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Per. 133 e. 419
1850





Painted by Roussin.

Luc II-40.

Lucas II-40.

Engraved by J. Jenkins.

The Holy Family.

THE CHRISTIAN KEEPSAKE.
1850.

FAMILY PICTURES FROM THE BIBLE.

By M^{rs} Ellet.



E. Baroccio pinx.

E. Smith sculp.

HAGAR & ISHMAEL.

PETER JACKSON, LONDON & PARIS.

THE
CHRISTIAN KEEPSAKE

FOR 1850.

FAMILY PICTURES

FROM THE BIBLE.

BY MRS. ELLET,
AUTHOR OF "THE WOMEN OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION."



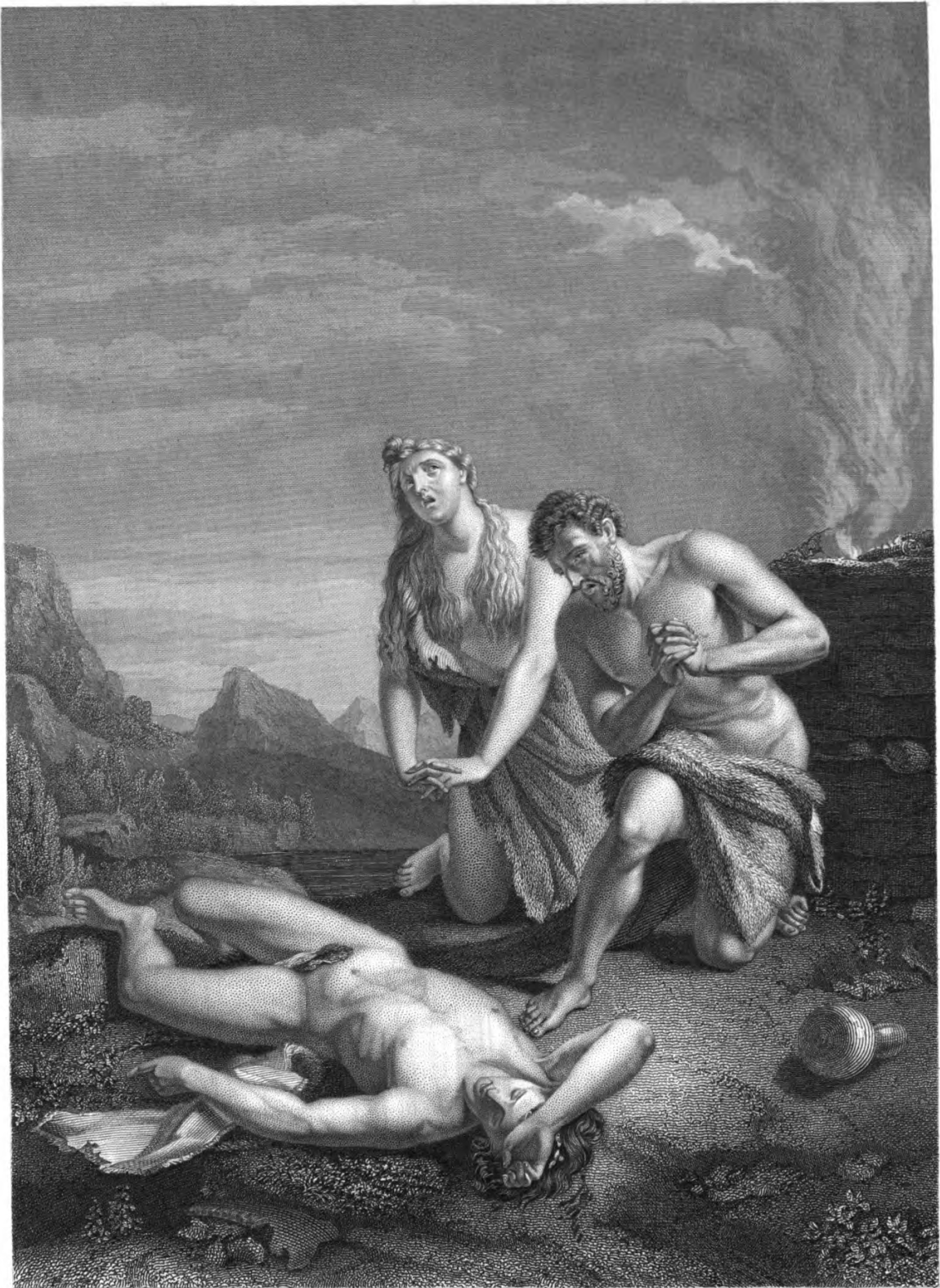
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Painted by Vanderwerf

Genese IV-8.

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Engraved by H. Robinson.

The first Death.

FAMILY PICTURES FROM THE BIBLE.



I.

THE FIRST HUMAN FAMILY.

NEANDER, in his *History of the Establishment and Progress of the Christian Church*, says that the Bible was the chief book of instruction for families in the first centuries of Christianity. A wise use was also made of it in the public education of youth. A celebrated statesman required his son “to commit to memory every day a portion of the Holy Scriptures, and the boy took great pleasure therein ; the cultivation of mind as well as heart being advanced, while his aspirations after truth and sanctification were the engrossing aims of his life.” The obligations of distinguished writers in all ages to the Bible, especially to its poetical portions, must be acknowledged by all who compare their works with it. Schlegel says—“The sacred writings form a fiery and godlike fountain of inspiration, of which the greatest of modern poets have never been weary of drinking ; which has suggested to them their noblest images, and animated them for their sublimest flights.” Cowley, also, in his preface to “*Davideis*,” proves his assertion that fiction is not necessary to fine poetry, by directing attention to the literary value of the Scriptures. “What can we imagine,” he says, “more proper for the ornament of wit or learning in the story of Deucalion than in that of Noah? Why

will not the actions of Samson afford as plentiful matter as the labours of Hercules? Why is not Jephthah's daughter as good a woman as Iphigenia? And the friendship of David and Jonathan more worthy celebration than that of Theseus and Pirithous? Does not the passage of Moses and the Israelites into the Holy Land yield incomparably more poetical variety than the voyages of Ulysses or Æneas? Are the obsolete threadbare tales of Thebes and Troy half so stored with great historical and supernatural actions as the wars of Joshua, of the Judges, and of divers others? Can all the transformations of the gods give such copious hints to flourish and expatiate on as the true miracles of Christ, or of his prophets and apostles?"

But not only, nor chiefly, in a literary point of view, is the Holy Book the best instructor of families. It will not be questioned, at least by any who believe in revelation, that a substantial religious foundation is indispensably necessary for the true family organization and welfare; the more so, as experience shows daily how far into the future extend the habits and influences of family life, exercising a controlling effect upon that which is more public, whether it lie in the department of Church or State. No truth is more generally admitted, than that most of the good or evil exhibited in the actions of men exists in the germ during childhood and youth, and that it may often be discerned by judicious observation, and checked or eradicated, or be nourished by careful culture. Where the conduct in advanced years is not governed by correct principle, the presumption is a fair one that the home-culture has been neglected.

The differences are strongly marked between the family life of ancient and modern times. In the primitive ages of the world, the bond of union was closer, firmer, and more enduring, and the communion of feeling more pervading and constant. Parental authority was more revered, and was exercised in a wider range: the sons and daughters were educated at home, and the household circle

constituted their society. The fear of God, which was the foundation of the earliest wisdom taught, dwelt in the house; the domestic altar was continually surrounded by worshippers; and sacrifices, as well as vows, were offered to the Most High. In the simplicity of ancient days, men who had been properly instructed walked by faith rather than by knowledge: they were accustomed to pay more regard to realities than to mere appearances, and the language of the lips more commonly expressed the feelings of the heart. Under the early constitution, the head of the family stood invested with authority delegated from the Supreme Father; the wife had her honoured though subordinate place, and obedience on the children's part was not only considered an imperative and paramount duty, but enforced by penalties rigidly exacted. The religious element which pervaded the domestic relations chiefly contributed to the preservation of order and harmony through all. The customs of polygamy and divorce, so discordant with the original institution of marriage, and the consequently degraded position of woman, were evils, however, that often marred the family life under the old usage. The tendency of Christianity was to remove them, while a new bond of union was added, in the common duty of allegiance to him who was "our elder brother according to the flesh."

In modern times, this religious foundation, the best and only sure one, so essential to the spiritual life of a household, has been parted with in a great measure—at least so far as respects the family organization. The domestic associations are no longer, by a law of their very being, so closely interwoven with piety, that a decrease of the one involves a weakening of the other. Parental government and filial submission seem grounded rather upon expediency, or the accidents of feeling or circumstance, than growing directly out of obedience to the authority of the Creator in his institutions. In individual examples, it is true, this element of love to God has its appointed place, but they are few and

scattered: it must operate universally, replacing the foundation, before the proper order and tendency of things can be re-established. To show this truth most strikingly, examples are better than metaphysical discussions. The Bible furnishes us with examples by which we may perceive and understand the true relations of this life; may observe the manner of its existence in the first stages of the world, and trace it, through corruption and decline, to its ennobling through the precepts and faith of Christianity.

In the following brief sketches, some attempt will be made to present a useful lesson, by exhibiting groups and individuals depicted in the Bible in their domestic associations. No effort will be made to array them in a colouring of romance, for the strength and beauty of simple truth in Holy Writ would be marred, rather than improved or set forth, by embellishment. The pictures will be shown as familiar to every reader, that a view of them in this new light may teach us the more impressively how inseparable is regard for the rules of life contained in Scripture from the integrity and preservation of the family constitution; and how inevitably, where this conservative principle is wanting, or its duties are neglected, the most disastrous and fatal results ensue, tending to the destruction of such ties.

With the **FIRST MAN** we become acquainted with the **FIRST HUMAN FAMILY**. God himself, who created the man, and the woman for the man, joined them indissolubly in marriage, and bestowed his blessing, the crown of all perfectness, upon the new institution. The nuptials were celebrated in Paradise—their home and possession: they were alone of all their kind, yet felt no want, for, their union being complete, they were sufficient for each other. Instead of communion with other human beings, by which their knowledge might have been extended and their faculties of enjoyment enlarged, they enjoyed the familiar presence of the Deity, and converse with Him. The fountain supplying the aliment of their spiritual nature was ever at hand, and inex-

haustible: nor had they any physical need for which the prodigal bounty of their Creator had not provided. They needed the shelter of no roof save the clear canopy of the sky, no covering but the innocence that enwrapped them as with a robe of light. Pure and serene, as the heaven around and above them, was their life before God and in each other.

Thus was this first example a perfect model of the true conjugal life, contemplated in its original constitution—grounded in the favour of God, embracing all the members of the family in its expanding circle, and furnishing an exhaustless spring of joy in the unselfish aspirations of each for the other, towards the Source of all happiness. The Love which is the essential being of God, and shineth ever in the zenith of eternity, was the life and light of the limited sphere in which were placed the ancestors of the race of mankind. They breathed and moved in a benignant atmosphere; the smile of Divine benevolence encircled them; there was naught to mar their complacency in each other, and the inferior creation rendered involuntary homage to the image of God in which they were made. So attractive has this picture of primitive innocence and virtue been found, that in different ages poets have delighted to throw around it the graces of fancy, and dwell lovingly on the ideal of a happiness such as the world has never seen since—such as has never since been delineated by the imagination. The descriptions given by Milton of the purity and felicity of the first pair, which linger so pleasingly in the memory, were but expressions of the idea we gather from the Bible; as were the pictures of elder poets. In the “Adam” of the Italian poet, Andreini, the Mystery or Sacred Drama which first suggested to Milton the idea of *Paradise Lost*, the Scriptural delineation is gracefully drawn out; the utterance of affection and grateful happiness being most appropriate to the pure peace of a state of innocence, while the evil spirit who looks on, “with jealous leer malign,” can but envy the joy he is yet unable to disturb,

and fly in shame and rage from the hateful spectacle of human piety.

By the first sin, this pure atmosphere of love was troubled—this cloudless heaven overcast. With the desolation of that first spiritual bereavement, when aspiration failed to reach the high companionship from which they had fallen, and the orphaned soul “all mournfully sat down among the senses,” came another strange and not less bitter experience of fallen humanity, the interruption of confidence in themselves and in each other. The shame which was the first consequence of their guilt expressed this reproach and remorse, as did their hiding from the presence of the Lord their consciousness of separation from him; the two-fold and wide-extending consequence of transgression thus being made known by anticipations of coming woe, felt through the two strongest principles of their nature!

Their expulsion from the garden where they had enjoyed intimate communion with their Maker, to wander in search of shelter, and wring subsistence by toil from the earth cursed for man's sake, was in appropriate significance of their spiritual exile. Divine mercy did not abandon the fallen pair. But the original beauty and glory of their state, in their relations to one another, were lost for them beyond the hope of recovery. The fatal jarring, by the forfeiture of innocence, of the chord from which had sounded the sweetest music of humanity, brought discord into their life; the man accused the woman before the Judge, as the cause of his disobedience; and for the perfect unity for which their nature had been formed, and which was now broken and destroyed by sin, were substituted the relations of authority and subjection. Their new condition, so sadly contrasted with the first, was to be

“A monumental, melancholy gloom,
Seen down all ages;”

although pleasures as well as sorrows belonged to it, and a way

was pointed out to prevent the ultimate tendencies of sin and loss. The mother of our race taking in all humility her lot of self-sacrifice and submission, and Adam tilling the ground whence he was taken, saw the gradual development of the consequences of the Fall. The birth of sons completed the circle of the first family, and religious hope, founded on the promise of a Seed that was to bruise the Serpent's head, sprang up in the heart of Eve with the sight of her first-born. But righteous Abel fell by the hand of Cain, and the murderer became a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth. Deep must have been the anguish of those parental hearts, and bitter the remorse with which they watched the fearful unfolding of the curse their guilt had drawn down—with which they listened to “the first audible gathering” of the groans of a ruined posterity.

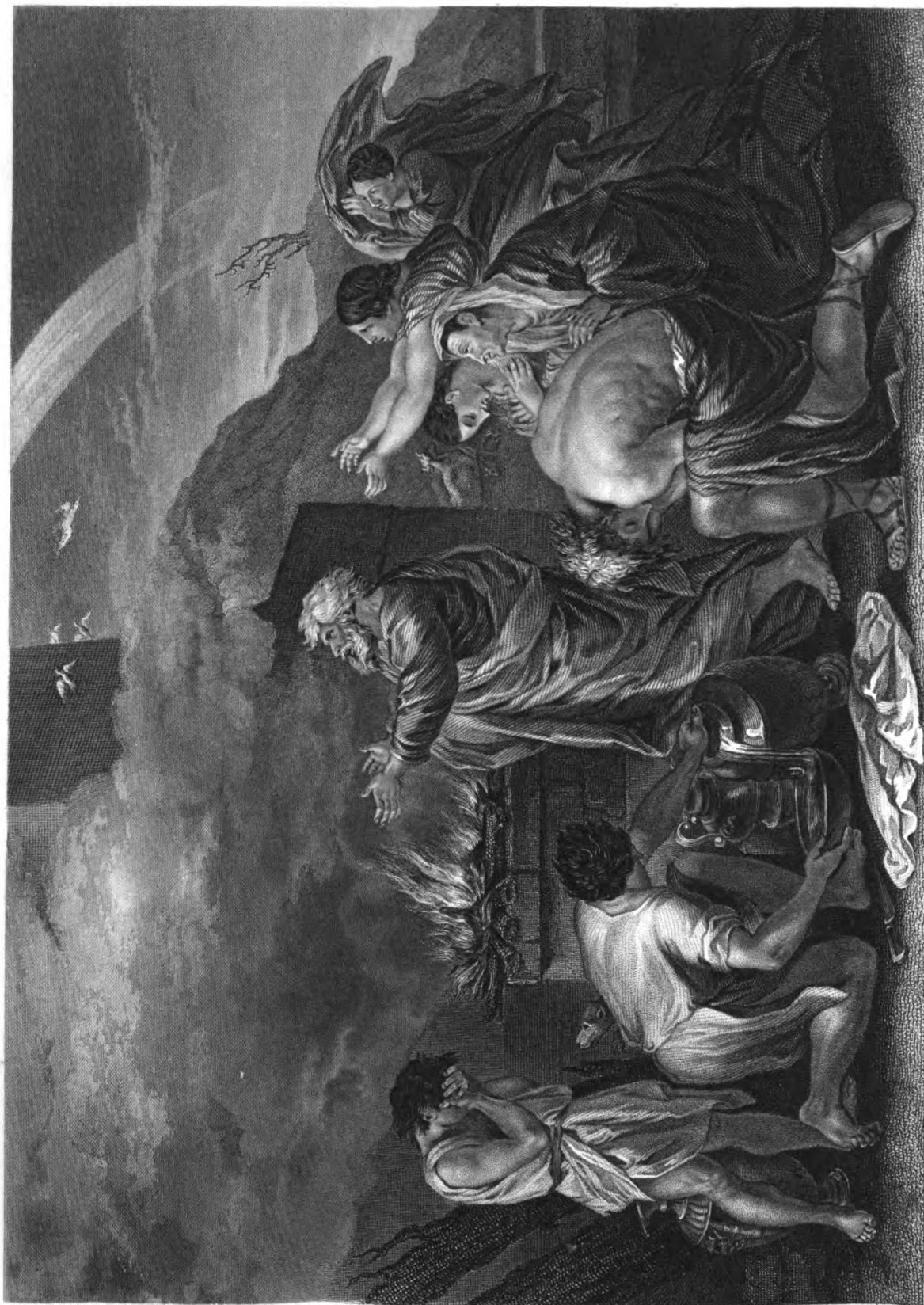
Their struggles or sufferings are not recorded. Only in the brief outline of their history that follows are we permitted to see that the hope, almost extinguished at Abel's death, was renewed at the birth of Seth—the gift of God in his stead—the progenitor of the Seed in whom was to be accomplished the work of man's restoration.

II.

THE FAMILY OF NOAH.

THE families of the earth had grown corrupt before God, and filled with violence; but Noah found favour, because he was a just man, and lived in obedience to his Maker. He was given at his birth a name that signified repose, or refreshing, perhaps by the spirit of prophecy, revealing his extraordinary destiny, and the blessings that were to flow through him to his posterity. Having the "righteousness of faith," he enjoyed the Divine protection and support, both during the progress of human corruption, and when, by reason of the great wickedness that filled the earth, the end of all flesh was come, and everything wherein was the breath of life was to be destroyed from under heaven. Noah and his wife, and his sons, and his sons' wives, were appointed to be saved in the Ark, when the windows of heaven were opened, and the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered. In the enumeration of the persons who took refuge in the Ark, it should be remarked that Noah and his three sons had each but one wife; although the destruction impending over the whole race of mankind, and their want of children as yet—for their sons were not born till after the flood—might have excused polygamy, could it have been excused. They acted, doubtless, under the immediate direction of the Deity, who thus testified his regard for the sacredness of the institution He had established in Paradise.

After the warning given so many years before, the tedious building of the vessel, and the preparations at which the unbelieving scoffed and sneered—while Noah "did according to all



Engraved by W. H. B. Eaton.

Canvas VIII. - 20. 1. M. 1808 VIII. - 20.

Painted by Poussin.

C. A. Delacroix



that the Lord commanded him"—the day of wrath arrived ; the obedient family were shut in, and the waters increased upon the earth.

"Sole, mid the storms, above the drear abyss,
Mid rolling thunders, and the whirl of winds,
And lightning's flash, sever'd and safe from all,
The ark went on ; while, swelling o'er the cries
Of drowning men, and the resounding roar
Of billows lash'd to rage, from hearts within
Rose the loud hymn to Heaven's all-ruling Lord."*

And fervent indeed must have been the tribute of gratitude that ascended to the Father of mercy, as, amid a world's destruction, the ark, bearing its freight of rescued souls, floated over the dark waste of waters.

As in Adam and Eve we saw an example of the disruption of the ties ordained in the primary constitution of a family, the confusion of its relations, and the disturbance of its peace by disobedience to the Divine command ; in that of Noah we may see how the principles essential to its life and happiness were preserved from the contamination of universal corruption, and may observe the restoration of that peace, so far as it can be restored in this mortal state, by self-denying and persistent obedience. Thus must the world-old truth, that evil produces its natural fruits, while the tendency of virtue is to elevate and bless, be illustrated in the daily experience of life. May we emulate the righteous patriarch, whose soul was still cleaving to good in the midst of a perverse generation ! No more floods are to desolate the earth ; but the waters of peril and sorrow are often rising around us, and we are only safe when borne above them in the ark of salvation.

The waters were abated, and returned from off the face of the earth. The saved family went forth from the ark, "and Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast and

* From "The Deluge" of Gabriello Chiabrera.

of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar." This passage strikingly shows the religious principle as the spring of his actions. His first act, on his deliverance from danger, was thus to express his gratitude to the Power who had preserved him so wondrously. The sole inheritor and lord of this lower world ventured not to take possession of the rich domain lying at his feet, before he had paid his vows of fealty to the Sovereign from whom he received all. His children joined in the service of praise and thanksgiving. The only surviving family of the whole human race was thus assembled and consecrated to God; and God established his covenant with them, and placed his bow in the cloud for a token, and bestowed on them his blessing,—saying, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." The gift of every beast of the earth, and every fowl of the air, and the fishes of the sea, and the green herb, and every moving thing, was formally made over to them; and the smile of Divine favour, brighter than the sun, beaming once more in a cloudless heaven, shone upon this new beginning of the race. Happy, had the religious principles instilled and cultivated by Noah, with such careful training, produced congenial fruits in all the members of his family! But the blight of Adam's sin was not yet removed; the root of wickedness not yet destroyed; the curse not yet taken away. The pious father had been seen righteous before the Lord in an evil generation; two virtuous sons were the joy of his heart, but in Ham prevailed the spirit of unkindness and mockery; and the prophetic curse pronounced on his son was visited upon his descendants.

Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years, and died at the age of nine hundred and fifty. He saw the generations of his sons, and the division of the land after their families, and the working of the blessing he had received—the blessing continued from father to son, unto thousands of those who love God, and keep his commandments.



Painted by Copley.

Genese XXII. - 12.

I Mose XXII. - 12.

Engraved by H. Rolls.

Abraham offering Isaac.

III.

THE FAMILY OF ABRAHAM.

AMONG the nations that overspread the earth after the flood, the families of the patriarchs stood separate and distinguished by the peculiarity of their religious faith. They were honoured by special revelations from time to time, and enjoyed the privilege of familiar intercourse with the Deity, being the chosen objects of his protection and blessing. They were called of God to be unlike those around them, and appointed for the preservation of the true knowledge and worship of Him, and the establishment of religion upon earth. The pastoral simplicity of their lives, and their migratory habits, were calculated to favour their state of immediate dependence upon Him by whose revealed will their movements were directed.

Abraham, the first and most eminent of the patriarchs, whose name has figured in Eastern traditions—and whose remarkable history is given in the simple narrative in the Book of Genesis—was one of a pastoral family dwelling in Ur of the Chaldees, a region which afterwards became the seat of the great Babylonian monarchy. The marriages of Abram and Nahor are mentioned as having taken place during their residence there; Haran, the father of Lot, dying before his father Terah in the land of his nativity. The migration of Terah and all his family from Ur of the Chaldees followed; and they fixed their new settlement at Haran, where Terah afterwards died.

The Bible does not inform us how Abram first acquired his knowledge of the unity and providence of the Deity, nor what was the belief of his tribe and family. The legends of other nations represent Terah as an idolater, and even as a maker of images.

One of these traditionary fictions relates the surprise of Abram on seeing one of the images broken by an accidental fall, and the reasoning in his own heart, by which he became convinced that a deity incapable of saving itself from humiliation and injury, could not be a proper object of worship. Another, related in the History of the Jews, represents him walking by night over the spacious plain of Chaldea, gazing upon the stars of heaven, the adoration of which was a primitive form of idolatry, and observing the wonderful beauty of the planet Venus. “ ‘Behold,’ said he, within himself, ‘the God and Lord of the Universe!’ but the star set, and disappeared; and Abram felt that the Lord of the universe could not thus be liable to change. Shortly after, he beheld the moon at the full :—‘Lo,’ he cried—‘the Divine Creator—the manifest deity!’ but the moon sank below the horizon; and Abram made the same reflection as at the setting of the evening star. All the rest of the night he passed in profound rumination; at sunrise he stood before the gates of Babylon, and saw the whole people prostrate in adoration. ‘Wondrous orb!’ he exclaimed, ‘thou surely art the Creator and Ruler of all nature!—but thou, too, hastest like the rest to thy setting!—neither then art thou my Creator, my Lord, nor my God!’ ”

Although we know not in what manner the idea of the one Supreme Creator was first acquired by the patriarch, it is pleasing to contemplate him, at this period of his life, alone among those around him, as a worshipper of the revealed God. All the descendants of the sons of Noah, it is probable, had preserved some notion of His nature and power, though darkened and corrupted in their traditions, and mingled with their veneration for those works of His hands, the aspect of which most forcibly impressed their senses. It is not likely that they had any worthy conception of the moral attributes of the Deity. They worshipped, therefore, whatever, to their perverted imagination, might seem to represent this unknown and incomprehensible Being.

The time came when Abram, the destined father of a family and tribe chosen from among the families of earth, was to separate himself from his country, and his kindred, and his father's house. The mysterious command was laid upon him, and the promise given, of which then there appeared little prospect of fulfilment, for Sarai had no children. The promise—"I will make of thee a great nation, and will bless thee, and make thy name great"—was one that comprehended every desire of a pastoral chieftain of that age. How great must have been the faith, which, looking beyond the most discouraging improbabilities, relied absolutely and implicitly on the Divine word! Abram doubted not, questioned not; his obedience was immediate. Collecting those who constituted his household—his servants, and all the substance he had gathered, and accompanied by Lot, his brother's son—he passed across the Euphrates into the land of Canaan. Their first settlement was at Shechem, upon the plain of Moriah, between the mountains Ebal and Gerizim, where he was again favoured with a vision of his Heavenly Protector, and the promise that the land before him should belong to his seed; and where he performed the fundamental duty of the chief of a clan, by building an altar unto the Lord. Moving onward, probably as the native pastures were exhausted, the tribe pitched their tents by a mountain eastward of Bethel; in every halting-place an altar being erected, and solemn worship offered to the God in whom Abram trusted, and who was the invisible guide of his wanderings. It is worthy of notice, that through all his removals, this was his first act on forming a new settlement. The blessing of the Almighty was sought, as the beginning and crowning of every enterprize, the safeguard and light of his dwelling. When he returned from Egypt, whither a famine had driven him, and journeyed to the place of his former encampment, near the site where Bethel afterwards stood, he took possession by going to the height where he

had at first built an altar, and offering solemn sacrifice thereon, calling upon the name of the Lord.

How attractive is the picture given of the pastoral life of the first patriarchs, passing from one pleasant locality to another, pitching their tents by some grove or fountain, and acquiring increase of wealth wherever they went, under the abiding influence of the blessing borne with them ! They were rich in flocks and herds, sheep and oxen, and camels and asses, and tents, and men-servants and maid-servants ; the simple possessions naturally exchanged and accumulated in a primitive state of society. Besides these, Abram had silver and gold ; he was prosperous, for his substance had increased greatly during his visit in Egypt ; but it does not appear that wealth made him arrogant, or rendered him less disposed to respect the claims of others. When it became evident by reason of the increase of Lot's riches also, that they could no longer dwell together without the continuance of strife between their herdsmen, and that "the land was not able to bear them, for their substance was great," Abram sought not to encroach on the pastures to which the stock of cattle belonging to Lot had an equal right with himself, but proposed a division of the land, and an amicable separation. He gave the choice to his brother's son, though he might have claimed it on the score of seniority, and the grant of the Creator. It was generous, therefore, as well as expressive of his desire to do justly, to ask no advantage for himself. He bids Lot select the portion he would inhabit : "If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right ; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." The fertile and well-watered valley of the Jordan, blooming as the garden of the Lord, attracted the eyes of Lot, and he took his departure eastward, to establish his independent settlement among the cities of the plain. Abram remained in Canaan. After the departure of Lot, the Divine grant of the land was

renewed to him and to his seed. He was commanded to survey the country from north to south, and from its eastern to its western boundaries: to walk through the length and breadth of the land, and to regard it as the heritage of his posterity, which should be countless as the dust of the earth.

The chief was not indifferent, in his own prosperity, to the dangers that beset his kinsman. When informed by a fugitive of the capture of Lot by invaders of the country, he made haste, with three hundred and eighteen of his trained servants, to pursue the enemy; and falling on them by night, rescued Lot and the other captives, and wrested from them the booty they had taken. The conqueror, returning, from his excursion, was met by the grateful monarch whose enemies he had routed, and received the blessing of Melchisedek, who presented him and his troops with the refreshment of bread and wine. The magnanimity of Abram, and his jealous regard for the honour of God, are strikingly shown in his answer to the generous proposal of the king of Sodom, that he should take all the spoil, of which he had given a tenth-part to the royal priest. He refuses to retain any part, "from a thread even to a shoe-latchet," consenting only that the young men, not of his household, who had joined his expedition, should receive their portion. He would not have it supposed that he had been influenced by a wish to gain booty for himself; nor would he permit one of the native chiefs to boast that his gifts had contributed to his wealth. He was the vassal only of the Most High, and would acknowledge obligation to no other benefactor.

Notwithstanding the strength of his faith, the mind of the patriarch was disturbed by the apparent prospect, owing to his want of an heir, that his name and dignity would pass into another line. What were his possessions worth in view of the near extinction of his immediate family, and the failure of his hopes of a long line of descendants. The condescending assurance given in the Divine vision, and the affecting appeal of Abram, show the

discontent and apprehension he had cherished. The natural feeling is not reprovèd; but he is comforted, and his faith sustained, by a formal ratification of the covenant, according to the usage of primitive nations. At the setting of the sun, in a deep sleep, and amidst "a horror of great darkness," the patriarch heard the mysterious voice announce the destiny of his posterity, and saw the symbol of Deity, the smoke and fire, pass between the divided victims, over which he had kept watch: the covenant being thus solemnly ratified, as between man and man.

But little is said in the Scriptures by which we may learn the character of Sarai. She appears to have been wanting in the faith so eminent in her husband, and which "was counted unto him for righteousness." Despairing of the fulfilment of the promise so often and so solemnly repeated, she ventures to propose means for bringing about the desired accomplishment. Perhaps the annoyances she afterwards suffered from the insolent behaviour of her maid, the natural consequence of her folly, were intended as a reproof for her want of trust, and irreverent patience. She seems to have been of a haughty and imperious temper, and felt bitterly the arrogant insults of the servant whom she had elevated to the dignity of a wife. She complains to her husband of the humiliating treatment she has received, and lays to his charge the responsibility. "The Lord judge," she says, "between me and thee." The appeal was answered by Abram with permission to his wife to do with her maid as she pleased. He exhibits none of the feeling shown on a subsequent occasion, when the dissensions in his family rendered it necessary for him to part with his son Ishmael; for it is evident he had not wronged Sarai by any transfer of his affections.

The jealous pride of the mistress, roused by the presumptuous conduct of Hagar, prompts her to treatment so harsh, that the slave flies from the oppression, and wanders in the wilderness. Careless of her own fate, or that of her unborn child, she desires

only to escape from present evil ; she can give no answer to the angel who asks whither she would go, but confesses that she has fled from the face of her mistress. It is a touching trait in the character of Hagar, that she makes no attempt to justify herself by complaint of the unkind usage she has received ; indeed, the consciousness of the presence and omniscience of God, which she expresses in the name given to him who spake to her, seems to imply that her thoughts dwelt on her own faults. The angel comforts her by an assurance that her affliction has been regarded, and a promise of numerous descendants ; and bids her return and submit herself to lawful authority.

The race of which the Messiah was to be born must be “ beyond every possible impeachment of its legitimacy ;” and after the lapse of fourteen years another revelation renews the covenant ; and the names of Abram and Sarai are changed by the Divine command, in token of their parentage of many nations. At the announcement that the covenant is to be established with the son whom Sarah was to bear, the father’s love for his first-born is touchingly exhibited. His whole heart is poured out in the prayer for Ishmael. The blessing is to be inherited by one unborn. What should become of the boy whose birth had first brought joy to his tent—in whom his soul was bound up ! The strength of the parental feeling in Abraham’s bosom is thus shown, in his tender solicitude for the child who had first awakened it. His prayer is answered by the promise of the blessing, though a subordinate one, to Ishmael.

The pastoral simplicity of the world’s infancy comes before us, as we contemplate the picture presented in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis—of the aged patriarch sitting in his tent-door in the heat of the day, the approach of the three strangers, and his reception of them with Oriental hospitality. We are not told if Abraham perceived at first sight the real character of the mysterious visitors, or if the truth was revealed to him by any after

intimation ; but it is probable that his lowly obeisance, when he ran to meet them from the tent-door, and invited them to rest under the tree and refresh themselves, was an act of respect rather than of worship. The quick preparations for their entertainment, in which the master and mistress are active as well as their servants, and the particulars related, strongly mark the simple and generous character of that ancient hospitality. The meal was partaken of under the spreading tree which shaded the tent ; and then the chief of the three strangers renewed the promise of a son before given, and fixed the time of his birth. The laughter of Sarah, who heard this promise in the tent-door behind, indicated the unbelief of her heart, and was reproved, though mildly, by the Almighty visitant.

It is remarkable, that by a few words in the verses succeeding, light is thrown upon the character of both Abraham and Sarah in their domestic relations. The patriarch's habitual exercise of due authority over his household, and pious zeal in instructing them, is attested by the Lord in the disclosure of his gracious purpose towards him. "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him," is not said as a reason for the bestowal of the blessing at first promised—for the very fitness to receive it was a gift from above—but it was part of the plan of benevolence. The father of the faithful had once listened to the persuasions of his wife, and obeyed them in espousing Hagar ; instances of misconduct and criminal distrust of God's protection through scenes of peril, are also recorded of him ; but his heart, by the Divine aid, was set to do that which was right, and the same grace would be granted to keep him faithful to the end, and to cause his descendants to "keep the way of the Lord." It appears from several particulars mentioned, that the patriarch was naturally disposed to exercise his own judgment in shaping his course. His disingenuous equivocation concerning his relations to Sarah, in Egypt and in Gerar, strongly evinces this

tendency ; but under the appointed discipline, these corrupt inclinations were gradually overcome. The last severe ordeal through which he was called to pass — in the sacrifice required of his only son—was met in a manner that showed him then advanced in the life of faith beyond the weakness which had marked its early growth ; and thenceforward we hear of no more doubts or shortcomings.

The expression of Sarah in the eighteenth chapter, calling Abraham “my lord,” seems to be referred to by St. Peter in his commendation of her obedience to him. The life of this couple—growing old in faithful affection, and in expectation of the blessing mysteriously promised—is simply and beautifully delineated. Sarah was subject to Abraham as her head, superior, and guide. Abraham, “the friend of God,” leaned on the Divine counsel and support. The son born to them—the child of promise—the heir of unknown blessing—the channel of mercy fore-ordained for the whole race of mankind, was a gift received from the hand of the Creator, and unspeakably precious. The circle of the family life was thus complete. The bondwoman and her son had no proper part therein—and they were to be removed from the association. The custom of men in that primitive age allowing a plurality of wives, it was not expressly censured ; but that the practice was a violation of the principle on which the marriage relation was founded, and tended to the subversion of domestic comfort and peace, is plain from the examples in the case of the patriarchs. Abraham was doomed to suffer the consequences of his own fault, by the necessity of parting with the son born to him by Hagar. The haughty spirit of Sarah could ill brook the boyish insolence of Ishmael ; and remembering Abraham’s former yielding to her complaints, she demanded peremptorily the expulsion of the boy and his mother. It was hard for the father to send from him the child he had first loved, and in whose opening faculties, wild as his nature was, he felt a parent’s pride. “The thing was

very grievous in his sight ;” and in his anguish he doubtless sought the direction of that great Being by whom hitherto his steps had been guided. The answer, couched in gracious and comforting terms, commands him to comply with the apparently unreasonable demand, and to yield to his wife the unlimited control over her servant assigned her by the usage of pastoral tribes. An intimation is added of blessing destined Ishmael for Abraham’s sake ; and Abraham, obedient to the Divine vision, rose up early to make preparations for the departure of the two. There is something unspeakably touching in the very simplicity of the account, which leaves room for imagination to dwell upon the melancholy scene. The aged and affectionate father, placing in Hagar’s hands the provisions which could sustain them only a brief way on their lonely journey, and sorrowing that he should see the face of his child no more—the Egyptian mother, bowed down in humiliation for this abrupt dismissal from the home that had been hers so long ; perhaps reproaching herself for the unseemly pride and arrogance which so provoked her mistress—and the spirited lad, who would naturally feel the separation less keenly, in his youthful love of adventure, to be indulged without restraint in the wild and uninhabited districts where they were to seek their fortune. What a scene, with its deep pathos, for the embellishment of poetry ! We may well believe that tears in abundance were shed as the patriarch bade farewell to Hagar, and strained his son for the last time to his bosom in agonized embrace. The heart of Sarah must have melted at the sight of his grief, and her anger have given way to a willingness for reconciliation. She could not see the suffering of him she loved ; she could not see the handmaid who had served her so long, the boy who had grown from infancy by her side, go forth from her door, driven thence by her severity, to wander through the world, without a revulsion of feeling. But a higher purpose than hers was to be accomplished ; and the words she had uttered in anger were exponents

of the decree fulfilled in after-ages. Abraham obeyed, not the imperious demand of his wife, but the Divine direction ; and the consciousness of this, and that he was committing Ishmael, not to the uncertainties of a dreary future, but to the care of One who had promised to protect him, took away from the bitterness of parting. The fervent prayer with which he commended the boy to the keeping of his Heavenly Father, ascended upwards from his pious heart on the wings of faith, and was heard. Then the Egyptian and her son went forth from the patriarch's dwelling.

The wandering of the outcast Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness—their sufferings from the failure of the supply of water, and the anguish of the mother, who lays down her child to die, and retires to weep, that she may not behold his last agonies—are recounted in a description which has never been surpassed in simple pathos. Here again is a scene for the artist, whose fancy could add no colouring more striking than is presented. The familiar story, with its typical meaning, need not be dwelt upon here, as the Egyptian and her son were no longer a portion of the family of Abraham.

When the command came—the keenest trial to the parental feeling, as well as to the faith of Abraham—to offer up Isaac in sacrifice, we read of no struggle nor hesitation, as in the case of Ishmael. He utters no murmur, though bidden to cut short, with his own hand, the life on which his expectation depended of a numerous posterity, and the blessing which, through him, was to pervade the whole earth. As before, after the vision, he “rose up early in the morning,” and prepared for his journey, having provided wood for the burnt-offering. Those who were with him knew not of his intention ; and it is not likely that he confided the matter to Sarah, whose feebler faith and maternal anxiety might have interposed obstacles. Through the journey—which did not terminate with their arrival at Mount Moriah till the third day—there appears no objection or want of alacrity on his

part to put the fearful command in execution. This is explained by the Apostle, who says, Abraham believed God could raise his son from the dead; and that he expected this is evident from the expression to the young men, that he and Isaac would return to them after their worship. He did not doubt the ultimate fulfilment of the promises; and the miraculous restoration of his son seemed a matter of course, since He who could not lie, had said—"In Isaac shall thy seed be called." When it became necessary to communicate to Isaac his fatal purpose, no resistance was offered by the destined victim; no shudderings of nature prompted to avert the blow. How strikingly does this circumstance show the strict religious training of the child of promise by Abraham! The youth might have remonstrated against his father's incurring the guilt of murder; he might have urged the illegality of human sacrifice, or even questioned the right of the prophet-patriarch—on the authority of a vision seen by none but himself—to immolate his son. Isaac was grown to manhood, and would probably have surpassed his aged father in strength, had he chosen to escape or defend his life. But he had been educated in the principles of obedience and absolute submission to heavenly ordinances. The instructions received from his father's lips had fitted him to understand the obligations of the command; and it is reasonable to suppose that Abraham communicated to him his own hopes of his restoration. He yielded himself voluntarily, to be bound and laid on the altar, as did the "Lamb of God," whom, by the act, he typified.

Not only was Abraham thus worthy in his family relations of being the great example of faith and obedience to his posterity and the world, but he appears equally exemplary in other situations. What can be more sublime than his expostulation with the Deity to avert the impending fate of the Cities of the Plain! And how exalted is the idea of the justice and mercy of the Infinite conveyed by the scene! His position among the princes of adjoining territories was a highly honourable one. He was a mighty prince

among them, and their esteem was often testified by gifts. Abimelech, the king of Gerar, sought to form with him a treaty of amity, to continue inviolable to his descendants; for he says—“God is with thee in all that thou doest.” He had not forgotten, in his abounding prosperity, to ascribe all to the favour of Him from whom cometh every good thing; and it is not unlikely that from him many of the neighbouring chiefs learned the worship of the true God.

The expression so often used in Scripture, “gathered to his fathers,” appears to have a meaning which throws light upon the customs of primitive ages. We learn that each tribe or family had its own place of burial—sometimes a spacious sepulchre, hewn from the rock, and divided into several chambers, where the dust of many branches of the clan might be deposited. The chief had here his appointed place, and round him were assembled the children who came one by one to moulder at his side. Thus the family union was preserved even in the grave. No stranger-dust was permitted to mingle with the kindred remains; and from generation to generation the descendants of the same progenitor occupied their last resting-place together. Thus Abraham, when Sarah died, applied to the chiefs of the clan of Heth to purchase a cemetery; for as yet he had been a stranger and a sojourner, and in his wandering life had possessed no place to bury his dead. His home was fixed now in the land of Canaan; and there was to be the sacred deposit, which he would guard with jealous care from foreign intrusion. He declines the complimentary offer of the chiefs, of permission to bury his dead in the choicest of their own national sepulchres; he refuses to accept as a gift from Ephron the cave and field he had selected as suitable for the purpose, though it was proffered publicly, as a mark of high respect. He will have this sacred possession isolated from all others, and takes it only on condition of being permitted to pay the price to its owner. The bargain is ratified, and the field

secured to him, with its rock, and the trees that were to shade the graves of his household.

In widowed estate lived the patriarch after the death of his wife, occupied with the care and education of his son. When the time came that a wife should be provided for Isaac, the same determination to keep his stock separate from the surrounding tribes, by avoiding their alliance, is manifested. In the ancient Mesopotamian settlement, the children of his brother Nahor yet live, and among his kindred there the patriarch determines to choose a wife for his son. His eldest and chief servant—supposed to be Eliezer of Damascus, the next in rank in the tribe, who was once his heir-presumptive—is directed to depart on the mission, and is required to pledge a solemn oath that in no case shall the wife be chosen from the daughters of the Canaanites. Almost equally strong is his repeated command, that Isaac shall not be conducted back to the land of his own birth, even though the kinswoman selected should refuse to come and meet him in Canaan. In obedience to the Heavenly mandate, he had quitted the country of his nativity and his father's house: Palestine, by Divine grant, was the patrimony of his descendants; and the merging of his family with those of his kindred, which would be the consequence of return to Mesopotamia, was not less to be dreaded than a heathen alliance. In this anxiety for the seclusion and isolation of his own stock, it is not possible to say how much of the pride of an independent chieftain mingled with Abraham's regard to the commandment intrusted to him. A desire to maintain his own dignity as the parent of a nation, may have had some influence; but his chief motive was the conviction of his duty to preserve integrity of descent in a line from which was to spring the mysterious Seed promised to the first mother. That this was so is evident from the confidence he expresses in the success of the mission: "The Lord God of Heaven—He shall send his angel before thee."



Painted by Coypel.

Genese XXIV, -22.

1 Mose XXIV, -22.

Engraved by H. Robinson.

Rebecca at the well.

The departure of the servant, his arrival at the city of Nahor, and meeting with the lovely daughter of Bethuel—that beautiful history so rich in romantic interest and instructive lessoning—belongs not strictly to this chapter. The bride in her modest beauty was received into Abraham's family, and on her first arrival at the encampment, conducted to the tent of Sarah, the place assigned to the chief female in the tribe.

The line of the Messiah being thus cared for, and Isaac constituted the sole heir to all the wealth of Abraham, the patriarch married again. But his other children, having received gifts from him, were sent away into the east country; nor were their descendants, though noticed in the Hebrew annals, considered as belonging to the same stock with the Jews. Ishmael, indeed, joined with Isaac in the last duties to their father, interring his remains in the cave of Machpelah, where the dust of Sarah reposed.

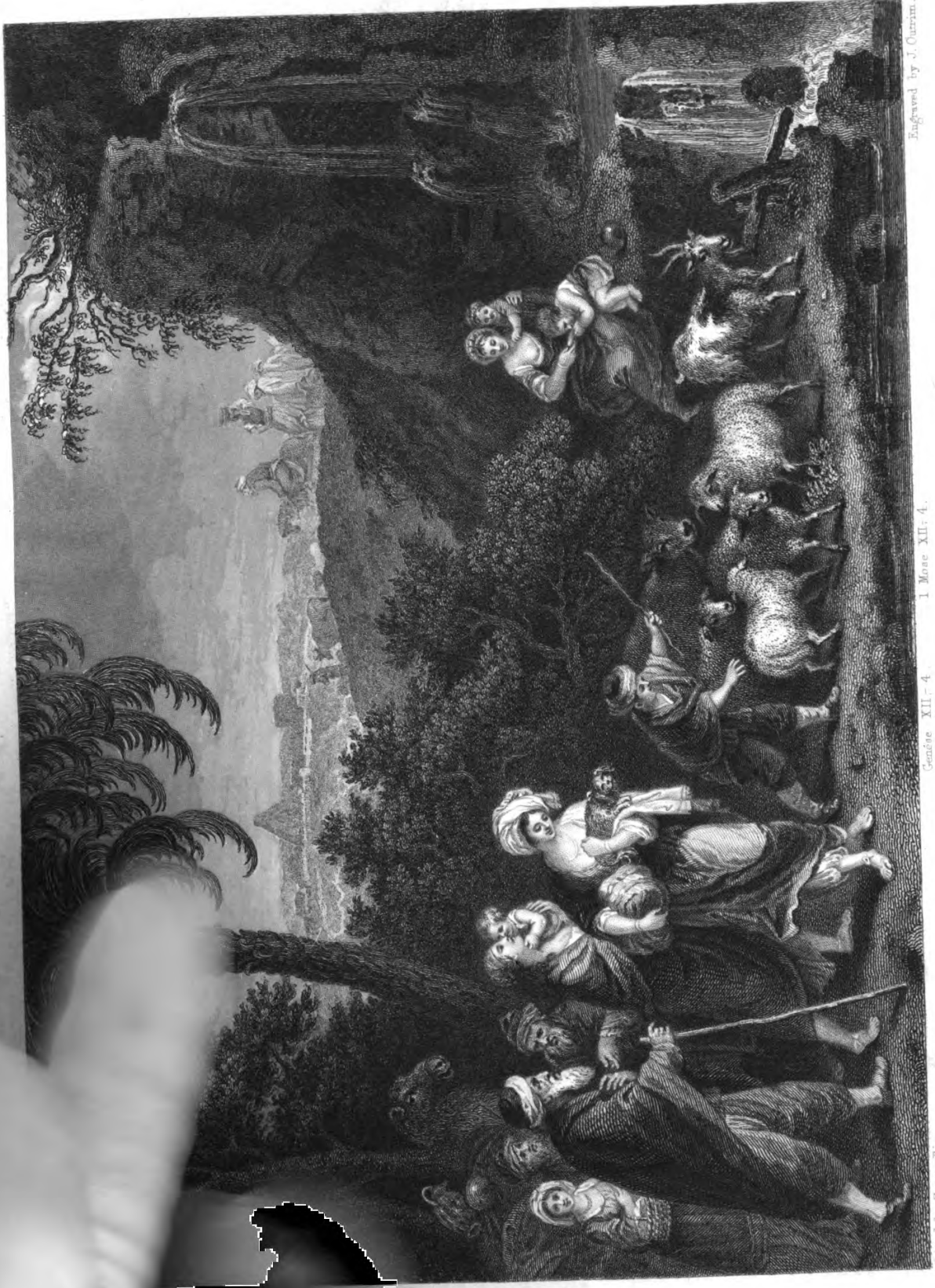
In all the relations of Abraham, his sincerity and fidelity appear prominent. He is thus as a husband, a parent, and as the head of a tribe; but most of all his fealty to God is inviolate. This is the foundation of his exemplary character in respect of inferior claims. His building and sustaining of a family, and his provision for its continuance, have reference to the fulfilment of the great purpose revealed to him, dimly and darkly it may be, but with light enough to guide his own course. He "rejoiced to see the day" of the promised Redeemer, though its full splendour did not burst on his sight, but was veiled in symbols and intimations. He "trusted in God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." In his tent and circle the family life assumes a high and holy character—a significance beyond the ties of earth. May it not also in the life of his spiritual posterity? May not each, in the maintenance of relations established by Divine authority, preserve a trust Divinely committed—to be transferred with care to the children whose remote destiny it must influence?

IV.

THE FAMILY OF LOT.

WHEN Lot separated his family from that of Abraham, with the design of establishing his pastoral settlement elsewhere, his eyes were attracted by a rich and beautiful district of country, exceeding in fertility that he was leaving. The valley through which the Jordan flowed, abounding in luxuriant pasturage, in fair groves and blooming fields, was watered by many streams and studded with flourishing cities. Pleasant to the view—"even as the garden of the Lord"—it offered every advantage for a permanent abode; for the resources of the land seemed inexhaustible, and the extending population would form a defence against the incursions of foreign invaders. Well content was the patriarch to have his home in so desirable a locality, and his encampment was formed near one of the principal towns. When the hostile army of the kings from the Euphrates and Tigris swept over this broad plain, and joined battle in the vale of Siddim with the confederate princes of Jordan, Lot was probably among those who strove to throw off the conqueror's yoke, since he was taken prisoner, and rescued by the valour of Abram. This danger over and the country delivered from invaders, there seemed the fairest prospect of peace. In the patriarch's abundant prosperity, perhaps he felt himself consoled for living in a city of the wicked. It does not appear that by his residence in Sodom any of the inhabitants had been won over to the worship of the true God; yet it is intimated that he had made efforts, though without effect, to stem the torrent of iniquity, and teach their duty to the reckless profligates who surrounded him. One of them bears testimony to this, and also to the fact that none in the city were like Lot—in



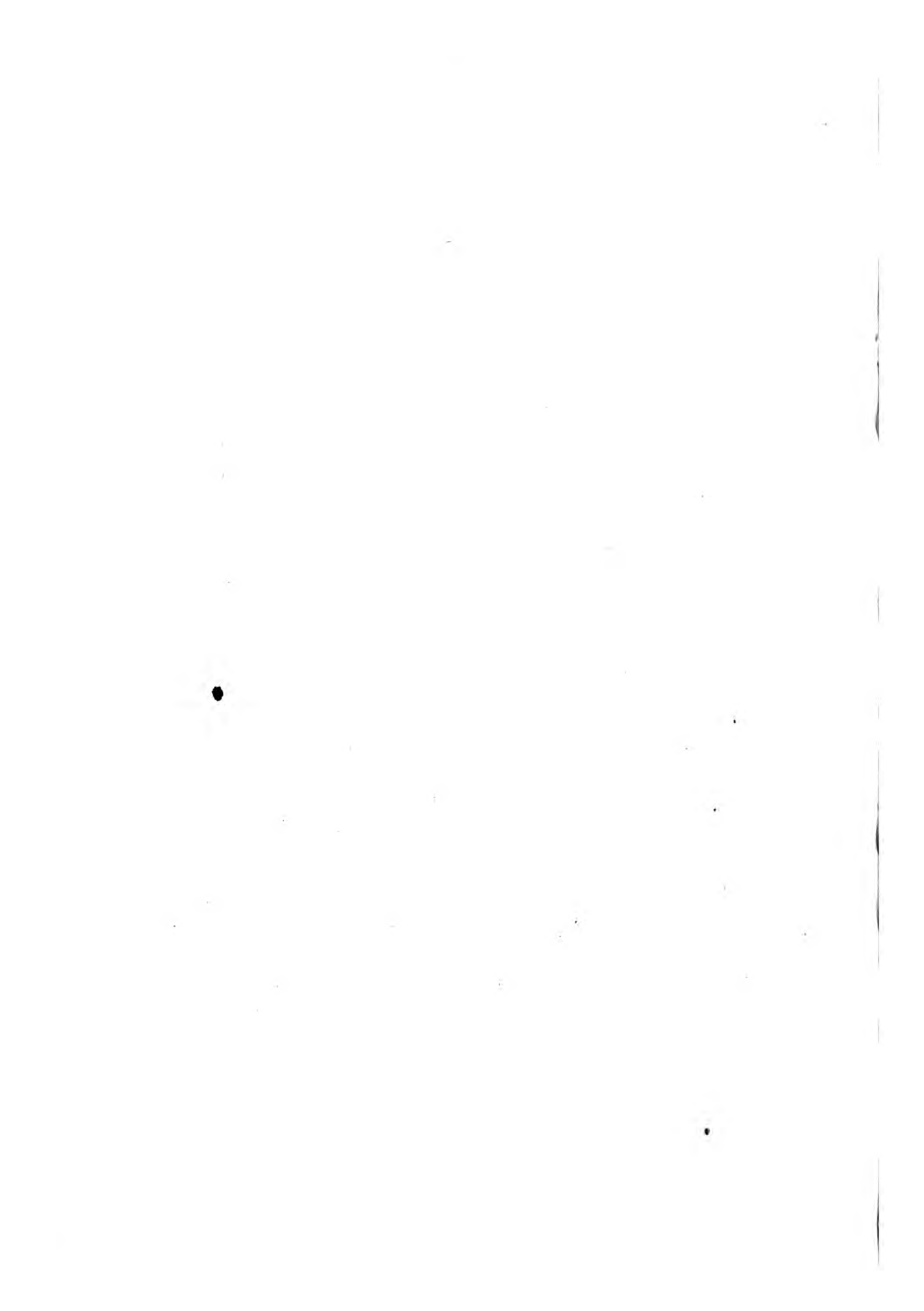


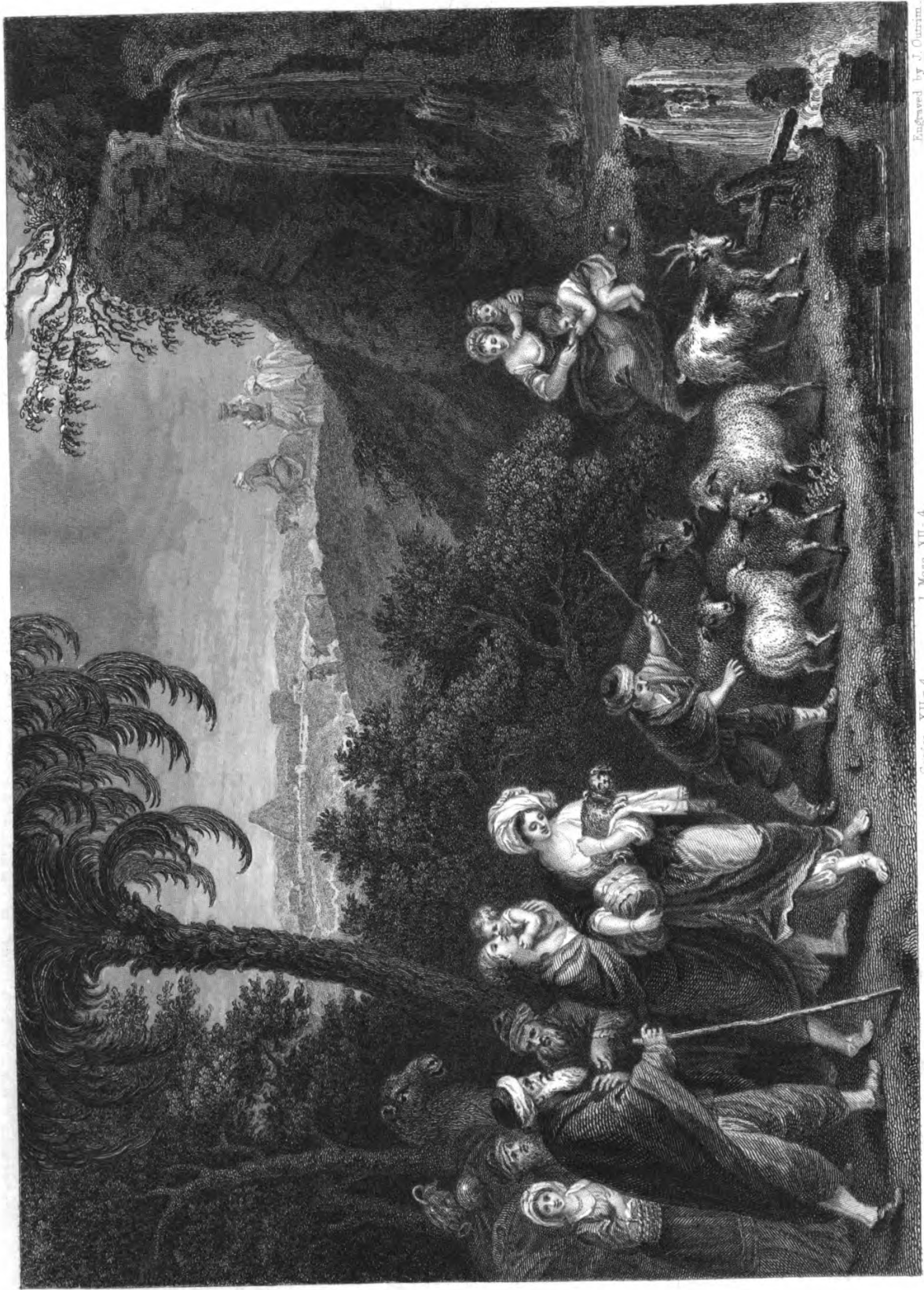
Engraved by J. Currin.

Genèse XII - 4. 1 Moïse XII - 4.

Prof. J. Currin of Adam & Eve.

Printed by Zuccarelli.





Engraved by J. Ouirin.

Genèse XII - 4. 1 Moise XII: 4.

Printed by Zuccarelli.

Departure of Abraham & Lot.

his reproachful speech—"This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge." Thus alone in his faith and worship of Jehovah—encompassed with wickedness—all the enjoyment his wealth could procure must have failed to satisfy the mind of Lot, harassed incessantly with scenes of crime he was compelled to hear of or witness. His thoughts must often have wandered back to the happier days of his youth—to the peaceful time when he dwelt with Abram in Canaan, and held with him the intercourse of congenial hearts, and joined with him in worship before the altar of the Lord. Those remembrances could not be effaced by the restless ambition or the anxieties of his new life.* In heart Lot still

* The train of thought here suggested brings to mind a beautiful poem by Mrs. Caroline Gilman, in which are expressed the involuntary feelings of the American back-woodsman, who, retreating into the forest, has thrown off the forms of society, and would "fly beyond the Sabbath." We quote the poem entire :—

" He flies !

He seeks the moaning forest-trees,
The sunny prairie, or the mountain sweep,
The swelling river rushing to the seas,
The cataract, foaming 'neath the dizzy steep,
Or softer streams that by the green banks sleep ;
To these he flies !

" He lists

The crackling of the springing deer,
The shrill cry of the soaring waterfowl,
The serpent hissing at his lone couch near,
The wild bear uttering loud her hungry howl,
The panther with his low expecting growl,
Unmoved he lists.

" Wanderer

Beyond the Sabbath, tell me why
With eager steps you shun the haunts of men,
And from the music of the church-bells fly,

honoured the religion he professed, though fearful encroachments
had been made by principles and motives antagonistic to piety—

That, floating sweetly o'er your native glen,
Call you to worship by their chime again ?
Say, wanderer, why ?

“ You know
You feel, beneath the woodland skies,
When comes the *seventh* day of sacred rest,
Deep wells of fond remembrance struggling rise
Within the caverns of your rocky breast—
A gush of thought, like visions of the blest,
At times you know.

“ And you
Will turn, and mark the record tree
In stealthy silence, and a gentle prayer
Unconsciously will struggle to get free,
And you will feel there is a purer air,
More holy stillness over nature fair,
Which softens you.

“ How sweet
The strain of skyey minstrelsy,
That floats above you in the wild bird's song !
Seems it to you the hymn of infancy,
Borne on the breezes of remembrance long,
When you were foremost in the Sabbath throng ?
Those strains were sweet !

“ Such tones
Are swelling *yet* in many a spot,
Sacredly twining out with praise and joy ;
And there's a group,—Oh, they forget you not,
Who prayers and tears for you, for you employ ;
And hopes that even time cannot destroy,
Are in their tones.

by the desire of worldly riches and power. His righteous soul was vexed from day to day with the conversation of the wicked ; yet he did not resolve to leave all and come out from among them. The passage—" God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow "—gives us reason to believe that the intercession of Abraham saved him from being involved in the ruin of his guilty fellow-citizens. When the angels led him forth from the city, the comment of the sacred historian is—" the Lord being merciful unto him ;" and his own acknowledgment testifies — " Thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life ;" thus implying a consciousness of having deserved to suffer the penalty escaped.

The family of Lot consisted of several persons ; but the sacred

" They call,

They call you, rover, back again !
There is a mound beneath your village spire,
Where, touched by love, your tears would fall like rain ;
It shields a holy man, your aged sire,
Who sought *in life* to curb your youthful fire,
Hear his *death* call !

" In vain !

Alas ! you heard not e'en that call ;
Proudly you stand upon the red man's ground,
And woman's tears, that slow and silent fall,
Slighted, from your resolved breast rebound,
Your free words through the woodland depths resound,
' Her call is vain !'

" Farewell

For ever, roamer of the wild !
God, whom you can forget, his own will see ;
His sun still shines upon his erring child,
His breezes fan you with their current free,
And his green sod your burial-place shall be.
Oh, fare you well !"

record gives no ground to believe that any of the members, except the head, partook of the true spirit of religion, or had any love to God. His wife, whom some think he had married in Sodom—his residence having been there for more than twenty years—was evidently strongly attached to the luxuries of her home, and showed reluctance to quit it, even at the command of the messengers of Divine vengeance. The two maiden daughters who escaped the destruction of Sodom, had not the fear of God before their eyes, as their after-conduct manifested. His sons-in-law, who had probably married others of his daughters—not particularly mentioned in Scripture—paid no heed to his alarmed announcement of impending destruction, but treated his words with derision. What a situation for the parent whose sensibilities were alive, to be surrounded by the thoughtless and hardened, even of his nearest and dearest! The feeling in Lot's nature may have been blunted by much care, and desire of gain; but many moments of bitter anguish must have been his, as he saw the gradual corruption, from the contagion of evil example, of the youthful hearts he would fain have moulded to piety; as he saw his precepts disregarded, and contemplated the moral prospect opening before them. He could not, however, resolve to flee from the contamination of the grievous iniquity around him, the cry of which had gone up to heaven. His abode was fixed in Sodom, and he could not abandon the substance he had gathered. He remained; till the purpose of God was ripe for accomplishment, and the day of retribution came.

At the close of even, the patriarch sat in the gate of the city, having, perhaps, been occupied in business during the day, or in conversation with some of the principal inhabitants. He saw two strangers enter, whose appearance engaged his attention. Not yet aware of their supernatural character, and eager to show the hospitality deemed so sacred a duty in ancient times, he arose to meet them, and, with a reverential obeisance and with courteous

deference of manner, saluted them, and entreated as a favour that they would accept the shelter of his roof for the night. They declined, saying they would abide all night in the street; but Lot felt this answer a reproach on his hospitality, and pressed them so earnestly to partake of entertainment, that they entered his house and sat down to the feast prepared for them. At a late hour, amidst the clamorous cries and frantic uproar of the wicked multitude without, the strangers bade Lot assemble his family, and gather together whatsoever he would carry with him in immediate flight. The iniquity of the place is full: its cry "is waxen great before the face of the Lord;" and the new-comers are the commissioned messengers of destruction. Lot is not disobedient to the heavenly warning. He hastens to call his sons-in-law, informs them of the impending calamity, and urges them to lose no time in escaping from the devoted city; but he seems to them "as one that mocked," and they refuse to credit the appalling words his lips utter. As they were not of the number who escaped, it is reasonable to conclude that they disregarded altogether his entreaties to save themselves—convinced only when it was too late, of the truth of his prediction—and that they perished in the wide-spread desolation.

The remaining hours of night passed in vain remonstrances and solicitations, and in preparations for their hurried flight. As the dawn glimmered in the east, the celestial visitants warned the fugitives that no time must be lost. The command to Lot to take his wife and the two daughters that were under his roof, might imply that the others, if living, dwelt in homes of their own, and shared the stubborn incredulity of their husbands. Still as the father lingered, reluctant to leave those who staid to certain death, his companion seized his hand, and the hand of those who followed him, and drawing them with merciful force from the scene of struggle, led them forth, stopping not till they were without the gate. "Escape for thy life," they cried: "look not

behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

Lot feared to flee to the solitude of the mountain. Accustomed to live in the midst of human companionship, he clung, in lack of full confidence in God, to the protection of his own kind. A city was near at hand; he might be saved the necessity of a long and perilous flight; while unknown evils might await him, should he plunge into the dreary recesses of those primitive forests. Even in the haste and agitation of escape, he turns to the angel to entreat that the small city in which he desired to seek refuge may be spared. "Is it not a little one?" the inhabitants are few, and the burden of their iniquity cannot be so grievous as here; it is but a small thing to be saved, when so many are overwhelmed! let me escape thither, and shun the dangers of an abode, shelterless and defenceless, upon the distant mountain! His pleading prevails; the voice of the avenger, which had pronounced the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, in gracious condescension assures him that his petition is granted, and bids him hasten the departure of his family to the spared city. As the first beams of the sun kindle the eastern sky, the fugitives are hastening at their utmost speed—not once daring to look back—across the cultivated plain. Brimstone and fire descend in torrents from the heavens, as poured out from the hand of the Infinite Avenger himself. The soil, undermined with veins of bitumen and sulphur, is kindled and broken up by the streaming flames; thunders and a terrible quaking of the earth shake the foundations of the overthrown cities, while the fiery flood swallows up the habitations of men; and amidst the awful convulsion of nature, the fierce uproar of the elements, and the wail of the dying that goes up as the inundation sweeps the valley—the rivers overflow their banks, and the waters, rushing together, fill the desolated plain. The rich and blooming vale becomes a sullen lake, whose heavy and unwholesome waters are impregnated with the bitterness of the

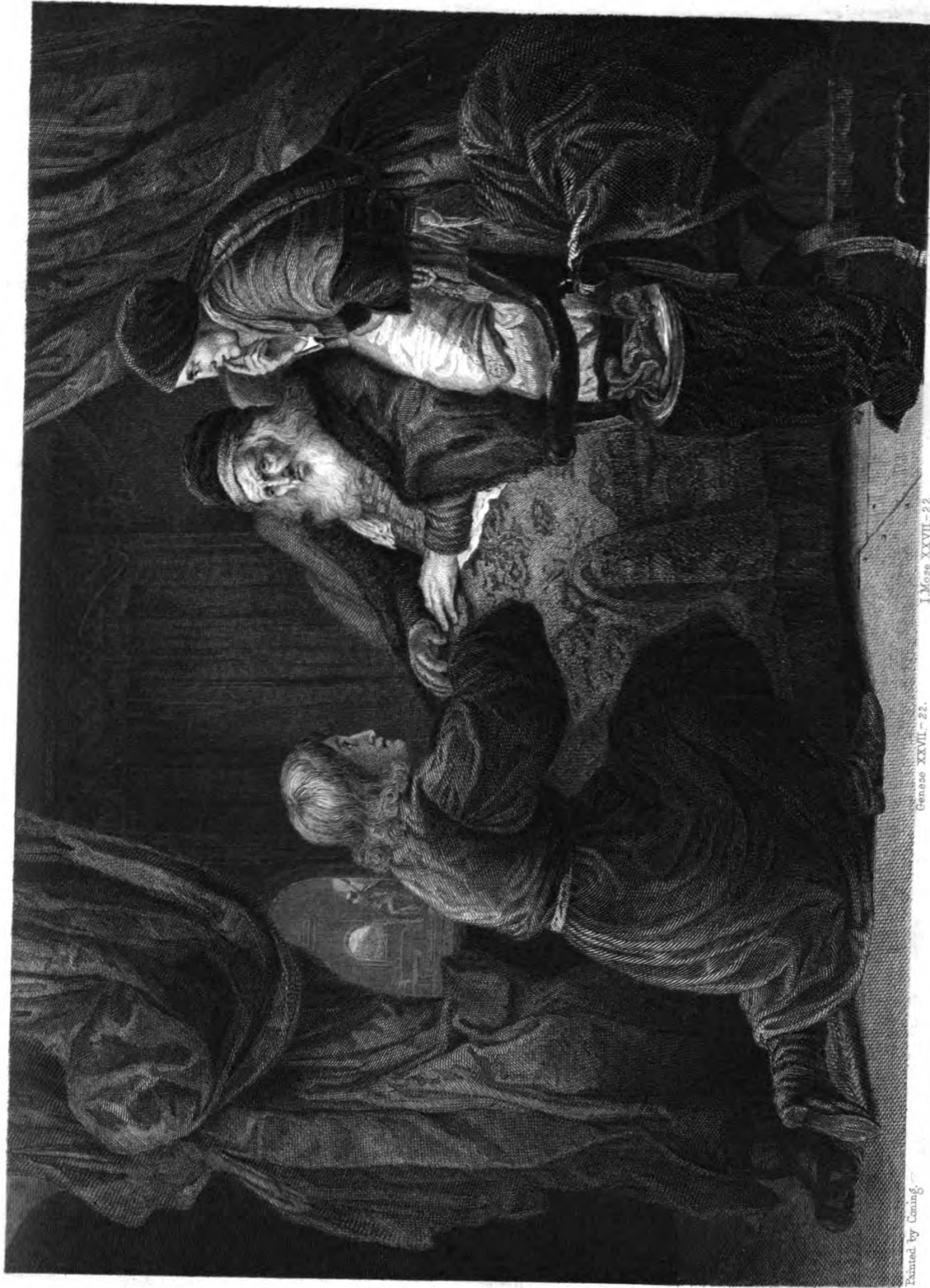
soil, and overhung by murky fogs; a scene of gloomy desolation; a monument to after-ages of the tremendous catastrophe described in Holy Writ. Malte Brun says of the valley of the Jordan—"It offers many traces of volcanoes; the bituminous and sulphurous waters of Lake Asphaltites, the lavas and pumice thrown out on its banks, and the warm-bath of Tabariah, show that this valley has been the theatre of a fire not yet extinguished. Volumes of smoke are often observed to escape from Lake Asphaltites, and new crevices are found on its margin."

The wife of Lot lingering behind in unwillingness to leave their possessions in Sodom, or, as some expositors think, attempting to return,—which opinion is favoured by the reference of our Saviour to the event, (St. Luke xvii. 31, 32,)—was suffocated by the saline and sulphurous vapours that loaded the atmosphere, and in the picturesque language of Scripture, "became a pillar of salt." The father and daughters remained not in Zoar; for he feared to dwell there. Probably the wickedness of the place, and its situation near the stagnant lake which covered the district once so beautiful and populous, were sufficient grounds for fear; and it is not unlikely that the remembrances of the terrific catastrophe, kept vivid by the locality, were to the last degree painful. He sought refuge, with the remnant of his family, in a cave on the mountains.

Early on that fateful morning arose the pious Abraham, and betook himself to the elevated place where, the evening previous, he had stood before the Lord interceding for the doomed cities. So gracious had been the assurance that for the sake even of ten righteous persons Sodom should be spared, if they were found therein—that some hope lingered in his heart that the city in which dwelt the family of his beloved kinsman might have escaped the general destruction. With anxiety strongly mingled with fear, but tempered by a pervading trust that the Judge of all the earth would do right, he hastened to the spot commanding a view of all the land of the plain. What a sight met his gaze! The level

beams of the sun were stifled in thick clouds of sulphurous vapour; the roar of the fiery storm was still heard, as the smoke of the country, like the smoke of a furnace, ascended to blot out the face of the sky. But amidst the terror of this appalling sight, the soul of the patriarch was comforted; for he knew God had remembered his prayers, and had saved from death those whom he loved.

How suggestive is this history—how full of solemn lessoning! We see the family of a righteous man transplanted from its proper and genial associations of virtue, and growing up in the midst of corruption; we see him vexed in soul from day to day by the enormities practised around him, yet lacking resolution to lose all for conscience' sake: hoping to shield those dear to him from the wickedness besetting them on every side, and to keep pure the atmosphere of his home,—or mourning that the contamination has crossed his guarded threshold. The decree of punishment goes forth; and just were it that the innocent, in circumstances like these, should perish with the guilty. But mercy arrests the uplifted sword. The accumulated vengeance cannot descend—the destroying arm must delay to strike, till Lot has escaped. The visible interposition of God's messengers snatches him and his family from ruin; for his sake, the fiery destruction passes by the spot whither he flies for refuge. Does not the scene impressively teach how precious in the sight of the Lord are the lives of those who obey Him! If angels must be sent to save the one family in a nation of sinners, whose head is a man of prayer—feeble though his faith may be—how shall the protecting care and goodness of God cease to abide with the least of his saints!



Engraved by R. Staines.

Genese XXVII-22.

Genese XXVII-22.

Printed by Cuning.

Isaac blessing Jacob.

V.

ISAAC.

BY REV. G. W. BETHUNE, D.D.

THE life of Isaac, apart from the history of his father and that of his sons, has few passages of much interest ; yet the character of Isaac is eminently beautiful and instructive. Without any of that selfish ambition which seeks aggrandizement at the expense of others, or that feverish restlessness which craves continual excitement, or that jealous irritability which fires at every semblance of affront, or that revengeful tenacity which contends for the shadow of right, he lived retired from public gaze in the bosom of his family and the fellowship of his God.

He was a man of strong affections. An only son, and much caressed by his parents, their indulgent tenderness seems only to have fed the flame of his filial piety. With respectful and confiding obedience, he accompanied his father to the mountain of sacrifice, and was bound for death unresistingly, not shrinking even from the upraised knife. With sincere and affectionate sorrow he long mourned the loss of his doting mother. With deferent and grateful humility he received a wife of his father's choice, to a love fond, changeless, and undecaying. The welfare of his children was the happiness he chiefly sought ; and, although he showed a sinful partiality for Esau, his love for Jacob poured itself forth in unbounded blessings. The trials by which he was disciplined were those of the affections, for there the divine Chastener saw that the strength of his character lay. Isaac, the man of God, was a man of love. A strong example that the religion

which God approves, instead of souring the heart and restraining its charities, denies the appellation of believer to those who do not delight in the reciprocities of familiar and social kindness. Love, the name and character of God, is the imitation of their heavenly Father by his intelligent children. Love, in its outgoings and extensions, comprises all our duty. He, who made us, gave us to each other, and regards well pleased the relations he has ordained between us. He has bound the links of affection around our hearts by his own hand. The tie which unites us to Him, unites us to all his human family. When our hearts are full of love to God, they will gush forth love to our fellow-creatures, as surely as waters flow from their higher source to bless the plains beneath. Jesus Christ, the Divine Perfection of humanity, condensed the ten precepts into Love for God, and Love for man for God's sake. His incarnation was an incarnation of love. God so loved the world as to send Him; He so loved the world as to come; and, when He had given that proof of love than which there is none greater,—“laying down his life for his friends,”—He left with his people another Comforter as divine as himself—the Spirit of love. Jesus loved the world; in one strain of affection He rose far above the highest morals of earth-taught philosophy—He loved his enemies; but He loved with peculiar tenderness the mother of his human nature, and the chosen companions of his life. Love was the characteristic that won his warmest regard. He loved the zeal of Peter, the industry of James, the guilelessness of Nathaniel, but John “rested on his bosom.” He entered many a house to bless its inmates and accept their hospitality, but the homeless One was most at home with Lazarus and his sisters. So, while the primitive Church retained the odour of the Pentecostal unction, its distinguishing marks were love for the world which persecuted them, and especially love for the household of faith. What sight on earth so rich in moral beauty as a family dwelling together in love, when all have a common weal

and a common happiness, weeping in each other's grief, rejoicing in each other's joy! Could such love be extended throughout a nation, one brotherhood embracing all its citizens, and one interest uniting all hearts, how would the beauty of the scene be magnified! But if the world were thus interlinked, and man looked upon man only as a member of the same family, fed, sheltered, instructed, and blessed by one heavenly Father, would earth lack anything of Paradise? There is such a family,—there is such a world,—

“ For Love is Heaven, and Heaven is Love.”

To fit us for that heaven, the Gospel has been sent; therefore does it hallow the attachment of wedlock, inspire parental devotion and filial piety, rivet the golden chain of friendship, and prompt the far-reaching aims of philanthropy. He who on earth feels most of such sacred love, anticipates most of the heavenly excellence and bliss. Never does the Christian rebel more against the law of his nature, the law of the moral universe, the law of his God and Saviour, than when he permits enmity or even coldness towards others in his heart; never can he write a worse libel upon the character of the faith he professes, than when he refuses to “lay aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envyings, and evil-speakings;” and especially when those hellish mischiefs work in the church of God, or the family. If Charity begin not at home, how can she go forth into the world? Where love rules not, God does not dwell.

The character of Isaac at home was his character abroad. He was a man of peace. He preferred peace above all worldly possessions, and for peace he was willing to give up everything but principle. He digged one well; but when the herdsmen of Gerar strove for it, he called it *Esek* (contention), and left it to them. He digged another; they strove for it also; he called it *Sitnah* (hatred), and left it also to them. The God of peace

honoured his forbearance, and by the waters of *Rehoboth* (space) he found room and quiet.

This the world would call mean-spiritedness and cowardice ; but God approved and rewarded it, "for the fruit of peace is sown of them that make peace." Such will ever be the conduct of the true Christian. He will rather yield his rights than his serenity, and submit to wrong rather than contend. It is the instinct of the brute to seek revenge ; it is God-like to forgive. They took from our beloved Master all, even his life, adding insult and torture to the robbery, yet He prayed for them with his last breath. Alas ! how few Isaacs there are among us now ; and how much more do we love to linger near the waters of Esek and Sitnah, than to seek a Rehoboth in the providence of God ! How much might we do for God and his cause in the time we lose contending with men for our own ! Surely the Divine glory should be most precious in our estimation ; and God will take care of *ours*, while we devote ourselves to taking care of *His*.

There is, indeed, an extent to which we may carry such passive endurance of wrong, which, like all other extremes, becomes censurable. The allowance of gross, palpable injustice against ourselves, without an endeavour to bring the offender under rebuke of the law he has violated, may be to betray the rights of the community, to endanger social peace, and to foster crime ; the yielding of our lives when assailed by a brutal assassin, without attempting defence, is an unfaithful abandoning of a treasure committed to our keeping by God himself ; yet, even in these cases, we should act from conviction of duty, not the fury of anger or vengeance.

Neither should the proper defence of truth be ever abandoned on the plea of peace. The love of true peace, which flows only from true religion, will prompt every true believer earnestly to contend for "the faith once delivered to the saints." While there never should be enmity against the errorist, there never should

be truce with error. To dream of peace, while false doctrines abound, "leading men's souls to perdition," is to deceive ourselves, by crying "Peace! peace! when there is no peace." It may be observed, that none are so anxious for the silence of those who hold established truth, as those most busy in spreading new or revived heresies. Busy themselves in sowing error, they demand that all others shall sleep in silence, on pain of being denounced as disturbers of the Church. No matter how bold the attack which they make on doctrines dear to our own and our fathers' hearts, we are accused of persecution, or, at least, illiberality, if we resist the inroad. Nothing can be more unfair. The one who introduces occasion of offence is guilty of breaking the peace; and he who alarms the honest fears of the Church for the purity of her doctrines, has upon his conscience the shame of her discord.

If the matter in dispute be so unimportant as not to justify defence, it does not justify attack, and it is worse than idle to agitate the minds or consciences of others by unnecessary speculations. How should the controversialist, who has risked his standing upon novel doctrines, complain if his standing shares the fate of his innovation? If he had succeeded, he would have added to his fame; he must not murmur if he experiences the reverse. We are bound by the highest obligations never to yield the principles of our faith. Our zeal in defence should even outwork the errorist in attack. Yet should no bitterness against those whom God will judge, sully our zeal for his truth; and in most cases an earnest didactic spread of truth is the best polemical method, offensive and defensive, against error. The truth is never well spoken except when spoken in love. We may win our erring brother with kindness, but must make him only more obstinate if we take him by the throat. Religious controversy is necessary while error lasts, but is acceptable to God and profitable to man, only when love for the souls of men is its motive. The moment

rancour takes the place of charity, the devil is sure of triumph, whichever side gains the victory.

Isaac was a man of meditation ; we find him at eventide walking forth to meditate in the field. He chose that tranquil hour and secluded walk to give his thoughts a solemn, devout direction ; amidst the works of nature he held communion with his God. The incident enforces a duty and privilege too often neglected by Christians. Pious meditation is enjoined by precept and example throughout the Scriptures. " O how I love thy law !" says the Psalmist ; " it is my meditation all the day long ;" and, speaking of the blessed saint, who is like the ever green and fruitful tree, " planted by the rivers of water," he declares that he meditates upon the law of God both " day and night." So our divine Master, pressed as he was by cares and merciful duties, found sweet comfort and strength in retirement for this sacred purpose. On the other hand, the reason assigned for the ignorance of God in those who have the means of knowledge, is, that they " do not consider."

The importance of meditation is readily seen when we remember that the food of the Christian is truth, which must be digested as well as received. If forethought and retrospect be necessary for the business of this life, how much more must it be for the life to come ! What is faith but the application and appropriation of truth to ourselves ? What is repentance but a sorrowful review of past sin, and a careful determination of our future course ? What is hope but an enjoyment by anticipation of the blessed promise ? Is self-examination necessary ? We cannot go through the salutary process but by meditation. Is it our duty to rule our conduct by the law of God ? We cannot do so without meditation ; neither can we otherwise feel the constraining influence of Christ's law to holy devotedness.

It is to the neglect of this duty that the Christian may trace many of his wants and difficulties. He often complains that he

cannot keep his thoughts from wandering, and that his heart is cold in prayer ; yet, perhaps, he has entered his closet, and, after a hurried reading of a little Scripture, knelt before God without preparation for the difficult exercise of communing with the heart-searching and inscrutable One. He has not reminded himself by meditation of the service he wishes to perform. He pronounces the words of adoration, but he does not feel their power, because he has not meditated on the character, the perfections, and presence of God. He uses phrases of confession, but he has not reviewed his conduct that he might remind himself of his sins. He only begins, and his mind labours to recall the mercies he has enjoyed, while the terms of thanksgiving are on his lips ; and he asks for future blessings, though he has omitted to inquire of his heart what the graces are that he needs. No wonder that his thoughts wander. Five minutes of prayer, made intelligent by five minutes of meditation, is worth an hour of attempted prayer without such a preface. No wonder that he has doubts concerning Scriptural truth, while he reads the Scriptures without meditating on their meaning ! One verse well digested is worth a chapter superficially glanced over. No wonder that he is betrayed into sin and hesitates as to his duty, when he has not meditated on his probable temptations and the claims of Providence ! No wonder that he gains no benefit from the exercises of the sanctuary, when he has neither prepared his mind by previous meditation, nor by subsequent reflection impressed upon his soul the lessons he heard ! No wonder that he grows not in grace, while he gives his thoughts carefully to his temporal concerns, and fences in no hour for holy thoughts alone ! Sweet is the season and the scene of such pious meditation ! Angels hover around us then, and heavenly voices whisper to our hearts, as we bathe our spirits in the clear wells of truth, freshening their wings for an upward flight.

Isaac was a man of retirement. Abraham was distinguished by

bold enterprise ; Jacob, by active and persevering industry ; but Isaac lived remote from bustle and brilliant exhibitions ; yet was he dear to the Lord, and the God of Abraham and Jacob was the God of Isaac also. He pleased his God, and ripened for heaven at home in the circle of his household. Prominence of station and parade of notoriety are far from necessary to a life of piety and usefulness. To comply faithfully with the duties of our lot, whatever that may be, is the requisition which God makes of his believing servants. It is not for the praise of men that we are to live, though we should so live that they may glorify our Master ; but the eye of God can see us in the humblest walks and the most secluded sphere of duty. On the day of divine retribution, when shame and everlasting contempt will be poured upon the laurelled conqueror and the world-applauded hypocrite, the angels of heaven will delight to honour, as favourites of their King, many who have lived unknown, it may be, despised by men. If God, by his providence, bid us "come up higher!" we are not to shrink from the prominence ; but until then we should not crave the excitement of a public theatre, nor murmur that our lot is low or our influence apparently small. If we will but faithfully inquire, we shall find plenty of work laid to our hand, and whatever our hands find to do, we are to do with our might. The sphere which God assigns to us is that where we may best serve him, and there we are most safe. In our families, in the circle of our neighbourhood, we may fill up all our time with obedient usefulness, and the God of Israel will own us, if we be faithful, in the day of revelation.

Especially should this theme be commended to the hearts of Christian women. There are some, who weakly and wickedly impugn the wisdom of Providence which has inhibited them the more prominent and notorious occupations of masculine engagements. It is not the more remarkable, that are the more important virtues, in the estimation of God. The highest office ever intrusted by God to one of our sinful race, was hers, who, as the

spouse of a poor man, in their quiet home amidst the hills of Judea, led with a mother's hand the *Jesus* of his people up to manhood. The piety of the two faithful women who nursed young Timothy and fed his growing soul with the bread of life, has exerted a more extensive and salutary influence upon the world, than all the princes who ever won the acclamations of the populace. What office so high and holy as that which moulds, by divine grace, the character of childhood in the image of God ! What duty so necessary, as the embellishment of home and household with domestic peace and familiar piety ! If ever woman deserves the name of *angel*, it is when she is the guardian spirit of the earthly *rest* that remains for man wearied and harassed by the bustle of the gross external world—then is she, indeed, a messenger sent to earth with blessed presages of heaven. Man, with all his physical strength and rugged faculties, is little worth, without the inspiring grace and constancy of woman's power. Her hand must buckle on his armour for the conflict, her hand cheer his fainting spirit, her hand bind up his wounds, her smile be the guerdon of his behest ; and if his mere sinewy prowess win the victory, more than half the glory belongs to her. Nay, there is more genuine heroism, more generous valour in her patient endurance, her faithful watchings by the bed of the helpless, her quiet devotedness to the comfort of others, than in all the feats of arms which heraldic chivalry has ever blazoned. Her resigned submission to not unfrequent tyranny from a brutal husband, that, peradventure, she may win back to honour and religion him whom all besides has abandoned, but to whom she clings with a love which no unkindness can change, and even crime cannot divorce, has in it more than the firmness of the martyr who sings amidst the brief pangs of the fatal flame. He suffers before the crowd an affliction which, compared to hers, is "light and but for a moment." She suffers long under the eye of God alone. She often drinks a fearfully bitter cup, but she will share the joy of Him who

drank the cup of trembling for us. Oh! let woman see to it that our homes be holy, and the world will lose half its sin!

Isaac was a man of affliction. His retirement was no retreat from sorrow. He could not escape the lot of man—the wages of sin; but grace turned his trials into a discipline more precious than the refining of gold. His spirit, humbled as it was, was not pure. It needed the persecutions of men to teach him that earth was not his rest, and the troubles of his own household bade him not lean even upon the most beloved of creatures. “He learned obedience,” like his holy Lord, “by the things that he suffered.” The disciple of the Man of Sorrows must expect His baptism of tears.

“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrows are unknown.”

We cannot escape sorrow by shrinking from duty. We may be tempted to fly from our external trials by secluding ourselves from the world which we are bound to serve; but God can send into our very families, as He did into that of Isaac, what will be to us “a grief of mind.” The best comfort in trial is to know that we have met it in the way of duty; for then we have the assurance of our heavenly Father’s faithfulness, the sympathy of our once suffering Lord, and the promise of that heaven where pious sorrow will be overpaid by everlasting joy. God’s love is first to fill our hearts, and then every other affection will be blessed in the holy atmosphere; but upon nothing less than the Infinite should our hearts be set, for there is nothing steadfast but God, nothing certain but His will, and nothing satisfying but His favour.



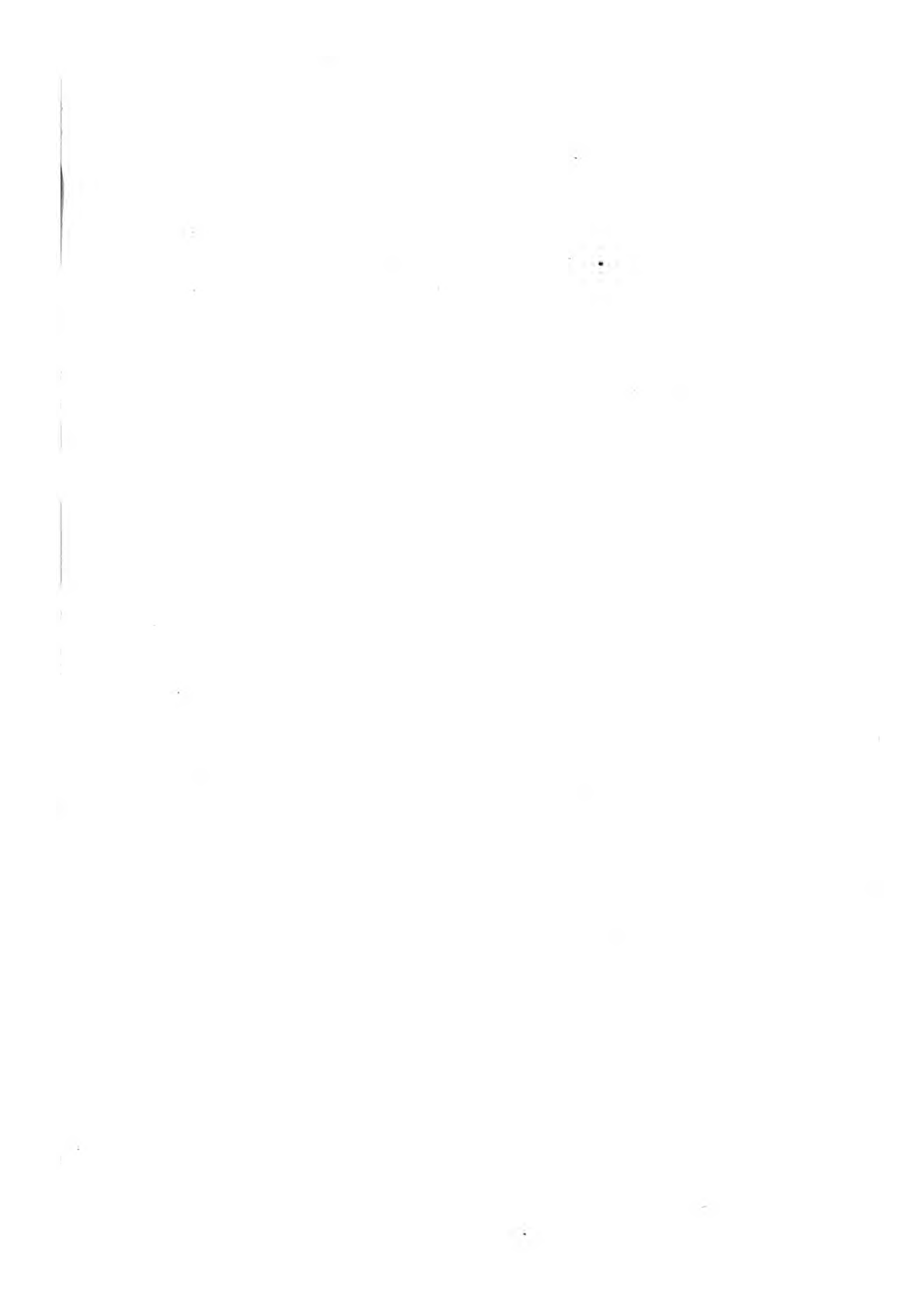
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Meeting of Jacob & Joseph.



VI.

JACOB.

BY REV. HENRY FIELD.

THE life of Jacob abounds in incident : it is full of lights and shadows. His domestic history is not altogether happy. A succession of family quarrels and feuds imbittered a great part of his life. Hated by his brother—forced when a young man to fly for his life—an exile from home for twenty years—and then falling out with his father-in-law—and, subsequently, the contentions of his children, the loss of his wife, and the violent death, as he supposed, of his favourite child, were the dark passages of his life. His dream—his early love—his reconciliation with Esau—his recovery of Joseph, are the brighter portions of his history. The impression becomes more pleasing as the narrative advances. His character is seen to be purified by suffering, and to be exalted by the habitual exercise of religious faith; and at last his sun goes down in peace.

The unhappiness of Jacob's life was owing partly to his own selfish and ungenerous disposition, and partly to that favouritism of a weak and partial mother, which has spoiled so many sons.

Esau and Jacob were twins; they were the only children of their parents. Nature had united them more closely than most brothers; yet their dispositions were opposite, and their course of life totally different. Esau was a man of great activity and daring—a bold hunter. Jacob was more timid, and fond of nestling by his mother's side. The fearlessness of Esau naturally attracted the admiration and fondness of his father, while Jacob was the

mother's boy. This difference of disposition is indicated in a few words: "Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison; but Rebekah loved Jacob."

Favouritism on the part of parents towards one child produces, almost inevitably, jealousy and discord in a family. Esau, perhaps, despised his brother as a timid man, staying at home and attending to affairs of the kitchen; while Jacob was envious of Esau that he had the birthright. This envy and discontent of Jacob were fostered by the injudicious fondness of his mother. Rebekah loved her son, but she took the direct course to spoil him—to ruin his disposition and his happiness. She was not a woman of strict integrity. Her principle easily yielded to her affection, and she encouraged her child in meanness and deception.

The sons grew up together to the age of twenty-five years, when the eager and ungenerous spirit of Jacob led him on one occasion to take advantage of his brother, when he was fainting with hunger, to get possession of the birthright. This act probably did not increase the affection of the brothers. But it was followed by one still worse—an act of direct deception and falsehood—by which Jacob got away his father's blessing. We are not of the number of those who think that reverence for the Scriptures requires them to apologize for, or extenuate, every bad action of a good man. Fidelity to truth requires us to see things as they are, and to speak of them as they deserve. We are to paint vice so as to excite indignation against it. This conduct of Jacob was most base and unnatural. History hardly presents a crime more utterly without an apology or excuse than that of this young man, standing at the bedside of his blind old father, with his hands and the smooth of his neck covered with goat-skins to aid his deception, and telling a deliberate lie, and that, too, for the purpose of defrauding his own brother!

This conduct was bitterly punished. It produced an instant rupture with his brother, and brought upon him a series of misfortunes which lasted the greater part of his life. Such selfishness needed the salutary discipline of suffering. A long exile from home must have made him often reflect with bitterness on his duplicity and fraud. In his sad and solitary hours, and, later in life, in his distress at the conduct of his children, he must often have reproached himself for his conduct to *his* father and brother.

This early history of Jacob, though the least pleasing part of his life, is perhaps the most instructive. It shows how jealousy and ambition may invade even the simple life of patriarchs and shepherds. The same passions destroyed their peace, which ruin the happiness of families at this day. Their domestic history is to us almost as much a warning as an example.

Esau and Jacob were alienated from each other by the unwise treatment of their parents. Their enmity and separation, which lasted twenty years, was the consequence of favouritism in the family. The trickery and lying of Jacob, encouraged by a mother whose affection outran her principle, stirred up a deadly feud between these brothers, so tenderly united by nature, which was not healed till years after, when that mother was in her grave.

Happily adversity was more useful to Jacob than maternal fondness ; and the sufferings which he had now to experience, will present us a nobler character and more happy scenes in after years.

After his cruel fraud upon Esau, Jacob was no longer safe in his father's house. He saw in the countenance of his brother a deadly hatred, which the presence of their parents alone restrained. His mother became alarmed for the consequences of her own folly, and sent him off secretly to his uncle in Mesopotamia.

Behold, then, a young pilgrim, with his staff in hand, stealing away from the tent of Isaac, and becoming a wanderer on the wide world ! His course lay towards Padan-aram, a distance of four hundred and fifty miles across a wild, uninhabited country. Alone

he crosses the desert, thinking bitterly, as he goes, of his selfishness and deceit, so justly punished. What had he gained by his dishonesty? Perhaps some advantage of property, if he should live to enjoy it. But he had banished himself from all whom he loved on earth, and become a wanderer and an exile.

Gradually, perhaps, the new scenes which met his eye as he approached Mesopotamia, beguiled his thoughts and raised his dejected spirits. At night the brilliancy of the heavens, as they shone down upon the desert, made him forget his troubles. It was after sunset one day when he arrived at a place suitable for him to spend the night. He had no shelter. A stone served for his pillow. But extreme weariness made him forget his hard bed, and he fell into a tranquil slumber; when, lo! a dream opened to him a glimpse of his future career. "And he dreamed: and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. And behold the Lord stood above it, and said: I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west and to the east, and to the north and to the south; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."

If we might allegorize this dream, we might regard it as a symbol of religion; the opening to the mind, of a spiritual world. "A door is opened in heaven." Faith commands the visible and invisible worlds. It takes away that sense of loneliness which man has in the present world. It opens to him a new sense, to discern that

" Millions of spiritual beings walk the earth
Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep."

These blessed spirits now fill the air. They brush past us in the twilight, and in the stillness of meditation their voices are almost audible.

Life is a different thing to a man, after he has learned the universal presence of God. The trees and flowers are different, since they now appear as the buddings forth, not of unconscious nature, but as the unfolding beauty of an Infinite Spirit, who pervades nature and gives it life. The brooks and hills, the valleys and mountains and stars, wear a new beauty to him who sees God in them all. "To him the universe is a temple; and life one continued act of adoration."

When Jacob awoke, "he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" He erected a monument on the desert, which became thenceforth a landmark in his history. This celestial apparition and voice appear to have made a deep impression on his mind, and to have been the date of the commencement of that earnest, religious life, for which he was afterwards so much distinguished. In all his wanderings after, he was supported by faith in a Power above him: "He endured, as seeing Him who is invisible."

The unhappiness of Jacob is now relieved by the most pleasing circumstance of his early life,—his attachment to his beautiful cousin Rachel. Their first interview shows the simplicity and innocence of the manners of that age.

A rural scene presents itself,—men and women tending their flocks in the open air. The occupation of a shepherd was highly honourable, being often united with that of a patriarch or a prince. A youthful stranger approaches, to ask if they know Laban, the son of Nahor. They reply, that they know him; that he is well; and that Rachel, his daughter, is at that moment coming with the sheep: "And while he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep: for she kept them. And it came to pass, when

Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flocks of Laban his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son : and she ran, and told her father." Laban received Jacob with the same cordiality as his daughter : "He ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house."

Here Jacob staid, enjoying the hospitality of his uncle, for a month. At the end of that time Laban proposed to give him employment at regular wages. Jacob replied by proposing to serve seven years for Rachel, Laban's younger daughter. If he had come to sue for her hand with a train of servants, and camels laden with presents, as Abraham's servant came to seek for a wife for Isaac, his courtship might not have been long. But Jacob was alone, without servants or presents, and had to make his way in the affections of both father and daughter by his own merit and industry.

The long term of service was rendered light by his attachment to her who was to be his reward. The whole story of love is told in one verse : "Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days for the love he had to her." What innocent joy he received as he tended the flocks of Laban in company with his beautiful shepherdess, as they drove them to some quiet valley to graze, or led them to the well to drink, or collected them in the fold at night.

After serving seven years, Jacob was cruelly disappointed on his wedding-night in having the elder sister Leah substituted in place of his appointed bride. Rachel was finally given to him as his wife, but he was compelled to serve for her seven years more. The cunning and duplicity which he had practised years

before on his brother Esau, God now punished by making him suffer from the miserly temper of Laban, a man more cunning and unscrupulous than himself. Laban was Rebekah's brother. The family was not remarkable for principle or conscientiousness. Rebekah aided in deceiving Isaac, to advance the interests of her favourite child ; and that same child was afterwards defrauded by Laban, her own brother. Such is the retribution which overtakes deceit and falsehood even in this world.

At length Jacob found that his situation was not altogether happy. The avarice of his father-in-law brought their interests into frequent collision ; and to get away from strife, Jacob resolved to return into his own land. He collected his cattle. His sons and his wives were mounted on swift camels ; and then the whole caravan fled across the desert. Twenty years had elapsed since he crossed that region before. Then he was a young man—alone and poor. Now he was returning with a large family, and flocks and herds. So privately had he stolen away, that it was not until the third day after he was gone, that Laban knew of his flight. He instantly collected a company among his kinsmen, and set off in pursuit. The march of the fugitives was so rapid, that it was not till after a week's hot chase that Laban and his party overtook them. At the close of the seventh day they descried in the distance the white tents of Jacob's encampment on Mount Gilead.

Laban was enraged at the departure of Jacob, from the loss to his own interests. But he clokes his selfish chagrin under a pretence of affection for his children, and rudely accosts his son-in-law : "Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly ; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harp ? and hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters ? thou hast now done foolishly in so doing."

Jacob replies by a simple story of the injuries he had received

from his avaricious father-in-law. Laban was a selfish and hard-hearted man ; but he was not without the feelings of a father. His heart relented at the tale of his own injustice, and he became reconciled on the spot. The father and son made a covenant together. Even Laban gave utterance to a beautiful sentiment at parting : " The Lord watch between thee and me, when we are absent one from another."

But no sooner is Jacob out of one danger than he is exposed to another. He is hardly escaped from his father-in-law, before he becomes alarmed at the prospect of meeting his brother. He heard that Esau is advancing to meet him with four hundred men. In this case his conscience reproaches him for having done wrong, and increases his apprehension.

The happiness of his wives and children depended upon his own safety, and required him to use every precaution. Jacob acted in this danger as a prudent and a pious man. He employed every means to avert the impending blow. He sent forward parties with presents to conciliate his offended brother. He divided his company into two bands, so that if one was cut off, the other might escape. After making these dispositions, he sought relief and support in prayer. At night he retired apart. The clear heavens were above him, calm as on that night when God appeared to him in a dream.

The next morning came, and Jacob's mind was at rest. The first sight of the brothers dissipated his fears. Powerful nature overcame their little jealousies. " Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, and they wept."

Jacob's life now reaches a period of comparative repose. He was again settled in his native land. He saw once more his old father Isaac. The care of his large family and of his numerous flocks afforded him sufficient occupation. He had attained ample wealth, and moved among his descendants with the dignity of a patriarch. It is pleasant to contemplate him at this period

of his life. His silver locks fell over a grave and venerable countenance, which bore an expression of tranquillity and religious hope. His years glided away in peace. He would have been completely happy but for the jealousy which now began to spring up among his children. It is easy to understand why he loved Joseph more than his other sons. Not only was he the child of Rachel, but there was a gentleness about him, unlike the rough dispositions of his brothers, and a magnanimity in striking contrast with their selfish and jealous tempers. But this superior goodness, instead of attracting the love, excited the hatred of his brothers. It is the spirit of low natures to hate any character which is above their own.

Forty years had passed since his return to his native land, and Jacob had become an old man, even in that age of patriarchs, when the mysterious disappearance of Joseph came to add a last pang to the sorrows of his life. A bleak, desolate existence followed during the years that he supposed him dead. It was not till a famine drove his sons into Egypt to buy corn, that he discovered the fact that his long-lost son was still alive, and at the head of a powerful empire. The news that Joseph was alive, was to Jacob like a resurrection from the dead. At first he could not believe it, and his heart fainted. But "when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him," his spirit revived, and he said, "It is enough, Joseph my son is yet alive, I will go and see him before I die."

The meeting of Jacob and Joseph is a beautiful subject for an artist. History presents nothing more touching. "Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel, his father, to Goshen, and presented himself to him, and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."

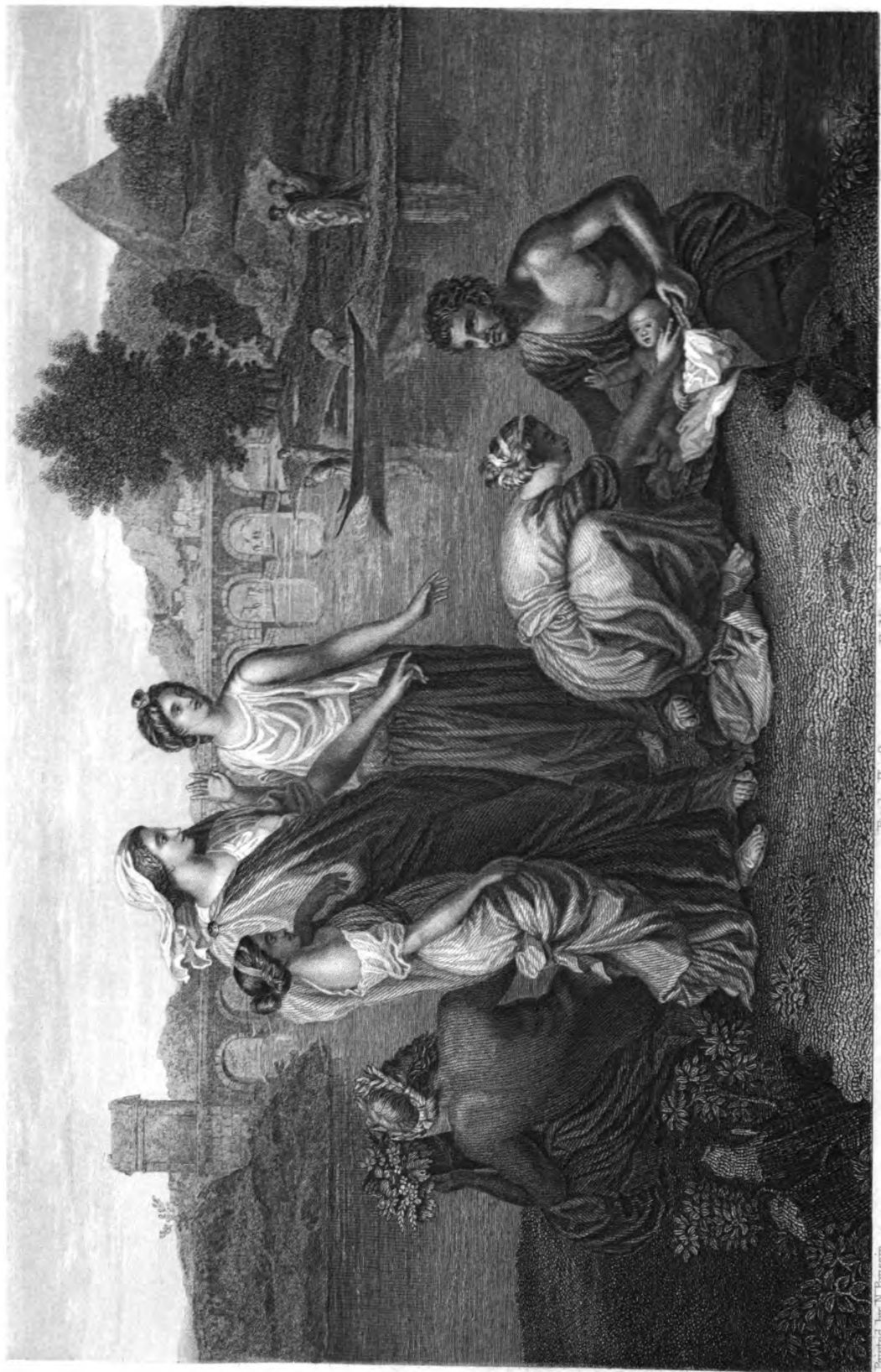
The last years of Jacob's life were the happiest. He lived in Egypt in honour seventeen years. He was introduced into the

presence of Pharaoh, before whom he appeared as representative of another generation. Touched with his venerable aspect, the monarch asked him his age. "The days of the years of my pilgrimage," answered Jacob, "are an hundred and thirty years. Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."

To render the old man's happiness complete, he saw all his family collected together again, and his children reconciled to each other. This affection continued after his death. Joseph's brethren feared that, when their father was gone, they should experience harsh treatment from him to whom they had showed no kindness. But their generous brother wept when the fear was mentioned to him. He forgave them all, and stilled their self-reproach by saying, "Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good."

The closing scene of the patriarch's life was affecting. Jacob knew that he must die, and the strong affection for his country which often visits old men, made him request, as a last favour, to be buried in his native land. He wished that his ashes might repose with those of his fathers, that they might be united in death! He called his son Joseph to his bedside, and said to him, "Bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt. But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying-place." Joseph promised to execute faithfully the dying request of his father, to transport his body to the cave of Machpelah, to repose by the side of the bodies of Abraham and Isaac.

There stood around that death-bed all the sons of Jacob, the fathers of twelve mighty nations, and he foretold their history. Memorable predictions! which have been verified in the fate of that strange people, whose character and position among the nations are a wonder to this day.



Engraved by W. H. Moss.

Exodus II - 9.

Printed by N. Ponsam.

"Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages."

VII.

THE FAMILY OF MOSES.

THE lustre of the public life of Moses has thrown into the shade the more private and domestic portions of his history. Besides, this has little connection with the great design of the Sacred Record, and is therefore briefly passed over. But the qualities exhibited in the administration of the great lawgiver also illustrate the character of the exemplary founder of a family. His disregard of self, and absolute devotion to the will of God—the kindly and generous affections which appear in many of his actions, his influence over others, and capacity to rule and guide them—his firmness and judgment, blended with a meekness that precluded motives of interest or ambition—all qualified him to fill with honour and usefulness a sphere more limited, as well as he filled the elevated place of lawgiver to the chosen people. It may not be profitless, therefore, to dwell on the outline given of his personal history.

The accession of a new monarch in Egypt, by whom the eminent services of Joseph were forgotten, brought into rigorous bondage the race of strangers, who, at first guests in the land, had increased and multiplied so as to become formidable to its governors. The policy adopted to diminish their numbers and crush their spirit—that of forcing them to labour in building cities, and in all manner of hard service, oppressing them with taskmasters, who exacted toil beyond their strength—having failed in its object, the bloody edict was issued for the destruction of all their male children, and the execution of the decree was committed to the king's servants. Amidst the terrors of this law, which none dared resist, the wife of Amram, a descendant of Levi, bore a son,

whose existence she concealed three months from the executioners of the barbarous edict. When she could hide him no longer, she committed her cherished child to the mercy of God, in faith, as we are informed, leaving the event in the hands of a wisdom greater than her own. In his ark of bulrushes, laid among the flags on the river's brink, the child was found and adopted by a princess, who, at the suggestion of his sister Miriam, employed the mother to nurse the infant. Some of the ancient classic fables in which the idea of immutable destiny is prominent—a destiny against which the short-sighted will of mortals struggles in vain, bringing about the accomplishment by efforts to avert what is impending—might have been suggested by this simple but picturesque history. Rabbinical tradition represents the Egyptian king mysteriously warned of one among the Hebrews, who was to bring his power to the dust, and achieve deliverance and greatness for his own people. Although nothing in the Scripture narrative sanctions such a belief, the vague dread cherished by the tyrant of the growing strength of the nation held in slavery and rendered hostile by oppression—is particularly mentioned. In the hope and expectation of soon cutting short the race, he takes into his household the very person appointed for the work of deliverance, and causes him to be trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. It appears that some consciousness of his own high destiny was in the mind of Moses from his youth. His rank, favour at court, and the brilliant prospects open to ambition, were deliberately renounced by him when he had reached the age of manhood. He observed the sunken and servile condition of the seed of Abraham ; his heart went forth to those poor toiling slaves, and he determined to cast his lot among them. He chose “to suffer affliction with the people of God,” rather than live the favourite of a monarch, the heir of honours and wealth and power, among the proud and idolatrous. His generous choice made, and probably the impulse of his divine

mission upon him, one day while witnessing the sufferings of his brethren, he was moved by indignation to slay an Egyptian for some cruelty exercised upon one of the slaves. The Hebrews showing little gratitude for his interference and courage in avenging their wrongs—and his secret reaching the ears of Pharaoh, from whom he could expect no indulgence after so daring a crime—the new-born hopes of Moses for his people were extinguished. They had grown, he reasoned, servile in spirit as well as in condition, and would rather sacrifice than support one who should rise up in their defence.

After the failure of his enterprise, Moses fled from Egypt, an exile from the country of his birth, and wandered alone among the roving tribes in the land of Midian. He had left all his hopes behind, and had now no aim nor purpose save to escape from persecution and danger. He sits by a well where the herdsmen come to draw water for their flocks, wearied with the journey of the day, under the parching sun of that climate. The daughters of the priest or prince of Midian come to draw water—a circumstance which presents a curious picture of primitive customs. It is likely that the scarcity of water in those sandy regions was at times very great; for the women, while drawing for their father's flock, are driven away by the shepherds—probably the followers of some neighbouring chief—who come with the same purpose to the well. The lonely stranger takes their part, helps them against the intruders, and gives water to their flock. They inform their father of the good turn done them by the Egyptian, and Moses accepts the hospitable invitation to take up his abode with Reuel, and serve him in the humble capacity of a shepherd. He is joined to him more closely by marriage with his daughter Ziporah; and in process of time sees his children around him. Moses appears to have been happy in this new mode of life; he "was content," notwithstanding the ease and splendour of his early years; for his mind was no longer distracted by the scenes

passing daily before his eyes. Of the character of Zipporah we know little; but from what is related of her, we may infer that she was in mind and heart not unworthy the choice of the future lawgiver. Her prompt action to avert the displeasure of the Lord, when it was awakened against Moses for his neglect of a solemn ordinance, indicates both understanding and feeling; and when it is intimated, in the narrative of the twelfth chapter of Numbers, that she had become an object of jealous dislike to Miriam and Aaron—by whom her Ethiopian or Arabian origin is charged against her—we cannot but suppose her occupying a position of dignity and influence. There is no intimation given that Moses ever married any other woman.

In his children he was more fortunate than his brother Aaron, whose sons perished for their desecration of sacred things in the performance of religious rites. The eldest son of Moses was called Gershom, “for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land;” the younger Eliezer, in remembrance of his providential deliverance from the sword of Pharaoh. Thus he remembered his exile, and the power which had saved him from death in Egypt; but during the forty years that passed while he kept the flock of his father-in-law, his ambition seemed bounded by the deserts and mountains among which he led his herds for pasturage. The zeal of the patriot, which had once burned in his bosom, no longer impelled him to rash acts of bravery. The oppressions of his countrymen, still sending up to heaven a cry by reason of their cruel bondage, seem to have gone from the recollection of Moses, while he was as entirely forgotten by them. The strength and enthusiasm of his youth had passed away in the natural course of human life; and the approach of old age—for even allowing the then proportion of life’s duration, he was an old man—found him still in the obscurity of a simple shepherd. The period of his stay in Midian may be said to comprise the whole of his life as the head of a family; for amid the cares of his public

position, his whole time and attention were occupied with his duties to the nation over which he was placed. These forty years embrace what is usually the most active and useful portion of existence. Moses was not summoned to his great work till after they had expired—perhaps that he might learn dependence, not on his own sufficiency, but the help of Omnipotence. It is evident that he had abandoned the patriotic hope he once cherished, from his answer to the Deity on the first announcement of his gracious intention—"Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"—and from his sinful reluctance to undertake the mission (Exodus iv. 13.) even when assured of support.

The years of his shepherd-life were undoubtedly the happiest, although alienated from his people, and forgetful of the covenant sealed with Abraham. He was "content" to dwell in his seclusion and servitude, ignorant alike of the toils and rewards of a higher service. The peace of those desert borders of Arabia was not likely to be invaded by foreign foes; the lowly herdsman has no more to do with the strife of individuals or nations; his family is growing up in his home, and his spirit of adventure has long since given place to a love of quiet and domestic security. Leading the flock of his father-in-law for pasturage across the desert, to a mountainous district between two forks of the Red Sea, he arrives at the mountain afterwards consecrated by the name of "the Mountain of God." In these solitudes, the presence of the Deity is manifested to him, and he receives the commission to go forth as the appointed deliverer and leader of Israel. He returns to Jethro, his father-in-law, and requests permission to visit his brethren in Egypt. It does not appear that Jethro has any intimation of his Divine mission; yet he expresses no surprise at the sudden resolution, adopted after almost a lifetime of contented exile; his assent and blessing are given, and, assured of safety from his former enemies, Moses departs for Egypt, accompanied

by his wife and sons, and bearing the rod of God, the instrument of so many miracles, in his hand. The conduct of Zipporah at the inn upon the way, where she hastily fulfils the rite, for the neglect of which Moses stands under the heavy displeasure of the Lord, has been noticed. She was sent back, with her sons, to Midian, probably after the meeting with Aaron in the wilderness.

The wonders wrought by Moses, and the mighty events in which he became so conspicuous, belong not to the subject under consideration. When the fame of all that the Lord had done for him and for Israel his people, reached the ears of Jethro in his secluded dwelling-place, he set out, with Zipporah and her sons, and journeyed into the wilderness, to the Israelitish camp by the Mount of God. The renowned leader, at the announcement of the approach of his father-in-law and family, went forth to receive them with due respect, and conducted them to his tent. How solemn, yet how joyful, must have been that meeting! The change in the fortunes of him, who, from a simple herdsman, had risen to be the head of a numerous people, their leader in battle, and interpreter of the will of their Divine Sovereign, had not changed the affectionate nature which still sought its enjoyment in the domestic circle. They sat together in the tent—those loved ones united after a long and eventful separation—to ask each other of their welfare with an interest that lingered on the smallest details, and to recount to one another all that had taken place since their parting. This domestic picture—one of the most touching and beautiful in the Bible—is the more impressive from the contrasts with which it is presented. It is a scene of repose and happiness in the midst of a life of action and anxiety. The great general and lawgiver, burdened with multiform duties involving a nation's destiny, here rests for a space, to taste a joy the meanest of those who followed him may call his own. The strange vicissitudes through which he and his people have passed, with the glory that has been revealed—on the one hand the mysterious future, dark

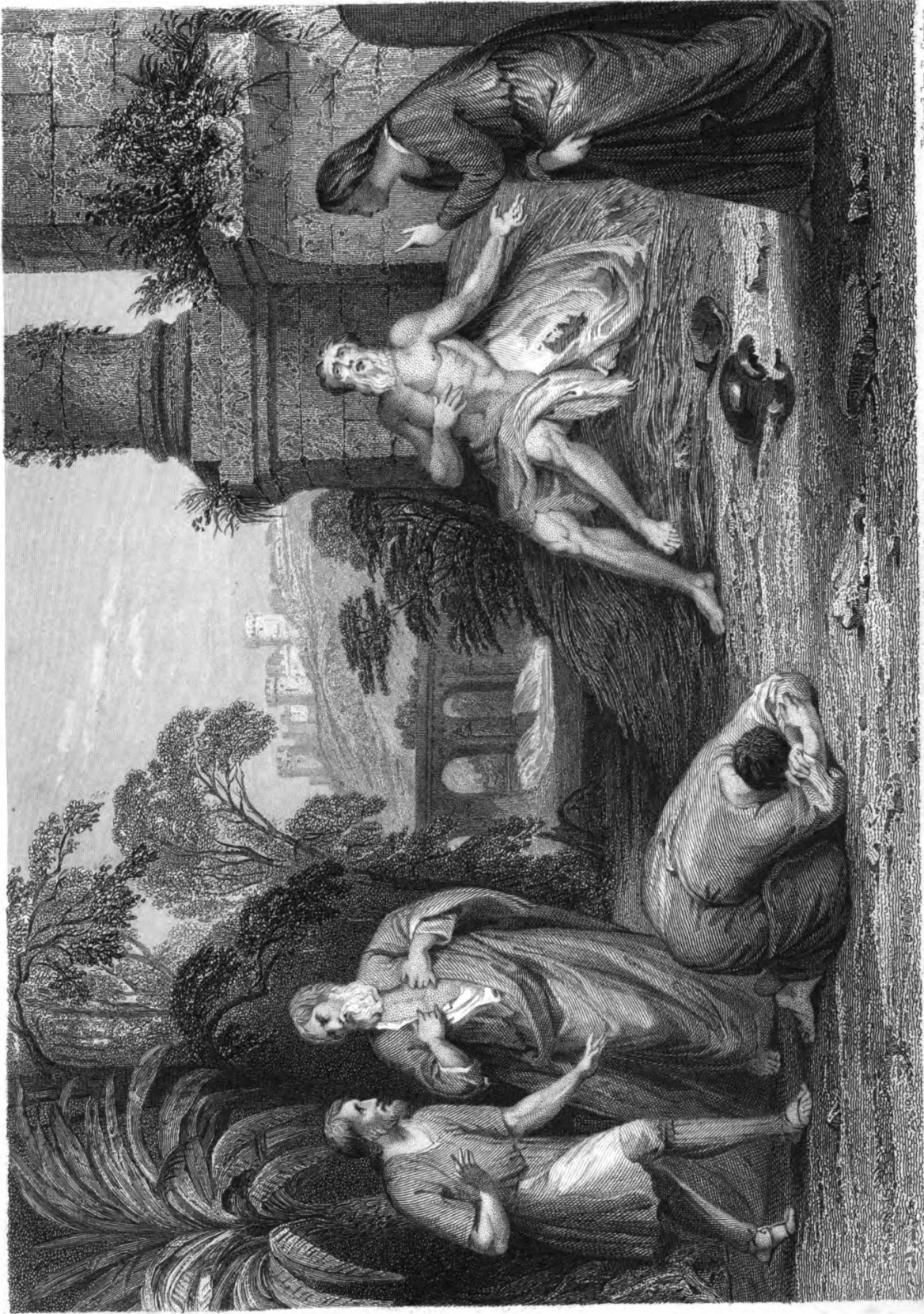
to mortal eyes, but lighted by the reflection of the guiding pillar of fire—the far-shining lamp of faith on the other; and in the midst the peace which is the fruit of a conscience void of offence towards God and man, confidence in intrusting all that concerns him individually to the keeping of his Heavenly Protector, gratitude for the mercy that has directed the steps of those dear to him, and brought them together once more to join their praises! The aged father-in-law hears the wondrous story from the lips of Moses, and breaks forth into an ascription of blessing to Him who has ransomed Israel. His faith is strengthened: “Now I know,” he exclaims, “that the Lord is greater than all gods;” and in the plenitude of his joy and thankfulness, he presents a burnt-offering and sacrifices. Aaron and the elders of Israel partake of the holy feast, and celebrate this happy reunion of the family circle.

With the morrow returns the duties of the leader and sole judge of Israel. An intimation is given of their labourious character, when it is said, “The people stood by Moses from the morning unto the evening.” The prudence and sagacity of Jethro appear evident in the counsel he gives for the appointment of subordinate officers for a regular administration in common, civil, and religious affairs. Moses renders respect to his father-in-law by attention to the advice so wisely and kindly given. The conduct of both is marked by dignified affection in their several relations; and we admire the sympathy of Jethro, and his readiness to enter with interest into the affairs of his son-in-law, to support and aid him by his counsel and prayers, as well as the respect paid by Moses to “all that he said.” The visit being ended, the old man returns to his own country, leaving the wife and children of Moses at the encampment.

Nothing more is said of Zipporah, who probably continued with the camp, till she is mentioned as being complained of by Miriam and Aaron, in their seditious language against the law-

giver, so signally rebuked by Divine interposition. We know not of the share she bore in what her husband did, or in the wanderings of after years. When the people lapsed into idolatry in despair of the return of Moses from the Mount, or amidst the many terrible scenes she must have witnessed, it is pleasing to imagine her steadfast in courage and faith. Probably her death took place long before that of Moses, as no mention is made of her, and the great prophet met his fate alone upon the mount whence he had the sight of the promised land.

Of the family of Joshua no more is known than may be understood from his noble declaration—so expressive, so encouraging, and so full of significance for all heads of families—“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”



Engraved by R. Staines.

Job I.-21.

Job I.-21.

Printed by E. Hart.

Job in affliction?



VIII.

JOB AND HIS FAMILY.

BY REV. M. S. HUTTON, D.D.

THE Book of Job affords one of the most interesting pages of man's history, not only because he himself is one of the most interesting of men, but because the book is of such remote antiquity. It is the single and solitary record of its distant times; the most ancient record in the world. Its author was the first inspired writer of the sacred volume. He lived before the sacred historian Moses was born, and wrote long before the Law was given on Mount Sinai. Indeed there is reason to suppose that the book was written prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and, therefore, before the Church of God was formed in the family of Abraham, and only about six hundred years after the Deluge.

In this light alone it is a most interesting book; relating to a man who lived at a period almost beyond church-history, before the age of man was shortened to its present brief span; relating to one who was a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, out of the ordinary church line, yet surpassed by none in religious devotion; as a fragment—a most beautiful fragment of patriarchal times, and of a patriarchal church—it is unrivalled in interest.

But it possesses also internal properties which make it invaluable. Says a late commentator, in speaking upon this subject, "As a mere specimen of composition, apart from all the questions of its theological bearings, as the oldest book in the world, as

reflecting the manners, habits, and opinions of an ancient generation, as illustrating, more than any other book extant, the state of the sciences, the ancient views of astronomy, geology, geography, natural history, and the advances made in the arts, this book has a higher value than can be attached to any other record of the past, and demands the profound attention of those who would make themselves familiar with the history of the race. The theologian should study it, as an invaluable introduction to the volume of inspired truth ; the humble Christian, to obtain elevated views of God ; the philosopher, to see how little the human mind can accomplish, on the most important of all subjects, without the aid of Revelation ; the child of sorrow, to learn the lessons of patient submission ; the man of science, to know what was understood in the far distant periods of the past ; the man of taste, as an incomparable specimen of poetic beauty and sublimity. It will teach invaluable lessons to each advancing generation : and to the end of time, true piety and taste will find consolation and pleasure in the study of the book of Job."

To this he might have added, as not the least of its valuable contributions, the picture which it affords of family religion and family union, under circumstances so different from our own ; a picture, the light and shade of which exhibit, with great certainty, the error of that theory which advocates the onward progress of society from a supposed infantile state. It would puzzle such theorists exceedingly, to find, even in our day of acknowledged light and civilization, after a lapse of nearly four thousand years, either a man more exalted in mental or moral qualities than Job, or a picture of family religion more delightful and instructive than that which is afforded by this book.

His birth-place and his family connexions are unknown, There are six different places in the East, where, it is said, sleep his ashes ; and there are also numerous traditions among the Arabs respecting him. These things corroborate the idea suggested by

the book itself—that the residence of the patriarch poet was in the northern part of Arabia.

In his worldly condition, at the time when his story opens, he was blessed beyond the ordinary lot of men. Says the sacred historian, “This man was the greatest of all the men of the East.” He held the station which at the present day is designated by the title of Emir or Sheik, and his mode of life was the natural combination of the pastoral nomadic life of his age and his country with the more settled and permanent manner of living which his wealth would induce.

At the period in which we are contemplating him, Job had probably reached the age of seventy or eighty ; and, according to the length of human life at that time, he was in the full vigour of manly strength. To form some estimate of the high esteem which his sincere piety and undoubted worth had produced, you have but to mark his passage through the streets, as he proceeds to the gates of the city, where the people are wont to assemble upon public occasions, and where the ordinary judicial courts are held, in which it was the duty of Job, as Emir or Sheik of his tribe, to preside. He himself thus describes it :—

“ When I went out to the gate through the city,
When I prepared my seat in the street,
The young men saw me and hid themselves ;
And the aged arose and stood up :
The princes refrained talking,
And laid their hands on their mouth ;
The nobles held their peace,
And their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth.
When the ear heard me, then it blessed me,
And when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me.
Unto me men gave ear and awaited,
And kept silence at my counsel ;
After my words they spake not again ;
And my speech dropped upon them :
And they waited for me, as for the rain.”

It is not, however, in his public life that we desire to note his character, but in his private relations, as a man, a father, and a head of a family. Let us then endeavour in imagination to follow him, as he retires from the court in the gate, and seeks the repose and enjoyment of his home. His official duties are not allowed to interfere with those which he owes to his family and to his God. Let us suppose the evening sacrifice to have been offered, and the family of the patriarch to be seated in their usual places. The father's eyes rest for a few moments upon the happy group with paternal pride, and then are raised in adoration and thankfulness to Him, whose name is to be blessed whether he gives or takes away.

The momentary silence is broken by the father's effort to teach his children the knowledge of divine things. He speaks to them of God : he informs them that there is but one supreme, wise, and glorious Being ; that he is almighty, omniscient, inscrutable, invisible, gracious, ready to forgive the truly penitent ; indeed, if we are allowed to judge of the extent of Job's knowledge of God, from the language used in this book, we must conclude that in all points, not expressly revealed by the Gospel of Christ, the knowledge of Job was not inferior to our own. Nowhere can we find descriptions of the Most High, which, in grandeur, beauty, and truth, surpass those contained here. Where—in what book, ancient or modern—can we find a better or more sublime description of the impossibility of comprehending the Divine nature than the following ?

“ Behold, God is great and we know him not,
Neither can the number of his years be searched out.
Canst thou by searching find out God ?
Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection ?
It is as high as heaven ; what canst thou do ?
Deeper than hell ; what canst thou know ?
The measure thereof is longer than the earth,
And broader than the sea.”

This great and glorious Being, Job tells his children, was their creator and preserver; that he formed man, and created the earth and the heavens; and that, therefore, it became them to remember him now, in the days of their youth. There is a passage of unequalled beauty and sublimity, which, if it be allowable to consider it as illustrating Job's knowledge of creation, we may quote, as the substance of what he taught his children on this subject:—

“Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?
Declare, if thou hast understanding,
Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest!
Or who hath stretched the line upon it?
Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened?
Or who laid the corner-stone thereof?
When the morning stars sang together—
And all the sons of God shouted for joy?
Or who shut up the sea with doors,
When it brake forth, as it had issued out of the womb?
When I made the cloud the garment thereof,
And thick darkness a swaddling band for it,
And brake up for it my decreed place,
And set bars and doors—
And said—Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther;
And here shall thy proud waves be stayed?”

Job was also well acquainted with the true history of man and his fall; and he showed his children how impossible it was for man to obtain by his own exertions, a righteousness which would justify him before God. He talked to them of their innate depravity, of the true source and hope of pardon, and made known to them something of the mode of pardon, as he sought to explain and urge the duty of sacrificing to the Lord; he himself, as the officiating priest of his family, setting them a noble example.

From such instructions, gratifying fruits might with reason be expected, nor are we disappointed—a single glimpse is given, but it is such as enables us to form a just estimate of its real value.

As time rolls on, the sons of Job themselves become heads of families ; but though they have left the paternal roof, we find them unforgetful of the paternal associations and home enjoyments. Separation in life cannot make them strangers to each other ; the family bonds are not sundered ; new ties, however powerful and tender, cannot weaken the ties of brotherhood ; and the family love taught in the father's hall, burns with undimmed brightness. What an insight does this fact alone give us into the religious and moral training which they had received ! It assures us that no bitter memories, no sad jealousies, no family jars, existed there. In this respect, how superior were they to most of the families of the Patriarchs whose history is recorded in the word of God ! Jealousy broke the peace of Abraham's family, and made his eldest son an alien from his father's house. The sons of Isaac dwelt not harmoniously beneath the same roof, and for the sake of peace had to separate. The sons of Jacob envied their brother Joseph to such an extent, that they drove him from among them. Aaron and Miriam were not always at peace with Moses ; and even in the family of Adam, unbrotherly feeling and irreligion wrought fratricide. But no such record disgraces the family of Job : there affection reigned—reigned unbroken and undisturbed ; even separate interests, and new associations and ties could not lessen it. And can we trace this to any other cause than such religious training as we have supposed ? No—it is religion alone which can soften down the asperities of our nature, and thus bind together. It is the love of God which produces love—the harmony of the family circle is no peculiar characteristic, where God is unknown and unhonoured.

At certain periods, we are informed, the family of Job were wont to hold family reunions, probably upon the birth-day of each brother : for at that age of the world, and in that land, the birth-day was usually observed with great solemnity and rejoicing ; and the Chaldee version of the Bible adds, that each of these feasts

lasted seven days : a supposition not at all improbable. The sacred historian mentions a single fact concerning these family gatherings, which, however simple in itself, is full of meaning. He tells us that the joy of the brothers was not complete without the presence of their sisters. This fact at once gives elevation, beauty, and character to these meetings. We ask no stronger, nor more decided testimony, both as to the character of these young men and to the moral and proper conduct of these feasts, than we have here ; there cannot be a more significant proof of the refined and elevated character of the family than this attention to their sisters. The regard paid to females, and the place which they hold in society, is a perfect test of the state of refinement in a community. Nay, it may be used as a test of the prevalence of true religion. It is the Bible alone which has placed woman in her proper station—on a level with and by the side of man. The single declaration, therefore, “ they sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them,” must be regarded as conclusive evidence, not only of the elevated, moral, and refined character of Job’s family, but also of their family piety.

But there is another fact mentioned, and another scene presented, which not only show the correctness of this view, but add incalculably to the beauty of this family picture. We allude to the conduct of Job, and the closing act of these festivities. “ And it was,” so says the sacred historian, “ when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning and offered burnt-offerings, according to the number of them all ; for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.”

In these family meetings Job greatly rejoiced : but he feared also ; he feared lest God had not been remembered as he ought to have been. He did not know that any particular sin had been committed by his children ; he had seen nothing wrong, but

knowing the native depravity of the heart, he was apprehensive that God, as the author of their blessings, might not have been truly honoured; and, therefore, early on that morning which followed the close of these joyful seasons, he sent for his children; he brought them again around the family altar. Again, as in former years, their beloved father is before them, as an officiating priest of the Most High, and for each child he offers a distinct sacrifice. As each came forward in his turn, and laying his hand upon the head of the victim, prayed for the pardon of any sin which he had committed—and then beheld his anxious parent slay the lamb as in his stead, and sprinkle the atoning blood on the altar, not without his added prayer—must not that child have felt that his festive joy had become an act of religion, by which God was honoured? Must not the influence of such a conclusion to their family gatherings have been most powerful? How deep must have been the love, and how great the reverence felt for their father! We need no longer wonder at the picture which the family of Job presents. A father so unremitting in his pious care, so solicitous lest his children should sin and offend God, making even their family reunions and social pleasures religious acts, continuing his anxiety and care even after his children were settled in life, could not but be blessed in his children, even though the Abrahamic promise had not yet been given—"I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee." What a religious atmosphere must there have been in this family! and may not we, who live in these more highly privileged days, learn a lesson from this picture of a long by-gone age? Job had no written Bible. He lived before the Bible was, and, as far as we know, had no promise that God would be the father of those children whose pious parents had dedicated them to Him in solemn rite. But to us the volume of God's revealed will has been given complete; to us the Abrahamic covenant and promise have been made known; and yet, where shall we find parents in our day fulfilling their

parental duties in a manner superior to Job? Do we feel the deep anxiety lest our children should forget God, which he manifested? Where, in Christian lands, is a religious influence and atmosphere thrown around the family, even equal to those which pervaded the household of this ancient patriarch? Yet this is the great secret of family religion, the true mode of attaining the early conversion of children—to make the atmosphere of the family more like that of heaven, and not so entirely of earth. It does not amount to much to forbid a child this or that particular worldly attraction, when nothing but a worldly atmosphere is breathed at the fireside. Let parents live for heaven; let them feel that their responsibilities with regard to their children, instead of ending with fitting them to act their parts well in this world, have only commenced here; that their families have been intrusted to them to be educated for an immortal existence, for God and Heaven, and not for man and earth; and let this sentiment breathe in their instructions, in their habits, in their lives, and it will bring forth glorious results. When our children have been exposed to influences and have mingled in scenes where God was far more likely to have been forgotten than in the family festival of Job's sons, how seldom do parents now feel as he did! We are, especially in our large cities, much exposed to worldly influences; it is impossible to preserve our families from them; but we should, therefore, be the more anxious that the family influences possess not the same worldliness. Job sacrificed his burnt-offerings, for fear his children had forgotten God, when in the enjoyment of their social blessings. When our sons and daughters have mingled in the gay throng, where the harp and the viol have excluded all thoughts of God, how few parents deem it necessary to sanctify them for the morning offering, and, kneeling with them at the family altar, ask God to forgive them, if it be that in the scenes through which they have passed they had sinned, and forgotten God. And should not this be one great practical lesson

learnt from this history? How can our children remember their Creator in the days of their youth, if there be no remembrance of Him in their homes? If the atmosphere of home be all worldly, be an atmosphere where God is not, we might more hopefully expect to gather grapes from thorns; and yet how many families are there where every family influence is against God; where the mother's praise and the father's smile unite to produce and to deepen the impression that this world bounds our existence, and that there is no brighter, higher, holier state, for which we are to prepare! And thus, by the very attractions of home and family such parents are cheering their children onward to that wretched world where love is unknown, and where dwells that malignant being who has ruined our race. Satan hates the family circle which religion binds together; he ever labours to disturb its harmony, for he well knows that there is no fortress so impregnable to his attacks. Hence he determined, if the power should be allowed him, to break up the family of Job. He could not bear to contemplate the happy picture. It was too beautiful for an earth over which he ruled. It was, to him, too much like another Eden; he must enter it. For wise reasons God allowed him to enter.

The history of the origin of the sorrows of Job may be justly placed among the many things which give interest to this wonderful book. It gives us an insight into the providence of God, and shows us how intimate and how connected is the conduct of the children of God upon the earth with his children in the angelic world, and how deeply interested are both heaven and hell in the consistent walk of the Christian.

It has, indeed, been supposed by some, that the account of the interview between God and Satan, contained in the first and second chapters of this book, is so improbable a transaction that it throws an air of fiction over the whole narrative. But we cannot for one moment allow the truth of the supposition, or

admit such a principle in the interpretation of Scripture. If God would convey a true idea to us, he must use our language, and the aid of imagery with which we are familiar ; from the necessity of the case, therefore, the Bible must contain many representations, even of himself, drawn from our own circumstances. It may be thus here, for the language and imagery are evidently taken from the proceedings of an earthly monarch, seated upon his throne, and before whom the various messengers which he had sent forth through his dominions were assembled, to render in their several statements. We say that this may be the case, but while we make this remark we attempt not to show how far the language is mere imagery, for we are certain that the whole account is a representation of facts, of realities, and, therefore, may be an actual glimpse into the spiritual land.

Angels, we know, are in fact employed by God for important purposes in the government of his kingdom. They are interested in the conduct and affairs of Christians : "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation?"

The account also here given of the character of Satan accords entirely with the uniform representation of him given in other parts of the Bible ; and it is impossible to prove that he does not now perform the same part in the trials of good men which it is said he did in the case of Job. There would be, therefore, no impropriety, no absurdity, in interpreting the whole narrative literally as an actual scene—we must, indeed, do so with regard to Satan's descent upon Job ; and forgetfulness of the fact that God allowed him to be buffeted by Satan, that Satan regulated all the circumstances, is one great reason why students of this book have erred in their understanding and interpretation of it.

Job we have seen to be an honoured prince, respected by all ; a man of great wealth, blessed with a peculiarly happy family, whose life had been one of almost unexampled prosperity ; and who had been thus blessed, as the fruit of his own eminent piety. God had

not hitherto allowed Satan to trouble him, and he was known in heaven as the peculiar favourite of his Maker. God is represented as saying of him, "There is none like him in the earth." Satan is represented, on the other hand, as having no confidence in him, and therefore maintaining that Job would prove no exception, if God would only allow him to be assailed as others had been. "Doth Job fear God for naught?" is his religion disinterested? has he not been abundantly rewarded for his piety by the blessings heaped upon him? have not I been prevented from coming near to him to tempt and harass him? Job's religion is caused merely by his abundant prosperity; and if his wealth were removed and his pious family destroyed, he would show his real character, and would curse Him whom he now praises as his benefactor.

The sorrows and trials which followed are designed to test the question, whether the piety of Job was of this kind. God allows Satan to enter his defences, and leaves him in his hands for a season. We soon see what it is for a good man to be in the power of this wicked being, and how needful the petition which our Lord taught us, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." The birthday of Job's eldest son had again come round; his brethren and sisters had assembled at his house, to renew the pleasant days of their childhood. The heart of the patriarch was full of joy; he saw his children all assembled again beneath the roof of their elder brother. No breach had been made by death in their circle, and he had retired to his own dwelling, perchance to bow before God and render the thanksgiving which his mercy and goodness demanded. But while thus seated the bright skies are overcast, the clouds have gathered, an unnatural darkness veils earth and sky. Suddenly a breathless messenger stands before him with terrible tidings. Scarcely has he finished his sad story ere another and another is present with a more fearful tale. In a moment the rich and happy man stands in almost solitary desolation—his property all swept away, his family broken, his

beloved children cold and mangled corpses beneath the ruins of their dwelling. Wherever he turned his eye, there lay the wreck of some fond hope—the fragments of some long-cherished expectation. We can hardly conceive of a more complete change. Blow follows blow in such rapid succession, that not a single moment is allowed him for reflection or prayer. An hour before, and he was the most favoured son of the East ; he stood like a large and noble tree, strong and beautiful in its proportions, with waving branches and luxuriant foliage ; but the storm came upon him, and he now stands like the lone and solitary trunk, its branches torn off, broken, and scattered, “shelterless himself, and sheltering none.” How great the power of Satan to work us ill ! How speedily did he find instruments ! The minds and purposes of the Sabeans and Chaldeans were all under his control. The elements also were alike obedient to his will. At the very moment which he selected, the lightnings flashed and the wind blew, proclaiming him to be, as the Bible calls him, “the prince of the power of the air.” True, indeed, he could not have done these things if God had not permitted him ; but from what he did, we may easily see what he both can and would do if all restraint were withdrawn, and what we may expect him to do in the eternal world to those who shall dwell with him. But he had no power over the spirit of Job. Then Job rent his mantle, and in accordance with Oriental custom shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped and said, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away : blessed be the name of the Lord.” How completely has Satan been foiled ? He said Job would curse God, if thus tried ;—he had tried him, and all the result of his malice was this—Job blessed God the more. He worshipped, he uttered no denunciation upon the Sabeans, no imprecation upon the Chaldeans. He did not curse the tempest and the storm ; he worshipped God ! how sublime, how exalted that worship ! what

unwavering faith ! what clear and honouring views of the character of God does it display ! "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." The words do not merely acknowledge the right of God to take away what he had given, but they assert that he is equally to be adored when he takes away as when he gives. He gave in love ; He has not changed ; He still loves ; and the love which prompted Him to give, now prompts to take away. Where in Israel, where throughout the chosen land, shall we find superior faith, more entire confidence in the loving character of God ? Before this trial, God said of his servant, there is none like him in the earth. May we not in this day of superior light renew this declaration ?

Nor is this conduct of Job in any respect to be ascribed to apathy or indifference. His character, as displayed in the deep interest which he felt for his children's spiritual welfare, when in their prosperity, forbids such an idea ; his subsequent conduct also shows that his grief was intense. No, it was the result, the legitimate fruit, of true piety ; it was true resignation ; its source was the great truth—God did it, and he does it in love. Religion, so far from making the heart insensible to grief, increases the susceptibility to sorrow and suffering ; but at the same time it exercises more decidedly its remedial and comforting powers. And we here see how it does this—it leads us to recognize the hand of God in our trials, it bids us feel the affliction, because God sends it, because he means that we should feel it ; but at the same time it reminds us that it is a kind, wise, loving Father who afflicts, the same who gave, and who has not changed in his love, when he takes away. He bids us weep, but it is at his feet.

But Job had not yet drunk the dregs of the cup which Satan was allowed to place in his hands ; there was a still more severe trial of his spirit to be endured. A bodily disease is sent upon him, of a most distressing kind. It is thus described, "And Satan smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto

his crown." And the manner in which it affected him we may learn from the sufferer himself. He tells us, that it made his nights restless and full of tossings to and fro; that it clothed his flesh with clods of dust, which he removed with a potsherd, or fragment of a broken earthen vessel; that it made his face foul with weeping, that it corrupted his breath, and made his bones, pierced with pain, to cleave to his skin, while it made his skin black, and burnt up his bones with heat. Contrast his condition as thus described, with that in which he is first presented to us, and you will be able to form some estimate of his afflictions.

There, upon a heap of ashes, out of the city, away from the habitations of men, sits weeping, the man of wealth and of distinction, before whom men bowed, and held their peace; in his hand a piece of broken earthenware, with which he is scraping his body, covered with undressed and most painful sores. Nothing done to heal him—no kindness shown in taking care of him—separated from his home—his children dead—doomed to endure his sufferings without sympathy. There is, however, one member of his once happy family, who survives—one from whom he might expect the warmest sympathy. The partner of his joyful life remains; surely she, with her woman's heart and clinging attachment, though all else forsake her husband, will be with him to cheer his heart, to soothe his spirit, to help him to bear his unparalleled sufferings! Doubtless she would have done so, had it not been for the influence of Satan. She probably felt his distressed and changed circumstances even more bitterly than he did, and the trial was more than she could bear.

It is customary to regard the wife of Job as deficient in attachment to her husband, but there is no certain evidence of this; the contrary seems to be the case. Had she been called upon to bear in her own person the sickness and pain which she saw her beloved husband endure, womanlike she would probably have borne all with resignation; but hers was a harder lot; instead of

enduring suffering herself, she had to endure the sight of the sufferings of one whom she loved—one dearer to her heart than all others. She had suffered with him the loss of property, and, as far as we know, had been silent; she had borne with him the loss of their beloved children, and her heart had doubtless ached, as only a mother's heart could ache, under such a bereavement; but, dumb with grief, she had uttered no plaint, she had mourned in secret over her terrible affliction. At length, as her grief somewhat subsides, she is able to think of the sufferings which the father of her children must endure; she seeks him out. Alas! what a sight meets her eye! Is that bowed, weeping, loathsome object, seated in the open air, upon the ash-heap—is that her noble-hearted, her generous and pious husband! Oh, it is more than her already crushed heart could bear; her piety yields before her affection, and, under the natural impulse, and in evident distress, more on her husband's account than her own, she abruptly utters the unadvised words, "Dost thou still retain thy integrity? curse God, and die." Her language simply implies, that if all these sorrows were the rewards of a pious life, it was not worth while to retain his regard for God. If God could thus afflict his righteous servant, he was not worthy of confidence or service.

The thought was Satan's, but it accorded with the natural feelings of fallen sinful human nature, when sorely afflicted. Others have felt in a similar way, and have similarly expressed their feelings; they have even called God a hard master, and given vent to feelings of rebellion and murmuring.

The reply of Job exalts him the more, and causes his piety to shine with more brilliant lustre. Her unexpected impropriety of speech doubtless increased the sorrows of the already much-enduring man. He saw with pain that the piety of his wife was overcome by his accumulated calamities, but his only reply is the sad and gentle rebuke, "Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh." In Bible language, folly is the opposite of

religion. Thou speakest as one destitute of piety ; what, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil ? This is the true expression of real piety ; it submits to all the arrangements of God without a murmur, it acknowledges that it has no claim whatever upon God : certainly no claim which makes it wrong or unkind for God to visit with calamity those upon whom he bestows so many undeserved benefits. In all this, says the sacred historian, Job did not sin with his lips.

But we have not yet fathomed the real depth of his afflictions, nor seen the full force of his trials. We have as yet only looked at the outer man ; we have not noticed the thrusts of Satan upon his spirit, and have therefore only contemplated the lighter parts of his sorrows. Let us then endeavour to form some idea of the trials which the inner man endured.

The design of Satan was to induce Job to curse God ; hence the suddenness and the order of the repeated blows with which he at first assailed him. He sought to excite wrath, anger, the desire of vengeance, in the heart of Job, against the human instruments who had robbed him of his property ; and when he supposed that the heart of Job was filled with passion, and burning for vengeance against the Sabeans and Chaldeans, without giving him time to soothe his excited feelings by prayer, and perhaps to prevent him from having recourse to prayer, he brings the news of the destruction of his children by the winds of heaven—thus seeking to turn the unholy passions which he supposed had been excited, directly upon the Creator of the winds, and thus make him vent his angry feelings against God.

We should notice, also, the peculiar juncture at which Satan robs Job of his children ; we have seen his anxiety for their spiritual and eternal welfare ; and that it was especially called forth at those seasons when they rejoiced in their family gatherings. It was one of these occasions which Satan selected for their destruction, before their father had offered his usual sacri-

fice, as atonement for their sins. The design of Satan was, that from the greatness and sudden nature of the calamity, Job might conclude that it was on account of their sins that the Lord smote them; that he might feel the anguish of fearing that his children had died before the Lord, with sins unatoned and unforgiven. He would have the fearful idea press upon his spirit, that so very remarkable a providence as the destruction of his whole family on the same day and hour at which his property was swept away, and the fall of that particular house alone, in which his children were gathered, while the storm had destroyed no other dwelling in the neighbourhood, was a proof of God's special anger, not only with him, but with his children; judge ye how this thought must have pierced the heart of the anxious father!

Satan now allows some period of time to intervene before he attacks the person of Job; how great the interval we are not told. It was probably just sufficient to enable his victim to feel the full misery of his changed worldly circumstances, to mark the diminished respect and regard which followed the loss of property. Job speaks most touchingly of this:—

“ But now, they that are younger than I have me in derision—whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock.

“ And now I am their song, yea, I am their by-word.

“ They abhor me, they flee far from me,

“ And spare not to spit in my face ;

“ Because He hath loosed my cord and afflicted me,

“ They have also let loose the bridle before me ”

This is, perhaps, the most bitter ingredient contained in the loss of property—the changed conduct of the world, the diminution of respect which accompanies it. Many, in our large cities, can give ample testimony on this subject. How has the iron entered their souls, as they have been made to feel the difference with which men treated them! The loss of wealth they could bear calmly—they could trace the hand of Providence in that ;

but the loss of that respect which was paid to them as the possessors of wealth, cut them to the heart. This we see Job felt most keenly. It is of this he complains, and complains with great severity, and perhaps with indignant pride and anger: "I would have disdained to have set their fathers with the dogs of my flock." We praise not Job for this; it was, perhaps, his first sin with his lips; but we see how he was tried, by this circumstance. As soon as Satan, most wise to distress, found the spirit of Job sufficiently moved by the effect of his first assault, he prepares for the second, and sends the bodily affliction. We have already spoken of the trying nature of the affliction, as presented to the outward senses; but this was the smaller part. There was cruel wisdom displayed by Satan in its selection. It was a disease which, while it demanded not sympathy as if dangerous to life, not only made its victim an offensive and unpleasant sight to beholders, but was more calculated, perhaps, than any other, to distress the mind, and produce the sin which Satan sought to effect. The whole system of nerves, by which sensibility is given to our frames, lie immediately beneath the skin. It was directly in the region of these nerves that the disease of Job was placed. Severe pains, nervous irritability, sleeplessness, and burning fever, were the necessary result. Let him who hath seen the brain so disturbed by a disorganized nervous system as to reel and totter upon the very confines of raving madness, judge what must be the amount of effort required to hold the soul in patience under such a disease. To all these physical and mental sufferings we must add the direct effort of Satan upon the mind of Job, through his sympathizing and sorrowful wife; we must not lose sight of the fact that Satan had one single direct object in view, from the track of which, like a bloodhound, he never swerved for a single moment. His aim was to induce Job to curse or renounce God; and hence, with consummate art, when by the bodily pains and mental anguish he had prepared him to enter-

tain the evil thought, he then suggests the very thought, by means of his suffering, bereaved wife; throws the very words into his mind by the tones of a familiar voice, softened and trembling under the severest affliction which a mother can endure.

But all these fail. Still more powerful influences, therefore, must be brought to bear upon his spirit; he must be irritated by injustice; be compelled to rely, while labouring under bodily pains, to false charges. Surely some improper words will drop from his lips. And here again we have an exhibition of the wonderful art of the great enemy of our souls. Having tried in vain to induce the unholy feeling at which he aimed by these multiplied external and physical inflictions, he prepares to operate upon his mind by the most powerful instrumentality of his most sincere friends—friends who clung to him when all others had deserted him, and who thus gave the most decided evidence of the strength and reality of their attachment.

The rumour of his unprecedented calamities had spread far; and three of his aged friends, men of exalted worth and station, having heard of them, concert a plan to visit him in company, and to unite their efforts for his welfare, to mourn with him, and to comfort him. In the prosecution of their benevolent purpose they approach the place where they are told they will find their friend. They see in the distance a most wretched object, so wretched, so altered his whole appearance, that they would not have recognized him had they not been prepared for the change by previous reports. They were all so deeply affected at the sight that they burst into tears, rent their mantles, as expressive of their grief, and sprinkled dust upon their heads, as mourners in that day were wont to do. On coming into his immediate presence, they sat down with him upon the ground. So overwhelmed were they with the sight of his melancholy condition, and so deep their sympathy, that none of them attempted to give utterance to his feelings for the space of seven days and nights.

They probably felt, as the full vision of his sufferings burst upon them, that the ordinary consolations would not suit the case. In this state of mind they were peculiarly open to the suggestions of the malevolent being into whose hands God had permitted Job to fall. Satan therefore easily induced them to adopt his own ideas, and shook their confidence in the piety of their friend. They seem unanimously to have adopted the opinion, that these great calamities were proofs of great criminality, and, therefore, that Job could not be the real friend of God. In accordance with this idea, instead of seeking to console, and making their real sympathy a comfort, they regard him as a hypocrite, and administer rebuke and reproof, trying to convince him that God, on whom he relied, was displeased with him. Oh! it required an intellect of the highest order, as well as exalted piety, to resist all these influences! How trying must it have been to the bowed sufferer to feel that his own friends, aged and dear friends, friends who had known him long and familiarly, did not understand him, had lost confidence in him, could not be persuaded of his sincerity and truthfulness! What a sense of isolation and injustice must have weighed down his spirit! and if, in his efforts to vindicate himself under all these circumstances, an impatient word dropped from his lips, or his self-vindication was carried too far, which of us will dare to do more than to pity him? or while we do acknowledge the sin, must we not still admire the piety and patience of the man? How far superior to the great mass of men does he show himself, even while he sins! Yes, Job did sin! but even in the midst of his sin he presents a spectacle of sublime moral greatness, such as our world has never seen in any other mere man. He did sin! but we all feel that it was the sin of a great and good man. Jesus Christ is the only perfect model.

Endeavour to bring up before your mind this noble sufferer as here presented, to realize the powerful and terrible forces by which he was at the same time assailed, all urging to one single

point—to induce him to curse God, to renounce Him, as the only object of love and worship.

You must bear in mind throughout the whole of his trials, who was the real adversary that had arrayed all his forces against the solitary man. You must not forget that it was that mighty and powerful being, who once stood near the throne of God—that noble creature, who had mind and power enough to dare, even in heaven, to think of seizing the throne of the Almighty; who had power and might and hardihood enough to imagine that it was possible to be successful in a contest even with Jehovah—that being, who was able to overcome our first parents in all their glory as they came from the hands of their Creator—that fearful one, who dared to meet in hostile array the Son of God when he was here on earth, and to measure his power with Omnipotence. It was this mighty foe, let loose and unrestrained by God, who stands before the solitary stripped sufferer, driving upon him all his forces, assailing him with the memory of joys and comforts torn away by violence, assailing him with the vivid picture of his scattered fortune swept away in an hour—urging on his throbbing heart the memory of the cruel death-pangs of his loved children—setting before him the vision of their mangled bodies, and urging him by all these to renounce his piety—pleading with him by the pains of his body, by the anguish of his soul under obloquy and contempt, pleading by the solicitation and sympathy of his wife—assailing him with the injustice of his friends, and by their strong arguments to prove to him that God was not his God. And yet that solitary, lone sufferer stands firm, clinging to his God with an unbroken and unrelaxing grasp, exclaiming in his darkest hour, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in him: I know that my Redeemer liveth;” and if in his anguish both of body and soul he do exclaim, “Cursed be the day of my birth, I am weary of life;” and if in his self-justification he do sin, must we not still admire and adore the grace of God, by which a creature

so weak in himself was enabled to stand so firmly and so long without sin, and to swerve so little from the pathway of duty?

The trial of faith, resignation, and integrity now draws to an end. The arch-demon who had directed it is completely baffled. God himself in some way visibly appears, to pronounce judgment; shows that he has been no uninterested spectator of his servant's trials, and speaks to Job out of the whirlwind. The address ascribed to Him bears innate evidence that God alone is its author. As a combination of dignity, sublimity, grandeur, and condescension, it is far beyond anything delivered in human language. It asserts the supremacy of the Most High, and that he must be adored—the incomprehensibility of his wisdom, and therefore that it is vain to arraign it—the omnipotence of his power, and therefore that it is absurd to resist it—the universality of his greatness, and therefore that it is blindness and ingratitude to deny it.

The awful and sublime address is listened to with conviction. The humiliated sufferer confesses the folly of his arrogance and presumption, abhors himself for his conduct, and exclaims in lowliness of soul, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee; therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. Behold, I am vile."

The departure of Satan immediately succeeds. The self-abasement of Job is accepted: his friends are severely reprimanded for their judgment concerning him, and for their false and dishonourable views of the providence of God, in contending that he never does or can permit trouble but in cases of wickedness. A sacrifice is demanded of them, and Job is appointed to be their intercessor. Upon the accomplishment of this the severely tried patriarch is restored to his former state of enjoyment, and his prosperity is in every respect doubled.

IX.

THE FAMILY OF ELKANAH.

AMIDST the scenes of war and violence, of alternate struggle and servitude, unfolded in the Book of Judges, the picture of the pious Levite of Ramathaim-zophim and his family, is one of peculiar beauty. The wonderful deeds of the most extraordinary among the Jewish heroes, Samson, were ringing in the ears of the people ; the feeble and irresolute Eli was judge and high-priest of Israel, and the sons whom he so criminally indulged were bringing destruction upon themselves and wrath upon the nation, when within the sacred precincts of the tabernacle was growing up the devoted child, the chosen prophet, the pious governor, whose administration was to restore dignity and peace to his country. Elkanah was a peaceable citizen of a town in Mount Ephraim, and a devout servant of Jehovah, as appears from the regularity with which he went up, at stated times, to worship and offer sacrifices. The ark and tabernacle were at Shiloh in the territory of Ephraim, the most powerful and least exposed of the provinces ; and thither, to the one place and the one altar consecrated by the presence of Divinity, was the true Israelite bound to repair, whatever disorder might prevail in the ceremonies, or however unworthy might be the priests who ministered in the holy ordinances. The character of this exemplary citizen is finely drawn by a few touches in the Bible. He was devotedly attached to Hannah, who seems to have been his first wife. For Peninnah, the mother of his children, he had due respect, and showed it in giving to her and the children the customary portions at the appointed peace-offerings, on which it was usual for the offerer to

feast with his family. To Hannah, the beloved, he rendered more than the wonted attention; a circumstance which did not escape the jealous observation of her rival. The patience and kindness with which Elkanah bears the arrogance and malevolence of Peninnah, exhibited in a way which must have wounded him most severely, since it imbittered the life of one dearer than himself—the tenderness with which he remonstrates with Hannah upon her indulgence of a grief that disturbed their proper performance of religious ceremonies, assuring her of the unchangeable affection which ought to have consoled her for all disappointments—and the fidelity with which he aids her to fulfil her pledge to the Lord, mark him as a faithful husband and father, as well as a true-hearted Hebrew. We know not the motives with which he had married Peninnah; probably the desire of offspring, as in Abraham's case, had influenced him; but like him, he had reason to repent a step involving injury to his own peace, and rendering his house, when his family was assembled, the scene of discord and suffering. On every occasion, and particularly when they went up to Shiloh, to join in the solemn acts enjoined by their religious law—the fortunate mother of sons and daughters, proud of her fertility, and rejoicing that her rival was denied the blessing of children, taunted and provoked Hannah. Peninnah is emphatically called “her adversary,” for her conduct was prompted by the most cruel malevolence, and might have generated not only discontent, but envy and vindictive resentment in the mind of the gentle being so wantonly insulted. But Hannah's nature, it seems, was not one ready to apprehend and resent injury. She gave no reply to the taunts hurled against her, even at times when respect for the ordinances of the sanctuary should have checked a vaunting or insolent spirit; she uttered no murmur against the Providence which seemed to have cut her off from the hope of being a mother in Israel; but she felt the reproach intensely and keenly, and poured out her sorrow in

tears, being unable to eat of the sacrifices, or fearing to partake of them in a spirit of mournfulness. Hannah does not appear to have possessed any of the impatient temper manifested by Rachel under a similar affliction. She had strong feelings, but they were controlled by her respect for Elkanah's authority, and by her religious faith. On the occasion mentioned particularly, the insolence of her adversary, and the anguish caused by her provoking language, seem to have reached their climax. Then it was that Elkanah rebuked her gently, for the immoderate grief, which was an offence to God, as well as unkindness to him. Hannah answered not, but rose up after the solemn feast; her soul was full of bitterness, her anguish no longer repressible; and she obeyed the native tendency of the spirit to pour out its woe to the Almighty Hearer of prayer. Let the waters of affliction overwhelm the soul—deep calling unto deep; let earthly help and hope disappear, and its cry ascends instinctively to Heaven. Happy those who, like Hannah, can pray in faith, as well as fervently, and keep the vow made in the day of trouble!

Hannah stood within the tabernacle, and the pent-up sorrow of her bosom found vent first in a flood of tears, and then in earnest supplication before the Lord. She vowed a vow, that if a son were granted her, he should be consecrated to God, and devote all the days of his life only to his service. Often might blessings importunately craved be found curses in reality, and the parent's heart be wrung by the ingratitude or unworthiness of the child received as the dearest boon of Heaven. She who prayed now for a son, would secure his welfare both in this world and the next, as well as testify her gratitude for the gift, by dedicating him to the Lord. As she stood and prayed—her whole heart absorbed in the earnestness of her petition, her lips moving, but with no audible voice—unmindful or unconscious of observation, there was one who looked upon and condemned her. The high-priest Eli, seated by the post in the temple or tabernacle, had

marked her entrance and her movements, and, mistaking the evidence of strong emotion, taxed her with drunkenness. Here again are shown the mildness and humility of Hannah, in the courteous and respectful manner in which she replied, evincing no anger at the injurious imputation cast upon her. It was nothing strange, perhaps, in those days—when the temple of the Most High was profaned by licentious excess, when the very priests “lorded it over God’s heritage,” and desecrated his sacrifice with abominations—for the inebriate to venture into the sanctuary; nor had the reproof of the high-priest, in most cases, much effect. Hannah not only testified no indignation, but, in declaring her innocence and the sorrow that had brought her thither a humble suppliant, did not explain the cause of her distress. It lay between her and her Maker: in him alone she trusted for relief, and so she sought no human sympathy nor intervention in making known her complaint to the God of Israel. Eli acknowledged his mistake, and without knowing what had been her petition, added his blessing and prayer that it might be granted.

Having “poured out her soul before the Lord,” Hannah goes her way, no longer oppressed with sadness, and able, with a cheerful countenance, to bear her part in the stated worship. The son she asked is given, and she calls him by a name that perpetuates her memory of the obligation. She does not go up to the yearly sacrifice till the time comes when she may perform her vow, and give him up finally to the sanctuary. Elkanah approves her determination: “Do,” he says, “what seemeth thee good; only the Lord establish his word.” His zeal for the honour of Jehovah, and confidence that he would do all things well, rendered him willing to yield up his own judgment even in disposing of his child. How signally was the devotion rewarded!

A scene of deep interest and pathos is presented, in the final restitution of the gift or loan for which Hannah had prayed in the sanctuary. Leading her boy, and having with her the offerings

for sacrifice and thank-offering customary for those who came to pay a tribute of gratitude and joy, she appears once more in the presence of the high-priest. No longer bowed down with distress, she is so changed by the cheerfulness of her countenance and deportment, that she is not recognized by Eli. Her heart is overflowing with thankful happiness; she remembers not his unkind reproof, but, greeting him eagerly, declares herself the same woman who stood by him praying; that she has been made happy by a gracious answer to her petition, and that she is come to render up God's due, by giving her son to his service. How must the touching piety of this mother, with the innocence of the child who stood ready to be thus devoted, have struck the soul of Eli—so lamentably deficient in his own domestic management—so unhappy in the misconduct of his sons! It was hard for those affectionate parents to separate themselves from their only son, in his tender childhood, while his presence was most dear to them, but harder would it have been to see the working in him of the curse that follows disobedience!

Again Hannah prayed; but this time not in humiliation and anguish. Then, her voice was not heard, but her prayer struggled upward from her heart; now her words are uttered aloud, and her love and gratitude poured out in the sacred and sublime hymn, at the close of which is a mysterious prophecy of the greatness of the Messiah. She returns to Ramah with Elkanah, leaving Samuel to minister before the Lord, but continues from year to year to visit him, and bring him little tokens of her maternal fondness, when she comes up with Elkanah to attend the sacrifice. She was blessed, amidst the cares of a numerous family, in watching the growth of this cherished son in wisdom and piety. Her trust was remembered, in the grace which made the child grow "in favour both with the Lord, and also with men."

The child destined after Moses to be the first eminent and acknowledged prophet in Israel, continued to serve in the sanc-

tuary under the direction of the high-priest. While slumbering at night in the area of the tabernacle, a mysterious voice called him by name; the call being repeated so frequently, that the aged Eli became convinced that some new revelation was to be made. It was an affecting scene, when, on the morning after the vision, the guileless child stood in the presence of the infirm high-priest, who had been to him as a father, for whom affectionate respect had grown with his growth, and, adjured by the great name of Jehovah, delivered the awful message. Strange, that the first words of prophecy from the lips of one so young should be fraught with such terror, and stranger still that they should denounce unrelenting vengeance upon the house of the priest who had protected the early years of Samuel, and hoped, perhaps, to find comfort in him for the wickedness of those of his own blood!

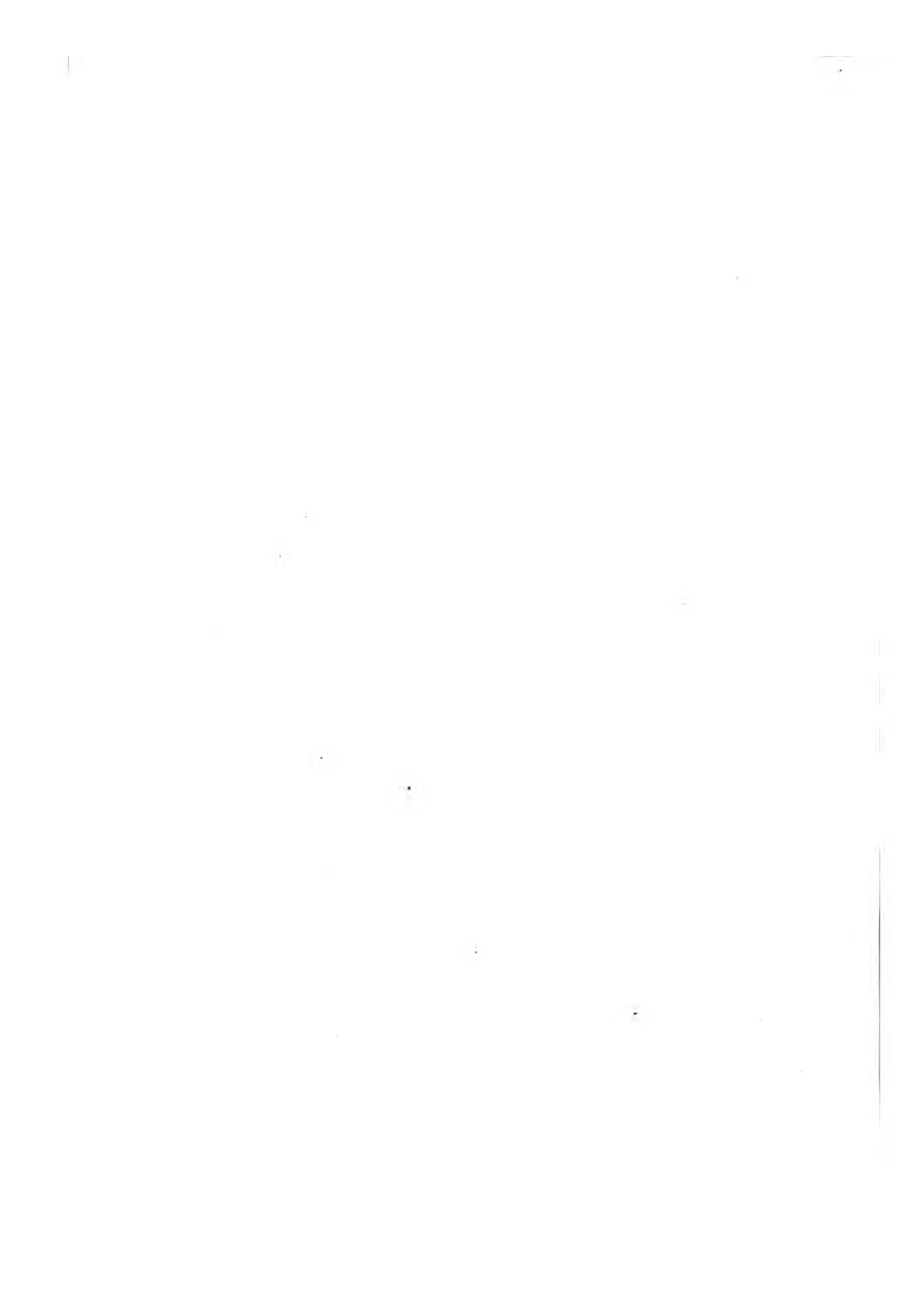
The fame of Samuel extended as he grew, and his word "came to all Israel," till he assumed his appointed place as head of the state. Thus was distinguished honour put upon the piety of his parents, and the wise nurture in which he grew. Elkanah and Hannah were blessed, not in his greatness, but in his pre-eminent usefulness.

X.

ELI AND HIS FAMILY.

THE condition of the Hebrew nation at the period of Eli's priesthood, contributed to increase the weight of priestly influence and power. The frontier, harassed by enemies, to oppose whom a considerable struggle was necessary—the central territory of Ephraim became the most powerful province among the tribes. The tabernacle and ark—the strength and hope of Israel, as the symbol of the presence of the Deity—were at Shiloh, whither the people went up at stated times to worship ; that place, therefore, was acknowledged as the capital, and Eli was invested with civil as well as religious supremacy, being both judge and high-priest in Israel. His own character, as an individual, appears to have been upright and blameless ; he had a knowledge of the attributes of God, and worshipped Him in sincerity ; he manifested submission, patience, and penitence, when punishment was denounced upon his house ; and at the last, when he watched, with a fearful looking-for of judgment—when overwhelming ruin was upon him—his apprehensions and his anguish were more for the ark of God than even for his doomed children. It was in his relations as a father and ruler—in his public capacity, that he was so culpably defective ; that he was judged worthy of the terrible punishment under which he sank in his old age.

Two sons had Eli—Hophni and Phinehas—who also were engaged in the sacerdotal service at Shiloh. They had been brought up to the sacred office, and probably instructed according to the law ; but they had no real acquaintance with the perfections of the Being they professed to serve, nor any disposition to honour





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his ordinances. Their unjust and illegal exactions from those who came to offer sacrifice, their insolence and tyranny, caused the people who suffered from such abuses to "abhor the offering of the Lord." Evils yet more scandalous and disgraceful were introduced by them into the very courts of the tabernacle; till the heaven-appointed rites of Hebrew worship, thus shamelessly profaned, were in danger of being assimilated to the corrupt practices of the votaries of Baal, or the Babylonian deities. Such abandoned conduct in men so eminent in official position, whose power and influence were doubtless considerable, could not fail to degrade, in the eyes of the people, the sacred ceremonies in which they ministered, and induced so general a neglect of religious observances as tended to bring Divine displeasure upon the whole nation. All Israel suffered from the wickedness of those sons of Belial in high places; and times of profligacy, apostasy, and idolatry were likely to ensue upon their sacrilegious insults to the institutions of Jehovah. While these atrocious abuses were going on, the pleasing interlude described in the foregoing chapter took place; and it is a relief to turn from the sight of the wicked priests to the picture of innocence, faith, and pious confidence and gratitude presented on the other hand. There was doubtless a congeniality of disposition between the aged high-priest and the consecrated child intrusted to his care. Eli addresses him as a son, endeared to him by affection, and knowledge of the high destiny in reserve for him; and sore indeed must have been the father's heart, when he reflected on the contrast between this artless boy and those who were indeed his sons. The rumour of all they had done to the people who came to worship at Shiloh, and of the effects of their heinous example, reached the old man's ears, and drew from him a mild reproof for their evil doings. He appealed to them as if they had possessed consciences, and had been capable of being moved by the reasons he alleges, to mend their course. Vain expectation! its indulgence only proves how

ignorant was the father of the depravity of the human heart, and the fearful state of those who are given up to impenitence and condemnation. He executed not upon them the punishment their crimes deserved, and which was imperatively called for, to vindicate the honour of the priesthood, and counteract the tendency of their example; he expelled them not from the office they had profaned, but listened rather to the dictates of parental feeling, which prompted to a light passing over of their offences, than to the stern requirement of his duty as head of the church and ruler of the people. His rebuke, so inadequate in severity, had no effect, for they had spurned the mercy of God, and were marked out as victims to his justice.

The father, culpable in his partiality, forbore to repress wickedness by due punishment; the righteous Judge therefore pronounces sentence upon him as involved in the guilt. A messenger extraordinary, bearing a direct message from the Lord of hosts, appears in the presence of the high-priest, whose peculiar province it was to consult the Divine oracle with the sacred breastplate of judgment. Fearlessly he delivers the words committed to him—the terrible threatening of vengeance, from which there was no deliverance: “Thou honourest thy sons above me,” was the charge against Eli; he had thus connived at, and virtually encouraged their crimes, and was to be chief in bearing the punishment. He had forgotten the favour conferred on the house of Aaron and his own family, and was now to see the calamity of the habitation of God, with the transfer of the priesthood to another line, and the degradation and misery of his descendants. The death of the wicked priests, his sons, was to be but a sign of the evil to come.

Once more, by the mouth of the child Samuel, came the message of vengeance to Eli. It is likely he looked to this youthful servant of God, growing up under his care, for consolation amidst the heavy afflictions which had bowed him down

more than the weight of years. He loved the boy, and was affectionately revered by him. They had taken sweet counsel together in the shadow of the sanctuary; and the soul of the feeble old man had been refreshed in the companionship of innocence pure from all contamination of the world. How agonizing must his consciousness have been, when, from the lips of this child, reluctant to speak of the vision, but solemnly charged to hide nothing from him of all that had been revealed, he heard the fearful denunciation, ere long to be more fearfully executed than even he had apprehended! There was no room for mistrust or suspicion of harshness or exaggeration, in the messenger; there was nothing equivocal in the message itself: "I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not," were words whose import could not be misunderstood. The meek reply of Eli to the communication showed his acquiescence in the terrible sentence. He presumed not to remonstrate, or entreat mercy; but, assured that God would do right, and that his part was to submit in humility to the merited chastisement, calmly expressed that submission, doubtless in humble trust that mercy would be extended to him as a man, in the midst of temporal judgments.

The time came for the destruction which had been foretold. The people of Israel were at war again with the Philistines. The time is supposed by some to have been shortly after the remarkable death of Samson; and if so, it might be that the Hebrews, who seem to have been the party to commence hostilities, were encouraged by the slaughter of the Philistine chiefs in the fall of the temple at Gaza, into efforts to throw off the oppressive yoke by a vigorous attack upon their enemies. The people went forth to battle with large hopes of success; and marching to Aphek, where the foe was encamped, the encounter took place there between the rival armies. It resulted in the total defeat of the

men of Israel, while four thousand were left dead upon the field. There was consternation in the camp when the discomfited forces returned; and the question as to what caused the day's disaster was rife among them. The elders were ready to propose an expedient which they imagined would secure them future triumph. The wonders wrought in former days, when the ark, the symbol of God's presence, was borne in front of the ranks, when the waters of Jordan were divided, and the walls of Jericho fell down before it, were vivid in their recollection; they forgot that no Divine command authorized them now to expect similar miracles, and anticipated the terror and flight of their enemies before the sacred emblem. They sent to Shiloh for the ark of the covenant. It may be conjectured with what feelings the blind old man, Eli, knew of the removal of the ark from its place in the holy of holies, to be carried into the army under the care of his guilty sons. Heavily must the prophecy have weighed upon his heart, mingled with fearful apprehensions for the fate of that on which hung the fate of the nation—and more—the worship of the true God upon earth. Its arrival in the camp is welcomed with a shout from the entire army, with which the earth rang. The shout is heard in the enemy's camp; the Philistine leaders, in surprise, inquire the meaning of the strange burst of exultation, and learn that the ark is with the Hebrews. Though flushed with victory, they are seized with a sudden terror at the tidings. "Woe unto us!" they cry, for they have an hereditary dread of the mighty and mysterious Deity who has heretofore proved invincible; whose presence and power brought such signal defeat on the Egyptians and the Canaanites. But their alarm is speedily overcome by strong resolution to sustain their character for valour, and fight to the death for their liberties. The final encounter takes place; the Philistines fight with desperate resolution, determined not to be enslaved by the people who had groaned under their yoke; the Hebrews with energy, and assu-

rance of success ; but the day is against them. The Philistines gain a complete victory ; thirty thousand of Israel are left dead on the field, and the survivors are scattered in every direction, fleeing every man to his tent. The wicked priests who bore the ark, proudly esteeming themselves the deliverers of the people, are slain ; and, worst calamity of all ! the ark itself has fallen into the hands of the uncircumcised enemy. What a triumph for the conqueror—what a loss for the nation abandoned of their God—and doomed, as it seemed, to hopeless servitude ! No such terrible disaster had ever before happened. A fugitive from the army, with his clothes rent, and dust upon his head, ran to Shiloh, to bear the appalling intelligence. The aged high-priest has gone forth, and sits by the wayside, near the gate, waiting for news of the battle—his heart trembling for the ark of God. As the messenger rushes in and spreads his disastrous news, a cry of wild grief and horror runs through the city. Eli hears the tumultuous lamentation, and eagerly inquires what is the cause. He knows that his sons have perished—that Israel's army is defeated ; but what woe more terrible than defeat and slaughter has fallen on the land—to plunge all into mourning ?—"The ark of God is taken !" With those words the measure of anguish for the old man is complete. He had bowed himself to the judgments predicted ; but this dishonour to his religion, this loss of that which was the life as well as the glory of the nation, this final departure, as he might have deemed it, of Jehovah from the place chosen for his abode ! and all in consequence of his own criminal weakness and negligence, has crushed him to the earth. Too much overcome to utter a word of reply or comment, he swooned, and fell backward from his seat ; his neck brake, and he died.

Nothing is said previously of the wives of the sons of Eli ; but the incident recorded of the wife of Phinehas shows the strength of her reverence for the national religion and the sacred ordi-

nances. She pays no regard to the intelligence that she has borne a son ; she heeds not the approach of death ; even grief for her dead husband and father-in-law seems lost in a deeper emotion. Her dying lips repeat the announcement—" The ark of God is taken !"—and she only notices her child to bestow the name commemorative of the event—" Ichabod—the glory is departed from Israel."

How impressive and full of instruction is the contrast presented in the history of the two families, thus strangely associated together, though so different in character ! The obscure citizen, persevering in his attendance on the religious services, steadfast in redeeming the vows by which his child was devoted, even though he leaves him exposed to the contagion of evil example, has his reward in the piety and usefulness of the great prophet and ruler of Israel ; the judge and high-priest sinks under the weight of the calamities his own sin has brought on his country through the iniquity of his sons. In the one instance we see great good, in the other great evil to the state, wrought by the due fulfilment, or the neglect of the fundamental principle in the duty of a parent. The regard of Elkanah and Hannah for the honour of God—the ruling motive of their conduct—cements the family union, and exercises a conservative influence over the children ; Eli's weak preference of the pleasure of his sons to the stern performance of his duty as priest of the Most High, not only involves him and them in ruin, but brings unprecedented disgrace on their land and their faith. Pages might be written upon the lesson ; but we leave it to the reader's reflection.



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Ruth. II. 8.

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Boaz and Ruth

XI.

THE FAMILY OF NAOMI.

So many dissertations have been written on the character and romantic history of Ruth, that a repetition of the familiar narrative, or another attempt to set forth the beauties of the Scriptural delineation, would be superfluous. We shall dwell upon it a moment, however, for the sake of its beautiful and touching exhibition of affection in the family relations.

There was something peculiar in the love of Ruth for her mother-in-law. She, as well as Orpah, had parents of her own in Moab; and doubtless the promptings of natural affection pleaded in her heart, when she was on the point of leaving them and the country of her birth for ever. Both the daughters-in-law had lived with Naomi till habit had cemented and strengthened the ties of relationship; both loved her for her amiable qualities, and deemed their interests so blended with hers that they intended returning with her into the land of her people. Both had doubtless been instructed by her in the principles of her religion. How was it, then, that when Orpah's resolution failed before the prospect of widowhood and destitution in a strange country—so that she yielded to Naomi's persuasion to turn back—Ruth clung to her the more closely, refusing to be separated from her, save by death!

It was the *religious faith* of the Hebrews which Ruth embraced, in cleaving to her mother-in-law. Her own family and the friends of her youth were dear to her, but she had renounced the gods of her people, and henceforth the most lasting bond of sympathy was broken. Young as she was, and beautiful, and respected for

a blameless life, and fair as might have been her prospects at home, she could not dwell there in peace, nor find satisfaction for the higher cravings of the soul. She was firm, therefore, in relinquishing every expectation of worldly advantage, and venturing all consequences, to trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel. "Thy God shall be my God," is the soul of her affection, and the crowning of her hopes. She is willing to undergo penury and hardship; to such a lot she looks forward, and is prepared to meet it; but she will not let go the bright hope of a future life which she has linked with her trustful love for the being who is to be henceforth her only earthly friend. "Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried," expresses more than the passionate devotion of her heart to the object of its cares. It shows the extending of the idea of union beyond the associations of mortal life, the expansion of affection into the range it can only reach when allied to religion. The young Moabitess will have her grave in the land of Israel, because it is the country of Jehovah's people; and near to hers who has been her teacher in the belief she has embraced for life and death. She attests the sincerity of her profession by a solemn appeal to the Lord in whom she trusted.

We see also here the disinterestedness of Naomi. It does not appear that a long time had elapsed after the death of her sons, before she formed the resolution of returning to the land of Judah; on the contrary, there is reason to believe that her bereavement was recent. Deprived of the stay on which she had leaned,—poor, afflicted, and aged,—about to taste one of the most painful of all humiliations in returning destitute among those who had seen her days of affluence, the company of her daughters-in-law was her only and sweetest solace. She bears testimony to their dutiful attention to her in the blessing she invokes at parting, "The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me." But she will not ask or receive from them so great

a sacrifice as that they should renounce home and friends, and go into exile for her sake. For them many years of enjoyment might remain, they might form other ties, and forget, each in her happy home-circle, the widowhood of her youth. She had no inducement to offer them, for she could see only trial and distress in the dreary future this side the grave. Scarce a situation in life can be imagined more desolate than hers; and her affectionate heart chooses rather to bear the burden alone, than to suffer any part of it to fall on those so dear to her. They have done their duty by her; she can no longer afford them protection, and she urges their return to their kindred, commending them to God with prayers and blessings.

No more touching scene can be depicted by the imagination, than the parting between the three thus endeared by mutual kindness, and by having rejoiced and mourned together. Naomi's farewell wish, "The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each in the house of her husband," shows her conviction that the dark days of sorrow would soon be past for them, with her knowledge of what is craved by the trustful nature of woman. She could not blight the promise of their young life by suffering them to yield to the affectionate impulse of the moment. Thus she kindly but firmly bids them leave her to pursue her way alone, giving reasons for the necessity of their separation, and grieving for their sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out so heavily against her. Orpah's resolution gave way, for her attachment to her mother-in-law, though sincere, was not strengthened by piety, and could not withstand the trial. She bade her a sorrowing farewell, and went back "unto her people, and unto her gods." How was "the better part" chosen by the faithful Ruth! Her steadfast determination, and its noble expression, silenced the remonstrances of her mother-in-law, and the two went their way to Bethlehem.

All the city, it was said, "was moved about them;" for the

sight of Naomi in her reverse of fortune, poor and unattended, save by her kind companion, returning desolate and heart-stricken to the place where her youthful and happy years were passed, greatly surprised those who had known her before she went forth. In bitterness of heart she disclaimed her ancient name as unsuited to her present condition. "Why call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" This outbreak of murmuring, extorted by sorrow, soon gave place to thankfulness.

The pious conduct of Ruth towards her mother-in-law, and her choice of the religion of Israel, did not escape the knowledge of the inhabitants of Bethlehem. Doubtless it was a theme of much conversation among them, and many above her in station invoked a blessing on the true-hearted stranger, who had given so affecting an evidence of her wish to share in their spiritual privileges. Boaz assured her that her story was well known to him; and he appears to have heard of her before he inquired concerning the stranger-damsel, of his servant that was set over the reapers. The example was in truth a singular and picturesque one, that one so young and lovely should be influenced by her belief in the true God, to forsake home and parents, and come among a people she knew not, submitting to privation and labour, and earning by her industry a maintenance for herself and her relative. It was not wonderful that many should say with Boaz—"The Lord recompense thy work;" for seldom does conduct so disinterested fail to draw down a blessing, even in this world.

The kindness of heart, dignity, and piety of Boaz are strikingly shown in the narrative in the second chapter. Although a man of large possessions, he gave his personal superintendence to the reaping of his field, and partook of their simple fare. His pious salutation to the labourers in his employ, with their answer so full of respect and affection, is characteristic of him as well as of the custom of the time, and illustrates the influence of genuine

religion in maintaining harmony and good feeling between persons of different stations. Were such the relations always between superiors and inferiors, how altered would be the aspect of the world !

The beauty of Ruth, and her foreign appearance, probably, first arrested the attention of Boaz ; and when, on inquiring about her, he learned she was the Moabitish damsel of whom he had heard, his humanity was strongly interested for her. Addressing her with the kindness of a father, he gave her a hospitable invitation to remain in his field, assuring her she should meet with no hinderance, but a cordial welcome as often as she chose to come. Then he secretly charged his young men to treat her with peculiar respect and liberality, as a privileged person, and even to let fall handfuls on purpose for her. In this direction he had respect to the law given by Moses, forbidding to reap wholly the corners of the field, or to gather the gleanings of the harvest, but commanding to leave them for the poor and the stranger. When Ruth with great humility acknowledged the favour, and asked why she, a stranger, was noticed in so friendly a manner, he replied by calling to mind what she had done—the rumour of which had come to his ears. His upright soul was pleased by such an exhibition of modest virtue, and he honoured it not only by kind deeds, but by wishing her a full reward from the Lord God of Israel. He had shown good will to his deceased kinsman, Elimelech, before his removal to the land of Moab, as is evident from the acknowledgment of Naomi in the twentieth verse ; and his disposition was to continue the kindness to his family, now more than ever in need of assistance. In all this he seems to have been actuated by motives of purest benevolence, in which no selfish affection was mingled. He saw in Ruth a destitute stranger, whose merits deserved, particularly at the hands of a kinsman of her husband, the succour she needed, while she, on her part, looked on him as one far superior in station to herself.

Consistent with the delineation so far, appears the character of Boaz, when the legal claim upon him was asserted by the fair Moabitess, at Naomi's instigation. The custom of the Hebrews required of a near relation the duty of a brother, of marrying the childless widow when the estate was redeemed. When reminded of this duty, the conduct of Boaz is worthy of all praise. He had expressed no regard for the beautiful foreigner beyond that prompted by humanity and hearty approval of her course; the disparity in age as well as station tended to remove her from his thoughts; yet he could not be insensible to the preference implied in the claim, to himself as well as the family of the dead. He evidently imputed her conduct to no interested motives, but solely to affection for her mother-in-law, respect for the house of Elimelech, and for the Divine law. His first words, therefore, are those of commendation and blessing, and tended to remove any doubts or fears which might have arisen in her heart. With how much delicacy does he assure her, in acceding to her claim, of the honourable repute she enjoys among all who know her, and her worthiness to be his wife! But the very law she has obeyed in seeking him, interposes an obstacle to their union. "There is a kinsman nearer than I." His was a prior right, but it might be supposed that he would waive it, as the words of Boaz intimate; and in this expectation the matter was dismissed until the morrow.

Throughout the beautiful story, the character of this honourable man shines with equal lustre. It is apparent, in the transaction at the city gate, that he is influenced by affection for Ruth; but he suffers not his feelings to stand in the way of this strict discharge of duty. The nearer kinsman is appealed to, and declines to fulfil the obligation resting upon him. It is, therefore, transferred to Boaz, and he formally calls the elders and people to witness that he has purchased the land "of the hand of Naomi." Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, he has also purchased

to be his wife. Well did he deserve the benedictions that followed the public recognition of his right ; and worthily was his disinterested conduct rewarded, by the bestowal of a wife fitted by all the graceful and lofty qualities that adorn the female character, to build up his house and render it famous in Bethlehem. And though he could not know the real greatness of the line of which he was the founder, nor had intimation of the more than royal majesty of his descendant Emanuel, yet he was blessed in the offspring of this auspicious marriage. It has been remarked that the mingling of foreign with Jewish blood in the ancestors of the Messiah, signified the future union of Gentiles with the chosen people, in the Christian church.

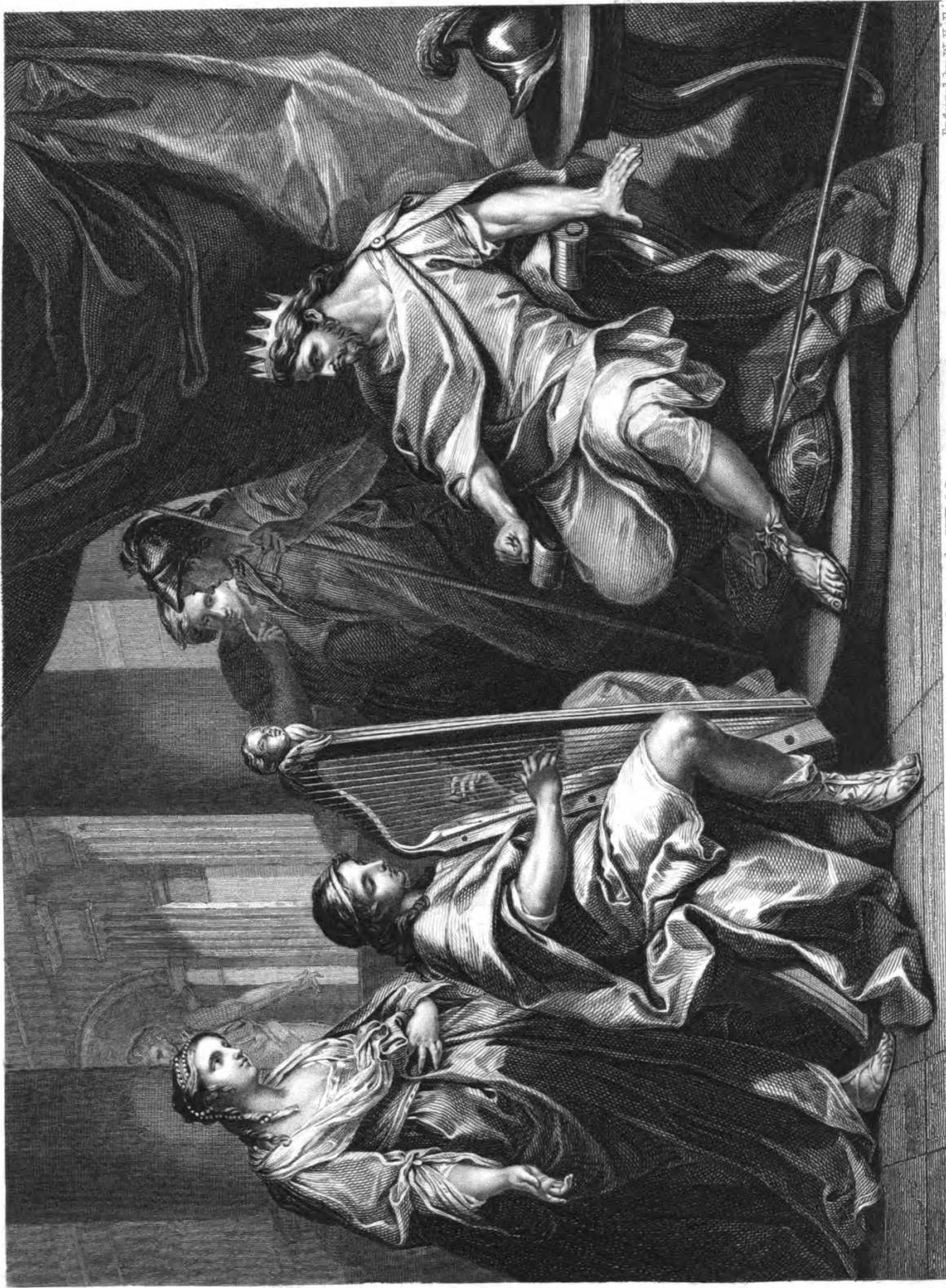
In each of the individuals of this family we may see admirable traits, well suited to their several conditions. In Naomi, the resignation that tempers sorrow, patience under misfortune, tender sensibility, and disinterestedness ; in Ruth, the most attractive modesty and humility, joined with warm affection, fidelity, and piety ; in Boaz, generous consideration for others, open truthfulness, and freedom from all that is sordid or selfish, with steadfast rectitude of purpose, and dignity of deportment, which could spring only from an elevated soul. It is most interesting to observe how these qualities act upon each other with a highly dramatic effect in some of the various situations ; and how they are enhanced in beauty by the romantic colouring thrown over them in the delineation of simple pastoral life. The introduction of the narrative between histories full of stirring political events, adds the interest of contrast to the quiet domestic picture ; while the evident purpose of its insertion, to record information concerning the genealogy of the Saviour, impresses us as we read, and strengthens the effect of the lesson so touchingly conveyed.

XII.

THE FAMILY OF SAUL.

IN royal families the ties of relationship seldom bind so closely as in humbler life. The forms of a court and the duties of public station tend to weaken the feeling of mutual dependence, and separate the members one from another, while expediency rather than affection too often directs the choice which is the root of other relations. The career of Saul as a monarch arrests the attention of every reader, while his character as a husband and father is touched upon more slightly. But we may learn something of it from the prominent illustrative incidents mentioned in his history.

When the people of Israel demanded that their form of national government should be changed into a monarchy, desiring to have their polity like that of other nations, the selection of the sovereign was made by Divine direction. The first appearance of the son of the Benjamitish chieftain produces in the reader's mind a strong impression in his favour. He possessed striking advantages of person, with external accomplishments valued in that age and country as peculiarly fitting him for eminent station. The modesty with which he disclaimed the distinctions offered him by Samuel, and the surprise he expressed at the first intimation of his high destiny, show a spirit as yet unsoiled by pride or ambition. When he met the company of prophets coming down from the high place, with psaltery and tabret and pipe and harp, his soul was kindled with lofty thoughts, and he joined with such enthusiasm in their hymns of praise as to excite the wonder of all who knew him previously, and could not account for the sudden change.



Engraved by W. Holl.

I Samuels XVI. 23

I Rois. XVI. 23

Printed by C. Yonker.

David playing before Achish.

Yet was this religious ardour no fruit of undue exultation in the prospect of the greatness that awaited him; for when the chant was over, and his kinsman questioned him concerning all the prophet had said, he told him nothing of the private, though solemn anointing, nor of the kingdom soon to be his own. Herein was prudence and discretion—awaiting the event of what Providence would bring to pass, and venturing no interference by acting on the suggestions of his own wisdom. He prevented thus the ostentation or the envy of his kindred, and the opposition of factious spirits, who might have busied themselves before the formal designation of the king, by stirring up the minds of the people to discontent. The assembly convened at Mizpeh, by Samuel's direction, from all the tribes of Israel, for the purpose of choosing a monarch, by appeal to God's decision in the way appointed—received the one on whom the lot fell, and answered with enthusiastic shouts the prophet's question—"See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among the people?" So far Saul appears as distinguished by a commendable humility of spirit, as by superior personal advantages. He manifested, moreover, no impatience to assume the insignia of sovereignty, but retired quietly to his home, leaving the administration of state affairs in the hands that had so long and so ably held the reins. He heard the murmurs of men disposed to reject his authority, who contemptuously refused the customary tokens of acknowledgment; but he prudently refrained from resenting their insolence, holding his peace, that civil discords might not disturb the beginning of the new state of things, and waiting God's own time for action.

The time came, and he was proved equal to the emergency. The monarch of the Ammonites, who had invaded the country bordering his territory, besieged the town of Jabesh-gilead, and demanded of the inhabitants, who offered to capitulate, that they should submit to lose their right eyes, as a mark of subjection

and disgrace to the Hebrew nation. Even the respite of a few days, granted them to entreat succour of their brethren, was probably designed to bring severer reproach upon all Israel. The news of their desperate condition was brought to Gibeah, and filled the inhabitants with grief and consternation. The newly-elected king, like the Roman dictator, had returned to his field and his herd. Coming homeward from his rural occupations, he heard the voice of bitter lamentation, inquired the cause, and with the tidings the Spirit of God came upon him. Fired with generous indignation, the herdsman was ready to assume regal authority, and become the leader of armies. He hewed a yoke of oxen in pieces, and sending the sign, like the burning cross of the Highlanders, through all the coasts of Israel, summoned the tribes, under threatening in case of disobedience, to follow him and Samuel to battle. The army mustered, was led against the Ammonites, the enemy defeated and scattered, and the victory was signaled by the refusal of Saul to execute vengeance, even at the people's request, on the disaffected persons who had striven against his elevation. This magnanimity was in keeping with the faith which ascribed the glory of his success to the Lord, and both promised the happiest results in the continuance of a reign which had opened so auspiciously.

The picture darkens as we follow his career. At Gilgal, when the immense army of the Philistines had swept the country, and the terrified Hebrews were scattered, hiding themselves in caves, and woods, and rocks, a remnant followed their king in mortal fear of the invader,—we see him usurping the priestly function, and offering sacrifice in violation of God's commandment, because the coming of Samuel was delayed. For his disobedience, the sentence was passed which excluded his line from the kingdom. The same impatient and presumptuous spirit was shown after the daring exploit of his gallant son, by which he was delivered from his critical situation at Gibeah. The young man, accompanied

by his armour-bearer, climbed a rock—one of the enemy's outposts—killed twenty men, and threw such confusion into the camp, aided by the terrors of an earthquake, that the panic-stricken men fell upon and slew one another. The complete victory of the Israelites which ensued was marred by the rash adjuration of Saul, forbidding the soldiers to taste food during the day, and adding to his prohibition the solemn curse which devoted the enemies of God to destruction. When it was found that Jonathan had ignorantly transgressed, the king was ready to sacrifice his victorious son, unmindful of his own sin in thus troubling the land and paralyzing all efforts for its deliverance. In the expedition against Amalek he again transgressed the special command laid upon him, reserving the spoil, and sparing the life of the monarch; and when taxed by Samuel with disobedience, refused to acknowledge his fault, arrogantly claiming the merit of having performed all his duty. Even when compelled, by fear of a speedy execution of the sentence denounced against him, to own his sin and entreat the prophet's stay, he disingenuously laid the blame to the people's charge, and manifested less sorrow at having offended God, than dread of forfeiting his own power and dignity. In how humiliating a light appears the king returning laden with the spoils of victory, as he lays hold on the prophet's mantle to detain him, and entreats him, for the sake of appearances before the elders and his people, not to withhold his presence from his religious service. The heart is unhumiliated, but the monarch trembles for his state and sovereignty. What marvel that Samuel, disheartened at these repeated acts of rebellion, and forced to give up the hopes he had founded on his early promise, should leave him, to return no more, and mourn for him, rejected from reigning over Israel?

Saul was of a spirit too impatient, and too much governed by caprice, to show justice and kindness in his domestic relations. Of his wife nothing is said but that she was Ahinoam the daughter

of Ahimaaz. His sons were Jonathan, Ishui, (elsewhere called Abinadab,) and Melchishua, besides Ishbosheth, called Eshbaal; his daughters Merab and Michal. Not the closest ties of relationship, nor the most signal obligations, could protect from the effects of his capricious humour. The youth whose exquisite skill on the harp had charmed him into peace during the paroxysms of his madness, who had taken away the reproach from Israel, and slain the champion of the Philistines, became the object of his jealous hate when the women extolled his fame in their triumphant songs. The elder daughter, he had promised to David as a reward for his valour, was given to another, when the time came for the nuptials. The love of the younger daughter was made a snare, that the hand of the Philistines might be against him. When Jonathan pleaded for David, calling to mind his honourable services, Saul was ready to swear that his life should be sacred; but speedily afterwards attempted to kill him with his own hand, while he played the harp in his presence. Sunk by degrees from the brave warrior into the moody tyrant, the slave of his intractable passions, forsaken of God, and grovelling beneath the shadow of his darkened spirit, Saul filled up the measure of his crimes. The whole range of Scripture history offers no more melancholy portraiture. The climax of his jealousy and bitterness seems to be reached when he charges his own son, the noble Jonathan, with having conspired with David against him, and follows up the accusation by the murder of the priests. The dark scene preceding the close of his life, when the bold warrior who had so many times fronted the enemy, trembled at their array, and, despairing of an answer from the offended Deity, sought insight into futurity by aid of necromancy, exhibits most mournfully the desperation and gloom of his spirit, and the depth of degradation into which he had fallen.

On the other hand, no character in history or romance appears in a light more beautiful than that of Jonathan. All noble and

amiable qualities belonging to the son, the friend, the hero, or the man, are united in him, and shine more brightly from the contrasted gloom. The gallant exploit which first brings him into notice, his almost single-handed attack on the garrison of the Philistines, displays his faith and piety, as well as his courage; for he ventures not on the hazardous enterprise till assured of success by a sign from Heaven. But his friendship for David, so full of romantic interest, forms an incident which more than any other relieves the darkness of his father's history.

In all true friendship exists an element of self-sacrifice; and this is remarkable in that of Jonathan for David. He first sees the youthful hero under circumstances that might have awakened less amiable feelings in an ordinary mind. Fresh from the slaughter of Goliath, the shepherd's son was an object of attention and admiration to all Israel. He stood before the king with the trophy of victory in his hand—of a victory which had achieved such important consequences, presented by Saul's general, who, though ignorant of his parentage, was ready to bear testimony to his heroic conduct. Modestly, yet with suitable dignity, David answered the monarch's questions, while the gentleness and uprightness of his soul were well represented in his fair and graceful exterior. It was then that the noble spirit of the prince was instantaneously and irresistibly attracted by the perception of congenial qualities. He felt no jealousy of military glory. His affection sprang up suddenly, but was not the less strong and enduring. No language can be more expressive and appropriate than that of Scripture, "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." The prince was first to love: it is generally the case that the superior is first in the bestowal of the unbought priceless gift of affection. An Italian writer considers inequality in fortune or endowments a great strengthener of friendship, if not absolutely essential to its existence. Taking this view, if one would imagine a situation

most favourable for the birth and growth of human love, it would be one like that of Jonathan and David—where the disparity between the two in point of external advantages and worldly position was so marked—and the real difference so great in powers not yet called into action. Conscious as Jonathan must have been of a mysterious superiority in the young stranger, before which his spirit instinctively bowed itself, he could not but know that in the proffer of his friendship he occupied the position of one bestowing, not receiving favour. David, too, must have esteemed himself honoured in the covenant formed with him by one so high in rank, so distinguished by military renown, and endeared to the people. But the generous devotion of Jonathan knew no restraint; he stripped off his own princely robe, and gave it to the youth, with his girdle, and bow, and sword,—an impulsive expression of the love that could withhold nothing. The affection of David was the offspring of gratitude, for he could make no return to the marks of favour received.

It was not long before the fidelity thus solemnly pledged was put to the test. The jealousy rankling in the king's distempered mind created the most implacable enmity towards David, which at length broke forth in the avowed purpose of taking his life. Aware that the stripling was nominated to be his successor, to the exclusion of his own sons, he appealed to Jonathan to aid him in removing so formidable a rival, and laid the same command on all his servants. But no motives of ambition could influence so pure and lofty a spirit. Jonathan lost no time in warning his friend of danger, and pleaded for him with such calm, earnest, and persuasive eloquence, that malignity itself was for the time disarmed, and he procured a reconciliation between Saul and David. Judging his father by his own frank and honourable nature, he esteemed his friend safe thenceforward; but when convinced that the king's hostility was as deadly as ever, he devoted himself wholly to David's service. In the largeness

of his love he promised to do everything—to sacrifice everything for him: “Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee.” No consideration could outweigh that of David’s interests; he recognized in him the chosen of Heaven, and willingly relinquished his own claims to the kingdom. His religious faith perceived that David was under the special protection of the Most High, and that all his enemies must eventually fall before him. Thus he looked forward to the future monarch’s power and greatness, even in the moment when there seemed but a step between him and death; and asked his favour for his children, when he was an outcast and persecuted, shielded from destruction only by his generous interposition. No selfish feeling or wish, however, mingled with his devotion. Again and again he caused David to swear in the covenant between them—and the reason is added—“*for he loved him as he loved his own soul.*” He would bind him more and more closely to himself, for the loss of his affection would have been bitterer to him than any other loss—even of life itself.

David, on his part, had not this sense of his own superiority or advantage. He called to mind the covenant into which they had entered at Jonathan’s desire, and entreated, if iniquity were found in him, that he would slay him, rather than give him up to the king. Some distrust was here implied, not of Jonathan’s regard or constancy, but his knowledge of Saul’s real intentions, or his firmness to withstand his father’s anger in protecting him: “What if thy father answer thee roughly?” David asked, when the proposition was made to sound him. How nobly did the prince vindicate from all suspicion the inviolable fidelity of his friendship, in the scene that ensued with the infuriated monarch, when his own life was madly attempted, because he boldly appealed to Saul’s sense of justice in David’s behalf! He hastened from the presence of the king in grief and indignation, not so much for the fierce assault on himself, as the relentless hate it manifested

towards his friend. His true heart "was grieved for David." The final and fatal rupture was inevitable ; David must be driven forth a hunted fugitive, while the harder lot of continual strife with the evil that environed him, was to be his while life endured.

Once more, in the wood of Ziph, the friends met, and pledged anew their mutual vows of everlasting fidelity. The fortunes of David were apparently at their lowest ebb ; his life sought by the king as an open enemy ; betrayed by those he had saved from their foes, and who had given him shelter ; a wanderer in the wilderness, and surrounded by treacherous enemies, watchful to deliver him into Saul's hand. Yet here the language of Jonathan was full of comfort and assurance. He "strengthened his hand in God"—directing his hopes to the source of his own steadfast confidence, and bidding him fear not—for it was settled in the Divine purpose that he should escape all snares, and be king over Israel. How strikingly does this exhibition of Jonathan's feelings show the religious foundation of genuine friendship ! His faith has proved victorious over all doubts and fears for the beloved ; in the darkest hour he sees the approach of the day of prosperity, and his heart rejoiced in the prospect. What earthly affection could be more disinterested, more fervent, more touching and sublime !

Köster, a German writer, has published an essay upon "The tragical quality in the history of the friendship of David and Jonathan."* "The history," he says, "is tragical, since, either in itself or in its consequences, it so exhibits important events, that our sympathy is awakened, and our sensibility deeply excited. An action is strongly characterized as tragical, when, though never fully accomplished, it exhibits a vehement struggle after something good, lofty, and noble, developed by a complication of circumstances, involving a severe struggle between inclination

* Translated in "Selections from German Literature," by Professors Edwards and Park. Andover.

and duty, or between two conflicting inclinations." How much of this entered into the history of Jonathan's love for David, may be seen by dwelling on the painful circumstances in which he was often placed, in the collision between dutiful respect to his father and sovereign, and loyalty to his friend. By his zealous defence of David, he had incurred the deep resentment of Saul, who did not scruple to accuse him of joining in the conspiracy against him, and even of stirring up his subject to rise in rebellion. Aware of this from the first, Jonathan did not provoke the angry king by any pertinacious display of his partisanship; after the hope of reconciliation was at an end, his meetings with David were held in secret. He followed the fortunes of his father, though his heart was rent in twain by the cruel persecution of him he loved better than life. In the last fatal battle of Mount Gilboa he fought and fell beside Saul. Here, as Köster truly observes, the noble Jonathan removed gloriously the stain which had been publicly fastened on him, and freed his honour from the suspicion of treason. The beautiful elegy composed by David in honour of his memory, expressly vindicates him from the unjust accusation.

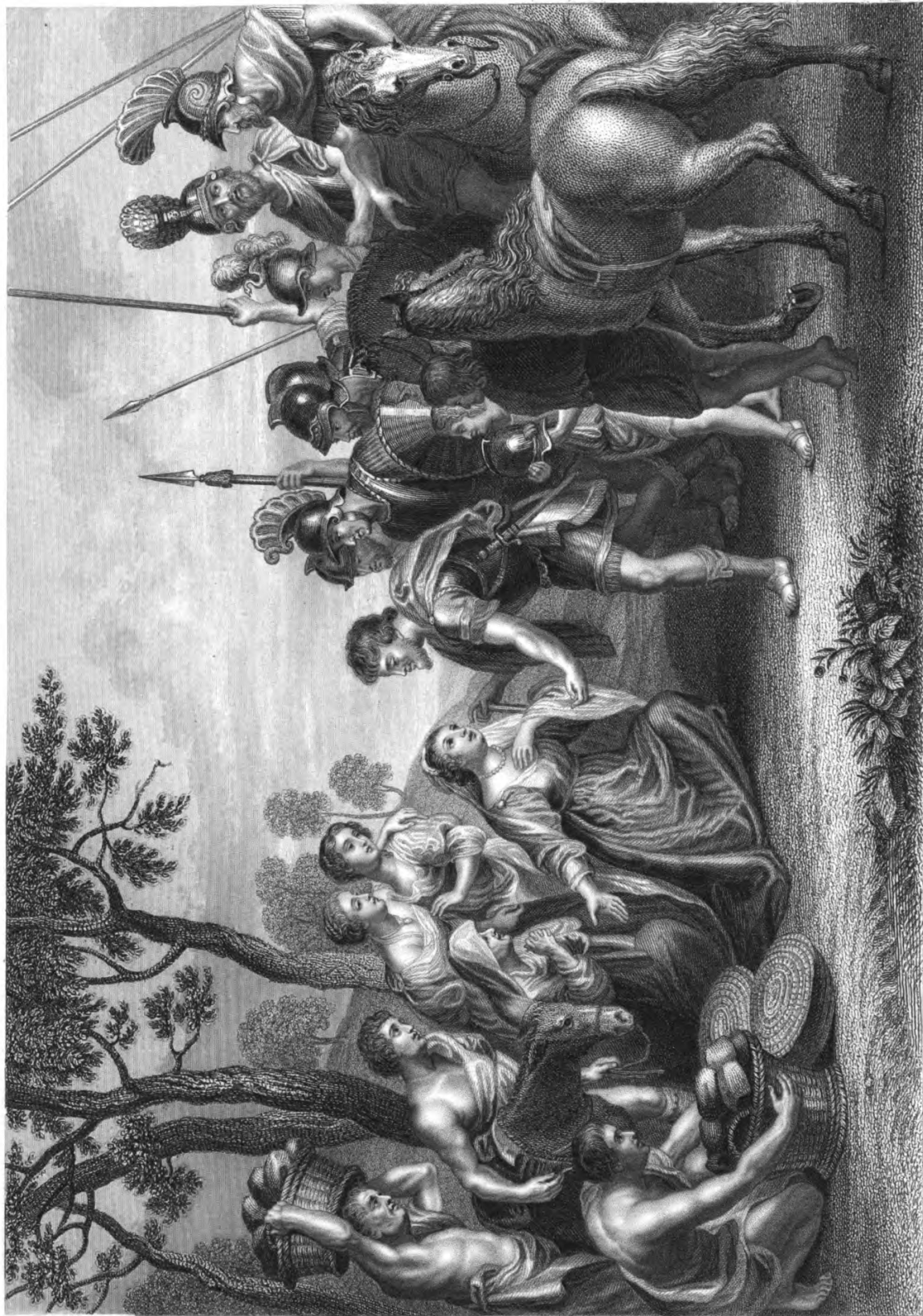
In the picture of Jonathan's friendship, therefore, we see concentrated the noblest qualities—the highest virtues which have ever adorned human nature. The example is the brighter and more touching from the contrast of the hateful passions of the vindictive monarch, and the turbulence and darkness of the period. All the sensibility to domestic attachments of which Saul was once capable, was swallowed up in his cherished envy, suspicion, and hatred. The malignant influence corrupted his whole mind, till ravaged by the storm it became a waste of desolation, under the wrath and curse of Heaven. The ardent affection of Jonathan purified his heroic soul from every selfish feeling, and taught him to discover and acquiesce in the purpose of God, though it deprived him of a crown, and consigned him to an early death.

XIII.

THE FAMILY OF DAVID.

IN the history of the wild and adventurous life of David, while seeking refuge in woods and caves, and desert fastnesses, from the pursuit of Saul, there are touches full of meaning which unfold his character as a man—brave, generous, impulsive, yet magnanimous, with spirit born for dominion, aspiring to lofty things, but subdued through faith to implicit submission to the Divine will. The slight account given of his early years shows him affectionate and faithful in his relations to his family. The youngest of his brethren—although attractive in person and disposition, he appeared invested with no preference over them, but pursued his humble and laborious occupation while they passed before Samuel for his choice of a king. Either his own modesty, or his father's disregard of his qualifications, prevented his coming at first among them to undergo the scrutiny. He was obedient to Jesse, as well after as before his anointing to be the successor of Saul; nor do we find that the prospect of elevation to the throne inflated his mind with pride or ambition, or changed his deportment towards others who had a right to control his actions. After his honourable reception at court, and the tokens of favour received from the monarch whose malady he had relieved by playing on the harp, he returned contentedly to Bethlehem, his duty being accomplished, to resume his employment of keeping his father's sheep. At Jesse's command, he went to the camp to carry provisions to his brethren, and bring back tidings of their welfare. There the haughty and insulting challenge of the Philistine fired his generous soul with indignation, and with zeal for

1



Painted by Rubens.

I Reis XXV - 28.

I Samuels XXIV - 28.

Engraved by W.H. More.

Meeting of Abigail & David

the honour of God and his country. He replied with mildness to the unkind accusations of his eldest brother, not even repelling them, but simply calling his attention to the cause—sufficient to justify the interest he had manifested, and the expression of his feeling.

Merab, the eldest daughter of Saul, was promised to David by the jealous king as a reward for his valour, but in the hope that his rash bravery might lead him into some fatal encounter with the Philistines. But when the time came for the espousals, she was given to another. The affection of the younger daughter, Michal, for the youthful hero, was well known; of that the infatuated monarch determined to take advantage, and urge David to his undoing. The invidious condition proposed was more than fulfilled; there was no excuse for withholding his daughter, and Saul gave her, though stirred to deeper malignity, and fearing David the more, on account of the success of his enterprise, and the love with which he was regarded by two of his own children. The affection borne him by Michal and Jonathan, bestowed by both unsought, and clinging to him through peril and misfortune, seemed to the king's distempered mind to forbode his future advancement and establishment in the hearts of those who were most bound to favour his own cause. Other evidences of his popularity and increasing renown at length caused the outbreak of secret malevolence into open and irreconcilable hostility.

When David sought refuge from Saul in the cave of Adullam, 1 Samuel xxii., his brethren and all his father's house came to him. Distrusting his own power for their protection, and unwilling that they should share his peril, he went to Mizpeh, and said to the king of Moab, "Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth and be with you, till I know what God will do for me." How touching is the solicitude thus evinced for his parents' safety, and how illustrative is the incident of his character as a son!

A celebrated English authoress* has drawn David as a hero, so simply yet so beautifully, in the colours of the Scriptural history, that I gladly substitute her remarks for anything I could say on the subject:—

“ If you institute the comparison between David and the Homeric chiefs, or with any recorded in classic and chivalrous history, or immortalized in romance and song, you will find none so perfect as a hero. Separate him altogether from the prophet and the saint, and regard him simply as a warrior who lived at a period when war was the occupation of life, and personal prowess the sole distinction of character. And what do you find? At the outset you have realized romance in the ruddy shepherd-boy, called from his songs and his sheep, to be anointed to a crown. You have the daring of valour in his fearless combat with Goliath, and its simplicity in his unboasting conquest; whilst his minstrelsy in the court of Saul, his marriage with that monarch’s daughter, the first and last days of his friendship with the princely Jonathan, his chivalrous generosity of spirit in contrast with the cold, mean, settled hatred of his persecutor, suggest a thousand pictures to the heart and imagination. Examine him then in his wanderings, and in his subsequent prosperity as king of Israel;—you will find the heroic traits still strong upon his character. Observe his forbearance under injuries which, united with power to avenge them, was unexampled, as opinions and manners were then constituted. Mark his readiness to acknowledge the merit of an opponent, proved by his expressions concerning Saul, Abner, and Ishbosheth; his recollection of kindness long since past;—witness his embassy to Hanun; his munificence of spirit, and complete freedom from sordid selfishness;—witness his care that all who tarried by the stuff should share like those that went down to the battle; his sending, from his private portion of the spoil of the Amalekites, presents to all whom he ‘and his men were wont

* Miss Jewsbury in her Letters.

to haunt ;' and his anxiety to prevent Ittai the Gittite from joining him in his flight from Absalom, because he 'was a stranger and an exile.' His refusal to drink the water, which, prompted by his urgent desire, the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines to draw from the well of Bethlehem, is another fine instance of generous self-denial; finer even than that recorded of Sir Philip Sydney, because connected with noble contrition for his former want of self-government. 'He poured it out unto the Lord, and said, My God forbid it me that I should do this thing; shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy? for with the jeopardy of their lives they brought it. Therefore he would not drink it.' Perhaps, however, the instance in which David manifested the loftiest spirit, that which combined in itself most of the elements of true greatness, was the kingly offering he made out of his own proper goods to the service of that temple he was forbidden to build, renouncing at the same moment all credit for his munificence. 'Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.' But David was not merely a 'mighty man of valour:' he possessed qualities it was impossible any heathen could possess, and which were his solely by virtue of his knowledge of the true God. It is this remarkable union of contrary endowments which renders his heroic character so perfect. Comparing him with other heroes of old, though acknowledging all their bravery and all their force of mind, we may alter the words of Manfred, and say that David had—

“ ‘ Not these alone, but with them gentler powers ;
Pity, and smiles, and tears, which they had not ;
And gentleness—but that they had for some—
Humility—and that they never had.’ ”

The character of Michal, as delineated by one or two touches in the history, deserves attention. She seems to have possessed

a portion of Jonathan's chivalrous spirit—his admiration of gallant exploits and heroic qualities—mingled with some of the pride and imperiousness of her royal father. The first appeared in her enthusiastic attachment to the victorious hero, which probably she took no pains to conceal. All her imagination could paint of the lovely and glorious was realized in his character. When she became his wife, her duty to him and care for his safety were paramount to every other consideration. Her father having proclaimed his enmity towards her husband, and his determination to persecute him to the death—the cause of David was her own. He came home in haste and perturbation, having narrowly escaped death by Saul's own hand, in a violent paroxysm of his phrensy. He knew not as yet how implacable was the enmity against him, till the messengers whom the king sent to take him were about his house, watchful to apprehend him as he should come forth in the morning. Michal was the first to warn him of the imminent peril in which he stood, and urge his escape that night. It is not mentioned that she had received any secret information concerning her father's intentions; but the penetration of anxious affection may have discovered them. She assisted David to escape from the house under cover of night, and contrived an ingenious stratagem to gain time for him to elude pursuit. The messengers of Saul, who came with orders to bear him to the monarch's presence, that he might gratify his hate by slaying him with his own hand, discovered the deception. But when the angry king demands of his daughter how she dared connive at the escape of his enemy, and impose on him—the falsehood she utters in vindication of her conduct is unworthy of the hero's wife. She did not firmly withstand, like her noble brother, the outbreak of her father's rage, nor oppose reason to his blind fury. In this subterfuge, which had not even the excuse of necessity—for it is not likely that Saul would have wreaked his vengeance on her—she appears far less admirable than Jonathan,

doing wrong to the reputation which should have been most sacred in her eyes, while she pretended fear of David. Had she boldly justified herself on the great principle of right and duty, or reproved her father for his unnatural enmity, she might possibly have escaped the anguish of a violent separation from him she loved so tenderly—in being given to another. Perhaps the same dread of Saul's displeasure, which had induced her to depart from the truth, brought her to submit to this degradation.

After the accession of David to the throne, when Abner, the general of Ishbosheth, proposed to join his party, and bring over all Israel to his side, the condition on which David consented to receive him into his service was, that his wife Michal should be restored to him. He sent to Ishbosheth a formal demand for his sister, whom he claimed as his own, having paid Saul the dowry required for her at the peril of his life. His motive for this demand was probably regard for the beloved wife of his youth, who had shared his early days of prosperity, and suffered in his adversity; although some have surmised that he wished to secure his political interests by asserting his relationship to the deceased monarch, or to vindicate the law of God, openly violated in the compulsory marriage of Michal to Phaltiel. The claim was acknowledged, and Michal restored accordingly. Phaltiel had a strong affection for her; it is recorded that he followed her weeping as far as Bahurim—not walking by her side as one about to be torn from an endeared companion, whose grief at the parting was no less than his own—but behind her, as unworthy to be her equal, or to win even a look from her when she was leaving him for ever. The command to return was given—not by her, but by the general who accompanied her as an escort. Phaltiel obeyed it in despair, while the princess, probably heeding little his anguish or his love, pursued her way to the high fortune that awaited her as David's wife—to the happiness of a reunion with him who had possessed her youthful affections.

The conduct of Michal on the occasion of the bringing of the ark in triumphal procession to the city David had chosen for his royal residence, shows her character in no amiable light. After the establishment of his capital on the hill of Zion, it was the next step of David to provide a place for the tabernacle and the ark of God, that a religious spirit might be promoted throughout the land, by the regular and solemn performance of the sacred services. The preparations being completed for the reception of the ark, a feast was made for the people, and it was brought up into the city in the midst of the rejoicing multitude, with festal shouting and dancing, and the sound of trumpets, and the magnificent song of praise composed for the occasion by the royal minstrel. It was a day of great joy for Israel, after the years of civil strife and war with foreign enemies, when the land had groaned under the weight of oppression and violence. The coming of the ark to its permanent place of abode, the place of solemn assemblage for the tribes henceforward, was a token of the peace and prosperity that should bless the nation under the reign of the king God had given them in mercy. Kindled with holy enthusiasm, David had laid aside his royal robes, and girded him with a linen ephod, forgetful of his rank and state, eager to be lowly in the sight of God, and to mingle with the people as one of themselves. While he gave expression to the emotions of his heart by the tokens of joy and thankfulness customary in festal religious services, there was one gazing upon him from the window of his palace, who took no part in the general delight. The daughter of Saul had been accustomed to little veneration for the sacred ordinances, nor had she a spiritual perception of the blessings of which the presence of the ark was a pledge. She had looked with complacency on David, when, at the head of thousands, he had gone forth to battle, or returned crowned with victory; she despised him when he voluntarily stripped himself of royal dignity, and appeared as one of the meanest of the people, for she thought his

zealous transports unbecoming the monarch, and tending to make him contemptible in the eyes of his subjects. This incident shows her want of appreciation of David's character, as well as her overweening regard for appearances and temporal honours. Had she truly loved her royal husband, sympathy with his feelings would have taught her respect for their demonstration, even could she not have entered into the national enthusiasm. But her pride was greater than her love; and that being offended, no affection restrained the reproach that sprang to her lips. When David had made an end of offering sacrifices, and had blessed the people, distributing portions to all, he returned home to join his household in a feast of thanksgiving. There is significance in the Scriptural description of Michal as "the daughter of Saul." Her father's haughty spirit was in her looks and words as she came forth to meet David with ironical, contemptuous, bitter speech, which displayed her passion and folly, and to which her husband replied in a manner so worthy of one who considered the favour of the Lord his greatest glory. After this occurrence, she is mentioned no more in the sacred history, except that it is said she remained childless to her death.

Very different was the conduct of Abigail, another wife of David. She is described as being "of a good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance;" expressions which comprehend all personal graces and mental gifts that adorn the female character. She was the wife of Nabal, a man who had large possessions, but who in temper and conduct was utterly unworthy of her. David's troops had not only refrained from injuring the servants of Nabal, but had given protection to their pastures and flocks; and in return he requested a supply of provisions. The message was answered by the churlish man with refusal imbittered by insult; and David prepared to avenge himself. His anger was arrested by the prudence and ingenuity of Abigail. Taking with her propitiatory gifts, she rode forth, attended by her servants, to

meet David and his men armed for their hostile expedition. Her conduct at the encounter displays consummate judgment and discretion. Mindful of the provoking taunts of Nabal, she hastened to pay him the reverence due to a superior, to address him in the most humble and deprecating language, and entreat that the blame of the transaction might rest on herself. Her whole address is admirable for the wisdom, delicacy, good feeling, and piety it exhibits; in her intimation that the well-known character of Nabal for insolence and churlishness should place him beneath the notice of David; her expression of confidence that God himself had interposed to keep his servant from revenge and bloodshed; that the sure protection of Heaven would be his, since evil had not been found in him; that his life should be preserved in spite of persecution, and he should finally be advanced to the kingdom. Her allusion to David's military services, and her suggestion, conveyed in a manner which could give no offence, that remorse and repentance would follow hasty and causeless violence—with the other persuasive arguments she employs—display so much of what is in modern days called tact, as to justify the belief that Abigail was a woman of singular intellectual endowments. Her modesty and faith were not less remarkable, and seem to have had the most powerful effect upon the mind of David. He was thankful for her interference, chiefly because it preserved him from shedding blood to avenge himself. Her petition and her offering were accepted, and she returned home to the husband she had saved, to find him grovelling in excess. It was not long ordained that she should suffer a fate worse than that inflicted by Mezentius, who bound the living to the dead. After Nabal's death, David sent messengers to Carmel, with proposals of marriage to the beautiful and gifted woman who had rescued him from the dominion of his own anger, and whose prudent conduct had secured his admiration and esteem. Abigail received his message as feeling herself honoured by it, and gave

her consent with the wonted Oriental expression of humility and submission. Attended by five of her maidens, she again rode forth to meet him, no longer a trembling suppliant, but a welcome and beloved guest, to become his companion through all his trials, and to share the state her faith in God had taught her to anticipate for him.

In the descent of the Amalekites upon Ziklag in the absence of David and his men, his two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, were carried away captives. He pursued and overtook the enemy, slaughtered them without mercy, and rescued the prisoners. These two of his wives were with him during his temporary exile in the land of the Philistines, when he fled from Saul to Achish.

The crimes committed by David to obtain Bathsheba for his wife, not only interrupted the peace of his soul with his Maker, but destroyed his peace as the father of a family. The first bitter fruit was tasted in the death of the child of Uriah's wife. In the deep anguish of David we see the strength of his parental feelings. This passionate love of his children was wounded in his punishment, as in his sin he had outraged all that is sacred in the domestic relations. It was the turning point in his fortunes; thenceforward the sword did not depart from his house, over which hung the malediction of Heaven. The wickedness of his sons was the source of the disasters which covered with gloom the remainder of his life. The dark tragedy of Ammon was followed by the rebellion of Absalom, whom the king had recalled from his banishment for his brother's murder, and with ill-judged lenity had re-admitted to his presence and favour. The outbreak of the revolt, for which artful preparations had long been making by the ambitious prince, the horrors of civil war, followed, with the retreat of David from his capital, under the weight of his bitter humiliation. Yet, driven forth by his ungrateful people—his throne usurped, and his life sought by

his own son—humbled under a sense of his guilt before God—an outcast surrounded by peril, when the decisive battle is fought, his last charge to the captains of his army, in the hearing of the people, is to respect the young man Absalom. How melancholy is the picture of the king awaiting tidings of the battle in the gates of Mahanaim! The pious Ahimaaz, who first brings news of the victory, would fain prepare his mind, by suspense, for the fatal event; but the next messenger reveals all. The immoderate and imprudent grief of David shows the fond excess of his parental love. “The king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept; and as he wept, thus he said: O, my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! Would to God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” The victory was turned into mourning, and the people who had triumphed “got them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed, steal away when they flee in battle,” while their sovereign gave way to the anguish of his bereavement.

Miss Jewsbury, in another of her admirable Letters, draws an ingenious parallel between this Scripture narrative and a scene in Shakspeare’s tragedy of *Macbeth*:—“The announcement to Macduff of the murder of his family, and to David of the death of Absalom. The spirit and construction are essentially the same, and it is interesting to see how closely a first-rate production of art approximates to the simplicity of nature. The transcendent dramatist has only been natural; the simple narrator of events has been dramatic. Both represent a bereaved parent, and that parent’s grief, in heart-broken, heart-breaking words. When the watchman reports the approach of Ahimaaz, and David replies, ‘He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings,’ we have one of the subtlest springs of human nature touched without design. Yet, who does not know the operation of that principle which hopes or fears according to the medium by which intelligence is conveyed, and again reflects back upon that medium the

precise feeling which the intelligence has excited ! Shakspeare gives a fine illustration of this in another place, where he makes Constance say to the bearer of ill tidings—

‘ Thy news hath made thee a most ugly man.’

Then follows another of those delicate touches which go home and instantly to the heart. Of each succeeding messenger David asks but one question, for his soul knows but one anxiety ; it concerns not the battle, though upon that is his crown depending—but ‘ Is the young man Absalom safe ?’ In the history and the tragedy the messengers alike give evasive replies in the first instance, and the sufferers are represented as guessing the truth before they hear it. David, more unking’d by grief than by his son’s rebellion, rose from his place, and ‘ went up to the chamber above the gate ;’ he asked no further question, desired no other intelligence, and craved no royal privilege, save the privilege to weep alone. His people were gathering round—those who had saved and those who had injured him ;—the din of battle and the shout of victory were in his ear ;—he saw and heard, but heeded not, for his soul was gone forth to Absalom, cut off in the full blossom of his iniquities ;—to Absalom, his beautiful and brave ;—‘ and the victory that day was turned into mourning.’ His recovered crown, his re-established throne, were vain comforters for his lost child. In David we see the monarch forgotten in the father ; in Macduff, after the first paroxysm of sorrow, the husband and father become merged in the warrior, who resolves to make him ‘ medicines of his great revenge.’ This is characteristic ; but had both been poetic imaginations, we cannot doubt which would have been considered of the highest order. One other observation on this passage. In David mourning over Absalom, one would think that pathos reached its climax ; but it does not till the subsequent chapter, where his grief is rebuked by the imperious Joab ; and at the suggestion (command more properly) of the slayer of his son, he goes again to sit in the gate,

‘ speak comfortably unto his servants,’ and seem to forget his child. With this assumed self-control, and real submission to the will of others, remember that David was ‘ a lion-like man,’ one whom his own soldiers pronounced the ‘ light of Israel.’ ”

The latter days of David were disturbed by the ambitious pretensions of Adonijah, the brother of Absalom, to the royal succession. He too, it appears, had been injudiciously indulged by his father, and too closely resembled his brother in his ingratitude, his imperious disposition, and his affectation of regal pomp. Informed of his conspiracy in time, David lost no time in having Solomon anointed and proclaimed as king.

In the midst of his splendour and prosperity, David forgot not his covenant with Jonathan, but showed kindness to his son, Mephibosheth, for his sake. We see from this, as well as other instances of conduct, that he was a man of warm affections, such as, regulated by prudence and controlled by religion, might have rendered his domestic life as happy as his reign was illustrious. But through his own folly and guilt all this was marred, till the springs whence flow the purest streams of human happiness, poured forth turbid waters, that fertilized not, but swept all before them to destruction. Let the solemn warning of David’s example instruct all who read his history.

XIV.

THE FAMILY OF SOLOMON.

THE oath of David that Solomon should reign after him was given to Bathsheba his mother, but not merely to please her ambition or show her favour. He was appointed of God from his birth to the throne, and his father, in designating him for his successor, spoke by the Spirit of the Lord. That Bathsheba had influence, is evident from the application of Nathan the prophet to her in the emergency of Adonijah's usurpation, and his intimation that her own life, as well as that of her son, was in danger from the fears of the prince, should his power, already formidable through the aid of Joab and Abiathar, become established. Adonijah's subsequent petition to her, that she would obtain Solomon's consent to his marriage with Abishag, was made because he believed the king would not refuse any request preferred by her. He calculated not only upon her kindness of heart, but her want of penetration ; nor was he mistaken, for she dreamed not of the insidious design concealed under his proposal, and presented his petition as if it had been her own. Solomon, on the other hand, saw through the artifice at once. The possession of the wives or harem of a deceased sovereign was connected in popular opinion with the title to his crown. Absalom thus asserted his claim to his father's kingdom ; and the quarrel between Ishbosheth and Abner was occasioned by a similar step towards the accomplishment of ambitious schemes. The artful character of Adonijah had been shown by his previous conduct ; it was now evident that he and his adherents had not relinquished their plans, nor their hopes of ultimate success ; and it became necessary for the security and peace of the

kingdom that such restless and scheming aspirants should be removed out of the way. The sternness of the king in pronouncing the doom, and ordering the execution of his brother, must be justified as necessary for the prevention of civil war, and the establishment of his authority over the whole nation. He speaks as certain of the Divine approval of his decision. In this very scene his reverence and affection for his mother are strikingly manifested. When she came into his presence he rose to meet her, and rendered her the homage of an obeisance, such as was common from an inferior to a superior. Then resuming his seat upon his throne—for it is probable the interview was in public—he caused a seat to be set for her at his right hand, thus honouring her before all the people as “the king’s mother.” When she spoke of her petition, he answered with respectful tenderness, bidding her say on, for that nothing she could ask would be denied; a promise which implied the supposition that the request would be such as it became her to make, and him to grant. As she attempted no remonstrance when he pronounced the sentence of death, it is likely she was immediately convinced of her error, and acquiesced in its justice.

The reign of Solomon brought the Hebrew empire to its period of greatest extent and splendour. Both his internal government and foreign treaties were regulated with consummate wisdom, so as to secure the peace of his subjects and the respect of neighbouring nations. Commerce flowed through his territories; his wealth was immense; his sumptuous palaces, and the magnificence that surrounded him, realized the gorgeous dreams of Oriental imagination; the fame of his luxury and his wisdom spread into distant lands, and brought princes to pay the homage of their admiration, and wonder at an understanding and knowledge surpassing that of other men. So great and widely-extended was the renown of his riches, and honour, and wisdom, that Eastern tradition invested him with supernatural powers, and sovereignty over the world of

genii and spirits. Still higher distinction, it was permitted him to build a house for the Lord of Hosts—the temple which was to be the dwelling of Him whom heaven and the heaven of heavens could not contain. He was favoured of God, and received the promise of the kingdom for his posterity, as it had been made before, on the condition of persevering obedience. The brightness of this life and reign were tarnished, their termination fatally clouded, by such folly on the part of the wisest of men, as must furnish to all who read his history a melancholy and humiliating lesson.

The first marriage of Solomon seems to have been with Naamah, the Ammonitess, since her son, Rehoboam, was born a year before his accession to the throne. Soon after he became king he formed a treaty of alliance with the monarch of Egypt, and solemnly espoused his daughter. She resided in Jerusalem only till the completion of the temple and the royal palace, and then removed into a palace built expressly for her in another part of the country. Solomon's reason for assigning her this residence is given in the Second Book of Chronicles: "My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come." Though supposed to be a proselyte, she was a stranger by birth to the covenant and the privileges of Israel: her court might be frequented by those who had no part with the chosen people, or despised the ordinances they held sacred, and the guardian of the national worship deemed it not right that the place of the sanctuary should be profaned by the presence of idolaters. Happy for him, and his people, had his regard for the faith of his country been always thus inviolate!

The cause of the sad change in Solomon's later years is pointedly indicated. His love for the women of heathen extraction whom he had married, led him not merely to countenance the worship of the different deities in which they believed, but himself to join

in their idolatrous services, consecrating high places for the purpose, and one on the hill before Jerusalem, in view of the temple he had built and dedicated to the God of earth and heaven. We read of no more melancholy instance of human depravity. He who in infancy had been named "beloved of the Lord," who had been reared in the precepts of a spiritual religion by the example of a father whose heart was set to obey them—who had been honoured with such glorious gifts of intellect, power, and prosperity, beyond all the kings of earth—whose fame had gone into all lands, and should live to the end of time—whose wisdom had been a light and instruction to the world—that he should fall into such weakness and depravity! He had summed up his estimate of human greatness and enjoyment in the sentence "Vanity of vanities!" a conclusion taught by the experience of a life crowded with all the pleasures and the grandeur of the world; his apostasy now showed the worth of human ability. It is not recorded that the princess of Egypt beguiled him to join in the worship of her country's gods; and perhaps the pride of having kept his allegiance to the national faith in this instance, led him to indulge his roving fancy in the choice of wives from the neighbouring nations, against alliance with whom the Israelites had been expressly warned, with a declaration of the consequence—"Surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." In the confidence of superior intellect, Solomon presumed to violate this injunction, and, forgetting the world-old truth—woe to the man who entertains temptation!—became guilty of the high-treason to the Sovereignty of heaven, which forfeited the kingdom of Israel for his descendants.

We see thus the fatal error of this wise, magnificent, and powerful monarch, to have been in his domestic relations. Choosing for beauty rather than for higher qualities, he yielded no better judgment to vain allurements, and surrendered the dominion of his spirit into hands that drew him from the path of right. Not

at once, it is probable, did he trample on the most solemn obligations of a Jewish monarch. He had no deliberate design of disloyalty ; he was unguarded, because he thought his purpose honest ; he had turned aside, tempted by free-will, and in the wantonness of independence, one step from the trodden path of duty, keeping that close beside him, that he might regain it when he pleased. He meant at first merely to grant a reasonable privilege to those who had forsaken home and country for him, with freedom of conscience to worship in the faith of their own nation. Thus by degrees his heart was turned away from the truth, and his attendance on heathen rites set an example of flagrant apostasy to the whole nation. The picture darkens as we gaze upon it. Enemies were raised up around him in his declining years ; rebellion and discontent environed him ; the son of his servant, encouraged by the prediction that he should govern the ten tribes, ventured to lift up his hand against the king. His kingdom disquieted and insecure—his subjects murmuring, and involved in the guilt of his idolatry—reproved, if not rejected for ever of the God of his fathers, Solomon sank in premature old age into his grave, a monument of warning to all ages—in that the lustre of his meridian was eclipsed by the gloom of his latter days.

XV.

THE FAMILY OF AHAB.

It is recorded of Ahab, the son of Omri, that he “did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.” His wickedness, and the apostasy of his people, reached their height when Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon, became his wife. This imperious and cruel woman was not content with bringing over the king to the worship of the Sidonian deity, but laboured to introduce it as the national faith, persecuting those who adhered to the religion of their fathers. Temples and groves were consecrated to Baal; idolatrous prophets were entertained at the expense of the impious queen; and the unbounded power she obtained was exercised to destroy the prophets of Jehovah from the land. Hers was a nature strongly endowed, and capable of exerting vast influence either for good or evil: a Catharine de Medicis in intellect as well as in ferocity, her indomitable will subdued to her sway all the minds with which her own came into contact. Her mental superiority to her husband is plainly intimated. The persecution by which the ancient religion was nearly exterminated was carried on at her instigation, and by her acknowledged authority; the prophets were slain by her command. When Ahab informed her of the disastrous termination of the trial at Mount Carmel, and the destruction of the heathen prophets, she does not appear to share in the fears of the weak and guilty monarch. The only emotion she exhibits is rage; her message to Elijah threatens a deadly vengeance, with a fearful imprecation on herself should she fail to execute it. The prophet, showing more dread of her wrath than he had previously of that of Ahab—for he knew her malignant and unscrupulous nature—fled for his life into the desert. The king had not ventured to withstand his authority when he

ordered the death of Baal's prophets; a temporary reconciliation, at least as far as appearances went, had taken place between them, and Elijah had paid a mark of respect and loyalty to his sovereign, by running before the royal chariot to the entrance of Jezreel. But the anger of the haughty queen crushed at once the hopes he began to entertain of the restoration of his country. Her enmity was unsubdued by the miraculous answer to his appeal, which had extorted confession from the assembled people, and humbled the monarch into silent obedience; her power was yet absolute; and forgetting, in his despair, that there was a Power who could bend the mightiest human will, and work out his own good pleasure by the wrath of man, he gave up all in the bitterness of disappointment, and desired only to end his life in the desolate wilderness! When, afterwards, Ahab coveted the vineyard of Naboth, and failed in his negotiation for obtaining it, his unscrupulous consort not only devised means of securing the possession, but at once proceeded to put them in execution. No hesitation in her purpose, either from conscientious motives, or doubt of her ability to accomplish her determination, appears in her speech to the king, when she first learns the cause of his despondency. She does not by mere suggestion or persuasion incite her husband to acts of treachery and violence; she takes the matter boldly into her own hands, bidding him be at ease, and intimating that she would teach him how to govern the kingdom. The high-handed atrocity of the measures she adopted,—her writing in Ahab's name and using his seal, and the report of the elders and nobles to *her* and not the king, show that she was in the habit of exercising the regal power to advance her purposes of cruelty and violence. When her victim was dead, and his confiscated estate in the king's power, she informs Ahab of the event with a kind of haughty brevity, expressive of her character. She does not say,—“The enterprise has succeeded: you can now take possession of the spoil;” but, as if triumphing in the success of her wickedness, prefaces the communication of

Naboth's death with a command to arise and take possession, dwelling on the incident of the vineyard's having been refused in the way of purchase, as if designing to mark the distinction between the sagacity of Ahab and her own bold proceeding. This transaction was but in keeping with the general tenour of Ahab's conduct, "which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord;" while the testimony is added—"whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." When Elijah came by the Divine command to denounce vengeance upon the wicked pair, then in possession of the coveted property, though Ahab exhibited every external token of humiliation and penitence, thus obtaining a respite from the threatened evil, it is not mentioned that his proud wife showed any sign of terror or remorse. She was the bolder offender, being restrained by none of the early religious impressions which the most abandoned Israelite could hardly throw off. And in the last fearful scene, when the doom denounced had already been fulfilled on her son, and Jezebel awaited in her palace at Jezreel the triumphal entrance of the new monarch of Israel, her pride was in no way subdued. Arraying herself like a queen, as one who scorned the part of a mourner or a suppliant, she stood at a window, and accosted the conqueror as he approached, with haughty and reproachful speech: "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" she asked, as threatening him with the fate of the traitor who had fallen before Omri, the father of Ahab. It is not likely that she hoped aught from the clemency of the victor, or expected to awe him into generosity. She wished not to survive her queenly state, and determined to die as she had lived, defiant and dreadless, yielding in contempt, as it were, of the power which she could not resist. No consideration for her royal condition weighed with the stern Jehu to spare her life, although he ordered burial for her corpse, because, though a cursed woman, she was "a king's daughter." But even this relenting came too late, and the prophet's word was fulfilled.

The last scene in Jezebel's life might invest her character with a colouring of heroism, could we imagine her firmness the result of any noble or unselfish feeling. It was not the queen losing feminine timidity in grief for the fall of her house and dynasty, nor the mother overwhelmed by the catastrophe that had made her childless, and forgetting her own peril to hurl her curse upon the murderer of her son; it was the flinty-hearted and despotic woman, who had used her power to crush all that dared oppose her will, and who scorned to live when stripped of it. No thought of conciliation finds place in her mind, for its gloom had never been lighted up by a spark of any great or generous emotion. She never showed mercy, and she asks none. Her path has been through blood and misery, over the desolation of many whose rights she has trampled on, and she must not shrink from the goal to which it has conducted her. Her understanding has been fettered by cold-blooded selfishness; to this the promptings of nature and humanity were ever sacrificed. No principle but the desire to extend and consolidate her own power has guided her life, and she has no belief in future retribution to appal her in the prospect of death. Yet, repulsive as she is, we can feel no contempt for such a character. Her deliberate and relentless cruelty may excite fear or hate, but her steadfastness of purpose, her resistless will, invest her with a species of dignity, which, terrible as it is, secures her from the scorn we should feel for one so wicked, of inferior nature. In the depths of her own soul no soft or beautiful image was ever reflected; the stern and the hateful alone abide in those recesses, unvisited by kindly gleams of sunshine. There have been a few such characters among women in the world's history, and they stand forth with appalling prominence,

"In human guilt a portent and an era;"

showing to what a pinnacle of wickedness she whose part it should be to purify, may rise, when the restraints of moral principle are cast off, and genius is made the handmaid of depravity.

The character of Ahab offers in some respects a contrast to that

of his wife. He appears in subjection to her superior will, in being stirred up to execute the mischief devised by her. But at times he cannot escape from the influence of the belief he has renounced. After the continuance of the drought three years, when driven to the last resource, he sends Obadiah, whom, though a devoted servant of the Lord, he had not dismissed from his office, to search the land for pasture. In the encounter with Elijah, though he reproaches the prophet as the cause of the country's sufferings, he dares not show anger when the reproach is thrown back; nor does he hesitate to obey the command to gather the people and the prophets for the decisive trial at Mount Carmel. His submission to the first haughty message of the king of Syria, and his going forth against him when reassured by the word of a prophet, are equally characteristic; as is the mercy he shows the fallen monarch, in violation of the command of God, for which sin he is so impressively rebuked.

No part of the Jewish history is more remarkable than the instrumentality of the prophets in those days of irreligion and disturbance. The Levites had departed, the priesthood was degraded; but by the mouth of these chosen teachers, who went, as occasion directed, from place to place, it pleased the Lord yet to rebuke iniquity. Their warnings were often delivered in a manner most impressive and picturesque. Sometimes visited suddenly with the Divine inspiration, the messenger went forth to bear the word of the Lord whither he was directed to carry it—unable himself to refrain from discharging his office, and stayed at the imminent peril of those who attempted to turn aside his steps. Ahijah met Jeroboam alone in the field, caught his new garment and rent it into twelve pieces, before he announced to the chief the intended partition of the tribes. Samuel took occasion by the rending of his mantle to express the rending of the kingdom from the house of Saul. Other emblematic actions are recorded, which served to illustrate the messages delivered according to the manner of Eastern nations. But not only in single instances, and under direct commission from Heaven, were

the prophets useful; they formed a class, educated in the fear of Jehovah and under the supervision of holy men, the business of whose life it was to instruct the people, to uphold the righteous cause, and to protest against iniquity wherever it was practised. So great was the danger of detection, should any of this privileged and respected class prove treacherous to his duty, and so severe were the penalties, that they were generally found faithful; though sometimes false prophets ventured to speak in the name of the Lord. They were honoured universally, and resorted to in extremity, even by the evil-minded kings who persecuted them.

Ahab's subsequent acts showed the same vacillating and pusillanimous spirit as in the matter of Naboth. Perplexed with the contradictory prophecies of the seers he consults, preparatory to the expedition against Ramoth-gilead, but persuaded by the lying prophets who assured him of success, he endeavours to secure himself further by ordering Micaiah to severe imprisonment till his return in peace, and by putting on a disguise before entering into the battle. All his actions thus evince the narrowness and feebleness of his understanding, as well as the depravity of his heart. It was a deliverance for Israel when his house was destroyed.

"The similarity," says Miss Jewsbury, "between Ahab and Macbeth, between Jezebel and Lady Macbeth, and a parallel resemblance in their style of action, has always struck me exceedingly. The portrait of Macbeth, when matured in villany—

' Bloody,
Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful,
Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin
That has a name'—

precisely describes Ahab; every epithet might be proved by an action. Nevertheless the excess of wickedness is, in both instances, to be charged on the influence of their respective wives, who, bolder in mind and blacker in heart than themselves, became their teachers and tempters in sin. The resemblance between the queens is even more perfect. Both were filled 'from the crown to the toe topful of direst cruelty,' mingled with a spirit of 'pure demoniac

firmness,' which knew not, or if it knew, heeded not the relentings of nature. Their minds were compact and integral; they contained no opposing principle which might impede their progress in evil, or imbitter success; so that murder itself, when apparently necessary to the attainment of an object, was consonant—not contrary—to their nature. It was not so with their lords, who, in comparison with each 'fiend-like queen,' were 'full o' the milk of human kindness.'

"Ahab evinced this after his victory over the Syrians. Benhadad, to whom he had formerly been a vassal, then sent messengers to him girded with sackcloth, and with ropes on their necks, to petition for his life, and Ahab said, 'Is he yet alive? he is my brother;' and 'he made a covenant with him, and sent him away.'

"Again—it was by yielding to the delusions of the 'weird sisters' that Macbeth laid the foundation of his after crimes and sorrows; their spells and promises clouded his mind like emanations from the pit of darkness, which needed but the influence of his wife to quicken into substantial evil. So it was with Ahab; he too sought to wizards and them that had evil spirits. In the grand crime of each, the murder of Naboth and Duncan, the parallel of each is minute and unbroken. Macbeth, who was only a thane, coveted 'the golden round of sovereignty.' Ahab, who, already a king, had no need to desire a crown, was disquieted for a neighbour's vineyard; a proof, by the way, how little it is the intrinsic worth of an object which regulates the desires of an unsatisfied heart. Both would 'wrongly win,' yet in the first instance would 'not play false;' one took his disappointment in sullen silence, the other was almost persuaded to rest satisfied as Glamis and Cawdor. Then appear the master-spirits. Lady Macbeth thus taunts her hesitating thane, and, with the hardihood of guilt without fear, develops the purpose which he has desired without conceiving:—

' Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour

As thou art in desire ? Would'st thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem ;
Letting *I dare not* wait upon *I would*,
Like the poor cat i' th' adage ?

and so on, throughout the speech.

“ Precisely in this spirit does Jezebel address Ahab: ‘Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? Arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders, and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth; and she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people; and set two men, sons of Belial, before him, and bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king; and then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die.’ The two monarchs resemble each other in their closing scenes. As dangers increase and the hope of repulsing his enemies diminishes, Macbeth clings with desperate faith to the words of those who ‘paltered with him in a double sense;’ and Ahab, seduced by false prophets, goes up against Ramoth-gilead, where destruction awaits him. The phrensy with which the former receives the messengers who bring tidings of the enemy’s approach, corresponds with the hatred which the latter expresses for Micaiah, the true prophet, ‘who did not prophesy good concerning him, but evil.’ Ahab and Macbeth resemble each other also in the brave spirit which flashes forth just before the end of life; a last ray of kingliness in one, and a burst of old knightly feeling in the other:—

‘*Macbeth.* I’ll not yield
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm’s feet,
And to be baited by the rabble’s curse,
Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou opposed, being of no woman born :
Yet I will try the last.’

“ ‘And Ahab said to his chariot-man, Turn thine hand, that thou mayest carry me out of the host, for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day ; howbeit the king of Israel stayed himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the even ; and about the time of the sunsetting he died.’ Their queens also died in a resembling spirit ; one, having ‘painted her face and tired her head,’ is killed with scoffing on her lips ; the other expires without one compunctious visiting which might prove that remembrance at last awoke remorse.”

The marriage of the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to Ahab’s daughter was productive of the most disastrous consequences to that kingdom. The alliance not only brought the king of Judah into peril, but his family to almost total ruin, and led his successor to “walk in the way of the kings of Israel,” working that which was evil, and causing his people to sin. The influence of Athaliah, who proved herself to possess a portion of the spirit of her mother Jezebel, wrought in like manner upon her son Ahaziah ; “he also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.” When this mother heard of the murder of her son, she resolved to reign in Judah : having probably been left in authority during the absence of Ahaziah, she now seized the crown for herself. To destroy every rival who could dispute her claims to the sovereignty, she barbarously put to death all she could find of the kingly stock, and the royal palace of Jerusalem flowed with innocent blood. For six years did her oppressive usurpation continue, during which time the land was defiled with the worship of Baal, and the temple plundered of its sacred treasures. She dreamed not that any of the line of David remained to sit on the throne ; but the Lord had not forgotten his covenant. Secreted in one of the chambers of the temple, a child who had been saved by his father’s sister from the sanguinary search of Athaliah, was living under the care of the high-priest. When the time was ripe for revolt, this rightful heir of the throne was exhibited by Jehoiada to the

rulers and captains, previously bound by an oath to his cause ; the conspiracy was organized, and Joash anointed and proclaimed king. Hearing the noise of the acclamations the queen-mother came into the temple, saw in the appointed place of royalty the youthful monarch, crowned, and surrounded by the princes and trumpeters, and heard the joyful shouts and the martial music that hailed his accession. She rent her clothes and cried "Treason ! treason !" but no guards appeared to defend her pretensions. She showed the spirit of her haughty mother in venturing alone into the midst of the military force, as if expecting that the majesty of her presence could put down rebellion ; she shared her fate, also, and doubtless met her death with the same indomitable resolution, the offspring of pride : "The wicked have no bands in their death."

The exhibition of wickedness in high places, as viewed in the family of this king of Israel, with the punishment which overtook its perpetrators, forms one of the most instructive lessons in history. We may see here how the absence of all religious principle made room for the introduction of selfish avarice and ambition, which became more and more insatiate of dominion. Idolatrous worship paved the way for the other evils under which the land lay ruined, till a bloody deliverance was wrought. Jezebel, the stronger spirit, had the mastery, and led her husband into crimes he was too infirm of purpose to shun ; their children were worthy descendants of so evil a stock, and were involved in the catastrophe which overtook them. There are many examples like this, but few in which the relations of cause and effect may be so clearly and impressively traced.

XVI.

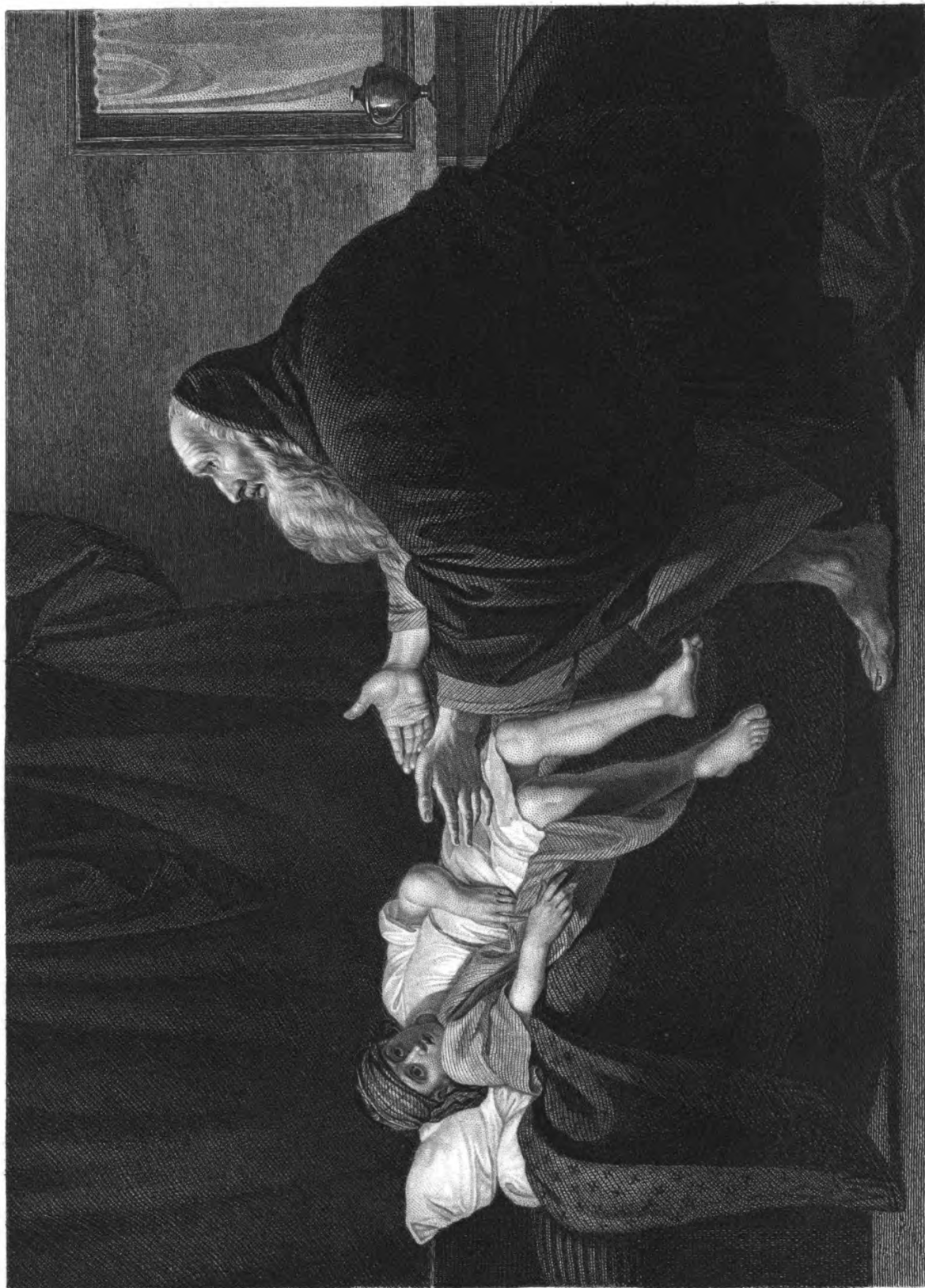
THE WIDOW OF SAREPTA.

BY REV. WILLIAM MARTIN.

HOSPITALITY, so positively enjoined upon us in the New Testament, is also by very striking examples set before us for imitation in the Old. It seems, indeed, to have been one of the primitive virtues of an age when morals were defective, because Christianity, with its refining, elevating principles, had not been sufficiently developed to make "the man of God perfect in every good work." This beautiful Christian obligation of hospitality seems from the first to have been perfectly appreciated and acted upon. In no instance have we it more impressively and thrillingly illustrated than in the heart-stirring narrative of the widow of Sarepta.

How strangely and yet how beautifully is the Gospel in its provisions contrasted with the narrow-mindedness of selfish man! The Jews believed salvation confined to the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, and, consequently, that the covenanted mercies of God could extend to none else; but Jesus, with a happy reference to their own accredited Scriptures, shows at once the fallacy of such a notion: "But I tell you, of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow." Sarepta was one of the cities belonging to Sidon, and hence the widow in question was a Sidonian, and





Painted by B West P.R.A.

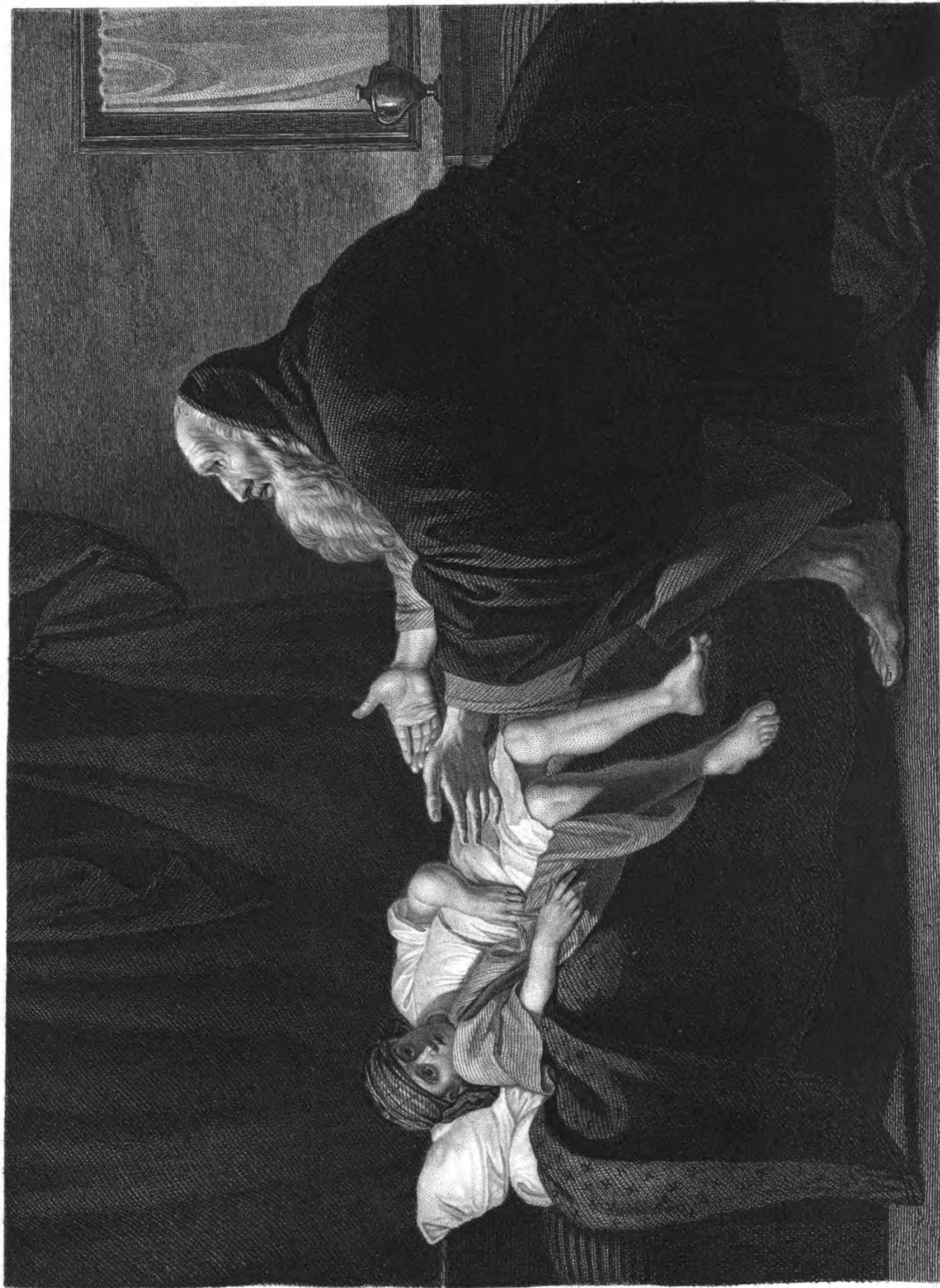
I Kings XVII - 22.

I Kings XVII - 22

Engraved by W. Holl.

10. Elijah raises the widow's son.





Engraved by W. Holl.

I Kings XVII-22

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Engraved by B. West, P.R.A.

Jacob, raises the widow's son.

not of the children of Abraham ; yet God sent the prophet to *her*.

From the time of the revolt of the ten tribes under Jeroboam, the kings of Israel had been, without one solitary exception, evil men. In their folly and wickedness they grew worse and worse, until Ahab married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon, who introduced the public worship of Baal, Astarte, and other Phenician deities. Thus idolatry and corruption prevailed to such an extent, that God, in anger, commissioned his servant Elijah to announce a severe and protracted famine. This famine, we are told in the New Testament, continued three years and six months. But God, ever mindful of those who fear Him, commanded Elijah to secrete himself in a cave by the brook Cherith, where he was fed by the ravens, which brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening. Thus he was sustained until the brook dried up. He then went, at the bidding of God, to the country of the Sidonians, and when he came to the city of Zarephath, or Sarepta, he met a widow-woman at the gate. Of this woman God had spoken to the prophet while yet at the brook Cherith, saying, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there ; behold, I have commanded a widow-woman there to sustain thee."

We are introduced to the widow of Sarepta under circumstances of peculiar interest. She, in common with all the inhabitants of her country, had suffered from the famine. She had seen her little store of provisions gradually diminishing, without the most distant prospect of its being replenished, until it was reduced to a mere handful of meal and a little oil ; that used, and the entire stock would be exhausted. This woman was a mother ; she had one only child, a son, in whom all the affections of her fond heart centred. With what anguish on his account must she have watched the approach of utter destitution ; with

what despair must she have seen at last that the little all which remained could furnish but one more scant repast, after which, both she and her son must die ! How heart-rending the thought that she must see her beloved child perish, unable to relieve his sufferings ; or worse, if possible—that she might die first, and leave him to suffer and die alone ! The hour so long dreaded has at last arrived. She goes to procure fuel, but at the gate she is accosted by a stranger—a man of rough and forbidding exterior, who bids her bring him a drink of water. She hastens to comply with his request ; but what must have been her astonishment and grief when he added “Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand !” “Who,” she asks herself, “can this strange, rough, wild-looking man, be ? Can he mean to take advantage of my helplessness ? Is he a stranger in the country, who knows not the miserable straits to which we are reduced ? I will tell him all ; perhaps my distress may move his compassion, and he will spare me.” And she said—“As the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse ; and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.” “And Elijah said unto her, Fear not ; go and do as thou hast said ; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel—The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth.”

Mark here the trial : not only is this woman out of her little store required to share with the stranger, but she is bidden to make him the first cake, and then make for herself and her son. Look at the group by the poor widow's humble dwelling. There is the little boy at play, unconscious of impending starvation ; the mother, with pale and saddened countenance, and the stranger, weary with his journey, and faint with hunger. He has no claims

of kindred, or even of country, upon her ; she has never seen nor heard of him before ; he is of a country whose laws, customs, and religion, are strange to her ; yet he throws himself upon her hospitality, and asks at her hand the bread she is about to prepare as a last morsel for her child. Must she give, under such circumstances ? Does charity or religion demand it of her ? While she hesitates, the stranger gives the promise, with the sanction of "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel"—concerning the oil and the meal. She complies with the apparently unreasonable and severe request ; she takes out the meal and oil with trembling hands, and prepares the cake. What was her moving principle ? Was it faith—faith in the promise of a stranger, made in the name of his God ? If so, what a striking and beautiful example of faith was hers, exhibited under the circumstances of her situation ! If she acted in obedience to what she conceived the imperious demands of hospitality, how noble was her disinterestedness and self-denying kindness !

The man of God is received into the widow's house ; becomes a member of her little family, and partakes with her and her child, of the daily supplies furnished from that barrel of meal, and that cruse of oil. The drought continues ; the famine increases ; the water-streams dry up ; the earth is parched, and vegetation ceases throughout the land ; yet still the handful of meal wastes not, and the oil fails not. The woman's faith has become established by daily experience of the fulfilment of the Divine promise, and her doubts and fears have gradually given place to abiding confidence and cheerful hope,—hope that by the blessing of the God of Israel upon her store, her wants may be supplied until the famine is over, and the earth shall again be made fruitful by plentiful showers, causing it to yield abundantly seed to the sower and bread to the eater. But while the fond mother thus dreams of a happy future, looking forward to the time when her son shall become the stay and comfort of her declining years, the opening

bud is nipped, and her cherished hopes blighted as in a moment. The object of all her anxieties and anticipations, her hopes and joys, is stricken down by the destroyer, Death. What pen could portray the agony, the despair of that lone widow, as she lays down from her arms that lovely boy, now cold and lifeless; imprints a kiss upon the marble brow, and gazes on the pale form as the last object that made earth desirable! How imploringly she appeals to the man of God, perhaps with some faint hope that he may aid her in this extreme distress! The scene is one of painful interest. The bereaved mother refuses to be comforted; the man of God stands calm and thoughtful, his soul moved with sympathy for the suffering mourner: "Elijah took the child out of her bosom, and carried him up into his own room, and laid him upon his own bed." What were the mother's feelings when she saw the holy man retire to his room with her lifeless child in his arms! what hope sprang to life, to be crushed the next moment by doubt and despair! But Elijah "cried unto the Lord, and said, Oh, Lord, my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son! And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, Oh, Lord, my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again." The Lord heard the prayer of his servant, and restored the child to life; and Elijah brought him to his mother; "and said, See, thy son liveth!" After this wonderful event, the widow, her son, and her guest, continued to dwell happily together, sustained by the special providence of God, until the day that it pleased Him to replenish the earth with refreshing showers and fruitful seasons.

Without doubt, one of the most beautiful and attractive phases of Christian charity is hospitality. Often it is found in higher and more frequent exercise among the poor than the rich. "Come, share my crust," says the poor man, with a free heart, ungrudgingly; but to share the *last crust* with a stranger—this

was the unparalleled hospitality of the poor widow of Sarepta. Twice blessed was that charity to her. "Be given to hospitality:" "When I was a stranger ye took me in:" "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares:" "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." Widow of Sarepta! surely *thou* hadst overpayment, and shall we not all? What investment is like that "charity" which "covereth a multitude of sins!" What venture like the heart's trust in these and such like promises!—"He that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully:" "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth to the Lord; and that which he hath given will HE pay him again:" "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints and do minister."

XVII.

THE HOLY FAMILY.

BY REV. B. M. PALMER.

AMONG the family groups presented to our view in the Scriptures, not one is contemplated with such various and intense interest as *the Holy family*. This title itself, by which, from immemorial antiquity, it has been separated from all the families of the earth, hedges it round with associations the most sacred, and awakens reflections which easily glide into frames of devotion. Pious families have, in every age, been embraced within the covenant of God, the individual members of which we may call holy, in a relative sense ; indeed, many of these have been drawn by inspired men, in fuller proportions than it seemed good to the Spirit to draw for us the characters either of Mary or of Joseph. Certainly, the elements of piety have not been so nicely analyzed in these, nor has such a diversified Christian experience been assigned to them, as the Scriptures attribute to many of the early patriarchs, or to some of the kings of Judah. However distinguished as the parents and protectors of the infant Jesus, they, no less than others, were sinners saved by grace, were justified by a righteousness imputed to them, and experienced the same “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” They, like others, “rejoiced in God their Saviour,” and were in no other sense holy than as they were “washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” Their holiness was “like the light of fire mixed with smoke ; an infused holiness accompanied with a natural taint.” It is not, therefore,

for their super-eminent piety, however great, that the common consent of ages has applied to this family the epithet, holy. But within the inclosure of this domestic circle there is a being who, considered in his human nature alone, lifts our minds to the most elevated meditations. Born of a woman, with all the corporeal and intellectual endowments of a real man, with all those sympathies and affections which bind our race into a common brotherhood, he was yet born free from that taint which in its fountain head corrupted the very nature of mankind. He is the only human being to whom the epithet, holy, may be applied in its absolute sense. Of him alone the record runs that he "was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Poetry has vainly employed its richest fancy to conceive the idea of a perfect man, and philosophy has refined its nicest distinctions to express the attributes which should adorn him. And, if while mourning amid the ruins of our fallen nature, the revelation were for the first time made, that such a being should actually exist, and that in accomplishing the usual stages of infancy, youth, and manhood, he should exhibit the pattern of a blameless life, with what acclamation would this promise be received ! with what admiration would all eyes turn upon this spectacle ! with what critical inspection would his character and walk be surveyed !—yet it is this spectacle which is viewed in the babe of Bethlehem. During thirty years he passes through all the fortunes of human life without a stain ; exercises affections the most ardent, without the alloy of human passion ; cherishes sympathies the most keen, without the imperfection of irritability ; and works actions the most notable, in which are mingled equally the elements of goodness and of power.

This holy being, too, against whom the law brings not a single challenge, undergoes all the pain and sorrow which form in part the penalty of sin ; and these sufferings, which yet avenge no transgressions of his own, invest him with a most affecting interest. Born in a lowly condition, he proves all the mort-

fications of obscurity ; without the poor shelter which even birds and foxes, under a benignant providence, enjoy, he knows the pain of dependence ; lonely amidst the moving crowd, death snatches away the few friends of his heart, and he feels the pang of bereavement ; his pure ears are filled with the coarsest invectives of brutal foes ; and his guileless spirit is pierced with sharp and malignant suspicions. It was his bitter lot to endure the kiss of the betrayer, the desertion of timid friends, and the savage insults of enemies who gloat over the agonies of his dying hour. We speak not now of the supernatural horrors which hung around his soul when he made that "soul an offering for sin." Viewing him alone in his natural relations, we trace his path of suffering, reproach, and want, till it loses itself in the awful gloom of the crucifixion. At every step we recognize the "man of sorrows ;" his acquaintance with grief has "marred his form more than the sons of men." Nature, blunted and selfish as she is, bids us weep over the sufferings which are yet the due reward of sin ; but what sympathy is felt to be adequate when the sufferer is sinless, and bears in his bleeding bosom the broken points of a thousand shafts aimed to avenge the sins of others !

Another feature, attaching the eye of the beholder to this group as to none beside, is found in the singular constitution of this household. In every other, from the very order in which families are developed, the parents must be the central figures. Their offspring, however they may afterwards eclipse them, are, in the beginnings of their history, wrapped within those from whom, in their fortunes and in their character, they are developed. They become important only as they enlarge, and in the lapse of time push their ancestors from the stage, to occupy their place. But in this group, the child is the commanding figure, and from first to last concentrates upon himself the gaze of all beholders. Nor is the tie the same which binds him to his parents. To Joseph he sustains only the relation of an adopted son: no blood of his flows through

his veins: he sprang not from his loins. While Joseph bends with intensest devotion over his infant form, it is with the love of a guardian, and in fulfilment of a trust committed in such a way as most fully to engage the affections of his upright heart. And who shall define the tie which binds this child to his *virgin-mother*? Supernaturally created from her substance by the power of the Holy Ghost, he is born as no other being besides himself was ever born. "Forasmuch as the children," whom he came to redeem, "were partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." He must not only possess a human nature *like theirs*, which might have been had he been created out of nothing, or from the dust, as Adam was; but that he may be near of kin to them, and so a legal ground exist for the imputation of his righteousness, he must have that very nature as it is derived from Adam and is propagated to himself. While, however, this human nature must thus descend to him in the way of inheritance, the necessities of his redeeming work require that the curse pronounced upon the first Adam, entailed upon all his natural seed, and conveyed to them through the channel of ordinary generation, should be stopped from him. His extraordinary conception in the womb of a virgin, and the immediate creation of his human nature by the Holy Ghost, cut off this entail, free him from the taint of original sin, save him from the condemnation of the race to which he belongs, and present human nature in him, spotless, as at the creation. This family, then, is seen to be constituted in a way peculiar to itself. A virgin, who had never known obedience to the law of her husband, becomes a mother. While absorbed in her maiden meditations, a celestial visitor appears to her, with this imposing announcement—"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore, also, that holy thing that shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." The third person of the adorable Godhead, who, at the first, with his forming and perfecting power, brooded over chaos, overshadows

her—by a *creative*, not a *generative* act, impregnates her womb—refines and supernaturalizes her substance,—and transforms it into that of a man. In this way did Christ emphatically become “the seed of the woman,” and in this way was “a body prepared” for him who was to be “found in fashion as a man.” Thus singular were the ties of relationship between the members of this household. The child gives denomination to the family. He is related to the father only by the love of adoption, and through the exercise of a special guardianship: he is related to the mother by no instrumental generation, but by immediate and Divine creation from her virgin flesh.

But let us draw nearer to the canvas, and take a closer view. The eye brightens and the bosom heaves, as greater mysteries are seen lurking within the deeper shadows of the picture. Who is this supernatural being, for whom so miraculous a birth is provided? And why does Mary mingle with her maternal caresses that look of deep devotion and adoring worship? “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!” “The great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh,” is here revealed! The stupendous truth must be admitted to the agitated bosom—this babe is the incarnate Deity! “The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

The myths and legends which form the oracles of Pagan antiquity, universally recognize God’s conversableness with man, and give dim notices of his incarnation upon earth. Did human wit first contrive this doctrine, and ingenious priestcraft fit it to the worship of men? Did human imagination, prolific of images and in dreaming phrensy, first conceive the idea that God should be in human form? Does not the incarnation, like all the great truths of God, rather lie quite beyond the range of human thought? And did finite mind ever so far wander from its orbit as to light upon a discovery like this? Could the doctrine, even

in its crudest form, find a place in the universal creed of men, among nations barbarous and polished, if it were not the distorted image of a revealed truth? There are some thoughts which so address themselves to the religious susceptibilities of men, that once cherished they can never die away from the mind. They may be overlaid, obscured, perverted, but never forgotten nor erased. They seem to enter into the very fabric of man's religious nature, and form a part of its texture. Thus, for example, while "the glory of the incorruptible God has been changed into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things," yet the great idea itself of God's existence has never been eradicated. The incarnation is a truth exactly of this nature. Originally revealed from heaven, it became indissolubly interwoven with all the religious associations and emotions of mankind. Broken off from the system to which it belongs, it has intermingled itself, fragmentary and distorted, with all the superstitions of men. Refracted by the medium of ignorance and error through which it has passed, and grotesque with the silly additions which the credulous have imposed, it is, notwithstanding, the archetype of all those fables which, as they describe God's commerce with mankind, contain the essence of all heathen religion.

The Scriptures teach, that as God mysteriously subsists in three distinct persons, the second of these, being equally related to the Father and the Spirit, becomes the revealer of the Deity to sinful men. He it is who conversed with Adam in the garden of Eden. He it is who appeared as a friend to Abraham, and gave the promise of a numerous seed. He it is, who, in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, led forth that seed from the house of Egyptian bondage. He it is, who, with imposing majesty, gave forth the law from Sinai. And, now that "the fulness of the time" has come, He makes that larger manifestation of which all these were only the types. As the purposes of God ripen to their consummation, the uncreated Son leaps from the throne,

which, as "Jehovah's fellow," he had always shared, leaves the bosom in which he had always dwelt, and speeds to earth, exclaiming, "Lo, I come—in the volume of the book it is written of me!" He strips himself of all celestial glories, lays aside the garments of praise, unwraps his majesty and puts it by, unclothes himself of light, empties himself of all grandeur, and becomes the babe whom we discover upon the knee of Mary. This sublime condescension illustrates itself yet further. He comes not only to be a man, but a "man of sorrows." As though in type that He and his people should be pilgrims and strangers upon earth, he is born by the wayside and upon a journey. As though in token that he and his should have no home but in heaven, he is crowded from the inn, and, unhoused, seeks a shelter even from beasts of labour. Ominous of the humiliation of the grave in which his life must end, that life begins in the humiliation of the stall and the manger. Yet even now signs of the true Divinity are not wanting. A shining star is set in the heavens from which he came, to mark the spot of his earthly nativity. While wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger, wise men from the East bring their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh; prophetic of the time when under the gospel "the kingdoms of this world should become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." Myriads of the heavenly host, with the glory of God shining about them, hover over the watchful shepherds, and sing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good-will to men;" the first note, it may be, of that chorus with which they echo the song of the Church redeemed and triumphant in heaven, "Amen; blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever."

The being thus marvellously combining two dissimilar natures in his mysterious person, is not more singularly united to the race of men, than he is associated with their history. For him and for his work of redemption this world was made. In relation to his

kingdom, all the kingdoms of the earth have waxed and waned. Little as the wise and prudent of our age may reckon of it, the proud empires of the present and of the future, no less than of the past, exist only because of their relations to the despised Nazarene and his humble church. Upon this family, holding in its embrace the manifested God, all the lines of history converge. The light of another world—the eye of faith may even in this—shall surely discover all facts, of all times, in all nations, revolving around the tragedy of the Crucifixion as the great central fact of all history, and taking complexion from it. All the predictions and promises of God, moreover, which spanned the arch of four thousand years, terminated upon this babe of the manger. And from this new salient point, they spring forth to span with the rainbow of hope other thousands of years, terminating upon his second advent, when he shall “come without sin unto salvation,” “to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in them that believe.”

These, then, are the associations called up by that suggestive title—the Holy Family. The specimen of perfect human nature, never witnessed but in the man Christ Jesus; the painful sufferings of Him who drank the wormwood and the gall in place of the guilty and condemned; the supernatural conception of this Virgin’s Son; the incarnation of the Deity in him; and the concentration upon him of all the lines of History and Prophecy: these are the features which give expression to the painting before us. To expand these points would indeed conduct the reader over a large tract of serious and profitable thought, but would lead him too far from the one practical design of this Gallery of Portraits, which is to illustrate the true family life as grounded in religion. With these three figures sketched before us, we may return to the domestic relations of the group, and deduce the lessons which they may offer.

The first of these lessons is, that Christ has sanctified a life of holiness and labour by his voluntary and patient endurance of it.

The inequalities of social condition, arising from the partial distribution which Providence has made of worldly good, have been bitterly bewailed as an unmitigated evil. In every age, Socialism has projected her theories to reduce the fortunes of men to a uniform standard. The ferocious spirit of Agrarianism, against which one generation does battle, and hopes to have buried for ever, experiences in the next a fearful resurrection. It lays, like Samson, the hand of violence upon the pillars of the state; and would shake society into ruins, that it may enjoy a level prospect, even though it should be the level of a universal wreck. What the state of the world would have been if man had never fallen—whether those striking inequalities would have existed, if the earth, unfettered by the curse, had spontaneously produced her fruits, or had yielded them to easy culture—it is more than idle now to conjecture. But since the dispensation of God has been otherwise, it is never useless to oppose the sanctions of religion to that species of savage cannibalism which leads the poor and hungry, with all the rapacity of recklessness or despair, to devour the noble and the great. While, on the one hand, the pressure of absolute want is an evil both to him who endures it and to the state upon whose body this ulcer grows, against which no argument avails; still, on the other hand, it can be shown to be better for the interests of the world at large, that the masses should not be independent of honest daily labour for their subsistence. Wealth brings with it that measure of independence, and naturally so insulates its possessors, that, were it not confined to few hands, it is hard to see but that society must be speedily disintegrated. But that reciprocal dependence which the working classes must ever feel, and which, within certain limits, is even an element of human happiness, binds society together with cords of sympathy and interest which are stronger than bands of iron. Passing by, however, these general reflections, the problem is easily solved why God, for the most part, secludes the “heirs of salvation” in

obscurity, and subjects them to a discipline of toil. Obscurity shields them from many snares and hurtful lusts which necessarily beset those who occupy positions of wealth and power. Labour places a wholesome check upon the impatient and turbulent spirit, which must be tamed and made obedient to the law of Christ. Dependence upon God for their daily food exercises that trustful faith which embraces a Divine Redeemer in the promises of the Gospel. The constant toil of every day hardens the Christian and adapts him to evangelical labours; and the intercourse with man, which business generates, opens wide the door for the entrance of their labours. But though sense were blind, and reason could discover none of these advantages accruing, it checks the murmur dropping from one's lips to remember Christ as standing with us in the same lowly sphere. Every spot through the whole dark passage-way of life, upon which the Saviour's foot was pressed, is sanctified to us. Even the grave is deprived of its appalling associations by his abode in the sepulchre. "Since Jesus hath lain there, we dread not its gloom." If our glorious Head hath borne down into its gloomy vaults his own covenant of love and placed it as the pillow upon which the sleeping Christian may rest, the grave is robbed of its terrors, and death itself is sanctified. Why, upon the same principles, should not poverty, reproach, obscurity, and labour be sanctified to the humble Christian, when his blessed Master passes by the palaces of Cæsar and chooses a humble carpenter of Galilee for his reputed father, and a humble virgin from the fallen house of David for his veritable mother?

Attention should next be drawn to the depth of character evinced by Mary, and in no small degree by Joseph. The profane worship which papists render to the Mother of our Lord has so thoroughly disgusted Protestants, that she is in danger of being defrauded of the credit due to her case as a pious woman. Her character will well repay a moment's study to those who wish to know what elements enter into family happiness. Scan her then at the moment her pri-

vacy is first broken by the angel Gabriel. Startling as his announcement is, she does not reel beneath it. Troubled at the manner of his salutation, she observes a discreet silence, and "casts in her mind" what it should mean. This single ray of historic light daguerreotypes her character before us with imperishable distinctness. What habits of patient meditation and inward self-communion does this perfect self-control reveal? When the message comes to be unfolded, still she staggers not. True, reason could bring no precedents from human annals to justify the astounding declaration. The eye of sense could discover no law by which this event should be accomplished, and her innocence of marriage would seem an interdict upon the promise. True, a calculating, selfish prudence could suggest the cold suspicions which might alienate the love of Joseph. Her womanly reserve might shrink from the prospect of the assembled judges and from the "bitter water of jealousy;" or her natural love of life might recoil from a martyrdom to chastity by the avenging stones of an infuriated and insulting populace. But nothing of all this. If a vivid fancy caused these hideous images to glide before her mind, she had the nerve to banish or suppress them. When the angel places the issue upon the veracity and power of God, her faith yields a ready acquiescence, and with submissive will she replies, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word." Immediately upon his departure, with expanding heart she hies to the mountain-home of her cousin Elizabeth; concerning whom the angel had testified that she was in like manner favoured of the Lord. The object of this visit and the affecting nature of their conference may be inferred from their impassioned salutations: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb!" To which Mary responds, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour: for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden, for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." We have no space for criticism upon the sacred canticle of which

these words are the introduction. One observation, however, must not be withheld : it reveals a strength of emotion and a compass of feeling commensurate with the deep self-communion already noticed. It is conclusive that the moderation and calm tranquillity of Mary under the visit of the angel were by no means due to passiveness of temper and a cold phlegmatic mould that can never fire, even though the torch be from the altar and throne of God. Her whole history goes to show, that, as in the case of others, so in hers, the universal law obtains, that what was "kept and pondered in the heart" was the aliment of the deep emotion, which, like a smothered flame, continually burst forth in the life.

This depth of character is due to the power of her living faith in the providence and covenant of God. Mary is a beautiful example of the piety which breathed and burned in the ancient Hebrew Church, when the faith of God's people fed upon the promise of a coming Messiah. Among the predictions of this event, that most remarkable of all, which foretold his birth of a virgin, and gave to him the descriptive name, Immanuel, had doubtless filled the mind of Mary, and in a measure prepared her for the startling revelations of the angel. With all those who, like Simeon and Anna, "waited for the consolation of Israel," her faith was placed in a supernatural Providence, to whom all things were alike easy. It was this faith that formed the substratum of her character. Indeed the proposition may be made universal, there is no depth of soul in any without the element of faith—faith in something which is great and good. There must be a recognition of principles beautiful and practical, which shall insensibly give tone to the whole inward man. The more elevated these truths, the stronger will be the faith and the more complete the ascendancy over the mind and will. If the principles be divine and such as to associate man with God, they will impart a dignity and vigour to the life which only a divine and inward spring can supply. There may be genius, there may be learning, where there is little harmony or symmetry

of character. Men may shine above their fellows with the lustre of stars: but they will prove "wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever," unless faith, with its attractive and assimilating power, bind them to the great Centre of truth and goodness.

The bearing of all this upon the forming of family ties will at once be seen. The family is the radix of the state, the germ of the church, and thus the basis of every organization known among men. It is in the family that government and law first are exercised. Here a despotism is established sufficiently strong and absolute to break the iron will of men, whose first impulse, as seen in the youngest children, is to break away from all restraint; and yet this despotism is tempered in its exercise, and is guarded from above, by that natural affection for his offspring, deeper than any love known to the parent's heart. Men would be incapable of restraint, and the most stringent enactments would be as tow to bind their passions, if they were thrown together in the mass. But divided into these separate provinces, while yet plastic in youth, they learn subjection to authority under the mild despotism of the family. But this involves immense responsibilities, from which none may shrink who assume this supreme jurisdiction. The true ends of life, and the ordination of family ties with a view to consummate those ends, must be understood and felt. The duties of every relation must be graduated upon a proper scale; and all the emotions and sympathies of the heart must be proportioned by that measurement. He surely should not have in trust the happiness of others, who himself, fitful and moody, swings in the gale without a mooring. He should not assume to mould the mortal and immortal destinies of others, whose own character is without consistency or form. He surely is not competent to guide others, who is not himself well poised, and turns not freely on the pivot through the entire circle of human duty. We cease to wonder at domestic broils, and the insurrection of

turbulent households, when we consider the unformed and ill-adjusted characters of those appointed to rule and guide.

The passage from this trait is easy to another, the most beautiful which can decorate the family abode—the exquisite tenderness and affection manifested by the parents of Jesus. Imagination can easily coin the few hints of this given in the narrative into most substantial proofs. How affecting the sight of this group fleeing by night from the persecuting sword of Herod—Joseph with a sturdy heart grasping his pilgrim staff, and Mary trembling with fear over her precious burden! They tread together the sands of that desert passed two thousand years before by their ancestors, and find a refuge in that Egypt which was once the house of bondage. How does the mother's heart heave with the emotion of danger just escaped, when the cry of the slaughtered infants of Bethlehem is wafted to her ears! “The voice of Rachel weeping for her children because they are not,” unseals the fountains within. Tears of sympathy for those bereft mothers—tears of grateful thanksgiving for the safety of her own—mingle with the tears shed by maternal love over her sleeping babe. Again the wilderness is recrossed; but parental love, ever suspicious of evil and quick to scent the approach of danger, turns their feet from the territory of Archelaus to “the parts of Galilee.” Years roll by, and these pious parents mingle with the throng of worshippers at Jerusalem. With what affection do they search, during three days of agony, for their lost child! and how tender the remonstrance of Mary, when he is found in the temple among the doctors: “Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?—behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” Last of all, see this mother as she stands in the loneliness of widowhood before the cross of her Son. Now “the sword,” which Simeon predicted, “pierces through her soul.” Shall we with profane hand remove the veil which inspired history has drawn over her grief? Even the rough affection of Peter gushed forth unrestrained at the bare foresight of that cross and

its impaled victim : " This be far from thee, Lord." But the bowed and prostrate form of this poor female—who shall say whether it expresses most the agony of a bereaved mother's heart or the deep worship of a Christian, who sees before her the great Propitiation for her sins? And why should this tenderness be ever banished from the domestic circle? Why does God send us thus in groups through life, if not that reciprocated love may bear us the more easily over its rough places; if not that the hand of affection may ever wipe the fallen tear, stanch the wounds of a bleeding heart, and sustain the head which droops in sorrow, or in death?

We hasten on, with the rapidity of suggestion only, to remark the filial subjection and piety of Jesus himself. We might antecedently suppose that He who was Lord of all, and who came to earth only to execute the will of his Father in heaven, however he might rightfully draw upon the service and care of earthly kindred, would yet render no subjection to them. But no. He came to fill all the relations of a perfect man, and to render the exactest obedience to that law which defines them. In the brief history of his early life nothing is told us but that, under his parents' fostering care, he "grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." But though distinguished by these attributes, he wanders not from the eye of his natural guardians. At the age of twelve years, inspired with a prophecy of his after-work, he is seen in the temple at Jerusalem, teaching and questioning among the doctors. He parries the mild rebuke of his mother by as mild a reply, "Why is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" or, as some with juster criticism understand him, Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house? that is, the temple. Yet with this clear discovery of his superiority to them, these instructive words are added, "he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and *was subject unto them.*" Authority and subjection are correlative terms. In the family constitution, God has made

the husband the head of the wife, and the parents are united in a joint jurisdiction over the children. Never can this order be subverted or neglected without serious evils. The parents' right, under God, to command, and the child's obligation to obey, stand over against each other. The parent stands to the child as the appointed representative of God's dominion ; and the child who lifts himself against the parents' just commands puts himself in rebellion against the whole authority of God. It is to impress this wholesome truth upon us that the fifth commandment is the first with promise. Against the radicalism of the times, then—which would set the wife loose from the law of her husband, and emancipate the child from parental control—which would thus draw away the very underpinning of social order—we oppose both the authority and example of Christ. For the law which, as man, he honoured by his most illustrious obedience ; as God, and as Redeemer, he binds upon the conscience with all the sanctions of religion. Nor is particular subjection to parental government during the whole period of nonage all that is required. Throughout life an habitual reverence for a parent's person, which age renders more and more venerable, and a desire to reciprocate in their feebleness the care which we experienced in ours, this too is demanded by the law of nature and of God. It is among the most affecting incidents of the crucifixion that, while enduring physical tortures that were overwhelming, and a mental anguish which no finite mind can ever fathom, Christ still had a place in his heart for his sorrowing mother : “ When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by whom he loved, he saith to his mother, Woman, behold thy son ! then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother ! ” and this remembrance of his mother and provision for her welfare was just before he cried, “ It is finished,” and gave up the ghost. If “ the hoary head be a crown of glory,” how much more in the sight of those for whose sake watchfulness and care have bleached it !

One last lesson from this instructive picture, before the curtain drops. Mary and Joseph act simply as trustees of the infant Jesus. Mary, especially, accepts that trust in view of suspicion and obloquy most hard to bear. Through life the sword glitters before her which is to "pierce her soul." Nothing alleviates it, but the honour of being the Mother of the Son of Man ; yet in her generation this honour was the infamy of being the mother of one almost universally counted an impostor. But though this trust presses against her bosom with a thousand lacerating points, she never shrinks in its discharge. Neither fear nor agony withdraws her from the cross, when bold men through the former alone had fled. In this day of enlarged labours for Christ's kingdom and glory, should not all Christian parents especially hold their offspring under trust from God? Many a widowed mother is called to consecrate the stay of her failing years to the work of the Gospel in heathen lands. May it not be that natural affection shall sometimes plead against a sacrifice, to it so severe, and be hardly silenced? Yet let it be felt that the baptismal rite seals the child for God, and not for man ; and if "the Lord hath need of him," "loose him and let him go." Parents are but appointed trustees : is it for them to say in what way God shall reclaim the trust to himself?

The curtain falls. What general reflection will express the wholesome impressions of the reader from this sitting? How momentous the thought, that no one is alone in the world! At every point we touch another, and every touch vibrates in Eternity! The family is the special school which God has instituted to train us all for the responsibilities of life. In this school let the lessons of love, of obedience, of self-subjection, and of labour, be well taught and be well learned. This, by the grace of God, may save from a life of uselessness and injury, and from an eternity of mourning amid unprofitable regrets.



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Luc 1. 42.

Lucas 1. 42.

Engraved by F. Hall.

Mary's visit to Elizabeth.

XVIII.

THE FAMILY OF ZACHARIAS.

BY CAROLINE CHESEBRO.

“FORASMUCH as many have taken in hand to set forth a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also,” having sought for a perfect understanding of all things, to write unto thee, in order, beloved reader, that thou perhaps mightest be led to think more earnestly of those things wherein thou hast already been instructed. Grace be with thee, and faith from our Lord Jesus.

Judea rejoiced in unprecedented peace and prosperity. The strong will, ability, and power with which King Herod reigned over the land, had attached to it an importance and splendour to which it had hitherto been a stranger.

From holding merely the governorship of a comparatively unimportant region, Galilee, that ruler came to be the independent sovereign of all Palestine—a king feared and disliked for the natural cruelty of his disposition, and because of the rigour and sternness with which he carried forward all his plans for self-advancement, and for the increased power of his kingdom; beloved he was by none, and honoured by few besides those whose greatness surpassed his own, who could afford to admire a firmness of will that had never for its object *their* subjugation; and applauded or encouraged only by those beyond the reach of his cruelty and rapacity.

The effectual aid Herod's father had rendered to Cæsar had gained for the Idumean the fast friendship of the great Roman

Emperor; and, in gratitude to Antipater, Cæsar made him procurator of Judea. Very naturally, the father, occupying this authoritative station, sought the advancement of his own sons; and so we read that Herod, one of these sons, was ere long made the governor of Galilee. It was not very long before that youth, exulting in his power, and desirous to win distinction, began to exhibit those qualities which, in later years more fully developed, made the glory of his dominions, and the misery and disgrace of his private history.

Herod did not reach his brilliant and powerful station as monarch of Palestine suddenly, neither were his honours altogether unsought. To reach that height he was forced to tread a path beset on every side with dangers; but he trod it valiantly, and won the glory which was to him dearer than all things else. Some time after his father had appointed him to the government of Galilee, Herod and his brother Phasael were made tetrarchs of Judea; and not long after this increase of their authority, those causes were set in operation, whose ultimate end was the elevation of Herod to the throne.* An army of Parthians entered Syria and Asia Minor; and one of the Asmonean princes, named Antigonus, a claimant to the Judean throne, thinking it a favourable moment to assert his rights, and supposing that he would be aided in his just attempt by the Parthians, marched with an army towards Jerusalem, and forced his way into that city. A fearful slaughter followed, without any prospect of a speedy cessation of hostilities, or of victory on either side. At length Antigonus proposed to Phasael that they should proceed together to the Parthian general, and leave with him the decision as to the justice of their cause. To this plan Herod's brother foolishly consented, but soon he discovered the trap which had been laid for him, and happily found means to convey to Herod the intelligence of the danger threatening him, with the necessity of his immediate flight. The younger brother fled from one place of safety to another, and finally to

* See Milman's History of the Jews.

Rome, while the unfortunate Phasael destroyed himself in the prison to which he was conducted.

From that city, which he had sought as a shelter in the time of danger, high in the favour of the Roman Emperor, Herod in a short time went forth again, the king of Palestine, with the crown upon his head.

After two or three years spent in subduing his enemies and in conquering Jerusalem, welcomed by none, but feared by all, the people beheld him, an "alien from the house of Israel," seated on the throne, and holding over them the mastery.

Herod appeared before his indignant subjects in a most unfavourable light. He had to brave the prejudices, the dislike, ay, even the hatred of a vast portion of his people; and his hands were stained with the blood of the last of a favourite race of princes, for in the siege of Jerusalem Antigonus had been slain. But they soon found it was not with one who would patiently listen to their rebukes and murmurings that they had to deal. Herod was no weak and cowardly usurper, whom they could frighten from the throne. He was not the man to listen calmly and complacently to the complaints of his subjects, nor one to seek patiently and hopefully to deserve and win their affections.

Fear was the prime minister he appointed to traverse the length and breadth of his land, and speedily that dark power was recognized; the voices of the most indignant were hushed, and the most diaffected were effectually silenced. The destruction of the Sanhedrim, who had dared to withstand his authority, was a dreadful example the people could not soon forget; it had the effect to quiet angry voices, but it was scarcely the way to win the hearts of the people.

The life of Herod, in common with the lives of all rulers who have unceasingly sought power, while conflicting at the same time with national and household enemies, is marked and stained with fearful crimes. The murder of the brother of his beloved wife

Mariamne, a boy gifted with extraordinary beauty, whom he appointed high-priest, and afterwards caused to be drowned, when he beheld the undisguised interest felt in the youth by the mass of the people, who loved him because he was a descendant of the Asmoneans—the cruel and unmanly fear lest the magnificent Mariamne should, in case of his death, wed another, and the consequent command that if he fell in battle she also should perish—the murder of the gray-headed Hyrcanus, whose only sin that Herod saw fit to punish was his just claim to royalty—the destroying of his beloved Mariamne, when his ears and his heart were poisoned by the malicious stories framed by powerful members of his own household—the murder of many men of high rank, instigated by that fiend in human shape, his sister Salome—the destruction of the beautiful young sons of his best-loved wife, at the suggestion of his infamous elder son, Antipater—the subsequent treachery of that wicked son, and the discovery, when too late, of the innocence of the murdered youths—the rage and hate that gathered in the father's heart for the perfidious Antipater ; all these crimes and their consequents serve to make the private life and history of Herod the Great remarkable for unrelenting cruelty, wrong, and self-inflicted torment.

Filled, however, and running over with guilt as was Herod's life as a man, his reign was a magnificent one, such as perhaps Palestine had never known before.

After the fashion of the Romans, Herod expended vast sums of money in adorning and beautifying Jerusalem. On every side splendid public works arose as if by magic ; the streets and all public quarters of the city, with the great theatre, were adorned with images ; and games and sports were carried forward with a zest that filled the religious Jews with horror, and aroused in them the strong suspicion that their king had not only imitated the fashion of the heathen in the adorning of his palace and city, but that he had also made room in his heart for their religion, or rather no-

religion. But when they murmured and accused him of abandoning the Jewish faith, to do away with such suspicions, he caused immediate and vast preparations to be made for the rebuilding of their temple. When the work was actually begun, and carried forward with the utmost zeal, their confidence in and respect for their monarch was immeasurably increased; and out of this respect and confidence, love for Herod was awakened in many a heart.

It was that temple which stood at last complete in its magnificence on the summit of Moriah, the wonder and admiration of the people, and a new source of pride to the king; it was that temple wherein, but a few years later, when Herod slept the sleep of death, our Saviour, the Divine child, stood and reasoned with the learned and venerable doctors; that temple around which, on a still later day, the dark clouds gathered, when its sacred veil was rent in twain, while from the graves of the splendid city arose the dead; and even unbelievers, when they looked on the cross of Calvary, and heard the dying cry of Him who was there crucified, gave in their most unwilling testimony, "This *is* the Son of God."

But neither Herod's munificence, nor the zeal with which he promoted the prosperity of the land, nor the progress they had made under his government in the scale of nations, could silence all doubts, or quiet all fears, as to the justice of their king's reign, or his sincerity in conforming to the outward form of Judean worship.

And among those Jews who looked with minds so troubled on the tendency and effects of Herod's sway, was one, who, holding ever steadfastly to the faith of his fathers, strove, in his feeble way, to counteract the heathenish influences of that monarch's domination. It is pleasing to turn from the records of a life and reign of such mingled crime and splendour as was Herod's, to the contemplation of a life so quiet and holy as that of the priest Zacharias.

He was a descendant of the holy father Aaron, "of the course of Abia," an aged man when he is first introduced to our notice in the sacred history. He had looked on many strange scenes and

changes in the government of his native land, both previous to and after the accession of Herod ; and the sorrows and losses which make up so great a part of the experience of all who have seen length of days, had attended him. His hair had thinned and whitened beneath the heavy, unsparing hand of time ; his eyes had grown dim ; his hands, accustomed so long to holy ministrations, were trembling, for many years had robbed them of their strength ; but still continued he a steward of the "holy mysteries," always faithful, always heartily earnest in his services. Even the voice of inspiration proclaims him "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless." But had we not this gospel-assurance of the excellence and peculiar worthiness of Zacharias, the mere fact that through sixty or seventy years he had been suffered to serve his Maker before the people, together with the knowledge of the crowning honour laid upon his head by the God he had worshipped so devotedly, were enough to prove that a man of no ordinary moral excellence and virtue was this priest.

In the days of doubt and distrust, fear and danger, steadfastly he clung to the faith of his fathers, trusting patiently in the power and goodness of his Maker when Jerusalem was filled with the horrors of war, and human life was held of no account ; mindful ever, even when gazing on the splendours of Herod's court, and temple, and city, of a far higher glory and a more excellent greatness ; rejoicing when it fell to his lot to go up to the city and minister in the temple—happy and content when his feet turned away again from the magnificence of that service to the humbler scenes of his poor home. Patient, contented, faithful, filled with love towards man, and adoration for his God—these were some of the chief characteristics of this most estimable man.

It is heart-reviving to see the young man, in the strength of his years, dedicating himself to his Heavenly Father's service ; separating himself from the vanity of the world, directing all his energies and faculties to the good end of teaching sinners the way

of salvation—guiding the erring, comforting the sorrowful, and striving to arouse the slumberers ; proclaiming ever the tidings of great joy, and beseeching those afflicted with moral leprosy to bathe in the cool and cleansing waters of His redeeming grace. But grander, nobler, more inspiring, is the example of him who has well nigh finished a long, eventful life, having kept always the faith, never wavering, never giving way to the tempter, never failing to deliver faithfully his sacred message. Purified by the fire of worldly warfare, such spirits are the stars which shall shine for ever in God's firmament.

The life of a priest, in the olden time, bore in it but little resemblance to the lives of supineness and ease too often indulged in by His stewards and ministers of a later, would we could say, in every respect, a better day ! Frequently it fell in his turn to aid in carrying forward the imposing and intricate mode of worship by which it pleased Jehovah in those days to be recognized and adored. The offering up of sacrifices, an oft-repeated form, which kept constantly in the mind of the officiator the greater and more mightily-efficient sacrifice, of which the shedding of blood was but the type or symbol—the burning of the incense, whose perfumed clouds swept heavenward, an emblem of the prayers of the faithful, which must be wholly pure, tainted with no sinful thoughts—and all the multitudinous forms and ceremonies, which in so great measure made up the solemn, awe-inspiring form of Jewish worship, were surely not calculated to induce in those who waited in the temple, habits of ease or idleness.

Descended from a line which traced its origin, through many generations, back to Aaron, the fraternal friend of the great law-giver, Zacharias was from his earliest years instructed in all that would tend to prepare him for a life of constant self-sacrifice to God. Pride, and all the passions of the heart, must be early and completely subdued, or how could he hope properly to minister to the moral necessities of a people who worshipped a pride-hating

God? The sinful desires and inclinations to indulgence natural to youth, must be held in constant subjection, or how would he dare tread the solemn courts of that holy place dedicated to a spirit of purity, that would not tolerate iniquity in thought or deed? A love, which no natural or worldly affection must be suffered to supersede, must ever be kept alive in his breast for Him who had redeemed his fathers from the land of cruel bondage,—who would yet redeem his people, and all nations, from a serfdom worse than that imposed by Pharaoh—a bondage of the soul to the powers of sin!

He had read in the books of the prophets of one whose voice, in a distant day, should be heard crying in the wilderness, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” He knew that this messenger would come as the forerunner of the King who should be more mighty and more glorious than any who had ever reigned on earth, and so it had been through all his life his prayer, that ere he yet was called forth to that country from whence he might not return again, *his* eyes might look upon the glory of that kingdom, and himself know of the wisdom of that power.

In choosing a wife, who was to be the companion of what might prove a long, disastrous pilgrimage,¹ Zacharias sought her not amid the giddy daughters of pleasure, and wealth, and ease.

Elisabeth was descended from the same priestly line with Zacharias. She brought to her husband no riches but the wealth of her heart's affection, but that he had chosen well and wisely, how conclusively their long, united, “blameless” life proves. Their conjugal fidelity, indeed, in a day when such a branch of morals was little heeded, adds one other great attraction to the consideration of the wedded life of these servants of the Most High. Elisabeth also, like her husband, had early given the best love of her soul to God, from which love, indeed, if the affections of the husband and the wife make it their common centre, will ever be found diverging those peaceful, joy-inspiring rays of light, which make beautiful and lovely the life of home; while yet it serves as a beacon to

guide them through all the enticements of the world, safely to that "rest" for which our earthly homes are given us only as a scene and an opportunity for preparation.

Zacharias and Elisabeth had lived together many years,—doubtless they had their share of sorrow and affliction, but His mercy had supported them through all, because they trusted in Him. Age was casting its shadow over them, but they could look without remorse, without much of regret, into their past. Peace, mutual affection, trust in the one Almighty and the Everliving, had given the prominent features to their domestic life;—they could look forward beyond the ever-changing world into the future without fear—for their faith was strong in God, who could make light to shine for them through the valley of shadows. They had never bowed before the idols of the world;—love of fame, of worldly honour, of riches, they knew not;—earth held for them no God, in whose worship they had forgotten the Invisible. Ah! we, who in our times of success and prosperity are so prone to forget God, might well learn of them who clung so faithfully to their trust in His goodness, during all those long years when the good they desired most on earth was denied them!

There was a blessing they had longed and prayed for, and yet it had been withheld—not for their unworthiness or want of faith—but simply because it was the will of their Father. When the earth should at last enfold them, and hide them in her arms away from the sun's light and life, their name would perish from the earth. There was no child in their dwelling; no youth whom the good father might lead in the temple, as long, long ago, he had been led, there to be given up to the service of Jehovah; no daughter, whose soft voice and tender love might be the comfort and joy of their old age; no offspring, who, after finishing their life on earth in faith, might with them inherit eternal life. Their own existence had been a happy one; how immeasurably would its happiness be brightened might there, through them and through His abounding mercy, be

added, at last, one other to the innumerable throng of immortals, who dwell in the presence of His smile !

But years passed away, and with it their great hope, and on no lagging wings they beheld the hour of their departure approaching, while resignedly they awaited the summons Death should give.

One day Zacharias left his home and went up to Jerusalem, for the day of his ministration in the temple were at hand. No sign or prophetic thought was given him that, ere he should return to his wife, the goodness and the glory of the Lord would be manifested to him ;—there was no conviction in the breast of Elisabeth, that when she should next listen to the voice of her husband, whose farewell words now lingered so tenderly in her heart, he would look upon their child, and say, “ his name is John !”

It was morning, and the bent figure of the old priest passed through the crowd that gathered around the portals of the temple, and entered, slowly and reverently, the sacred place. It was his lot to burn incense there that day. As he trod along the marble floor, and approached the altar whereon was placed the golden candlestick, filled with the lighted candles, typical of the spiritual illumination which he sought, there was spread through the holy temple such a rich flood of light, as contrasted strangely with the flickering gleam cast by the tapers upon the gilded ark and the splendid altar. In the east the sun was rising, and its first rays fell on the white, polished marble columns, on the carved ceiling, on the altar with its costly gold and jewelled adornments, and on that aged form that knelt so reverently in the midst of all that magnificence.

But not greater was the contrast afforded in those illuminations, than that presented between the worship of God as it was, and the worship of Jesus as it must be. The golden candlestick and its burning tapers, how fit an emblem of the Jewish faith and the Jewish ceremonial ; of the falseness of the glow and the glitter of

Herod's reign! Those warm and life-reviving semblances, how true a representation of His reign and His glory, who was coming to illuminate the mental darkness of the people, who would give life to a dying faith, who would awake Israel to repentance, who would forgive sins!

But the day had not yet dawned, though it was so nigh at hand, when *that* sun was to rise, and so it was meet that the outer courts of the temple should be filled with adoring worshippers; it was meet that sacrifices should be offered, till the Saviour came and the great atonement was made; that the priests should don their splendid vestments; that the incense should be burned; that the law of the old dispensation should be obeyed, till the new and comprehensive law—love towards man, and faith towards our Lord Jesus—should be given.

Zacharias stood before the altar whence the smoke of the burning incense rose; and while the sacred cloud ascended, he prayed for the multitude standing without the temple, for Israel, for himself. On wings swifter even than those of air that lifted up the incense, his supplication was borne to heaven; and behold, as he raised his eyes towards the invisible throne whose majesty he was adoring, beside the altar stood a form of wondrous light and glory! What human thought or hand may paint an angel?—imagination falters, and my voice is faint—surely, the heart and the imagination are weak even to conceive of all that glory and beauty which shall one day be revealed to us! Zacharias “was troubled, and fear fell upon him”—the angel came not to speak accusing words to the trembling man; still it was impossible for the old priest even to look on one who dwelt in the immediate presence of God, without profound emotion.

But soon the heavenly messenger's words, so full of peace, so mild, and withal so glorious, assured the earth-born; his aged eyes were raised, and fixed in confidence upon the radiant form beside him. In breathless joy he listened to the words so full of blessed

promise, to which, even while they sounded in his ear, he scarcely dared give credence. The terrified flutterings of his time-tried, but not time-chilled heart, ceased, when the angel's message was delivered, and the aged man bent reverently down, as to his heart came the words of the heavenly promise,

"Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard!"

But even as the hopes of the fulfilment of these glad tidings grew strong in the mind of Zacharias, the thought of the improbability of such hopes ever receiving fruition grew stronger also. Should the blessing which had been so long withheld, be indeed granted when old age was his companion and Death drew near? Was **HE** yet to listen to the voice of childhood in his own home, and to learn the might and strength of a father's love?—it seemed to him a thing impossible. Alas! how weak and imperfect is the faith of humanity, even in its best development so often giving way, and leaving the poor mortal without any efficient stay in life; so often incomplete, professing to believe in God, and yet not deaf to *all* voices that dare question His power and Almightiness!

"Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years?"

"I am Gabriel," was the answer to the questioning priest, "that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show these glad tidings. And behold thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak until the day when these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season."

And the priest stood before the angel dumb, unable to express his unbelief, even had its existence longer been possible; and while the glorious form of light sped away, the glad mission performed, the poor, voiceless old man stood alone in the temple, marvelling at those things he had seen and heard.

Without the temple-walls stood the gathered people, old men

and infants, young men and maidens, the beggar and the noble, the sick and diseased, and they in whose veins the tide of health and joyous life was flowing. Some in prayerful attitudes, whose supplications were poured forth unmindful of the crowd around; some, impatient of the long delay of Zacharias, whose blessing they were awaiting; some, forgetful even of the sacred place where they were assembled, making plans for buying and selling, or talking over the night's revel, or indulging in gay dreams for the future. Higher and higher rose the morning's sun, and still they remained there, all that multitude, awaiting the blessing. They little dreamed of the extraordinary scene transpiring so near them; they knew not that an angel had come from heaven, and was standing within the temple, foretelling the nigh approach of a messenger, a heaven-sent missionary.

At last came out into the porch the white-haired priest. He stood before them pale and trembling, gazing upon the upturned faces lovingly, but speaking not a word. He looked older and more time-worn even than usual, but in his eyes there was a gleam of joy that was long remembered gratefully by many of the miserable on whom the kindly glance fell. He raised his hands, as though he would fain bless the multitude, but no words broke from his lips; and the people said among themselves, "He has had a vision in the temple." Filled with wonder and fear, they turned slowly away from the holy place. If a lesson may be learned that we would do well never to forget, from the life-devotion of this priest to God; from the confidence he had for so many years evinced that He had ordered his servant's life in wisdom; and from the faithfulness of his connubial love, which forbade his putting aside his aged wife Elisabeth for a younger and a fairer woman—a practice frequent among his people—would it not be also wise in us to take warning from the punishment inflicted on the old man for a momentary want of faith in that Power with whom all things are possible; it was no weighty

dereliction of which Zacharias was guilty. Alas for the calculating soul that doubts, and weighs, and wavers, until the trial-hour of probation has passed, and the seal—the seal of God's displeasure—is unalterably set !

At the close of the days of his appointed ministration in the temple, Zacharias returned to his own home, which was in Hebron, as is supposed, in the "Hill Country." He went not back to Elisabeth, the trembling worn-out pilgrim, whose life-journey was well nigh finished, whose loves and hopes were nearly weaned from earth, but bearing a happy heart, that was filled with a great and a God-sanctioned hope, feeling the strength of earlier years renewed in his frame, rejoicing in the great honour which was at last to attend his house, and eager to communicate to his wife the wondrous message of the angel. Judea had not within its borders a happier home in that day than the home of Zacharias. There were loftier and more luxurious dwellings, and forms that were clad in the fine linen and the purple every day, but the rich and the noble never knew such gratitude and joy as was then in the hearts of that venerable pair. In the midst of their poverty how rich were they ! They needed no coffers of gold, no costly garments, no splendid habitation. The sunshine of content made their lives beautiful ; the blessing, the love of God, was their crown of glory and their reasonable cause for joy. They knew not if the child whom God would send to proclaim to the world another King, even an heavenly—another Ruler, even an Almighty one—was to lead on earth a life of splendour or misery ; but this they knew, that He who commissioned him would be an all-sufficient protector. In honour or poverty, in prosperity or disgrace, He who had said, "He is my messenger," would uphold and comfort him.

There was heard the voice of childhood in that home ; the meek and loving Elisabeth held in her arms the precious gift her God had given, and the father's soul overflowed with thanksgiving.

Infancy and old age, the "wonder child" and the grey-headed parents! It is a group on which the mind loves to rest—a simple picture from which the willing heart may learn a lesson of wisdom.

In that home assembled the friends and neighbours of the parents to rejoice with them, and to give a name to the infant; there was sympathy and heartfelt gladness in the words of those who came to bless the child, and to behold the honour the Lord had laid upon his servants; ay, and in heaven, around the throne of Jehovah, there was also thanksgiving and adoration, and the songs of the angels went forth in praise of him who was hastening the hour of his appearance on earth as a Redeemer and Sanctifier, who had now sent his messenger to prepare the way for his coming. It was in the presence of all the witnesses who had gathered to circumcise his child that the voice of Zacharias came again to him; it was there he broke forth into the beautiful song of praise, testifying thus with his recovered powers, his strengthened faith, and his thankful spirit.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light

to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

John the Baptist was not, as the son born to Abraham in his old age, the long-promised and the long-delayed; nor was he come to redeem a world lying in wickedness, as did Emanuel, the Virgin Mary's child; there was no pompous rejoicing over him, as when a heir of worldly wealth and pride is born in the dwelling-places of the great,—yet a hope, and a fear, and an exceeding joy, such as is seldom known in any home, was born with him. No light mission was that on which he was sent: "To make ready a people prepared for the Lord!" A monarch so jealous, and even on the alert to know the faintest questioning of his right to reign, as was Herod, it was not for a moment supposable that he would be deaf to a voice arousing his people to the knowledge of another king, and demanding for him their allegiance. Danger would probably attend every step of that child's after-progress. No matter what was the nature of that reign for which he came to prepare the people, the mere fact that he was bespeaking the interest of a nation for a strange ruler was one implying danger, constant and imminent, to the Messenger. Yet, dangerous as the mission of their son might prove, though it was obviously such as made the parents at times weep and tremble as they ministered to his helplessness, still did they confide in that Power which was even than Herod's more mighty. They must not shrink back—must not strive to thwart his will, though temptation might at times be strong; they must go forward, bearing the boy, if need be, to the fiery furnace or the sacrificial altar!

"And the child grew and waxed strong, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel."

That is all Scripture tells of the early years of John the Baptist; but does it require any wild imaginative powers to form a reasonable idea of his youth? Filled from his birth with

the Holy Ghost, as he was, it is not supposable that the Messenger would not, without the least parental guidance, have come before the world, the same strong, lion-hearted forerunner,—the same bold accuser and condemner of sin, no matter whether he found it dwelling beneath the princely robe or the beggar's rags. Had he never known the worth of a father's counsel and a mother's tender care, he would undoubtedly, as one God had sent, have as constantly given utterance to that deep, world-entrancing, world-interesting theme,—repentance towards God.

“Repent! repent!” would have as surely been the burden of his cry, had there *not* been in his humble home “in the deserts” a human voice to teach of heaven and hell, or a human hand to direct his eyes and his feet to the narrow way.

God *needs* no human instruments to carry forward his wondrous, mysterious designs. Christ *needed* no forerunner to prepare his way; but who can turn with a deaf ear or careless heart from the record of the humblest of the servants He deigned to employ? or who would care to acknowledge that for him it had been as well if the holy, fearless, constant advocate of justice, John the Baptist, had never lived?

Bethlehem resounded with the cries of mothers weeping for their children, who refused to be comforted because they were not, for Herod sought thus to destroy the infant child of Mary, fearful, though he knew his own end was approaching, that the Jesus who was born, would wrest from his successors the earthly power he loved so well.

But Herod died, and in Egypt, the carpenter, with his wife, and the “Son of man,” were dwelling in safety. The triumph of the king of Judea was passed, his magnificence was ended; he knew it, and, determined that his people should in the day of his death be wretched as himself, he ordered that in Jerusalem there should be a universal massacre, so that if his people could

not mourn for *him*, they should have occasion to weep and lament for themselves,—that they should ever remember his death with fearful agony and grief.

They buried Herod in splendour, with the crown, amid whose golden bands and jewels thorns had been woven—with the crown he had worn in such stately pride, placed on his head, and the sceptre which had indeed, in his hand, proved an *iron* sceptre, resting by his side, it seemed as though in mockery of his vanished power. Then they laid him away in a princely tomb—and others reigned in Judea in his stead.

During all this time, the child John was living in the desert, and the day was hastening “for his showing unto Israel.” How often, as that day drew nigh, would the mother’s heart have failed her, as she looked on the beautiful countenance of her son, listening with all a mother’s innocent pride to the glowing, fiery, inspiring words with which the boy gave utterance to the mighty thoughts dwelling within his breast, had it not been that God, in whom she trusted, gave to her that strength which he will give to every parent who looks to him for help! How often, but for his higher love towards God, would the father’s affection have caused him to mourn over the fate that would so soon remove that innocent, loving, and obedient child from their protecting care!

Yes, doubtless, fears at times encompassed them. The over-weening power of human love, doubtless, occasionally was stronger than their spirit of self-sacrifice; but, reader, there was dwelling within them in their desert-home, a somewhat that strengthened their weak human hearts for the trial-hour, that upheld them and made them brave in the presence of danger, that endued them with power to hope, and to believe, and to bear *all* things. To the parents at best but a few years remained in store; and for the son, even his youth and vigour were no guarantee of length of days. Every ill might encom-

pass them during the time of their remaining pilgrimage ; and yet, beyond all cares and vexations, trials and dangers, beyond the endurance of the cross, heavy as it might prove,

“ Beyond the clouds, and beyond the tomb,”

remained for them all, *if faithful to the end*, a rest unfading, eternal ; such as the power of Herod could not buy for him ! such as the infinite grace of God only can give ; such as man can never demand as a right, or hope for save through grace !

In an age when faith seems to have lost its vital and essential power,—when the necessity of confidence and unfeigned trust in God seems the last necessity recognized, it would be well for us, perhaps, did we oftener turn our thoughts to those times when the lives of our Father’s chosen were lives of constant, unreserved self-sacrifice ! Think of it ! There is no conceivable danger man’s heart cannot nerve itself to brave, if he may but gain riches and the applause of the world !

There come to us tidings that in a far-off region, in the wild caves of nature, lie stores of gold, which all who will may gather, and a mighty nation is moved : all the dearest ties are severed without a thought of regret, and in the face of danger, hardship, and death, the human tide goes rushing on in search of gold ! But, the “repent ye!—repent ye!” of John the Baptist, that comes echoing through the long vista of eighteen hundred years, strengthened and commended by the teachings of Him whose very words are life to them who will believe—ah ! how feebly that cry resounds through our sin-hardened, care-burdened, world-loving spirits ! Ever with untiring voice the Messenger is heard crying in the wilderness of sin ; but, even as our rebellious fathers did, we turn away, we have *no time* to listen. Have we not gold to seek ? and fame to win ? and mighty works to do ?

The early years of John’s life passed ; and at length, from an

obscure dwelling-place, a young man went forth, clad in rude, coarse garments, whose outward guise bore witness only to his humility and poverty. Alone, unknown, he entered on the mission for which he had been born. The people of the towns and villages through which he passed, when they heard his strange words, looked upon him, some of them with curiosity, and others with amazement ; some with scorn, others—but oh, how few!—with aroused attention, and an inclination to believe.

Faithfully was that message delivered. By the roadside, to the traveller who was journeying through the same paths with him, he told with words so earnest of Him who was coming to demand the homage and love of all, that his listener was constrained to believe in the truth of the message, or to question the sanity of John ; and who that knows the human heart will wonder, if the latter was the conclusion often arrived at, and that the incredulous were often glad to forget such earnest searching words as rang in their ears, in the thought—"He hath a devil." In the villages, to the wondering labourers and countrymen—to them whose lives were lives of toil—to weary fishermen resting by the river side—to children—to aged—to the thoughtless pleasure-seeker and to the beggar—to the noble, the rejoicing, and the sorrowing, alike those momentous words were poured forth, "Repent ! for the kingdom of heaven is at hand !"

It is but reasonable to suppose that by the poor and destitute of those cities and villages through which the strange preacher passed, those promises of a king, just and good, who was coming to bless and save them, would be eagerly welcomed and believed. And, in accordance with the sinful nature of man's heart in the time of prosperity, is the supposition and the fact, that the rich and gay, well satisfied with their condition, wished for no better day than that they already had, and scorned so humble a messenger !

That youth was he, of whom so long ago Esaias had pro-

phesied, saying, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain shall be brought low; and the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God!" That youth was the son of the "blameless" Zacharias and Elisabeth—John the Baptist.

As he pursued his way and came to the "region round about Jordan," the rumour of his preaching preceded him, and people thronged to hear what he had to say to them. In every public place his voice was heard ringing out his warning, condemning, and entreating words. Grey-headed men trembled before the fearless youth. They, who out of curiosity stood within the sound of his voice, were many of them "cut to the heart." And when these expressed to him at last their glad belief, his hands laid on their heads the sacred waters of baptism: sinful hearts quailed before him; the jeers and laughs of the unbelievers were more rarely heard; the coward trembled at his words, as he had never trembled in the face of mortal danger; and even proud men, who heard by chance the powerful doctrines of the preacher, to whom, in person, they would not deign to listen, felt humbled many a day by the condemning truths, which shot like well-aimed arrows through their hearts. Even the "careless daughters" (would there were a John the Baptist to so speak, and so arouse the "careless daughters" and "the women at ease" *now!*) wept in secrecy over follies, to whose iniquity the youthful Messenger's preaching had for the first time effectually opened their eyes. And many who would not turn a step out of their path that they also might hearken with the deeply moved multitude to the preacher's warnings and counsel, they, too, at a later day, when all Judea was moved, joined in the cry which from that time through all succeeding ages of the world has arisen from the

hearts of repentant sinners, and will arise until the judgment-day—"What shall we do to be saved?"

"Bring forth fruit meet for repentance!" was the reply, applicable now and ever, as then,—purge yourselves of secret sins—forget the things that are behind, and press forward for the prize of the love of Christ Jesus!—lay down your weapons of pride and rebellion—cease from covetousness—give to the poor—be obedient where obedience is a virtue!

Know ye whence he had the bravery to speak these words in the ears of a powerful people and government? The Holy Ghost was with him!

If there is one whose eye is resting on this page, who hears sounding in his heart words the Spirit is prompting him to utter for the good of those about him, words which self-interest or fear of world-condemnation would tempt him to stifle, when oppressed or outraged humanity might be bettered, and aided, and encouraged by their utterance—oh! if there be, be *thou* a John the Baptist in spirit, and word, and deed, and thou too mayest be a blessed herald of a better day to them who are mourning and pining in darkness.

How anxiously must the hearts of home, of the father and mother, when they had blessed their child and sent him forth, have watched and waited to know the reception his preaching and himself would meet from that "rebellious and untoward generation!" With what thankfulness and gladness must Elisabeth have heard the tidings of the valiantness and success with which he advocated the cause of their Master; and with what joy must that aged father have beheld the fearlessness and force of his son's ministry! A comfort, an intense satisfaction was theirs, even in their loneliness, such as no worldly power could affect or destroy; for themselves, and he they loved better than all else in life, were in the hands of One mighty to save.

“John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say he hath a devil!” were the expostulatory words our Saviour addressed to the Pharisees when they reviled Him for eating with publicans and sinners. And considering them in another light than as a truth employed in that argument, what an insight that simple sentence gives us into the personal character of the Baptist! Refraining ever from companionship with sinners, and from all indulgence that would prove to those ever ready to imagine evil, that earth was more to him than a mere scene of pilgrimage, or a journey on which it was his to teach the travellers who thronged the road through which he passed—giving way to no appetite—chaining and holding always in subjection his human passions—constantly absorbed in the one thought, the immense importance of the trust committed to him—that of awakening a careless, unbelieving people—pure in habit and in heart, self-denying, self-forgetful, John was and is an example—not only to the teachers of the people—not only to man in his dealings with man—not only as a witness of that great truth, that straightforwardness and strict honesty in act and in speech is ever the best policy; but also in the relations of his private life, how brilliant a lesson is he to us, in the simplicity and godliness of his life, and in the noble purity of his heart! giving to the selfish, over-careful multitude such lessons in charity—to the self-righteous Pharisees of all ages such instruction in the principles of justice—to the cruel, tyrannical soldiery such exhortations to mercy, and to all who could hearken to him, the glad tidings, that One was coming after him, and was even then nigh at hand, far mightier than he, who would give to all ready to receive, a baptism—not simply of water, but a baptism into life and blessed immortality!

There was none so lonely, and destitute, and vile, within the sound of the Messenger's voice, that to them his words were not applicable; none so lofty, that he dared not tell them of One in

whose hands they were but dust, who would condemn and visit for their sins if they did not repent.

The kingdom over which, in undivided power, Herod reigned, at his death was given into the hands of two rulers. Over Galilee, Herod the tetrarch was made king. He was a proud, wicked, and crafty man ; but, aside from the errors and wickedness of his government, he had committed an act of gross wrong in putting away his own wife, and contracting a criminal alliance with a near relative, named Herodias—a woman ambitious and designing, destitute of all good or virtuous feeling, who in the end proved the curse and the ruin of the reign and the life of him who had so unlawfully wedded her.

Maddened by the accusation which the fearless noble preacher dared to bring against her, Herodias persuaded the king to imprison John, doubtless even then revolving in her mind some plan by which she might accomplish, or be the means of his ruin, disgrace, and death.

And had they yet departed to the home of the just, those aged parents of John, in the day when their forebodings were realized? and chains were laid upon the vigorous limbs of their young son? The sacred pages throw no light upon their after-lives. We know not if they were resting from their labours in the land of God's peace, in the hour when dangers gathered thickly round the youth ; nor whether, alone by their fireside, they still communed together, praying that God would rescue and preserve their child. Feasting and mirth and sin were in the halls of Herod ; dwelt they still in poverty together, or had one already departed, leaving the beloved companion to bear the double affliction? What would it avail us to know, if we have not already learned one lesson from the love, faith, humility, patience, and obedience to God in all things, of the family of Zacharias?

It would seem that John, in the very midst of his useful

career, was suddenly deprived of his great power to teach, and counsel, and warn. It was not so. *His mission was ended!* He had scattered broadcast the seed which was to spring up and bear fruit in the day when Christ should speak the word. The work of the sower was done. What need for him to tarry till the harvest?

The hands which had poured the waters of regeneration over the repentant people were in chains; but how nobly the labour set for them had been fulfilled! Had they not rested in their baptismal office on the head of the Redeemer? They had been folded in infancy, when his father taught the little one to pray; they had been uplifted while his words, falling like coals of fire amid the multitude, startled the gainsaying generation; they had ever done holy work, and what if they did wear the chains of Herod? The heart which had never beaten with love, save of the purest and most exalted nature, might have throbbed at first wildly, beneath the shameful, galling bonds; might have panted and longed to carry on that good work so gloriously begun; might have questioned if his mission were to end thus ingloriously: but John had not learned the lesson of submission in vain. Ere long the peaceful conviction was again ascendant, that if his Lord had *need* of him, He would in an instant force from those limbs their vile fetters, fling wide the prison-doors, and let the captive go free.

It was a festive night. The lords of his kingdom were gathered with Herod in the magnificent banqueting-hall of his palace, and on swift wings the pleasure-freighted hours sped away. A cloud was gathering over the bright summery sky of those men's existence; its fury perchance has not yet fully broken on them—it may not “till that day”—but then?—

The eyes and the senses of the king and of his nobles were inflamed with the wine they had so freely quaffed; the tables

before them bent with the weight of vessels of silver and gold, that were filled with the choicest and the costliest food, and numberless lamps spread over the splendid display a brightness like that of sunlight. Afar there wandered one "who had not where to lay his head,"—the Son of Mary, the Lord God Omnipotent, robed in the poor garments of humanity! And within the sound of the mirth and revelry in Herod's palace, John the Baptist knelt in his prison-cell and prayed!

Into the great hall where the pride of Galilee was gathered, glided a light and graceful form, the beautiful young Salome. More like some fairy shape than one of human mould, the young girl seemed to those delighted guests; and voices that had been heard to ring fiercely in the battle-fields, and sternly in the halls of state, were raised in wondering admiration as the maiden moved on in the dance.

Pleased and excited by the homage rendered the daughter of Herodias, the king exclaimed to Salome, "Name but the gift thou desirest! though it were the half of my kingdom, I would give it thee!"

Joyfully sped the young girl away to her mother to learn of *her* the gift it was most fitting she should ask. Admiring glances followed her as she went, and the heart of many a youth beat wildly while gazing on her beauty. But when she came again, and passed with a slow and heavy step through the crowd of courtiers, with head bent, and face so pale and sorrowful, there was a murmur of wonder, and men gathered anxiously round the king to hear her name the gift she prized the highest. Oh how cruelly sharp and piercing was the youthful voice that made the fell demand,—"*I will that thou give me the head of John the Baptist in a charger!*"

And for his oath's sake King Herod suffered it to be so.

The prisoner was alone in his cell in the darkness. A damp, chilly, comfortless place was that prison, but at nightfall a ray of

sunlight had streamed through the barred window. It seemed to him like the visitation of an angel—perhaps, he knew not, it *was* the angel heralding to him another day than would dawn upon the people of the earth. But John was not afraid; there was a Spirit with him there—the Spirit God had sent. It strengthened and supported him; that same Spirit who had spread such happiness through his early home, who had ever proved the consoler of his aged parents and himself. Hours passed on; it drew near midnight, when, in the deep hush of the prison, the wakeful missionary heard footsteps moving through the passage leading to his cell. Were they come to liberate him?

They entered the narrow room; one of the stern men bore in his hand a light, the other carried with him instruments of death!

* “The king demands thy head!” was the greeting to the prisoner. One supplication, ’twas not for life or liberty—one prayer, it was for *their* forgiveness and his acceptance, and the obedient head was bowed, and the heart of Zacharias’ son was ready for the sacrifice. The oblation was made, and that strong intellect was before another sunrise grasping loftier truths than the heart or mind of man hath ever yet conceived.

And then the head whose brain had teemed with such lofty, zealous, generous thoughts, was given to the maiden in the presence of the multitude who gathered around Herod. And Salome bore it to her mother; and the murderess smiled when she knew the sin-condemning voice of John was hushed for ever! But it was quite another group that met and wept over the mutilated form which had spent itself in the Redeemer’s service. The disciples bore away from the prison the precious body, and laid it in a lonely grave. It was a place ever consecrated and precious in their memory—a place where many a tear of deep repentance fell—a place where more than one heart grew strong and bold to follow in the Baptist’s footsteps!

Thus was laid to his rest the first soldier in that most glorious army, whose ranks, composed of brave hearts of every nation, and kindred, and tribe, are scattered now over the wide earth. God grant there may be found some few amid the multitude as worthy to do battle and to die for the great "Captain of our Salvation, as the Messenger sent to prepare the people for His coming!"

But yet, dear reader, it is not warriors ready to fight to the death in His service, that are chiefly wanted *now*! Rarely among *us* is the sacrifice of blood required. I would my voice might take unto itself wings, and penetrate not the remote wildernesses—not to the heathen nations beyond seas, but unto fastnesses more difficult to penetrate! into the cold dead hearts which have so long heard the Word in vain—into the recesses of homes where fathers toil early and late without ceasing, enduring anxieties, cares, and hardships incredible, and all to lay up for their children stores of perishing wealth.

I would my voice might come unto the mothers whose pride is in the beauty, and grace, and talents of their children, that they might be constrained to think, if worldly honour and success, and the applause of perishing sinners, is the *best* good they can hope to secure for their offspring. I would I might approach the children hedged in by the almost impenetrable wall of custom and fashion of the world, that I might entreat *them* to think much of that mission on which *they* are sent!

Thou father! hast thou taught thy sons to be messengers of Truth to the world? Through the dark paths which they must tread, what light hast thou put into their hands to guide them? Hast thou sent them forth to prepare their brethren, as much as they may, for the Saviour's second coming? or hast thou read of Zacharias in vain?

And thou mother, for what hast thou prepared thy daughters? Hast thou made them beautiful and graceful, and taught them to

strive to please and charm mankind—to dazzle and shine in the scenes of fashion, when thou *mightest* have made them beacon-lights to save the “tempest-tossed?” or hast thou sent them missionaries into the world, to guide, and bless, and teach?

And ye children—young men and maidens, what is it ye are living for? Folly, and pleasure, and fame, and gold? Is it to shine in the dance—to grace the festival—to win names of honour—to be recorded on the “scrolls of fame?” Are ye scorning the builders of the Safety Ark, and turning deafly away from the voice of the Messenger.

Ye cannot—remember, ye cannot plant brilliant flowers on the broad and pleasant way, and at the same time make straight the paths of the Lord; neither may ye stand idle all the day. Which will ye choose, God, or Mammon? Messengers of Jesus, or of the Evil One?—which will ye prove? Oh, may the Holy Spirit that dwelt in and inspired John the Baptist help you to decide, and *to-day*, if ye will hearken unto my voice—*harden not your hearts!*

XIX.

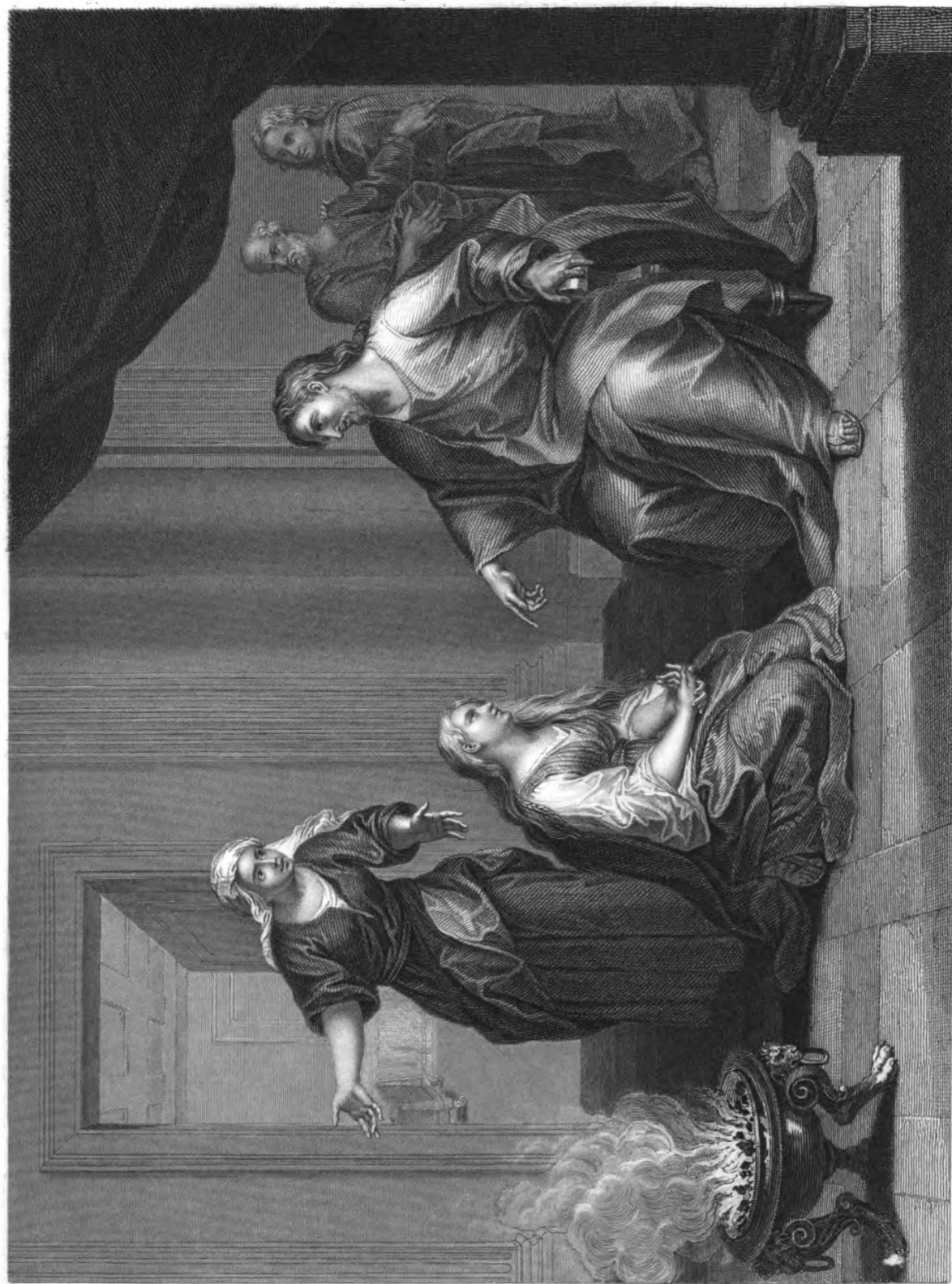
THE FAMILY AT BETHANY.

BY REV. S. D. BURCHARD.

“Behold the place where Jesus often dwelt,
While soft compassion all his spirit moved ;
And friends who gloried in his presence felt
The joy of loving, and of being loved.”

MANY of the places mentioned in Scripture are associated with some signal event which has hallowed them in the memory of the good. That event may have been transient ; perhaps the outgush of some terrible emotion, or the uplifting of the arm of Deity, either for deliverance or destruction. Be it what it may, —a miracle of mercy or a manifestation of wrath,—the place of its occurrence is an object of interest to the succeeding generations of men. What a rush of old memories, venerable as time and awful as the treadings of the Almighty, comes over the traveller as he stands upon Sinai or Horeb, dark, rugged, and awe-inspiring! Less terrific, but not less hallowing, are the associations which cluster around Carmel, Hermon, and Mount Zion, “where the Lord commanded his blessing, even life for ever more.” These places may be bleak and wild, barren of every vestige of modern art, but they possess a charm which no romance can equal or poetry describe. Dearer and still more attractive memory-places are those rendered sacred by the miracles and ministry of Him who was God manifest in the flesh.

In the lapse of time and in the unfolding mysteries of Providence, we see the star which had hung over the darkness of Eden in the form of a distant and doubtfully interpreted promise,



Painted by Coppel.

Lucas X. 42.

Lucas X. 42.

Engraved by F. Holl.

The Family at Bethany.

pointing out Bethlehem of Judea as the birth-place of Jesus, the anointed King of Israel. And now is beginning to be seen, in all its marvel and in all its magnificence, the fulfilment of the prophetic saying, "But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."—Micah v. 2.

Bethlehem would long since have faded from the memory of man, had it not been mentioned in prophecy and distinguished in history, as the chosen spot over which the wings of angels hovered to welcome the advent of the Son of God.

Cold, indeed, must that man's piety be, which is not kindled to a warmer glow as he stands amid these clustering associations, treads the streets of the Holy City, or walks the mountain-slopes of Judea, or listens to the murmuring waters of the Jordan.

But of all the places recorded in Scripture, perhaps none is more sacred than the little village of Bethany. Though not recognized by this name in the Old Testament, it is frequently mentioned in the Talmud, and is undoubtedly a place of great antiquity. It is situated on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, on the road to Jericho, about two miles from the city of Jerusalem. This village, romantic and retired, was distinguished in the days of our Saviour as the residence of Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. It was to this place, amid the pressure of his trials and the fatigues of his labours, that He was accustomed to repair. It was the soft green, on which his heart found repose from the trials of a hard and toilsome life. It was in this pious family, where love and religion blended their hallowing light and influence, that he met with those little kindnesses and attentions, which were so soothing to his sensitive nature, and made him feel that there was one spot of earth at least partially restored to its primeval bloom and beauty. It was here that the human and social of the man Jesus

were gratified. In other relations he awed the multitude by the grandeur of his miracles and the flashings forth of his Divine nature; but in the family at Bethany he was the companion and the friend, cultivating and honouring those social and domestic attachments, which relieve earth of much of its care, and make it a type and emblem of heaven.

This was doubtless a Jewish family educated in the Hebrew faith, and strictly observant of that ancient form of worship; but their hearts had been opened to the reception of that truth which giveth light. The shadow had been yielded for the substance, the scaffolding for the building, the type for the anti-type, Moses for Jesus. How this family had been brought under the influence of this Divine teacher, the history does not definitely inform us. They may have met him in the temple, at some of their religious feasts, and, attracted by his meek and gentle bearing, they may have extended to him the hospitalities of their quiet home, where he planted the spiritual seed-grain in hearts previously and providentially prepared, which subsequently sprang up and ripened into a harvest of enduring and immortal growth. Whatever may have been the circumstances which led to their conversion, they evidently became devotedly attached to the Saviour's person and mission. Though as yet there had been no formal renunciation of their former faith and worship—no seclusion from their brethren according to the flesh—still holier fire had been kindled upon their ancient family altar, and holier incense had risen from their hearts, than ever ascended from golden censers. With an earnest and full faith, they had received Jesus as the true and promised Messiah, the hope of Israel and the Saviour thereof. Many are the evidences of the individual faith and piety of this interesting family. The fact that they received and entertained the despised and rejected Nazarene manifests an affection and a fortitude truly commendable in that age of prejudice and persecution. What but a true faith in Him as the Messiah, enabled them to endure

the odium attached to their voluntary fealty and friendship? Doubtless they *loved* Jesus as a man, but they *trusted* in him as God. It was more than the outgush of natural affection which prompted Mary to that noble sacrifice which incurred the censure of at least one of the disciples. It was a precious memorial of her faith—an act of piety which has rendered her name illustrious and immortal. And she was commended by Him who appreciated the affectionate token, and He said by way of reproof to her accusers: “Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of, for a memorial of her.”

This pious act is mentioned by at least three of the Evangelists. John, more minute in his details, says, that “she took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.”

What an exhibition of love and humility is here?

“With tears she wash’d his sacred feet,
And wiped them with her flowing hair;
And freely took the ointment sweet,
And pour’d its costly fragrance there.”

Luke mentions another fact which illustrates the piety of these sisters of Bethany: “Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village; and a certain woman, named Martha, received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard his words. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her, therefore, that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.”—Luke x. 38.

Now this brief narrative brings to view their respective and distinctive traits of character. Both were pious, both loved Jesus, and both desired to serve him. Mary seems to have been the more gentle and loving in her disposition : her piety was of the calm and meditative cast. She was content to be the passive and delighted recipient of those divine teachings that distilled like the dew from his lips. The world, with its anxieties and troubles, its every-day perplexities and cares, was nothing to her, so long as she could sit a charmed listener at the Master's feet. She loved with all the deep intensity of a trustful and devoted heart. She may not have had the elements of endurance, self-denial, and womanly fortitude, which characterized her more careful and anxious sister. She might have made a more amiable companion, a more loving friend, but perhaps not a more heroic and self-denying missionary. She, doubtless, had the meekness and the patience to submit to trials without the murmur of a word, but not the heroic courage to meet and overcome them. She was the *gentle* Mary, who loved because it was her *nature* to love. Her love, indeed, was holy, for in all its strength and pathos it was consecrated upon One worthy of love so deep, so pure, so *divine*. Martha was a different character, possessing more strength and energy, being more stirring and active, more nervous and petulant. Her heart may have been quite as open to the wants of others, quite as ready to do and to suffer for her Saviour, as her more gentle and confiding sister. But there were household duties to be performed, and she was doubtless conscientious in endeavouring to provide suitable entertainment for so distinguished a guest. She conceived that the Master was worn and weary with his more public labours and cares, and she desired for him rest and refreshment. Are not *these* the suggestions of love and piety? She, perhaps, erred in being too anxious and impulsive, and for the momentary fret which she manifested, she was duly

reproved by Jesus, who delicately shielded the gentle and loving creature sitting at his feet from her unmerited rebuke. The reproof was timely and well meant, and, doubtless, well received; and was a salutary warning to Martha not to suffer the earthly to supersede, even for a moment, the heavenly. A due attention to the former is right, but the danger is in excess and absorption of one's entire thoughts and energies. Safety lies in the other direction; it is a course illumined with promises, radiant with hope, and crowned with a blessing. "And Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her." Lazarus was also a member of this family group. He was an only brother, and tenderly loved by Jesus, and his two sisters, Martha and Mary.

Bereaved of their parents, and secluded from the world, their earthly affections clung the more fondly to him; and it seems that he was devoted to the comfort and welfare of his sisters. He was the light of their household and the joy of their hearts, and beautiful and blessed were the hours spent in each other's society.

Thus happy and harmonious, it was a *model* family, selected out of all the families then upon the earth, as the favourite resort of the Son of God. And shall they not be exempt from the blighting touch of sorrow!

Shall death enter, and, amid hearts all warm, all sensitive, all gushing forth in tenderness, and deaf to the pleadings of sisterly affection, mar the happiness of this family group, and spread the loneliness of the grave over their dwelling? At length, disease, that fearful precursor of a more dreaded calamity, comes. Lazarus is the chosen victim.

"Therefore his sisters sent unto Jesus, saying, Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick."

It might seem that his affection for the family would have hastened his departure to the scene of trial; but no, he intends

to evolve light from amid the deepening gloom, and to elaborate from death and corruption an argument irresistible, in favour of life and immortality. The awful blow, with crushing weight, at length has fallen—

“Lazarus is dead!”

“That form which love had whisper’d would be last
To greet their dying vision, cold and still
In death is laid. The hand which they had cherish’d
Would return no pressure. Those lips which cheer’d
Were closed in marble stillness, and gave back
No fond caress!”

Alas! to them the world is drear and desolate.

“They had been oft alone
When Lazarus had follow’d Christ to hear
His teachings in Jerusalem; but this
Was *more* than solitude. The silence now
Was void of expectation.”

But lo! the Master cometh; and on his lips are words of life and blessing!

To the anxious Martha, who, on the way, had met him, he says, “Thy brother shall rise again.” In the full belief of that cardinal doctrine of our faith, she replies, “I know that he shall rise again, in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life! he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” What sublime words are these! words which spoke comfort to the sorrowing heart of Martha: “*Thy brother* shall rise again.” Not some undefined and spiritual substance shall be eliminated from the dark grave of mortality; not some strange being shall go forth from the tomb; but *thy brother*, with all a brother’s warm heart and sympathies, shall rise again. But this seemed to point to the dim and veiled future; and shadow and mystery hung over the

promise of reunion with the loved and lost. This, though comforting, was not satisfying; it was too distant, too vague to be apprehended only by faith. She desires something immediate, and she seems to cling to the trembling hope that her Lord might now interpose, and restore to her the object of her love. She says, "I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." With a bosom heaving with the struggling emotions of hope and fear, she returns to the house, and secretly says to her sister, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him, and fell down at his feet, saying, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus, therefore, saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping that came with her, he groaned in the spirit and was troubled, and said, Where have ye laid him? They say unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept." Behold now the humanity of Jesus! He felt, ay, he felt deeply for those stricken-hearted mourners. Not with cold indifference, not in proud triumph, did he stand by that grave of sorrow.

Though he was thinking of a triumph — a triumph over death — yet sadness was in his heart; and again groaning within himself, he steps to the mouth of the cave. An awful suspense rests on the minds of that sorrowful group. He prays; — deep and tremulous were the tones of his voice.

" He ceased,
And for a minute's space there was a hush,
As if the angelic watchers of the world
Had stayed the pulses of all breathing things,
To listen to that prayer."

"Take ye away the stone," said Jesus. There was no need of omnipotence for that. The stone is removed. Doubt and

expectancy alternate in the agonized hearts of Mary and Martha.
At length the mandate is given—

“Come forth,” he cries, “thou dead !”
O God ! what means that strange and sudden sound
That murmurs from the tomb, that ghastly head
With funeral fillets bound !
It is a *living form* !—
The loved, the lost, the *won*—
Won from the grave, corruption, and the worm.
And is not this the Son
Of God ? they whisper’d, while the sisters pour’d
Their gratitude in tears ; for *they* had known the Lord.

They awoke from their delirium of grief as from a strange, dark dream. It is not a phantasm that is before them ; it is their brother, returned from the land of darkness and mystery. Their home is again cheered by the tones of his glad voice,—the broken link is restored,—they are again, as before, the hopeful, the happy, the harmonious family at Bethany.

XX.

THE FAMILY OF CORNELIUS.

ONE of the most attractive and interesting pictures in the New Testament is that of the centurion Cornelius and his household. A Gentile by birth and education, he had probably enjoyed the advantages of instruction in the principles of revealed religion, as taught among the Jews. A soldier, having a military force under his command, and occupied during a great part of his time by active duties, it is likely the influences which surrounded him were no more favourable to spiritual piety than such have been in later ages. Yet on him the spirit of prayer was largely poured out; and it is evident he had such a conception of the nature of God and religious services, as showed he had not been left to the vague apprehensions of mere human reason. Though not a proselyte, we may conclude that the spiritual notions of the Deity peculiar to the Jewish creed had been recognized by him as truth. In an age of superstition and idolatry he worshipped one Eternal Father of the universe, acknowledging his spiritual and illimitable nature. He knew nothing, however, of the typical meaning of the stated sacrifices, nor of the way of salvation opened through the blood shed on the cross for the remission of sins, nor of the Light which was to enlighten the Gentiles, and be the glory of Israel. The good report which he enjoyed among all the nation of the Jews bespeaks some acquaintance on his part with their tenets and their law, while the truth they had refused to receive had never yet been proclaimed in his hearing.

The testimony recorded of him, that he was "a devout man, and

one that feared God with all his house," is evidence that he fulfilled in their highest sense the duties belonging to the head of a family. It implies the subjection to his authority of each member of the circle, according to the provisions of the original institution, with a judicious government on his part, mild yet absolute, so far as their spiritual well-being was concerned. It was his province, as a father and ruler, to direct and purify their worship, to be their leader in sacred services, and to watch that the daily practice of all under his responsible control was conformable to the principles by which they professed to be guided. He "prayed to God always," and thus was enabled to discharge this trust. His benevolence overflowed not merely upon those nearest him, but upon all the people to whom he "gave much alms." He was universally esteemed a just man, not only enjoying the respect of all his acquaintance, but being an object of grateful veneration to the poor who shared his bounty—

" Distress but glean'd from others' store,
From his she reap'd a plenteous dole ;"

while the spring of his charity lay not in selfish ostentation, but in pure love to his fellow-beings, born of love to the Creator. What character more amiable or more admirable among men could be portrayed ! What nobler example could be presented to those of his own station and circumstances ! Yet for this man, whose heart has been prepared by the secret influence of Him who changes the unclean into clean, that the good seed might be sown therein, and ripen, and bring forth fruit in abundance—a revelation of the way of salvation was necessary before he could stand accepted before the face of his Maker. His prayers and his alms went up for a memorial, not to plead his cause or obtain favour for him at the throne of mercy, but to show that he was fitted, by the mysterious operation of the Spirit, to receive the grace which alone could make alive through Christ Jesus ; to be made a child of God through the righteousness which is by faith.

The word had never yet reached him. Commanded to begin their teachings at Jerusalem, the apostles had not yet so far shaken off the yoke of the ceremonial law as to contemplate the full extent of their Divine mission. The sound of the words heard from the mount that might be touched, lingered in their ears, and they knew not that they were already come to the typical Mount Sion, the city of the living God. The exclusive character of the Jewish ordinances forbade the sharing of their privileges with those who had not received the seal of initiation; the same spirit of limitation in their apprehension pervaded Christianity. The fountain of blessing, issuing from the gates of Jerusalem, was to flow only in the ancient channels; the people who had of old been chosen for the preservation of the Divine oracles, were still to be the sole depositaries of the truth, and to dispense it to the world. The idea that God would pour out upon the uncircumcised heathen the gift of the Holy Ghost—that the blessings of the religion they were appointed to disseminate were to be free to all mankind, as the bestowment of air and light—that whosoever would might drink of the water of life freely—that the Almighty was no respecter of persons—had not entered into their conception. The knowledge of this great feature in the new dispensation was first given to the apostles and brethren in the impressive instance of the family of Cornelius.

This new revelation of the Divine will, destined to be so mighty and pervading in its effects, was made known by two visions. One was sent to the Roman centurion as he fasted and prayed—the other to the apostle as he prayed upon the housetop; and how marvellous is the connection between them! The military chief and the zealous disciple were strangers to each other; in the ordinary course of human affairs they might never have met. They were brought together by a miraculous interposition of Providence—with a design not only gracious to them as individuals, but involving consequences of infinite importance to the whole human

race. The piety and good works of Cornelius were had in remembrance in the sight of God, because He was mindful, in his all-embracing mercy, of the helpless condition of the nation who sat in darkness and the shadow of death. The exclusiveness of Peter was to be rebuked, because the end of all things was come, as regarded the former dispensation; the first being taken away, that the glorious second might be established. It is in this light that we must look upon the vision in which Cornelius saw the man in bright clothing—the angel of God standing before him, and calling him familiarly by name. It was indeed a worthy mission for one of the most exalted of the hierarchy of heaven, to be charged with such a task—to remove the partition-wall built for ages—to take away the veil which had hitherto forbidden access to the most holy place.

Although the supernatural visitant called him by name, the soldier was afraid when he looked on him. The Being whom he worshipped so devoutly, appeared not yet to him in the light of a Father, whose messages he could hear without trembling, for he had not yet beheld the Invisible in the face of Him who is the express image of his person. But with submissive reverence he asked, "What is it, Lord?" The reply was most encouraging, and assured him of acceptance, the way to which was now to be shown him: "Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter; he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do."

The angel departed, and Cornelius immediately summoned two of the servants of his household, and a soldier of the guard he kept about his person, one who like him was deeply imbued with the reverence due to the things of religion, and who worshipped in sincerity, according to the light given him. To these the chief related what had passed, and sent them to Joppa in search of the man indicated in the vision.

It was necessary that the mind of Peter should be prepared

before he could be satisfied to do what implied the abrogation of the ritual law established so many ages before by Divine authority, and to dismiss at once his Jewish prejudices. A mysterious vision while he was at prayer on the housetop, in which animals declared unclean by the law, were pronounced clean and fit for use, threw him into musing, till the arrival of the men sent to seek him, and the command of the Spirit that he should go with them, explained the meaning of the injunction thrice solemnly repeated—"What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." The men were foreigners and Gentiles, such as a Jew could not associate with, or come unto, without violating the law; but he was commanded in a manner he dared not gainsay, to go down and receive them as guests; to depart with them, without hesitation, he knew not whither, nor for what purpose, doubting nothing, for that they had been sent by the Holy Spirit. There could have been no greater trial of his faith, for it brought into conflict duties he had held consistent with one another; and as yet he knew not to what tended the strange requisition. But he could not be disobedient to the positive command laid on him. Inquiring of the messengers their business, and hearing their report of the character of Cornelius, and the cause of his sending for him, he invited the men to remain with him till the following day. Doubtless it was a great surprise to the brethren at Joppa, to see the great apostle of the circumcision thus offering hospitable entertainment to persons whom the religious customs of his country forbade him to harbour. They were probably liberal both of question and remonstrance, and some of them accompanied Peter on his journey, desiring to understand further the import of what had occurred; or perhaps going at his request, that they might witness all that should pass, and bear testimony to other believers.

On their arrival at Cesarea, they found preparations made for their reception. The centurion had assembled his kinsmen and

near friends, all disposed, as he was, to receive instruction, that they might share in the expected communication. There must have been something peculiarly impressive in the scene, when so many converts on whom grace had been shed, preparing their hearts to receive the truth, were waiting the approach of the stranger from whom they were to hear the words of life. The hush of expectation was at length broken by the announcement of his coming ; and Cornelius went out to meet him. He doubtless expected to see an extraordinary person ; perhaps he thought the Messiah predicted by the prophets was before him. He fell prostrate at his feet, and worshipped him ; but Peter refused the homage, as not to be received by a mere man. Raising him from the ground, he bade him stand up, for that he was, like himself, but a frail human being, and by no means entitled to the reverence due to one of Divine nature. The words spoken before entering the house seem to have been on the apostle's side, and explanatory of his real character, for he was most anxious that no mistake should be made with regard to his person or mission, and always emphatically rebuked those who offered him Divine honours. When he entered, and stood in the midst of the assembly convened to meet him, his first address reminded them of the prejudices of his nation, and the law prohibiting the association of Jews with foreigners.

In this case, however, he had acted contrary to the law, and had overstepped the prejudice by the express command of the Maker of all, who had shown him that he "should not call any man common or unclean." With this new and enlarged apprehension of the dignity of his fellow-beings, he had come when sent for ; and now desired to know why he had been called thither. The account given of his vision, by Cornelius, first showed the Divine purpose, in all its breadth, to his understanding. He saw that his judgment had erred in limiting the blessing, meant by the Giver to be unlimited ; and after the

ingenuous conclusion of the centurion's speech, ("Now, therefore, are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God,") Peter's first words imply a sense of his error. The prejudices in which he had been educated—the natural clinging of opinion and feeling to a time-honoured dispensation, gave way at once to the conviction forced upon him, "that God is no respecter of persons." The universality of the Gospel provisions was evident to his mind; and, impressed with the discovery of God's gracious purpose, made in this unprecedented transaction, he proceeded to unfold the message with which he had been charged to sinners—the words of life whereby it had been promised (not by prayers and alms) that the centurion and his family should be saved. As he "began to speak"—before his discourse was ended, an event took place most marvellous to the believers who had come from Joppa with the apostle: "The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." They were instantly endued, not only with the illuminating and sanctifying influences of the Comforter, but with the same miraculous gifts which had accompanied his advent on the day of Pentecost. There could be no doubting or questioning further; the like gift was poured out upon the Gentiles as on those born within the pale of the ancient Church; and Peter appealed to the brethren who were with him, to know if any could forbid the baptism of water, by which the new converts, thus honoured with the seal of Heaven, should be formally received into their ranks. The same argument prevailed to convince the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem, who afterwards publicly called Peter to account for thus dispensing with the law of ordinances.

We are taught, by this view of the family of Cornelius, how much may be done by the piety of the master of a household. It is reasonable to suppose, that most of those who owned subjection to his military authority, were influenced by the equity of his

character, his liberal charity, and his sincere piety; while those nearest him, with his kinsmen, were accustomed to join in his religious services. Each morning and evening his prayers ascended; and they were not merely for the daily blessings of life, but for new light whereby he might walk. The knowledge he had gained taught him to crave further directions respecting the truth and will of God, and he waited in earnest faith for the manifestation. What an example was this Gentile captain to Christians who live under the light for which he prayed, and which was so marvellously sent! That this man, born a heathen, should not fail of repentance unto life, an angel is despatched to instruct him whom to send for; that Peter should not be disobedient to the message, a wonderful vision is sent, with the interpretation by the Holy Spirit himself: thus, by a series of miracles, are gathered the first-fruits of the harvest of Gentiles for the Church of the Redeemer.

A heathen philosopher says—"No one is happy before death." Experience has taught that no earthly possessions bestow happiness. But it belongs only to Christianity to point out the means both of attaining the highest degree of enjoyment in this life, and of securing that of the life hereafter.

THE END.

