lord quoted the Holy Scriptures in refutation of the doctrines of the Sadducees, he declared God to be the God of all alike, and in equal degree—"I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Still, the words of the verse prefixed to this chapter direct and limit the promise, or rather mark out the channel in which that promise was to run—and that was, to Isaac, and to Isaac only.

Ishmael was already born; nay, he was thirteen years old at the time of this promise, and had no doubt, with all the winning ways of childhood, and as the son of his old age, wound

himself around his father's heart, and was dear unto him as an only child; and we are not surprised to hear that father pleading with God in behalf of Ishmael, "Oh! that Ishmael might live before Thee!" Oh, that *he* might be the depository of Thy covenant, the channel through which Thy promised blessings are to flow! Abraham had long ceased to expect the promised son by Sarah; he had, in all probability, brought himself to believe, and it may be even to wish, that the son of Hagar should be the appointed seed. But all the purposes, as well as all the promises of God, "are in Him Yea, and in Him Amen." He is the Lord: He changeth not. "My covenant will I establish with Isaac," was Jehovah's counsel. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," was the Almighty's purpose. And, therefore, after He had announced the change of name from Sarai to Sarah, the Lord proceeds to mention, with more minute distinctness, the channel in which He designed his covenant to run—"I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her." At this intimation, we are told Abraham fell on his face and laughed; and though no words were uttered, yet God read that

heart, and saw there surprise, I fear we may add questioning also, and, perhaps, regret as well. Abraham's faith in this very promise is no doubt spoken of in terms of highest commendation; and the strong language of the Apostle in Rom. iv. is often quoted in evidence that Abraham never for a moment doubted God's promise, or questioned his power. I do not say that his laughter was the laughter of unbelief, or that it partook of the sin of Sarah's laughter afterwards; but that it expressed surprise, and somewhat of a questioning of the Lord's purposes, and that the father's feelings urged him on to make that appeal for the son already born—"Oh, that Ishmael might live before Thee!" That there was infirmity—that there were human feelings, and, therefore, somewhat of sin in Abraham's reply—I can hardly doubt, but the Lord knoweth whereof we are made. He remembereth, as Abraham himself acknowledged when pleading with the Lord for guilty Sodom, that we are but dust and ashes; and, therefore, as He saw neither unbelief of His power, nor distrust of His promise, we read of no rebuke administered to the patriarch, as in the more flagrant case of Sarah's unbelief and falsehood, save that rebuke which

was contained in the Lord's denial of His wish.

And I would just remark here, how gently does the Lord deal with His erring servant! With what condescending tenderness does He recall his thoughts to the far greater boon in store for him, than that the son of the bond-woman should be the heir of the promise. "Sarah, thy wife, shall bear thee a son indeed." How sweetly is that word "indeed" introduced, as if God willing more abundantly to show unto the heir of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by this word, "indeed;" that thus the patriarch might have a strong consolation in the temporary disappointment which the Lord saw was in his heart. But He does not stop here—"Thou shall call his name Isaac." It was an angel, though that angel was Gabriel, that standeth in the presence of God, still it was a created angel, that said in after ages to a son of Abraham, "Fear not, Zacharias, thy prayer is heard, and thy wife, Elizabeth, shall bear thee a son, and thou shall call his name John." Here, however, it is God, the uncreated Angel and Messenger of the Covenant, who Himself holds converse with Abraham; and to show how truly He had read the very secrets of the patri-

arch's heart, and how truly He had seen that laughter which, even as he concealed his face in the dust, had played over his features, He added, "Thou shall call his name Isaac," which signifies "laughter." There could hardly be a reference to the laughter of Sarah as well, for that did not occur till afterwards.

But Abraham had pleaded for Ishmael; and oh! what an assurance is here given to us that God heareth and answereth prayer. "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee." And what an abundance of promised blessing does He pour out on the bondwoman's son, with what an ample hand does He scatter the riches of this world's store and renown on the apparent out-cast of his father's tent. "Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation."

Humanly speaking, Ishmael's destiny was a brighter one than Isaac's—as afterwards Esau's than Jacob's. Isaac had but two sons, and they gave him much sorrow and vexation of heart. Ishmael had twelve, and each one became a prince of renown, and founded a mighty nation, which, amid all the vicissitudes of times, and

the revolutions of empires and dynasties, the uprooting of principalities and powers, still holds its own in the very soil which their progenitor Ishmael first trod.

And yet Isaac was the chosen seed; and how does the Lord reiterate His purpose, that Abraham might know that in Him was neither variableness nor shadow of turning; and so, after enumerating all His purposed blessings to Ishmael, He emphatically adds—"But my Covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year."

It is to this point of the history that I am inclined to think the Apostle's comments, in the fourth chapter of Romans, refer—when it is here said, "And He left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham," all questioning and disappointment at once ceased; he not only acquiesced in the Lord's will and way, but he saw, too, the unutterable tenderness and loving-kindness and wisdom of the Lord in making Sarah, as well as himself, a participator in the promised blessing. He never had for a moment staggered in unbelief of God's power; but, as *we* are so apt to do, he had dwelt on his own way till he fancied it the Lord's way; and the

first intimation that his own way was the wrong one, had therefore come upon him by surprise. But now, as the Apostle says, "he was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and was fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able also to perform."

We now see not only *through* whom, but *to* whom this promise looks. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called;" and as the Apostle adds, "He does not say 'and to seeds' as of many, but as of one, 'and to thy seed' which is CHRIST." And I would just observe, how remarkably, how distinctly, written, as it were with a sunbeam, do we find the gospel in every book of the Old Testament. Not only do "all the prophets give witness" to him—not only does the Book of Psalms, with almost historical accuracy, tell of the Redeemer's kingdom as well as the Redeemer's sufferings; but in every book, and almost in every page, do we recognize the footprints of the Saviour's coming. Truly and appropriately did the good old Romaine, speaking of one of the books of the Pentateuch, and that, perhaps, the least attractive of all to the heedless reader, call it "the Gospel according to Leviticus." We may even more emphatically call this present book "the Gospel according to

Genesis.” The Apostle, indeed, tells us that it is so, and that “God himself,” oh, wondrous truth! “preached the Gospel unto Abraham.”

And where shall we find that Gospel as preached by God? Where shall we trace that glorious revelation of eternal grace and truth, as delivered by the Almighty’s lips to the father of the faithful, save in that record which the Holy Spirit of God has transmitted to us of the eventful incidents of that patriarch’s life in connection with that promised seed, who so strikingly prefigured the Saviour’s death and resurrection? And as the evangelist Philip “preached Jesus” to a casual traveller in the deserts of Gaza, whom he found reading a passage from the prophecy of Isaiah, so would I wish for no higher privilege, no nobler office, than to go forth with the Word of God in my hand, and preach Jesus, and proclaim the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, from the first chapter of Genesis till the last text, with the last breath should be “Even so! come, Lord Jesus!”

Not only then to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all those Old Testament worthies recorded by the Apostle, who “all died in faith, not having indeed received the promises, but, having seen them afar off, were persuaded of

them, and embraced them," and held them fast, and would not let them go neither in life nor in death. Not only to these, but to the countless generations of believers of the true Israel of God—countless as the stars in the heavens, or the sand upon the sea-shore, was the same direction given, "looking unto Jesus, the Author and finisher of faith"—the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the Ending—The All in All. Even the very law, under which they lived, was but their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ.

Nor do I know of any direction for ourselves better adapted for time and for eternity, to guide us on our way on earth, and lead us safely to heaven than to "look unto Jesus," and to have a saving interest in him; for as the Apostle sums up his argument, "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise?"

CHAPTER II.

“ And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac, being eight days old, as God had commanded him. And Abraham was an hundred years old when his son was born to him.”—GEN. xxi., v. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

THE Apostle Paul, in speaking of the birth of Christ, of whom Isaac was so conspicuous a type, uses this remarkable expression—“ When the *fulness* of time was come, God sent forth His son”—the fulness of time—that time appointed before of God in his everlasting counsels—in the self-same day, and the self-same hour which Jehovah had before ordained—not a day, nor a moment before or after—then He sent forth His son. So, in the set time of which God had previously spoken, “ I will certainly

return unto thee according to the time of life, and lo! Sarah, thy wife, shall have a son." And when Sarah, in her incredulity, laughed at the declaration, the Lord reiterated his purpose. "Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed, I will return unto thee according to the time of life, and Sarah *shall* have a son."

It is interesting to trace the Lord's promise with regard to the birth of Isaac, how it grows in clearness and precision from its first faint and indistinct trace in the call of Abram from his kindred, and from his father's house, unto a land not yet pointed out, but which God would show him, and there "will I make of thee a great nation. In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Then the land itself is pointed out; and, as it were, solemnly taken possession of (though another people, the Canaanites, still held undisturbed tenure of it), by Abraham's building an altar unto the Lord, "Unto thy seed will I give *this* land, and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him."

But Abraham still went childless; and though he doubted not God's promise, still he might think that he had misunderstood the Lord's pur-

pose, and that one born in his house, though not his actual son in the flesh, was the promised seed.

So the next promise more distinctly marks out the channel. "He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels, shall be thine heir." And He brought him forth abroad, and said, "Look now towards heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and He said unto him, "So shall thy seed be." Still the promise was, as yet, confined to Abraham; no mention is made of Sarah—no allusion to her name, as this mother of many nations, this progenitrix of the seed in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed; and though no doubt Abraham looked to her, and Sarah would look on herself as the channel through which every predicted blessing should come, yet hope deferred even then, as in the days of Solomon, and as now, maketh the heart sick and sad, and in her impatience at the Lord's delay, Sarah petulantly exclaimed—"Behold now the Lord hath restrained me from bearing;" and she herself proposed the questionable expedient of her husband's taking her handmaid Hagar to wife, that, as she expressed it, "I may obtain children by her." The ac-

quiescence in her proposal brought its own punishment; henceforth domestic peace and quiet were banished from Abraham's tent. The Egyptian handmaiden presumed on her position, and Sarah became jealous and discontented at the result even of her own proposal.

Ishmael was born to Abraham, and the child grew; and for many a lengthened year, no mention is again made of any other son—any other heir, in whom the promises of God should be fulfilled. Abraham was eighty and six years old “when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.” And in the very next verse we read that Abram was ninety and nine years old, so that a period of thirteen years had elapsed, and, perhaps, both Abraham and Sarah had long since acquiesced in what they now thought was the Lord's purpose concerning Ishmael, as, in all probability, he was looked upon by the other inmates of the household as the undoubted heir of the aged and otherwise childless patriarch. But man's extremity is God's opportunity; man's hope had ceased; man's expectation had perished. Sarah, as the Apostle expresses it, was “past age,” and Abraham “as good as dead.” Yet, even from “that body now dead,” and from the “deadness of that womb,” had

God foreordained that there should spring forth a seed, "as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand, which is by the sea-shore, innumerable." And so now, when Abraham was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared unto him again, and once more is the promise reiterated; but with an addition which must have come upon the startled patriarch's ear with surprise at the first, but with grateful thanksgiving afterwards—with wonder, love, and praise at the Lord's dealings with him. "As for Sarai, thy wife, I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her." And then that there might be no mistake, no misunderstanding of the Lord's purpose; that there might be no longer any suspense, any sickening questioning as to the "times and seasons" of the fulfilment of this promise, the Lord now fully, unequivocally, and distinctly names the very time at which all shall be accomplished. "My Covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year."

We are now, then, in a condition to approach the verse that heads this chapter with reve-

rential and grateful adoration, and wonder at the declaration it contains, that "the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him." We must never forget that we are not reading nor commenting on a narrative in which we have no personal interest—that we are simply sharing as readers in the protracted hopes, the long-cherished expectation, and the disappointments of year after year, which made the hearts of these aged ones both sick and sad, and at length, when hope had ceased to exist, and every expectation and purpose had long been transferred to another, then a son born in their old age, gladdened their aged eyes, and caused their hearts to sing with joy.

We might enter into the feelings of such parents as we read their story; but the impression would soon die away, and I doubt whether any amount of romance, or beauty of style or narrative, could keep alive the smallest particle of interest, beyond that of the moment, in the domestic incidents of any being who lived nearly 4,000 years ago. And yet, the history of Isaac's birth is read with unabated interest to this day—not because the narrative is touched

with a master's pen, and its very simplicity awakens the best feelings of our hearts, but because we ourselves are deeply and unutterably blended with the narrative, because our own eternal interests are involved in the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham; and when the Lord declared his covenanted purpose, that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed, we, upon whom the ends of the world are now come, are as much and as vitally interested in that promise, as he to whom it was delivered, or they who saw its literal fulfilment in the birth of Isaac, or its spiritual accomplishment in the birth of Jesus. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are as much our progenitors, according to the promise, as they are of Israel according to the flesh, and the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, is our God for ever and ever. So that even now I might take up the very words of the Apostle's address to the assembled Jews at the Temple gate, and say to all, "Ye too are the children of the Covenant, which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, 'And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.'" And, in the same words, of the same Apostle, I might go on to add the same precious

truth, "Unto you, God having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." So that, in reality, and in very truth, we, who at this distant day read the narrative of the birth of Isaac, have not simply a personal, but an eternal interest in every result; and as those who celebrated the event in that great feast which Abraham made on the same day that Isaac was weaned, looked forward through a thousand generations to Him that should come, so we, with grateful adoration, look backwards, not only to Him that hath come, and in whom all the families of the earth are blessed, but to that promised child from whose loins, according to the flesh, Christ should come.

Abraham was seventy and five years old when the Lord called him out of Haran; and now a period of five-and-twenty years had elapsed ere the promise of an heir was accomplished in all its fulness. The duration of man's life had no doubt materially diminished in the patriarch's time; nor were children born as heretofore at so advanced a period of their father's lives; and yet, one can hardly imagine that Abraham was so much staggered at his own advanced age as at Sarah's barrenness, and

the lengthened period through which the Lord had continued him childless. His own father, Terah, in all probability, was an hundred and thirty years old when Abraham himself was born, and, therefore, his own lesser age could hardly have startled him, as in fact, long afterwards, after the death of Sarah, we find him marrying again, and becoming the father of a numerous offspring.

Nor were there wanting, even in Abraham's time, living evidences, not only of the duration of man's life, but of children who had been born even at a more advanced period of their fathers' lives than even Abraham himself had been. We are no doubt all familiar with that roll of names in the fifth chapter of Genesis, of men who had lived before the flood, and whose lives were protracted to such extended periods, and over whose head centuries had rolled, and sons and daughters were still born unto them; and we can hardly, in our present shortened existence of threescore years and ten, or fourscore, realize the links that held together the continuous chain of being through so many centuries and generations. The Battle of Culloden, in 1745, or the sinking of the Royal George, in 1782—not long ago—were epochs to which we were accustomed

to refer as far distant events, in which men of advanced years might perchance have taken a share. Yet of the first not one survivor can by possibility now remain; and of the latter, it is scarcely probable that one living person remembers its occurrence; so that fourscore years, or, at the utmost a century, severs the link that binds the living to the dead, the present to the past.

We are therefore startled when we first catch a glimpse of, and afterwards verify and realize, the astounding truth that one of those whose names we find in the fifth chapter of Genesis, whose eye had gazed on the earth ere the waters of the deluge had swept over it—one of that scanty band of inmates of the Ark, was actually living on this earth when Isaac was born, and that, in fact, Shem did not die till Isaac was nearly fifty years old, or ten years after his marriage to Rebekah.

The history now tells us that “Abraham called the name of his son that was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.” It reminds one of the predicted forerunner of the Saviour, on a similar occasion, when friends and relatives and neighbours flocked in to congratulate and rejoice with the aged parents on the birth

of their son, as of one born out of due time; and they too made signs to the father to know how he would have him called, and he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, "His name *is* John." It is added, "they marvelled all," for they knew not the secret reasons which dictated the name. They knew not how, like the name of Jesus, it had been so named of the Angel before he was conceived in the womb. And so, in the present instance, Abraham and Sarah, as Zachariah and Elizabeth, well knew why the name of Isaac was given to their long-expected child. As the Psalmist, in after ages, put into the mouth of the Church on her return from captivity, "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing, for the Lord hath done great things for us."

Sarah had "laughed" at the first announcement of God's promise that she should have a child in her old age. That was a laugh of sin and unbelief, but the Lord had put away her sin, and in the fulness of his forgiving love, had made that name which might have, and no doubt did, remind her, and, in one sense, has perpetuated the remembrance of her sin, an occasion of thanksgiving and praise; and as those around saw the joyous smiles lighting up

the aged features of the parents, as they gazed on the living gift of God, they too would recognise and approve the appropriateness of Isaac's name, and say to her, "God indeed hath made you to laugh;" and they might have added, "And all we who have heard of the great things the Lord hath done for you, will laugh with you."

It was about a year before that the Lord had instituted the rite of circumcision as the token of the covenant betwixt Him and Abraham himself, and Ishmael, and Eliezer, and Abraham, "all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house were circumcised the self-same day" that the Lord had appointed. It was no doubt a painful rite even in infancy; and in the ready submission of Abraham's household to an ordinance so repulsive and painful, and the reasons for which could be so little understood or entered into by others, we find, I think, a perfect, though undesigned confirmation of that testimony of the Lord to his servant's obedience which is recorded in the next chapter—"I know him that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment."

And now that the appointed day had come when Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised his son as God had commanded him. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin," said the Apostle, in after ages ; and in this early rite, in this sign and seal of the Covenant which God entered into with his people, respect was had unto this shedding of blood. And as Isaac was essentially so conspicuous a type of Christ, it behoved him in this respect also to be made like unto Him in things pertaining to God, and we accordingly read, that as Abraham circumcised his son Isaac, being eight days old, so "when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child Jesus," He too became obedient to the law for us.

There may possibly have occurred a thought to our mind why Jesus, the pure and spotless, and undefiled, and separate from sin, should needs have submitted to such a rite, which, as the Apostle declares, was but a seal of that righteousness of faith which is in Him, and that so the sign and the thing signified should meet in one and the same Being. It was something, no doubt, of the same feeling which suggested itself to the Baptist, when Jesus presented himself to

be baptized of him—"I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" And it might suffice for such an inquiry to return the same answer which our Lord gave the Baptist—"Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." But the Apostle has left another reason upon record when he tells us that "Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers," Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

We are not told the time that elapsed between the circumcision and the weaning of Isaac; no doubt several months, perhaps even a year—some have even conjectured that five had intervened. It was, however, on the occasion of the latter event that "Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned." It was no doubt a day of great rejoicing, as well as of religious solemnity. Isaac was so especially the child of miracle and of promise—one born out of due time—born of one, too, as good as dead, and in whom so many great and glorious promises were centred—that one cannot for a moment doubt that this day of weaning was a high day—a day of holy festivity, as well as friendly gathering. The happy mother, as she

welcomed guest after guest, would feel, and perhaps express herself somewhat in the words of another mother under similar circumstances. "Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me to take away my reproach among men." The sweet Psalmist of Israel had not indeed then arisen, nor had his harp struck its notes of praise and thanksgiving for mercies and deliverances vouchsafed; yet I think some such scene as this, beneath the patriarch's tent, must have occurred to his remembrance, as he penned the verse—"He maketh the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother of children." And all this, as bishop Horne beautifully remarks, may be considered as a prelude and a type of that marvellous exertion of Divine power whereby the Gentile Church, after so many years of barrenness, became in her old age "a fruitful mother of children, and the mother of us all." "Sing O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child."

And yet even this feast beneath Abraham's own tent, and amid the members of the patriarch's household, was not without its heart-burnings, its envyings, and its jealousies. And

how often has it been so! How often has a scene of apparent outward gaiety and splendour hidden many an aching heart and tearful eye! and amid those who have shared its pleasures, have there been found some to speak reproachfully and mockingly, even of their entertainers!

Abraham's feast was no exemption. It began in gladness; but it closed in sorrow. It was not, indeed, like that entertainment which Herod gave upon his birthday, and which ended in bloodshed; but one can hardly avoid seeing that not only was its rejoicing marred by heart-burning and jealousy, but that, in itself, it gave rise to some melancholy exhibitions of that bitter spirit of hatred and contention, which has ever existed between brethren of the same race and children of the same human family. God, no doubt, over-ruled it for the carrying out and furtherance of His own purposes; and has, by His Holy Spirit, educed a spiritual lesson which may cheer and gladden us Gentiles to the end of time. But though He may cause even man's wrath to praise Him, and the remainder of wrath He may restrain, still His own word is true, that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God, and man's angry passions are not the chosen

channels of the Lord's purposes of love and mercy.

Were we to look at this scene of Ishmael's mocking with merely human eyes, and human feelings, no doubt we might see much that would palliate a boy's act. We are not, indeed, directly told that Hagar shared in the transaction, or instigated the act; but I think the narrative implies as much, and that Sarah's angry exclamation, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son," fastened upon the mother as the real instigator of the offence. And no doubt the supplanting of her own son would rankle in Hagar's heart, and reawaken all those bitter and haughty feelings which had many years before caused her to forsake her master's tent, rather than submit to Sarah's harsh and exacting treatment. For twelve long years, too, had Ishmael been the sole and cherished child of Abraham; and, as we have suggested, perhaps, too, the acknowledged heir of his house. And, though I have called Ishmael a boy—as indeed he was, for he could hardly have been more than fifteen years old—yet a boy's heart, even of fifteen, indulges brighter hopes and builds loftier castles, and sketches gayer pictures than the maturer judgment of manhood—and though it may be true,

also, that disappointment sits looser on a boy's shoulders, and is soon soothed by newer scenes and prospects, still the first shock of a crumbling edifice, even though built by a boy's hands, is one of which it may be truly said, that the boy's heart knoweth its own bitterness in the matter. And if, in addition to this, there was what he might deem a mother's wrong as well, and that mother's spirit to stimulate and exasperate, I think—humanly speaking—there was much to palliate Ishmael's fault.

But in reality boyhood is no palliation for sin. He were a poor moralist, and a worse teacher, that should justify even childhood's sins by the plea of childhood. Childhood may mitigate the severity of the punishment, or disarm the keenness of the rebuke, but the dimensions of the sin remain unaltered.

And why do I look on Ishmael as thus guilty in mocking at his brother Isaac? I might reply, in the words of Moses to murmuring Israel, "Your murmurings are not against us, but against God." And so, unquestionably, Ishmael's mockery, though outwardly against the child, was in reality against God and God's purpose, and that purpose must have been well known to him; for at the time when God had declared that Sarah should bear a son in her old

age, He had also instituted the rite of circumcision as a token of the covenant betwixt Him and Abraham. And can we doubt that when the patriarch called his household together, for the purpose of submitting to that rite, he had not fully explained the purpose for which God had ordained it, and the promise with which He had ushered it in—that within a year Sarah should bear a son, that that son should be called Isaac, and in him God's covenant should be established. And if all this was true, as we cannot doubt it was, then Ishmael and his mother were well acquainted with the Lord's purposes; and Ishmael, at least, had silently acquiesced and submitted to his father's authority in the matter of circumcision.

If, then, the son of the bondwoman was guilty in thus mocking at, and, as the Apostle adds, "persecuting the son of the freewoman," the child of promise, was Sarah blameless in resenting the wrong? That by no means follows: her language was, to say the least, as contemptuous and as full of scorn as any gesture or word of Ishmael's could be. "Cast out the bondwoman and her son,"—was that the fitting designation of one whom she herself had given to be her husband's wife, and who was the mother of his son? It was indeed the language of

an exasperated spirit unduly exulting in her own privileged position, and angrily resenting every encroachment on her own exclusive right. As if the Lord could not defend his own, nor secure his own promise without her interference and aid.

And Abraham no doubt felt all this; he no doubt looked with a father's feelings and a father's leniency on the offence of Ishmael; and Sarah's proposal, we are told, was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of Ishmael. Once before, he had weakly and guiltily yielded to Sarah's harshness, and it had ended in Hagar's flight from his tent. Now, it would seem he was once more in great perplexity; but I think we may gather from the context that, like Hezekiah in his trouble, he spread it before the Lord, and committed the matter in prayer to God, and that the directions given in the 12th verse are in reality the Lord's gracious and compassionate answer to his servant's appeal; using, as it were, the very expression which the sorrowing father had probably himself used in making known his difficulty to God. The thing was "very grievous" in Abraham's sight, because of his son, and God said, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad." It reminds one of that sweet and condescending assurance of

the Lord to Moses, with regard to his captive people, "I know their sorrows, and I am come down to deliver them."

But the Lord goes on to add, "In all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice, for in Isaac shall thy seed be called." And it may be asked—Was not this approval of her conduct? It assuredly reiterated God's purpose and covenant with Isaac, and it assuredly also sanctioned, for the Lord's own reasons, the proposed separation between the brothers; but I read no approval nor sanction of Sarah's words any more than I read any remembrance of, or allusion to, the Lord's purpose, in her angry language. It was no part of Caiaphas' cruel counsel to the Jews to carry out the eternal purpose of Jehovah in the death of Jesus, when unconsciously and without any knowledge of the meaning of his words, "he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation, and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God, which were scattered abroad." Neither do I find in Sarah's words any reference to God's will, nor in the Lord's directions to Abraham, any approval of Sarah's conduct.

If we are told that we may not do evil that

good may follow, it is a necessary inference that though good may arise out of our misconduct, it can in no degree nor sense alter the character of the evil from which it springs. The Lord in his mercy often overrules our own evil for wise and gracious ends, and not unfrequently carries out His own purposes by the agency even of wicked men ; but though man often does, God never puts darkness for light, nor bitter for sweet, and we must not allow ourselves to tamper with God's truth.

It was God's purpose that Isaac and Ishmael should be distinct and separate, and He permitted the angry passions of Sarah to be the channel to bring about that separation. Had they continued beneath the same tent, it might have led to still more painful collisions and heart-burning. As it was, one can hardly doubt that all bitterness and jealousy, ere long, gave way in Ishmael's mind to a kindlier feeling and acquiescence in the Lord's purpose concerning Isaac. Even if there was not frequent and friendly intercourse, which there probably was, we read that they at least met over their mutual father's grave, where unkindness seldom lingers, and enmity can find no place.

CHAPTER III.

“ And she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son even with Isaac.”—GEN. xxi., v. 10.

“ And Abraham rose up early in the morning and took bread and a bottle of water and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away, and she departed.”—v. 14.

“ Which things are an allegory, for these are the two covenants.”—GAL. iv., v. 24.

WE leave for a short period the history of Isaac, as recorded in this chapter of Genesis, to turn aside to the great and mysterious truths revealed to us in the transactions that occurred on the day that Isaac was weaned, or shortly afterwards, in the banishment of the bondwoman and her son, and the appropriation and confirmation of all the rights and privileges of the true heir in the person of Isaac, the son of the freewoman.

The apostle tells us that these things are an allegory. Of course we are not to suppose by this expression that he meant us to understand that the transactions themselves had no actual existence and had never occurred, but that they were invented as a fictitious narrative to shadow forth some hidden and important truth. The apostle means nothing of the kind ; but in arguing with his Galatian converts on the folly of allowing themselves to become entangled in the yoke of bondage which Judaism sought to impose upon them, he turns as it were to the roll of his own Scriptures, and as he re-reads the narrative of Ishmael's rejection, as the son of a bondwoman, and Isaac's adoption as the son of the free-woman, his thoughts are gradually led by the teaching of the Holy Spirit to that illustration of his subject which the history supplied. Something of the same idea, from the same history, had before suggested itself to the prophet Isaiah, who, in apostrophising the Gentile Church under the character of the once barren Sarah, calls out to her—" Rejoice, thou barren, that bearest not ; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not,"—for, as he goes on to add, " the desolate (Sarah) hath many more children than she which hath an husband,"—that is, than

Hagar, the wedded wife of Abraham, and mother of his first-born.

It is probable that we ourselves might have read over and over again this narrative of Holy Writ, and never penetrated to the hidden meaning which lay so deep beneath its surface, had we not had this clue of the apostle's to take in our hand. But I think that this very circumstance is a gracious evidence to us that where there is a blessed truth important for us to know, where there is a precious encouragement to guide us in our pilgrimage, that truth and that encouragement will never be withheld, and that, as our Lord promised of the Holy Spirit's work, "when He shall come, He shall guide you into all truth."

God's *ways* are often in the deep, and his footsteps not known nor able to be traced; but God's *truths* lie on the open plain, or where, as in the present instance, they are apparently concealed, He puts a clue into our hand, and His word becomes in reality "a lanthorn unto our feet, and a light unto our path."

Nor must we imagine that we, at this distant day, are little interested in the truth here set before us; that the bondage and burdensome

ritual of the Jewish church can no longer be imposed on us, and that that church itself, with its altars and its sacrifices, and its never-ceasing round of days and seasons, and its routine of rites and ceremonies, has long since passed away; and that the law of Moses, which Peter himself characterized as a yoke upon the neck, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear, has long ceased to gall and confine. It is true that the antagonism which once so painfully existed between the first preachers of the Gospel and their Jewish converts no longer exists." We now hear and meet with none of the sect of the Pharisees coming into our churches and congregations, and saying that it is needful to be circumcised, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. But is Judaism therefore, extinct? Is its principle and its essence utterly at an end? Is there none of its leaven even at this moment leavening our churches? Is there, at this day, no transgression of the commandment of God by the traditions of men? Is there no evidence of a declining church in thrusting on one side that great and glorious doctrine of justification by faith alone? And have we not need, with as much earnestness and fidelity and love as Paul evinced

for the Galatians, to proclaim as loud as he the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and the miserable yoke of bondage in which modern Judaism, under the name of "The Church," would again entangle us.

There is still the same antagonism as there was in the patriarch's day between the two brothers; and though, in all earnestness of Christian love, we should step in between them and say, "Sirs, ye are brethren, why do ye wrong one to another?" still it would be "as then, he that was 'born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." Nevertheless, as Paul adds, "What saith the Scripture?" "To the law and to the testimony," and if men speak not according to this word, it is because they have no light in them. What, then, does the Scripture say respecting these two Covenants? Let us thank God that we have Scripture to go to—that we are following no cunningly-devised fables; but with the word of God in our hands, and the law of God in our hearts, and earnest prayer for the guidance of His Holy Spirit, let us now proceed to ask what the Spirit saith to the churches respecting these two Covenants, as shadowed forth in this narrative of the casting forth of Ishmael,

and the adoption of Isaac as the depository and channel of all God's promises.

“It is written,” says the Apostle, “that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. He who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.” Isaac the one—Ishmael the other. Hagar and Ishmael, the types of that Covenant of works which God entered into with Israel, and that law which was promulgated on Mount Sinai, and which, in itself, could give no blessing nor inherent title to any, and was, therefore, in the Lord's own time to make way and give place, as Ishmael did to Isaac, for that better Covenant of faith which was in Christ Jesus, that by it, and it alone, “they might be justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

It is true that the expression here used, “after the flesh,” may, and probably does, signify that Ishmael was born in the natural course of things, in due time, according to the usual generation of man; but still the same expression in its literal words, though not in its literal meaning, is used by St. Paul to signify those who are walking after the flesh, who are minding

the things of the flesh, and who, therefore, cannot please God, and may, therefore, in some measure, be said to designate those who are described as the descendants of him who was born after the flesh. Really and literally the Israelites were the posterity of him who was by promise ; but though, in one sense, heirs of that promise, which was in, and through Isaac—yet, in another sense, as long as they were under the burden and bondage of the ceremonial and ritual law, which could never give life nor liberty, they were only bondmen and bondwomen, to perform those works which the law, in its rigour, exacted.

One can well understand, however, the indignant repudiation of a Jew of such an imputation as that of being a bondman. One can almost picture to oneself the flashing of their dark and fiery eye, and the angry scowl which would furrow their brow as they exclaimed—“ We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man—how sayest thou, ye shall be free ?” Their boast, indeed, was not literally true ; for how often had the iron of captivity and bondage entered into their soul : but still, as descendants of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, they might well maintain and believe

that "to them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the Covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God," aye, and the promises of God also. But still, there was the inherent deficiency, the original taint of birth—of the bondwoman—of the earth earthy—after the flesh. Mount Sinai, (which represents Hagar) with all its pomp and splendour, and its thunders and lightnings, and the voice of God speaking out of the Mount, could never give life. Glorious, as it was, its glory was to be done away, for it was essentially the ministration of death written and engraven on stones, which stones have long since crumbled into dust, and was finally to be merged and swallowed up in that far more glorious ministration of the Spirit in Christ Jesus, as revealed and shadowed forth in the Child of Promise.

The law of Moses, in every rite and ceremony, in every sacrifice and oblation, in its solemn feasts and convocations, its new moons and Sabbaths, was still only a ministration of condemnation. It spoke but of sin, which the blood of bulls and of goats could never take away; and in every type and figure pointed to Him alone whose blood cleanseth from all sin. So that, as Paul argues, in another place, "the

law being only a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, could never, with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect."

The righteousness, which is of the law, had this condition affixed to it—"This do, and thou shalt live." It was the same Covenant of works which was entered into in Paradise, but which was so soon and for ever violated and broken by man's transgression. And this was the mistake of the Jews, that, being ignorant of God's righteousness and God's way of righteousness, they went about to establish their own righteousness, and would not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God.

Had then the Jews no advantage? Was there no profit in circumcision? Much every way. There were privileges and promises to Ishmael as well as to Isaac. "Behold," says God to Abraham, "I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." And again to Hagar, "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude." "Ishmael shall dwell in the presence of all his

brethren." So that if the question were asked what advantage then had Ishmael—what profit was there that he, too, was a circumcised son of Abraham? we might still answer in the words of Paul, "Much every way." But *the* promise was not by him, *the* Covenant was not with him. It was not said of Ishmael as it was of Isaac—"In him shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Jesus, indeed, said "Salvation is of the Jews;" and so it was; but in the line of Isaac, and not of Ishmael; and when Ishmael mocked at God's arrangement, and, if he could, would have defeated it, then came the irrevocable sentence—"Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son even with Isaac."

And so with the law of Moses; in its own place and rank it was of much avail. It was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ; and as long as it fulfilled the work given it to do, and as long as that work was needed for it to do, so long was it permitted of God to occupy the position He had assigned to it. "But," says Paul, "after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster"—his occupation is gone; and to attempt to exercise authority or jurisdiction any longer, would be as irrelevant

as a guardian claiming power over his ward when he had come to full age.

The history does not, indeed, mention what the Apostle directly charges upon Ishmael—that in addition to mockery he added persecution; but the history in no degree precludes the idea; and though we know not either the way or the extent of the persecution, we can readily see that there were many ways in which the position and the age of Ishmael might enable him to be the persecutor of his brother Isaac; and I think we may, perhaps, account for somewhat of Sarah's apparent harshness and severity, if we look upon her language as the impulse of a sudden resentment at some persecution of her own son, which she had just witnessed.

But be this as it may, we at once perceive and acknowledge the fittingness of the type as regards the Jewish church, in those elements of persecution which, "from the days of John the Baptist until now," she has so unremittingly poured forth upon every one who nameth the name of Christ. Her opposition was the great hindrance of gospel truth in the Apostle's days. They were Jews who forbade to preach in the name of Jesus: he was a Jew who shed a martyred Apostle's blood, and because he said it

pleased the Jews, would have proceeded to shed a second's also. They were Jews in every synagogue and city who stirred up the people against the Apostle's doctrine, and followed on their track from city to city to use them despitefully and to stone them. They were Jews, too, even among the Christian converts, who first kindled this firebrand and threw it among them, that unless the Gentiles submitted to the rite of circumcision and kept the law of Moses, they could not be saved; and Paul himself had bitter personal experience of the truth of what he said when he wrote to the Galatians touching this history of Ishmael and Isaac. "As then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit; even so it is now." And we may truly say at the present day, that if the bitterness of a Jewish heart is ever exhibited in its truest aspect, it is when one of their own creed and nation emancipates himself from the bondage of the law of Moses, and becomes a free and consistent follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To enter then fully into the allegorical meaning of the Apostle's argument in his Epistle to the Galatians, we must remember that it was among those Galatian converts that the most

strenuous efforts were made, by Judaizing teachers, to entangle them in that yoke of bondage which the law of Moses necessarily imposed on all, and, as the Apostle strongly words it, to bring them into subjection to the beggarly elements of observing days and months, and times, and years, as necessary to salvation. Nor did Paul shrink from asserting what he knew to be Christian truth and Christian liberty. What he was by letters when absent, such was he also, indeed, when present. There was the same distinctness of utterance, the same clear avowal of Christian principle when he rebuked Peter at Antioch, as when he charged upon the Galatians the very same dereliction from the first principles of gospel truth and liberty. To the one he said, "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing." To the other, though an Apostle as well as he, he as boldly spoke, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law ;

for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

It is a blessed truth, then, which the Apostle enunciates ; that as many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. “Is it not plainly manifest?” says a very able writer, “that there was a people who had been baptized into Moses, who were now called upon by the preaching of Paul and the Apostles to be baptized into Christ? To be baptized *from* one who could not put away sins *unto* one who could put them away, and who did put them away, by the one sufficient sacrifice of himself—*from* Moses the burden-imposer *unto* Jesus the burden-bearer—*from* a ceremonial and ritual which was a yoke of bondage, *unto* a law of love which was an early yoke ; *from* a stern lawgiver and ruthless judge, *unto* the lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.”

It is just eighteen hundred years since Paul wrote those words of the Jewish church as represented by, or answering to, the earthly Jerusalem, that it even then was in bondage with her children. He spoke of no human conqueror—no chains of foeman’s forging—no tread of hostile armies. He spoke of a far more fatal slavery, a more iron sway than ever

despot wielded ; but now, in addition to her spiritual slavery, Jerusalem is in literal bondage with her children—and the infidel lords over what was once Jehovah's heritage. But, blessed be God, the Apostle speaks of another Jerusalem under the image of the freewoman, and that Jerusalem is bidden to rejoice in the liberty wherewith Christ has made her free, as well as in the numbers of those whose feet shall stand within her gates. She is builded as a city that is compact together ; her place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks. Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities, thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down ; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed ; neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. " Upon this rock," said Jesus, " will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." And not only shall the Gentiles come to her light, and kings to the brightness of her rising ; but thither, also, shall the now outcast and scattered tribes, even the tribes of the Lord—even Israel go up for a testimony of the truth of that Covenant which he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac.

Now, we—as Isaac was—are the children of

the promise. We, too, have a personal interest in those very promises which were made unto the patriarch. But as in times past they were not all Israel which were of Israel, so it may be—so it is, we fear—with many now. I am not speaking of profane persons, such as that son of this very Isaac, who, for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright, and for whom no place of return, nor repentance was found, even though he sought it carefully with tears. But I am speaking of those who, like these Galatians to whom Paul wrote, would fain place themselves again under the law, under the unavailing, unprofitable ceremonial of ritual and outward service, to the displacing and lowering of Him “who is the Head over all things, the Head of the body the Church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.”

It would be sad if the Church, now emancipated from those trammels of Judaism which once so painfully hampered and thwarted even apostolic labour and zeal, should, with suicidal hand, again rivet those fetters of human bondage from which Christ has set us free. Once more, what saith the Scripture?—“Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of

the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." "Circumcision availeth nothing, and uncircumcision availeth nothing." He is not a Jew which is one outwardly only. There will be many in that coming day who will say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? have we not in thy name cast out devils? have we not in thy name done many wonderful works?" But still the eternal truth remaineth, that he only is a Jew which is one inwardly. That only is the true circumcision which is in the heart! in the spirit and not in the letter. He only will be accepted of Christ who is a new creature, who keepeth the commandments, and whose faith worketh by love.

Earthly distinctions soon pass away. Of Isaac's promised inheritance, like his father Abraham, he never possessed one single spot of ground, save that cave of Machpelah, wherein he too was buried by the side of his father and his mother; and at this moment it may be said that his descendants possess none also—no, not so much as to set their foot on. By sufferance only do they now occupy, in scanty numbers and in degraded condition, the inheritance of their fathers; yet are they looking for their promised redemption; even in the distant places

wheresoever they are scattered and dispersed, from many a Jewish heart, from many a longing spirit, is going forth the cry—"Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?" And for many a darkened year, through many a century of lamentation, and mourning, and woe, there has been none to answer nor any that regarded.

But now it is not the prophet's voice alone that answereth, "The morning cometh;" but we may add, even in the words of Him that wept over the approaching downfall of Jerusalem, "Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." And as Paul argues, "if the casting away of Israel was the reconciling of the Gentiles, would to God! what shall the receiving of them be? what shall their restoration to the Lord's favour, and their return to their own land be, but life from the dead?"

And far beyond even that glad and glorious day, many shall come from the east and the west, and the north and the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Then, indeed, of all those unnumbered guests will there be no distinction—neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free,

neither male nor female—but all one in Christ Jesus. Then shall Paul and Philemon sit side by side with Onesimus, Isaac, and Ishmael, heirs of the same promise, “and all the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away ;” while in that millennial day the new song that shall resound from every redeemed tongue shall be, “Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kingdom and tongue, and people and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and *we shall reign on the earth.*”

CHAPTER IV.

And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, 'Abraham,' and he said, 'Behold, here I am.'

And He said, "Take now thy son—thine only son Isaac—whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will *tell thee of*."—GEN. xxii. v. 1, 2.

WE have now arrived at that incident in the comparatively uneventful life of this patriarch which, whether we consider it in the literal commandment issued, or in that stupendous work of redeeming mercy which it foreshadowed, is, without exception, the most wondrous event on record, either in God's word or man's annals, save that one event of which it is so illustrious a type.

In the last chapter, we had the birth, the circumcision, and the weaning of Isaac, and the feast which his father made on that occasion, as

well as the mockery of Ishmael, and his consequent expulsion from his father's tents. We are then told that Abraham entered into a covenant or agreement with Abimelech, who is called king of Gerar among the Philistines, and having amicably settled a dispute respecting a well, and confirmed their future mutual relations by an oath; the place was henceforth, in commemoration of this event, called Beer-sheba, or Well of the Oath; and Abraham continued to sojourn in peace and security in this land of the Philistines "many days."

The "many days," no doubt included many years, for we find Abraham planting a grove of tamarisk trees that he might enjoy their shelter, and raising an altar—as was his practice where-soever he tarried—continued to call upon the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.

No incident in Isaac's childhood or youthful years is recorded, though, like that other child of promise, and type of the blessed Jesus, "the child grew and waxed strong in spirit," or like the holy child Jesus himself, "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." We can hardly doubt the lessons of holy obedience and faith, of docility and piety, which he would receive beneath the tents of

Abraham, from the lips and from the example of such holy parents; nor can we doubt how the best affections of their hearts would center in this child of promise, and as they saw him gradually emerging into manhood, and themselves as gradually but as surely declining into still more advancing years and infirmities, with still more fervent gratitude would they thank God for this blessing vouchsafed to their old age.

We do not know how long a time was included in these "many days;" but we can scarcely err, I think, in assigning the incident recorded in this chapter to that period when Isaac would be about thirty years of age. Commentators indeed vary: some assign fifteen years as the age of Isaac; and others go as high as thirty-five. We have no direct clue to guide us to the exact age, but we are told that Sarah was ten years younger than her husband, and that she was in fact ninety years old when the promise was made that in the next year she should bear a son. Now, we read also that Sarah was one hundred and thirty-seven when she died, so that at her death Isaac would have been thirty-six; and as this command of God to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice was undoubtedly given during Sarah's lifetime—

and probably not very long before her death—we may not be very far from the truth in assigning it to a period when Isaac would be about thirty-three or thirty-four. I do not say that in every minute detail and incident the type should necessarily correspond with its antitype—it is sufficient if, in its main points, there is that veri-similitude which at once marks out its adaptation and appropriateness; but I know no canon of criticism, nor rule of interpretation that forbids the suggestion that, as Jesus was upwards of thirty years of age when he actually suffered on the cross, so the type who prefigured that event was himself about the same age when he too was taken to the land of Moriah, and there, on the same height, and probably on the same spot on which Jesus bled, himself lay an unresisting victim beneath his father's hand.

Be that, however, as it may, I think we need have no scruple in repudiating the suggestion that would assign to Isaac the age of fifteen at this period. At such an age he would have been, as the apostle phrases it, “under tutors and governors,”—under his father's control,—with such habits of obedience and submission to that father's will, and that father having the power

of life and death in his own hands over every member of his family; that, as a boy, Isaac could in reality have made no resistance to any mandate his father chose to issue. But he was to be in all things a type of Him who in the fulness of time was to come. He, too, was to be the willing, unresisting sacrifice and victim. He, too, was to go as a lamb to the slaughter; and, as a sheep before her shearer is dumb, so was he not to open his mouth in murmuring or complaint. Nay, the language of his heart was to be—"I delight to do Thy will, O, my God; yea, Thy law is within mine heart. My heart is ready, my heart is ready."

We know that, in the ancient sacrifices of heathen rites, if the victim struggled, or seemed even to shrink with instinctive apprehension of its doom, it was looked upon as an ill omen. But *our* victim never struggled, never drew back; nay, He declared of that baptism of blood wherewith He was to be baptised, "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" And surely in this type which so strikingly foreshadowed, not so much the Saviour's sufferings as the Saviour's willingness, we might truly expect to find, not simply the obedience of a child to a father's will—however nature and instinct

might shrink—but the perfect, entire, and ready acquiescence to the will of God, however mysterious and inscrutable its purpose, however painful and abhorrent to every feeling He himself had implanted in the human heart. “I am content to do it,” was as true of Isaac, as it was undoubtedly true of Jesus.

But let us now revert to the incidents themselves, as detailed in this narrative. And I think we might say, without fear of contradiction, that in no writing which we have on record, save in those narratives of the sufferings and death of Jesus which we have in the four Gospels—have we any incident or narrative which comes in any degree near to this in intensity of pathos, in the agonizing suspense of a father’s heart, in that simple touch of nature in Isaac’s question to his father—“Where is the burnt-offering?”—and yet in that genuine and natural simplicity throughout, which no human composition has ever yet reached.

Did any one ever read this twenty-second chapter of Genesis, for the first time to a child? and did he ever mark the gradual concentration of every feeling in that child’s features as he proceeded? how attention deepened into interest, and interest into agony; how wonder and

surprise blended with the strongest awe; how tears have filled the eyes and streamed down the cheeks, and the lips parted, and the breathing stopped when the loving father took the knife to slay the beloved son? I believe that to a child of impassioned feeling and sensibility—nay, I have known that to such an one, it was almost dangerous to read this chapter; and that when, in the course of our Sabbath services, that lesson took its place, it was deemed advisable to keep that child from church.

It is no uncommon thing when we want to realize the feelings which we may suppose to have influenced or occupied another's heart under certain circumstances, to endeavour, in imagination at least, to put ourselves in the same position, and, as it were, go through the same scenes. But I believe this to be an utter impossibility as regards Abraham and Isaac. We painfully know, indeed, that a parent can, and may forget the close and holy tie that binds a child to a father's heart. "Can a mother forget her sucking child?" asks God, and His own answer is, "Yea, they may forget;" aye, and many a mother has forgotten nature's feelings, and nature's instincts, and has trampled on the son of her womb, and many a father's

hands have reeked with the blood of their own children; so that alas! it is not in this sense that the impossibility lies.

Isaac was the child, not only of Abraham's age, but the child of promise also; in him the promises were centered; to him, and him alone, were they confined. It was not, as in many an instance, if the first-born dies, there are sons and daughters still remaining who may raise up seed unto their brother, and prevent "the name of their father from being done away in his family, because he hath no son." But—"in Isaac shall thy seed be called;" and if Isaac perish, the promise perishes with him. Abraham might have had and had, sons before and sons after Isaac, yet had he but one Isaac? And "with Isaac will I establish my Covenant." Ishmael, too, had been expelled, and that, by the will of God, from his father's tent, that there might be no collision—no clashing of purpose, or affection in the father's heart between the son of the bondwoman, and the son of the freewoman, and for more than thirty years Isaac had been the acknowledged, undisputed heir of the promises of God. In him infancy and childhood had passed away, and no alteration in the Lord's purpose had been suggested. Boyhood and

youth had merged into mature manhood, and still the Lord's appointment held good.

The time was drawing nigh, too, when Abraham and Sarah would be anxious for their son's settlement in life, and, perhaps, they had already many a time talked the matter over, and thought of the distant kindred from among whom they would wish for Isaac to take a wife.

And it was at this crisis, when, as yet, no cloud had gathered over the patriarch's tent, and betokened the coming storm, when not a shadow darkened their sunny pathway, when their son's footsteps and their son's voice—morning and evening, and at noonday—gladdened their aged hearts; then came the trial in its suddenness, in its bitterness, in its wrenching and uprooting of every tendril and fibre that ever grew and spread over a father's heart. We might, indeed, say of this word of God, that it was "sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and joints, and marrow." And had an aged Simeon stood by the aged Abraham, as he heard the astounding edict issued, he might have said to the father of that child of promise, as he did say to the mother of Jesus, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." It

must, indeed, have been a stupefying blow—such as never before, nor since, crushed a father's heart. It is called here a temptation—“God did tempt Abraham,” and, no doubt, in one sense, the temptation to unbelief, to distrust, to disobedience, must have been almost overwhelming. Of course, God did not tempt Abraham to sin, for as “God cannot be tempted with evil, so neither tempteth He any man;” nor did God, in this instance, permit Satan to present a temptation to Abraham under the plea that it was a command from God, whereas the Lord had not spoken.

It was undoubtedly a command from God himself; it was the Lord's own voice that issued the agonizing edict, and that dwelt with such harrowing detail on every word that could give added bitterness and anguish to the task. And Abraham knew it to be such; he never for a moment misunderstood the voice itself, nor the purport of that voice. Each word, as it rung mournfully on his ear, gave out no uncertain sound like a shivered trumpet in the battle field; it left, as it were, no loophole for mistake, evasion, or retreat. “Take now thy son—thine only son—Isaac—whom thou lovest—and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him

there for a burnt-offering on one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." No—Abraham never misunderstood—never doubted that it was God's own command; and herein, as I conceive, lies the utter impossibility of our ever being able to place ourselves in the patriarch's position, or comprehend the nature and extent of that trial by which God proved His faith. He well knew what it was to offer a burnt-offering on an altar; he could take no comfort in some shadowy outline of a duty he did not fully understand. Through many a lengthened year he had offered burnt sacrifices—year by year, and probably day by day continually—with his own eyes had he seen the dying agonies of the victim, and witnessed the quivering thrill of death; and he knew, therefore, beyond all probability of mistake, what the words enjoined.

No doubt, too, there was one at hand to suggest a thousand reasons to distrust either the evidence of his own senses, or the literal meaning of the command; and had Abraham listened for one moment to the tempting voice, or admitted one insinuation of unbelief or doubt to take possession of his heart, I cannot see, humanly speaking, how he could ever have set forward a single step in the pathway of obe-

dience to such a command. It was only in instant, unhesitating, unquestioning obedience that Abraham's faith escaped, through the grace of God, its severest trial.

Again, in many a sad and sorrowing emergency, in many an agonizing conflict between affection and duty, or between passion and principle—in many a season of deep and dark perplexity, it is a great mitigation of sorrow, as well as real diminution of anxiety, to be able to take counsel with a friend, to pour out the anguish of an over-wrought spirit into the listening ear of one who you know will sympathize with every throb and pulse that beats in your own heart. But all this was debarred to Abraham in his trial; he had no earthly friend nor counsellor to whom he could communicate his sorrow, or from whom he could expect sympathy in such a trial. Even the very wife of his bosom, the mother of his child was, if possible, more than any other, closed against him as a comforter. He well knew that not one could enter into his feelings or his circumstances, that not one could build up or strengthen his tottering faith; and that all, without exception, and the mother loudest of all, would join in the outcry against a deed so unnatural and abhor-

rent. He had, therefore, to bear his sorrow and his trial alone; like Him, of whom Isaac was now to be the type, he had to tread this winepress alone. He looked, and there was none to help—none to uphold; though he might have added, in the words of Jesus, “And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

I have said that it was in instant, unhesitating obedience that Abraham's safety lay. Had he questioned, had he reasoned, had he taken counsel of his own heart, Satan would have entered in like a flood, and swept away every barrier. And the narrative, I think, suggests as much. It would seem that this command of God was given to Abraham in the night season; whether in the visions of the night, when deep sleep had fallen upon him, or whether as he lay upon his bed waking, we know not. It was, however, the voice of God—that voice he had so often heard, and so loved to hear—the voice of Him with whom he had spoken face to face, as friend communeth with friend; that voice, which had hitherto spoken only in accents of kindness and love, had bidden him not to fear; and assured him that He was his exceeding great reward. How different its language now; how altered the tone; how changed the message.

“In Isaac shall thy seed be called,” “with Isaac will I establish my Covenant”—was once the gracious promise. Now it was—“Take thy son—thine only son—this very Isaac—and offer him for a burnt-offering.”

But how instant the obedience! “And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up and went unto the place of which God had told him.” He did not suffer an instant to escape, “rising up early in the morning,” (and we know how early an eastern morning dawns), summoning two of his young men to accompany him on his distant journey, and awakening Isaac, his son, the destined, unconscious victim, he prepares to set forth on the appointed errand. But this was not all. To show the entireness of his obedience, his calm and settled resolve to fulfil the Lord’s command to the very letter, and to evidence that he understood that command in its literal meaning, before he left his tent, he clave the very wood that was to be employed upon the sacrifice, and carrying it with him, commenced his melancholy journey, without communicating his purpose to any.

And here, perhaps, we can enter somewhat into the patriarch's feelings ; we can estimate, in some measure, the weight of that silent grief he was carrying in his heart ; how every step that brought him nearer to the appointed spot, would only increase his sadness, and every word that his fellow traveller, by his side, uttered, would but deepen the intensity of that anguish over which he was thus silently brooding. For three long days he bore the dreadful secret unrevealed ; for three days he permitted Isaac to be with him by day, and to rest by his side at night in ignorance of the purpose for which he was travelling to Mount Moriah, beyond the undisguised and open fact, that his father had a sacrifice to offer unto the Lord. "On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off." With what straining eyes, with what beating and exulting heart does the long-tossed mariner see afar off the haven where he would be ! How eagerly does the wanderer, returning from his distant and protracted exile, see afar off the first glimpses of the home he seeks, and recognise the well-known and long-loved landmarks that guide him to the spot. With what still deeper intensity of desire does the wearied pilgrim of life

stretch his vision across the confines of the grave, and see the land that is very far off, and behold the king in his beauty! And so Abraham, too, but with far other feelings, saw the place "afar off" to which the Lord had bidden him to go.

Up to this period it is quite clear that Isaac was altogether unconscious of the errand on which he and his father were travelling, as far as he himself was concerned. And, beyond all doubt, the two young men, who accompanied them, were ignorant also. Abraham's agonizing secret still remained locked in his own breast. But now it must be told, and to the one most deeply interested in it. Isaac must be prepared for his doom; the victim, as it were, decked out for the sacrifice, and that by his father's own hands. Abraham's own lips must tell his son that he is appointed to die. He bids, therefore, the young men remain with the ass behind, while he and his son went onwards to worship; and then he adds in singularly prophetic words—"We will come again to you." The original is in the plural, so that there can be no mistake in the expression—"We will come again to you." Did then Abraham, like that prophet of Bethel to the man of God, lie

unto these young men? Did he utter that which he felt to be, and meant to be a falsehood, in order to deceive and pacify them? God forbid! Abraham, we know, *uttered* no lie; and we are sure he meant none. Did then the patriarch know or think that all this was to be a mere fiction on the Lord's part—a mere representation of some future event? Had God intimated to him that no reality was intended; that all was to be a picture, a figure, the shadow of things to come? And are we to suppose that, after all, Abraham went through no trial? One cannot for a moment admit such a supposition. *All* was real; the command was real; the trial was real; the anguish was real; aye! and the faith and the obedience were real also. Nor do I think that we can have recourse to, or heed the supposition that Abraham unconsciously uttered words of which he knew not the purport—that, as with Caiaphas of after times, the language of prophecy fell from unwitting lips. I believe that none of these suggestions at all meet the truth; that they are alike derogatory to the character of Jehovah and of Abraham; and that when Abraham said to those young men, “Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and will

come again to you," he spoke that which he felt assured would come to pass, though he knew not the way, and fully believed, that in some mode inscrutable to human eye, and impervious to human reason, God would restore Isaac to him; and that, though that son must pass through the ordeal of death, he would yet in some way as wondrous as his birth, and as contrary to all human expectation and analogy, once more be restored to life and being. He rested on God's promise—"In Isaac shall thy seed be called." "God was not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent. Hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Even then was it eternally true, that "All the promises of God in Christ Jesus were yea, and in Him Amen to the glory of God." "Let God be true, and every man a liar."

It was in this that Abraham's faith came out so conspicuously bright and clear. It was this which so justly entitled him to be called "the father of the faithful," because he judged Him faithful who had promised. One cannot doubt that as he journeyed during those three sad and weary days, and as he communed with his own

heart ; and as, more than all, one unseen and unsuspected, hung upon his path, and whispered hard thoughts of God, there was One also mighty to save by his side, and that as the Spirit of the Lord lifted up the standard, there were written on it the precious words—"The Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him."

You may, perhaps, say that this assurance lessened Abraham's trial, that it disarmed it of its bitterness, that hope still lingered behind, and sweetened the ingredients of the cup his Father had given him to drink. In one sense, no doubt it did. Could Abraham himself—could any living being have borne up under such a burden, without the conclusion that God was with him of a truth ; and though the fiery trial, which had been sent to try him, was, indeed, a strange thing, yet God was faithful, who would not suffer his servant to be tempted above that he was able to bear, but with the temptation would, and did make also a way to escape. But though the Lord, in His mercy, did thus, as it were, set His bow in the cloud as a token of the covenant He had made, yet Abraham knew not the way of deliverance, and still believed, and acted too,

on the belief that God would exact to the very uttermost farthing all that He had demanded.

And our faith and our obedience, though blessed be God they never will, and never can be tried as Abraham's were, must yet be founded on the same unerring principle—the word and will of God—“Thus saith the Lord.” Do we hear that voice? do we read those words? then believe that voice! Obey those words! Question not, reason not, delay not. Duties are ours—events are God's. “Faith, like prayer, increases by exercise;” it may be, and often is, like a grain of mustard seed, in its first committal to the heart; but even then, saith the Lord, “it shall remove mountains.” Even then, “nothing shall be impossible” to it; but what is it that gains “the victory, that overcometh the world itself—even our faith.” Still faith may be, and often is, tiny as the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, that came up from the waters of the Mediterranean; but as that cloud gathered blackness, and spread and darkened over the whole heaven, and there was abundance of rain, so “faith has subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, out of weakness

has been made strong." Through faith, too, like Abraham, "women received their dead raised to life again." It was through this faith that "Abraham, against hope, believed in hope, that he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God."

CHAPTER V.

And Abraham said "My Son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."—GEN. xxii. v. 8.

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad.—St. John viii. v. 56.

IT is my purpose, in the present chapter, to continue the narrative of Isaac's sacrifice through its remaining incidents, making such remarks as naturally suggest themselves, and then to turn to that spiritual application of the whole to which the words of the Evangelist seem to me so unmistakeably to point. With what reflective light do we turn from the pages of the Old to the pages of the New Testament. What mutual illustration do they afford; and how much of that which was probably dark and mysterious to the actors in the Old Testament, and in many an instance must have seemed in-

congruous and inexplicable to the bystanders and lookers on, is now used by ourselves in the full blaze and clear radiance of the Gospel. Verily, as Augustus Toplady said, though with other meaning, "It is a great boon to be born in the old age of time;" and we may thank God that we live under that gospel dispensation, which puts the key, as it were, into our hands, and unlocks and reveals to mortal vision that mystery into which angelic beings once desired to look, and which many kings and prophets desired to see and hear, but did not see nor hear. And we may well add, in the words of Jesus, "Blessed are the eyes that see the things that we see." It is true that we do not, any more than those kings and prophets who so earnestly longed for the coming of the predicted Saviour, see Him walking among us tabernacled in the flesh; we hear not with our ears the gracious words which He, who spake as never man spake, uttered when on earth; but we have those words recorded, aye, and many a saying which his disciples understood not at the time is now clear and manifest to us through the same teaching of the same Holy Spirit, who brought all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Jesus had said unto them, and who also took of

the things of Jesus, and showed them unto them in all their significance and meaning. And as we read how Abraham, after parting with his young men, laid the wood he had prepared and brought with him for the purpose, on Isaac his son, we are reminded of Him whom Isaac so literally prefigured, who went forth to his death bearing his cross, till He sank beneath the far heavier burden which his Father laid on him. Abraham laid on Isaac's shoulders the wood alone; the Lord laid on Jesus 'the iniquities of us all.' So that in every cross we are called upon to take up, we see, as old Flavel says, that "Jesus bore the heaviest end thereof."

But though Isaac bore the wood, Abraham had his portion of the melancholy burden, for he carried the fire that was to consume the sacrifice, as well as the knife to slay the victim. And, thus equipped, they went both of them together. The narrative records no conversation that had passed between the father and the son as they journeyed on the preceding days; and now probably, as they went alone, and were drawing nigh to the appointed spot, few if any words escaped them. Abraham's heart would be too full of heaviness; he would be revolving how and when he should reveal the command to

his son, and lifting up that heart in silent prayer, "Lord! undertake for me!"

And Isaac too, as he gazed on his father's countenance so full of sadness, in reverential silence would refrain, for a time at least, from intruding on his griefs, and muse within himself what these proceedings meant. But at length his heart too became hot within him, and at the last he spake with his tongue. But oh! what a word of tenderness, and what a reply, touching as it were the deepest nerve of a parent's heart, and making it thrill and quiver with intensest agony! "My Father," "My Son." It seemed as if all the concentrated feelings and anguish of these three days gushed forth in that one expression "My Son!" It was the very word which the Lord had used when he enjoined the sacrifice—"thy son, thine only son!" And how often, no doubt, during those three days' journey—by night and by day—as the morning dawned—and as the night closed—in the noonday travel—or beneath his tent—had those same words welled up from the depths of his heart, "My Son, mine only Son!" And now when that son's voice breaks upon his ear and heart in that term of fond endearment, "My

Father!" he but repeats the same word, "My Son!"

And yet one reads in it the Lord's answer to prayer. Up to this point there can be no doubt that the Lord's command and Abraham's purpose had not been communicated to Isaac; and, as we have naturally suggested from the narrative, the father's thoughts must have been painfully revolving the how and the when he should make known to his son the fate which awaited him, and lifting up, one cannot doubt, many a fervent ejaculation for guidance and direction. And now the answer comes, and through Isaac's own lips; as if the Lord would not abate one jot nor tittle of that sacrifice he was demanding at the father's hands. Isaac's suffering, had that sacrifice been exacted, would have been but transient and momentary. Abraham's was protracted till, in the the language of the prophets, "he had drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling and wrung them out." But still,—though every word must have gone as a knife to the father's heart, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?"—it offered the opportunity which Abraham sought, and of which no doubt he availed himself, and to which his first reply so naturally

paved the way. "My Son! God will provide himself a burnt-offering." You point to the lamb the usual victim on God's altar, and had I been left to myself to choose and provide the offering, I should have gone to my flock and my herds and have chosen thence a lamb without blemish and without spot. But, my son! God will, nay He has provided for himself a burnt-offering. He has chosen his appointed victim. He has marked out the lamb that shall be consumed on his altar.

We are not told the language in which Abraham made known the Lord's purpose to Isaac, nor indeed is it said that he communicated it at all. We are left to our own inferences, and as we can have no doubt that he did reveal and explain all, so there can be, I think, little doubt that he occupied the remainder of their journey till they stood on the appointed height of Moriah, in preparing his son to offer himself as the willing, unresisting sacrifice. We read Isaac's answer in the result. We do not indeed read that, like the aged Eli afterwards, he answered and said, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth Him good;" but we do read that when they reached the appointed spot, Abraham built an altar of turf and earth and stones, laid the

wood in order, and then bound Isaac, as Jesus afterwards was bound, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

One seems almost to fancy we can hear Isaac's voice saying to his father, as he took what he thought his last, lingering, loving look of that father, and perhaps saw the tears falling upon his aged features, "Weep not for me." And now the uplifted hand, and the sacrificial knife ready to descend, testified indeed that faith had wrought its perfect work—that obedience was complete, and had done all the will of God. What, indeed, had not grace wrought? And now "bring forth the headstone thereof, with shoutings, crying, 'Grace, grace,' unto it." Let Paul and Abraham—the Patriarch and Apostle—as they sit side by side at the marriage supper of the Lamb, join in holy rivalry as to whom and for whom grace had done the most. And yet "My grace is sufficient for thee," is alike the panoply of every soldier of Christ: Patriarch and Prophet, and Apostle and Martyr, and Missionary, have gone forth clad in this armour of God; and every one has alike found God's strength made perfect even in their weakness.

How truly does this portion of the narrative

illustrate our saying that, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," or, as the Jewish proverb runs, "When the tale of bricks is doubled, then Moses comes." But, behold, a greater than Moses is here; for though it is said the angel of the Lord called to Abraham out of heaven, yet the very next verse shows us who this angel of the Lord was—even the uncreated angel, the messenger of the covenant; the same who before had covenanted with Abraham that in Isaac should his seed be called; the same who had issued the command to offer that son as a sacrifice, and who now, by his voice from heaven, restrained the uplifted hand, and accepted the will for the deed: "Seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, *from me.*" And what tenderness in the Lord's language!—using the same expression, "thy son, thine only son," in which he had before enjoined the duty.

One may faintly imagine, but no pen can describe, the feelings of that father's heart, nor of Isaac's either, as that voice sounded from out of heaven. It was not as with Agag, "Surely the bitterness of death is past," for death in itself had no bitterness; faith had gained the perfect victory—nay, was more than conqueror—and had brought every human feeling and every

earthly tie into captivity to the obedience of Christ. I think something of that language which the Psalmist has prophetically put into the mouth of Christ, and something of that feeling which is described in the 118th Psalm, may most fittingly represent those emotions of grateful thanksgiving which must have filled the hearts of both father and son, as Abraham once more receives Isaac, even from the dead. "I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore, but He hath not given me over unto death. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. God is the Lord who hath shewed us the light; bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." And lo! as the one victim is bidden to go free, as the scapegoat is let go in the wilderness, another offering is found; the Lord himself provides and prepares the victim. Isaac, for three days under sentence and dominion of death, is on this third day once more passed from death unto life; and the ram, entangled in the thicket, and bound unto the horns of the altar, is now the substitute, as well as the type of Christ.

How different the scene which, more than 1800 years afterwards, took place on that same

height of Calvary! It was again a Father taking his son—his only-begotten son, his well-beloved—and offering him up on the same mount of Moriah. The son again toils up the same heights, bending beneath the burden of his cross. He sees the daughters of Jerusalem in tears at his side, and bids them “Weep not for him, but for themselves and their children.” He, too, is bound and laid on the altar, nailed to the wood of the cross—but no voice save his own is heard, and oh! what a cry was that—“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” There was no angel of the Lord out of heaven calling to the murderers, “Stay now thine hands; this is my Son, my only Son; surely, they will reverence my Son.” No! it pleased his Father to bruise him; it was not possible for him to escape. He drank of that which his Father had given him to drink. He poured out his soul even unto death. There was no substitute, no other victim found for him. He was himself bound to the horns of the altar, and “the Lord laid on him the iniquities of all.”

Thus, then, Abraham's temptation and trial ended; and if the father's faith and obedience were tested to the uttermost, weighed in the

corruption, and *his* dust is still resting in that cave of Machpelah, by the side of his father and his mother.

Did, then, Abraham know, on the day when he received the command to take his son—his only son—and offer him up for a burnt-offering, that all was to be done to typify the future shedding of the life-blood of the Son of God? And, during those three days of melancholy journey, had he, from time to time, glimpses and glorious revelations of that mystery of God manifest in the flesh? I cannot think so; but rather that all was dark and inexplicable, and that faith alone—something of that faith and trust which led Job to exclaim, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him”—bore him up under the heavy burden of those three days. Nor do I think that till all had been exacted of the patriarch which the Lord purposed to exact, till his faith and obedience had been tried to the last test, and that Isaac was once more restored to his father’s arms unharmed and in life, that then, and not till then, did the Lord reveal to his servant the spiritual meaning and application of the whole.

We read that the Angel of the Lord, the uncreated messenger of the covenant, the second

person of the glorious Trinity, called a second time to Abraham out of heaven. The first time was to bid him stay his hand, that he slay not his son, and that God was graciously pleased to accept "the willing mind," instead of the actual offering. But in the second voice the Lord both renews and enlarges his covenant through Isaac, and distinctly adds, "because thou hast obeyed my voice; because thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son." In the case of guilty Sodom, when the Lord was about to rain down flaming fire on those doomed cities of the plain, He is introduced as saying, "Shall I hide from Abraham the things that I do?" and He assigns as a reason why He should not withhold his purpose, that He knew Abraham's fidelity and obedience, and that he would bring up his children and regulate his household by the same principles which governed himself. And if God, in condescending approval of His servant's obedience, would not hide from him the thing He was about to do in wrath, would he conceal from him those purposes of love and mercy to a doomed and guilty world which He had been even now shadowing forth in this offering-up of Isaac.

God had once before, when renewing His

declaration that Abraham's seed should inherit the land into which He had brought him, in gracious answer to his inquiry, "whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it," made known to him, by special revelation, the future destiny of that seed in their land, and lengthened bondage in the land of Egypt—all of which was typically represented to Abraham when deep sleep was upon him, and a horror of great darkness fell upon him. And I think we may reasonably infer that, in this second revelation and renewal of his covenant with his servant, God made, as it were, to pass before him all his purposed goodness and mercy to the children of men, and that the Lord then showed to him how, in that transaction in which himself and Isaac had been such unwitting and unconscious agents, was prefigured all that agony and bloody sweat, that cross and passion, that precious death and burial, and that glorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well might Abraham rejoice and be glad, as thus eighteen hundred years before it came to pass, God made known the glorious mystery of that day of Christ, when He, too, should stand in the flesh on that height of Calvary, and there should it be seen how the Lord himself had

provided the offering, even the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and how He “so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever [unto the very end of time] believeth on him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

There can be no doubt that whatever was communicated to Abraham in this second calling of the Lord out of heaven, was during their brief sojourn on the mountain, and before they returned to the young men. In all probability Abraham, like the mother of Jesus, kept all these things in his heart, as regarded his household; and if he revealed them to any, it would be to Sarah alone. The aged mother, like the aged father, had an equal interest in the fortunes of their son; and though Sarah lived not to see that son married, her latter days were no doubt cheered and brightened by those reiterated promises of God, and that far higher destiny than all earth's inheritance could give—that in Isaac should all the nations and all the families of the earth be blessed. God's edict for the offering-up of Isaac had been mercifully as well as wisely withheld from her knowledge, but I see no reason why those revelations in which she herself had so deep an interest—not

only as the mother of Isaac, but as one who, equally with every son and daughter of Adam, needed salvation for her own soul—should be concealed from one to whom the Lord himself had once condescended to communicate His purposes of mercy.

Are we heirs of Abraham's faith? Then are we longing with equal desire to see that day of Christ which Abraham so desired to see, and which, when he saw, he rejoiced with such exceeding joy. In one sense, indeed, that day has come to us as it never came even to the patriarch. Through that long vista of eighteen hundred years he looked onwards to a Saviour that was to come, on a Lamb that was to be slain. No blood had then been shed which was to cleanse from all sin. No voice from out of heaven had then proclaimed of one walking on earth, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased—hear Him." *We* look back, it is true, through the same long vista of eighteen centuries, but it is on a Saviour already come—on one whose blood has been poured out—and who, ere He was offered up, said to his loving Father, "I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do." So that Christ's day, in that sense, has come to us: Jesus of Nazareth was

He, and we have no need to look for another. But has He indeed come to us as a Saviour? Have we received Him into our hearts? And does His love, the love wherewith He loved us, constrain us to all holy obedience and love in return?

It was an aggravated condemnation of the Jews' rejection of the Saviour, that when light was come into the world, they loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil; that He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. No doubt, like Isaac, we too are children of promise, and like him, we have been received by baptism into covenant with the Almighty; but as circumcision availeth nothing without the circumcision of the heart, so baptism, in its mere outward element, is of no avail without the effectual baptism of the Holy Spirit renewing the heart unto all holiness and righteousness.

“Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?” said the Jews, in their scornful incredulity, to Jesus. But oh! how far more wondrous—how far more beyond our finite comprehension, had not the Lord revealed it to us, that Abraham *should* see Jesus. That he desired to see the day of Christ we can

easily believe and comprehend; but that he saw that day of Christ—saw it in all its lowliness and weakness, in all its sufferings and agony, and yet in all its glory and mercy and love! And how was this? Jesus tells us—“Before Abraham was, I AM,” Yea, as his own Holy Spirit testifieth of Him “I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning; or ever the earth was, when there were no depths—when there were no fountains, before the mountains, before the hills.” Yes; “before Abraham was, I AM.” “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” Glorious and precious truth! Sweet and comforting assurance, “What God was,” says the pious Obadiah Sedgwick, “that He will be for ever. His name is not ‘I was,’ nor is it ‘I will be,’ but ‘I AM’ is His name—ever Jehovah—by that He will be known for ever. Was He able once? He is able for ever. Was He loving once? He will love for ever. Was He merciful once? He will show mercy for ever. Was He faithful once? He will keep truth for ever.”

And again he adds—“Honour the Lord in His promises; above all, Remember Him who hath said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” “It is God who hath said it—who hath

said it, and will perform it, for He is able and faithful who hath promised. If corrupt reasonings interpose themselves, and question how it can be—if unbelieving sense suggests, “I can see no hope nor probability in the world how this will be effected.” Shut your ears and your heart against them, and say, “Though I see no means, yet I see promises—though I cannot see the man who will do me any good, yet I do see the God who will do me good. His word hath been tried seven times. I have His promise—I will live and die upon it. Abraham did not consider his own body, but God who promised.” —*Sedgwick's “Shepherd of Israel.”* 4to. 1658. p. 331.

CHAPTER VI.

And Abraham said, "Go unto my country and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac."—GEN. xxiv. v. 4.

"MARRIAGE is honourable in all," said the Apostle; but he said also, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." And, perhaps, there has been no more fruitful source of misery and sin than such ill-assorted unions, for as the Apostle goes on to ask—"What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? Or what concord hath Christ with Belial?" And it is a striking comment on this, which is recorded by the Holy Spirit of that sad idolater and wicked Ahab, king of Israel, that not only did he do evil in the sight of the

Lord above all that were before him, but, as if it had been a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that "he also took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him." And it is added, "there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel, his wife, stirred up." And it is especially mentioned as one of the aggravated sins in the old world, before the waters of the deluge swept over the earth, that the sons of God, or descendants of Seth intermarried with the irreligious offspring of Cain.

But without pursuing this thought farther, it was expressly said of Abraham by God himself, "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." And this chapter, on which we have now entered, furnishes a very interesting illustration of the commendation, which was pronounced by such unerring judgment on the patriarch's rule of conduct in his household.

We are hardly competent to form a correct judgment as to much that occurred in those distant days; and especially with regard to mar-

riage, though we can have no doubt that the Lord, in His wisdom, most scrupulously guarded against admixture of what may be called idolatrous blood in the chosen line. One would hardly say that there was sin in such connections. Abraham, we know, formed such a marriage with the Egyptian Hagar, and though we are not told who Keturah, his wife after the death of Sarah, was, we may infer that neither she nor her sons ranked in the same class with Isaac. And yet the Lord seems not simply to have permitted, but to have sanctioned and blessed with offspring, such a marriage, though a marked and distinct line still separated between the offspring of Hagar and Keturah, and the son of Sarah.* And with regard to Abraham's own kindred, who still dwelt at Haran (to which they had probably given that name in memory of Haran, Abraham's elder brother), one can scarcely doubt that idolatry lingered

* It is quite true that twice in the genealogies of Christ, we meet with two names, which were undoubtedly of idolatrous origin, as intermarrying with the chosen line, Rahab of Jericho, and Ruth of Moab. One can hardly doubt that, in their admission into the roll of Christ's ancestors, according to the flesh, it was intended to prefigure the admission of Gentile as well as Jew into the Church of God; and there can be also as little doubt that they both became proselytes to the Israelitish faith.

even among them, and that from that earlier period before the call of God, and while they dwelt on the other side of the Euphrates, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor, with his children, served other gods. Joshua xxiv. 2.

It seems indeed to magnify the sovereign grace of God, that while we must fear both Abraham and Sarah were originally idolaters, the Lord in his mercy called them, and separated them from their family and their kindred, to be the chosen depositary of his promise, and the channel through which His name was to be preserved and made known. One knows not whether any communication was kept up between Abraham and his kindred in Haran—the history rather implies not—and, at any rate, the taint of idolatry continued even in that family and line in which we find Abraham seeking a wife for his son; and Laban the brother of Rebekah had encouraged and sanctioned image-worship and false gods in those daughters whom Jacob married; and we find Jacob in after days saying to his household, “Put away the strange gods that are among you.” I am afraid we must say of that early world that had Abraham or Isaac kept not company with any that were idolaters,

or beyond the precincts of their own tents, then as the apostle says, "they must needs have gone out of the world." I would not indeed say that "the times of this ignorance God winked at," but I think we may say, as of Israel in later times, "He *suffered* their manners in the wilderness."

To return, however, from this digression to the chapter now before us, and the incidents narrated in it. Some years had elapsed since Isaac's last scene on the mount of Moriah, probably five or six. During that interval he had lost his mother, no doubt with Abraham closing her eyes, and like him too mourning and weeping for her. It is a touching expression which is used at the close of this chapter, that in his marriage with Rebekah "Isaac was comforted after his mother's death," as if up to that period he had felt the void in his heart unfilled; and the unoccupied tent in which his mother dwelt had kept up the remembrance of her he loved so well. Of Sarah's treatment and management of her son during the impressible years of childhood and early youth, we are told nothing; but as she is held up by an apostle as a pattern for godly matrons, we may conclude that she was indeed irreproachable in every relation of

life, and that as her husband praised her, so her child also rose up and called her blessed. That she was affectionate and endeared to Isaac by the closest ties that ever linked the hearts of mother and son together, we may well infer from the lengthened period during which Isaac held that mother in such loving remembrance, and suffered not her place in that heart to be filled, till one came of whom God's word had said, in the beginning, that "therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh."

As one reads this chapter one thinks how little human nature, and human feeling and action have altered since these patriarchal days. As our Lord said of the days of Noah and of Lot, "They ate, they drank, they planted, they builded, they married and were given in marriage," so in our own days how continually do we see the same scene recur which is described here—"And Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother, Sarah's tent, and she became his wife." Yes! the mother, it may be the aged mother, dies and is buried; the place that has known her so long knows her no more; the vacant seat and chamber are no longer tenanted; the bereaved hearts know their own bitterness, and for a time

there is, as the Psalmist describes it, a going heavily in the household "as one that mourneth for his mother." But after a while a new occupant of the vacant place cometh; once more brightness and smiles resume their wonted aspect, "the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride," again resound through the dwelling, and once more is "Isaac comforted after his mother's death."

Let us now proceed to a brief consideration of the contents of this chapter. And the first question that meets us is on the very threshold, as to the ambassador whom Abraham employed in this delicate negotiation. It has been generally, and perhaps correctly, supposed that this "eldest servant" of Abraham's house was the Eliezer of Damascus, whom, some sixty years before, we find Abraham mentioning as the steward of his house. We have no reason to doubt the correctness of the supposition, nor if we did, have we any other to substitute in its stead. Whoever he was, he was a trusted and a trustworthy confidant of his master's purposes; the confidence of the master and the trustiness of the servant being mutually exemplified in the commission

given and the mode in which it is received. It is, too, a pleasing illustration of the manner in which servants, or perhaps more correctly speaking, slaves were treated, and the light in which they were looked upon in those simple patriarchal times. I have used the word "slaves," but with no reference to the treatment or condition of slaves in later, or alas! even in present days. I have used the term only, as implying ownership in the one and fealty and submission in the other. Born, generally speaking, beneath the tent of their master, brought up and educated under his eye and within his daily knowledge, having no interests beyond that encampment, and every affection centered within its range, and looked upon rather in the light of children of the establishment than its servants or its slaves, one feels no surprise that one who had now grown aged in the service, who had known no other home, and whom Abraham in his childless estate had looked upon as the probable heir of his possessions, should be chosen as the fitting negotiator on so important an occasion.

We have before seen that God had spoken

of Abraham as one who had accustomed his household to be regulated and guided by the principles of judgment and justice, and to keep the way of the Lord. It was a fitting inauguration, therefore, of so solemn a commission that it should be ushered in with religious ceremonies and sanction. We do not, indeed, read that prayer was used upon the occasion, but the narrative evidently implies that some previous communication had already passed between Abraham and his servant on the subject; and that not only was Eliezer fully acquainted with his master's wishes, but that it had already been the subject of conversation between them, and therefore we may infer of prayer as well. And what is recorded in the beginning of this chapter seems rather, if we may so express it, the beginning of the end, the result and close of the conference before Eliezer's dismissal on his mission.

The mode of taking an oath here mentioned is singular, and perhaps was confined to a covenant entered into by an inferior with a superior. In a preceding chapter we find Abraham declaring, with an oath, to the king of Sodom that he would receive no gift

from him for the service he had rendered ; and his words are, "I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord the most High God." But here he says to his servant, "Put thy hand under my thigh ;" and we find Jacob afterwards calling upon his son Joseph to employ the same token of fidelity to a given promise.

We have had no incidents recorded of any of Abraham's kindred and family since the day that in obedience to the Lord's commands he had quitted Haran. Whether any communications had passed between them we know not ; probably they had mutually heard of each other's welfare, and how the Lord had prospered Abraham and had given him a son in his old age. It has been suggested, from the expressions in the 5th and 6th verses, that Isaac, and perhaps Abraham with him, had been to Haran on a visit to his relatives, and that it is to this Abraham alludes, when he says, "Thou shalt not bring my son hither *again*." But I do not think the suggestion at all probable, and the words are sufficiently clear, even in their literal meaning, that neither himself nor any of his family were to go thither again to reside.

Eliezer, like a faithful and intelligent messenger, desires to understand thoroughly how he is to act under every possible contingency. And as his master was evidently entrusting to him, no doubt with Isaac's full sanction and knowledge, the sole and entire management of the negotiation, he specifies the probable alternative of a refusal on the part of the woman, or her kindred on her behalf, to quit her country and her father's house, to go to so distant a place as where Abraham and Isaac were residing.

Abraham's answer is a striking testimony, even after so many years, that he had not repented of his choice, nor, like the unhappy wife of Lot, had ever turned a lingering longing look to the friends and the home he had quitted; though as yet he possessed no other portion of the promised land than his wife's burying-place. He still recurs to and reiterates that promise, with the full assurance that in His own time, the Lord would make good his word; and his very injunction to Eliezer to swear unto him that he would not take a wife to his son of the daughters of the Canaanites, amongst whom he dwelt, at once evidences that, though he knew the Lord's patience was not yet exhausted, nor the iniquity of the Amorites full, he was well assured that

all the guilty race of the inhabitants of Canaan were doomed to destruction, and that there was to be a line of separation for ever between his posterity and theirs. Abraham adds to his parting words, "The Lord God of heaven which took me from my father's house—He shall send His angel before thee." Many years after this, when Abraham's grandson was himself an aged man, and that grandson was pronouncing a blessing on his own grandchildren, he makes use of a similar expression: "God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, THE ANGEL which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads!" There is no doubt to whom Jacob refers under the title of "The Angel," even the same Being whom he calls "The God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac;" and one can hardly err in referring Abraham's expression to the same Being, even that Angel of the Lord who called to him out of heaven, and bade him stay his uplifted hand. Even if, as many suppose, Abraham meant only a created angel, we are well assured that God giveth His angels charge over every child of His family to keep them in all their ways, and that "the Angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear Him

and delivereth them" from every evil. So that whether a created angel or the God of angels be meant, every step of Eliezer's journey was as safely guarded and as securely looked after, as if a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night had guarded and guided him from first to last, as they did Abraham's posterity so many generations afterwards.

Every preliminary of Eliezer's mission being thus arranged, the faithful steward of the house sets forth on his errand. And in all probability there was but little difference in the calvacade and retinue that attended him from what would accompany a great man or Sheik in the present day. The camel is still the faithful vassal of the Oriental that he ever was—still the unmurmuring drudge of his master's will, the patient, uncomplaining, all-sufficient handmaid that ministers to every want of the Eastern traveller, carries every burden, and lends its own ready back for every load. Those Mesopotamian plains, across which Eliezer journeyed, still see the string of camels and dromedaries kneeling down at evening time by some well of water, and the maidens of the neighbouring village or city still go forth with their pitchers at the usual hour for water for their cattle.

Many a change has come over those mighty cities which once studded the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates ; but the plain and simple manners and customs of pastoral and patriarchal times remain, in a great measure, unaltered to the present day. In one respect, indeed, it is more than probable that Eliezer's journey differed from many that have since traversed the same track, and it is in the earnest fervent prayer with which he began it, and sought the Lord's blessing on his work. No doubt a Mussulman at the present day, at the hour of prayer, wherever he may be, on the arid sands of the desert, or in the crowded street, will, with punctilious regularity, prostrate himself in the attitude, and utter the appointed form of prayer. But how different was Eliezer's prayer—full of his subject—full of his wants, seeking to be guided aright, and asking that token of the Lord's favour which might, as it were, stand like a sign-post in his path, as clear and unerring as if he were to hear a voice behind him saying, "This is the way, walk ye in it."

I do not, however, say that Eliezer's prayer is a right one for ourselves to follow, as regards the mode in which he asked for guidance. I do not think that we should be at all justified in

dictating and laying down to God the manner in which He should answer our petitions; and if we did, I should fear we should far oftener go on our way disappointed and discouraged rather than rejoicing and cheered. It is true the Lord did answer Eliezer's prayer in the literal way he asked; and so He did Gideon's with regard to the dew upon the fleece and on the earth; but in the one case, an especial deliverance was to be wrought for Israel; and in the other case, an especial purpose and promise to be accomplished. And it may be that as our Lord on the eve of His crucifixion, for the guidance and encouragement of His disciples, minutely specified every incident and detail that should direct them aright to the Paschal room, so here He might suggest to Eliezer, as the subject of His prayer, what He had before appointed to come to pass. At any rate, though I would not recommend it as a literal pattern for ourselves to follow, it is a sweet encouragement to every anxious and perplexed spirit, to take and to cast its cares on God, in the full assurance that He will make the crooked things straight, and the rough places plain. It is a precious promise which the Lord has left on record by his prophet, (Isaiah lxxv. 24), "And it shall come to

pass that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." And how often has that promise been fulfilled and realized to many a longing, anxious soul! How many such answers are recorded in God's own word which we can read for ourselves? How many more, unseen by human eye, and unknown to man, are recorded in that book of remembrance, and stored up, as it were, in those vials full of odours which are the prayers of the Saints! It was so assuredly with Eliezer; like his master's grandson, in after years, he too had power with God and prevailed; for "it came to pass that before he had done speaking, behold Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher on her shoulder."

More than eighteen hundred years after this scene by the well-side in the neighbourhood of Haran, another traveller was sitting by the side of another well, which Jacob, the son of this Rebekah, as yet unborn, had digged; and he, too, asked water of a woman that had come there with her pitcher on her shoulder to draw it. We need not pursue the story of what passed between the weary thirsting traveller at Jacob's well and the woman of Samaria; but

just consider for one moment how unbroken the line that connects the two events—how the scene in Haran led the way to that by Jacob's well, and how God, in His inscrutable and mysterious dealing, when He sent forth Rebekah to draw water for the Syrian traveller and his camels, was in that very event preparing for the coming of that predicted One who was greater than Jacob, and before Abraham. One loves to see the two ends of such a mighty chain brought into juxtaposition together, and to know that the Lord held them both, and that not one link could snap, not one jot nor tittle of His word and promise could perish till all were fulfilled in Him who said to the Jews, "Before Abraham was, I am." We may well cry with raptured Paul, "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" It reminds one, in some measure, of that vision which was afterwards revealed to Jacob, when he too was travelling through the same district, and partly on the same errand, but under far different circumstances; when, as he slept, "the earth his bed, and a stone his pillow!" he saw a ladder, or, as it might be more truly rendered, a "staircase,"

reaching from heaven to earth, and up and down its steps were continually ascending and descending those ministers of God, his holy angels, while the Lord stood above as the source and fountain from whom all emanated, every command issued, and every event had its origin. It is a great privilege to feel, in all its breadth and depth and height, the sweet and precious truth that the same God who guided Eliezer on his journey, is our God also; that as He was to him, so is He to us, that He is about our path as well, and will send His angel before us, who will bear us up in His hands, lest our foot trip even against a pebble in our way, and so His child should come to harm.

CHAPTER VII.

Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, "The thing proceedeth from the Lord ; we cannot speak unto thee good or bad. Behold Rebekah is before thee, take her and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife as the Lord hath spoken."

And it came to pass that when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth.—GEN. xxiv., v. 50, 51, 52.

ONE cannot but be struck throughout the whole of this narrative of Isaac's marriage with Rebekah, the commission entrusted to Eliezer, Eliezer's setting forth on his journey, and his interview with Rebekah, as well as afterwards with the members of her family, how very prominent a place religion, or rather I should say devotional feeling, occupies in every stage of the business. It stands forth as the moving principle of all ; it enters into every thought of the heart, mixes in every conversation, refers all to

the Lord, seeks His guidance at every step, and, with grateful thanksgiving, recognises and acknowledges His hand in all. It is this which gives such an interest to all the narratives and histories of the Bible above all others—that religion and religious feeling so thoroughly enter into all—that men never seem ashamed to talk religiously, that there is no evasion, no slurring over the topic, as if people thought it a reproach that God should be in all their thoughts. You may say that it is but natural to expect and to find this in the Bible; if we did not find it there, where should we look for it? But remember, though the Bible be the word of God, it records the history and the actions of men, and men as they were—men as they spoke, and as they acted. It throws no veil over what is sinful and wrong; it obtrudes nothing of good ostentatiously and for display; men and women just talk as they actually talked, and just act as they were wont to act. And this it is which gives such a charm to Bible narrative, even to those who enter not into its holy doctrines and glorious truths, who give no heed to its precepts, and appropriate not its promises—readers who simply look upon the Bible “as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can

play well upon an instrument"—who are pleased with its simplicity, touched with its pathos, and enraptured by its grandeur and sublimity.

I have been led to make these few observations, arising, as they do, so naturally and obviously from a contemplation of Eliezer's character as exhibited in this chapter. Our Lord, indeed, once said to His disciples, though with a different meaning, "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord;" and I think in this history we see that the disciple is as his master, and the servant as his lord; and that if the master of the household set a holy and consistent example, the servants of that household are quick to follow it; and of Eliezer as well as of Abraham, may it be said that they too will rise up in judgment with, and condemn many a Christian master, and many a Christian servant in the present day, who, with far more abundant privileges, and more gracious means, set neither Abraham's example nor follow Eliezer's fidelity.

We have already seen that Eliezer, as he stood at evening tide by that well of Haran, had prayed to God for His guidance and direction, as well as blessing on His mission. I know not that he prayed aloud. It is said, indeed, in

verse 45, that he was speaking in his heart; but this may allude to the heart's being lifted up a few moments in silent prayer at the close of the more public prayer; and evidently his attendants were within sight, and hearing also if he spake aloud, and he felt no shame in that strange land, and at such a spot of public resort, to be found praying to the God of heaven with his attendant retinue. In all probability, the servants heard what their master had said, for they acted upon it, and refrained from what would have been their duty at the close of the day's journey, to draw and fetch water for their camels, nor would Eliezer have permitted a maiden, even though with such a willing heart and ready hand, to undertake the somewhat laborious office of watering so many animals. Of course, we know, though the maiden knew not, and may have wondered, why these servants stood aloof, and helped not in the task. And one cannot but admire the simplicity of those ancient times, not so much that she was ready to give a drink of water to a thirsty traveller casually met at a well side; but that she thought no scorn, and deemed it no degradation to draw water from the well, and empty it into the trough, and run to and fro on the same errand

till every one of the ten camels had drunk enough.*

I remarked in the preceding chapter how little human nature and human feeling and action have altered since those patriarchal days; and can afford to smile at the simplicity with which the historian mentions how Eliezer brought forth his ornaments of gold earrings, or as the word more properly implies, jewels for the forehead,† and bracelets, in return for the kindness of this Syrian maiden. There can be no doubt, however, that Eliezer was acting only in conformity with the usual custom of presenting such ornaments to a chosen bride, such as Eliezer now recognised in Rebekah. And the Lord, by His prophet Ezekiel, represents himself on the day of His espousals to the church,

* The passage in Homer's *Odyssey* has been often quoted and admired as a pleasing picture of the primeval simplicity of those days, in which Nausicæa, a Phœacian princess, on the morning of her bridal day, is described as going down to the river side with her attendants to wash and prepare the robes and dresses for the occasion. But how immeasurably inferior the whole scene to the simple, courteous, kindly-affectioned and pure-minded work of this Syrian damsel in drawing water to refresh a weary traveller and his beasts of burden!

† It is the same word in Ezekiel xvi. 12.

reminding her how He had adorned and beautified her as His bride. "I decked thee with ornaments, I put bracelets upon thine hands, and a chain on thy neck, and I put *a jewel on thy forehead*, and earrings in thine ears." It is true Rebekah knew not the thought in Eliezer's heart, and may have scrupled to accept them, though we do not read so; nor do I see why we need reject the supposition that would attribute a little to the girlish vanity of one, whose age, if Jewish writers be correct, did not exceed fourteen years. It is quite evident, whatever we may think of the vanity of the damsel, that the avarice of the brother was stirred up at the sight of gifts so manifestly betokening the wealth of the giver, and though I would not depreciate the ready hospitality of Laban, yet the historian significantly enough says, that "when he saw the earrings and bracelets on his sister's hands," and heard her report of the stranger, he immediately hurried off to the well-side, and offered all that an Eastern traveller needed, or Eastern hospitality could provide.

It was no doubt a natural as well as a sincere wish on the part of Rebekah's kindred to detain their sister as long as they could. In those days of comparatively scanty intercourse and means

of communication, the marriage of a maiden was indeed a more entire separation from all former ties, than it is now. It might be truly said to the bride of those days, as the Psalmist speaks to the Church under the character of a bride, "hearken O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear, forget also thine own people and thy father's house." And Laban's family seem to have felt that in parting with their sister, they were in all probability parting with her for ever. But Eliezer was too faithful, too earnest a messenger to linger needless on his errand. Human instinct could tell him without the promptings of a prophet's lips, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that bringeth good tidings of good;" he would be anxious to hasten homewards with all the speed of one that had such good tidings to communicate. At the first reading, indeed, of this portion of the narrative, there seems, perhaps, something ungracious in the refusal of Eliezer to tarry the ten days that were asked; and it almost reads as if he not only withheld his assent even to that delay, but that he hurried his departure and that of Rebekah, on the morning following the evening on which he had arrived; in that case scarcely allowing even ten hours, instead of

ten days. Had such been the case, one might perhaps have felt that the reproach which some have cast on Rebekah, as guilty of undue and indelicate precipitation in her instant decision to return with Eliezer, was just. The margin of our Bible, however, for 'ten days,' reads "ten months or a year," and the word here translated 'days,' often signifies in the Bible "the end of days" or a "full year;" and it is therefore perfectly consistent with what we may suppose to have been the custom of those times, as well as their own natural affection, that they should ask to detain their sister for ten months or a year; and still more consistent with Eliezer's impatience to return home, that he should reject such a proposition, though it by no means implies, or does it follow that he so hastened his departure, as not to tarry some days, till every arrangement was made for the equipment and retinue of their sister on so important an occasion. I see no indelicacy in Rebekah's reply, "I will go," any more than I do in Mary's answer to the angel, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word." Both received it as an intimation of the Lord's will, and both humbly and piously acquiesced when they knew it, and both, too, in their respective gene-

rations, were alike carrying out the Lord's covenant promise, that "in Isaac should all the families of the earth be blessed."

Once more, then, the cavalcade of camels and attendants sets out on its homeward journey; but now, with its company augmented by the presence of Rebekah and her maidens. One other is also mentioned, and that too by name, as well as by station; and there is something that comes home to one's own especial feelings of grateful and affectionate remembrance in this simple record of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse. Her name, indeed, is not found in this chapter, but it is mentioned in the record of her death, in the 35th chap., 8th ver., and there is something peculiarly touching in this condescending memorial in God's own word, of so humble a retainer as Rebekah's nurse. Of her character we know nothing, save by inference, and we may at least infer, that there was a strong link of close attachment, which so bound the foster-child to her nurse, that when quitting her home for her husband's tent, Deborah was still the chosen companion of her way. We hear no more of this faithful and attached dependant, till the day of her death; but how much is implied in that one little verse—how much do we gather from that simple re-

cord of the event? Rebekah herself was then dead; in life and in death that nurse had been by her side; she had received almost her earliest, and, probably too, her latest breath; had shared in all the joys and sorrows, the suspense and disappointment, and at last, the gladness that was in her mistress's heart, when those two children were dandled on her own knee, as their mother had been before.

We know not the period of Rebekah's death, but after that event, we find Deborah sojourning in the tent of Rebekah's son Jacob; thus, in some measure, through the kind providence of God, reawakening all the attachments and associations of her own earlier days beneath the roof of Laban, in Leah and Rachel, the children of Laban. And how deep the attachment, how affectionate the regard, that subsisted between these children of her early master and mistress, and this their aged servant, we infer from the simple memorial which the Spirit of God has deigned to preserve in His imperishable record, that the oak tree at Bethel, beneath which they buried her, was called the Oak of Tears.—(*Allon—Bachuth*).

Let us, however, now leave for a time the returning party, and look in upon the tents of

Abraham and Isaac, in the neighbourhood of Beersheba. No doubt Isaac, as well as his father, had with tolerable accuracy calculated the time that the journey to Haran and back, with the probable detention there, would occupy, and might now be anxiously looking out for the expected return of their messenger, with somewhat of the language, if not the feeling, of the mother of Sisera, as she looked out of the window for her son's return, and cried through the lattice, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot? Hath he not sped?"

But how great soever might be the natural anxiety of Isaac for the return of his messenger, we are not left in doubt as to the method in which he calmed down his impatient spirit; and what is recorded as the employment of one day, was no doubt, the occupation of all. We read that "Isaac went out to meditate in the field at eventide;" at that calm and quiet hour of nature's, as well as man's repose, when the occupations of the day are over, and the wearied spirit, vexed perhaps, with the trials and turmoils of the day, finds its best strengthening and refreshment in communion with God—in meditation and prayer—and in the stillness of

the eventide, when all around breathes only an atmosphere of praise and thanksgiving to the beneficent Creator; then, more especially, is the spirit of man turned inward, and from the contemplation of the outward objects of the Creator's love, is his mind led onwards and upwards, to that fulness of redeeming mercy, which, to the inheritance of time, has added the unsearchable riches of Christ.

No doubt Isaac's meditations, however they might deviate here and there, on this hope and on that, would ever recur to that blessed promise, which was handed down to him as the precious heir-loom of his inheritance, that in him—in Isaac—"should all the families of the earth be blessed," and in the sweet certainty of the fulfilment of that covenant promise of the Almighty, would he no doubt recall that foreshadowing of the Redeemer's death, in his own sacrifice on the mount of Moriah. On the margin of our Bible, the word "to meditate," is rendered "to pray;" and can we believe that prayer was no portion of Isaac's occupation in those walks at eventide; that while he meditated on all the wondrous purposes of God's mercy to man through him and his seed, his heart would also be lifted up in prayer for its accom-

plishment, in the return and successful mission of his servant? Isaac was no more debarred than Eliezer was, from making God, as it were, the confidant of all his thoughts, and feelings, and desires. I believe, indeed, that those early patriarchs, living as they did in such closer communion and personal intercourse with God, knew far better than we at least practise, what it was to come with holy boldness to the throne of God, in fervency of prayer, and in full confidence of trust. I fear that with all our higher privileges, and more glorious promises, and more effectual means of access, it may be said of too many among us, that we "restrain prayer" before God more than they, and that our achievements in prayer are poor and insignificant compared with those giants of patriarchal times.

On one of these calm and quiet evening walks, thus musing and meditating on the sweet and precious promises of Jehovah, Isaac, perhaps with quick and listening ear, first catches the distant tread of feet, or hears the hum of approaching voices in the twilight silence of the eve, and then lifting up his eyes, beholds the joyous cavalcade drawing nigh, and it may be, amid the group of camels, detects one, which with instinctive guess he knows is bearing the

precious burden of his future bride. The recognition seems to have been mutual, as well as at the same instant, and on inquiry of Eliezer, who the approaching stranger was, and being told that it was Isaac, Rebekah at once alights from her camel, and with instinctive female delicacy, covers herself with a veil, and thus awaits his approach.

There was no doubt much to tell on Eliezer's part, how he had managed, and how the Lord had prospered him in all his undertaking; and to him too for his faithful earthly service might most appropriately have been given the same approving meed of commendation which our Lord assigns to his faithful steward, "Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful in a few things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." And so, in the simple announcement of those good old patriarchal days, Isaac "took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her, and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

CHAPTER VIII.

And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel, the Syrian of Padan-Aram, the sister to Laban the Syrian.

And Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.—GEN. xxv., v. 20, 21.

FROM the close of the last chapter to the period of the present verses, nearly twenty years have elapsed, during which we know little and read less of Isaac's domestic life. We have, however, recorded in the earlier part of this chapter the death of Abraham, and the distribution and settlement which he made of his worldly possessions during his lifetime. Though Abraham was eighty and six years old ere he had a child at all, and though another lengthened period of fourteen years passed before he had another, and then an only son, still, before the close of his own protracted

life of one hundred and seventy-five years, he had what may be called a large and flourishing family of eight sons, and of them, all primogeniture belonged inalienably to Ishmael. No after alteration or arrangement could change that fact. Ishmael was the first-born and Ishmael, of course, remained the first-born. But still the purpose of God, according to election, stands "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," and the Lord's covenant was in Isaac, not in Ishmael. It was probably not so in the beginning, and of the first two brothers that were born into the world, God's appointment was that the younger should be subject to the elder. In remonstrating with Cain on his sinful envy of his younger brother, the Lord uses this expression, "Unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him," but probably from that time this was not to be the immutable rule of God's proceedings.

Be this, however, as it may, Abraham exercised a wise and judicious judgment in providing against any possible disputes among his children, after his death, by his own express will and settlement previous to that event. We are told, indeed, that he gave all that he had unto

Isaac, that is, he constituted him the sole heir of all his possessions at his decease, but during his life, and as his children grew up, "he gave gifts," or provided abundantly for each son, and settled them in different and distant localities far away from all interruption or probability of encroachment upon Isaac; and where, in process of time, they grew up and increased into large and powerful communities. It is singular that Ishmael's name is not particularised in this settlement of the sons of Abraham, unless, indeed, the sons of the concubines include Hagar's son as well as Keturah's. At any rate, as I have before remarked, we find Ishmael and Isaac once more united in the performance of a solemn duty, at a spot, too, where bitterness ought to find no place, and animosity no fuel. If there be one spot on earth where quarrel and feud should be hushed, it should be by the side of a father's grave. We have, however, no reason to suppose that the reconciliation between Ishmael and his brother was delayed till then. It had probably scarcely ever been more than the quarrel of childhood, and Isaac, at least, had personally nothing to do with the banishment of Hagar and her child. Nor can we for

a moment suppose that Abraham permitted Hagar to return into her own country of Egypt without making abundant provision for her need, as, indeed, the future fortunes of Ishmael amply testify to the liberality of his father.

We have, however, somewhat antedated the death of Abraham, as it, indeed, is in the chapter before us; for he did not, in fact, die till fourteen or fifteen years after the birth of his grandchildren. Abraham was an hundred years old when Isaac was born. Isaac was forty when he married, and sixty when Esau and Jacob were born, and Abraham was one hundred and seventy-five when he died, so that he had at least the gratification of seeing his son's sons grown up to boyhood ere he himself "died in a good old age, an old man and full of years."

And yet Isaac, like his father, had his faith tried by a long period of disappointment and suspense. Perhaps to Abraham it renewed all the memory of his own far more protracted waiting, when with him delayed hope had made his heart sick, and he had recourse to a step suggested indeed by the impatience of Sarah, and backed up by his own carnal heart, which at least embittered his home, and added its own

peculiar sting to his parental feelings. Isaac, however, betook himself to no such questionable proceedings; his faith, though not so long nor so heavily tried as his father's, was equal to his trial, and sent him to the only refuge and support for a tried and perplexed spirit. He betook himself to prayer, "Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife," and he had learnt too that lesson which our Lord when on earth so strikingly inculcated on his disciples, that "men ought always to pray and not to faint." For twenty years that prayer went up unanswered, and still he prayed on; he still continued earnestly and perseveringly, entreating the Lord that the barren woman might at length become a joyful mother of children. He knew the Lord's promise that "in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed," and he never for one moment doubted its fulfilment; but this in no degree made him relax in prayer, and no doubt added one more, and that too his most powerful plea, why God should hear and answer him, even for the glory of his own name, and for His truth and promise sake.

At length the answer came, and at the close of twenty years Rebekah became a mother; and, as in the case of another mother, who for

a far longer period had been barren, and yet, in answer to her husband's prayer, conceived and bare a son, and that son, ere he saw the light, by some sudden and mysterious impulse, leaped in her womb at the approach of the mother of the yet unborn Saviour; so even in Rebekah's womb, "the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God, according to election, might stand not of works but of Him that calleth," even then, while yet in their mother's womb, God chose to intimate his purpose that the elder born should serve the younger.

Rebekah, it is true, did not understand the mysterious movement, and she may have thought that it indicated only disappointment, that she should not give birth to a living child. Her very remark implies as much. "If it be so, why am I thus?" if I am doomed to disappointment, why have I been permitted to conceive? "Shall the Lord bring to the birth and not cause to bring forth?" It was no doubt a case in which human counsellors could be of little avail. Deborah could afford no solution, and Isaac, to whom no doubt she would communicate her perplexities and fears, could as little explain the cause, and Abraham, though still living, might throw no

light on the subject. But Abraham and Isaac could point to One who could clear up every doubt, and we therefore read that Rebekah, probably at their suggestion, "went to inquire of the Lord." Whither she went, or to whom, or in what way the inquiry was made, we are not told; nor do we know whether the Lord's reply was personally addressed to herself, or through the medium of another. In those days the Lord seems to have maintained frequent personal intercourse with several, sometimes by vision, and in times of sleep, and sometimes by the ministry of created angels. It is, however, of little consequence to pursue the inquiry further in Rebekah's case. It is sufficient for us, as no doubt it was for her own perplexities, that the Lord was pleased to return a clear and distinct answer to her inquiries, and which so soon verified itself in the birth of her twin children. One cannot for a moment doubt that if Isaac did not accompany his wife when "she went to inquire of the Lord," he was at least immediately made acquainted with the answer, and must have read in that reply an intimation of the Almighty's will with regard to his children, so clear that no difficulty as to the meaning could possibly arise. It will be important to bear this in mind in our

consideration of Isaac's after conduct in the bestowal of his blessing on his sons. "Two nations are in thy womb, the one people shall be stronger than the other people, the elder shall serve the younger." No language could speak plainer, no edict could run more closely, and however length of time may have weakened the impression, and the lapse of years obscured the remembrance, and however strongly the attachment to the one in preference to the other may have pleaded for Esau, and induced a hope or a belief that the Lord would alter his purpose; still, at the time, Isaac must have thoroughly and conclusively understood the purport of the words, and the birth of the twins at once explained the only ambiguous portion of the answer. "Two nations are in thy womb." No doubt it would recall to Isaac, and to Abraham as well, the circumstances under which himself and his elder brother Ishmael had been set apart of God, each indeed as the founder of a great nation, but reserving to the younger the covenant—superiority over the elder in the promised blessing of spiritual pre-eminence. But temporarily and personally, Isaac had exercised no superiority over Ishmael; and Ishmael, as far as we can infer, had assuredly felt no galling inferiority in his own

position. Like that vine which the Lord in after years brought out of Egypt, he too might be said to have spread out his boughs unto the sea and his branches unto the river. In this very chapter is given us a far more flourishing statement of the earthly fortunes of Ishmael at the period of his death than those of Isaac; how even his descendants "dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that is before Egypt, as thou goest towards Assyria, and that he died in the presence of all his brethren." So that Isaac must have been well aware that the superiority of the one over the other was chiefly in the spiritual blessing of the promised Redeemer, in the lineage of Isaac, and that whatever of temporal superiority was implied, had no reference to the individual brother now born to him.

It does not belong to this history to pursue the respective accounts of the Edomites and Israelites through all their national animosities and vicissitudes of fortunes, or it would be no difficult matter to show that Israel never exercised that continuous dominion and sovereignty over Edom, which we imagine this declaration of the Almighty to have involved in it; and as in fact the last kings of Judea, almost to the close of her political existence, were of Idumean or Edomite

race, I think we are justified in confining the predicted superiority, as I have already said, to spiritual pre-eminence.

We are, however, at present more concerned with the characters of these brothers in their earlier years, and the few incidents of their lives beneath their father's tent, as detailed in this portion of their history, than with the fortunes of their descendants. And, most assuredly, we see that from the very first there was the most marked and striking dissimilarity between them in their habits and pursuits, as well as their individual characters. We might, perhaps, expect and predicate of two boys born of the same parents, educated beneath the same roof, subject to the same influences, breathing as it were the same atmosphere, and with the same examples daily before their eyes, that they would grow up in the closest ties of brotherly affection, and that their very differences of habit, and disposition, and temper would only bind them in stricter union ; that the weaker would lean more unreservedly on the stronger, and the stronger find his truest enjoyment in developing and sustaining the less prominent energies of the weaker. But we have only to take the first family of children we meet with to see the fallacy of such utopian expecta-

tions, and too often, alas ! even without the element of religious discord, do we see brother at variance with brother, and sister set against sister, and the very nursery the miniature arena of the quarrels and rivalries of after life. No doubt somewhat may be ascribed to injudicious management and partial affection, and indiscreet favouritism in parents, little thinking, and little heeding how they are sowing in those early years the seed of that bitter fruit of which Adam and Eve reaped so deadly a crop, in those first brothers of the human race.

It was evidently to this in a great measure, if not solely, that the alienation of Esau and Jacob proceeded to such lengths as to threaten the same fatal termination which had stained the hands of Cain with his brother's blood. It could not be because Esau preferred the occupation of the chase, and the more stirring excitement of out-door life, while Jacob's temperament led him to the sedentary and quieter amusements and employments of home. There might be occasional unkindliness of speech, in the one brother refusing to join the other in some occupation of the day, as well as some exhibition of selfishness in the refusal ; and there might be somewhat of sarcastic remark and unkind re-

flection on their mutual occupations, but there could be no rivalry in their different pursuits, and all these little collisions of temper would have passed away, as the wind that blew across their Mesopotamian plains, and left no trace behind. A little judicious counsel, a word here and there spoken in season, some holy lesson of brotherly love from a father's lips, some gentle admonition, such as a mother's heart alone can give, would have fostered and nourished all that was lovely and loving in these brothers' spirits, one towards the other, and have repressed and crushed all that was unamiable and selfish. But, unhappily, we read that it was otherwise; and I fear that Isaac's conduct in this matter was far from that standard of high attainment which was so conspicuous in his own father, when God gave that memorable testimony to his holy and consistent management of his household, and the pious, blameless example of his own life. It was no sin that Isaac loved Esau; it would have been sin had he not; but oh, what a reason is here assigned for that love! What a poor, wretched, degraded estimate of a father's love, of a father's affection for his first-born! "Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his son's venison!" We shall have occasion, in

a future chapter, to allude to this subject, and I would, therefore, only remark at present, that the expression seems purposely and significantly used, to throw light on much that is perplexing and painful in this patriarch's character. I think we have been accustomed to look on Isaac's life, not merely as devoid of incident, and as peculiarly peaceful and undisturbed, gliding on in its calm and equable current, unruffled by those winds and waves which so often mar the tranquillity of other men's existence, but as free also from all those blemishes and sins which mark the infirmity and pollution of our common nature, and from which no child of Adam is exempt.

And I think, also, we have a striking warning held out to us in this household of Isaac—that as the parents declined in closeness and consistency of walk before God, so, in proportion, the happiness and unity of spirit between the members of this household declined also; and as holiness, so happiness became dimmed as well. At first, indeed, it was but a shade that came between; then a cloud overshadowed them; till at last, in the bitterness of her spirit, the unhappy mother exclaimed, “I am weary of my life. It is a sad insight into a disunited family,

which this verse gives us—"Isaac loved' Esau because he did eat of his venison, *but* Rebekah loved Jacob." What a striking monosyllable that little word *but*, showing in its impressive contrast, the affections, the interests, and the influence of the husband and the wife, the father and the mother, at variance and in opposition—not simply that the love of the one was not as earnest and devoted as the love of the other, but that where the one loved, the other did *not* love; that there was neither unity of heart nor purpose between them; that while the father lavished affection on the elder, Rebekah was equally assiduous in sowing the seeds of alienation and rivalry in the bosom of the younger.

One is not surprised, therefore, that the harvest was so quickly gathered, and that the misguided parents had to mourn over the result of their own partiality and favouritism, in the estrangement and disunion of their twin children. Nothing, indeed, is said directly of the Lord's purpose, that the elder should serve the younger, but the incident recorded in the close of this chapter, as occurring between the brothers, shows that it was known to them, and was germinating in the hearts of both its natural fruits of jealousy and arrogance, and that Rebekah at

least had made God's promise a frequent text for comment to her favourite, Jacob. Perhaps Isaac, in his partiality for Esau, had struggled hard to forget it, and at any rate had suffered its impression to be weakened, or perhaps, with the usual ingenuity of a self-deceiver, had persuaded himself, either that God had forgotten, or that He had altered His mind, or that when His time was come He would make it known by clearer manifestation, and that till then, He might fairly hold it in abeyance. But if Isaac had forgotten, neither Jacob nor Esau had, and the narrative which closes this chapter is a melancholy exhibition of selfish, grasping, unbrotherliness on the part of Jacob, and of irreligious heedlessness, and contempt of God's promise on the part of Esau. One hardly knows which brother's character stands out more offensively in the whole transaction; perhaps, if we have any feeling in the matter, it is enlisted in favour of Esau, as the supposed wronged and injured one; and at any rate one can have no sympathy with the cold-blooded, calculating selfishness and cupidity of Jacob. One seems to picture to oneself, the one brother coming home from the lengthened chase, wearied and spent with hunger and toil, ready to faint, and no man at hand

or able to minister to his wants ; and that in this extremity, ready to perish, he sees his brother with food before him, and begs him to bestow it on his need ; and that Jacob takes a cruel and unkind advantage of his hunger, to drive a grasping bargain with his brother. But of course, such a state of destitution and of hunger could never have occurred beneath his father's tents to a son whom Isaac loved, and a few minutes alone would have supplied every want. Still, there can be no doubt that the transaction is literally true—that Esau came home from the field, hungry and faint, and seeing Jacob with a savoury meal, such as he too loved, before him, longed for it, instead of waiting for food to be prepared for himself. Do we not see also, in this eager craving for the mess of pottage, that would brook neither denial nor delay, a painful development of a father's infirmity in his "pro-fane" son ? It reads a very striking lesson to every parent, and shows in unmistakeable lines, the father's habits in the son's practice. Jacob's character was assuredly to make the best of every bargain ; and no doubt seeing the eager eye of his brother fastened on his pottage, he proposes, by way of exchange, that Esau should transfer to him his own claims of priority of

birth, and all the privileges attached to that position.

Jacob, no doubt, was well aware of the Lord's prediction. Rebekah had too often told him of it to be easily forgotten; and his own heart's covetousness led him to believe that earthly possessions and inheritance were included in the promise. And, therefore, he determined to make assurance doubly sure, and by his own ingenuity and contrivance to render God's gift more certain—God's word more valid—and to have it in his power on some future day to bring forward his brother's spontaneous transfer of his rights to himself; before therefore he would surrender the coveted meal, he exacts an oath from him that the sale should be a binding one. Esau most assuredly at that time either had no conception of that spiritual pre-eminence implied by the Lord's prediction, or, if he had, gave no credence to it, and thoroughly despised its prerogative. Confident in his father's partiality and affections, and fully satisfied that he would make no change in his inheritance in favour of Jacob, he seems to have assented to his brother's offer, with a reservation in his own mind that he would set the bargain on one side as soon as it interfered with his

interest to do so ; and that as to any supposed superiority of spiritual privileges, if any such existed, they could do him no good, and Jacob was welcome to the boon ; and thus, as the Apostle strongly puts it, “ Esau for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright.”

And yet, in reality, Esau had no birthright to sell ; the whole transaction between the brothers was full of impiety, unbelief, and greediness, and one might well apply to them both the words of the Psalmist, “ He that sitteth in the heaven laughed them to scorn, the Lord had them in derision.” Whatever might have been the thoughts of Esau’s heart at the time, most assuredly he lived to repent his share in the transaction ; and when he sought, even with tears, to change his father’s purpose, he found no place for alteration or repentance in that father’s heart, as regarded the blessing. And as to Jacob we may truly say of him, “ in the net which he hid for another was his own foot taken, and he too was trapped in the work of his own hands.” But “ the word of our God shall stand for ever,” “ Let God be true, and every man a liar.” Isaac would have set aside God’s word, and Rebekah would have fulfilled it by a falsehood ; Esau sought with tears to

alter it, and Jacob to confirm it by his artifice. “Nevertheless,” saith the apostle, “the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His.” And, therefore, as the same apostle emphatically adds, “Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from all iniquity.”

CHAPTER IX.

And Isaac dwelt in Gerar. And the men of the place asked him of his wife, and he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say "She is my wife, lest," said he, "the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah," because she was fair to look upon.—GEN. xxv., v. 6, 7.

IN the preceding chapter we had Isaac in the family, and in the present one we have Isaac in what we call the world. In the management of his family he was very far from blameless, and in his intercourse with society and with his fellow-men this chapter furnishes a melancholy instance of that fear of man which produceth a snare. Parents, however, may read in the narrative of Isaac's conduct at Gerar, and the falsehood and duplicity into which it led him, an instructive but painful warning to themselves, how they ever put it into a child's power to plead

a parent's example for their own sin. One does not read so continually recorded in the Old Testament of many of the kings of Israel and of Judah that they walked in all the steps of their fathers to do evil, without the impressive lesson being brought home to us that a parent's steps, even though his path be a path of sin, have a lasting and, if we may so speak, a consecrated influence over a child's conduct. And I cannot but think, however hardened a parent's heart may be as to his own career, and heedless as to its results to himself, it must bring a blush into his cheek, and a pang into his heart, when he sees his own child treading closely in his own footprints of degradation and sin. And even if it be not so on earth, even if, as has sometimes been the case, a father and a son, a mother and a daughter, walk hand in hand, and side by side, in the same pathway of crime and shame, one can hardly doubt that the most agonizing and heart-rending curse of hell must be that which a parent hears from a child's lips for having brought him or her to that place of torment.

To return, however, to our chapter. We read of famines in the time of Abraham, as well as now in Isaac's time, as we afterwards do in

the days of Jacob; and Egypt, from the peculiarity of its river and the facilities of irrigation, seems to have been a favoured country as regarded its produce. "Go down and buy, for there is corn in Egypt," was Jacob's commission to his sons; and his descendants afterwards enumerated "the fish, and the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick," as among the good things which they somewhat perversely remembered in Egypt. To Egypt, therefore, in this time of famine, had Abraham gone down, and there passed off among the princes of the land his wife Sarah as his sister; and it is probable, now that famine had again occurred, that Isaac meditated taking refuge in the same land whither his father had gone. But the Lord ordered otherwise, and by His directions Isaac went to Gerar in the land of the Philistines, of which country Abimelech was then the king.

It was to the same Gerar that Abraham had also gone and sojourned there just before the birth of Isaac, and there again had the same melancholy falsehood and artifice been practised with another Abimelech as had been practised with Pharoah in Egypt.

But that had been, probably, more than ninety

years before ; Isaac was sixty when his sons were born, and they were now grown up to manhood, so that in all probability the time specified had fully elapsed. Isaac, therefore, knew nothing personally of his father's guilty fears and falsehoods. But one can hardly doubt that he was acquainted with them, and the very readiness with which he too adopts the same falsehood, under exactly similar circumstances, implies at least his knowledge. It has been said that "the good that men do is too often buried with them, but that the evil lives after them," both in the remembrance of it, and in its results. And if the name of the place and its inhabitants, and the very title and name of the king as well, recalled Abraham's sojourn there and his sin, it recalled, also, the recollection of the means by which he escaped a supposed peril. And yet, in some respects, Isaac's sin was greater than Abraham's. In the first place, he had that father's conduct, and the rebuke that God had given him, as a landmark to guide his own steps from a similar snare. Besides, Isaac had the direct promise of God's protection over him in that Philistine land. And more than that, the Lord minutely, and with most condescending tenderness, recapitulated word for word the

various assurances of the promised blessing which He had vouchsafed to Abraham, and had bade him continue where he was till he should receive intimation to depart. I do not add that Isaac's assertion, that Rebekah was his sister, was a more direct falsehood than his father's, who had some plea of such relationship to urge; for in reality it was no palliation of the sin of Abraham. He meant the assertion to deceive, and it did deceive; and all we can say of Abraham's excuse is, that though it apparently suggested the falsehood, it in no degree diminished the guilt; and in that respect the father and the son are both alike guilty before God.

Much, however, as the earlier part of this chapter has led us to speak of the infirmity which marred Isaac's faith, and the sin and falsehood which stained his character in the land of the Philistines, its continuation affords us abundant evidence that he had drunk deeply of that peaceful quiet temper, and that unselfishness of spirit and self-denial, which marked his father's character in that dispute which his herdsmen had with the herdsmen of Lot. And Isaac had great provocation to resent the injuries and wrongs he had received. Notwithstanding his sin, of which no doubt, he had deeply repented, and been ashamed

at the rebuke of Abimelech, the Lord had still signally blessed his servant, and all that he did prospered in his hands.

We read that Abraham was very rich in cattle, and in silver, and in gold, but we do not read that he ever was a tiller of land, or sowed seed, and gathered in the harvest. It is indeed said that he planted a grove at Beersheba; and therefore, it is evident that he tarried long enough in a district to have cultivated ground had he so pleased, and he may have done so, though we do not read of it. But here it is carefully recorded, and that probably as a memorial of the abundant return which the Lord made to him, that Isaac sowed seed, and in the same year received a produce of one hundred fold; and it is expressly added, that "the Lord blessed him." Of course one has no need to measure the comparatively scanty products of our own cold and northern clime with the abundant produce of oriental harvests. Our Lord, under the imagery of such an harvest, represents good seed as occasionally producing an hundred fold; and in those early patriarchal days, before, indeed, the Gospel had revealed a brighter inheritance, and more ennobling hopes, the Lord's blessing was frequently manifested and estimated by outward

prosperity as well as long life. "Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour." It would seem, indeed, that Isaac's worldly prosperity was indeed great. The historian describes the man as waxing great, going forward, pushing out as it were his possessions farther and farther, and growing till he became very great.

No doubt those vast Mesopotamian plains afforded abundant pasturage and room for the increase of flocks and herds, and a vast portion of the wealth of those days consisted of those possessions. We are not, therefore, surprised to hear that Isaac had large flocks and herds, and great store of servants, and still less surprised that it is added the Philistines envied him. Isaac, we must remember, was at Gerar, if we may so speak, on sufferance; and the far narrower confines and limits of that country would naturally render the extent of his cattle irksome and galling to the denizens of the soil; and something of the same feeling might exist as had arisen between his father and his kinsman Lot. "The land was not able to bear them;" and so strife, and ill-will, and envy, and opposition would naturally be engendered by a stranger's prosperity. They might, too, recall to mind how when Abraham had

sojourned among them, the Lord had sorely visited the people for the offence which Abimelech had unconsciously committed in taking Sarah from her husband; and they might now dread alike visitation under the nearly similar circumstances in which Isaac and their present king stood the one to the other, especially as they could not but know that Isaac was under the protection of a God whom they knew not and did not worship.

At any rate, these Philistines were anxious to get rid of their too-powerful neighbour, and no more effectual means of annoyance could be devised, than stopping and filling up with earth the wells, on which Isaac must have depended for the watering of his numerous flocks and herds. Such a step was no doubt most galling to Isaac's herdsmen, and had their master, as his father had once done, under great aggression, armed his trained servants, born in his own house, and taken the matter into his own hands, there could have been little doubt as to the result, for as Abimelech acknowledges to Isaac, "Thou art much mightier than we." And Isaac had right as well as might on his side, for the wells were his own; wells which his father's servants had digged, and which Abimelech had covenanted

he should possess, when he said to him, "Behold my land is before thee, dwell where it pleaseth thee;" and special mention was afterwards made of the very wells which were now the subject of dispute. It is, however, a noble testimony to the peaceableness of the patriarch's disposition, as well as his loving and self-denying spirit, that without retaliation, or even remonstrance, he immediately departed and took up his abode in a district beyond, though adjoining, the territories of Abimelech. "If they persecute you in one city," said our Lord, "flee ye to another." And one rejoices to think, how in those earlier days of the patriarchs, Isaac, as well as Abraham, had drunk of that spirit which was in Christ. "Go from us," was the uncourteous demand of Abimelech—"he departed," the answer which Isaac made.

Our Lord had also said to his disciples, "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. If a man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. If a man compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." I know of no precepts in Christ's code more difficult to the natural man than these, and though I know too, that an Apostle said of

himself, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me," and the same strength that was effectual in Paul, is equally available and powerful for the feeblest and the poorest. Yet there is that in every man's heart, which rises up in opposition to injury and wrong; and though his desire is, as far as in him lies, to live peaceably with all men, yet there are those that, as far as in them too lies, will hardly permit them to do so. It was not the Psalmist only, who had to complain of his adversaries, that when he wished for peace, they made them ready for battle. Isaac assuredly had abundant cause for the same complaint, and one almost wonders how he endured so long, and so patiently, when the means of resistance were so effectually in his power; and that the only retaliation he allowed himself to take, was the affixing to each well, as it was taken from him, a name that recorded the wrong done him, and his sense of its injustice. No doubt we may ascribe somewhat to Isaac's natural disposition and love of peace, that he had no desire to disturb the even current of his days, by mingling in scenes of contention and strife.

We do not find in those early days that the boundaries of territories were very accurately or

strictly defined, nor perhaps was there much occasion for it. Each one pushed onwards as his needs and numbers required, and there were few to clash or interfere with one another's claims. It was not till many generations afterwards, that we find the boundaries of the country and the limits of Israel's tribes accurately described, and as it were mapped out, and that the Lord affixed an especial curse on him that removed his neighbour's landmark. It was not till Israel had taken possession of the promised land, and the whole country was subdued before them, and that they had set up the tabernacle of the congregation at Shiloh, that Joshua sent out regularly-appointed commissioners, to describe and mark out the whole land in its portions, and bring the description or map when completed to him—the first geographical chart of which we have any record.

It was not so in the days of which this chapter speaks; and as Isaac had only removed to the confines of the Valley of Gerar, there was at least a pretext for the claim which the Philistines made to the fresh well which Isaac's herdsmen had dug—"The water is ours." It was not indeed the fable of the wolf and the lamb, for if might made right, Isaac, by their

monarch's acknowledgement, was "much mightier than they." But it was at least the determination of these Philistines, to seek a quarrel if they could, and Isaac's resolution to avoid it. He, therefore, went further away, and digged another well; and as there was strife at the one, so there was hatred at the other, till at length he reached the district where his father had so long resided, and in the neighbourhood of which he himself had lived before he went to Gerar. And here too, was re-enacted the same agreement and covenant with Abimelech, which his father so many years before had entered into with his predecessor on the throne, and from which two-fold circumstance, the name of Beer-sheba, or "Well of the Oath," was given to the place. So that we may now say, as Isaac gratefully acknowledged, referring all to its true source, "the Lord had made room for him, that he might be fruitful in the land."

After this we hear no more of Isaac's wanderings, nor the envyings of his prosperity among his less affluent neighbours; and we may, I think, conclude, that as far as regarded these outward objects, the life of this patriarch must henceforth have flowed on in a calm and placid course; that he lived in peace and friendship with

his neighbours; and that there was no disturbance of his tranquility or ease from any external source—his wealth great, his fortunes flourishing, and all things around and about him betokening a happy old age. But was it ever good for one of the Lord's children to be without chastening, whereof all are partakers, and which is so especially an evidence of the Lord's love and care? I think we may see in Isaac's case that it was needed, and that there were indications of a propensity to settle down upon the lees; that, so to speak, God had made his nest very soft, and he was inclined to nestle in it too complacently; and we know how much more grace, and prayer, and a steady hand and heart it requires to carry a full, than a half-full, or even an empty cup. I am afraid even in those days the patriarch would have felt the truth and the mercy of our Lord's warning, as to the incompatibility of worldly riches with an entrance into the kingdom of heaven; and as I am quite sure that the Lord loved Isaac, I am not surprised to find He therefore chastened him.

It was no doubt a very painful distress to the father's feelings that this chastening came through his son's hands, and that, too, the loved

son Esau. It was not an enemy that had done this wrong; the blow came not through Abimelech, nor the Philistines, nor a servant in his household, then he could have borne it; but it was Esau, his son, whom he loved. Our own dramatist has too truly and sadly described the anguish and suffering that is given to a father's heart by a thankless child, as "sharper than any serpent's tooth;" and there is something very touching as well as truthful in the simple brevity with which the historian tells us that Esau's perverseness and misconduct with respect to his marriage, was "a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah." Isaac especially must have recalled the period of his own marriage, and all its attendant circumstances; how Abraham, with religious solemnity and reverence, had exacted an oath of the faithful Eliezer that he would not take a wife for his son of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom he dwelt, and how he was sent on an especial mission to a distant home, with all the pomp of retinue of an Eastern chief, to fetch a wife from his own kindred and his own people. Isaac must have recalled that season of prayerful meditation when in the cool and calmness of evening, he went out into the fields to meditate on

all the promises and purpose of God involved in that declaration, that "in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed." And though he knew, and must have remembered, the Almighty's declaration with regard to his own sons, that the elder should serve the younger, yet it is more than probable that Isaac had not merely hoped, but had actually believed that in some way or other the Lord's purpose would be altered as regarded Esau and Jacob, and, therefore, to Isaac was the blow doubly painful! Rebekah, too, felt, and deeply felt the wayward perverseness of her elder-born, and the grief it gave her husband. But Isaac, in addition to the misconduct of a child, had to mourn over the downfall of his own secret hopes.

And yet, self-deception is wonderfully tenacious. What we wish to believe, we find so easy to believe; and the deceitfulness of man's heart finds its amplest scope in deceiving a man's self. That Isaac soon forgave his son, we may readily believe. A father's heart does not hold out very long against a favourite son,—that he even restored that son to his wonted place in his heart, and received, as usual, that son's services in administering to his appetite, we are not surprised at, nor would we charge it as a weakness;

but that Isaac should still look upon him, nay, and destine him to be the recipient of that peculiar blessing which God had expressly reserved for the younger, does, indeed, seem not only surprising, but to jar painfully upon our feelings as regards the father's self-delusion.

Esau's act was no hasty impulse of passionate and excited youth. It was no sudden unpremeditated fall from overpowering temptation. He was at the mature age of forty, the very same age as his own father, when he took to wife Judith, the daughter of Beer, the Hittite. He had evidently made *his* marriage no subject of prayer, nor serious meditation. He must have known the prohibition and the ban that existed with regard to such an idolatrous connection, and yet contemptuously disregarded the wishes of his parents, and the injunction of the Almighty. And not only did he feel no compunction for the grief he had caused his father, nor sorrow for his own sin; but, unless we can imagine that he married both wives at the same time, which is hardly probable, he very soon again showed his utter indifference to his father's feelings and God's commands, by taking another wife from the same doomed and forbidden race.

This was certainly God's uplifted finger to Isaac, and for a short season he may have recognised its warning, and as he mourned over his son's disobedience to himself, and disregard of God's purpose, he may have seen his own sin in this matter brought more forcibly home to his own mind. Isaac, however, was not the first, as assuredly he was not the last, whose reawakened impressions were soon lulled into slumber and oblivion, as we shall find in the brief remainder of this patriarch's history as detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER X.

And it came to pass that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau, his eldest son, and said unto him, "My son;" and he said unto him, "Behold, here am I."

And he said, "Behold, now I am old, and I know not the day of my death; now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field and take me some venison, and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die."—GEN. xxvii., v. 1, 2, 3, and 4.

THE landmarks of Isaac's age, though few and far apart, are yet hardly marked with sufficient minuteness and accuracy to enable us to speak with clearness and tolerable precision of the period of life at which the few events recorded in his life are said to have happened. We are, perhaps, not far from the mark in fixing the

probable time of Isaac's sacrifice on Mount Moriah, when he must have been upwards of thirty. We know that he was forty at the time of his marriage, and sixty when his sons were born to him; nor can we err in fixing on one hundred years as his age at the period of his son Esau's marriage. But here our probable accuracy ceases, and there is considerable difficulty in fixing the date of the events in this chapter. Scott and the majority of commentators adopt the usual chronology of a period of nearly thirty-five or six years having elapsed since the events recorded in the last chapter, and the events of the present one, and consequently that Isaac was one hundred and thirty-seven years of age, and Jacob seventy-seven, when he left his father's tents for his uncle Laban's home at Padan-aram. The adoption of this date has arisen from the necessity of making it synchronise with the acknowledged and undoubted date of Joseph's age when he stood before Pharaoh, and was appointed governor over all the land of Egypt, as well as Jacob's statement of his own age when he went down into Egypt. And this it would not do if the usual chronology of Jacob's departure from his home and his stay in

Padan-Aram was insisted on. If the period of Jacob's service with Laban was twenty years, and that only, then assuredly Jacob must have been seventy-six or seventy-seven when he quitted Isaac and Rebekah. But the supposition involves so many anomalies, and even contradictions, that one is induced to believe that another computation which makes Jacob's stay with Laban extend over a space of forty years is the true one. It seems to militate against our ideas of probability that, at the age of seventy-seven, Jacob should be sent forth on his travels in search of a wife, and though, of course, the lesser age of fifty-seven is an extreme one, a *fortiori*, the greater is the more unlikely: his father and his brother both marry at forty; and Jacob, even at seventy-seven, is content to wait seven years longer for his wife. One may conceive the quiet, plain, home-loving Jacob remaining seventeen years with his father and his mother, contented in his unwedded state, after his brother Esau's marriage; but that Rebekah, with her anxious desires for the fulfilment of the Lord's promise in her favourite younger son, and even Isaac, with his natural wish that Jacob should not fall into the sin of his brother Esau's choice, should have

suffered nearly forty years after his brother's marriage to expire without urging Jacob's marrying too, does seem very contrary to what we might have imagined so natural. Jacob's habits may account for nearly twenty, but forty seems to baffle all calculation. I am, therefore, inclined to conclude that a period of about seventeen years had expired since Esau's marriage, and that instead of one hundred and thirty-seven, Isaac was one hundred and seventeen, and Jacob fifty-seven, when the events in this chapter occurred.*

The first verse of this chapter may, indeed, seem to refer to a far more advanced age than I have adopted; and loss of sight from old age, and Isaac's anticipation of approaching death, may favour the supposition. But the first infirmity is confined to no exact period, and as to Isaac's looking forward to speedy death, we must remember that even taking the more advanced age of one hundred and thirty-seven, there would still be an interval of more than

* It does not at all belong to the plan of this history to enter at any great length into this chronological argument; but the reader who is desirous to see it fully stated, and, as the present writer presumes to think, abundantly established, may consult the invaluable work of Thomas Hartwell Horne. Vol. ii. pp. 581, 2, 3. Edit. 1821.

forty years to the actual period of his death. It is true that at one hundred and seventeen, as well as one hundred and thirty-seven, he might equally say that he had not attained to the days of the years of his father, neither can we say of him at the earlier age, as was said of Moses at an hundred and twenty, that "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." And it is probable that the affliction of blindness may have led him to look upon it as a forerunner of approaching death, or at least, as an intimation to him "to set his house in order." Abraham, with wise precaution, had done the same as regarded Isaac and his other sons; and now Isaac would do the same, that he might leave the solemn sanction of his own expressed wishes and purpose as a guide to those that should survive him. The motive was most honourable, and its purpose excellent; and one cannot but believe that such arrangements, even if left to the eleventh hour, are far better done than left undone altogether. It is certainly not desirable that such matters should be procrastinated till a dying hour, when more solemn thoughts and musings should occupy the mind, when the blessing that should rest on a child's head from a dying father's lips should be a

blessing for eternity, and not with reference to time only; and I think we see the Lord's mind in this matter; in that, both Abraham and Isaac are recorded by the Holy Spirit of God as apportioning their substance in the calm and undisturbed possession of intellect and reason. It is true that Isaac, in his weak affection, would have made a fearful mistake, and, as far as his own act and deed went, did commit the error, or we should more truly say, did consciously commit the sin of attempting to alter the Lord's avowed purpose, and substituting his own choice for God's will.

We read in the close of the last chapter, that Esau's intermarriage and double connection with an idolatrous race, had caused great grief to his parents, but the father seems soon to have forgotten the sorrow, and to have suffered things to go on in their usual quiet course, unwilling to be disturbed in the enjoyment of his ease, and not sorry, it would seem, to make his wonted use of Esau's skill and success in the chase. Esau's sale of his birthright, if indeed ever known to him, must have passed away from his memory; and what was far more sad, the Lord's appointment, with reference to the younger and the elder, had been forgotten also. It is not

probable that it had equally escaped from Esau's recollection, for in the first burst of his indignation at Jacob's fraud and falsehood, he at once alludes to the transaction; but it had lain dormant—it had never yet been acted upon, and he intended it never should. At any rate, God's will was violated by the father, and his own act and bargain repudiated by the son. I cannot see that anyone of the agents in this chapter is free from sin; no doubt, the mother and her favoured son are the guiltiest; but neither is Isaac free from blame; and though one perhaps feels in this immediate transaction, Esau is more sinned against than sinning, yet even his purpose was to take advantage of his father's weakness and affection to set aside his own bargain with his brother.

There are many narratives in the word of God which are altogether at variance with what we know to be "true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report," in the sight of God and man; and many excellent and well-intentioned writers have set themselves to explain away and give such a colouring to incidents, as, if possible, to leave no stigma on the characters of those engaged in them, and to make out that they are at least blameless in

carrying out the purposes of the Almighty, even though it be through their own sin. I do not indeed, say, that one does not wish that such transactions never had occurred, and therefore, never had been {recorded—one could almost say as one reads such narratives, even of good and holy men falling into sin, and being led away by the prevalence of temptation and their own corrupt passions, “Mine eyes gush out with tears” at such evidences of the deep depravity of our fallen nature, and of the needed continual grace of God, to be preserved and kept by the power of God from day to day, and moment by moment. But this I believe also, that the Holy Spirit of God in thus giving them a place in his own word, never meant us to call evil good, any more than He meant us to call good evil, nor to put darkness for light, nor bitter for sweet; and that injury has been done by the mistaken efforts of some to explain away the sins and infirmities of many Bible characters, as if God’s word needed the puny reasonings and explanations of erring man to bolster up its credit and authority. To my mind, indeed, the very presence of such narratives in the Bible, is the strongest evidence possible, that the whole book is of God, and that they still retain their place, not as blots,

but as clear unerring evidence of God's truth, and God's hatred and abhorrence of sin. No other book that professed to give a code of morals for every age—no other book that claimed and professed to be a guide to the young as well as to the aged—that was to be placed in the hands of the young man as well as the maiden, that was alike to circulate in the schools of the learned, as well as the homes of the unlearned—no other book but God's Bible would have admitted such narratives into its pages—no other book, if it had, could have stood its ground, aye, and more than that, have been revered, and loved, and prized, for the possession of which men and women have laid down their lives, and have deemed the ownership of the Bible as more precious than that of gold or silver, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. Can we imagine that the gates of hell, and all the artillery and batteries of wicked men, have been striving for countless ages to oust the word of God from its high and lofty pedestal, and yet never have prevailed, if there had been one weak and crumbly crevice in which to insert their wedge?

I read in this chapter that a mother and a son combined to take a cruel and base advantage of

the infirmities of a blind and aged father; that with premeditated artifice they contrived every scheme that ingenuity could suggest to escape even the contingencies of detection or failure. I read also that they succeeded in their plan, and that fraud and falsehood obtained their end; but I read as well that the Lord marked His displeasure at the sin by the punishment He entailed on the sinners; and though he overruled their counsels for the furtherance of his own purposes, and educes good out of their evil, I see no reason why their fraud should not be stigmatized as fraud, and their falsehood as falsehood.

Let us, however, now take a somewhat rapid glance at the various details of the narrative in this chapter.

We have already considered Isaac's age and his affliction of blindness, and no doubt his infirmity rendered him more dependent on the ready services of his elder son. There seems to have been no lack of natural affection towards his father on the part of Esau; rather, one would say from the touching and affecting expostulation with his father, "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father!" that there existed between them

as strong an attachment as ever bound a father's and a child's heart together. And we may well believe that Esau was ever at hand to administer to his father's wants; and that Isaac looked to him for such services as an attached son can so gratefully supply.

We are not, therefore, surprised at the ready answer which Esau returns to his father's call, "My son," "Behold, here am I." Often, no doubt before, in his blindness had Isaac called to his son for some little office of kindness, some ready service of affection, and often too had the same quick reply of love met the father's ear. But now that father's heart is charged with a deeper purpose, and he touchingly prefaces it by the affecting conviction which old age has brought home to him, that though he knows not the day of his death yet he feels that it may be nigh. There is something very affecting in an old man's unquailing glance at his dying day; his course is run; he has fought the fight, the day of his departure is at hand, and the aged warrior looks hopefully upwards to that crown which the Saviour's arm has won for him. And though Isaac's words are immeasurably inferior in interest or expression to those of the dying Paul, few I

think even of the young, and far fewer of any of the old, have ever read them without feeling their hearts touched by the simple but solemn truth they utter.

One wishes, indeed, that Isaac had stopped there, or at least that he had simply intimated his purpose to make that arrangement of his affairs which his conviction of approaching death warned him to make. One mourns to find the infirmity of former years still lingering even in old age; and if, in comparative early days, his son's venison was recorded as the cause of the father's love, it is not without significant meaning, that now in his old age, we find Isaac still dwelling on and mentioning with eager complacency "the savoury meat such as he loved," which Esau's hands had so often made. It seems, indeed, an odd prelude to a father's blessing on his son, that he should send forth that son to bring in venison that he might eat of it before he blessed him, but there most probably was some religious solemnity or offering intended to accompany it, and Isaac might not altogether mean a mere common meal. These instructions to Esau, however, Rebekah overheard, and fully guessing their import, she hastened to communicate to Jacob

the risk he run of losing the promised blessing. And here was Rebekah's first false step. The duty and privilege of a wife empowered her at once to go in to her husband, tell him what she had overheard, remind him of the Lord's purpose and declaration to herself even before the children were born, and urge on Isaac not to run counter to the Lord's will in this matter. Had she acted thus, Isaac might have been arrested in his course, sin would not have been chargeable on either parent, Esau would not have been a murderer in heart, nor Jacob a wanderer for forty years from his father's home.

But she did not do this. We know not the motive which restrained her; it could hardly have been fear; it was most probably the suggestion of the Evil One that darted the thought into her mind, that she might more easily and more effectually secure her end by overreaching Isaac than by persuading him by argument; and in an evil hour she took counsel of her own heart, and yielded to the temptation. It is quite evident, from Jacob's reply to his mother, and the objection he started, that he was in no degree shocked at the proposition. In her eagerness Rebekah had perhaps overlooked the physical difference in her two sons, or might

have already planned it in her mind ; but Jacob was too wary a supplanter to run a needless risk, and therefore suggests the real difficulty that stood in the way of a successful accomplishment of their designs. He speaks, indeed, of his father's curse if he should detect the fraud ; but he never mentions or thinks of God's displeasure at the sin. He was more concerned at the possibility of a failure of the plan, than unwilling on the score of its guilt. He feared Isaac and Esau, but he did not fear God ; or, as some one designates the liar, he was a coward towards man, but a bravo towards God.

At the first reading of Rebekah's answer to Jacob's expostulation there is something that painfully jars upon our feelings, and yet how strong a mother's instinct ! how intense her affection, that was willing to incur even a curse if she could promote her child's good ! But, alas, how different in this mother's case, what a wide and unpassable gulf of difference between her exclamation and that passionate outburst of holy love which broke from the apostle, that he could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren's sake ! I do not imagine, however, that Rebekah meant anything more than that she was ready to run all the risk of Isaac's displeasure, and to take upon herself the conse-

quences of detection. One does not indeed assign to her a very enlightened view of the Lord's attributes of justice, holiness, and hatred of a lie, or of human responsibility; but she could hardly have presumed or dared to induce her son to imagine that she could avert from the sinner one grain's weight of the Almighty's punishment of sin, or make atonement for the slightest deviation from His law and will. He indeed that was to come; He that, according to the flesh, should be born of Rebekah's and of Jacob's lineage, might indeed, and did offer himself as a ransom for the sin of a whole world. He might and he did plead before his father, "On me be their sin;" and it was, blessed be his name, a sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for all. His blood was able to cleanse from all sin, and every sinner that applied it, from Adam's self, Rebekah and Jacob too, for this sin of their lips and of their hearts has found, in all its fulness, the healing, cleansing efficacy of that blood. Rebekah probably was not the first, as assuredly she was not the last misguided mother who has sought what she thought her child's good at the expense of honesty, straightforwardness, and truth; or who may have thought temporal good fortune cheaply purchased at the cost of the soul's ruin.

Jesus indeed had not then asked that solemn question, "What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" But the eternal distinction between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, must have been as well known beneath Isaac's tents and by the members of his household, as if God had written it with a sunbeam, or it had been "graven with an iron pen in the rock for ever." Alas, too, that a mother should ever use the influence and authority which God has given her over a child's affections and feelings to lead that child astray from the paths of rectitude and holiness; or that a child should be taught to believe that obedience to a parent's commands can sanction or justify disobedience to God. "Only obey my voice," was Rebekah's appeal to her son; and it is sad to think that such could be the teaching of a mother to her son, and that too under Isaac's tent, and to Isaac's son. But while we thus judge rigidly of the conduct of this mother and her son, let us remember our own selves, and our own deceitful and deceiving hearts, and more especially if we think in our conceit and pride that we are securely standing! let us take heed—more prayerful and careful heed—lest we ourselves also fall into similar temptation, and make shipwreck of our principles as well.

CHAPTER XI.

And Esau said unto his father, "Hast thou but one blessing my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.—GEN. xxvii., v. 38.

WE concluded the last chapter with Jacob's expression of his fears lest his father should detect the imposition intended to be practised, and that the result would end in a curse and not a blessing. To this indeed, Rebekah had answered, that she would bear all the responsibility and burden of his father's displeasure; but as detection would of course frustrate her purpose, she immediately adopted a plan which, as she thought, would in all probability ensure success. To us indeed, at first sight, it would seem one of the most clumsy contrivances that ever suggested itself to an imposter's mind; and one

has perhaps wondered what sort of a man Esau could have been, that the skins of animals could have resembled his outward appearance. And we may have perhaps thought that Isaac must have been in his dotage, as well as blind, to have been taken in by such an artifice. It was not, however, so clumsily contrived as we may have imagined; its very success indicates that Isaac was not in his dotage, and therefore easily deluded; the very precautions he takes against deceit—his repeated questions, his feeling his son's neck and hands, his almost detection of Jacob's imitation of Esau's voice—all show that Isaac was fully alive to the possibility of imposition, and guarded against it as far as he was able. But in reality the plan was by no means an ill-managed one, and shows us, even from those early days, how true was our Lord's estimate of the wisdom, and cunning, and policy of the children of this world; how deep-laid their schemes, how admirably suited to the circumstances, how perseveringly carried out!

It is one great defect in our way of reading the Bible, that when any scene is brought before us—any narrative recorded, or parable recited—our imaginations instantly, as it were,

play us a trick, and we bring the whole scene before our mind's eye just as it would occur in our own days and our own country. We bring our own European ideas to bear upon Asiatic customs and manners, and assimilate the habits of patriarchal days to those of our own times. It reminds one of that picture of the painter—the *chef d'œuvre* indeed of Rembrandt—of Daniel in the presence of the King of Babylon, where the Babylonish soldiers are equipped in Roman armour, and the prophet is enveloped in a wig, just such as the painter himself or his contemporaries might have worn. Or those scenic representations of more modern times, in which Roman warriors, or Moorish chiefs, or Scottish kings, or Italian nobles used to appear upon the stage in the court-attire of the days of George the First or Second. In these and such like cases, the anomaly was simply ludicrous; but in reading the word of God it jars upon every feeling of solemnity and awe, and too frequently throws an air of irreverence and doubt on what should be alone approached with uncovered feet as holy ground. And it is no doubt from such feeling as this that we have perhaps pictured to ourselves Jacob disguised in the rough-haired skin of some animal, and so imposing himself on

his father for his brother Esau. The skins, however, which Rebekah used for her plot were those of the young of goats, not yet come to maturity, and therefore soft and tender, and almost smooth and silken to the touch—such as can only exist in Eastern countries, where the hair of animals more nearly resembles silk, and of which we can have but little idea in the rough shaggy hides of our own cattle. The Tartar cap of Russia at the present day is composed of the skin of young lambs *unborn*, and, from its short, silken, curly ringlets, might—to the touch, at least—easily deceive even the most shrewd. If we add to this that Rebekah herself applied and adapted the skins to her son's person with all the aptitude and pliancy of woman's hands, we may readily conceive that the deceit was not so incongruous and barefaced as we are apt to think it. Still the suggestion may recur to our minds that Isaac's blindness hardly accounts for the facility with which he is deceived, and that his own senses, one would have thought, (to use an objection which has been made even while writing this very passage) would have detected the cheat. But the sense of sight was absent; the sense of touch misled him, as Rebekah meant it should; the

sense of hearing deceived him also, though it was keen enough to detect a resemblance; and we know well how often brothers' voices do resemble one another; and in this case Jacob would no doubt strive to imitate as much as possible his brother's tone and manner. There was another sense in exercise, the sense of smell, and that sense misled him also, so that even Isaac's senses all combined to carry out the contrivance of Rebekah. To all this we must add the solemn asseverations of Jacob, and the natural unwillingness of a father's heart to believe that a son could come with a lie in his right hand. In fact, the more attentively we read this narrative, the more we seem to find Isaac's perceptions and keenness fully awake and on the alert. The very promptitude of his return, and the unexpected speed with which the venison was prepared, if it did not awaken suspicion, at least excited surprise and elicited inquiry—"How is that thou hast found it so quickly, my son?" Jacob's answer is indeed a most painful evidence of the low tone of morality, of religious feeling, and love of truth which was in his heart. Esau is indeed called by the apostle "a profane person," but I can see little difference in the brothers as regards a

sense of God's all-seeing eye and all-hearing ear, and their own responsibility as moral beings.

It has been well, though quaintly, said by some one, that "a lie requires a good deal of thatching;" and assuredly Jacob, as well as Peter in after ages, found it so; but Jacob's first falsehood was the saddest of all, inasmuch as it sought to cover, under the semblance of God's providence and forethought, his own artifice and fraud, as if he meant to express his grateful acknowledgment of that loving-kindness of the Lord which had so promptly blessed and rewarded his chase. "Because the Lord thy God hath brought it me." Of all sin religious dissimulation is the most painful. The hypocrite is a double-dyed sinner—aye, and that of the deepest dye—for he first commits the sin, and then tries to hide it under a covering of sanctimonious devotion and use of the Lord's name. I have often thought that it is a holy instinct even in our fallen nature—some remnant of that shattered image in which God at first created us—that almost all men turn aside in abhorrence from the character of the hypocrite. The open, the avowed, the daring, and defiant sinner, we can at least mourn over,

and even pray for, but the hypocrite—the man who cloaks his vices under the veil of religion, who uses a religious profession for the mere furtherance of his own designs, and as a more ready and cheaper way of gaining his end—from such an one we turn away in loathing, and seem to think that prayer for such would almost be profanation in the sight of God.

It was probably the sound of the voice in this answer that at the moment reminded him of his younger son, and perhaps so far started a momentary suspicion of something wrong, that it could only be allayed by some other demonstration of Esau's identity.

How often has Isaac's reply been quoted and applied in every possible variety of application, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau!" And how truly and touchingly might Isaac have described Jacob's act almost in his own words, "The voice is my son's voice, but the act is the act of an enemy and of an alien!" Truly, indeed, though in a far different sense, "a man's foes are those of his own household;" and if Isaac, in other particulars, was so eminent a type of *Him* that should hereafter be born of his own seed, he might as pathetically have said

of the wound now given to him, "It is that with which I have been wounded in the house of my friends,"—by the hands of my own child. Jacob little thought of the reiterated scrutiny to which he should be subjected; he might possibly have shrunk from the contemplation of his repeated falsehoods, had he known whether the first steps would have led him; but, alas! Satan is too crafty a seducer to allow a victim to know the miry road he has to travel, or the extent of shame and degradation to which he is leading him. "Is thy servant a dog that he should do these things?" may often be uttered by some ingenuous youth, who really and unfeignedly would shrink from the perpetration of crime, but whose first step in sin has entangled him in a bondage, and bound him in an iron coil, from which there is no escape. One can well believe that Jacob must have wished more than once that he had never entered on this course of fraud and sin, that he had never listened to his mother's suggestions, nor suffered himself to yield obedience even to a parent's wishes. No doubt, too, all this delay must have increased the risk of Esau's return; and though probably Rebekah was on the watch to give him timely warning, still Jacob's feelings

could have been of no enviable a nature ; and the very success which crowned his imposition must have added its own peculiar bitterness to his heart. Jacob could have been no hardened sinner. In an evil hour he had yielded to the temptations of his own carnal heart, backed and sanctioned by a mother's counsel ; but even while carrying it out, there must have been feelings of remorse and shame as well as fear and apprehension at the falsehoods it entailed, and the risks it involved him in. But perhaps the bitterest moment of all must have been as he heard his father, with tremulous and aged voice, pouring out the undeserved blessing on his head—as all the earnest wishes of that father's heart welled up from its very depths to express what was indeed uttered to Jacob, but was intended only for Esau. I believe that the Almighty, in his retributive justice, not unfrequently inflicts the bitterest sting of conscience even in the very moment of successful accomplishment of guilt, that many and many a time the prize for which the sinner toils is no sooner won than it is flung aside in hatred and in scorn.

Of course in this blessing which Isaac pronounces over Jacob, we read in it only the

expression of his wishes and intended purpose for Esau, and we cannot but see how thoroughly Isaac had forgotten and set aside the Lord's purpose and prediction concerning the future destiny of his children. Nearly sixty years before, the Almighty had said—"The elder shall serve the younger;" but now, as far as Isaac's power and meaning went, he reversed the Lord's decree, and said, as he thought, to the elder, "Be Lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee;" and he concludes with the same wish, and in almost the same words, which Balaam, in after ages, used with reference to the descendants of Jacob—"Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee."

Our own natural sense of justice, however, here asks a question: Could such a blessing, obtained by such means, stand? could an inheritance thus purloined, we might almost say, from a rightful owner, hold good? and what was undoubtedly meant for one son be fraudulently conveyed to another? We unhesitatingly answer, "No;" and if Isaac had revoked his blessing when he detected the deceit; had he, when Jacob's fraud stood revealed, at once recalled his words, then the blessing—as far as

Isaac's purpose went—would have been given to Esau, and to Isaac must have attached the deeper sin of disobeying the known and avowed will of God. But nothing of the kind occurs; in the very instant that the imposition stands detected—at the very moment that he is fully aware of all that has passed, of what he himself had done, and how unconsciously and unintentionally the blessing designed for Esau had been given to Jacob—he seems at once to have recognised the hand of the Lord in all; to have acknowledged the overruling guidance of God, and to have confirmed the whole proceeding by the emphatic declaration—“Yea, and he shall be blessed.” I do not mean to say that Isaac was not exceedingly distressed and perplexed when Esau presented himself with his venison and sought the promised blessing. We are indeed told that he “trembled exceedingly;” and though indignation at the fraud practised on himself, and distress at the disappointment of Esau might be mingled with his feelings, yet I cannot but think that Isaac's greatest “trembling” was occasioned by a sense of the sin into which he had fallen, and the still greater sin from which he had been so mercifully preserved; and he hastens to ratify what had been done by

declaring that it should remain unrepealed. He could have no doubt who it was that had thus filched the blessing from him; he had no hesitation in applying to the whole transaction its true character and colour—"Thy brother came with subtilty and hath taken away thy blessing," but still it was of the Lord, and therefore I again repeat it,—“yea, and he shall be blessed.”

Had Isaac's purpose been less firm; had his resolve been less founded on his newly-awakened conviction of his own previous guilty weakness, and the Lord's merciful preservation and deliverance from the sin he had so nearly accomplished; had they indeed been altogether human feelings and affections, those feelings would undoubtedly have decided in favour of Esau. Expulsion from his father's tents and presence might have followed the detection of Jacob's fraud, and the elder son been more firmly than ever established in his father's heart, without a competitor to share with him. Isaac was undoubtedly a loving though a weak father, his affections, though partial, were strong, and he never could have withstood the earnest, impassioned entreaties of his favourite son; he never could have borne the agonized exclamations of Esau, or felt that gush of tears which perhaps

fell so warmly on his own cheeks, as Esau may have hung upon his neck, and cried out in that natural outburst of deep, heart-broken anguish, "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, oh my father!" The result let the apostle's own language tell us, "Ye know how that afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears; "that is, there was no place for repentance or change of purpose in that father's heart, even though his son besought it with such earnestness and tears."

"Hast thou but one blessing, my father?" It may be so with an earthly father; he may divide his goods between his children, he may, like Abraham, apportion gifts to his various children, and settle them in different places during his lifetime, or after his death; but to one only can he give the portion of the first-born. It is no lack of love, but lack of power, that limits an earthly father's gifts to his children, and too often has he occasion to mourn over that inability which can so scantily provide for those that are dear to him. How often too has a parent had to lament, too late, that misjudging love, and indiscreet affection, and

weakened judgment have bestowed on one child what should have been a provision for all alike, and has found, alas! when most needed and required, that he has no "blessing" left, no provision stored up for them. In truth, an earthly father's love, even at the best, is full of infirmity and mistake; it is liable to a thousand accidents, and *may* at any time, and *must* ere long cease altogether. But the love wherewith our heavenly Father loves his children is an everlasting love; whom He loves, He loves unto the end. There is no error, no mistake, no inadvertency, no indiscretion, no misjudging partiality; what He bestows on one child never diminishes the portion of another; as they are all equally dear to Him in Christ, so are they all alike filled and abundantly supplied from those exhaustless treasures, the unsearchable riches of Christ. The elder and the younger, the first-born and the latest-born share and share alike in the fulness of their father's love; there is no respect of persons nor of children with God; as His love is from everlasting, so it is to everlasting; it is not like that water in the bottle with which Abraham supplied Hagar and his son Ishmael, and which was soon exhausted and spent; but that which Jesus gives us, is as he himself

describes it, "A well of water springing up unto everlasting life," and his invitation to each and all is, "Drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved." It was at this fountain that our fathers of old quenched their thirst and were satisfied; and the same fountain still flows by the city of our God for the refreshment of every pilgrim in the wilderness. He still leadeth them beside the waters of comfort. "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house, and He shall make them drink of the river of his pleasures."

I can, however, imagine some broken-hearted desponding child, worn and wearied with the conflicts and toils of life, having sorrow continually at his heart, and like Israel of old "discouraged by reason of the way," going to God day by day and returning back without that answer of peace which he has so earnestly desired. I can imagine such an one to say in the bitterness of his spirit, crying out with the passionate exclamation of Esau, "Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father!" and while the words were yet on his lips, and the tears in his eyes, and the anguish in his heart, an answer of peace has come, and he that sowed in tears has reaped in joy.

It was not so, however, with Esau, for it was no spiritual blessing he sought, no heavenly inheritance he desired; and the very language of bitterness against his brother, in the presence of his father, at once shows us the current of his feelings, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, the supplanter, the deceiver? has he not supplanted me, and thrust me aside those two times? Did he not take ungenerous and unjust advantage of a time of faintness to deprive me of my birth-right under the forced semblance of a sale, and now has he not again stepped in to defraud me of the blessing my father had intended for me?" It is remarkable that in the blessing which Isaac bestows on his son at his reiterated importunity, if indeed we can call it a blessing rather than a prediction of his future fortunes, Isaac distinctly repeats the Lord's purpose that the elder should serve the younger, thus evincing his entire acquiescence in the dispensation, and how entirely he had surrendered his own wishes in the matter to the Lord's will.

CHAPTER XII.

And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, "Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan.

"Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, thy mother's father! and take ye a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother.

"And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people;

"And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham!"—GEN. xxviii., v. 1-4.

THE occasion on which this renewed blessing, with its remarkable additions, was given to Jacob, while it evidences the solemn truth that the Lord changeth not, and that his counsel shall stand, shows also the Lord's hatred of sin, and how He will by no means clear the guilty. Jacob's sin, humanly speaking, was a successful one; Rebekah's artifice gained its

end, and perhaps even more than either had contemplated in the beginning. Their purpose was to divert the blessing intended for Esau to Jacob, their means were that Isaac should in his blindness mistake the one for the other, and thus unconsciously fall into the snare prepared for him, and give to the younger what he designed for the elder. And their plan succeeded: Isaac, in his blindness, did mistake the one for the other, and gave to the younger what he had designed for the elder. What their ulterior purpose was we do not know; they could not under any circumstances hope to escape detection, all that they could anticipate was to delay it till Esau's return from hunting; then, they must know the whole would be revealed.

It is certainly possible that Rebekah, knowing the Lord's predicted purpose of the priority of the younger over the elder, and that her husband was in reality a holy and religious man, one that feared the Lord, may have indulged the expectation that Isaac, when he was fully aware of what had occurred, and that the blessing had been irrevocably pronounced, would ratify the act, and confirm in all its fulness, the birthright to Jacob; and so we find it came to pass even in the very instant of detection, when

one might have imagined indignation and resentment alone would have found admission to his heart; then the confirmation, if not the approval, passed his lips, "Yea, and he shall be blessed." He could not approve the means, but nevertheless he sanctioned the end. Nor was he for one moment diverted from it, not for a single instant did he waver, even with all the entreaties and tears of Esau, or withdraw one tittle of that blessing he had already pronounced on Jacob. And, in this chapter, on the calm review of all that had passed, having, no doubt, once more with the practice of earlier life "meditated" and prayed over the whole matter, and seen more clearly his own sin, and the Lord's mercy and grace that had restrained him in the very moment of commission, he solemnly and fully assigns to Jacob and his seed the birthright and inheritance which the Lord had declared should be his. It is therefore very possible that something like this expectation may have passed through Rebekah's mind when to Jacob's apprehensions of bringing down on himself his father's curse she replied, "Upon me be thy curse, only obey my voice." But how was Esau to be dealt with? how was his indignation and anger to be averted? how was he to be appeased and

induced to surrender what he no doubt deemed his right? They must have known his fiery and impetuous temper better than to calculate on his sitting down calm and contented while smarting under such a sense of injury and wrong. And yet this would seem to have been their only supposition, and that Esau, in the hopelessness of his position as to any change in his father's purpose, would recognise the validity of that sale which so many years before he had in an unguarded and reckless moment made of his birthright, more perhaps in jest than in earnest, but the remembrance of which it is evident still rankled in his heart. I am afraid, however, that we must believe that both Rebekah and Jacob trusted very much to what so many trust, to the chapter of accidents. One thing I think we may be well assured of, that they never dreamed to the extent to which the brother's spirit of revenge would hurry him, nor of the sad alternative to which his threatened vengeance would reduce them. The tradition of a brother's murder by a brother's hand, though so many centuries before, was still too recent, if I may so call it, not to be remembered, and shuddered over in all the sympathy of a mother's heart. Rebekah herself might possibly have

heard the aged Shem recount the tale beneath Isaac's tents, or have listened to Abraham as he repeated the sad details of that deed of horror.

There might have been a feeling of affection for his blind and aged father still lingering in Esau's heart, when he would have delayed the purposed vengeance till after his father's death; but his contemplation of the speedy approach of that death, and his comforting himself with the belief that the days of that mourning were nigh at hand, seem to render the idea of affection for his father restraining his hand very questionable; at any rate, if he had reverence for the feelings of one parent, he felt none and expressed none for the feelings of the other. One cannot but think that he must have felt that as a murderer stained with his brother's blood, he would no longer share either in his father's affections or his possessions. Whatever his motives were, he seems to have made no secret of his intentions, and to have openly boasted of his purpose, and to have spoken of it too as if the very idea was a balm to his wounded feelings: "Esau doth *comfort* himself purposing to kill thee." This, indeed, was a blow which the unhappy mother had never contemplated as resulting from her artifice. She might have calculated on still greater alienation

and estrangement between the brothers; but Esau no doubt dwelt in a separate home apart from his father's tents. The quiet habits of the one brother, and the out-door roaming pursuits of the other, seldom brought them into contact, and therefore, there need be little intercourse and little fear of collision between them. And, no doubt, also, the mother trusted somewhat to that greater healer of wrath as well as sorrow—time.

The intimation, therefore, of Esau's murderous intent, conveyed to her, no doubt with friendly purpose, must have come upon her with painful surprise and anguish. We have no reason to suppose that, though Jacob was the favourite son, Esau was an alien from his mother's affections; though there might be little sympathy, little of tenderness between them, still the elder was the child of her womb as well, and her first outburst of joy that a man was born into the world was over Esau's head. Her fear, therefore, for one son, was strangely blended with dismay and agony at the sin and cruel purpose of the other.

It is not probable that any long period between Jacob's obtaining the blessing and Esau's threatened vengeance reaching his mother's ears had intervened. A few days or even hours alone

would have sufficed ; and though in the usual methods of the Almighty's dealings with the sinner, punishment for the sin may not be speedily executed, yet it is not always so, and sin has overtaken the sinner in the very hour and moment of the offence. It was so with Jacob's own descendants, "While the meat was yet in their mouths the wrath of God came upon them and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel." And so, in all probability, it was with Jacob himself ; and while the words of his father's blessing were yet sounding in his ears, and Rebekah exulting in her success, the displeasure of the Lord had already prepared a rod for their offence and a scourge for their sin. It was necessary that instant steps should be taken to avert the blow ; alas ! alas ! how truly does sin take its keenest arrow out of the very quiver of success ! how often is that arrow fledged with the best affections of the heart ! When the mother would have urged her timid son to fraud and falsehood, she had unhesitatingly, and without fear or thought of consequences, exclaimed, "On me be thy curse, my son ; only obey my voice." And now the curse had fallen, and how sadly must the same words have fallen on that son's ears, as

he heard his mother repeat again, "My son, obey my voice!" And yet in this instance her counsel was not only the instinctive counsel of a mother's apprehensions, but probably the wisest, if not the only one; that could be devised. There is something very touching in this remembrance of the home of her own childhood; how instinctively does her heart and her heart's best affections recur to those early days and scenes, like the timid fledgling in some moment of alarm, hurrying back to the nest it had quitted. Nearly fourscore years had passed away since those days of maidenhood and youth, when she had first quitted her kindred, and the home of her kindred, to become Isaac's wife; and how naturally does her heart return to, and her lips utter the name of that brother whose parting words perhaps were still treasured up in her memory. "Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those that hate them." Unconscious, perhaps, of the change that time had wrought in herself, she seems to have thought alone of Laban as the brother of her youth, unaltered in temper, disposition, and character; and little, indeed, dreaming that in her contrivance for her son's safety beneath her brother's roof, that

brother's selfishness and covetousness would repay to Jacob the same measure of fraud and falsehood which they themselves had practised on Isaac. Of course, too, she never dreamed of the lengthened exile to which that son would be doomed. She speaks of his absence as the absence of only "a few days;" probably using the word in the same sense as Laban had used it to Eliezer, when he asked him to tarry at Haran "a few days," meaning thereby months, "till his brother's fury was turned away." And whichever calculation we adopt of the length of Jacob's exile, whether the briefer period of twenty, or the more lengthened one of forty years, we may fully believe that neither the one nor the other had ever entered into the estimate of mother or son. Happy that our earthly future is hidden in obscurity and darkness, that the Almighty in his tenderness and wisdom has not revealed the days to come, inasmuch as "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." "Why should I be deprived of you both in one day?" was the sorrowing exclamation of Rebekah at the prospect of losing one son by a brother's violence, and the other, through his own guilty deed, becoming an alien to his father and his mother. And yet,

the very step she took to avert the blow was in part the fulfilment of her worst fears; and on the day that Jacob set forth on his melancholy journey to Haran, or, as God himself called it, "When he fled from the face of Esau his brother," Rebekah was deprived of her son for ever on this earth. They never met again.

I do not see deception in Rebekah's concealing her chief motive for wishing to send Jacob away. It was only in affection and in tenderness that she would withhold from her aged husband what could only give him grief and sorrow of heart; and as no doubt the marriage of her son to one of Laban's daughters was one of her ulterior purposes in selecting Haran as his place of exile, she was fully justified in putting forward the one plea and holding back the other. It is indeed possible that she may have hinted at Esau's disappointment and anger as another and a secondary reason why Jacob's departure should be hastened, and Isaac may not only have acquiesced in the produce of the plan, but he seems to have been desirous before Jacob's leaving not only to put this matter of the blessing beyond all possibility of mistake or doubt, but to testify openly to every member of his household that as God had declared to

Abraham that "in himself should Abraham's seed be called," and that "with Isaac should he establish his covenant," so now on Jacob and not on Esau should the blessing of Abraham descend. There is no allusion in this renewed blessing to the precedency of the younger over the elder, no declaration that his mother's sons should bow down to him, and that he should be lord over his brethren. It was no doubt a wise and discreet silence on the part of Isaac, and may have tended to allay the exasperated feelings of his elder son. And so Jacob, forgiven of his father, and solemnly declared to be the inheritor of the blessing promised to Abraham, renewed to Isaac, and now established in Jacob, is sent away to Padan-Aram to his uncle Laban's house, with a solemn charge from his father to seek a wife from among the daughters of his kindred there, and not among the ungodly and irreligious daughters of Canaan.

One cannot help fancying how Isaac in the blindness and solitude of his old age must have recalled to mind, and meditated on the different circumstances under which Eliezer was sent to Padan-Aram on the same errand on which Isaac was now sending away his own son Jacob. Then all the pomp and procession of eastern

travel accompanied his servant—camels and men servants, and beasts of burden laden with all that was needful for the journey, and gold and jewels and precious ornaments to bespeak attention and favour, and such credentials as a mighty chief would give to a commissioned messenger. How different now! Jacob, though a son, is sent forth, it is true, with his father's blessing on his head, but unaccompanied, unattended, with staff in hand, to find his way as well as he could to the distant land of his exile! No camels, no train of attendants, no provision by the way, beyond the scanty portion he could carry with him, and no credentials, no gold nor jewels to ensure him favour and acceptance when he reached his uncle's home. One might well say that seldom has traveller set forth from his father's house so poorly equipped, seldom suitor gone forth on such an errand with such appliances of success. And why was this—"the man Isaac," we read, was very rich, and had possession of flocks and herds and great store of servants, so that he was an object of envy to his neighbours. It was not poverty, therefore, that thus sent his son away; it was not covetousness; it was no lack of affection on the part either of father or of mother; but it was Jacob's sin

that thus found him out, and was thus visited on him in righteous retribution. It was true he was a pardoned sinner ; but though the transgression be forgiven, the consequences of sin too often remain ; and many a one, while comforted by the assurance that he is forgiven, has had to mourn through many a lengthened year the withering effects of his first deviation from the paths of rectitude and truth ; the whole current of life changed, a fatal incubus pressing on and hampering every effort, and even to old age and grey hairs having occasion to cry out with Ephraim in the bitterness of his spirit, " I do bear the reproach of my youth." It was but the natural result of Jacob's sin that he should thus steal away as it were from his father's tents unnoticed and unknown, that Esau's fury might find no fresh fuel in preparations made for his younger brother's departure. To all human appearance Esau was still the favoured son and heir, while his brother was a wanderer, and serving a long servitude ere he could gain a wife ; and through many a weary year besides, consumed by drought by day, and by frost by night, subject to all the unkindness and selfish covetousness of Laban, with his wages and his terms of hire continually changed

at the caprice of a harsh and exacting master. During all these years Esau remained in his father's neighbourhood, striking his roots far and deep, with his numerous offspring growing up around him, and becoming each, in their generation, men of renown in the records of the world's mighty ones.

It does not belong to this work to pursue the history either of Jacob or of Esau further than as it is connected with that of their father. I would, however, just mention that it is probable that Esau's fury against his brother was soon abated. In all probability Isaac, after the departure of Jacob, would explain to his elder-born the circumstances attending the prediction at their birth, and the Lord's purposes concerning the spiritual blessing in and through Abraham. And as Esau could not but see how little the Lord's will affected himself personally, that he was still, to all intents and purposes, his father's heir as to all his temporal possessions; and as we cannot but suppose that Esau in reality cared nothing for a spiritual blessing—and that, too, at some distant and uncertain date—we may well believe that he acquiesced in all this arrangement without troubling himself farther about it, and in the conviction that his

own earthly fortunes were far more prosperous than those of his exiled brother.

We have already said that Rebekah and Jacob never met again on earth; and it is a significant circumstance, full of much meaning, that after the record of this imposition on Isaac, and its results in the departure of Jacob for Padan-Aram, we hear no more of Rebekah. Her death is not recorded. We hear not of Isaac's mourning over her, though no doubt he did, as was said of Abraham, "How he came to mourn and to weep for Sarah." We read, indeed, that she was buried in the burying-place of Machpelah, for Jacob himself tells us so; but oh! how cold, how indifferent the tone in which he alludes to the circumstance!—how unlike what we should have expected from such a son of such a mother under the circumstances in which he was then speaking, of his own approaching death to his own children on his dying bed, and charging them to bury him in that field of Ephron the Hittite, which Abraham "had bought for a possession of a burying-place." "There," he adds, "they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah."

Little more, indeed, is recorded of Isaac. He had imagined the day of his death to be nigh at hand when he directed his son to make him savoury meat, that he might bless him before he died; and yet there is no doubt that he lived forty, and more probably sixty, years after that event. His brother Ishmael had died long before—a few years only after the departure of Jacob—at the age of an hundred and thirty-seven, when Isaac was one hundred and twenty-two or three; and if the supposition be correct, that Isaac was one hundred and seventeen at the period of Rebekah and Jacob's imposition, then five or six years at most could have elapsed before Ishmael's death.

It is, however, with Isaac, rather than Ishmael, that we have to do; and Isaac was so far happier than Rebekah, that he lived not only to witness the return of Jacob, and to behold his numerous offspring, even to the latest-born Benjamin, but to enjoy for many years the society of his son. We read, "And Jacob came unto Isaac his father, unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned." Now, on either supposition, whether Jacob's exile lasted twenty or forty years, all are agreed that he was ninety-

seven years of age on his return from Laban, and that of course Isaac was one hundred and fifty-seven ; and as we read in the next verse that “the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years,” it necessarily follows that an interval of twenty-three years elapsed between the return of Jacob and the death of Isaac.

And now once more the cave of Machpelah opens its closed doors for the reception of another inmate. “The stone was again rolled away from the sepulchre,” and another tenant of its chambers was to enter in and see corruption, and be gathered unto his father, and his dust be mingled with his till the voice of Him, that was according to the flesh to descend from his loins, should be heard resounding through its long-disused vaults, and all that are in that grave—Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, and Joseph and his brethren—shall again come forth !

There is something very striking and suggestive when one stands by the side of a newly-opened grave, ready to receive its *first*, and perhaps only, tenant in its narrow enclosure ; and few can look down into its scanty depth without strong, and we may hope salutary, emotion. But to stand at the entrance of a vault which

has for many a generation received its successive inmates—to see the row of coffins in its gloomy caverns, with their tarnished, mouldering finery—such very mockery—and here and there among them the tinier shell of some young and loved one prematurely snatched away, all in their various stages of decay, and now one more bright and polished, and almost stainless coffin, with its gorgeous emblazonments, soon to see corruption, also, is admitted into this home of the dead! And I have often wondered what sort of thoughts—whether holy, and hopeful, and humbling, or sad and bitter, or remorseful—pass through the minds of those living ones who are now committing the remains of another member to that home which must one day, ere long, reopen for themselves.

I have said that Jacob never saw his mother after he had parted with her on leaving his father's tents; Rebekah was however buried in the cave at Machpelah, which was now once more opened to receive the body of Isaac, and both Jacob and Esau stood side by side on its brink, and there, no doubt, perhaps for the first time, would Jacob gaze on all that remained of that loving, affectionate, tender-hearted, though misjudging, mother,—of her whose chief fault

had been that she had loved her son too dearly, and whose grey hairs had been brought down with sorrow to the grave by the loss of that beloved child, and the more bitter reproaches of her own conscience.

We have now gone through all the different incidents that are recorded in God's word of the patriarch Isaac. With his anxious hopeful parents, hoping even against hope, we have waited for his predicted birth, and we have seen that birth ushered in by prophecy and miracle, as a fitting type of Him to whom all the prophets gave witness, and at whose birth the Lord created a new thing upon the earth; as much when a virgin bare a child as well as when from the womb and loins of one as good as dead, there sprang forth a seed as many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand by the sea-shore innumerable. We have accompanied, too, the aged father and his unconscious son in their melancholy three days' journey to the land of Monah, and there beheld the meek, unresisting child of promise bound and laid upon the altar, and content to do his father's will, that he might be like unto Him, who, when He suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously. We have seen Isaac, too, in that

most important incident of his whole life, committing the matter in prayer to God, and meditating deeply on all the spiritual privileges involved in that promise, that "in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed." But we claim for Isaac no exemption from the infirmities, and errors, and sins, that have beset every child of Adam; there were no doubt many spots in Isaac's character, "which were not the spots of God's children;" and while one admires and reveres the fidelity of the narrative that records them, one can only mourn over that corruption of our fallen nature, which amid so much that was bright and holy, and pure and lovely, and of good report, still needed to be washed and made clean in that fountain of precious blood which flowed on Calvary, and by that sacrifice there offered, of which his own was the glorious type.

It is no unfitting close of this Patriarch's history, that the last time the word of God names him is in that enumeration of guests who are seated at the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

THE END.



NEW WORKS AND NEW EDITIONS

PUBLISHED BY

BINNS & GOODWIN,

(OF BATH),

GLOUCESTER STREET, REGENT'S PARK, LONDON,
(CITY DEPÔT, 4, AVE MARIA LANE),

E. MARLBOROUGH & Co., AND HOULSTON & WRIGHT.

Morning Dew; or, Daily Readings for the People of God. Selected from the Writings of the Choicest Ancient and Modern Divines. By ISABEL CHARLOTTE GARBETT. Crown 8vo., cloth, 5s.

This work is adapted either for Private Devotion or for Family Worship. A Text of Scripture is selected for each day, and that text is illustrated, often in a quaint, and generally in a most striking and impressive manner, as if delivered by the living voice, and that the voice of one of the most revered and esteemed Authors in the Christian Church, who has made that portion of Scripture his special study.

Holly and Ivy. The story of a Bird's Nest. By MISS DAVIES, Author of "Gloriously Happy," &c. SECOND EDITION. Small 8vo., with Engravings, cloth, 2s. 6d.

This is a touching and interesting account of the origin and progress of that valuable institution founded in Kingstown, Dublin, by Miss Whateley (daughter of the late Abp. of Dublin) and other Ladies, for destitute and homeless children, and known as "The Bird's Nest."

Our Country's Story; an English History for Children. By a Lady. Small 8vo., Engraved Frontispiece, cloth, 2s. 6d.

A simple, concise, and interesting relation of events, including biographical notices of the most distinguished men, the manners, customs, and dress, from the earliest period of British History to the reign of Victoria.

Tales of Old Times in England. By LOUISA HATCHARD. With Engraved Frontispiece, small 8vo., Cloth, 2s.

New edition—completing a total of 19,000 copies of

A Survey of the Holy Land: its Geography, History, and Destiny. Designed to elucidate the Imagery and Oriental Allusions of Scripture, and demonstrate the Fulfilment of Prophecy. By the Rev. J. T. BANNISTER, L.L.D., Author of "Chart of the Holy Land," "Incidents of Jewish History," &c. Demy 8vo., with Maps and Plates, cloth, gilt edges, 8s. 6d.

Whisperings of Truth, for God and His Glory. A True Story of Heart Trials. By the Rev. GEORGE B. SCOTT, Author of "Morning," "Evening," "The Beauty of Holiness," &c. Small 8vo., cloth, 4s. 6d.

BINNS & GOODWIN'S NEW PUBLICATIONS, ETC.

Prayers for Private Use, and Short Meditations. By a Lady. EIGHTH EDITION. 32mo., cloth, 1s.

A Poet's Playmates; or, Country Pictures. By the Rev. CHARLES ARMSTRONG FOX. Small 8vo., cloth, 3s. 6d.

The Silver Shrine of Legends, Lays, and Lyrics. By JOHN DE BURRAGE. Small 8vo., cloth, 6s.

Hop Blossoms. Translated from the German. Small 8vo., Engraved Title, cloth, gilt edges, 2s. 6d.

This is an interesting work for the young, inculcating the highest principles of integrity, as exhibited in the successful resistance of temptation in a well-trained family under circumstances of privation and trial.

Pictures from English History. A Fireside Amusement. SECOND EDITION, small 8vo., Engraved Frontispiece, cloth, 2s. 6d.

The object of this work is to impress the memory of the young reader by exciting interesting inquiries as to the names referred to, and circumstances related in conversation, which are left to be guessed at, but, in case of failure, the required information is given at the end of each chapter.

The Castle Maiden, and other Stories. By Mrs. R. J. GREENE. Engraved Frontispiece, small 8vo., cloth, 2s. 6d.

"This charming series of stories is worthy of the Authoress, her name, and race."—*Christian Examiner*.

Drifting Clouds. By E. B. 2 vols., Post 8vo., 10s. 6d.

"The plot is well constructed, the incidents skilfully woven together, and the interest well sustained to the end."—*Gloucester Journal*.

Recent Publications :—

Reminiscences of the Life, with Letters, of H.R.H. HELENE LOUISE, the late DUCHESS OF ORLEANS. By her attached Friend and Tutor, Dr. G. H. VON SCHUBERT. Post 8vo., cloth, price 7s. 6d.

Eastern Lands and Eastern People; or, Personal Recollections of Nights in the East. By Rev. EDWARD WIDT CULSHA, M.A. Post 8vo., cloth, price 6s. 6d.

Icnusa; or, Pleasant Reminiscences of a Two Years' Residence in the Island of Sardinia. By MARY DAVEY. Post 8vo., cloth, price 7s. 6d.

N.B. Should any difficulty arise in procuring B. & G.'s Books, copies will be sent post *free*, to any part of the kingdom, on receipt of Post Stamps for the amount.

BINNS & GOODWIN,

(OF BATH)

GLOUCESTER STREET, REGENT'S PARK, LONDON,*

PRINTERS AND PUBLISHERS,

Beg to state that they undertake, at reasonable prices, the Printing of works to any extent. B. & G. also beg to remind Authors that the convenience of the post renders distance for sending proof-sheets unimportant, B. & G. being in frequent communication with Authors residing in the remotest parts of the kingdom.

BOOKS, PAMPHLETS, PSALMS AND HYMNS, TRACTS,
or other publications adapted for a very large circulation, Stereotyped, and
Printed by Machinery and Steam Power to any extent.

MUSIC PRINTING FOR CHURCHES AND CHAPELS

ESTIMATED FOR, AND SKILFULLY EXECUTED AT MODERATE PRICES.

B. & G. will be happy to devote their efforts to obtain an extensive sale of works confided to them for Printing, provided the principles of such books are unobjectionable.

ESTIMATES FOR PRINTING BOOKS IN EVERY DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURE
SENT ON APPLICATION.

PUBLISHING.

BINNS & GOODWIN beg to state that they are open to negotiate with Authors for the publication of new works of merit and interest; in some instances they will be happy to *share the expense and divide the profits of works with Authors*; in others, for the convenience of those who publish by subscription, or can dispose of copies of their productions themselves, or who wish to know their *exact outlay without further risk*, B. & G. offer their

MUTUAL OR HALF PROFIT SYSTEM.

On this plan, the Publishers take all risk of the outlay for Paper, Printing, Engraving, Binding, Advertising, &c., on condition of the Author purchasing 250 copies of the work,* from the published price of which is allowed a profit of 20 per cent; and B. & G. ultimately divide with the Author the profits arising from the sale of the whole edition.

** In the event of its being inconvenient to the Author to dispose of the 250 copies, B. & G. will retain the 250 copies, or any portion of them, for sale with the remainder of the edition, and pay the proceeds to the Author.*

B. & G. will be happy to advise with Authors who have not yet published, and, if practicable and desirable, they will endeavour to aid such Authors in their first efforts to bring out their works with satisfaction and success.

N.B. Authors are reminded that MSS. or Printed Books can be sent per post, the end of the parcel being uncovered, at the rate of 2d. for every half-pound in weight.

* CITY DEPÔT, 4, AVE MARIA LANE, LONDON.

NOTICES BY THE PRESS
OF
BINNS & GOODWIN'S PUBLICATIONS.

From a Review of "Ellen Seymour," in the Protestant World.

"The enterprising house of Messrs. Binns and Goodwin, of Bath, has secured an honourable position among provincial publishers, not only for the valuable publications which have issued from their press, but also for the peculiar facilities they afford to Authors to publish works, which, though they have cost them a large amount of time and talent, they might be unable to produce unless thus guaranteed against pecuniary risk. This feature in their arrangements enhances their claims on public support."

Binns and Goodwin's Books.—Bible Class Magazine.

"Some of the most beautifully printed books we have ever had to notice. They are from the press and house of Binns and Goodwin, and are greatly to their credit in the taste which they display in the way they are got up."

"British Grasses."—Worcester Herald.

"Can scarcely be rivalled in the wide range of British paper and print."

"Ocean Flowers."—Oxford Protestant Magazine.

"The whole appearance of the book is most attractive. Not the delicate engraving, or the still more delicate drawing—but Nature's self, is here in unapproachable beauty. Original in its design, tasteful in execution, we have seen nothing like it."

"Every-day Astronomy."—Morning Advertiser.

"The plates are the most brilliant and clear pictorial representations we remember to have seen."

"Michaelo and the Twins."—Morning Post.

"These engravings are printed in colours, and are admirable in design and execution. They are curiosities in art. The title page alone is a gem of decorative printing."

"Universal History."—British Controversialist.

"The beauty of the typography and the elegance of the binding we have rarely seen equalled—never surpassed."

"Morning of Life."—St. James's Chronicle.

"The book is elegantly printed."

"The Garden, the Grove, & the Field."—Portsmouth Guardian.

"The typography and binding of this work, (as of *all* the publications of the same firm,) are of a very superior character."

EXTRACTS FROM AUTHORS' LETTERS.

'Honourable dealings have characterized all your transactions.'

'Let me thank you for the smallness of the charge.'

'I have never had less trouble' [in the correction of proofs].

'Accept my best thanks for your valuable suggestions.'

'In point of execution, and in every other respect, I have found nothing to desire.'

'You have done your part, and done it well.'

'You have surpassed my expectations.'

