Bible Characters

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Abram: The Friend of God

Genesis 12

What we see in the word of God before this remarkable account of the call of Abram, though profitable surely for us, is also humbling; and none the less the more we think of it, and see what God has told us of man's sin and ruin, not merely as bringing on the flood, but as following it. What was to be done now? For God had hung out a sign in the very heavens that He would no longer visit the iniquity of the race as He had done in the deluge. There had been a secret principle of grace with God that He always acted on; but now this principle was to be brought out manifestly. What had made the difference in the case of Abel, of Enoch, or even Noah? It was grace that had flowed to them and wrought in them whatever was good and holy and true. But there is a new thing that comes out in the history now before us. It was to be no longer the favour of God in its hidden dealings.

Promise was to be thenceforth a public ground of action on the part of God. Is not this a most weighty and instructive change? God was no longer content that He should act after a secret sort. If He had Himself called souls without any one knowing it outside, now He would make the call distinct and plain, drawing to it the attention of friends and enemies: and this so definitely that it has been the invariable starting-point with God from that day to this. It was the call of God, no more secret but evident to all.

So we are told in this place: “Now Jehovah had said to Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house unto a land that I will show thee.” We are apt to pass over such a statement of the ways of God because of the tendency to confound what is a secret of grace with what is manifest. But Abram was called by God to a place of separation, so as to be manifest. This is the express point with which the chapter opens, and the great principle that God would have us now to weigh with all seriousness, as we read His word.

By Israel at Sinai the ground of law was taken. Yet God had called His people by grace out of Egypt; but they were, as most know, put (or put themselves) under the law. The consequence was that, however divine the principle was, it fell through in the case of the chosen nation. So again, God has now applied the self-same principle to the call of the church. There it is not (one need not say) a body put under law, but the very contrary, dealt with in sovereign grace. It is not merely mercy towards the soul, for this has always been true; but God has a body publicly called in this world, composed of such as are meant to be witnesses of His grace in Christ on high, just as much as Israel ought to have represented the law graven on stones and manifested it before the whole earth.

This will show, then, how early and wide the principle is. But the Lord begins, as you can easily understand, first of all with an individual; and there was great wisdom and much force in this. Long centuries after, it was the resource of the prophet Isaiah, impressed upon his heart by God when Israel was passing into a desperately low condition, and with the prophecy of still greater ruin at

hand. How does he seek to comfort the people? With the fact that God called Abraham alone. He falls back upon what was the salient principle of God's dealing at this very time. It was as good as saying, "Be things as they may, count on the Lord. Impossible to be lower than that with which Israel began; for when God called and blessed at first, it was Abraham alone."

To what end was this? Not only that he himself should be blessed, but to be a blessing: and this not only to his own seed, but to others far and wide. "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

In the earth and with men, as they are, such is the sole possible way of blessing. In the line of His call God brings out His promises, and there it is that His blessing is found and maintained. Man may, no doubt (not to say that he must, when put on the ground of law), end in more manifest ruin than ever; but the principle of His call is not only sound but invariably true. If there is to be blessing at all in a world that is ruined, it must be on the ground of one who comes out obedient to the call of God, not staying where he is, nor attempting to reform the evil in the midst of which he may be. God made it particularly manifest at this time; for it was now that the world for the first time had seen nations and families and tongues, all arranged in the elements of that which is in our day approaching its finally developed form. The world was no more as it had been before the flood; it was separated into its distinct nationalities. Government also had now been instituted. This was of course an outward mercy for the world. Wickedness was not to go on unpunished, iniquity must be restrained by the judge. God had accordingly given responsible charge on the

earth to man who was thenceforth to curb evil in the world. He had authority for it from God. (Gen. 9)

But now that idolatry had entered (Joshua 24:2), separation to God, the true God, comes in as the recognised place. Instead of having souls to walk individually with Him, although seeking to please Him by faith, God, from that day to this, takes up what was then a wholly new thing for man, that, if He is to be pleased or magnified, if His will is really to govern, it must be as separate to Himself, and not merely by our looking to Him individually where we are, and in the midst of all our national associations. God looks for more now; He calls out. Hence the force of the word here, "Get thee out," etc.

It is not simply "believe;" this was not at all the question put. The great object of faith was not brought out, though we find a type of the way of faith in Gen. 15 where Abram's faith is seen exercised on the word of promise that God gave him; but still it is not a question here of the gospel being sent out, nor of Christ being presented personally. It is God who separates to Himself, at His own word, a man who was in the midst of all that is evil — his own family worshipping false gods like the rest. For although God had already marked off a certain part of the sons of Noah as preserved for blessing, and Shem particularly so — that it might be proved it was in no way an after-thought, but God's purpose in all stedfastness and not depending on a certain part of mankind as in themselves better than others (though in fact piety was there); yet here too was the solemn fact that the family of Shem had gone into idolatry no less than others. In spite of the predicted purpose of God, Shem's sons had proved faithless. What next could be

done? Was there no way of securing God's honour? This was the way: the call of God goes out in sovereign grace, separating to Himself a man no better than his fellows but avowedly involved in the idolatries of his fathers. "Get thee out of thy country.... unto a land that I will show thee."

Now the first thing I would press is that faith is shown, not so much by following what others have received before, but in believing what God brings home now to one's own soul and for one's own path. For God has a will about each successive stage in all the varying phases of life, as evil itself grows and works in the world. Satan does not limit himself to the same snares of falsehood and sin, but becomes more and more subtle and determined in his plans. God looks for faith in His word accordingly. So in this case (I refer now to Shem's line) the very family that had whatever there was to hope for were fatally involved in his meshes just like other men. But God has a way, a blessed and worthy way, of vindicating Himself; and this is a way which, giving all the glory to Himself, faith at once feels is just what it ought to be. The call comes without the slightest ground for it in Abram himself. This we see to be perfectly consistent with the dealings of God. He meant the blessing to be in that line; He meant to take up this man and make him the father of the faithful; but he was evidently a child of the unfaithful, and no doubt an unfaithful child himself. The calling was, accordingly, of grace: God Himself called; and God, at the same time, was fitting this man for the place of blessing; and God had, before Abram was fitted for it, pronounced what it was in His heart to give him, so that it might be, not of Abram who deserved it, but of God that called him. It

was grace. “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great.”

The whole principle of the blessing as flowing out of the call of God had been manifested in a man distinctly separated to Him, and (I would add) called out without disturbing the arrangements of the world. There was no setting him up with a mightier sword in his hand to put down the workers of iniquity. The world was left, after having been arranged under the providence of God in separate families, nations, and tongues, but not till government by man was sanctioned by God. But there God’s honour being completely set aside, and false gods worshipped, He separates under His promise of blessing the man who comes out at his call to the land He would show him.

This then is God’s own blessed way — one most effectual, as it is also peculiar to Himself; and on it in fact God has acted in our own call, whether to Himself or into the church. It is on my heart to dwell a little on the general truth of the call of Abram, so as to illustrate the way in which God connects the principle of the call with the promises and with the whole place of faith here below. It was much for God to say, “I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great.” But there was another word, and this was especially dear to the heart of one so blessed himself. “Thou shalt be a blessing.” This was to make him not only the object of grace, but the instrument of it. It was to give him communion with God Himself in the activity of His own goodness. “Thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee” (of course, on the earthly side); “and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

Abram then acts on the word of the Lord. “He departed, as Jehovah had spoken unto him.” But there was more than one drawback. Lot his nephew went with him and we shall see the consequence of that. Further, Abram not only took Lot, “his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran,” but in the chapter before we have a remarkable intimation not brought before us here. It was not that Abram took Terah, but that “Terah took Abram.” This was not merely a hindrance, it was a false position as long as it lasted. It acted as an interference with the call of God; for although the call might seem to nature harsh, and that which no doubt man would have been quick to condemn, the word of God was plain — “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house.” Abram does get out of his country, though hardly from his kindred; but instead of getting “out of his father’s house,” his father takes him. There was clearly an influence at work that was inconsistent with the call of God. It was not merely that Terah was with him; the Spirit of God has not put it so, and of course it was incompatible with due relationship that a man should or could be said to take his father. It was “Terah took Abram.”

Here then was that which positively hindered the accomplishment of the will of God as long as Terah lived. The call of God should be paramount; but the honour due to a father who was not in it must oppose. “Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son’s son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram’s wife, and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees.” The simple fact is stated in Genesis 11; and one can see that the reason why it is stated there is this. It was

purely a question of Abram acting from his own judgment, from himself, and not from the call of God, who therefore does not make it a part of Genesis 12. No doubt, the move was after the call of God spoken of in chapter 12, but inasmuch as it was not the accomplishment of His will, God puts it in the chapter of nature and providence (that is, Gen. 11) and not in that of grace and promise, Gen. 12. We have in chapter 11 simply a list of fathers and sons from the flood, and among the rest Abram and Nahor. Sarai is seen there with no child. This was nature; and had it simply been a question of nature, so it would always have been — Sarai always barren. When grace begins to act, we find the dawning of hope in the heart of Abram (at any rate what we can now well understand to point in that direction); finally God gives the distinct word that Sarah shall have a child. But this was after grace begins to be developed. At first there is nothing of the sort, and it is here therefore we have the account of Terah taking his son Abram and coming as far as Haran, and dwelling there. Accordingly there also we have the days of Terah shown us, and Terah's death.

But now there is another side so distinct that, although the same facts are alluded to, God begins an entirely new unfolding of His mind. In chapter 12. He is not speaking of the family as viewed in nature but of His call. Although Abram believed in God, yet nature was at work and had its way. Accordingly God takes no notice of it here. Thus we see that what looks a great difficulty in the two chapters — a thing which people have often put one against another — is perfectly solved the moment we come to see that the one chapter is the story

of the family in nature, the other is the secret of grace now made manifest.

“Now Jehovah had said to Abram, Get thee out.” Note that so He “said to Abram,” not to Terah. As long as Terah was there, he was the acting person, as indeed he had the claim of father; and if (not God but) you bring a father on to the ground of faith, what is the effect? If he is not in the call of God and you are, what must result from allowing your father’s authority to have its way there? It swamps you. It is not that you raise him into the higher regions of faith, but that he drags you down into the quagmire of nature. This is what we may see in these two chapters; so that, spite of the blessed call of God, we have the fact brought before us that Abram remains at Haran and fails to reach Canaan.

At length however “Terah died in Haran;” and what follows? We are told next (ver. 5) that “Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.” Now what a different tale! Not that everything was according to God, for there is no perfection save in One; but still Abram could now act and not before. Lot was his nephew only, and did not bar the way as his father had done. While he was alive along with him, Abram must needs be subject, but henceforth he was free. Lot might act selfishly and be an encumbrance; but his father, if there at all, must have a father’s authority; and so it was. He found himself in a sort of half-way ground, and this was what compromise leads to. It is certainly no longer Ur of the Chaldees, but yet only Haran, and not Canaan. The fact brought before us in

the previous chapter explains how it is he can get no farther. Terah, who was not in the call of God, was nevertheless the one who “took Abram” thus far, and Terah acted so positively as a hindrance, that, as long as he lived, Abram could never get on; but the moment that Terah is taken away, as we read, Abram took Sarai, etc., “and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.”

There is no failure, so far, in the accomplishment of the purpose of God. When they reach Canaan, what is it that God sets before us? “The Canaanite was then in the land” (ver. 6). Things were not yet according to God. It was not only that Abram’s faith shows the weakness of man, but further, the state of Canaan was altogether opposed to that which befits the nature and proper purpose of God. It was not only that the world already left behind by the man of faith was still pursuing its idolatries; but if there were men on earth peculiarly under the curse of God, it was the very race that Satan planted in Canaan. “Cursed is Canaan.” What a solemn thing, the meeting of the blessed one, about to be a blessing, with the cursed ones, that God would surely deal with in the day that was coming (and so accordingly we find)! Satan’s object by it was no doubt to thwart the purpose of God: but it only gave Him the opportunity of carrying it more thoroughly and gloriously to the enemy’s shame and everlasting contempt.

We never understand the importance of our walk here below, unless these two things are distinctly and stedfastly before us, not merely that we are objects of God’s tender mercy and personal interest, but that we are called out to Himself, as well as to “the better country” that He has shown us. But He has told us too

who has meanwhile usurped possession of it. The heavens are now opened, and we see by the Holy Ghost sent down thence Him who is on the throne of God, interceding for us as cleansed by His blood, and gone to prepare a place for us. The heavens were opened not merely for Him to enter as the victorious Saviour, but they are open still where He is exalted. This is the way in which He is now revealed to us. They will be open until the Lord has brought us there. I do not say that they will be closed after that, but that judgments will fall thence. In grace they are open for us to look now into. He whose blood opened them for us is the One on whom they opened, not for judgment, as we read once in Ezekiel 1, but, as in the very beginning of the New Testament (Matt. 3:16), that God might express His delight in Him, His Son, the perfect man withal here below.

Let us remember then that we too are identified with God's great starting-point for Abram; we are called out, and blessed, to inherit and to be a blessing. Does the grace of it (and it is not the richest part of our blessing) fill our hearts at all times? Take for instance our ways as members of Christ's body, the church, etc. It is not merely that we come together to acknowledge His mercy to us, which of course we do. Thankfulness should be the first thought of the heart that has been opened by the grace of God. Who are we that now speak to God, looking up and singing praises? Sinners brought out from guiltier evil than that out of which Abram was called. I can understand those who never had sin celebrating His praise, where sense of personal delivering grace is not the special character of their thank-offering before God. But who can understand a

soul that is redeemed presuming to begin with anything but hearty thanksgiving for the mercy that has plucked him from destruction, and put him so that he can look up to God and magnify his Saviour? But whatever we begin with should not be the end for us. It is very right that we should feel evermore what it is to be the object of the tender mercy of God, in awakening our hearts and lips to thank Him; but we should go on to praise Him for what He is as well as own all He has done. For now we see how worthy He is, and can delight in what He is even apart from ourselves. The heart can thus go out in adoration of another and a higher character, in praise and blessing as well as thanksgiving.

But I was going to dwell upon another point. It is not only that we are blessed, and that the spring of thanksgiving is touched, and that praise flows forth from those that are blessed; but there is more than this, an activity of love that looks around according to the goodness we have learnt in Him, as well as love breaking out in praises as we look on high and see Him who in our midst praised and taught us to praise before He went there. So we see here: “Thou shalt be a blessing,” and “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” Take the occupation of the Lord’s day. That which calls forth our hearts, is it only when we gather round the Lord at His supper? Has not such grace and truth as His furnished special occupation all through the day? I should say that its entire course has its calls and place no less than the assemblage at His table, and I say it the more because there is a danger of a little reaction. Time was when men used to think the chief thing worth hearing was a gospel sermon, and when they used often to bear a great deal that tried them to get what was not

even a good sermon, longing to hear something that might help, comfort, and strengthen their souls. There are many Christians in that state still. Are we in the enjoyment of better blessings from God? Have we the sense of what His grace has done for us in heavenly places? But do we, as well, keep up the activity of His love in our souls? or are we settling down, content simply to give thanks for the blessing that we possess as children of God ?

Do you suppose that a person can be at the spring of blessing without also knowing more or less of joy in the power of its active going forth? Depend upon it that this is of great importance to the Christian as such and to the assembly; for it will always be found true, that if we are not going forth in the power of blessing, the world in its power of evil steals in upon us. There will be a withering influence that will show itself under perhaps fair forms. Do you say, why should I go and listen to the gospel? What have I to do with the message to the unconverted? You have, you ought to have, a great deal to do with it. You may not be a preacher; but is there no such thing as fellow-working? or even loving interest if not positive help? Are there no hearts that go forth with every word that is said by the evangelist, none to pray with him for every soul that listens, and especially for those awakened by the Spirit? I do say that we are called on, not to be as we once were, with our heads down and our eyes anxiously looking out, if haply we might get something to satisfy our starving souls. By grace we now know God to be no hard master, and we can in our measure see and enjoy the rich provision of His glory. We of all men then should not appear like the bold beggar that having got his morsel goes off

therewith content. Can it be that this is what it has come to with any of us? Or that any soul would sanction such selfishness? Take care that we never seem to come short in this respect. Let us look to it that we put far from us every semblance of heeding only our own things but the things of Jesus Christ as to sinners as well as saints. If we value the things of our Lord in the church, so also let us not be slack in the gospel. Let us have this simply and fully before our hearts, to remember that we too have Abram's portion, not only as objects but as instruments and channels of blessing. For indeed it is meant that we should draw from the very spring of grace that is ever flowing, whether for the help of those who are already Christ's, or for those in that darkness out of which we have been delivered by infinite mercy.

There is a fresh point I should point out. "Jehovah appeared unto Abram" — He not only spoke but "appeared," language to me not casual, but intentional. "Jehovah appeared to Abram and said." How it was done, we do not know; but we do know what is written. All that we read the first time is that "Jehovah had said," but now we find "Jehovah appeared to Abram and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land." There is nothing vague any longer, but precise. It is not "a land that I will show thee," but "unto thy seed will I give this land." What is the consequence? There "he builded an altar unto Jehovah," and not this merely, but "unto Jehovah who appeared unto him." It is quite evident therefore to my mind that in this was the needful preliminary to worship, which necessarily awaits the manifestation of the Lord. Worship follows, when He has appeared, and the heart knows Him as He has made Himself known. So

Abram, when Jehovah has not merely spoken but also appeared, builds an altar to Him.

Do we know how blessedly true this is in our Lord Jesus Christ? This is precisely what He was showing, but what the disciples were so dull to take in. You remember Philip saying, “Lord, show us the Father,” when the Lord Jesus had been showing them the Father in His own self all the while here below. It is what the Holy Ghost soon after made real, not when Jesus was there, but after He had gone, that it might be completely a matter of faith, and that we who never saw but believe might have the joy no less. Need I say, that what the word of God gives us of our Lord Jesus Christ is incomparably more to us than if we had but seen Him ever so long with our bodily eyes? I hope we all really understand this; for it is of no slight moment. We can easily imagine what a wonderful thing it was to have looked on Him and to have heard Him; but no intelligent believer need hesitate to say that we have far more of Himself in and by the word than if we had seen and heard Him all through His life and ministry on earth without that word. Do we not appreciate this? If we believe it, let us give God thanks now as we shall for ever.

I will explain why this is so. Are your eyes and your ears as good as those of God? The word is not merely Peter’s or Matthew’s or John’s impressions of the Lord, but God’s truth, though no doubt He employed them to write it. Then think of the advantage we possess in having it not only perfectly but permanently, not left to the shifting sands of memory under the ebbs and flows of the heart, still less to anything before the eye for a passing moment. Here we have God’s mind about Jesus

faultlessly, completely, and imperishably, in the word of God.

And now is sent down the Spirit that we might see the Father in One who alone could make known the Father. What is the consequence? Wherever the heart surrenders itself to God as He manifests Himself, there is an altar built. This is by grace the way and the effect. It is not therefore the fact, observe, that we had the worship all at once. Not the least trace of it appears till now. Possibly Abram may have built altars on his pathway from Ur of the Chaldees to and in Haran; but this I do say that, if so, God makes nothing of it at all. The only altar up to this He mentions is now in Canaan after He had appeared to Abram. It may well be, in point of fact, the first altar that he ever erected; but of this we must be sure, that it was the first that God thought worth naming to us. What a lesson for our souls !

Abram was now in what answered to the heavenly land, and there the Lord gave a fresh manifestation of Himself. It is when the soul has reached this in faith, when (not merely His word and His work, but) the Lord Himself is personally known to us brought nigh to Him (for this is the point that it sets before us as a principle), that one truly worships. If He has brought me near Him and shown Himself to me in Christ, what can I do but use the altar built for His worship? For “we have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle” — they who prefer Jewish forms and shadows to Christ, now that He is come and has wrought redemption and placed us as children before His God and Father.

But there is more than this. Abram “removed from thence;” but if he pitches his tent elsewhere, he none the less worships. Move or not, Abram has his altar, wherever he finds himself in the land of Canaan. “There he builded an altar to Jehovah, and called upon the name of Jehovah.”

Alas! a new scene opens to us. “There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there.” Did he ask Jehovah before going there? Did he spread the circumstances of the land before Him? Not a word is said implying it; and I think there is the strongest reason to gather from the silence of scripture that He did not. For its silence, if we are familiar with it, speaks to us no less than what it utters. God brings before us now the sad slip into Egypt of the man who, once called out in the face of difficulty and spite of hindrances which his own unbelief had brought in or allowed, had at last found himself in the place of blessing with God; but, there getting into trial, he goes unbidden into the place of the world’s plenty. “There was famine in the land.” Why did he not then lay all before Jehovah? Undoubtedly Canaan was not yet as it should be according to God; but had He not called him there? and could not He keep him there? Abram goes down to Egypt to sojourn in it without a word of guidance from Jehovah. It was the direction of common sense, “for the famine was grievous in the land.” God states the fact without reserve; He never withholds the truth, albeit to the shame of those He loves.

“And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know thou art a fair woman to look upon; therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee,

that they shall say, This is his wife; and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister." How solemn it is when a saint takes and perseveres in the downward path I It is not only now that he departs from the land that Jehovah had shown him, and given to his seed; that he is distressed just like a Gentile by the famine, and bound for a country (Egypt, figure of the world, as Canaan of heaven) where there was abundance without a word from God; but now, further, having put himself into these circumstances of nature, he falls even from its proprieties.

Indeed, I may ask, do you ever find a child of God taking the ground of nature without going below it? When the Christian deserts Christ to stand on character, wonder not if his character utterly fails. Is God with him in it? A Christian is called to be a witness not merely of justice and right but of Christ. Do you look for no more than honesty in a Christian? Where then is his testimony to the grace and truth of Christ? He is content to give up Christ if he is content to be only an honest man. "He does not want to be always praying and singing, preaching and bringing in his religion." To slight Christ thus is a solemn thing. I did not ask for his religion, but that he should manifest Christ. Is he ashamed of Him? Is his conduct such, his bearing such, that it would not do for Christ to be named by him? Is it not to be feared so? He does not like to name Christ, lest persons should ask, Who is this that talks so about Christ? He who by faith behaves in a way which becomes that excellent name does not shrink from speaking of Him. But the unfaithful Christian is content to be known among his own class as an honest man. Will this last since God is not with him? God upholds those who humbly confess Christ. To speak

of Christ is to sound the silver trumpet of the Lord, who thereon will own and be with you; but you who do not sound His name, have you the Lord to protect you? Assuredly you will fail.

So it was with Abram at this time. He goes down without Jehovah directing his way, as he seems not to have called on His name: and in Egypt, sad to say, the father of the faithful is guilty of equivocation, with no purpose higher than that of protecting himself at the expense of his wife: not a noble place for a husband, nor a worthy use to make of his wife. But so it is, when one who ought to have been walking in faith falls back on the slippery paths of his own fears and the world's favours.

See another result. Everything now flourishes outwardly. Abram had never been so rich. Had he ever been prospered before as now? Was it not the marked blessing of the Lord? "He had sheep and oxen, and he-asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she-asses and camels." We do not read of this in past times. But how was it all gained? Oh, if Abram had only now got before the Lord, if Abram had but placed himself before Him that appeared to him, not a single acquisition but would have been a wound in his heart, and the keener too as it was through the denial of his wife. Was this to live Christ?

The Lord nevertheless dealt in His own marvellous way; for He did net smite Abram, or even Abram's servants to thin them down, but "he plagued Pharaoh and his house with greet plagues." How striking are the ways of the Lord, and how full of instruction for us! The righteous government of God was at work: for Pharaoh knew well enough that he had no right to take the woman, even if

she were Abram's sister. He was taking advantage of his position to claim what did not belong to him. The issue is that, struck by the evident hand of God, Pharaoh calls Abram and finds out the truth. Now it was Abram's turn to feel. If Pharaoh was plagued, Abram was put to the blush: what a humiliation for him! The very world reproaches Abram. And what can he say? He came without God and he went without honour.

Abram quits Egypt. Pharaoh had learnt somewhat of God's righteous ways: what could he think of Abram? Were his riches to his credit? He had gravely compromised himself, and been rebuked by a heathen; but at least he is on the right road again. "He went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south," and afterwards goes to Bethel "unto the place of the altar which he had made there at the first, and there Abram called on the name of Jehovah" (Gen. 13:4).

Yet surely, brethren, that passage in Abram's life had not been in vain. Did not grace then as now cause all things to work for good to those who love God? No slight work was that which went on in Abram's soul. He had been compelled to review his conduct, and we see clearly that it was the Lord who brought him back to the point whence he ought never to have departed. Repenting before His sight he returns, and in due time and place is found again a worshipper. But it is in Canaan, not in Egypt, where scripture hints not a word at either tent or altar.

Lot now comes before us. If I do not dwell more on him now, let me remark at this juncture how nobly Abram comes out. There was a strife among their respective

herdsmen; and what does Abram do? Lot was the nephew, he the uncle. To Abram, not to Lot, all had been promised; nevertheless, when dispute arises, he stands up for no rights of his. He had learned too well his wrongs. He had been down before the Lord, and is as far as possible from taking a high place, even with one who ought to have been subject.

But mark the blessedness of bowing before the Lord and of refusing to fight for our rights, however natural to the heart. The moment that Abram gives up to Lot, Jehovah appears again; and never was a gift in such distinct and large terms to man as that which He now gives to Abram. Lot "lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan," and chose the best of it. Now Jehovah says to Abram "after that Lot was separated from him, [that is, after he had taken possession of his ill-gotten gains,] Lift up now thine eyes" — how blessed are the words of the Lord! — "Lift up now tine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever."

How sweet for Abram to have trusted in the Lord, leaving all the question, though apparently with Lot, really with Jehovah! When shall we learn to be thus simple and confiding? Assuredly we shall also learn at the same time that there never is a giving up of self that is not answered by the Lord, in His grace and in the sweet assurance of it to our souls, by a better gift still through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Genesis 14.

I have contented myself now with reading the remarkable scene with which the Spirit of God closes

the public history of Abram. We may, if permitted, look a little by and by at the beginning of that which is of a more private and personal nature; but we must now follow up the close of Abram's call with its consequences. It was intended to be of the most public nature in its effects, if not in the fact itself. As already shown, it was not that the secret choice of God was a new principle, — He had always acted on the ground of election in His own mind; but Abram was a person chosen and called out to be a publicly separated witness. This helps us a little more to see the force of that often misunderstood chapter, Romans 11, where we have the figure of the olive tree introduced. Its root is the divine call of Abram into a separate place of privilege, and consequently of testimony on earth — testimony that might be of an outward character simply, as in the case of-the children of Israel, or rise to a higher object as Christians are responsible for now. But the Jews were what the chapter describes as the natural branches of the olive tree. Nevertheless it is plain that God's glory was for the time being connected with that very testimony; and our Lord Jesus Himself was pleased to go into it as minister of the circumcision, and we ourselves now form a part of it, grafted in there by the grace of God. It must be remembered that this is not at all the highest part of our testimony; and it is only referred to now for the purpose of illustrating the difference between what we have had, and what we may have in what follows.

From the beginning of Genesis 12 to the end of chapter 14 is the more public part of Abram's history, which illustrates the dealings of God, not so much with his soul, as bringing him out into a place of testimony for

the glory of God here below. He is here seen therefore soon put to the proof; for this is a discipline from which no person escapes here below. It will presently be shown how this bears on the chapter just before us. But I mention it in order to remark, the more definitely, the difference between what we have had already, ending with chapter 14, and what begins in chapter 15.

Here the results soon appear of that which had already come out in the respective ways of Abram and Lot. What took place in the land of Canaan might seem to have not the smallest connection with the struggles of these powers of the earth. But a witness for God, let me remind my brethren, is a very important thing, both to Him who raised it up on the one hand, and to the enemy on the Other. Now we are slow to learn this. The first great lesson of a soul — and that which our hearts feel most (at our starting-point at least) — is when the mercy of God arrests us in the path of our folly, awakens us to our excessive danger, brings us to Himself through our Lord Jesus, and gives us then in peace to enjoy the grace wherein we stand. And there, practically, many of the children of God stop. But there is much more than this, and indeed this is not the first thing that comes out. For the main lesson we have here is very different from what we might have anticipated. If we had had to do with the history of Abram, I do not hesitate to say that we should have begun with Genesis 15. Ourselves believers, we might have thought first of his soul’s need, and so of bringing him out distinctly as one quickened and then justified by faith. But God shows us here another thought. It is not as if all this and more is not all-important, and the gospel now makes it quite plain. But here God is pleased to give us first of all a general

sketch of the public place of Abram. By “public” I mean what Abram was called out to be as a witness for God.

Now Lot, as we know, had chosen for himself. He coveted what seemed to be, and what I suppose really was, the fairest in the land. For as a single eye is very quick to discern that which concerns the glory of Christ, a covetous one is sharp enough to see its own interest. But there is a truth, beloved friends, that some of us have to learn, deeply it may be, that it is better to trust the Lord’s eyes than our own; and that although, no doubt, in the world shrewdness may discern much, yet the world at its best is but vanity and assuredly deceives those who love it most. Nor is it only true that God will expose its folly and evil in the day that is coming; for one of the precious lessons we have learnt from the word is, that now is the time when God deals with us in the way of government, just because we belong to Himself; and being in the public place of testimony for God brings us peculiarly under it. Hence, to illustrate practically what affects ourselves in connection with this, God has been pleased in His grace to put us who believe in His Son in a place not merely to gather blessing for our souls, now that by faith we are enjoying His salvation, but in our little measure to be identified with the glory of Christ in the world. Do we know what it is to be in the place of testimony for the truth of Christ? What is the consequence of it? That things which might once seem little become great, as the great have dwindled wonderfully. Thus the old definitions of great and little well-nigh disappear. And no wonder, as we find while God brings us, little as we are, into connection with His greatest things, on the other hand our little things (or that which flesh, when it wants its own way, would call

the least) become of importance because they concern Christ and represent Him either truly or falsely.

Now it must have seemed to Lot a very natural thing to choose what would suit himself, as Abram appeared wholly indifferent where he went. At any rate thus he may have reasoned. Evidently there was not a thought of testimony for God or of faith in this. Abram shows in general one who walked in dependence on God. There was this difference in their character: not that there was not faith and practical righteousness in Lot, nor that there was not failure sometimes in Abram, for we see how clearly scripture has laid both before us: but for all that there was generally this marked difference, that in Lot we see one who profits by his opportunities, wherever he may be, while Abram shows us one who went out, as it is said, “not knowing whither he went.” Would Lot have done this? I cannot conceive it. Lot, on the contrary, took good care where he was going, first with whom, and next, when alone, he looked well out for what would be useful to his cattle, that is, to himself. As Abram did not seem to be so very particular, Lot thought he would be; so he chose the best he could see. After all he made but a bad calculation, as men always do in such cases; just because they have come into the place of the testimony of God. Lot never thought of this. It did not enter his account; but God had Lot before Him, and He does not forget it.

And allow me to remind you, brethren, that we too are there. No doubt there are some that understand the truth better than others, having a graver sense of the conflict, and a more solemn feeling of responsibility to the Lord: but whether we have thought of it or not, whether we have weighed it passingly or gravely, there

we are. And what is more, the world feels it, and, one may add further, Christians feel it; and therefore they are concerned and occupy themselves with all who are testifying to Christ in a way altogether disproportionate to their apparent importance. It might be a very simple soul, and perhaps ever so young, occupied with work of the humblest kind; but they feel all of them, that here is a person distinctly and avowedly identified with Christ before God and man. Consequently what might pass with others, and produce no remark or feeling at all, draws out at once the judgment of those that see and hear him. So we find in this very case: only here it is a more solemn thing, for in this chapter we have God marking, by what He brought about, and by what seemed altogether remote from what is before us, His decision about the matter.

This comes in, it may be observed, very abruptly. God leaves us to form a spiritual judgment as to the connection of it with what we have had before. For it is always by the Spirit of God, simply following His guidance, that we are enabled to form a distinct and (in the measure of our faith) an assured judgment as to the lesson that God is showing us. Be this as it may, it came to pass in these days that there was war between the kings named. War doubtless was no such uncommon matter; but there was something very unusual in the results of this battle. God indeed ordered things so as to draw unmistakeably the attention of all to Himself. There was a lesson thereby shown to the world, as there was a lesson now taught to Lot, that ought not to be forgotten. I do not say that Lot did not fail afterwards; for he did. But there was a lesson in this which, if Lot

overlooked it afterwards, God has preserved for our instruction now.

These kings then came to a conflict, which raged not at all in the far distant east of some of those engaged in the strife. God's witting hand brought it close to the spot where His witness walked. We see them in the vale of Sodom. There things came to an issue that seemed final, as it is said, "the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled and fell there, and they that remained fled to the mountain. And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their victuals, and went their way." Now comes the connection with our story in verse 12. "And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son." Here we find no particular stress laid on, nor express reference to, any part of Lot's previous life. Why so? Because God looks for a spiritual understanding in His people. He has not told us the previous tale of chapter 13 in vain. He looks for our understanding why it was, without further explanation. Yet we may ask here why not Abram? Why Lot? "They took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods and departed." This might seem natural enough; but we shall see whether all could be merely natural before we have done with the chapter.

I do wish to impress it strongly as on my own mind, so on yours, my brethren: never forget that we as believers have to do with what is supernatural every day. In no case allow yourselves to be beaten out of the true groundwork of faith for yourselves, nor permit men of the world to drag you down from God's word to what they call "good common sense" — an excellent thing for the world, but wholly short and misleading for the Christian in that which concerns God. And the simple reason is, that we are bound to walk by faith. It is our

call. We are entitled to confide in God and His word. What to a man looks so foolish as that? If God is still "the unknown God" to the world, His ear is open to us.

There is a word the apostle uses which perhaps you may never have weighed well, never have had it so before you as to make an impression on your mind; and that is where scripture tells us that "every creature of God is sanctified to us by the word of God and prayer." Ἔντευξις is not the ordinary word for "prayer." There is a reason for that; because in 1 Timothy 4 it is not the expression of mere want. This indeed is not the idea at all. Ordinary prayer is the drawing near to God, and asking Him for what we have not got; but in this case it is clearly not that, because it is supposed we may have the thing in our possession. But is there therefore to be no going out of heart to God about it? Suppose now it is what we have actually in the house. Common sense would say, "You cannot ask Gad for what you have got."

The fact is, it is the expression of a heart open, not only for God to speak to us, which was always true, but for us to draw near to God. It is intercourse with God that is the point, and not only the expression of want: free, simple, happy, communication with God — such is the idea. And this should be our thought and feeling and way in partaking of anything that God's mercy grants to us, whether we have it at the present moment or not. If we have it not before our eyes, it is before His eyes. He loves us, and cares for us — why should we trouble? Does He really hear us as we speak to Him? We have only to bethink ourselves for a moment in order to rebuke our unbelief. But suppose we have the things needed: are we to be independent? God forbid. If there be no wants to present to God now, have you no wish to

speak to God now ? — no sense of the blessing of God upon you? Do you not want to tell Him how greatly He loves you, how truly He is caring for you? This is what is specified here; and in this sense to us every creature of God is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

The word translated “prayer” here, you may not have perceived, is the opening of this intercourse with God by which we can speak to Him about anything and everything — even the commonest matters which concern us day by day. I refer to it because all this is very intimately connected with the strength of our testimony. Abram knew its principle well; but now God has revealed Himself incomparably more fully than in the days of Abram, and our familiarity with God ought to be in the measure of His communications to us. As it is said, “every creature of God is sanctified by the word of God.” It must begin with Him. It is first He who speaks to us; then we speak to Him; and the consequence of His so speaking to us is that we freely speak to Him. It was just the want of simplicity and vigour, if not reality, the want of living thus before God, that enfeebled the testimony of Lot. Assuredly power of public testimony depends, after all, on faith in what is unseen, and the resulting intercourse that goes on between God and our souls.

Here it comes out plainly. God reminds us that Lot dwelt in Sodom.. This would at once disclose or recall what Lot’s behaviour and unbelief had been; how little his soul could taste in daily life of “the word of God and prayer.” Was there not the very reverse? It was not Lot standing only for God, but striving to care for himself. The consequence is, when the strife and turmoil of the battle between the powers of the world take place, there

is an end of Lot's settling down for the present. But that which was no small rebuke to Lot was the occasion for Abram to come out as one who walked with God confiding in Him, and who shows us, too, that power of grace which rises above whatever had been personally wrong. There was no doubt about Lot's failure in testimony. But Abram thought nothing about his faults now. What he looked at was a righteous man (for no doubt Lot, spite of all, was righteous) swept away by the contending potsherds of the earth. This drew out his feelings of loving desire for Lot's rescue. "When Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan."

We must not misuse such a fact as this. No doubt we do find, in the history not only of Abram but of Daniel and others, that which could be no kind of direction for the Christian now. Most of us know that to use the superior mind or the strong arm to deal with the world would be anything but suitable for a Christian; but then we must carefully remember that there are things which, though right enough morally, would be quite wrong for the Christian because he is brought into heavenly associations in Christ. This I hold to be a very important consideration for practice, as it is a grave principle to understand in scripture; because otherwise we get either into capricious laxity or into undue severity of judgment. We may begin to reason and conclude that this was a wrong thing on the part of Abram, because it does not become a Christian. If a line of action is clearly outside the path of Christ, does not this decide for us? What were the ways of our Lord when He was here, and what suits Him now (for it is with Him as He is that we

are united) is the question for us. We have thus to use the light of Christ to see what is becoming for a Christian now; but it would be altogether a wrong measure to judge Abram by. God had not yet brought in any such unfolding of His mind as we have. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ; it was not fully uttered before. The true light had not shone, before which darkness fades away. Hence there are ways that not only were not wrong in Abram, but that God Himself was pleased to bless him in, regarded in those early days without even a sign of disapprobation; and no doubt this was one of them. I see no ground whatever to suppose that Abram had made any mistake, or acted wrongly, in employing these three hundred and more trained servants that were born in his house, with whom he pursued the retreating kings to Dan.

“And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.” Have we not a very marked fruit of Abram’s testimony here? Just as Lot had come to nothing, which was the end of his lending himself to his own thoughts, and of his desires unjudged; so on the other hand here was the power and honour of God with Abram. It was, I need not say, far from being a natural affair. Here were victorious kings marching home with their armies; and a private individual,? pilgrim and a stranger, was so led and strengthened of God, that the victors are vanquished in their turn and the faulty believer rescued.

But this gives the occasion now for a closing scene of the deepest possible interest in another way, and for one

of our grandest types of that which will be displayed in our Lord Jesus at the end of the age. The New Testament makes grave and interesting use of it. “And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter... and Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God.” It will be observed, there is an intentional abruptness in the introduction of the royal priest. It is with distinct design that the Holy Spirit introduces him without the slightest previous mention. He comes forward and he disappears from the scene in a like mysterious way. What are we to gather from this? That Melchizedek was an angel? That Melchizedek was an apparition of the Son of God? No more than it is Shem under a new name. There is no hint of such a disguise here or in any part of the scripture. Melchizedek was a priest, as he was also a king; scripture says so. But there is no ground to suppose that the peculiar manner in which he is here named indicates that there was more than a real and royal and priestly personage in Melchizedek himself. It is the way in which he is introduced by the hand of the Spirit of God that is so remarkable. There is no hint of anything angelic or divine in his person. And one whose ancestry or descendants are expressly hidden stands in full contrast with Shem. Again, he who met Moses on his coming out of Egypt, and who, under very important circumstances, counselled him in the wilderness, was both a priest and king. It was therefore in early days, by no means so uncommon a combination. Prophecy shows that it will be so again in our Lord Jesus, when He reigns over the earth. We may see the principle of it at any rate in David when he wears the linen ephod and dances before Jehovah. This was of course short of the reality; but it

showed that even in the days of his throne in Israel, the glory of Jehovah was dearer to him in that which concerned the sanctuary than anything which touched his own person, about which Michal showed jealousy of unbelief fatal to herself. All these might be shadows; but the great and abiding reality is coming for the world, and the Lord Jesus is the One who alone will display it unfailingly. But still, as a matter of fact, there were men who were both kings and priests in those days of yore, and Melchizedek is one. Further, I see no reason to doubt that he was then living, a real king and priest, at this very time, and in this very quarter; but the Spirit of God introduces him in a way that becomes typically most striking, appearing on the scene and vanishing from it after a singular sort.

All this combination of facts was ordered of God for the purpose of making him so much the better a shadow of the glory of the Lord Jesus as the sole royal priest. The very meaning of the word is “king of righteousness,” as the apostle Paul insists in Hebrews 7 and after that “king of peace,” referring to his place of reign. The person, of course, was before the place. The name of the person was Melchizedek, that is, “king of righteousness,” and his relation to the place was king of Salem, which means “peace.” These facts the Spirit of God, by the apostle Paul, uses beautifully as a prefiguration of the glory of our Lord. It is true of His person, of that which is come and seen now; and this was particularly telling to a Jew, because the story is introduced in that part of scripture which every Jew acknowledged to be divine. If there was indeed any part which to his mind had supreme place in point of authority, it was the five books of Moses; and here in the

first of them, in the earliest section of the word of God, stands out this marvellous intervention of a person who appears after the stirring scenes of the defeated kings, and blesses returned and victorious Abram. Now the father of the faithful was no small personage in a Jew's estimation; he had naturally and rightly a very great place; but here comes one who, suddenly and strangely appearing, occupies an incontestably greater. To him Abram pays tithes, as he also confers blessing on Abram; and, beyond controversy, the sacred homage from the one and the blessing from the other alike imply the stranger's superiority over the patriarch.

The bearing of this can scarcely be exaggerated. It is a prophetic type. In that land there will be a mighty conflict at the end of this age; and in it the guilty people of the Lord will be involved; and when the victory seems to be won that sweeps them away, the mighty power of God by a greater than Abram will interfere. Then that blessed One whom we await, not merely for our own joy and glory in the heavens, but for changing the face of the earth and all things on it, will answer both to the victorious Abram and to the blessing Melchizedek. It is our Lord Jesus at His coming again, and this at the issue of the world's conflicts when all will be reversed to the glory of God.

This closes, we may see, the public testimony. Then will be another scene not so much of testimony as of the application of God's kingdom in power. For the Lord will bring in the kingdom when He comes in His glory. What is going on now unseen, to be then displayed in the kingdom, is proclaimed in testimony. It may be well to say so much here, as often the thoughts of many a child

of God are not distinct about the place of Christ as the true Melchizedek.

It is plain that the priesthood in question is altogether peculiar, for Melchizedek offers no sacrifice, nor is there anything of intercession. He brings out bread and wine for man, without a word of sprinkling blood before God. And it is remarkable that, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which refers to Genesis 14 and Psalm 110, the moment we come to the exercise of the priesthood of Christ, Melchizedek is dropped, and Aaron is brought forward, and this is what makes the difficulty, though not to a spiritual mind. First of all our Lord is brought before us as the true priest. This is done as early as the end of Hebrews 2. In Hebrews 3 it is still pursued. Our Lord is evidently alluded to as answering to the type of both Moses and Aaron. In the end of chapter iv. Moses entirely disappears, and Aaron remains a type of Christ. But the point there is not at all what Melchizedek was doing, but intercession grounded upon sacrifice. It will be noticed that in this scene of Abram and Melchizedek there is neither one nor other of these things. Melchizedek does not offer up a sacrifice, whatever the ignorance of Fathers or Romanists may dream; it would have been entirely inappropriate here. Nor is there any such thing as intercession in a sanctuary. It is all public. We have seen throughout that the testimony had been public, and so here the action of the royal priest is of this character; whereas the very point of propitiation is that it goes up to God, and the efficacy of it simply to Him, though it may be for man here; and intercession is that which proceeds within the veil in the presence of God. Neither of these had any place in the scene before us.

But let us pursue for a little moment what we find in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to profit by this instance of the beautiful interlacings of the truth, seeing the way in which Old Testament facts are handled by the Holy Ghost in the New.

Aaron beyond doubt is prominently before the mind as the type of our Lord's priesthood in Hebrews 5. This closes with a digression, which goes through Hebrews 6, and then in Hebrews 7 Aaron is dropped, and Melchizedek introduced. What is the reason of so remarkable a break in the chain? It seems to me plain. The apostle wants to show the incontestable superiority of the priesthood of Christ to that of Aaron, although Aaron might be the great high-priestly type of Christ. This he proves by the fact that of old a royal priest came out to Abram who gave him tithes of all and received his blessing. The head of a family like Abram was superior to his descendants by the common acknowledgment that a father is above his sons; so the fact that Aaron was only a branch of Levi, as Levi was of Abram, and that it was Abram himself who paid tithes, showed therefore his subjection to a greater than himself. Nay further, not only did Abram pay tithes to Melchizedek, but more than that, Melchizedek blessed him; and, as we are told, "without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." The person that confers a blessing is greater than the person that receives it; and so it was that Abram did not pretend to bless Melchizedek. There was an act on Abram's part which implied subjection to Melchizedek, and an act on Melchizedek's part which implied superiority to Abram, giving a double illustration and witness of surpassing dignity.

Such is the argument in Hebrews 7 and nothing can be more complete in its place as against those who cried up the Aaronic priesthood to deny Christ. For now the apostle shows that Melchizedek was not merely a conspicuous personage of old, of the highest authority and with evident glory attached to him, a king and a priest; but, further, he is introduced by Moses in a most striking manner. As far as scripture tells about him, he has “neither beginning of days nor end of life.” Not that he was not born, nor that he did not die, but that scripture says not a word about either; never alluding to children, any more than to his father or mother. So far as the history goes there is a blank as to all this. Scripture treats it with absolute silence in order to make him a type of the One, who, as Son of God, clearly had no father or mother, though He might, as born of the Virgin Mary, still be Son of God, as in fact He was; yet He would not have been Son of God, as born of Mary, if independently of this He had not been so in His own divine right and being. And thus it is evident that there was a deeper glory in the person of the Son of God, on which all the glory that was seen in this world hung, that this glory was eternal, and that it belonged to Him in the title of His own divine nature and person from eternity to eternity.

But the royal Psalmist also takes up the same truth hundreds of years after this scene of Abram and Melchizedek was over. Psalm 110. speaks of a certain person in quite as extraordinary a way; a man, David’s son, whom nevertheless his inspired father, to the contradiction of mere human nature, owns as Lord, and calls Lord. And He whom David thus calls his Lord, though (as our Lord reminds the Jews) really his son,

(the great and insuperable difficulty to unbelief,) takes a place quite peculiar to Himself on the throne of Jehovah.

And He is not merely there on the throne of God, but acknowledged to be priest. “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” He is a priest like Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron: a truth of all-importance to rightly understand the Epistle to the Hebrews. I purposely dwell a little on this, because it is so extremely momentous that we should have simple faith in it, and due understanding of what is meant by it. The meaning is clearly this: — in Aaron’s case there was a succession, for his was a priesthood of dying men following each other; the clean opposite of what is said of Melchizedek, (viz. “that he liveth,”) not a word being said in Genesis or elsewhere of his death. The apostle uses this as a type of One that ever lives in the fullest sense. Hence Melchizedek is brought before us as a suited type of Christ, who is for ever after that order, instead of dying like Aaron and his sons. Christ stands alone an undying Melchizedek and so needs no successor, the sole and sufficient priest, as the Christian knows.

Melchizedek is, however, soon dropped again. We have him introduced simply to show the glory of his person, and his superiority to Aaron, whether in life, not dying, or consequently alone, as needing no transfer of his functions to successors. But the moment we come to the actual unfolding of priesthood in application to the believer, the apostle takes up Aaron again, and drops Melchizedek. Why is this? The reason is obvious. Though He is the great Melchizedek, He is not acting in that quality yet. What is He doing now? He is interceding in the heavenly sanctuary before God, and this grounded

on the propitiation once for all offered for our sins. What has this to do with Melchizedek? Nothing.

Thus you see how perfectly the truth hangs together, and how God uses the person for His own purposes, and then takes up an exercise wholly different. The truth is that the application of Melchizedek, not to the person of the Son in His superiority to Aaron, but to what He will do as Melchizedek, will be at the end of the age, and not before. The force of his bringing out bread and wine to Abram has nothing at all in common with our eating and drinking wine in the Lord's Supper; and it is extremely important to carry this in our minds distinctly and to understand the ground of it. Popery, being blind, has an immense hand in thus leading the blind into this ditch. One of the chief errors of the catholic system of old was applying things to the church which were promised to Israel, and so antedating the dealings of God. It is on this ground that Popery now claims to put down and rule the governments of the world. There is a time coming when the Lord will do so, reigning in Zion, but it will be when Christ takes the reins. The church is incompetent to do it in its present state, as it is also wholly foreign to the grace which is characteristic of the Christian. To suffer with the rejected Christ, while espoused as a chaste virgin to Him who is on high, and looking to reign with Him at His coming, alone suits the heavenly character of the church of God while on earth.

But when our Lord Jesus appears as Melchizedek by-and-by, then will be the day for our glory with Him; and the various traits here prefigured will coalesce in Him, not merely the sole dignity of the priest but the exercise of the priesthood in its character of blessing. Then will be the answer to Abram's putting down of the victorious

powers of the world, the deliverance of the poor though faulty people of the Lord (shown by Lot), and finally the bringing out the symbol of what God gives not only for the sustenance of His people but for their joy — the bread and the wine of that day. So it is that the Lord will then act; for this will be one of the wonderful differences between the Lord Jesus as the priest on His throne and all others that have ever governed in this world. It is the sorrowful necessity of those that govern now that they must take the means of maintaining their dignity and grandeur from the people whom they govern; that even the poorest contribute to that which the world owns as greatness and majesty. It must be so; it is the necessity of earthly glory which never can rise above its source; for the haughtiest monarchy of the world is after all founded, whatever the sovereign gift and ordinance of God, on the least contributions of the least people on earth. But when creation is arranged according to the mind of God, and when His kingdom comes in its proper power and majesty, how different! It will be His prerogative to supply all. The instinctive sense of this was what made the people wish the Lord Jesus to be king when He was here below. When He miraculously fed the multitudes with bread, they as it were said, This is the kind of king we want — a king that will give us plenty of food without our working for it.

And doubtless the day is coming when the kingdom will be so ordered. That which the corrupt heart of man would like very well now, to avoid toiling in the sweat of his face, the Lord will give, according to His own goodness, when man is bowed down as well as broken and the riches of God’s grace are no longer made the cloak of man’s selfishness to His dishonour. This is one

of the great distinctive features of that future kingdom, and Melchizedek shows it here. It is not only that there is food for the hungry, but he brings out bread and wine for the conquerors. That is, it is not merely the meeting of the necessities of man, but God acting after the victory is won according to His bounty and as is due to His own glory. And so it is that in the great day of the coming kingdom God will do these wonderful things on man for the earth. But mark His wise and righteous way — not before the cross, that is, the mighty work of the Son, is a fact; not before the Spirit of God has wrought to bring the souls of those very men into the acknowledgment of Him that wrought it, and into the appreciation of the value of that atonement which was accomplished on the cross. God will have wrought this work in the remnant of His people whom He will make a strong nation, when the day arrives for the Lord Jesus to manifest Himself in the exercise of His Melchizedek priesthood — not merely to be the anti-typical Melchizedek, for this He is now.

At present He is not yet bestowing His Melchizedek favours; but when that day comes, it will be, I repeat, for the exercise of the priesthood, and not merely the glory of that one sole priest. The need of man too will be secured in that day. The people will be prepared for blessing. If there will be power and glory, it will be the portion of a people poor in spirit, confessedly contrite and broken down, sensible of the mercy that God had shown their souls, and made honest enough by grace to confess their sins, a people in short that will have found all their boast in that Saviour whom they once despised and in that which was their abhorrence. Then it will not be a base and selfish seeking of what merely suits

themselves and allows them to vegetate in idleness. Not so; but it is the day for the King to lavish what He has Himself wrought, and for God to manifest what was ever in His heart. For God has always longed to bless men; but He awaits the day when He can righteously as well as freely bless them. Alas! man has never yet been in the state wherein he can be blessed. For to bless him when his heart is at enmity to God, where would be the good of it for man, not to speak of God? Would it not be, on the contrary, the grossest mockery to pour out blessing on man who, being unrenewed and unrepentant, must after all be cast into hell? Such is the state of every man naturally; no showers of blessing from above, if this were all, could change the soil. In his natural state he is not fit for heaven, nor even for the earth under the reign of our Lord Jesus, but only to be cast into the place that is prepared for the devil and his angels. But in the day that is coming the Lord will have a people born of God, washed every whit clean, and rescued out of the hand of the spoiler, by His own redeeming grace and power; and then we see the Lord Jesus bringing out all that will manifest the goodness of God and glory of God, making the heart of man to rejoice before Him, and his face glad for ever. Then shall man know what is the God he has to do with, when he sees reversed and set aside and rooted out every vestige of Satan’s old lie that God does not take pleasure in goodness and in lavishing the fruits of it on man here below.

This then is the scene that is soon to open, surpassing fable indeed, and yet true. Mark too how all confirms it in the context. Christ is the antitype of Melchizedek, the king of righteousness and afterwards of peace. Then will be the day of peace founded on righteousness. But

further He is the “priest of the most high God.” Glorious title! It is not merely “Jehovah,” nor merely “Almighty.” The almightiness of God comes out in protecting His poor pilgrims; and His character of Jehovah, as of old in judgment when the people were under the first covenant, so under the second, particularly when He shows Himself the unchangeable God, who cleaves to His purpose of blessing a people that were alas! changeable more than all others on the earth. But “the most high God “ — what is its force? Just this. When all other oracles are dumb, when every false god becomes, like Dagon, a fallen and dishonoured stump before the true ark and Him whose glory dwells there, then and then for the first time, since Satan foisted idol-worship into the world, shall every idol vanish out of it, and their worshippers be ashamed before the only true God. Then shall God have His place as “the most high God.”

Yet He is not only this, but “the possessor of heaven and earth.” When will that be, and what will display His possession of heaven and earth? We all know He is so now in real title; but when is the due testimony to it on the earth? Where the power that enforces it? As far as one sees, man is the possessor of the earth now; and if one bows to scripture, who can deny that the devil is the god of this world, the prince of the power of the air? It is only faith can say that God is really so; but in that day it will be evident to all. His possession of heaven and earth will be manifest when the Lord Jesus comes. For whence does He come? Not from Bethlehem then, but from heaven. He will come from God’s right hand and put down all contrary powers here below, and the heavens and earth, long severed, will be manifestly at one. The mind of heaven will be no longer as now in contrast with

the mind of the earth. Then will come the reconciler, the blessed One who will unite, for God's glory and under His own sway, "all things, whether they be things in heaven or things on earth" — even in Him "in whom we have obtained an inheritance."

This then is the evident meaning of the glorious foreshadowing brought before us in this divine tale of Melchizedek.

I need dwell no more on the history, except to point out one moral feature, the beautiful manner in which Abram, thus blessed, and deeply affected by both God's dealings on the one hand and this remarkable confirmation of his faith on the other, answers the king of Sodom, who, feeling all thankfulness for the mighty intervention of divine power through Abram, offers unsought to give Abram the goods. But Abram at once shows us that faith is more generous still, knowing what it is to be rich toward God, and refusing to tarnish His testimony by anything that would enable the king of Sodom to say, "I have made Abram rich." At the same time he pleads for the others. Whatever may be the self-renouncing grace of Abram, he in the largeness of his heart forgets not what is due to those who had not his faith. He asks for Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, who had helped him. It was only and quite right that they should participate in the spoil.

I need not spend many words in exploding the petty and nauseous hypothesis which regards the whole chapter, the battle of the kings and the interview of Melchizedek and Abram, as a traditional patch worked in at this point. Certainly there is a discriminating use of the divine names in the different portions of Genesis as

everywhere in Scripture even to the Revelation of John in the New Testament; but only the credulity of an infidel could have thence been induced to believe that Genesis, any more than the Revelation, is a compilation of distinct documents by differing writers.

A rationalist may be learned; but he is necessarily ignorant of God's mind in Scripture, as his false principle leads him to deny it, and hence not even to seek it, as the believer does who sees in the word of God the Spirit's testimony to Christ.

Genesis 15.

There is a sensible difference between the portion we are entering on now, as compared with the chapters we have had before us. They have given not only a distinct, but also, as it appears to me, within their own line, a complete view of that side of the truth which it was in the mind of the Spirit of God to convey. In this way chapters 12, 13 and 14 form a whole; and, as we have already seen, the great thing there before God was the call of Abram, and its consequences from first to last, the public step that He was Himself taking in His own ways, in having a man, not only walking by faith, as others had done before, but set apart openly to Himself as none had ever been before. I do not mean merely separate spiritually now, for no doubt Abel was so, to begin at the beginning. No one can doubt that, before the difference between him and Cain, or the terrible issue came out into view, the moral distance between the first brothers had been existing, and was felt, not only by themselves, but by every one else. It is plain that Cain's own spirit found it intolerable; and it was just this conviction which he resented, and which carried him to

lift up, first his hand in violence against his brother, then his voice in irreverence and rebellion against God, as his heart had been a stranger to Him all through.

Here is another thing. For the first time we see the efficacious principle of a separate witness, to whom God conveyed a promise, and a promise too that had to do not only with what was unseen but with what all could see, after coming out at God's word. The latter was indeed the earlier of the two; for Hebrews 11 shows us that, first of all, Abram was actuated by faith in leaving the country to which he belonged, and when he came into the land that God promised to give him, then his eyes were lifted higher still. Thus does the Spirit of God show us the introduction of the great principle which God has never given up since, but has always been carrying out. He set it publicly before Israel in an earthly way, and now He is giving it effect after a heavenly sort. This seems to be the subject of chapters 12, 13, 14. That it is concluded there is manifest from this, that we have a scene which brings distinctly before us the last great conflict — the battle between the kings of the earth, and the victory which the man of faith enjoys by the power of God, even over the powers previously victorious. In short, it is there we have the type of the great "Priest upon his throne" in Melchizedek, active toward God as well as man, blessing man in the name of the "most high God," and blessing the "most high God" on the part of man. All this will assuredly find its due place and season when Christ appears in glory.

To this I have referred in a brief summary, to show you that there is a complete whole in these chapters, starting with the call, and ending with the glory; so that

we have the general public picture of the life of faith, with its worship, its drawbacks, failure, and recovery; the disclosure of the earthly mind too, its covetousness, and its disasters; faith's triumph over the world it had left behind, and the sudden appearing of Him who will display the glory of God in the blessing of man, and the harmony of heaven and earth; all brought before us within the compass of these three chapters.

But what follows seems rather to come back again, and make a new start. That this is true is most evident from Genesis 15, as compared with those before it, and indeed it relieves one of no little difficulty when seen to be so intended by the Spirit. For if it be viewed simply as a continuance of the former chapters, would it not be very extraordinary to hear how Abram is justified by faith? There is naturally, therefore, a fresh beginning. Of course, it is not denied for a moment that what took place at this time did literally occur after the scene with Melchizedek; but we are now speaking of the ulterior and deeper aim which the Spirit of God had in recording these matters. It is a question not only of facts, but of God's mind in His word; and we are seeking to regard it as a divinely given source of profit for ourselves, and of gathering from the Lord why it is; for we may with reverence inquire, and indeed are bound to inquire, seeing this is the way in which we grow in the knowledge of the mind of God.

Why then, we ask, does the Spirit of God introduce the theme at this particular place? It appears to me that here we have a fresh start, and another course of divine lessons for our souls, in looking at the new dealing with God with His servant. And it will be shown further that there is a series, as it is not merely an isolated fact; but!

just as we saw in what went before, a chain of circumstances all connected one with another, and completing the subject as a whole. A similar principle governs here as there. There is this remarkable difference, that here we come to what is far more personal, as one may call it. We have no longer public testimony. What we have had bears this character right through from first to last. But here another thing is impressed on us, and very important in its place — that we are not merely witnesses. Here, accordingly, personal faith comes first before us.

Some of us must be more or less aware of the danger to the soul from being so occupied with that which is public as to neglect what is personal. Take, for instance, the gathering together of the saints to the Lord's name — our assembling around His table. Who does not know that, however precious the privilege, however closely bound up with the Lord's glory, however full of comfort, and blessing, and growth to our souls, if used aright, there remains much which is not a question of testimony, but of the exercise of faith individually, carrying one more into God's presence, and intercourse between Him and our souls?

Here, at any rate, in the wonderful book before us, begins a new series of instruction: God is showing His own dealings with the soul of Abram, not viewing him so much as a witness for Him before others. He is looked at alone as in his house, but, above all, with God. Every one could see when Abram had left his country, and set out for a promised land; they could see too that he sometimes failed for a season to accomplish what was before him. And it is all most instructive. Then, again, his pitching his tent, or rearing an altar, was all visible,

and meant to be so. So, further, the victory over the powers of the world was that which men generally could not only hear of but feel: it was a real and public testimony. But had this been all, it would not have met what God meant to give, and what He loves to give, for the blessing of the soul. There is such a thing as living too much in the public walk and activity of a saint, to the neglect of that which is more personal. This seems precisely what the Spirit of God enters into here from chapter 15 — the dealings of God with the soul individually, beginning with its wants, but leading on to a far deeper communion with Himself.

The first thing to notice by the way is, “After these things.” This is the usual way of marking off a new division or a fresh subject. You will find a similar expression at another and similar section in Genesis 22. There clearly begins a line of things quite distinct from what preceded. So it is here. “After these things the word of Jehovah came unto Abram.” We have not had. this expression before, although we have had “Jehovah said to Abram.” What makes it more remarkable is, that in the counterpart of it in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 7), we are told that “the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham” at that very time. Thus it is the more striking, because, although He did appear, it is not so said in Genesis 12. It was according to the mind of God only to speak of His speaking to Abram. Of course it remains perfectly true that He did appear, but not a word of it is mentioned in the history, which adds indeed to the point of it, by the seventh verse of the same chapter, where it is distinctly declared that God appeared to him; and worship is thus grounded on it, that is, on the positive revelation of God to his soul, and

not merely on a revelation from God. Such, too, is the form in which God presents that which has come out now in Christ our Lord. There the Father was. showing Himself in Him. We are called to the knowledge of the Father and the Son, and truly our fellowship is with both, the Holy Ghost being the power that gives the enjoyment of it. Thus it is not merely His words we have, but the showing of Himself. So one of the disciples said, “Show us the Father,” though this indeed He was ever doing, but they were dull to see it. An hour was coming, however, when they should see it. This was the hour for christian worship, which is the answer of the heart, the precious and spontaneous effect of the revelation of God to the soul.

Here then, as one sees, is a new form we have not had before. It is not merely that Jehovah “said,” still less that Jehovah “appeared,” but, suitably to the fresh lesson of the Spirit of God, “After these things the word of Jehovah came unto Abram.” What “the word” calls for is faith. There we discern at once the reason of it; and faith is the groundwork of all dealings between the soul and God. As, on the one hand, it is “the word of Jehovah” that came to Abram; so on the other, faith answers to His word; and this is the point of truth illustrated here.

But there is another trait noticeable, the wisdom of God in not always putting — indeed we may say never — the highest truth first. He thinks of the soul’s need. This is of great moral interest. Even if it were the Lord Jesus from heaven speaking to Saul of Tarsus, still after all He is dealing first with his conscience, though by the light of the glory in Himself. There might be that which Saul, afterwards pondering, enters into far more deeply than when he was converted; but the thing that was blessed

to his soul was a divine person, yet a man in heaven, judging all, but in perfect grace, and not something that supplied merely a wonder for the mind to be occupied with. This was not the point. He was made nothing of before the Lord. No flesh may glory. One can glory, but only in the Lord. And so I find here. This scene may not be at all so deep, high, or large in its character as what follows, but it just marks the way of the Lord in dealing with the soul to justify it.

The truth is, when the "word of Jehovah" comes to a man, it not only finds wants but awakens them. Such is its just fruit. It is not merely that we are needy. The present case of Abram was not that of one disturbed and anxious about its condition. Abram long ago had been quickened of God, and indeed had walked in His ways, as we know, for many years before this; but God was pleased to make the chapter that comes before us the first of a new series for the opening of His truth in the more hidden and personal life of His servant. The first thing seen here is that He sets him in perfect confidence in Himself.

"Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." No doubt there was a beautiful suitability in this revelation after what had just passed. Abram had refused what the world had to give, and God graciously owns this with complacency, and announces Himself his sufficient reward. If God were his shield, Abram need not fear the jealousy of the Canaanite, nor even the hostile reprisals of the kings he had defeated, nor yet from any other quarter. "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." God would be true to His own word. Here was a bulwark of protection, and source of supply, at once secured to His servant. But mark the

effect. It awakens the sense of wants, and draws out too the expression of those wants. If Abram had long felt in secret any such desire, there is no reason to suppose that he had ever told it out to God before. Now he does. God had given him the land of promise, but with this he was not content, and God meant that he should have more. His unfolding Himself to him in this new way leads Abram to breathe out what he had perhaps never defined to himself before. He was not content with the general terms God had hitherto used to him. He says, “Lord Jehovah, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?” Where was the value of God’s being ever so great a reward, if after all he was childless, “and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?” What matter the lands he might have, if all was to go to his servant?

Now I do not say that this is by any means the highest point of Abram’s faith; on the contrary, it seems to me far from what we see not long after. But still there was reality, and this is assuredly one point of moment for us here — that God would always have us in the truth of our state, whatever this may be. Suppose a person is not at ease about his sins, let him not gloss it over. If God is dealing with his soul, He brings it clearly out If to be fully blessed, the person is made as unhappy as he can be, and in fact the same grace which gives to the soul the assurance that God blots out and forgives also brings the soul to look at its own sins to the very depth. So again, yet more, supposing a person is clear enough about his forgiveness, still he may be troubled about the sin that dwells in him. This is another exercise for souls. But, whatever the occasion, God will always have reality; and though He encourages in grace, that He begins with

it is what we find in His dealing with Abram now. He sounds Abram's wishes and thoughts, and He brings out from his lips what was at the bottom of his heart. He who had the promises was not satisfied, because he had not a son to inherit all that God had given him. And so he takes this place — "Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir."

Soon the word of Jehovah comes to him again. "This shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." And then he is taken abroad, and bid to "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars if thou be able to number them; and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in Jehovah, and he counted it to him for righteousness" — that very fruitful scripture, which the New Testament uses over and over again for the most important purposes. In all these, however, it will be observed, that the object is to meet the soul at the starting-point individually, which is exactly what I am showing in the account of Abram, though in fact the thing occurred in Abram's history after he had been a believer some time. Still, even the New Testament shows that life is not justification, so that the truth abides substantially alike everywhere. But even though quickened, a person cannot go on stedfastly, or enter into the mind of God fully, until he is clear as to the grave point of righteousness. This too gives us an instructive lesson for ourselves in having to do with others. It makes us feel the incomparable mercy that God has shown us in this respect; for if there is one thing that He has been pleased to bring out into distinctness, and to give the simplest soul to enjoy through faith in Christ and His work, it is that personal freedom, and deliverance from

every question, which it is our privilege now to enjoy; and I believe that a greater mercy there cannot possibly be for the believer individually.

Very likely what first arrested one was something quite different. It may have been with us as it was with Abram. Many of those called out in our day were brought into and occupied at first with the public ways of God. What we had understood as the church was learnt to be a mere ruin. We had received from God truth as to His own will and counsels about us, as Abram had; but God wrought, and powerfully too, in another way. Not of course that any one could assume in such a state to have more than a very partial insight into God's mind in that respect. But this one may say, that unless a soul be at one time or another — perhaps not always at the start — brought into clearance, into thorough enjoyment of its own place by grace through faith, the public walk of faith in testimony and worship will not always possess its charm, still less will the soul always hold it in power for the Lord's glory. The real reason, one will find, why souls (and not infrequently, grievous to say) slip out of the place of witness to Christ, is that they have never been thoroughly broken down as individuals. They have never really been brought into that which would make the preciousness of Christ alone, and liberty by and in Him, enjoyed by their souls. They have slurred over the great matter of personal clearance with God. The public life, in short, has been not only that on which the soul first entered but where it abides, and this entails an unconscious escaping from the question of finding and getting the answer to our wants personally with God.

Now this seems to me of no small moment, not only for ourselves, but also in dealing with the persons we meet from day to day. Were it only a question of what is public, it would not bear the stamp of the truth of God. It might be true, but still there would be something wanting for spirituality of soul.

I believe it, therefore, to be a matter of profound thankfulness to our God that He has not only brought out from His word the path of faith in worship and public walk, and given some few to enter into it more or less, but He has brought the same souls into the liberty with which Christ makes free. Doubtless there are differences of apprehension, and there must be so among the people of God; we are not all equally spiritual or simple. But it remains true that God has of late wrought so that we should by grace enjoy both these aspects of the truth, the public and the personal, and that the very same testimony which on one side of it has made clear to us what is publicly for the glory of the name of the Lord Jesus, has brought the word of God unto our souls to establish us in His righteousness more clearly, and with greater power, than we ever knew before we trod that public place of testimony. Can I not appeal to the souls that read these words for the truth of them?

But as some despise what is public in desire for the supply of personal need, so others may merge all in what is public. There is danger, therefore, on either side. The general testimony may expose to the danger of neglecting the more personal part of the truth. As we see, it was not so with Abram; and it is of great consequence that we should look to this for ourselves, if we are not in perfect peace, and for souls generally.

Never assume that those who bear the Lord's name in Christendom are personally clear before God. If they are in thorough departure from the mind of God ecclesiastically, they are just as ignorant and unestablished as to the soul. It is a good thing to bring them out of all that hinders them; but seek far more than that. Do not fail to probe the soul as to the consciousness of its place with God. Do not be content that they should hear a little of what is meant by the assembly; that they should see the importance of what it is to worship the Father in spirit and in truth. This is well, and also most important; but there is a nearer want, which may never have been fully faced and met. Can the person take the place now of standing before God in calm and constant confidence, without spot or stain? Does he know what it is (for that is the form the truth takes for us) to be not only justified by faith, but dead to sin, and crucified to the world? Sometimes, through unwillingness to offend, or assumption that a believer must know, we are apt to slur over these matters, just as if, because they have taken a public stand, all the rest must be settled. Often it has never been so; and very generally, if not always, it will turn out that those who have slipped aside from the testimony are men that never enjoyed the individual clearance of their souls. "That day" may show that all who have departed from what is due to the name of the Lord Jesus were weak personally. Indeed, if we ourselves come to search, looking back, and weigh that which they have talked, or (it may be) preached, do we not see ground enough to infer that there had always been a lack there? No wonder that the public walk failed, if the personal faith was never according to the just measure of the truth of God.

This then is the prominent point here; and you will observe that in this chapter Abram does not rise above the answer to his wants. Let none slight what is so needful and important in its season. It is no use to be asking for great things, if there be an unsatisfied want that is near the heart; and this was the case with Abram. Undoubtedly God meant all through to have given him a son; nevertheless He would have Abram's heart thoroughly searched, and sends His word purposely to bring out what was there, meets him where he is, answers the faith that was exercised, and gives him further enlargement, with a token by which he should know that he should inherit the land. Thus his heart is first drawn out about a son, and if a son, then an heir. The inheritance follows, though after intervening sorrow and trial.

"And he said unto him, I am Jehovah that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord Jehovah, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcase Abram drove them away" (vers. 7-11). It was of course no question of expiation here, but of confirming the divine grant of the inheritance; and in the character and variety of the animals slain God (as it seems to me) took into account the weakness of faith that asked the sign. He does not decline to give Abram the bond that he asked, or to make all sure by death. (Compare Jer. 34:18, 19) But it

was not to be made good without tribulation as well as patience on the part of the seed. “And when the sun was going down,” more followed for his discipline and our instruction, which was very appropriate as a sign of this: “a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a horror of great darkness fell upon him.” You see it is not one that stands in the light of God, but one that lingered in the region of his own wants, and of all the sorrow that belongs to wants connected with such a world and such a state.

“And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full (vers. 13-16).

Ultimately we find the land of promise secured to Abram as punctually as in a map. “When the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces” (ver. 17). Jehovah knew what was in Abram’s mind, and so He enters into this covenant — “Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates, the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites” (vers. 18-21).

Throughout the chapter, then, it is what man wanted, and this made it a suited scene for illustrating justification. It was not God appearing, but the word that

came, and Abram believed, and his faith was counted to him for righteousness. Jehovah had adapted His word to bring this about by saying, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” Then Abram asks and has the promise of a son and heir out of his own bowels, his seed to be as the stars for number. The pledge follows whereby he should know his inheritance of Canaan. It is sealed by a sacrifice; and the horror of great darkness which fell on sleeping Abram seems to be in keeping with the prophecy of affliction for his seed in a strange land, however surely Jehovah would judge the nation they should serve, and they in due time come again to Canaan when the iniquity of the Amorites was ripe for divine vengeance. So it was in fact as we all know.

A smoking furnace and a lamp of fire passing between the pieces point to this too, while the same day Jehovah covenants with Abram, marking the limits of the land and the devoted races of Canaan. Throughout it is the wants of man on the earth, and God securing the answer, in His grace, by sacrificial death. It is the earthly people to be delivered by judgment on their enemies in and out of the land. Those who fall under the judicial dealings of the Lord are met in grace with definite pledges for their tried faith; and the prophetic word, excellent as it is for all, casts its light as from a lamp on the dreary scene of man’s lawlessness where the sword of the Lord clears the way for the sceptre according to His mind. In none of these passages do we see the counsels of grace for heavenly glory. It is first the individual justified by faith; and next the people to pass through tribulation, but to be saved at the end of God’s allotted time.

Genesis 16.

But Abram did not know how to wait; and Sarai takes no happy part in the action of this chapter. It is first “that which is natural,” though we can also add, “afterward that which is spiritual.” Flesh is impatient, and seeks at once the accomplishment in its own way. She proposes her Egyptian bondrnaid, Hagar, and, Abram hearkening instead of walking by faith, the maid conceives, and her mistress is despised. The Epistle to the Galatians gives the certain clue to what we else might never have understood. It is the covenant of Sinai which she represents, answering to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. The law works not peace but wrath, not the accomplishment of the promise but fleshly pride, and a child born in sorrow who cannot be heir. What a contrast to blessing and praise through the royal priest in chapter 14, or the altars of chapters 12, 13! If the justified man take up the law (save to convict others), no wonder if the issue be disappointment on all hands. Such is the solemn admonition of our chapter. The law is good if one use it lawfully; but it is not applied rightly to righteous persons, but to lawless. The believer has no more to do with it for himself now, than Abram then should have taken Hagar. It is interesting to observe that as Hagar was really of Egypt and a slave, so she typically is mount Sinai in Arabia, the covenant that genders to bondage (Gal. 4). The flesh, the world, and the law work together, and the gospel delivers the believer from all by the death of Christ, as unbelief exposes to mischief from them all.

Genesis 17.

But now we come to another scene of a wholly different nature. “When Abram was ninety years old and nine, Jehovah appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be thou perfect.” What a change! We see here that it is no longer Abram bringing out what was concealed in his own heart, but God unfolding Himself with a greater fulness than He had ever been pleased to do before with Abram or indeed any one else. Here is the then characteristic revelation of Himself, and farther than this none of the patriarchs ever advanced. El Shaddai (God Almighty) is the substance of the distinctive truth on which the fathers flourished. Here was that which especially became their joy and their source of strength. This they learned in the face of all difficulties and of every foe. “I am the Almighty God.”

We must not look at these words merely from the blessedness into which we are brought. It were well to reflect how such a revelation must have told on Abram. He had just before this been proving how feeble he was, and how little he could see before him. He had experienced the danger of listening to his own wife. What ill-feeling followed as the immediate consequence and what trouble there was likely to be in store! Now we have God revealing Himself, though of course in a grace suitable to those He was blessing. Still it is not in view of man’s wants on earth, as in chapter 15. There, as we have seen, Abram had been faithful, he had not only conquered the enemy’s power but refused the world’s honour in his jealousy for the Lord; who thereon speaks to him, and, if one may so say, rewards him. Abram accordingly asks according to his own measure. He

thinks of what would be sweet and comforting for him then, but it was connected with himself; and so, again, what the Lord shows him is a vista, bright in the end, connected with his seed and with the land which was to be their own. It was all consequently of a comparatively narrow character, gliding into prophecy as to Israel and the land. Not so here, and for the simple reason that now there is a still deeper lesson to be taught and learnt.

It is not failure by the way; this we have had in chapter 16. It is not merely want supplied, most true and important in its place, and useless to be slurred over. How vain to ignore what we do lack, and talk of things we do not feel! Abram brought out what he felt, and God met him there most abundantly.

But now there is far more than this; not what Abram feels or wants, but what God wanted for him and loved to give him. God therefore imparts the richest revelation ever made known up to that time. “I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.” What was the consequence? No horror of deep darkness follows now, no deep sleep falls on him here. “Abram fell on his face;” nor was this all: “God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.” Those enumerated in the end of chapter 15 were the enemies, the races that had usurped the land and were to be subdued; but now a far higher range of things opens. Abram should have a child, and be the father “of many nations.” It is evident therefore that the circle is immensely enlarged, and all in pure grace.

Abram has not asked a word; nor does he seek any pledge or token.

It is not Abram now that presents what God had, as it were, suggested and drawn out of him, what was then in his heart, and what was of importance to be forced out because it was there. Far other things are here. Abram had been humbled, feeling his weakness and his foolishness, and Sarai's too. Accordingly God now, out of nothing but His own grace, unveils Himself in this special manner: "I am the Almighty God: walk before me and be thou perfect." If He was the Almighty God, it was not merely a question of enemies now. Not a single word is said about them. It would have been unsuitable at this time to have talked of putting down this or that people. They do not require God's almightiness to deal with them; and Abram had already counted on His power upon this fresh revelation of Himself; and surely not in vain. But He needed to be the Almighty God to bung about the blessedness He is here speaking of. The connection of El Shaddai, I repeat, is not with putting down foes, but, wonderful to say, with Abram's walk before Him! "Be thou perfect."

What an introduction of Abram to new privileges! What a groundwork to go on! There he was, a stranger, surrounded by those who wished him evil, and after having just proved his own weakness. No matter what all else might be: "I am the Almighty God: walk before me, and be thou perfect; and I will make my covenant between me and thee." Is it not intensely personal too? All the questions that could rise up as a matter of trial, all thoughts of disappointment, have now disappeared. God had already met his wants as a man; and if these had not been perfectly met, would there have been the

same suitability in this fresh vision? But they were: the void for his heart would be filled; nothing in this respect could trouble more. The one thing that remained lacking for Abram's present comfort, a son and heir, God would take in hand. His wife's expedient had only brought sorrow on them all by her haste. He had everything else. But now he leaves all in the hands of God, who here speaks after a wonderful way.

After God has brought in Himself in His almightiness before Abram, He speaks of the land for ever given to him and to his seed. But not a word of this in the first instance. It was of all importance to Abram that there should not be a word about his prospects till after the revelation of God Himself. God does not even say, "I am thy God." He does not connect Himself with Abram in any such way. The first word here was the simple revelation, "I am the Almighty God." On this Abram's heart rests. It is not Abram seeking it of himself with God, but God unfolding Himself to Abram. Such is the great thought, and this as "the Almighty." "I will make a covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly." How it was to be He does not yet explain; but it follows in due time.

Then see the effect on Abram. He never felt so overwhelmed in the presence of God, just because he had never been so near Him in spirit before. "He fell upon his face, and God talked with him." Yes, Abram is in the dust before Him. It is not worship at the altar, nor a sacrifice to secure a promised gift, but communion: God deigns to talk with Abram. His falling on his face is not conviction of sin, or darkness of soul, but lowliness before God. He is really far nearer God practically than in Genesis 15, and can confide more simply in His word.

Then he had unsettled questions: then too a horror of darkness; and failure ensued in chapter 16. But here is the blessing of Abram personally, the establishment of an everlasting covenant between himself and his seed, and the promise of many nations and kings.

Notice further the expression of communion. “God talked with him.” It is so put purposely by the Spirit of God; for He had nowhere else used this language before. It serves, I have no doubt, expressly to show nearness of intercourse; and a very weighty thing it is. Such is the force we see in 1 Timothy 4, where we are told of the wondrous place into which we are brought, far beyond that of Abram (though the scene we have before us may be viewed as a kind of premonition and shadow of it), that “every creature of God is good,” — “for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer,” that is, by free intercourse with God in His grace.

Here in Abram’s history we have it. If the “word of God” comes in Genesis 15 and in the chapter which follows, as we have seen, now we have this familiar intercourse with God in chapter 17. The word “prayer” in 1 Tim. 4:5, as is well known, is not the ordinary expression of wants. It is not the word for supplication; which has its own place and a very important one too. However blessed we may be, we never get out of that need here below. Were any one to assume now that, because we have intimacy of fellowship in Christ, we cease to be in the place of need, and no longer are called to persevere in prayer as the expression of our dependence on God, need one say what a dishonour to Him is done, and what a downfall must be at hand? But still there is something more than prayer; there is the enjoyment of intercourse; and where souls do not enter into this, where they

cannot get near enough to God, so to speak, and do not habituate their souls to His talking to them in His word, and their free pleading before Him, which is what the Christian is entitled to now (I am not speaking of formally kneeling down and presenting our needs, but of being able to draw near to God and speak about everything), there is a great lack in the private personal life of the Christian.

It is well to note that the intercourse in the scene before us is the fruit of God's revealing Himself more perfectly to the soul. Thus all was founded, not on a fresh start taken by man, but on His gracious ways with the soul. It is far from the vain idea of a self-consecration, or the higher life that men prate about, however one may share their protest against the habit of others to go on sinning with a measure of contentment, or at least with a sense of necessity that so it must be. The reverse is seen here; even God's unfolding Himself by a fuller revelation of His name. He was making Himself known in a way that never was heard of before. It is one thing for man to summon up from his own mind what he would say to God; quite another what God says about Himself as the suited revelation for the blessing of a man's soul. Here there can be no doubt about its character. He appears to Abram, and says "I am the Almighty God." He does not even say He is the Almighty God to him. It was not called for.

When a soul is young in the ways of grace, God links Himself with him, vouchsafing various helps to the soul that yet knows Him feebly, unable to enjoy Him unless He stretches out His hand to. help the struggling sinking soul. But it is not so here. Abram did not want it at present. He had learned both about himself and about

God, and he shows the profit of it here. Now that God says “I am the Almighty God,” it is enough for Abram. No doubt He adds, “I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly,” but the way in which He reveals Himself is not so much what He was to Abram, but what He is in Himself. When justified by faith, we are entitled to enjoy this. We can joy in God (not only in the blessing but in the Blesser) through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore it is that, though in the first dealings of God with our souls there is no one that has not found it an immense thing to know Him as Father — the “babes” (1 John 2:13) being distinguished by this very thing, they “know the Father,” and there being no Christian who does not enjoy Him as such, DO matter how long he may be in the ways of the Lord — yet I am persuaded that when a soul advances in the knowledge of divine things, there comes out, not merely the cleaving to Him as Father, but the ability to “joy in God.”

But if one has to do with worldly men, they do not know what you mean when one speaks of God as his Father, save as the Father of everybody. They use this which is true to deny His special relationship to the Christian. It is then no small thing for the soul to know that “God is my Father,” in the Spirit to cry, Abba Father; but it is another thing, where all questions are settled, and we are able peacefully to enjoy Him as God. This is assuredly of great moment and will be found to be true in the ways of God with our own souls. It is evident that our Lord Jesus meant that we should find and enjoy it; for if we refer to the message on the resurrection day, He says, “I ascend unto my Father and your Father” — but this is not all — “and to my God and your God.” I do not believe it is possible to enjoy “His God and our God”

until we have known what it is to look up with perfect rest in Christ and in conscious relation to God as “His Father and our Father.” In short all true real believing enjoyment of God as such follows the enjoyment of the Father.

As long as there remains a single question unsettled, there will always be a shrinking from God as such. Note the calmness of Abram here. He can enter, without anything to come between, into what God is in Himself as “the Almighty God.” But further, it is said, “God talked with him;” not “the Almighty” nor “Jehovah,” but “God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations I have made thee.”

Not merely has the patriarch a new name given him, but mark how everything rises now. It is not only the land where the Kenites and others dwelt, but “I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee; and I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant.” It is not then alone that there is such an immensely greater sphere opened out for the hopes of Abraham, but the time also is unlimited. It is an “everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger.” God had not forgotten the lesser gift in presence of greater things — “all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.”

Observe too another thing that goes along with this. No longer now does Abraham ask for a token whereby he should know that he is to inherit the land. Not a word of the kind is dropped. But God speaks of the seal of circumcision. It is not now something outside him, as we saw in the dead animals of chapter 15, but “Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant which ye shall keep, between me and you, and thy seed after thee: every man-child among you shall be circumcised.” What does it mean? Flesh mortified before God; the sentence of death put on man in His sight, and this in Abram’s own person as well as in his seed afterwards.

Circumcision here accordingly is not introduced in a legal way, any more than the sabbath in Genesis 2. It is really the answer in man to the grace of God. It is that which God has made the Christian’s portion in our Lord Jesus, that “circumcision without hands,” which God has given us in Him, for in Him we are circumcised. It is not the death of a victim now, but every child of Abraham takes the place of death by this sign, which typically sets forth our death with Christ, the perfect deliverance of the individual as dead with Him. Until one knows what it is to be thus dead, there is no possibility of enjoying what it is to be free unto God. What a precious thing it is that this is precisely what God has made true in an incomparably better way to us now, bringing us into the calm and peaceful enjoyment of Himself, with the certainty that everything that is offensive to God — our very nature as children of Adam has the sentence of death on it, not only pronounced but executed! This is what one knows now as a Christian. It is no longer a sign, precious as this was to Abraham (and I pretend not

to say how far he entered into it), but we are entitled to understand its truth; it is a part of the wonderful blessing in Christ that God has given us. It is not merely His meeting our wants; for I do not believe when it is a question simply of wants, that a soul ever enters into the sense of personal liberty and deliverance. But after having Christ for all our need and wretchedness, there is the further blessing that He is bringing us into, living intercourse with Himself now. We require a sound and solid basis for this; and God has given it to us in our death with Christ.

But this also you may observe: it is not our asking for a token. Who would have looked for such a thing as to be dead with Christ, or risen with Christ? Never did such a thought enter the heart of man. It is all God's grace, His own perfect wisdom and goodness to our souls. Yet is it all the fruit of the work of Christ Jesus our Lord. It is not merely a man risen; persons had been raised from the dead: but what was this to Christ being raised? They would all have to die again. But now we have got to the knowledge of resurrection in a wholly different and far superior way to this, for Christ rose, breaking the power of death for us, and we shall experience it soon as the consequence of that which He has done already. As dead and risen with Christ, we are waiting for a resurrection like His from among the dead, or a change, which is the same thing practically — when we shall be with Him, and be like Him, endued with the same incorruptness and glory according to the power of His resurrection.

But he that had obtained such favour was moved for the child of the bondwoman and said to God, "Oh, that Ishmael might live before thee!" If Sarai was to be thenceforward Sarah, to become nations, and kings to

be of her, though he and she were no better than dead, why should not Ishmael share the covenant? But nay: the child of promise and of the free-woman is the one with whom God establishes His covenant, though Ishmael for Abraham's sake goes not without His blessing, begets twelve princes, and becomes a great nation. And the selfsame day Abraham is circumcised, Ishmael and every male born in his house or bought with his money (vers. 25-27). Thus fall the reasonings of a saint, and God's will alone stands, even in blessing outside the covenant of promise. Even there no flesh shall glory in His presence. In no case is it improved but passes under sentence of death.

May the Lord, then, give our own souls to enter into these wondrous lessons of God, whether they be the public ones for a life of testimony, or the individual ones for personal intercourse with God!

Genesis 18.

The portion read now is founded a good deal upon the previous chapter, and the general train runs on to the end of Gen. 21. We can see at a glance that Gen. 22 introduces a series of truths altogether new. The distinctive mark already mentioned, "After these things," makes a decided break, a fresh start in thought; and you will observe how completely this is the fact, because there it is not only an altogether new train of communications from God, but also of a different character. The death and resurrection of the promised son are brought before us in a figure, and all the other dealings of God that are founded on this grave fact; as for instance the passing away for the time of the

covenant of grace with Israel in Sarah, and the call of the bride in Gen. 24.

Of course I do not mean to enter on these subjects just now; but I make the remark in order to help persons to read the scriptures for themselves, that they may have a clearer understanding of the order of these things, and have more fixed in their souls the consciousness that it is the word of God, and not the thoughts of ingenious men, really a matter of divine truth, and altogether independent of anybody's fancies. This I hold to be a capital point for the children of God, particularly in these days; that they may have a distinct ground to go on, not only for their own souls, but also in case of being challenged by others. For there are those who, not knowing the truth, are the more ready to doubt the reality of the blessing which they do not themselves enjoy. They have the miserable desire to spoil the happiness to which they are themselves strangers. Hence we cannot be too simple. Besides this, we do well to seek to be thoroughly established in the truth that we receive — to see how it is all bound up with the personal work of Christ, as well as revealed in the word of God, foreshadowed in the Old Testament and clearly set out in the New.

In this case then the communication is in a measure founded on chapter 17, which we saw introduced an unfolding of God's name in a way that was an advance on all before. But in this case it was not as with Jacob, where he sought to know the name of God, who withheld His name. Indeed the difference is remarkable. With Abraham there was more ease, and God begins to speak out plainly. Not but that Jacob was afterwards brought to hear God unfolding the very same name of "the

Almighty God;" but to Abraham it was brought out at once. There was no such thing as the desire — still less was there any "wrestling." Abraham, on the other hand, intercedes with Him; and indeed "wrestling" is not exactly the word that would be suitable to the character of Abraham's intercourse with God. It was both more peaceful and of a higher character. In Jacob's case there was immense activity of nature. I do not mean sin, of course, but nature in its best sense, that is, domestic affection. The love of family was exceedingly strong in Jacob's case: no one of the patriarchs seems more marked by it than Jacob. It is not meant of course that either lacked in this way, for they did not. Witness in Isaac a character remarkable for his home attachments, with a life more equable than Jacob's.

Abraham, however, had this distinguishing feature, that he was a man who very simply went to God about everything as it rose. Consequently God could act more freely and immediately in His dealings with him. There was not so much that required first to be broken down, as we find in Jacob's case: how often he must be made nothing of before God could be revealed! Therefore it was comparatively late in the history of Jacob before God made His name known to him. To Abraham, as we saw, Jehovah appeared, and opened out His name, unasked, as the "Almighty God;" and there followed the making of the covenant, which supposed the death of the flesh, the express figure of that which we now know in its truth and power in Christ; would that so wondrous a weapon of deliverance from all on that score were well wielded by all saints t What a source of trial, difficulty, and perplexity, do the great mass of God's children find through not knowing it! For, as many know, it is not in

their case a question so much of the faith that overcomes the world, as it is really doubt about their own personal clearance before God. He that is dead is justified from sin, but this they do not perceive. They are as yet under law. But we have seen that here circumcision is not at all connected with the law, but, on the contrary, with that covenant God made in grace long before it. It is the sign of blessing God was to give in Christ Himself. Circumcision is viewed as the type of the complete setting aside of the flesh before God. This is what we have had in Genesis 17. Now we enter on a further activity of God, and its consequences, which are carried on to chapter 21.

Here again the Lord appears, though we may notice this special feature about it now, that He leaves it to Abraham to find out Who was visiting him. There is no outward token of the majesty of His presence — no special intimation betrays Who was there. It is also to be noticed that on this occasion the Lord personally came, attended by two others, who, no doubt, were outwardly much like Himself. He deigned to take the appearance of a man; as it is said, “He (Abraham) lift up his eyes, and looked, and lo, three men stood by him.” We have no reason to suppose that it was in such a manner that God was pleased to appear to His servant oh former occasions. It was a dealing with Abraham, founded on what went immediately before in chapter 17, but having its own distinct character. This is preserved throughout.

“When he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door.” He was one of those who, like Lot in the next chapter, had an ungrudging hospitality, which had its reward in this, that, ready as they were to receive those who looked but strangers, they were really entertaining

“angels unawares.” Nay, more: this present occasion was the most remarkable entertainment ever enjoyed by any on the earth until Jesus came. Some might count it even more wonderful than that; because the Lord Jesus, being pleased by being born of a woman to become a man and to tabernacle amongst us, came down habitually into human circumstances as a man with men. I do not doubt, however, that, in all these manifestations of the Lord in the Old Testament, we are to understand the Son of God was the one manifested. Not only was He pleased to come in the appearance of a man, which may have been the case on other occasions also, as seen in the history of Noah, Gideon, and others; but here it is said there were three men, meaning by this of course what they seemed to the eyes of men. The peculiar privilege here was that God Himself deigned to be the guest of Abraham: yea, and more than that, for He treats him as His intimate, stamping on the patriarch for ever that remarkable designation, “the friend of God,” which is founded on this very chapter. Assuredly the circumstances are such, that we do well to look into them with care.

Abraham then “bowed himself toward the ground” — as far as we are told, not knowing at first who the three were. But God is gracious to His people, and leads on step by step. We can see at a glance whose grace it was that put into the heart of Abram the habit of what we might call indiscriminate generosity and kindness; and this readiness is the more to be observed as it was the part of one called out to be separate to the Lord. A grave and important lesson it is for us in this respect, that the man who was most of all separate is the same whose

heart went most of all out towards others, and that strangers.

There is nothing in the most complete separateness to the Lord to hinder the largest and most active kindness, not merely to the people of God. but to all men. Abraham did not know at this time who or what his visitors might be; he merely saw three men, and his heart was at once towards them. Not strained nor scanty was the flow of divine goodness; there was a heart ready at once to meet and even seek others, desirous of their blessing. Is it not in the highest sense so with the Lord? Does He not constantly pour blessing into the heart of the man that is intent on the blessing of others? In this case, too, there was a greater honour in store, though the object of it knew it not.

Though we must not suppose that at first Abraham knew the divine dignity of one of "the three men," there is the remarkable fact that he addressed himself to one, and I can hardly doubt to which of the three. However that may be, he says, "My lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant; let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet." He does not confine himself to the one to whom he had at first addressed himself. He is thinking of that which was needful, not only in courtesy but in love. "Rest yourselves under the tree, and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts." We can scarce doubt, I think, that he is treating them according to the appearance in which they stood, though we shall find that it is not long before he learns more. "After that ye shall pass on, for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do as thou hast said."

Abraham accordingly hastens, making Sarah the partner of his kindly toil, and soon after stands by them under the tree as they eat. Then comes their turn before us. They said to him, “Where is Sarah thy wife?” Perhaps it was then that the first word, intimating the divine power of Him who deigned to be there, fell on the attentive ear of Abraham. “I will certainly return unto thee.” It does not become man to talk of certainly returning. Was this lost on Abraham? Assuredly not; more particularly when his long-cherished hope is about now to enjoy the promise of a specified, and, I may say, dated accomplishment. “I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son.” If it appeared vague before, it was henceforth distinct and defined. But the one who was immediately concerned had not the same sense as Abraham of the presence of God. There was not the same preparedness of heart for it. Sarah, no doubt, was an honoured woman, but her state was spiritually different from that of Abraham. We hear of her during this conversation behind the door. I dare say she ought not to have been there, but there she was; and if she was where she ought not to have been, need we wonder that she indulges in feelings that little became her? She laughed in her doubt of the word. Could any of us imagine Abraham behind a door? Was there not a simple dignity in him incapable of hiding and listening behind a door?

We can understand easily an eastern wife’s temptation to conceal herself in more modern times, when woman was more of a prisoner, and otherwise degraded; but it is evident that in those early days no such reason operated, and no excuse could thence be for anything of

the kind. For we find Rebekah, and others far later, going to the well, without any idea of impropriety. Sarah must no doubt have enjoyed no less a degree of freedom, but would have from her circumstances much more. She, the matron, by no means young now, was under no conceivable custom of keeping out of sight. Wherever such manners as those before us are resorted to, never expect anything good or worthy. It is no light mercy to be delivered from all the darkness and all the pettiness of nature, and to be brought to walk in the light as God is in it. It is sweet to think of it as the Christian's place, but it is what we all want to }earn more of. What else enables one to stand so simply in the presence of man? Not that we begin with man, and then know how to stand before God, but just the other way: God gives us the root of the matter first, and this is where we are brought in virtue of our Lord Jesus Christ. He could not do more, nor would He do less. He has brought us by and in Himself near to God. This is what in its spirit was true of Abraham; and he was one who enjoyed much of the conscious presence of God; and it is this that I am persuaded had its reward now. He had a conviction of who it was that was addressing him in words which could not fail. There was a sort of instinctive feeling, a growing assurance, in Abraham's soul who the guest must be he was entertaining.

It is remarkable, however, that he hears these words quietly. No astonishment is expressed. How happy when the soul is thus kept calm before God! We are not then taken by surprise: we expect good, and not evil. Instead, therefore, of stooping to the ways which let out how mean the flesh is, the sense of His presence preserves, and true dignity is associated with the utmost simplicity.

It is not in this case self-possession, nor the pride of being anything, nor the vanity of desiring what we have not; but all is founded in the deep sense that it is God with whom we have to do, and whose voice we hear and obey.

Abraham, then, as I have said, stands in marked contrast with Sarah hiding behind the door, and laughing within herself. But when charged with it, she is ashamed to own the truth, which she felt an ignominy to herself. But He that was on the other side of the door soon shows that such an obstacle could not keep Him from seeing and knowing what passed in the heart of Sarah, as well as where she was. “Jehovah said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?” How surprising it must have been to her, and how sharp the rebuke, though conveyed without a harsh word! “Is anything too hard for Jehovah?” How blessed to accustom ourselves, beloved brethren, to this one answer to all difficulties I For this we are called to walk by faith, not by sight. God never had a thought of a Christian, or of His church, being exempted from difficulties. To hinder this is the main effort of man after the flesh.

Directly men look at the church as a human institution, they want to smooth its way, to put it on the ground of natural rules and arrangements, and thus reduce the Christian to a walk of mere prudence and common sense. They forget it is God’s habitation through the Spirit, and cease to walk in dependence on the Lord. No doubt morality is quite according to the law of God: I quite admit it. But all that is entirely distinct. Supposing a person were to walk within the letter of the ten commandments every day, he never would behave in a

single particular as a Christian ought. The doing of all the commandments would not meet the will of God about the Christian. It would be very proper for a man, and excellent in a Jew; but far from being Jews, now that we are in Christ, we are no longer sons of Adam, but, according to His grace, His children by faith. We are born of God, and brought into a new place by redemption, and are blamed if we are walking as men.

So the Apostle Paul with the saints at Corinth. He reproaches them because they “walked as men,” not as bad men, but “as men.” It was unworthy of grace that they should be on mere human ground. If a brother offended another, is one to have him up before the law-court? We can understand that the Christian might easily reason about it, and say, “For my part I cannot but feel that a Christian is a great deal worse than a man of the world if he is guilty of a wrong, and therefore I must have him tried and punished by the magistrate.” The premise is true; the conclusion, false. For it is not at all a question of wrong or right, but of Christ. I perfectly grant that a Christian may do wrong, and that the assembly should judge it; but to do-right is not enough for a Christian. He is sanctified to the obedience of Christ, to obey God as the Lord did. It is a question, not of doing the law, but of obeying like Christ. This is what is written on us, as the law was on the tables of stone. Israel ought to have represented the law graven upon stones. We have Christ on high, and are called to walk and witness accordingly. This is the point of the apostle’s words in the chapter referred to. The Christian is the “epistle of Christ,” and nothing short of a manifestation of Christ can satisfy the mind of God as to him.

Here we see Jehovah as man in a beautiful way. So it was, I believe, in this case, although not of course as yet the Word made flesh, yet the nearest approach to it; and just as we shall see in the series that follows (Gen. 22), the resurrection of the Son of God in type, and the dealings of God founded on that great fact, so here we have, as far as it could be, the coming down of God to be among men, and the grace that accompanied His presence here below. Thus I read this very scene; and that is the reason why here, and here alone, the Lord takes the place of a man.

How beautiful to look back, and see how suitable it is that, before the series that introduced the work, there should be the series that introduced the person, in as near an approximation to His taking flesh as was possible to be beforehand! If there be one thing that marks a man with others, it is sitting at the same table in social intercourse. This is what the Lord does here. It is one of the very things in which an unbeliever finds an enormous difficulty: but what is poison to an infidel is the food and joy of faith. Accordingly, where faith receives it, we rejoice in so blessed a thing as God thus deigning to be at Abraham's table, and partaking of his hospitality, with His angels round Him; but this in the guise of men.

After He has thus put Himself along with His servant on familiar terms, He speaks of that which was nearest to the heart of Abraham. He knew that he was surely to have a son; but he had waited long, and wanted to know when the son would come. Now it is fixed; there is a distinct time allotted, and for the first time. God here too shows Himself considerate of Abraham's feelings. As we saw, Sarah was not up to the mark yet; she needed a

rebuke. The communication that God makes brought out what was not according to the proprieties of the presence of God. She was not used to it, like her husband, in spirit, day by day; and when the Lord did come, she did not know how to behave herself; but Abraham did, and there is nothing more remarkable than the ease, and calm, and comeliness of Abraham in all this scene. He was in no way thrown off his balance when it begins to dawn upon him Who it was that deigned to talk and eat with him; the wonderful fact that he stood before the true God, the Lord of heaven and earth — the pledge of the incarnation, when He should take flesh and dwell among us.

Jehovah brings all out plainly now. “Is anything too hard for Jehovah? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” But Sarah laughed in her incredulity and then, convicted, she denied it, saying, “I laughed not” — denied it for the same reason that some of us may have had to reproach ourselves for no less. “She was afraid!” How often these sad departures from the truth arise from nothing but the want of moral courage! What would train up the soul in unflinching and most scrupulous truthfulness is exactly what Abraham cultivated, and what Sarah failed in — habitual acquaintance with the presence of God.

There is no safeguard so efficacious, even supposing we be ever so disposed to exaggerate, uncareful, quick to speak, slow to consider and weigh what is said. There is nothing that would keep and form the soul more simply in truthfulness than this very thing, the constant sense of the presence of God. This it is that characterized Abraham more than most; not that we may not find

failure, for Abraham was not Christ. In this particular too, under solemn circumstances, Abraham broke down, and, sad to say, twice about the same thing — once in the earlier part of his career, and once later. For God would give the terrible lesson, that flesh in no way ever improves, and that Abraham needed the presence of God to keep him towards the close of his career, just as much as at the beginning.

Now we see that as the Lord convicts Sarah for her own good, so He blesses Abraham more and more. But though it is sad that a saint of God should fail in truthfulness, it is no small mercy that God should make that untruthfulness felt where the soul has been guilty. I do not know anything worse for any one who has fallen into untruthfulness than that such a one should go without the discovery of it, and without its being painfully brought home to the soul by God Himself. Here we have it. The Lord does not do it in this case as in so many others in the Bible; for one of the remarkable features elsewhere plain is that we have cases of untruthfulness, and other things equally bad, found in God's people, but they are left, either without conviction, or with the fact simply stated. Here it was brought home for Sarah's profit, and we know that she gained it, But we must turn to the Lord's way with Abraham.

This is the very thing that perplexes unbelievers. It is not so to faith. God disciplines and exercises the hearts of His people in judging these things from their acquaintance with His own character, and with His word in general. In this particular case there was a lesson to be taught, and therefore God does not pass it by. He does not permit that Sarah should simply say, "I did not

laugh;" so He says, "Nay, but thou didst laugh." The sin is brought home by the unmistakeable voice of God. Oh, what a thought for Sarah afterwards, and how humiliating, not only that she lied, but that she ventured on a lie to God Himself, and that, at her one interview with Him, this she should have to reflect on! It was the last word that passed between her and God Himself.

This, no doubt, is a serious thing for our own souls, worthy of reflection, yet full of comfort also. For what a God we have to do with! What patience, long-suffering, goodness! and this with (not a human being merely, but) a child of His! And His way is to let a word from Him act on her conscience. Never do we hear of any repetition of the evil on Sarah's part. It was a lesson not to he forgotten, yet how gracious!

We read next that "the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom." Here we enter on another part of Jehovah's action at this time. We have had Him coming down in richest grace, and dealing with the utmost possible tenderness, even with such a failure as that of Sarah. But now we have to see the manner in which all this operated spiritually on the heart of Abraham. "And the men rose up, and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them, to bring them on the way." Here is another beautiful feature in Abraham, which also had its reward. His was not a mere hospitality that receives like a patron without going farther. There was nothing of what we may call the condescension of a great man in Abraham, which is scarcely to be called true, or at least christian, hospitality. He in whom that is found will, on the contrary, be found filled with the importance of himself, his family, and his position; he scorns to act below the

idea he has, and would impress on others, of his own dignity. Who that reflects could call this grace? “This did not Abraham.” Genuine humility was there, and yet withal an unmistakeable stamp of dignity in his character, yet none the less of true kindness, of lowly and persevering love. Thus he hangs upon their steps; and no wonder. At this time it was not merely the ready heart for a stranger, but a sense of the glory of his visitors, and among them of One especially. Who can be surprised that Abraham was loth to see them depart, and accompanied their way? But again, let me say that scripture speaks of such a reception of strangers as though it were no unwonted thing for this generous man. I do not suppose that it was the first time for him to bring such forward on their journey after a godly sort, any more than to receive them into his tent, and treat them as he did.

“And Jehovah said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah, to do justice and judgment; that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” What a character! But I would ask myself as well as you, beloved brethren, is that what the Lord can say of you and me? Does He really know this of us? I do not mean that He said it to Abraham, but in His word about him. Now He has written it for us; and for what purpose? That we should merely know what He felt towards Abraham? Nay, but that we should search ourselves, and see whether there are grounds for the Lord to speak so about ourselves

and our households. For you generally find that a saint's ways are shown, not merely in his own personal conduct, but even more in the relation of his family all round to the Lord, as the fruit of his faith or the lack of it. This is the reason why (in the New Testament), no matter what gift a man had, no matter how much he might be personally excellent, if his household were unruly and not in subjection, such an one could not be an elder or bishop. How could a person rule the church of God, if he could not rule his own home ~ Because, where moral power would be shown most is, not in a discourse, or in company, or in a visit, but where a man unbends, where he is no longer the teacher or preacher, where he can either familiarly bring in God or habitually leave Him out, where he can have a free and constant circulation of that name, with all its fruitful consequences, in the family, or he proves that his heart is in ease. Show or money for them is really for himself.

The Lord assuredly looks for a reflex in the household of the ways of God with the head of it; because there it is that God should manifestly be owned, and habitually govern; and there it is that the one who stands at the head is responsible to God for showing what his mind and heart value. It may be done with great simplicity, one need not say, with tender attention and care and interest in what goes on with each member of the family. And I do not mean merely the children, though the children have the nearer place; but servants also, supposing there are such in the house, Servants, it is true, are not expressly mentioned in 1 Timothy 3, possibly because some of the elders might be among the poorest, and perhaps servants themselves. Therefore God puts the matter in a general way; but where there

are such domestics, just the same thing should be found. For that which sheds blessing among the children secures blessing among the servants. At any rate there should be godly order, even if the children or servants be not yet brought to the knowledge of God. So it most assuredly was at this time, and ordinarily, true of Abraham's house.

"For I know him:" was it ever so said about Lot? It would have had a sorrowful meaning in Lot's case; it has a blessed one in Abraham's. For this is the knowledge of approval, of divine complacency; it is the knowledge that prepared the way for his being the depository of the secrets of Jehovah — the one to whom He could communicate that which no angel knew, save those who had their orders from Him and were just about to be the executioners of His judgment. But the angels in general, I venture to presume, knew little or nothing of it. It was enough for them to learn it when the thing had taken place. Thus it is that they learn about the church, and the wonders that God has shown to us. The church of God is His living lesson-book for the angels (Eph. 3); it is by the dealings that He carries on with individual Christians, and with the assembly above all, that He is instructing them in His ways; as He did already by our Lord Jesus Christ in the highest degree, when He was here and exalted on high. He was not pleased to tell them of Christ beforehand; whereas one of the most remarkable privileges saints of old had was the revelation, as far as it went, of the sufferings of Christ and the glories after these. And now we know things to come, as well as the things of Christ above. "Ye, therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before."

This is, or ought to be, one of the cherished privileges of the Christian.

For every child of God now really has, not only a priestly place in the grace of Christ, but what may be called a prophetic one. He is not of course a prophet, in the sense of giving out inspired communications from God. This the prophets did, as part of the foundation of the church, and it might be in what is called prophesying. But all ought to enjoy the reality of seeing, and testifying the things that are not as though they were, according to divine revelation, giving us to enter into the mind of God before His word comes to pass. The whole of the New Testament supposes that a part of what the Holy Ghost is come down here to do is, not only to "take of the things of Christ, and show them to us," but to show us "things to come" (John 16).

In this chapter, and in the fresh scene that I am dwelling on, we have the very pattern of Christ when He was present here; I do not say when the sacrifice of Christ was offered in sign, which comes before us in Genesis 22. But here there is a remarkable anticipation of the presence of Jehovah — of God's presence in Christ, when He tabernacled as a man among men. Hence the wonderful opening out of that which was in His own heart; just as the Lord did in John 15, which may be viewed as the counterpart of what we find here. He had, as we know, been with the disciples in the tenderest love. There, it is true, it is not courteous furnishing of water for His feet, but (wondrous way!) His washing theirs. Supper time was come for Him and them: and He would stoop down and wash their feet, as a witness of His work of love when He should leave them; but, before He goes, He would tell them what was in His mind. He is

treating them as friends; so He lets them know what the Holy Ghost is about to do when He Himself is absent on high. “It is expedient for you that I go away, else the Comforter will not come.” But He went, and the Holy Ghost came and more than made up for His absence. So we find in measure with Abraham. The angels proceed; Jehovah remains behind with Abraham, who enters into a phase of communion with Him far beyond what he had enjoyed before.

“And Jehovah said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.” He is speaking here just after the manner of men. Jehovah adopts the familiar language of common life, and deigns to adapt Himself to that which every one could understand in a man. It is wholly above our comprehension how God knows all things at once, without inquiry or investigation. He condescends here to speak so that Abraham might be thoroughly free in His presence.

“And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before Jehovah. And Abraham drew near, and said.” How precious is this access to Him who had thus come down! Abraham shows no shrinking behind the door. He has confidence in God. “Abraham drew near.” The Christian can understand it all, now that redemption has been accomplished, and sin has been judged, and we have been left, according to the word of God and the work of Christ, without a single spot or stain to arrest the eye of the Judge. Such is the efficacy of the blood in which we have been washed from our sins, even as we ourselves

are a new creation in Christ before Him. But is there always in us, as here in Abraham, a real readiness to draw near and speak to our God? Are we happy in making due use of the: privileges we possess? This is a serious question for our souls. We see how it was with the patriarch.

“He drew near” and says, “Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” Now, mark, it is no longer a question about himself, or about the son. The son was soon to come. All this was settled. He rests upon it, his heart is perfectly free. He has no longer a single want for himself; not one suit remains to be spread before Jehovah. His heart is drawn out in a spirit of grace, which answers to the grace of the Lord towards himself. He entreats Jehovah about others. He does not yet mention the one that no doubt lay heavily on his heart. His nephew was in Sodom; Lot dwelt there. Who was there living that knew the faults of Lot better than Abraham? But Abraham entered, in his measure, into the feelings of God. For if faults, if blots, could have fumed away the love of God, where should we be? Lot had done Abraham no little harm; he had been the cause of considerable trouble. It was a case of risking life itself on one occasion never to be forgotten.

All this, however, made little or no difference to Abraham. But now he could only think in sorrow of Lot as in the very midst of the doomed city. We need not suppose that he had only mourned over Lot for the first time. Could it be an entirely new thought to Abraham that Sodom and Gomorrah were nests of wickedness, and utterly unfit for the sojourn of that righteous man, Lot? Why should he “vex his soul” there? It was certainly not God who had called him into it. Was the old man

hankering after wealth or honour in town, as once for the well-watered plains of Jordan near it? He had not reamed his lesson, and now a far more serious chastening was at hand. Now he was only going to be saved so as by fire. Soon must he abandon that seat of honour in the gate of Sodom he too dearly loved. Lot must now taste the bitterness of what he had chosen. Whatever is our wrong must in the long run be our chastening.

But look at Abraham. “Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” All his heart is moved, now that he has a glimpse of the destruction so swiftly coming on the plains which had beguiled his kinsman. “Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou also destroy, and not spare, the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? Such is his plea with Jehovah. He pleads as one whose heart felt deeply; end when our hearts are engaged, the work is not done badly. That is the real secret of it. We may do things simply — and we cannot be too simple — but we see the mark clearly where the heart feels aright. It was so with Abraham. He intercedes earnestly and with perseverance, giving expression to that sentiment which the New Testament brings forward under the hand of the Apostle Paul — “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” Of course He will, and here we have the answer of grace: “Jehovah said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.”

Then Abraham ventures to take a little more courage, and brings his request down to forty-five, to forty, and to twenty (vers. 27-31). At last he says, “Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once.

Peradventure ten shall be found there. And he said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake." Why "this once"? Alas! our faith never reaches up to the grace of God. We weary and fail, not He. We get enough, through His grace, for our blessing, but rarely do we venture into its depths. Sound as we may, we certainly never get to the bottom. It was to be proved so here; for although Jehovah answered to the full all that Abraham's faith and confidence in His grace essayed, His grace far exceeded, for it descended after all to that one person who lay on the heart of Abraham, though he had not the boldness to say so. But Jehovah knew it; and while He surely did not spare that wicked place (and it was according to His righteous government that it should be made an example of divine judgment), none the less did He rescue that righteous soul spite of his faults.

But I refer to this now in order to note the gracious effect on Abraham's spirit of being brought into the knowledge of God's mind about the future. For it issues not merely in prayer, but in intercession for others. It may be well to ask, beloved brethren, whether we are given to similar intercession, who know that the Lord is soon coming to judge the habitable earth? There are few persons in this room who do not know a great deal more of what is coming to pass on the earth than those who have the credit for learning and theology in this day of ours. We know how great are our shortcomings, and how little we know; but still, as a matter of undeniable fact, it is certain that we are accustomed to look into the future, that we are used in spirit, where God has made Christ our all, to enter into that to which He points us on. We have no doubt what is coming on the world, and on the different parts of the world, as clearly as if we

saw it on a map — one painted blue, and another black. We know perfectly well that there is a land where the eyes of Jehovah rest, and He will surely magnify His name. On the other hand, we know of other lands that shall be given up to desolation. The revealed future is thus a matter of settled knowledge to us which has its results practically, though of course in different degrees.

But I ask again, what is the present effect of all on our souls? Does it draw us out in intercession? Are we pleading with the Lord? Ought it not to be so, if we really believe what is coming to pass on the flower of Christendom? Has it engaged our hearts in intercession? Are we sufficiently alive to the way in which God's children are at this moment dishonouring Him by unworthy, mistaken, unbelieving thoughts? or to the great danger from this to their souls? Can any of these things be without loss or peril to them? They are deeply injurious, these false expectations, as well as the want of faith in what is before men. They look for the improvement of society and the progress of Christendom. They believe not in a judgment of the living to be executed by our Lord when He comes in His kingdom at, or just before, the end of which He will judge the wicked dead.

This trifling with the word of God, this blotting out from the future of God's warning, have present consequences of the most serious kind; but do they stir our hearts in desire for the saints of God? We know, of course, that nothing can stay the judgments that are coming on the ungodly, and that God will shelter the righteous in that day; but are our hearts going out to Him about His people? We see how Abraham interceded. The Lord give us to be like Him! It supposes hearts at rest in His grace

as to all that concerns ourselves before Him. But that very grace gives us confidence in Him for others dear to Him; and their failures, or dangers, should draw out intercession; yet HE is beyond all that we ask or think.

Genesis 19.

The connection of the solemn history which now opens before us is one of contrast, especially full of instruction for us who find ourselves on the eve of a judgment of incomparably larger extent. Our Lord Himself pointedly applies it no less than the catastrophe in the days of Noah to present warning. “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.” (Luke 17:26-33.) It will be a judgment of God, not merely in providence, but directed by the Lord, and as none of the wicked shall understand, so shall none escape. It essentially differs from such scenes as the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, to which the commentators so perversely refer it. The intimation of verse 34 seems

expressly added to refute such a notion. Let us turn to the facts, as scripture records them.

“And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them, rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant’s house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned into him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.” (Gen. 19:1-3.) Jehovah no longer deigns to accompany His messengers, nor visits Lot, like Abraham. He would have been ashamed to be called the God of Lot, who “sat in the gate of Sodom,” instead of running to meet them “from the tent door,” like his kinsman pilgrim. Yet was much in common: no less courtesy, perhaps, but a little hospitality. Nevertheless, we see a certain shrinking on the part of the angels, as we have already noticed the absence of Jehovah. Not even He, much less they, said Abraham Nay, or proposed to stay without. To Lot, even though it was, they decline his proffered shelter, and propose to abide in the street all night. At length they yield to his pressure, enter his house, and accept of his unleavened bread.

Their visit gives occasion to the open and unnatural depravity of the inhabitants, “both old and young, all the people from every quarter” (ver. 4). They foam out their shame shamelessly (ver 5). Lot goes forth to plead for his guests, to remonstrate with his fellow-townsmen (alas! he calls them “brethren”), and offer his two

daughters (ver. 6 8). For he has lost the simplicity of faith, and, instead of looking only to the Lord in this scene of difficulty and danger and surrounding wickedness, he chooses in worldly wisdom what he conceived the lesser of two evils. Could we expect better from a righteous Lot which “sat in the gate of Sodom?” “And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door” (ver. 9).

How often had Lot flattered and excused himself, as he gradually drew nearer to guilty Sodom, that his was the wise and right course, not like his exclusive uncle, Abraham! What is the use, what the duty, of a good man in the world, if not to improve it? Was there not a haughty and self-righteous stiffness under the lowly guise of Abraham, who kept himself apart from all his neighbours in the land? Separate from the present world, he in his tent declared plainly that he was seeking a better (that is, a heavenly) country. But did not Lot’s conscience ever smite him, lest (under his assumption of a more active and benevolent zeal) there might lurk an unjudged unbelief of God’s estimate of the present and promise of the future, which left room for the rank growth of covetousness, and the love of ease, honour, wealth, and power? Abraham had not a question as to God’s favour and kindness, any more than as to His purpose of blessing and glory by-and-by: as little did he doubt that the world and, above all, the races in the midst of whom he pursued his stranger path, were doomed to divine judgment, though there might be a defined delay in its execution. Lot had no such clearness

of vision. He anticipated better things. He had more confidence in human nature, more assurance of the moral influence of a good man like himself. He hears too late the rebuke of his folly from the lips of the most unclean Sodom: “This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge.” They felt that a righteous man had no consistent place in their midst; and they were not so blind to his motives as himself. What had Lot gained, with his position, but vexation to his soul, as he saw from day to day their filthy conversation and lawless deeds? Certainly he had not pleased the Lord, whose will and lessons he had despised: how had he fared with the world to which he had held? How different it was with Abraham before the sons of Heth in Gen. 23!

But the hour of destruction was at hand for the cities of the plain; and when the miscreants came near to break the door, the angels “put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door. And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? Son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place. For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of Jehovah; and Jehovah hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for Jehovah will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law. And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.

And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; Jehovah being merciful unto him; and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. And he said unto him, See, 1 have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from Jehovah out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (vers. 11-26).

Even in the hour of deliverance, it is humiliating to read how Lot "lingered," though he might not, like his wife, "look back," and become the lasting witness of the truth of the warning. No wonder there was no power in such a preacher of righteousness! Dwelling among the men of Sodom is the way neither to glorify God, nor to win their souls to the Saviour. Even the last fatal night "he

seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law," as we have seen what a storm he brought on himself from his townsmen. What a contrast with him of whom Jehovah said, "I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah, to do justice and judgment; that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him!" Yet, to worldly philanthropy and wit, did Abraham seem a useless person in his day and generation; to faith he is the man of whom God said, and of whom faith is sure, "Thou shalt be a blessing, and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Just so, there are many Lots; but where are those blessed, and a blessing, with faithful Abraham? If content to be less, we certainly sink below even this sad level, like Abraham's seed, who were not Abraham's children (John 8.). We may, in the pure and sovereign mercy of God, be "delivered" men, like Lot: but are even now, like Abraham, men separate to the Lord, and knowing these things before? (2 Peter 3). Is it enough for us to be snatched, as it were, out of the fire, when the word is, "we will destroy this place; escape for thy life, lest thou also be consumed"? Or do we covet the portion (which indeed it is the Christian's shame not to covet) of being with the Lord before a sign of doom appears, morally far apart from all that cries for divine vengeance, sharing His mind who deigns to open His secrets and treats us as His friends? Are we interceding for others in love, as Abraham in Genesis 18; or deprecating what we dread, as Lot in Genesis 19? "Oh, not so, my Lord; behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy

which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life, and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: behold now, this city is near to flee into, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live." So it is always. The saints who live like others in the world share the world's fears. Their prayers savour of its state. Its troubles oppress them, as its successes ensnare them. This did not Abraham. "The mountain," which was the source of fear to Lot, was the scene of communion between Jehovah and Abraham. There he had prayed, with touching importunity for the righteous endangered by the approaching judgment, and not in vain; for God did better than he asked. He did destroy the guilty cities, but He delivered less than ten righteous found there, righteous Lot himself, who was here begging (and not in vain) for the least city of the five.

And, now that the blow is struck, the difference between the heavenly-minded man and the earthly minded is still kept up as strikingly as ever. "Abraham get up early in the morning to the place where he stood before Jehovah: and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt. And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters" (vers. 27-30). Was not Abraham even here, where it could be least looked for, not only blessed but a blessing? Nothing could be done

to Sodom and Gomorrah till Lot came to Zoar; but was it not for Abraham's sake? It was even then and there, because "God remembered" not Lot but "Abraham."

This then was the end of the place where Lot had lived and laboured, or at least talked. He was as little in the secret of Jehovah as the men of Sodom, though no doubt he was vexed, or rather (as scripture so pregnantly tells us) the righteous man vexed his righteous soul from day to day. But God never called Lot to Sodom, as He had called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan. Abraham's groans were gracious, and had profitable fruit; Lot's were not without his own fault and torment, groans barren even for himself. Abraham is attracted to the place where he had enjoyed the presence and converse of Jehovah, and looks down on the scene of desolation which attested in its solemn way what it is to hate Jehovah, and what to love Him. And there Lot too goes up out of Zoar: afraid to go at God's bidding when there was no ground for fear there, afraid longer to stay in Zoar, and not afraid to go where and when he had feared most of all, had he been aware into what a snare he was about to be caught by wine and women — alas! his own daughters. Such was the end of him who would needs be a judge in Sodom, but only the beginning of those who should inflict sorrowful results on the children of Abraham throughout their history, till that day come when Sodom's doom finds its antitype, and the Branch out of Jesse's roots shall reign, and Moab, with Edom, shall be the laying on of Israel's hand, and the sons of Ammon their obedience (Isa. 11:14).

And have saints who now court and cleave to the world, valuing position and honour in it, no reproof to learn?

Genesis 20.

Nevertheless a signal time of favour and blessing may precede a great humiliation through unwatchfulness and sin. So it was now with Abraham, as he sojourned in the land of the Philistines. Was it that he too, as well as Lot, feared to abide under the shield of the Almighty in view of the scene of the recent judgments? This were to tempt God, as Israel in the desert when they questioned His presence in their midst and His care. Certain it is that he journeyed from where he once stood before Jehovah in intercession. and a little later in awe-inspiring contemplation of the judged land of the plain whence the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of the furnace. Long-before it the pinch of famine induced him to journey toward the south, even to Egypt, and to sojourn there. Now he dwells between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourns in Gerar; and now as then he denies his true relationship to his wife. “She is my sister” says Abraham of Sarah among the Philistines, as at an early day he told her to say so among the Egyptians (Gen. 12:11-13; Gen. 20:1, 2). What! the father of the faithful? And this again, after all the times which had passed over him?

Alas! “all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the Spirit of Jehovah bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of our God shall stand for ever.” No difference in this respect distinguished the first father of Israel. Abraham sinned now, like Adam at the beginning; and he who taught his wife to prevaricate before they entered Egypt falls into the like snare himself in Philistia.

Christ has never denied the church; though I would not weaken the warning that if we deny, He also will deny us; if we are unfaithful, He at least abides faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. But the church in spite of His warnings and His faithful love has denied her true relationship to Him, has denied it because of fear of the world or the world's seed that borders on the heavenly land, utterly failing in faith of His unseen presence and that power which would assuredly arm her where He did not call on her to glorify Him in suffering or death.

But where sin abounded grace super-abounded. For if Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah, God came to him in a dream by night, and said unto him, Behold, thou art a dead man for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is married to a husband. The Philistine king, however, could plead the sincerity of his heart and the innocency of his hands, identifying his people with himself. "Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?" Abraham and Sarah were both guilty of deceit. Yet it is to be noted that, while God allowed the plea, intimating indeed that He had kept the king from actual sin, He maintains the special place, in which Abraham stood. "Now therefore restore the man his wife: for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine. Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid" (vers. 7, 8). This is a principle in God's ways, and as evident in the New Testament as in the Old. Thus the Lord may reprove (however graciously) the Baptist who inquires through his disciples whether He was the Christ, pointing simply to His irrefragable proofs; but He

turns round and at once vindicates the place of honour given to John beyond all born of woman. So here it was unquestionable that Abraham was wrong, and that far more grievously now than nearer the commencement of his course. Yet Abimelech must restore him his wife, “for he is a prophet and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live:” otherwise he must die with all his.

“Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing? And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife’s sake. And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother. And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and women-servants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee. And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver: behold he is to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus she was reproved. So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. For Jehovah had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of

Sarah, Abraham's wife" (vers. 9-8). It is a sad picture when the believer has to own his fault as Abraham was now doing not only before Jehovah, but before the power of the world; and when his account of his motives is but the laying bare of unbelieving fears, the more guilty because the deception was planned and agreed on between man and wife. But when does one sin stand alone? and where is sin so ugly as in saints of God? It was an early fear, the root of it was not thoroughly judged in Egypt, and as lack of self-judgment exposed them to it in Gerar, so it was attended with severer abasement the second time than the first.

It is even so with the Christian. It is not that he who is bathed loses the virtue of that divinely given privilege: the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost are not at all the working of man's will, ephemeral as this is, but of God who begets sovereignly by the word of truth. But he does indeed need to wash his feet. Defilements from walking through the world must be removed: else one has no part with Christ. In His incomparable grace He thus keeps clean the cleansed, or removes whatever grieves the Holy Spirit. This Peter had to learn, though reluctant in his haste and folly, first in word, that the Lord should stoop so low for his sake, and then in all the depth of the truth. How little did the disputing apostle anticipate that he would so soon feel his own need and bless his Master for the active constancy of His love! It is grace suited to the saint as necessary as that which the sinner wants (1 John 2:1).

Here Abimelech restores Sarah to Abraham with many a sheep and ox, manservant and maid, and gives him express leave to dwell in the land where it was good in his eyes, yet not without a severe reproof to Sarah and

indeed to her husband. The Philistine had paid his reparation price; but what a covering of the eyes had the husband been for the wife to all that were with her and with all others! Is it not humbling when the Gentile can thus justly rebuke the people of God for failure in holding fast their privileges till it end in a breach of common truthfulness? Nevertheless God listened to the prayer of Abraham, and the judgment which had fallen on the house of Abimelech was removed. “When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another, he suffered no man to do them wrong; yea, he reproved kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.” If He was thus watchful of the children, He cared no less for their father. He would only relieve an Abimelech at the intercession of Abraham; but Abraham must first be put to shame before the Philistine, and make confession of the sin which had exposed him to the censure and rebuke of the uncircumcised. How often has fear of the world been thus a snare, and equivocation on the part of those who should have been a faithful witness (as being elect and called) thrown the portion of faith into the hands of the world to the confusion and danger of all! But God is faithful and knows how to extricate for His own name’s sake those who should have walked in separation to Himself.

How holy and wholesome too is that word which God has magnified above all His name! Where spurious holy writings venture on the ground of fact, they cry up their heroes, and hide their faults with diligent care, even when they do not descend to positive fable. Far otherwise does the Spirit of God deal, in the Old Testament, with the conduct of the fathers or the people

of Israel, in the New with the sins even of an apostle, with the shame of a whole assembly. So with the portrait of the father of the faithful here, drawn by Moses for the chosen nation, yea by the Holy Spirit for all saints of all times: who but He would have so simply and truthfully set before us Abraham and Sarah on the one hand, or Abimelech the Philistine king on the other?

Genesis 21.

The power of God was now accomplishing what His mouth had promised. The child is born of Sarah, the son given to Abraham, type of Him, the Son, whom God sent forth, when the fulness of the time was come, to effect redemption, and be the centre of all His purposes for heaven on earth, and the judge of all He will cast into hell.

“And Jehovah visited Sarah as he had said, and Jehovah did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was torn unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac, being eight days old, as God had commanded him. And Abraham was an hundred years old when his son Isaac was born unto him. And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age” (vers. 1-7).

Thus was Isaac’s birth the occasion of joy in measure, as his very name imports, when Sarah laughed no more in unbelief, as once (Gen. 18:12-15), but in gladness of heart, as in the fellowship of all that hear of the

goodness of the Lord. It is a lovely witness to the power of grace when faith thus gives the victory in what had been one's weakness, and sin, and shame. And so, if Abraham gives the name to his son, Sarah needs no prophet, but explains the mind of God in it for herself, and for ever.

But another sight of the family of faith is next vouchsafed to us. "And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking. Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son. And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed" (vers. 8-13). Of this incident, which our light hearts might quickly pass over, the Holy Ghost makes a great deal in the two Epistles of the New Testament, which either assert or vindicate the fundamental truth of justification by faith.

The first occurs in Galatians 4, where the apostle is convicting the bewitched Galatians of their folly in departing from grace to law. If they desired to be under the law, why not hear the law? The two sons of Abraham should have had a voice to every believer. One was by a slave, the other by a free woman; one born after the flesh, the other by promise, as the mothers answered to the two covenants, Jerusalem that was in bondage with

her children, and Jerusalem which is above, the free mother of the free. But this, though much, is not all; for after citing from Isaiah a marvellous testimony to the reckoning of grace during the desolation of Jerusalem, the tale of the child of promise is again used to show (1) that as he that was born after the flesh then persecuted him that was after the Spirit, so it is now; (2) that the sentence of scripture is, Cast out the bondmaid and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. Grace refuses partnership with law or flesh. The child of promise alone inherits.

It is the more instructive and important to note that in this transaction Abraham was weak, and Sarah strong. He did not give glory to God as she did; hence God called on Abraham to hearken to Sarah's voice, whatever might be the natural subjection of wife to husband — a subjection in which the apostle Peter expressly cites this very Sarah as an admirable pattern to christian women generally. But here the weaker vessel was by grace the stronger of the two, and Abraham must not regard Sarah's feeling as the mere affronted pride of the mistress who could not brook the airs of aspiring and mocking Ishmael. She was in the secret of Jehovah more deeply than her husband; while he was allowing unduly the claims of flesh, and was grieved at the proposal of expelling the bondmaid's son from the house. But so it must be according to God. Sarah was right. Her child was of promise, as the word was which declared Jehovah would return at the time appointed and Sarah should have a son.

It was not so with Hagar and Ishmael, though God would make a nation of him because he was Abraham's seed. But there must be liberty in the house for all that are of

God, and no entangling with the yoke of bondage. Every remnant of law, world, and flesh must be expelled, and what was of promise alone abide. But it is all ever thus judged till the day of “a great feast.” Then comes the decisive moment, and what is of the flesh persecutes what is of the Spirit, and grace gives the Sarahs to speak out, and God will have it heard and acted on, though an Abraham may be grieved: but then, and not till then, is the bondmaid cast out with her son. The Sinai covenant that genders to bondage and her child after the flesh can be no longer tolerated in the household of faith.

The second quotation is in Romans 9:7. The apostle is combating the pretension of the Jews to enjoyment of the promises by natural or national descent, so as to exclude Gentiles. This he establishes in the most conclusive way by an appeal to Abraham’s own seed, Ishmael. If the promise necessarily falls to the seed of Abraham as such, the Ishmaelites must be let in. As no Jew would allow of this, he must abandon his principle. It is a question of promise, not of fleshly descent but of His own sovereignty who had limited the call to Isaac. “In Isaac shall thy seed be called.” Sovereignty therefore is the only source of hope for Israel, which is reasoned out still more fully in the chapter, and applied to Jacob, to the exclusion of Esau, though of the same mother as well as father, and even twins. But the same sovereignty of God is shown to be the sole resource for Israel at Mount Sinai, when all else had been ruin for the people as a whole by their worship of the golden calf: so completely were they silenced on the score of their own righteousness. Driven thus from the ground of law, as well as of lineal descent, on what could they fall back?

On the sovereign mercy of God. This alone did, or could, save a sinner or a sinful people in entire accordance with Exodus 33:19; but if they owned this, who were they to dispute that sovereignty calling Gentiles too, as indeed the prophets expressly declare that He would, when Israel became for a season Lo-ammi by their idolatry and their rejection of Messiah ?

Here we go beyond the passage which has given occasion to the apostolic argument. Still, looked at in the narrowest point of view, how fruitful is scripture, and how marvellously does He who wrote in the Old Testament use the facts and words of the New Testament! How self-evidently divine are both! Ishmael, like Israel after the flesh, cannot take the inheritance by law, but are cast out, though preserved of God.

It does not come within my present scope to dwell on God’s dealings with Hagar, the comfort He gave her then and afterwards as to Ishmael, or his subsequent history (vers. 14-21); though we may notice in passing that, as the bondmaid mother was an Egyptian, so the wife she took her son was out of the land of Egypt: law, flesh, and world go together.

But in the next section we see Abraham in his true place and dignity. “And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God is with thee in all that thou doest: now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son’s son; but, according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear. And Abraham reproved Abimelech

because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing; neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I of it, but today. And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant. And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What mean these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves? And he said For these seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me that I have digged this well. Wherefore he called that place Beer-sheba; because there they sware both of them. Thus they made a covenant at Beer-sheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines" (vers. 22-32).

In the beginning of the chapter we saw that the servant abides not in the house for ever: Ishmael and his mother are dismissed. The son abides always: Isaac is there, the heir of all.

Now we see that the Gentile king, who once inspired Abraham with guilty fear and became the occasion of a foul snare, not only seeks favour of the father of the faithful but is himself reproved. The power of the world acknowledged God to be with Abraham, and asks for a covenant between them. (Compare Zech. 8:23). Earthly righteousness is now asserted, as before we saw heavenly long-suffering, save where a corresponding pledge of the coming kingdom came before us in Genesis 14, which concluded that series, as this concludes the later series. Here therefore the well of the oath is recovered and secured, and a grove or orchard is planted there, for the wilderness shall be glad, and the

desert blossom as the lily; yea, there shall break out water and brooks, and there shall walk the redeemed. And Abraham “called there on the name of Jehovah, the everlasting God. And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines’ land many days” (vers. 33, 34). He is in type no longer the pilgrim, but the head of the nations and heir of the world.

Thus the second division of Abraham’s history terminates with the figure of the kingdom in manifested power of glory, when beauty is given for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

Genesis 22.

The last chapter closed that series of divine dealings with our patriarch which opened with Genesis 15. We can readily see that it forms a natural conclusion. The long-promised heir is come; the legal covenant and the child of flesh are cast out; the prince of the Gentiles is reproved instead of reproving, and seeks the friendship of the father of the faithful, who plants a grove and calls there on the name of the everlasting God. Thus, as in Genesis 14, we are brought again to a picture of millennial peace and power and blessing.

In Genesis 22 we begin another series of yet deeper character and moment — final too, as far as Abraham and Sarah are concerned.

“And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham; and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-

offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." It was the greatest trial to which God had ever put the heart of a saint. It was not tempting with evils any more than God is tempted with them. It was, on the contrary, His own good that was before God, who would make His friend the witness of it, while testing his confidence in Himself and His word to the uttermost. Isaac was loved as only a child so promised, born and reserved for a wondrous destiny, could be — to say nothing of personal qualities that must endear him to his parents. How the father's heart must have pondered on God's covenant with "thee, and thy seed after thee in their generations, for an everlasting covenant," and the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession; especially after Hagar and Ishmael were expelled, and the word of promise came, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called!" The father was assured therefore that this son, and no other, was that of the promises. God could not lie; but He might and does try, and those most whom He loves best. So with Abraham now. God demands that the father shall offer up his only son for a burnt-offering on Mount Moriah. It was the shadow of His own incomparable and infinite gift, but only the shadow; for Christ really did suffer and die, and God the Father sent Him, in divine love, to be thus a propitiation for our sins.

Abraham was only "tried"; still he was tried most severely, and by grace endured the trial, and was blessed accordingly. There was no delay in giving up his son to God, any more than he had doubted of God's word that he should have a son of Sarah when both were as good as dead.

"And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, as took two of his young men with him, and

Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (vers. 3-5).

The moment was come when Abraham must challenge his heart for the last time, counting on God to make good his promise, and give him back that very Isaac to be the heir of all assured to himself, and the channel of blessing to all families of the earth. God must raise Isaac assuredly, as his own mind was made up to sacrifice him at God's bidding. "And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering" (vers. 6 8).

Unconscious prophet of a truth too well (too little) known, Abraham anticipates exactly what God has done in the gospel, of which this very scene stands out, in some respects, the most eminent type. Guilty man, in his heart of hearts, thinks all depends on some atonement he is to make, even if he also, in ever so orthodox a manner, confesses our Lord Jesus as a Saviour. But this he confesses for all the world: for himself to get the benefit, he really trusts to a sort of compounding for his sins. He hopes to give up his sins, most of all, and that God will be merciful. Such is the gospel of the largest

part of Christendom, where it is not even an avowed confidence in life-giving ordinances, and saving rites and works of goodness. What a contrast with “God will provide himself a lamb!” What grace on God’s part! What a call for faith on man’s! “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be of grace.” Nor could any other way suit either. Sins are thus borne and judged, and forgiven to the believer but yet to God’s glory, while His grace reigns to eternal life. Anything else would depreciate God, as it would exalt the sinner, for which certainly Christ did not die; but suffered once, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God; and this He has done for every believer cleansed from every sin by His blood.

“So they went both of them together; and they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of Jehovah called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of Jehovah it shall be provided” (vers. 9-14). Thus was Abraham fully tried, and God magnified and honoured by his simple-hearted trust in Himself. Yet not a drop of Isaac’s blood was shed. God remains God.

He spared not His own Son, but gave Him up freely for us all. In all things Christ has the pre-eminence.

Still Abraham shines brightly in the scene, and God marks His appreciation of it. “And the angel of Jehovah called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son; that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (vers. 15-18).

Galatians 3:16 casts fresh light on the blessing here pronounced. The blessing is twofold. In verse 17 it is Jewish, and consists in a countless progeny, which possess the gate of their enemies. In verse 18 no number is attached to “thy seed.” This, accordingly, is what the Holy Spirit contrasts as “the seed” of Abraham to which the promises were made. “He saith not, And to seeds as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” Thus the Seed with no number or multiplicity annexed to it is shown to be Christ, typified by Isaac, risen again from the dead in figure, who blesses all the Gentiles, as now in the gospel, contra-distinguished from the numerous Jewish seed, who are to subject the nations and rule over them, in the age to come. The Seed risen from the dead has evidently broken the link with life or relationship on earth, and is in a wholly new condition wherein He is able to bless the Gentile as freely as the Jew. This Christ is doing now, as the Epistle proves, wholly apart from law or circumcision which

suppose the flesh and the Jew still under the probation of God, and so in effect deny the cross.

We see accordingly how harmonious is the teaching. of Hebrews 11:17-19 with Galatians 3. Christ is the true Seed of Abraham, and this not only of promise but, as dead and risen. It is, thus the promises are secured; it is thus also that they open out to all the nations or Gentiles; even as it is written, In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. The Seed dead and risen is as free to bless the Gentile as Jew. Both were lost in rejecting Him; but He is risen from the dead, and God is pleased to bless in Him not only the Jew but all the Gentiles. The Seed of the woman is the Son of Abraham risen from the dead after being offered up. And the blessing is unconditional grace, independent of the law which came in long after the promise and for a wholly different end, as the apostle argues and proves to the bewitched Galatians. Law can only bring a curse on those who take that ground for their souls with God. Blessing is by faith in virtue of Him who died and rose again, and can thus in pure grace reach the believer, spite of flesh, law and world, which ensure only condemnation for sinful man. But Christ is dead and risen, and the blessing is confirmed in Him by God’s oath to all the nations. So much the more awful will be the lot of all who despise Him, trusting in themselves, in others, or in aught else!

The rest of the chapter (vers. 20-24) calls for no particular notice now. It was meant to prepare the way for Rebekah, by showing her relationship with Abraham’s lineage, in view of a still closer tie.

Genesis 23.

The death of Sarah follows, and God takes special notice of it, not only for Abraham's sake, but, as it would seem, for its typical bearing, since it comes after the sacrifice and resurrection of the son, and before the call of the bride. In this point of view we must remember that, as Hagar represents the legal covenant of Sinai, Sarah is the shadow of the covenant of promise (Gal. 4). One cannot wonder that her death as a figure is unintelligible to those who regard her as symbolic of our best and characteristic church blessings. But it is not so: scripture is right, theology as usual wrong. Sarah sets forth the covenant of promise presented to the Jew after the cross (but on his unbelieving refusal) passing away to make room for the call of the church to heavenly glory and union with Christ on high. Of all this the reader may find the key in studying the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. Compare especially Acts 3, which answers to Sarah, with Acts 9, on the total rejection of this in the death of Stephen, when God begins to send the gospel outside Jerusalem, raising up Paul as minister of the church in its full character.

Certain it is that Abraham's wife is the only woman whose years are carefully noted. To her death and the account of the purchase of a burying place the whole chapter is devoted. "And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her" (vers. 1, 2). Faith does not enfeeble affection; it heightens our sense of the havoc sin has wrought. But we sorrow not as others who

have no hope, looking for His coming who is the Resurrection and the Life.

Again, we are expressly told in Hebrews 11 that these all (Sarah included) died, not in possession, but in faith. Of this the scripture before us is the most striking witness. Till the burial of Sarah Abraham possessed not so much as to set his foot on. He abides the pilgrim and stranger to the last. He has to buy even for a burying-place. He would have Canaan only under the glory of the Lord, and in the day of resurrection. He is content to wait till then. The time of faith is the time of Christ. While He is hidden, believers are hidden also; when He appears, then shall they also appear along with Him in glory.

There can be no greater mistake than that faith destroys lowliness, or promotes a want of considering others. It really brings God in, and thus is self judged, and love can flow. See the admirable bearing of Abraham with the children of Heth.

“And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight. And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him, Hear us, my lord: thou art a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead. And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth. And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight; hear me and entreat for me to Ephron the son of

Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which is in the end of his field; for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me for a possession of a burying-place amongst you. And Ephron dwelt among the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, even of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying, Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give it thee; in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead. And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land" (vers. 3-12). God had given him the moral respect of his neighbours; but he neither presumes on his favour in their eyes, nor will he take advantage of their feelings. As he rises above the sorrow that pressed on his heart, so he does not accept what cost him nothing for the burial of his dead. If he exceeded the sons of Heth in courtesy, he was none the less careful that the fullest value should be paid in due form, and with adequate witness.

"And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou wilt give it, I pray thee, hear me I will give thee money for the field; take it of me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him, My lord, hearken unto me: the land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead. And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant."

"And the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which

was therein, and al} the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city" (vers. 13-18). Faith never was meant to encourage a careless spirit, as Abraham's conduct in this business exemplifies, at a moment when any one else would have rather availed himself of another's help. Whatever the circumstances, faith makes the believer superior to them all.

"And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan. And the field, and the cave that is therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a burying-place by the sons of Heth" (vers. 19, 20). God works, doubtless; but the believer himself is exercised before Him and is delivered from his own will, or from the influence of objects such as the enemy uses to divert from God. So it was here. God gave Abraham such a place in the esteem of his neighbours that there was no difficulty whatever; but Abraham bore himself as one who sought not his own things but the will and pleasure of Him who had called him out by, and to, His promises — promises as yet unfulfilled.

Burial in the land began with Sarah. It was no mere feeling or fancy, sentiment or superstition, but a fruit of faith, in Abraham. He looked to have from God's hand the land wherein he laid her body. The gift of Canaan was far surer than any possession of a burying-place meanwhile. I deny not that he desired a better country, that is, a heavenly, that he looked for the city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God. But he rejoiced to see the day of Christ and expected in it the

wresting of the earth from the hands of the enemy, and knew that all the land of Canaan would be his for an everlasting possession.

Hence the importance to the patriarchs, while preserving their pilgrim character, of burial in Canaan. So, when Abraham was gathered to his people, his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the same spot, “in the cave of Machpelah in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre, the held which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife” (Gen. 25:9, 10). There too was Isaac laid by his sons Esau and Jacob (Gen. 35:27-29). And so it was with Jacob, though he died in Egypt, for Joseph had him embalmed; “and his sons did unto him according as he commanded them, for his sons carried him into the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a burying-place of Ephron the Hittite before Mamre” (Gen. 50:12, 13). Joseph again (Gen. 50:25, 26) “took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.” Hence he too was embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt; but when deliverance came, Moses took the bones of Joseph with him (Ex. 13:19), which the children of Israel in due time buried, not in the cave of Machpelah but in Shechem, “in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of silver; and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph” Joshua 24:32).

Very different is the spiritual feeling which the hope of Christ’s coming forms in the breast of the Christian. As His presence on high, in the true tabernacle which the

Lord pitched and not man, calls one in worship from earth to heaven, and thus makes it no longer a question of Jerusalem any more than of “this mountain,” so we look for Christ to come, gather us round him in the air, and present us in the Father’s house, as well as to reign with Him after a heavenly sort over the earth. A special resting-place here below vanishes from a mind thus formed and nourished. We look, not for death though we may meanwhile fall asleep, but for Him who is the Resurrection and the Life, and will change us whether we wake or sleep into His glorious image, transforming our body of humiliation into conformity to His body of glory according to the working of the power which He has, even to subdue all things to Himself. Thus the opening of the heavens for us, consequent on redemption and our Lord’s ascension, makes the earth to be of no account for the Christian in any way or for any present purpose.

Genesis 24.

It is not my purpose to dwell at length on the call of Bethuel’s daughter to be the bride of Isaac, however attractive the subject may be; but I would only point out in passing the striking propriety that here, after the death of Sarah, we should have the introduction of Rebekah. He who is at all instructed in the ways of God recognises in the latter the bride for the risen Son and Heir of all things, and this after the figure of the covenant of promise in Sarah has passed away. Till the Jews had refused the fresh summons of God to own their Messiah, now risen and glorified, there could be fittingly no bringing in of the Gentiles, no formation of a heavenly bride, the body of a heavenly Christ.

Not that the tale of Rebekah opens out the mystery which was reserved hidden in God for the apostle Paul to reveal to us, itself revealed not to the Old Testament writers, but to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This however does not hinder, but rather help, us, now that the secret is revealed, to understand the type of Rebekah as far as it goes; but it may be noticed that it does not set out either of the two great parts of the mystery — first, Christ, the Head of all things, heavenly and earthly; secondly, the church, in which Jewish and Gentile distinctions disappear, united to Him as His body in that universal supremacy, conscious of the relationship even while here on earth by the Holy Ghost sent down from on high. The type fits in with all, but cannot be said to reveal it.

My task now is to say a little of Abraham's part in what is here recorded. "And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and Jehovah had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: and I will make thee swear by Jehovah, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware that thou bring not my son thither again. The Jehovah God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto

me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter" (vers. 1-9).

In all this the Father's purpose seems clearly foreshown; a new thing was in progress — a bride to be fetched for His Son. None but the most careless can forbear to see the great and unusual solemnity of the transaction. Thus his trusty Eliezer is employed "that ruled over all he had," who aptly prefigures the place of service which the Holy Spirit is pleased now to take in executing the purpose of God as to the church in this world. In no other case, not of Genesis only but of all the Old Testament, do we find an oath introduced, the purport of which is so urged again and again. The subject of it too is no less to be observed. A wife must on no account be taken for Isaac from the daughters of Canaan. She must be sought from the country and kin out of which the father of the faithful had himself been called. Angels are not called, fallen or unfallen: sovereign grace chooses from the world. But there is another provision no less insisted on — the risen Son must on no account be brought again to the world for calling His bride. It is the Holy Ghost who accomplishes this work, not the Bridegroom. The Spirit is sent down from heaven to preach the gospel, and so to effect the formation of the church. The risen Bridegroom abides exclusively in heaven, while the call proceeds. Most impressively does Abraham admonish us in type of what moment it is to

see that Christ has nothing but a heavenly relation to the church, and in absolute separation from the world.

How true this is in Christ for the Christian! “We all with open face beholding [or reflecting] the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Lord the Spirit.” “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.” So our Lord Himself said (John 16), the Comforter, on coming, should “convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe on me; of righteousness, because I go away to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.” The righteous One was cast out by the unjust and lawless world, but God the Father has accepted and exalted Him at His right hand. This is the righteousness of God in its heavenly aspect; and there we know Him, not as the Messiah reigning on earth, but as the rejected One exalted in heaven. He is in no sense of the world; and Christians are not, even as He is not. Nay, more, “As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly; and as we have borne the image of the earthy, so shall we also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Cor. 15). The practice depends on the principle: the position of Christ determines the walk, as well as the spirit, of the Christian. Rebekah was to have Isaac in Canaan before her; there only was to think of him. On no account — not even to win his bride — must the bridegroom leave his place, save only to receive her to himself at the end. Isaac stays in Canaan and there only is known, while she is being led from her father’s house, across the desert, by trusty Eliezer.

We may notice next the place which prayer receives in the servant, and this, not through pressure of trial as in Jacob, but in giving (as here) character to the walk of faith. “And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor. And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water, at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water. And he said, O Jehovah God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master” (vers. 10-14).

So it is with the Christian in the world. “We walk by faith, not by sight.” “Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” “In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.” Intercourse is established between the believer and God. He knows Whom he has believed. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we seek anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” “And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who

was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a tattle water of thy pitcher. And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. And the man wondering at her, held his peace, to wit whether Jehovah had made his journey prosperous or not" (vers. 15-21).

Thus faith is kept in constant happy exercise. It is the work of the Spirit in man, especially now that redemption is known. Conscience is at rest, and the affections are free.

But there is more than prayer which distinguishes the christian and the church. The power of the Spirit finds ground of thanksgiving as well as of prayer and supplication. It is indeed the hour when the true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him, and the figure of this we find here. "And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden ear-ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; and said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, which

she bare unto Nahor. She moreover said unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in. And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped Jehovah. And he said, Blessed be Jehovah God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, Jehovah led me to the house of my master's brethren" (vers. 22-27).

That which came forth from God in guidance goes forth to Him in praise, a still more evident characteristic of the Christian. If we live in the Spirit we should walk, as well as worship, in the Spirit.

Along with this difficulties disappear. As the Lord directs, so He opens the door and blesses. There is the comfort of this — the comfort of knowing that it is His own hand that does all. Whatever may be the hindrances, the mission of the Spirit is accomplished. It stands not in persuasible words of man's wisdom, but in the power of God. No doubt there are gifts which accompany from the first the message of the witness, and array the bride, but the work is eminently one of faith and not of human influence. And hence it looks for, and has, the blessing of the Lord.

"And the damsel ran, and told them of her mother's house these things. And Rebekah had a brother, and his name was Laban; and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well. And it came to pass, when he saw the ear-rings and bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man: and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. find he said, Come in, thou blessed of Jehovah, wherefore

standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels. And the man came into the house: and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that were with him. And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on. And he said, I am Abraham's servant. And Jehovah hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great; and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses. And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath. And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell; but thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son. And I said unto my master, Peradventure the woman will not follow me. And he said unto me, Jehovah before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house: then shalt thou be clear from this my oath, when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give not thee one, thou shalt be clear from my oath. And I came this day unto the well, and said, O Jehovah God of my master Abraham, if now thou do prosper my way which I go: behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw water, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink; and she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: let the same be the woman whom Jehovah hath appointed for my master's son. And before I had done speaking in mine heart,

behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down unto the well, and drew water: and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee. And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her shoulder, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also. And I asked her, and said, Whose daughter art thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bare unto him: and I put the ear-ring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands. And I bowed down my head, and worshipped Jehovah, and blessed Jehovah God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son. And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me: that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left. Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from Jehovah: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as Jehovah hath spoken. And it came to pass that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped Jehovah, bowing himself to the earth. And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things" (vers. 28-53).

Lastly it is the work of the Spirit to give, and keep up, and strengthen the desire of being with Christ and of His coming, whatever communion of saints may be enjoyed here. "And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master. And her brother and her mother said Let the

damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing Jehovah hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master. And they said, We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go" (vers. 54-58).

So, in the Revelation, the Spirit and the bride say, Come, when Christ presents Himself as the bright, the morning, star. It is the cry, "Behold the Bridegroom! go ye out to meet him," which awakens the slumbering virgins at midnight. It is this which recalls the saints now to go out, as they were called at the first, to meet the Bridegroom. "And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them. And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way. And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahai-roi: for he dwelt in the south country. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: And he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a veil, and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her:

and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (vers. 59-67).

So will it be with the heavenly bride. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up, together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." The Father's purpose shall not fail of accomplishment, and all heaven shall rejoice and give honour to Him, "for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

Genesis 25.

The first part of the chapter, comprehended in these verses, gives us the closing scenes of Abraham's eventful and instructive history. The Jewish tradition which identifies Keturah with Hagar is not only without proof but set aside by verse 6, which speaks of "the sons of the concubines which Abraham had;" and as Hagar was one, so Keturah was the other, not (as I think) to imply that she filled this relation during any part of Sarah's life, but rather to affirm her inferiority of place. Keturah is expressly called Abraham's "concubine" in 1 Chronicles 1:32; as Hagar, on the other hand, is styled his "wife" in Genesis 16:3. Nor need we revert to the Gentile difficulty, that sons were begotten of Abraham after Sarah's death, which has induced not a few of old as now* to believe that Abraham took Keturah during Sarah's life-time, and that the whole paragraph, if not chapter, is placed out of its chronological sequence in order not to break the main narrative. Proof of this is wanting, as the whole paragraph flows naturally, after

Rebekah's marriage with Isaac, up to the several portions of the sons, as distinguished from the heir, and the death of the patriarch which was severed from Sarah's by at least thirty-seven years.

One may refer for instance to Mr. E. S. Poole, in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," 2:12.

"Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah. And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah. And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim. And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch, and Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. But unto the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country" (vers. 1-6).

Here then we see, after the call of the bride, the blessing of nations associated with Abraham. It is a very distinct thing from that which faith receives now; for they which are of faith, the same are the children [sons] of Abraham. It is now a blessing open to all or any of the nations; and they are blessed with faithful Abraham. Through the cross the blessing comes to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith; and as Christ is dead and risen, and thus the accomplisher as well as object and crown of the promises, so there is no Jew nor Greek. Fleshly distinctions disappear. All are one in Christ Jesus. In that which is typified by the concubines' sons to Abraham we see the strongest possible contrast with Isaac. Midian

may be there, and Jokshan, with the rest; perhaps Sheba, Dedan and Ephah, the son's sons. All these were Keturah's children.

Still it is written that "Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac." The risen son is the heir of all things; and if we are of Christ, then are we Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise. But unto the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away. They receive gifts, not the inheritance of the promises; and they are sent away, instead of abiding in the house for ever, as does the son.

So it will be in the age to come on earth, when, the church being completed, the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready. Blessing will flow, and the land of the morning will be no longer "the immovable east." I do not speak of Israel, the head of the nations under Christ's reign here below; still less of the glorified saints on high; nor do I mean only those that may then be born of God in every nation or people or tribe under the sun. But all the Gentiles are to rejoice with His people — a principle more deeply true, doubtless, in the present election for heaven from among Jews and Gentiles, but to be far more openly and widely seen in that bright day; and this, too, even in that quarter of the globe where dark superstitions of Christendom grow up rank, and side by side, with the Mahometan imposture and heathenism of every type.

"And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. And his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him

in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; the field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife" (vers. 7-10).

Thus peacefully passed away the man who, of all in Old Testament story, most strikingly combines the title of "friend of God" with "stranger and sojourner on the earth." Not that others — his son, grandson, and other descendants — did not carry on the blessed line of pilgrims who also walked with God. As a whole, however, what saint of old equalled him in these respects? Still less could any be said to surpass "the father of all them that believe."

Let us not at the same time forget that we have to do, not so much with the promises as he had, but with accomplishment in Christ (Rom. 4); and that, whatever promises of God there be, in Christ is the yea, and in Christ the amen, for glory to God by us. We are more than Abraham's seed, being blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3). Sovereign grace alone accounts for a purpose so rich and above the thoughts of men or even the ancient oracles of God. Do we believe it for our own souls and for all that are Christ's? Do we walk and worship accordingly as we wait for Him from heaven?

Isaac

Introduction

Having already sought to weigh the history of Abraham, I desire to consider what Scripture gives us to learn of Isaac. It is true that much less is said of him than of Abraham on the one hand or of Jacob on the other; even less than of Joseph among the many sons of Jacob. Yet there is not a little, in the spiritual account of him who came between the two chief fathers, distinguished by his own equable, retired, and peaceful way, and indicative of great principles in God's Word and ways, not in the Old Testament only but also in the New.

Isaac was the pattern of sonship, the child of promise, and as Abraham was its depository, elect, called out, blessed, and to be a blessing universally for the earth at the end, though himself looking higher by faith. Sovereign grace wrought as to both father and son. "For the promise that he should be heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through law, but through the righteousness of faith." Thus only could it be, as it was, according to grace; that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of Abraham's faith, who is father of us all, before the God whom he believed, who quickens the dead and calls the things which are not as though they were.

But the progress of revelation as to this is as interesting as instructive. It was when Lot's choice of the well-watered plain of Jordan severed him from the one to whom all the land was promised that Jehovah renewed

the assurance of it all not only to Abraham but to his seed (Gen. 12:7; Gen. 13:15). Still had the patriarch to wait; and when, after his disinterestedness on the occasion of his victory, he lays his childlessness before Jehovah, the word came that not Eliezer, his steward, should be his heir, but he that should come forth out of his own bowels, seed numerous as the stars (Gen. 15). Then after the episode of Hagar in Genesis 16 comes the revelation of God Almighty, El-Shaddai, in Genesis 17, and under the outward rite of circumcision, death to the flesh imposed on him and his seed, with a new name to his wife as well as himself; for she too has the promise of the son, whose name was given. Thus however great and fruitful He would make Ishmael, His covenant was to be established in Isaac, whose birth had a time set for it.

The exceptional interest Jehovah took in the birth of Isaac has a still more striking witness in Genesis 18. There in the guise of man He Himself appeared with two angels (compare Gen. 19:1) to Abraham, and deigned to partake of the meal he prepared and set before them under the tree in Mamre. Thus and then He specified the precise certainty of the time when Sarah should have a son. For the difficulty lay, humanly speaking, yet more in the wife than in the husband, and her unbelief was reproved. But Abraham as the “friend” of God, heard not of his son’s birth only, but of the world’s judgment, which drew out his soul in intercession for his righteous kinsman and his house in ungodly and lawless Sodom. If his advocacy stopped short, “God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the overthrow.”

After another failure in Genesis 20 (more guilty than the first occasion in Genesis 12), Jehovah visited Sarah as

He had said, and Jehovah did to Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. Him on the eighth day Abraham circumcised; and Sarah's laughter was now of overflowing joy and gratitude. But the great feast on the child's weaning drew out Ishmael's mockery, and the expulsion of the bondmaid and her son on Sarah's remonstrance, an allegory to which Galatians 4 gives us the key.

The great change is then adumbrated. For instead of Abimelech reproving Abraham justly, Abraham now reproved the Gentile king; who with the chief captain of his host, owns God with him in all that he does. Yet Abraham swears to show him kindness; and they make a covenant. And as the well of the oath was not without significance, so neither was the grove planted there, or the calling on the name of Jehovah, the everlasting God. The day was anticipated when "in the wilderness shall waters break out," and "the glory of Lebanon shall be given to it." The blessedness of the coming age for the earth is thus typified.

After these things, and quite distinct from them, God tried Abraham. What is not here for God as well as man! It is the picture, which blind unbelief alone fails to see, of the Only-begotten Son given, of the Lamb which God would provide Himself for a Burnt Offering. Here Isaac gave himself up to die, as Abraham was ready at God's word to sacrifice his beloved son: the sign of a far better thing.

But Jehovah arrests his hand when his heart was proved, and confirms to the son raised from the dead in a figure, that in Christ, the Antitype, should all the nations of the earth be blessed, as the apostle reasons in Galatians 3.

Then after the passing away of Sarah (the covenanted mother of the child of promise), we have the call of the bride for the bridegroom and heir of all. Next are given certain details of Isaac's history, as we shall examine in due time after this preliminary notice. Yet we may notice here the "moderation" of Isaac made known to all men in the question of the wells his servants found (Gen. 26); and the crisis of his ways when his foot had well nigh slipped in the matter of his two sons (Gen. 27). Grace here overruled; and he was saved yet so as by fire. How striking it is that such a scene should be singled out to his praise in Hebrews 11:20! "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau even concerning things to come." Isaac lived many years after this; but Scripture records only his death and burial.

His Antecedents - Genesis 12-20

Isaac stands in marked contrast with Abraham, though he and Jacob were "the fellow-heirs of the same promise." But Abraham comes before us the unexpected object of sovereign grace. The tales, so plentiful among Jews and Muslims, of preternatural ability and attainments of wisdom and goodness antecedent to his call, are altogether fabulous and excluded by Scripture. All the more therefore did he suit divine election. No prophetic word hailed his birth like Noah's, whose father said, This same shall comfort us for our work and for the toil of our hands, because of the ground which Jehovah hath cursed. Yet no man was given to hold a

place as “father of those that believe,” like Abraham, a headship of higher character than Adams’s. But Isaac has the peculiarity of his own, however personally and in place overshadowed by his honoured father, in that he was gradually introduced before his birth more frequently and signally than any, save that Son of Abraham, and Son of David who was also Son of God as no one else could be, Isaac’s great Antitype.

It may be of interest to draw out the evidence of this. In Genesis 12:7 “Jehovah appeared to Abram and said, To thy seed I will give this land; and there built he an altar to Jehovah who appeared to him.” Long before in Ur of the Chaldees had Jehovah said to Abraham, “Get thee (or, Go) out of thy country, and from thy kindred and from thy father’s house, to the land that I will show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing. And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:1-3). Therein Abram at first failed, not quitting his father but following him to Haran, from which he did not emerge till his father’s death (Acts 7:4).

Then and not before “Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had acquired and the souls that they had got in Haran, and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.” Obedience now had its perfect work, and its result accordingly. The renewed appearing of Jehovah was not only a call to separation, but to the walk of faith, a pilgrim and a sojourner in the land of promise as in [a land] not his own, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob the fellow-heirs of the same

promise; for he awaited the city that hath the foundations, whose designer and master-builder is God" (Heb. 11:9, 10). What was the possession of an earthly seat compared with this in heaven which dawned on his faith? Now he learns that Jehovah would give it to his "seed." He worships and was content to be a stranger; and as he moved his tent elsewhere in the land, he built an altar to Jehovah and called on His name (Gen. 12:8).

Still "seed" was vague, as it is explained in Romans 9:7 and so appears also in John 8:33-39. But the time was not yet come. Abram failed in his new place, swerving from the revelation which had so happily wrought in his walk and worship. He goes down into Egypt for help under the strain of a famine in the land; and there is not a word of altar or tent. There he denies his wife, who was taken into the home of this world's prince, and got rich by it to his shame. Jehovah failed not, but plagued Pharaoh and extricated Sarai. This was not "all families of the earth blessed" in him: how could it be other than a curse when the depository of the blessing had left his true place with Jehovah and compromised his wife? Delivered by overruling mercy, he returns to the south or Negeb, and thence as far as Bethel, "to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai; to the place of the altar that he had made there at the first; and there Abram called on the name of Jehovah" (Gen. 13:3, 4). The humiliation before was blessed to one, whose first wrong step led to worse; but his heart turned to Him who had rescued them, and he again regains his privilege without a fresh appearing to him. But in the strife between their respective herdsmen that followed, Abram is as disinterested as his nephew

betrays his worldly wisdom. And “Jehovah said to Abram, after that Lot had separated himself from him, Lift up now thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that thou seest will I give to thee and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth,” etc. (vv. 14-18). Lot has no title here. A fuller view of the land was given to him who looked above: it was secured forever to him and his. Again Abraham moves to Hebron and built there an altar to Jehovah. His worship rises afresh.

Next, after the wondrous episode of Abram’s victory over the earthly potentates, who had punished their vassal kings and carried off Lot, and after the still more wondrous scene of the mysterious King-priest of the Most High God, we have (in a new series of Abram’s history) the word of Jehovah coming in a vision, to assure him that not Eliezer, but “he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir,” and like the unnumbered stars, “so shall thy seed be.” And he believed Jehovah, who reckoned it to him as righteousness; of which the New Testament makes fruitful use. So it must be for the earthly seed, as well as the heavenly: flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. It is the earthly which is in view here; as this was what Abram sought, and God bound Himself by covenant based on death of victims, with prophecy and the limits of the land defined according to the Gentile races in present possession.

But if the son and heir was now defined to be Abram’s, not so yet the mother. For in Genesis 16 Sarah manifests the haste which is not of faith but the device of nature, to gain the blessing in its way to the sorrow of all and

especially her own. This the apostle applies allegorically to Israel under law. In Genesis 17 Jehovah reveals Himself (not His gifts only) by the new name of El-Shaddai (God Almighty), not His word in a vision, but God talking with him who has His covenant and the enlarged promise to be father of a multitude of nations, and kings to come out of him. Circumcision, death not of victims but of flesh, is imposed; and as Abram's name was now widened, so Sarai's was raised: Abram's son God would give of her. "And thou shalt call his name Isaac, and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant to his seed after him" (v. 19). Ishmael was not to be forgotten of God; but His covenant should be with Isaac, whom Sarah was to bear at this set time in the next year. Thus was the case made increasingly full and clear.

These preparative notices are crowned in Genesis 18 where Jehovah appeared to Abraham by the terebinths of Mamre, and with two angels, who in human guise deigned to honour him as his guests. He thus emphasizes the importance to be attached to Isaac's birth, which even then Sarah laughs at as too wonderful. But the son and heir will surely come at the appointed time, and Jehovah personally announces it for the last time before it is accomplished. And we may note the proof He gives that He made Abraham His friend by telling him, not only the detail of what so intimately concerned himself and Sarah, but the judgment He was sending the angels to execute on the guilty cities of the plain. This draws out Abraham, not now to ask for himself, but to intercede, and Jehovah answered beyond his faith.

Yet Abraham failed once more after so signal a favour. How often it is so! Flesh is puffed up, not judged: we are off our guard, instead of watching to prayer. No flesh shall glory, but as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. The unbelief of the believer led to deceit; and the sin of Abraham was worse now with Abimelech than long before with Pharaoh. He denied his wife's relationship, after Jehovah let him know the soon coming birth of the promised son by her. Yet though inexcusable and reproved by the Philistine king, God does not forget but maintains Abraham's relationship and makes Abimelech seek his prayers.

The Son and Heir Born - Genesis 21:1-7

The set time was now come. The child of promise was at hand. Many and various had been the premonitions on the one side, and checks on the other; but at length in the face of weakness and drawbacks, of unfaithfulness with gracious overruling, the divine word is proved to be, as it is, unfailing and worthy of all trust.

"And Jehovah visited Sarah as he had said, and Jehovah did to Sarah as he had spoken. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. And Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born to him. And Sarah said, God hath made me laugh: everyone that heareth will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said to Abraham, Sarah will give children suck? for I have borne a son in his old age" (vv. 1-7).

Here the usage of the divine designations comes before us remarkably. To impute the difference to distinct authors is the despairing or malevolent resource of unbelieving ignorance. First of all “Jehovah” occurs with emphatic repetition (v. 1). Governmental relationship was in question; and as Jehovah had promised, so also did He show Himself faithful to perform. But it was of no less moment in the next place to indicate that He who thus spoke was God in the supremacy of His nature (v. 2). Hence “Elohim” is employed, and throughout the chapter, till verse 33 where relative dealings properly demand the name of “Jehovah Elohim,” as will be shown in due course.

But beyond controversy it was the birth of one who here typifies the Son of Psalm 2:7, 12. This explains why there should have been so many prophetic intimations to prepare the way. This accounts for the serious consequences which followed for such as despised Him when come. So the prophet was given to say, more than seven centuries before the event (Isa. 9:6 and following): “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And they shall call his name Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of eternity, Prince of peace.” The prediction, glowing and glorious as it is, has nothing to do with His being Firstborn from the dead, Head of the body, the church, who is the beginning. It belongs to His other Headship, as born into the world, the Firstborn of all creation. For in all things He must have the supreme place.

Hence we can see that Calvin only expresses the prevalent confusion of these two relationships, when he says that in this chapter God has set before us a lively picture of His church.

Not so. It is not “the mystery” which is here foreshown, but the new covenant; it is the mother,1 and not the bride. Consequently the Christian has already new covenant blessing in the death of the saviour; but the Scripture which most fully explains it to us (2 Cor. 3) points to its being in spirit rather than in letter; it will be formally with both houses of Israel in the day which fast approaches, and for ever. But Israel, however richly blessed in that day, will not have the union with Christ as His body, which is ours even now with Him who is Head over all things. And this involves the most important differences, as widely apart as heaven is from earth, of which this is not the place to speak more particularly. The distinction however, cannot well be overestimated.

Next in verse 3 Abraham called his new-born son Isaac. So he was now, whatever had gone before, whatever might come after. Any laughter of doubt had given place to the joy of grace. And Abraham certainly looked on with joy to wide, deep, and enduring results; he rejoiced that he should see Christ’s day, and he saw it and was glad. How blessed will it be for Israel and the earth and all the nations and every creature of God! How different from the day of Massah and Meribah in the wilderness; when man hardened his heart and Jehovah was grieved long years with a generation that erred in their heart and knew not His ways! In that day what singing aloud to Jehovah, what shouting for joy to the rock of salvation, and coming before His face with thanksgiving and psalms! Yea, the heavens shall rejoice and the earth be glad; the sea shall roar and the fullness thereof; the field shall exult and all that is therein. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before Jehovah, for He

cometh - for He cometh to judge the earth: He will judge the world with righteousness, and the people in His faithfulness (Ps. 96). Isaiah bears the same witness at intervals from his first chapter to his last, notably in Isa. 11; Isa. 12; 24-27; Isa. 30; Isa. 32; Isa. 35; Isa. 40-45; Isa. 49-55; Isa. 60-62; and Isa. 65. So we may say in general have all the prophets spoken. So much the more lamentable is the unbelief which merges all in the church's blessings, only to lose its heavenly bridal place to no end obscured by that groundless confusion.

But the joy of Abraham in no way weakened his duty of subjecting his son to the sign of death for the flesh. He circumcised Isaac duly when he was eight days old, "as God had commanded him" (v. 4). The eighth day points to resurrection in contrast with nature. Circumcision was instituted, not when Ishmael was born, but in view of Isaac, the seal of the covenant. The principle was God's righteousness. Man was judged as evil and flesh mortified.

It is notified in verse 5 that Abraham was a hundred years of age when Isaac was born. Faith had indeed to wait, but was in no way disappointed: God is faithful. "And Sarah said, God hath made me laugh; every one that heareth will laugh with me" (v. 6). She had laughed at first when Jehovah announced the set time for her to be a mother, and she added the shame of untruth when taxed with it (Gen. 18). But all is here changed by grace. God, she owns, made her laugh now. It was no longer within herself, but of Him; and others who heard would share her joy. "And she said, Who would have said to Abraham, Sarah will give children suck? For I have borne a son in his old age" (v. 7). Sarah is thenceforth,

old as she was, become a child of wisdom; and wisdom is justified of all her children.

Isaac Abiding Hagar and Ishmael Dismissed - Genesis 21:8-21

God knows how to rectify the false position that springs from unbelief. We may therefore look to Him and His Word, and have only to obey. But if this ever costs the flesh not a little, blessing surely follows self-denying submission to His will.

“And the child grew and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw Hagar the Egyptian’s son, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. And she said to Abraham, Cast out this maid-servant and her son; for this maid-servant’s son shall not be heir with my son, with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham’s sight because of his son. And God said to Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy maid- servant: [in] all that Sarah saith to thee, hearken to her voice; for in Isaac shall a seed be called to thee. But also the maid-servant’s son will I make a nation, because he is thy seed. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread and a leathern bottle of water and gave [it] to Hagar, putting [it] on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away; and she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. And the water from the bottle was exhausted; and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went and sat down over against [him] about a bowshot; for she said, I will not look on the death of the child. And she sat over against [him,] and lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the lad’s voice; and God’s angel called to

Hagar out of the heaven, and said to her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the lad's voice there where he is. Arise, take the lad, and hold him in thy hand, for a great nation will I make him. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became as he grew up an archer. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt" (vv. 8-21).

As the child born and the son given typified the Son of the Highest, it was meet that the occasion should be marked by consequences of the gravest. What can distinguish inspiration more than the lesson the apostle in Galatians 4:22-26 draws from that which seems on the surface a mere domestic occurrence? "For it is written that Abraham had two sons; one of the maid-servant, and one of the free-woman. But he that was of the maid-servant was born according to flesh, and he that was of the free-woman through the promise. Which things have an allegorical sense; for these [women] are two covenants: one from Mount Sinai, gendering unto bondage, which is Hagar. For Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to the present Jerusalem; for she is in bondage with her children; but the Jerusalem above is free, which is our mother."

This was God's purpose, though none apprehend it save those who have Christ's mind. Hence the unbelieving Jews fill the place, not of Isaac, but of Ishmael. They are as far as possible from suspecting that they are only born according to flesh, and persecute him that is born according to Spirit. Yet they cannot deny that their

mother is the Sinai covenant, and that they are cast out by God. They have the law's curse as transgressors; they have not a shred of the promise to cover their nakedness. Their own prophets declare that they are not God's people, and if without a false god without the True, as they have plainly neither land nor prince; and this because they rejected, first Jehovah, next His Christ.

But the apostle goes a great deal farther; and though he does not confound the believing Gentiles with Israel, like the theologians of Christendom, he shows that all who take their stand on law come under the curse (Gal. 3:10). Thus the principle applies in all its force, indeed emphatically, to Gentiles, who have not the excuse of inveterate Jewish prejudices. It is to fall from grace, through which alone can souls be saved. Law cannot save but condemn sinners; and if grace be mixed with law, the mixture is unavailing: grace only can save the guilty and lost. The Galatians who were bewitched to tack law on to grace, he solemnly warns of utter ruin, so sure that as many as are of works of law (i.e., on this principle) are under curse. After having begun in Spirit, how senseless for them to seek perfection in flesh! The law itself, in the tale of Abraham's two sons, convicts of folly those who thus abuse the law. Its lawful application (1 Tim: 1:9) is not to a righteous person, but to lawless and insubordinate, to impious and sinful, to unholy and profane, to whatever in short is opposed to the healthful doctrine Paul taught.

Hence the peremptory tone of the apostle to the endangered Galatians. He will have this "leaven" extirpated, whatever it cost. It was a deeper peril than the "leaven" which he enjoins the Corinthians to purge out. Not even a moral man could defend the gross

inconsistency with Christ and His sacrifice of having the wicked man in their midst. But the fair show in flesh set up in the Galatians churches was subtler, and a denial of the grace which the gospel proclaims, when law had been proved to be simply a ministry of death and condemnation. What then "saith the scripture? Cast out the maid-servant and her son; for the son of the maid-servant shall in no wise be heir with the son of the free-woman." The Judaizing Gentile is even more blamable than the Jew. Alas! the ritualism of the day is incomparably worse still and growingly apostate; for not content with the legal forms of Israel, it incorporates the idolatries of the heathen also, as in the adoration of the sacramental elements, etc.

Yet is it affecting to know God's goodness to Abraham's seed according to flesh. When the mother yielded to despair, and laid her son down to die at a distance from her, "God heard the lad's voice"; and His angel bids Hagar hold him in her hand. Had not Jehovah called his name Ishmael, because He had heard her affliction? And as she was then by a fountain called Beer-la-hai-roi, Well of the living who was seen (or, seeth me), from the name of Him that spoke to her (Gen. 16), so now God opened her eyes to see a well of water whence she gave the lad drink. If she forgot the divine assurance of a numberless multitude in general to spring from her, and that Ishmael should dwell in the presence of all his brethren, God remembered him and declares that He will make him a great nation. So it has been. There they are with the same characteristics to this day.

Jehovah, God Everlasting - Genesis 21:22-34

Though the name of Isaac does not occur in this section, it is in no way a digression, but in strict pursuance of the divine ways on the occasion of his birth, the dismissal of Hagar and her son, and the recognition of Sarah's son as the sole heir of Abraham.

"And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech, and Phichol the captain of his host, spoke to Abraham, saying, God [is] with thee in all that thou doest. And now swear to me here by God that thou wilt not [literally, if thou shalt] deal falsely with me nor with my offspring nor with my son's son. According to the kindness that I have done to thee, thou shalt do to me and to the land in which thou hast sojourned. And Abraham said, I will swear. And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away. And Abimelech said, I know not who hath done this, and also thou didst not tell me, and also I heard not but today. And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave [them] to Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant. And Abraham set seven ewe-lambs of the block by themselves. And Abimelech said unto Abraham, what [mean] here these seven ewe-lambs which thou hast set by themselves? And he said, For seven ewe-lambs shalt thou take, that they may be a witness to me that I dug this well. Wherefore he called that place Beersheba, because they had sworn, both of them. And they made a covenant at Beersheba; and Abimelech rose up and Phichol chief of his host, and returned into the Philistines' land. And [Abraham] planted a tamarisk (or, a grove) in Beersheba, and called there on the name of Jehovah God everlasting. And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days" (vv. 22-34).

It was not only that due order of the household was now secured by the expulsion of the Egyptian and her mocking son, and that the child of promise abode without a rival; but an outward event follows of such significance that the Holy Spirit gives it here an imperishable place. The marked blessing that resulted drew the Gentile's heart, and the Philistine with due formality (for the commander-in-chief accompanied him) seeks the pledged friendship of Abraham. So it will be in days to come when the promises are accomplished in the Messiah; and thus far Isaac typifies Him. It was far otherwise when the Lord came the first time, and even the Jew rejected Him in dark unbelief and in bitter hatred that the grace which they refused should be preached to the nations. Unhappy and unholy, they please not God and are contrary to all men; and the wrath is come on them to the uttermost. But the day hastens when they judging themselves shall welcome by faith Him in whom the promises are Yea and Amen unto the glory of God. Then shall Gentile kings be Zion's nursing fathers, and queens her nursing mothers (Isa. 49); then shall ten men take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, shall even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you (Zech. 8).

Nor does Abraham at all repel the Gentiles. The Seed of promise received and honoured leads to a new state of things for the earth. To the king Abraham assents, and forms a covenant on oath and other solemnities. In the Seed are the Gentiles to be blessed. Woe to those that curse in that day! A witness of the change to ensue on the largest scale is here given by Abraham's reproving Abimelech. Now only does he speak of the wrong done

by Abimelech's servants who had violently possessed themselves of a well dug by Abraham. And Abimelech bows meekly. Righteousness will reign in that day, and princes shall rule in judgment; yea, judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. For the Spirit will then be poured on Israel from on high; and He holds the inflexible sceptre over all the earth, the Righteous Servant and Atoning Sufferer, who in that day shall be seen exalted, and lifted up, and very high. And Israel's seed shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which Jehovah hath blessed (Isa. 61). The limper shall no longer halt, but the first dominion be even to the daughter of Jerusalem.

The Well-of-the-Oath is the name Abraham gives as the permanent sign of the covenant made then and there. Typically it is a total change from strangership to possession, as it will be really in the days of the coming Kingdom. Nor do we hear of a tent now, though Abraham's calling on the name of Jehovah implies a fresh altar here. Only it is not now as the One who appeared to him in the far off land, and led him at length, separated to Him, into Canaan; nor is it the altar he built at Bethel anymore than at Shechem, nor yet at Hebron. Here only is the striking change, which inspiration alone can account for, to "God everlasting." For so it will be when the displayed Kingdom comes in power and glory. Fallen and fading things will then give place to permanence and peace and blessing. For "Thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee" (Ps. 102).

In unison with all this is the planting of a grove on Abraham's part. Here only do we read of such an act, the beautiful prefiguration of "that day" when the parched land shall blossom abundantly, and all the trees of the wood shall sing for joy.

Isaac Dead and Risen in Figure - Genesis 22:1-14

Here begins an entirely new section of the book, which we may regard as stretching over the death of Abraham in Genesis 25, though more than once verses seem appended to complete the history rather than higher views. No more profound principle can there be than that which is introduced as the basis in our chapter; for it is death and resurrection in the person of a beloved son, an only-begotten. Such a type is unmistakable save to the blind. The very details are full of living force: what then is the Antitype? All is impressive, lovely, and instructive in the highest degree. As the figure of Abraham looms most in the scene, and as this has been years ago before us in treating of him, it remains to speak here of Isaac.

"And it came to pass after these things that God tried Abraham and said to him, Abraham; and he said, Behold me. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only [one] whom thou lovest, Isaac, and get thee into the Moriah land, and offer him there for a burnt-offering on one of the mountains which I shall tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he crave wood for burnt-offering, and rose up and went to the place of which God told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar

off. And Abraham said to his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship (or, bow down), and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood for burnt-offering, and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and knife; and they went both of them together; and they came to the place which God told him of; and there did Abraham build the altar and pile the wood; and he bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And Jehovah's angel called to him from the heavens, and said, Abraham, Abraham; and he said, Behold me. And he said, Stretch not forth thy hand against the lad, nor do thou anything to him; for now I know that thou fearest God and hast not withheld thy son, thine only [one] from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold a ram behind caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for burnt-offering, instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh; as it is said this day, On Jehovah's mount it will be provided" (vv. 1-14).

We must bear in mind that "the lad" had at least reached his majority, as we say; Josephus (Antiquities 1:13, 2) makes him 25 years old. His entire submissiveness to his father indeed, but also to the will of God, is exactly in keeping with his piety. If it was beautiful in the type, how much more in that which it shadowed! For it was unsought and infinite love in both Father and Son.

Here it was not merely a test of the strongest claim ever made on the heart of man, indefinitely increased by the promise so long waited for and so singularly accomplished, and by the full persuasion of world-wide

blessing which centred in that very son, and yet seemed to be made impossible by the intensely painful act to which he was called. What was suffered to the full and unsparingly, that God might be glorified, that sin might be condemned in a sacrifice of blessing to sinners without bound or end, that good might surpass where evil abounded, that love might overcome where enmity had wrought its worst, that Satan might be vanquished where he had been a prince and a god, that man might be brought, no longer a child of wrath but of God, out of all iniquity, intense misery, and everlasting judgment to peace and righteousness before God now and to heavenly glory with Christ in the presence of the Father forever?

The father and son brought before us so strikingly here furnished an unrivalled occasion to show in a figure or "parable," as it is called in Hebrews 9:17-19, the real death and as real resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The interpretation given, as it has been believed by all saints of New Testament times, rests on no probability however strong, on no tradition of men, however ancient. He that disputes will have to give account of his inexcusable incredulity to the Lord Himself when we are manifested before His judgment seat. Very beautiful is the minute accuracy of this New Testament comment. "By faith Abraham when tried hath offered up Isaac; and he that took up to himself the promises was offering up the only-begotten, in respect of whom it was spoken, In Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that even from the dead God is able to raise; whence also he received him in a parable." We may not in English easily express the perfect in the first instance of the offering; but the force is evident and points to the subsisting or fixed

result of that act. Morally it was done; and the effect abides. The second use of the word in the imperfect corrects all possible misuse of that; for it states that literally Abraham was in the act of offering his only son when arrested as Genesis tells us by Jehovah's angel. The spiritual test was complete, though the act was not completed. So had divine wisdom ordered and accomplished.

Nor is this new thing, though only in parable, an isolated and transient fact, but is connected in the declarations and the events that follow with consequences of the utmost importance, as will be shown in due time. This is the most powerful and conclusive proof that the Scripture is in the fullest sense inspired of God. It is not only that a moral pinnacle is here reached as never before; but that the death and resurrection of Christ prefigured by it reflects on what follows a light which shows that what is related stands in perfect keeping with that infinite event, and is a shadow of what we find in the new Testament could only follow it, as it did according to God's counsels and in the development of His ways.

The answer of the father to the son (vv. 7, 8) was from above and in a wisdom wholly above man's; God's providing Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering is the basis of the new and only justifying righteousness, God's righteousness. In the infinite reality it was the Son become man and on behalf of men yet to God's glory, after proving Himself the righteous Servant, made sin for us, that we who believe might become God's righteousness in Him. Thus was love maintained as fully as holiness, and that new righteousness, God's righteousness which can justify absolutely him that

believes on the Lord Jesus, instead of condemning the sinner as he deserves. It was the Father's will, the Son's work, and Holy Spirit's witness, as indeed we read in Hebrews 10.

Viewed merely on the historical side, what admirable devotedness to God's authority testing the heart to the uttermost! What unhesitating trust in God and His word, that the giving up of what is dearest in possession and hope would result in unimpaired re-establishment of all! And so it truly was in the issue, and beyond all expectation of man as he is.

Isaac: The Numerous Seed, and the One Seed - Genesis 22:15-24

Consequent on the wondrous type of the far more wondrous sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, we have Jehovah's angel announcing to Abraham His solemn oath on that which deeply concerned both Jews and Gentiles, and we may add God Himself most nearly, and His title to bless not only in His righteous government but in sovereign grace according to His nature.

"And Jehovah's angel called to Abraham a second time from the heavens, and said, By myself I swear, saith Jehovah, that because thou hast done this and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thy seed as stars of the heavens, and as sand that is on the sea's shore; and thy seed shall possess his enemies' gate; and in thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast harkened to my voice. And Abraham returned to his young men; and they rose up and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba.

“And it came to pass after these things that it was told Abraham, saying, Behold, Milcah, she also hath borne children to thy brother Nahor: Uz his firstborn, and Buz his brother, and Kemuel father of Aram, and Chesed, and Hazo and Pildash and Jidlaph and Bethuel (and Bethuel begot Rebekah). These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. And his concubine named Reumah, she also bore Tebah and Gaham and Tahash and Maacah” (vv. 15-24).

Because of Jehovah’s appreciation of Abraham’s unreserved surrender to Him of what was most precious to his heart, first comes the assurance of rich blessing and great multiplication of his seed according to flesh. It should be for multitude as stars of the heavens and as sand of the seashore. Nor this only, but with power over their adversaries, as befits the earthly people of His choice. Beyond just question Israel is thus in view (v. 17).

But there follows in verse 18 a promise intentionally severed, and couched in such terms as point to the True Seed in whom should all the nations of the earth be blessed. And here not a hint was uttered of a numerous posterity; as indeed the evident aim was to indicate the One on whom alone depended blessing of a far higher order, and this for “all the nations of the earth.” Here we are recalled to the original promise made to the patriarch and recorded in the last half of Genesis 12:3: “And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” There, as here, it follows the national blessing of the earthly people. It was therefore left open and goes out in unlimited grace as in the gospel. He only could thus speak who knew the end from the beginning.

Of this the apostle in the power of the Holy Spirit avails himself in writing to the Galatians (Gal. 3), beguiled as they then were into that judaizing of heavenly truth which has been and is the sore bane of Christendom. Works of law are a ruinous principle for sinful men; the promise is by faith, whereby alone believers are blessed with the faithful Abraham. For as many as are of law-works are under curse; not merely such as violate the law, but all that take the ground of law before God. As surely as they do, they being sinful fall under curse. Therefore Deuteronomy 27 is cited, wherein the Holy Ghost passes by all account of the blessings of the six tribes on Mount Gerizim, and only gives in detail the curses of the other six on Mount Ebal. These alone were effective. The blessings cannot be for guilty man on that ground. It is by faith, says the prophet, the just shall live; and redemption from curse is needed for those under law, that the blessing of Abraham might come to the nations in Christ Jesus, as the gospel declares. Nor is this all. For the Seed is arrived, and the covenant is confirmed, as it was typically in Isaac, dead and risen parabolically. Hence the apostle proceeds, “But to Abraham were addressed the promises, and to his seed” — to the father in Genesis 12, and to his son in Genesis 22. “He saith not, ‘And to seeds,’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to thy seed’ [where allusion to stars and sand, as well as ‘greatly multiplying,’ are quite dropped], which is Christ.”

The reasoning of the apostle, here as elsewhere, only appears weak to presumptuous men, who are unbelieving and so must fail to understand God’s mind in it. Where souls accept the divine authority, not only of the Epistle to the Galatians, but of Genesis which the

Epistle assumes, all is seen to be bright, profoundly true, and of living interest. It is no question of mere grammar, but of context; which, in the promise that distinctly contemplates Israel, makes much of numbers; whereas in that which introduces the Gentiles for blessing, it says not a word about anything of the kind, but only of one, “thy seed.” It was a covenant confirmed beforehand by God; and the law, which came after four hundred and thirty years, does not annul it, so as to make the promise of no effect. Nor does the law clash with the promise: each has its own object; the one, a ministry of death and condemnation; the other, of blessing by faith. Mixing the two does the mischief; and this is exactly to what man is prone, and what Scripture ever explicitly sets aside.

In the light of New Testament facts, how the types of Genesis come out! The woman’s Seed is surely man, yet more than man, bruised to bruise utterly and forever the old serpent the devil, fallen angel as he is. Abraham’s Seed, foreshown in Isaac dead and risen in figure, portrays the Deliverer in the wholly new condition of man beyond death, able to bless Gentiles in sovereign grace no less than Jews, and unite them to Himself in heavenly glory. And this is just what the gospel now reveals to faith.

The closing verses of the chapter bring before us a brief sketch of Nahor’s line (Abraham’s brother), whose son Bethuel was father of Rebekah through Milcah the wife, not through Reumah the concubine. How closely this connects itself with Isaac’s future we shall have before us in due time, carrying out the purpose of God.

Sarah Dead and Buried - Genesis 23

Here is given the decease of Sarah with her burial, to which inspiration devotes a considerable place. Is there no instruction beyond the affecting moral that is before all eyes? Where in all the Old Testament is there such a picture of a husband's sorrow in providing a burial place for the departed wife? Where of a father's care and faith in the call of a bride for his son, as in the chapter that follows? We have looked into the deep typical lessons of the chapter that precedes, and we hope to weigh that which is hardly less to be questioned in that which is now to occupy us. Is it to be assumed that our chapter is altogether devoid of similar truth below the surface? Let us at least seek to learn of God through His Word.

"And the life of Sarah was a hundred and twenty-seven years — the years of Sarah's life. And Sarah died in Kirjath-Arba, that [is] Hebron in the land of Canaan. And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spoke to the sons of Heth, saying, I [am] a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a sepulchre with you, that I may bury my dead before me. And the sons of Heth answered Abraham, saying to him, Hear us, my lord: thou [art] a prince of God among us; in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead: none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre for burying thy dead. And Abraham rose up and bowed himself to the people of the land, to the sons of Heth, and spoke to them, saying, If it be your will that I should bury my dead from before me, hear me, and entreat for me Ephron son of Zohar, that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which is his, which [is] at the end of his field; for the full price let him give it to me among you for a possession of

a sepulchre. And Ephron was sitting among the sons of Heth. And Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the ears of the sons of Heth, of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying, No, my lord; hear me. The field give I thee; and the cave that [is] in it, to thee I give it; before the eyes of the sons of my people I give it thee: bury thy dead. And Abraham bowed himself before the people of the land; and he spoke to Ephron in the ears of the people of the land, saying, But if only thou wouldst listen to me, I give the price of the field: take [it] of me, and I will bury my dead there. And Ephron answered Abraham, saying to him, My lord, hearken to me. A field of four hundred shekels of silver, what [is] that between me and thee? bury therefore thy dead. And Abraham hearkened to Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the price that he had named in the ears of the sons of Heth - four hundred shekels of silver current with the merchant. So the field of Ephron which [was] at Machpelah, which [was] before Mamre, the field and the cave that [was] in it, and all the trees that [were] in the field, that [were] in all its borders round about, were assured to Abraham for a possession before the eyes of the sons of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city. And after this Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field at Machpelah, opposite to Mamre, that [is] Hebron in the land of Canaan. And the field and the cave that was in it were assured to Abraham for a possession of a sepulchre by the sons of Heth" (vv. 1-20).

The sketch is so simple and so graphic as to need few words. Abraham's grief lives before us, as does his noble bearing in such circumstances with the sons of Heth for a cave wherein to bury his dead. It was a delicate affair. For the Hittites were touched, courteous, and friendly;

while Abraham, resolute to plead for such, as in Genesis 14:24, was no less resolute to appropriate nothing now as then for himself. Even in the presence of death would he preserve the place of pilgrim and stranger in their midst. He would pay in full for a possession, not of a mansion nor of an estate, but of a sepulchre. Ephron, oriental-like, set his price abundantly high for those days; and Abraham weighed it in presence of all, the then mode of lawful and sure conveyance with a curious anticipation of modern particularity. Otherwise the patriarch had no inheritance in the promised land, no, not so much as to set his foot on, whatever argument the late Bishop of Lincoln set up to the contrary. Even for a grave he would not be unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion has light with darkness? Abraham would be separate and touch no unclean thing. Is this scorn or pride? Not so, but subjection to God, and maintenance of His honour by His children, however weak and unworthy, as some are, but all ought to be, quite willing to allow.

Typically viewed, Sarah was the free mother of the child of promise, in contrast with the bondmaid and her son cast out already, according to the doctrine of Galatians 4. Now that the Son is seen dead and risen, even that covenant, which Sarah represents, passes away, in order to bring in a yet higher counsel of the Father who would call a bride for His Son in the heavenlies. As surely as Sarah dies, she will rise again; and only then will that covenant of promise and liberty be valid for Israel, who meanwhile are blinded by unbelief and find their pattern in Hagar and her son. Thus did the Jews lose for this long season their privileges; for they were sons of the

prophets and of the covenant which God made with Abraham. But rejecting the one true Seed, their own Messiah, through whom alone any and all could be blessed, they have stamped upon them more deeply than ever Lo-Ammi. Yes, Sarah is dead; and as the next development of rising purposes, we shall see Rebekah called from a far land and conducted across the desert to be the spouse of Isaac in Canaan.

The Bride Called for Isaac - Genesis 24:1-9

Genesis 22 gave us the new and unique position of the son and heir, dead and risen, the figure of the infinite reality where the Antitype was also the Lamb that God would provide Himself for a burnt-offering; Genesis 23 the passing away, at this point of God's ways, of Sarah, the mother of the child of promise. For those who ought to have received the dead and risen Messiah stumbled at the stumbling-stone, and by their blind insubjection put off for the present the application of a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. As regards the ancient people, it was dead through their unbelief, though grace would not permit it to fail for a godly remnant and for those of the nations who believe the gospel. That blood, which the Jews imprecated as a curse on themselves and on their children (Matt. 26:28), is to Christians the cup of blessing which they bless, Christ's blood of the new covenant that was shed for many unto remission of sins. Its literal terms and full extent for the earth await the chosen nation to whom it is pledged by Him who will infallibly accomplish it another day. Not more surely shall Sarah rise again than the covenant of grace shall be made good to Israel, notwithstanding all that they have done, when they shall

say, Blessed is He that cometh in Jehovah's name. Then will he execute judgment and righteousness in the land, and Jehovah shall be King over all the earth, in that day there shall be one Jehovah and His name one.

But it is a wholly different prospect here, the no less distinct figure of the new and heavenly relationship which grace forms, while the Jew abides in unbelief and therefore postpones the magnificent scenes of predicted glory for Israel and all the Gentiles in that day. It is the call of a bride for Isaac out of that world from which Abraham had been called. The trusty servant, described in terms quite exceptional, "The eldest of his house, who ruled over all that he had," is charged with the delicate mission of finding her out according to God, and of guiding her across the desert to the bridegroom.

And Abraham was old, advanced in age; and Jehovah had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said to his servant, the eldest in his house, that ruled over all that he had, "Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and I will make thee swear by Jehovah, the God of the heavens and the God of the earth, that thou take not a wife for my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but thou shalt go to my land and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac. And the servant said to him, Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land: must I, then, bring thy son again anywise to the land from which thou camest out? And Abraham said to him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again. Jehovah, the God of the heavens, who took me out of my father's house and out of the land of my nativity, and who spake to me and who swore to me, saying, To thy seed will I give this land; even he will send his angel before thee; and thou shalt

take a wife thence for my son. And if the woman be not willing to follow thee, then shalt thou be clear from this mine oath: only bring not my son thither again. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter" (vv. 1-9).

No one denies that in the letter the aged father was devising in a grave and pious spirit to help his son Isaac in the most important step of a life, not merely momentous to the Jewish seed which had earthly blessing divinely promised, and in the highest degree, but yet more bound up with still better blessing in his own seed to all the families of the earth. Nor was Abraham content with the long proved fidelity of him who had from earlier days earned and deserved his confidence. Here and now only he exacts of Eliezer an oath of peculiar solemnity, that the bride taken should be, not from the accursed race of Canaan, but out of that land from which he himself had been called, and of his kindred. But he who weighs the typical meaning which the New Testament authoritatively gives to the previous history, as we have seen, will not be disposed to deny it here; where the exceeding fullness and character of the narrative suggest a deeper import, which is itself the certain truth of God, and fits it here, as nowhere else, precisely answering to the new history, but of more exalted application and of the nearest interest to the Christian reader.

"I will make thee swear by Jehovah, the God of the heavens and the God of the earth, that thou take not for my son a wife of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell; but to my country and to my kindred thou shalt go and take a wife for my son Isaac." It is well to

remark that here the divine title is most noteworthy, besides proving the groundlessness of Astruc's conjecture which has exercised so powerful a spell over rationalist minds. The nearest to it in the book of Genesis, (both without parallel in the Pentateuch) is found in Genesis 14. There "God Most High" is in conjunction with "Possessor of the heavens and earth"; and the evidence points to the days of the kingdom as yet future, when it will not be merely the "order" in contrast with Aaron's, but the true Melchizedek will exercise His priesthood in blessing the victors at the end of the age, and the heavens and earth shall be united instead of severed as they are still.

In Genesis 24 before us "the God of the heavens and the God of the earth" presents the universal rights of the only true God, revealed fully and only when the Son of God is come, and He dead and risen brings out all the truth distinctly in connection with the call of the church, the bride of Christ. Hence, in Ephesians 3, the apostle speaks of the mystery or secret hid in God who created all things (v. 9) and the Father from whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named (v. 14), one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in us (or, you) all (Eph. 4:6). Thus it is not only life and incorruption which are now brought to light in Christ Jesus, but the highest and widest rights of God in His universal supremacy, universal providence, and yet the truest intimacy of relationship with His children, and them all. Now if God intended to communicate this as far as a type (only intelligible with the Antitype), where could it be fittingly introduced but here)? Truly God's ways are as marvellous as blessed; and His Word as here is the revelation of them, as also of His counsels and

nature. Of this rationalism is profoundly ignorant, and necessarily so because it is rationalism, and not faith.

The answer of the servant and the reply confirm the force of another and connected truth. “Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land: must I then bring thy son again to the land whence thou camest out? And Abraham said to him, Beware thou, that thou bring not again my son thither.” Here we see the utmost stress (and it is reiterated once more) laid on Isaac’s abiding in Canaan. There only must he be found; and he only of all the patriarchs. For as his father came out of Mesopotamia, so did he for a time go down into Egypt; and again his son Jacob returned to Mesopotamia, and also went down into Egypt, and died there. But Isaac alone must and did never leave the land of Canaan. In this he most strikingly represents Christ after He died, rose, and ascended; in which condition He becomes Head of the church, and the Bridegroom. He is emphatically the heavenly (δ επουράνιος). God makes Christians “heavenly,” not yet as a displayed fact (for we still bear the image of the man of dust), but as a spiritual title and reality, on which we are called to walk while in the world, but not of it as He was not. Compare Eph. 1:3-20; Eph. 2:6; Eph. 3:10; Eph. 4:8-16; Eph. 5:25-32; Eph. 6:12; also 1 Cor. 15:48, 49.

Hence Abraham continues, “Jehovah, the God of the heavens, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, To thy seed will I give this land; he will send his angel before thee; and thou shalt take thence a wife to my son. And if the woman be not willing to follow thee, then shalt thou be clear from this mine oath: only my son bring not again thither.” And so the

servant swore. The Head given to the church remains heavenly in the most exclusive terms and according to the most distinct and persistent purpose. And such is the clear and sure doctrine, which the apostle was the inspired vessel to communicate. It was a secret revealed (Eph. 3:6) to the holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; but Paul became minister of the church (Col. 1:25) according to the stewardship given him to complete the Word of God in this respect; as in fact no other writes of the church as he does. Christ is glorified in heaven to be the church's Head; and He is there only while the body is formed in the power of the Holy Spirit sent for this end. "As He is, so are we in this world." The Christian, the church, is called to manifest the mind of heaven on earth. But the ground of this is that we are already joined to the Lord, one spirit with Him who is on high. Thus it is that we characteristically know Him; no mote according to flesh, but dead, risen, and ascended (2 Cor. 5).

Here the shortcoming of Christendom through unbelief is all but universal, though in varying shape. Some are so dark as not to comprehend what answers to Hagar and her child expelled from the house of Abraham. The bondmaid covenant of Sinai is still their rule of life, though they deny not the birth of the true son and heir. Others advance no farther than the covenant of promise in Sarah and Isaac, though they see that the son of the bondmaid cannot be heir with the son of the free-woman. They believe in the atonement; but they have no right apprehension of the new place of the Son as dead, risen, and associated only with heaven. Yet this alone, as we have seen in the figure, gives the proper blessedness of the Christian in union with Christ, by virtue of the

Holy Spirit given to us on the ground of His sacrificial death, where He is, being Himself on high till He comes to take us to the Father's house. Hence as the heavenly relationship of the church is unknown as Christ's body and bride, as the truth of having died with Christ and being risen with Him and seated in Him in the heavenlies, is utterly vague and uninfluential, the door lies open to the rudiments of the world, as well as philosophy and the vain deceit of rationalism; hence the baptized set their mind like Jews or Gentiles on the things upon the earth instead of those above, where Christ sits at God's right hand. They are so ignorant of the power of Christ's resurrection and ascension, that they cannot read its wondrous fore- shadowing in the first book of the Old Testament. Thank God, they do not deny His death adumbrated in the sentence on Isaac, though only effected and forever efficacious in the cross of Christ. But they wholly fail to appropriate the new standing prefigured in Isaac risen and never quitting Canaan, while the bride is being called from the world to join him there.

Let us recall the beautiful conformity of the Acts of the Apostles, and of God's ways in this connection. After Christ went to heaven, Peter preached to the Jews in Solomon's porch, as recorded in Acts 3, and pointed out how the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob glorified His Servant Jesus whom they denied and slew. Yet did he assure them that, on their repentance and conversion, not only should their sins be blotted out but God would send Jesus who was fore-appointed for them, in order to bring in times of restoring all things as His prophets had ever declared. But the Jews sealed their unbelief; and thus the new covenant lapsed as far as the people were

concerned; and an apostle was called by the Lord in heaven to preach to the Gentiles and reveal the full heavenly place of the church, one with Christ above. This it is which is called “the mystery,” or secret hidden of old when God gave promises and prophecies. In the Epistles of Paul we have the mystery revealed as to Christ and as to the church.

Genesis 24:10-21

In the early verses we have the most specific directions laid down by the father for his son’s bride. Now we learn how faithful was “his servant, the elder of his house who ruled over all that he had,” in giving effect to his will. It is he who becomes the most prominent throughout the chapter till the bride joins the bridegroom. This is unmistakable typically. As surely as we behold the Father seeking a bride, the church of God for Christ His Son, all the while and only in the heavenlies, so do we recognize the sending and action of the Holy Spirit in this signally honoured and trusty servant. In fact his unstinted and unwavering subjection, so far from being a difficulty or objection, is what the type required. For just as the Son became bondman to do the Father’s will and secure His glory, so does the Holy Spirit subserve the Son as well as the Father. Thus we read in John 14-16 and other Scriptures. Take this one: “He shall not speak from himself; but whatsoever things he shall hear he will speak; and he will report to you things that are to come. He will glorify me: for he shall receive of mine and will report to you. All things that the Father hath are mine,” etc. For the Christian, for the church, we need and have the Holy Spirit as well as the Word. The Spirit given is our distinctive privilege and power.

“And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master and departed (now all the treasure of his master was under his hand); and he rose and went to Aram-naharaim [High land of the two rivers], to the city of Nahor. And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water, at evening time, at the time that women go out to draw [water]. And he said, Jehovah, God of my master Abraham, meet me, I pray thee, this day, and do kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, I stand by the fountain of water; and daughters of men of the city come out to draw water. And let it come to pass [that] the maiden, to whom I shall say, Let down, I pray thee, thy pitcher, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also, [be] she whom thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and hereby shall I know that thou hast done kindly to my master. And it came to pass before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah wife of Nahor, brother of Abraham, and her pitcher [she had] upon her shoulder. And the maiden was very fair to look on, a virgin, and no man had known her; and she went down to the fountain, and filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me sip, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher. And she said, Drink, my lord; and she hasted, and let down her pitcher on her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, Also for thy camels I will draw, until they have done drinking. And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw, and drew for all his camels. And the man wondered at her, holding his peace to know whether Jehovah prospered his way or not” (vv. 10-21).

How simply beautiful is the picture here presented of the walk by faith, not by sight or appearance, to which the church is called, and those who individually compose it! In no other part of Genesis, nay of the Old Testament, can one recall a scene so capable of foreshadowing it as what we have now before us. Dependent and confiding prayer characterizes it. So we find repeatedly in the Acts of the Apostles; even when not exactly “praying in the Holy Spirit,” we are encouraged in every thing to make our requests known to God. Compare Ananias in Acts 9:10- 17, and Paul in Acts 22:17-21; and that “free address,” which is the exact import of the word translated “prayer” in 1 Timothy 4:5. Christ come, and His work, bring us into the reality of what becomes us before God. Even if we were not so weak and ignorant as we have learned ourselves to be, how blessed to have God near and faithful in fully proved love, so that we may bring before Him “every thing” great or small! How dishonouring Him to trust in our wisdom or common sense! See too how the servant keeps before him and puts forward the promises to Abraham, the special relationship grace had already formed as a place for present need, and especially in what had been pressed as of the profoundest moment. Guidance of the Spirit is precious but guaranteed. As many as are led by God’s Spirit, these are sons of God. It was not a mere sign he asked as Gideon in Judges 6 and 7, but the very bridal person herself of whom he was in quest, not for himself, but for his master’s son. The honour and love of faith filled his heart.

Nor had he long to wait. “Before he had done speaking,” the maiden comes. Freely he had asked, boldly and minutely had he ventured to prescribe. But this

reckoning on Himself is most pleasing to God, if unbelief dares to deny it as presumptuous. It was really prayer of rare simplicity, of striking suitability, of entire confidence; and the immediateness of the answer anticipated the day when righteousness shall reign, and Jehovah will hear while His people are yet speaking. So it is now through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, when we have the new covenant in spirit if not in letter, and the Messiah not present, it is true in earthly power and glory, but known on high in a yet surpassing glory.

Accepting the answer, “the servant ran to meet” Rebekah. There was no hesitation but alacrity; for he knew whom he had believed, and laid before her what he had already asked of Abraham’s God, Jehovah. And Rebekah with no less alacrity responded graciously to his request uttered to her, and to that which he had said only to God in caring for “all his camels.” No wonder that he wondered at her, silently waiting for full assurance (as he was but the type of a greater Servant), whether Jehovah prospered his way or not. Even our Lord expressed fully His appreciation of the Syro-Phoenician woman’s faith, and wondered at the Gentile centurion’s, though it was His own grace which produced faith in both. The servant could and would not disguise from his heart that God had acted according to his heart’s desire for his master and his master’s son; and he looks for yet more to His own glory.

Genesis 24:22-29

There was astonishment in the servant’s mind at the immediate and punctual answer to his prayer. To call it unbelief is unwarranted. It is the picture of the Holy Spirit’s working in man, which never wrought so fully as

since redemption, and never will work so again while he is on the earth. But if the servant rightly felt the gravity of the oath taken of him by his master, and the delicacy of the task for his master's son, he was deeply and believingly impressed with the speedy fulfilment of all he had laid before Jehovah, his master's God. The first sight of her could not but impress him. Still more was he struck, when, running to meet her, and asking as he had been led, she simply and completely responded to his petition just spread before God. Even our Lord, perfect man as He alone was, "wondered" at the Gentile centurion's faith. If this expressed His delight, where not a particle of unbelief could be, we need not disparage the servant's "wondering" at her, when he received so marked and ready a token of favour on his mission, "remaining silent to know whether Jehovah made his journey prosperous or not." His action that follows is the best proof of his faith. "He that believeth shall not make haste"; and this absence of the haste, into which flesh rushes, is what really comes out in one content to take a single step at a time, as becomes man however blessed.

"And it came to pass, when the camels had done drinking, that the man took a gold ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets of ten [shekels] of gold, and said, Whose daughter [art] thou? tell me, I pray thee. Is there in thy father's house room for us to lodge in? And she said to him, I [am] daughter of Bethuel, son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor. And she said to him, [There is] both straw and much provender with us, and room to lodge in. And the man bowed down and paid worship to Jehovah, and said, Blessed [be] Jehovah, God of my master Abraham, who hath not withdrawn his

mercy and his truth from my master; I [being] in the way, Jehovah hath led me to the house of my master's brethren" (vv. 22-29).

What a testimony to "the riches of grace" we have here from the outset! Where in all the Bible do we find anything to compare with those precious gifts on such an occasion or at so early a stage of it? The Christian reader can read the counterpart in Ephesians 1. There as here we have purpose in the early verses, followed up by the boon of redemption in verse 7 — the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of God's grace, before the proper privileges of union with Christ are spoken of, or those peculiar gifts which He gave as ascended on high, the type of which we shall not fail to see later on. So, anticipating the gospel of God's grace, our Lord shows how the Father receives the returning prodigal: the best robe, a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet, and a feast of joy greater far to Him than to the son thus wondrously received or to any that shared the feast. The gospel accompanies but precedes the church; and the call of grace is marked variously in both. Can any with open or intelligent mind fail to trace in our chapter the divine design, which is the constant and unmistakable witness of inspired Scripture, and which makes it differ from every other book?

But in the history before us, how confirmatory was the maiden's reply to the enquiry of the servant! Truly dependent on God, he tries even the brightest concurrence of circumstances by the word which guided his way and defined his aim. This does not suit the self-confidence of man; but is it not the one path, the inalienable duty, of the saint? For we walk by faith, not by sight. The Holy Spirit, as He thus led the Lord Jesus

always and perfectly while here below, deigns now to conduct us after the same blessed pattern. What Rebekah said fell altogether and distinctly within the requirements of Abraham in the bride he sought for his son Isaac. No doubt her character even in this brief interview shone out in love and lowliness, in unaffected respect and readiest service, a meet daughter-in-law for Abraham, a pure and gentle wife for Isaac. Yet this was not everything that the servant sought, true to the interests of the son and to the words laid down by the father. “Whose daughter art thou?” Was she of Abraham’s kindred? Her answer was just what he sought, and she assures him and his retinue of a suitable reception.

This draws out another characteristic in the account. For the man bowed down and paid worship to Jehovah. Worship, worship in spirit and truth, distinguishes the Christian and the church. So the Lord told the Samaritan woman. The hour for it is come and now is. The true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and truth, in contrast with Jerusalem no less than the mountain of Gerizim. A people in the flesh, a worldly sanctuary, earthly priests, material sacrifices and offerings, are unacceptable. The Father seeks and has children. They are sons, not distant bondmen nor yet infants; but redeemed and with the Spirit of adoption they cry, Abba, Father. Nor is it less true of the church than of the individual; as we read in 1 Corinthians 14 where the Lord enjoins that all be with the spirit and with the understanding also, prayer, and singing, and blessing, and giving of thanks. For not literal circumcision is now of account; but we, Christians, are the circumcision, who worship by God’s Spirit, and boast

in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence or trust in flesh. Forms avail not, nothing but Christ, our life.

And the man said, for it is intelligent worship, “Blessed be Jehovah, God of my master Abraham, who hath not withdrawn from my master his mercy and his truth; I in the way, he hath led me to the house of my master’s brethren.” It is confiding and adoring acknowledgement of His faithful goodness. So in our case the Son of God is come and has given us an understanding to know Him that is True; and we are in Him that is True, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life; without which, and the Holy Spirit given now that He is gone, we could in no way rise to such worship. But what a wondrous prefiguration of it is the scene before us! It is just where it should be; nor is there a scene like it elsewhere.

Genesis 24:28-33

Hitherto we have seen the lovely prefiguration of the Father’s purpose in calling out of the world a bride for His Son. In this point how sedulously and solemnly the Son is kept from all direct relation with the world. He is seen in a heavenly position exclusively. Nor is less clear the place which is given to the chief servant of the house in executing this charge of entire devotedness, distinct dependence in the prayer of faith, and in ready attitude of worship. These are exactly the qualities looked for in, and suited to the operation of, the Spirit in Christ’s body and bride. As Rebekah at once and signally met this purpose from the first, we are now to learn how all that follows was furthered by grace to the same end.

“And the maiden ran and told her mother’s house according to these words. And Rebekah had a brother,

and his name [was] Laban; and Laban ran out to the man to the well. And it came to pass when he saw the ring and bracelets on his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spoke the man to me, that he came to the man, and behold, he was standing by the camels at the well. And he said, Come in, blessed of Jehovah: why standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for camels. And the man came into the house, and ungirded the camels; and he gave the camels straw and provender, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him. And there was set before him to eat; but he said, I will not eat until I have told my business. And he said, Speak on" (vv. 28-33).

The simple-hearted alacrity of Rebekah is here as apparent as her thoughtful courtesy and kindness before. Such should be the church, and the Christian now. Blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, are we not individually and collectively bound to reflect the grace of Him to whom we belong in His sovereign goodness? Freely we received; freely should we give. Far from us should be the proud forbidding independence of a Jew, the ever craving unsatisfied covetousness of a Gentile. Yet was the maiden quick to discern the signs of the crisis for her, and ran to tell "her mother's house." This was in keeping with propriety, even if her father were not throughout singularly in the background: so much so, that some have ventured to think that the name after Laban's (v. 50) may have been a younger brother rather than the father. Certain it is that Laban is the active leading man of the house from first to last. Here he ran out to the man by the well or fountain.

Nor is it a casual circumstance that we read of Laban's ready proffer of hospitality when he saw the ring and the bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard her report of what Abraham's envoy said to her. Forthwith he came to the man still standing by the camels at the fountain, and gave him a welcome in terms no less cordial than pious, as such characters are apt to say when sure of honour and advantage accruing. The history shows subsequently that Laban was an overreaching man and an idolater. We are compelled therefore to infer from the language here employed that the sight of the jewels given to his sister, and the man's words about his master, powerfully acted on one whose motives were far from unselfish. His salutation was winning however: "Come in, blessed of Jehovah: why standest thou without? for I have prepared the house and room for the camels. "

The remarkable procedure of Abraham's servant is what we have to notice for our edification. He came into the house, ungirded the camels, and had straw and provender given, with water to wash the feet of himself and those with him. But when meat was set before him, he refused to eat till he told his story. This is not at all in accordance with the usual way, especially in the East, and after so long a journey. His errand is all-absorbing. He would not allow his own ease, or the customs of men, to come first or make the way for what he had at heart. He was there for his master's sake. Word and oath bound him, as well as honour and love for his master's son. He would not even seem to let their interests be secondary. "I will not eat until I have told my business."

So it is most exclusively and in a way altogether worthy of the Father and the Son, that the Holy Spirit devotes

Himself to His quest and care of the Bride. We know that all things work together for good to those that love God, to those that are called according to purpose, as the apostle says in Romans 8. But what should be our confidence when we also know the divine Person of the Paraclete sent by the Father in the Son's name to teach us all things, and remind us of all that Christ said, the words that are spirit and are life, and many other things which could not be borne before redemption? What new and heavenly relationships, as of Christ's body and bride! What light of His heavenly glory! What announcement of the things to come! If the Saviour's meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him and to finish His work, the blessed Spirit of God is no less sedulous in speaking, not from Himself, but all that whatsoever He should hear; for He it is who here and now glorifies the Son.

Genesis 24:34-49

This portion is entirely devoted to his intervention whom the father sent to fetch a suited bride for the son and heir.

"And he said, I 1am] Abraham's servant. And Jehovah hath blessed my master greatly, and he is become great; and he hath given him sheep and cattle, and silver and gold, and bondmen and bondwomen, and camels and asses. And Sarah, my master's wife, bore a son to my master after she had grown old, and to him hath he given all that he hath. And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife for my son of the daughters of a Canaanite, in whose land I am dwelling; but thou shalt by all means go to my father's house and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son. And I said to

my master, Perhaps the woman will not follow me. And he said to me, Jehovah before whom I have walked will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way, that thou mayest take a wife for my son of my kindred and out of my father's house. Then shalt thou be quit of mine oath, when thou shalt be come to my kindred; and if they give thee not, thou shalt be quit of mine oath. And I came this day to the fountain, and said, Jehovah, God of my master Abraham, if now thou wilt prosper my way on which I go, behold, I stand by the fountain of water, and let it come to pass that the damsel who cometh forth to draw, and to whom I shall say, Give me I pray, a little water out of thy pitcher to drink, and she shall say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels — that she [shall] be the woman whom Jehovah hath appointed for my master's son. Before I ended speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder, and went down to the fountain, and drew; and I said to her, Give me, I pray thee to drink. And she hasted and let down her pitcher from her, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also. And I drank; and she gave the camels drink also. And I asked her and said, Whose daughter [art] thou? And she said, Bethuel's daughter (Nahor's son) whom Milcah bore to him. And I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her hands. And I bowed down and worshipped Jehovah, and blessed Jehovah, God of my master Abraham, who led me in a way of truth to take my master's brother's daughter for his son. And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me; and I will turn to the right hand or to the left" (vv. 34-49).

Is it not well to notice the immense place which Scripture gives to him who was sent from the father and the son to make good the purpose of finding and bringing back the chosen bride? Various types present the bride in Old Testament Scriptures. In the last book of Scripture (Rev. 19) the New Testament discloses her in her heavenly place before the millennium as the Lamb's wife and in the eternal state (Rev. 21:2), no less than as the holy Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God in her millennial relation to the nations and the kings of the earth (v. 9). We have the type of Eve with her admirable characteristics as Adam's counterpart at the beginning of this book, and at the end we have the wife Pharaoh gave to Joseph when exalted to administer the kingdom in his rejection by and separation from his brethren according to the flesh. So we see also in Moses (Ex. 2) before the time came for their deliverance from the king and land of Egypt. Jacob goes off himself and marries in a way wholly distinct in Haran, and through Laban's craft has another palmed on him before he received the Rachel of his heart, who in no way prefigures the church but Israel, Rachel weeping for her children, but with hope for her latter end. Sarah too not at all sets forth the calling of the bride, but the mother of the child of promise. Ruth again is a special figure, but not of the church any more than is the object of the king's love in the Song of Songs, the Psalms, or the Prophets.

Here is the unique figure of a bride not only called from a distant land in marked contrast with any woman of Canaanitish race, but by the extraordinary mission of the father's servant, the eldest of his house who ruled over all that he had, and with a most solemn pledge and

charge, quite unexampled in any other case. And we have already drawn attention to the place it fills, for which no other marriage in Scripture could furnish such a type as this. For it follows the death and resurrection of the son in the “parable” of Genesis 22 as well as the death of Sarah, the figure of the covenant of promise and liberty in contrast with her who is in bondage with her children. Yet even she, the free-woman, disappears to leave room for the bride who is here called.

Again, how striking is the fullness of interest which converges on the trusty servant, and his absorption in caring for the father and the son! We have the whole ground traversed again before the bride’s family, and bringing out purpose in the father for the son as nowhere else in this book or anywhere else of old, and devotedness most marked and exclusive on the part of him who was sent to effectuate it! Where is there an approach in another type of God’s Word to that personal presence and action of the Holy Spirit which distinguishes the church? The time, the place, the action, the personal interest, the grace in giving, the prominence assigned to prayer and worship, the absolute carrying out of the word or charge, are all in perfect keeping with that which it pleased God to represent here, and here only in the same fullness. Is this all, is any part of it, casual?

Examine the entire range of types (and there are not a few which bring out the object of Christ’s love for heaven); but where is one which so fully and distinctively presents her calling, as Rebekah does? Again, where, save here, have we closely connected with the bride the living representative of that other Advocate, who identifies Himself with the honour and

the interests of the Father and the Son, in effectively gaining the bride, then in guiding and guarding through the many trials and the imminent dangers of the desert, safely to join the Bridegroom? How admirably he pleads for those absent, whose envoy he was! As he lost not a moment in engaging the damsel's heart for his master's son, so he hears of no delay in telling his errand to those who might naturally detain, if they did not deny. No picture in other Scriptures is comparable with this if divinely intended, as we assuredly believe, to set forth, not merely efficient operation, but personal presence and care in the highest degree. And in no part of the Old Testament was this so requisite and significant as in the scene graphically put before us here.

Genesis 24:50-53

We may observe how Eliezer acts with the decision given by a single eye. Not only have we prayer in the Spirit, and worship; but there is a walk singularly devoted to the will and word of his master who sent him on this mission for his son. On this he is exclusively set. It was quite outside the world and its objects. Eliezer will not swerve from his errand; he allows no need of the body to interfere with its being the first object before him: to it all other claims must bend.

"And Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from Jehovah: we cannot speak to thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah [is] before thee: take [her], and go away; and let her be wife of thy master's son, as Jehovah hath said. And it came to pass, when Abraham's servant heard their words, that he bowed down to the earth before Jehovah. And the servant brought forth vessels of silver and vessels of gold, and clothing, and

gave [them] to Rebekah; he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things" (vv. 50-53).

It is just so for the church and the Christians. The Holy Spirit given and indwelling acts by the Father's will for the glory of Christ whose bride is the church, whose member is every Christian. He is a Spirit not of cowardice nor of indifference, but of power and of love and of a sound mind; above all He is given to be with us forever and in us to glorify Him who glorified the Father.

Is it objected that this is to confound the Holy Spirit with the church and the Christian? It is really scriptural truth, not confusion. The objection flows from failure to discern that it is of the essence of the Spirit's action to merge Himself as it were in the object He employs or abides in. Hence every good fruit, of which He is the source and power, is set to the object's account. Indeed the case is equally true of those possessed by evil spirits. Thus the two demoniacs in Matthew 8:29 cried out, saying, "What have we to do with thee, Son of God? Didst thou come here before the season to torment us?" Still clearer is this quasi-identification expressed in Mark 5:2, where, when asked his name, the chief of the two answers, "Legion is my name, because we are many." No less plainly does it appear in Luke 8:28, 29, where the possessed said, "I beseech thee torment me not"; and the evangelist continues: "For He had commanded the unclean spirit to go out from the man." Hence we see how profoundly correct it is in the history that Eliezer, typifying the Holy Spirit's action, should represent the church and the Christian also.

We can scarce fail to note too how God controls hearts as well as circumstances in pursuance of the design in

hand. It is not that difficulties or dangers were lacking. They were many and manifold, to exercise faith in Himself who in the face of contrary appearances knows all beforehand, and works all things according to the counsel of His own will. We have no reason to accredit the zeal of Laban and Bethuel for the divine glory; yet they fell in at once with what was set before them, confessing that the thing was of Jehovah which left them without a word to oppose. Their yielding at once, their recognition that Abraham's word was Jehovah's doing, drew out the fresh adoration of Eliezer.

Then follows the bestowal of proper bridal gifts of silver and of gold, with clothing, for Rebekah, as well as precious things for those connected with her. It will be found by those who investigate symbolic usage in Scripture (for example in the tabernacle's construction), that, as silver answers to divine grace, so does gold to divine righteousness. This certainly is plain in the Antitype of Ephesians 4 where to each one of us, it is said, was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men... And he gave some, apostles, and some, prophets, and some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints unto (or with a view to) work of ministering, unto edifying the body of Christ." Could any type be more appropriate in this place? Here only, where it was so needful to complete the picture, it is given with marked care. Never were given gifts so distinctly flowing from the grace of God in Christ, and based on God's righteousness.

The power of Christ's victory will be fully and in many other ways manifested in heaven and earth another day.

Meanwhile these gifts are the witness of His love to the Christian and to the church, delivered already from the enemy's power. He, the ascended Man, gave them to men; and this in virtue of His previous descent in humiliation the human victims of Satan's malice and of their own folly and sin. All is for the perfecting of the saints unto ministerial work and unto edifying Christ's body; all looks on to the bright future when Christ will present to Himself the church glorious, having no spot, wrinkle, or any of such things, but that it should be holy and unblemished.

Genesis 24:54-60

Very unusual in the type are the marks of a marriage altogether extraordinary in itself. After a long journey, and even without such a one, how strange to refuse to eat, before the errand was told! A distinguished commentator remarks that his story seems superfluous. Far from this, it was in perfect keeping with the business in hand: and every part of his narrative to the household conveyed grounds of the nearest interest and of the deepest moment.

If he was the father's servant and devoted to the son's honour, God in His covenant name was before his heart from first to last. He, Jehovah, it was who had so greatly blessed; He directed his master in the oath exacted to take no daughter of the Canaanites for the heir, only from his father's house and kindred. If election thus dominated, providential mercy would control hearts and circumstances, as indeed was apparent throughout. Prayer was thus stimulated and promptly answered. The desired maiden came before he ended speaking in his heart, met every test with grace proper to her, and

convincing to him that she was none other than the woman whom Jehovah appointed for his master's son. Her reply to his question about her parentage sealed the matter, so that he could not hesitate to bestow suited ornaments, and once more bowed down in worship of Jehovah. When they of the house acquiesced in its proceeding from Him and bade the man to take Rebekah to be Isaac's wife, again the servant bowed down to the earth before Jehovah, and the gifts flowed yet more to the bride in particular, but abundantly to all the rest also. It is a unique scene in itself and in what it thus appropriately foreshadows.

"And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and lodged. And they rose up in the morning; and he said, Send me away to my master. And her brother and her mother said, Let the maiden abide with us days, at least ten; after that she shall go. And he said to them, Hinder me not, seeing Jehovah hath prospered my way; send me away to go to my master. And they said, We will call the maiden, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah and said to her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go. And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, and said to her, Our sister, become thou thousands of tens of thousands; and may thy seed possess the gate of those that hate them!" (vv. 54-60).

Simple and fitting is the figure of communion with which this account opens: how strikingly is this too in keeping with the church's calling! Never in point of fact could there be full communion of saints till the deliverance came to Christians through the efficacious work of Christ and the new relationships founded on it. Hence

the picture given in Acts 2 from the day of Pentecost. “And they continued stedfastly in the teaching of the apostles, and the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers” (v. 42); “And day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they partook of food with gladness and simplicity of heart” (v. 46). In the Lord’s Supper, it was the communion of Christ’s body and blood; but it pervaded their new relationship even in the most ordinary things of earthly life. And no wonder; for as Christ was their life, so was the Holy Spirit power against the flesh, that faith and hope, peace and love, in active exercise might fill them with joy. Their associations were based on Christ come, and their crown was to be in His coming again.

He Himself so taught and set them. Compare Luke 12:21-38. Again, in the parable of the Ten Virgins we have the same principle modified by the Spirit’s special aim in the Gospel of Matthew. It is in the middle or Christendom section of our Lord’s great prophecy, the first part of which (Matt. 24:1-44) presents the future for the Jews to the end of the age, and the third (Matt. 25:31 ff.) that of the nations when the new age opens. Nor is it service in its corporate aspect as in the close of Matt. 24, or in variety of gift as in Matt. 25. It is the individual responsibility of the Christian, true or untrue; and its character is that thus, having taken their torches, they went forth to meet the bridegroom. For this nothing but the unction, the power of the Spirit, avails. The tarrying of the bridegroom became the test when all grew drowsy and slept. They all failed in the very aim which drew them out to Christ from every link of flesh or world. Where was their hope, if they no

longer went forth to meet Christ? When the cry at midnight awoke them, the prudent alone resumed the early and alone right attitude. For they only had oil in their vessels; and, being ready, they joined Him at His coming, whilst the foolish went in quest of what they never possessed. How could such as these wait for His coming? Only those who had oil in their vessels. Alas! all failed in watching for Him, all fell asleep. But only the prudent had the Spirit's power and presence — oil in their vessels. The foolish had barely the torches of profession without His sustaining energy, and must be thus unready when Christ comes.

Only we have to bear in mind that the exigencies of the parable required, not the bride, but the train of maidens prudent and foolish, so as to represent Christendom; as the type demanded not such a retinue but the bride. Rebekah becomes now the prominent figure, as is the trusty servant of the father and the son, who here puts aside the natural feelings of the family. His one thought is to fulfil his mission. They would have her abide awhile. He, the more he is prospered, will hear of the less delay. The bride has to decide the matter. "And they called Rebekah and said to her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." Her heart is made up.

So it is, so at least it ought to be, with her who is espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ; whom not having seen she loves, on whom, not now looking but believing, she exults with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of faith, soul-salvation. What is country or kin or father's house, or all other objects combined in comparison with her Bridegroom? What could she say but "I will go"? She falls in with Eliezer's zeal. This report was answered by her faith, hope, and

love. Unhesitating decision was the result. She goes forth to meet the bridegroom; and the faithful servant who had won her heart to Isaac, continues his care, and guides her across the desert. “And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham’s servant and his men,” with abundant blessings, short as they might be of her real position. But the picture is unmistakable. It is the bride, delivered out of the present evil age according to the will of God our Father, to belong to Him who is in heaven, soon to join Him there, typified by the elect maiden who sets out on her pilgrim journey to meet the one to whom she is betrothed.

The Meeting and the Marriage - Genesis 24:61-67

How can one be surprised that the Holy Spirit dwells on circumstances such as those we have considered, if they prefigured the call of the bride the Lamb’s wife? It is ever and justly a matter of the utmost spiritual interest for all but the thoughtless. What could this be to God if meant to typify the consummation of His Son’s love to the church? What of wonder, love, and joy did He not intend for us who read it in the communion with His mind and His grace which faith gives to those so directly and deeply concerned? Here it is pursued to the close.

“And Rebekah arose, and her maids, and they rode upon the camels and followed the man; and the servant took Rebekah and went away. And Isaac had just come from Beer-la-hai-roi; for he was dwelling in the south country. And Isaac had gone out to meditate in the field, toward the beginning of evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and, behold, camels were coming. And Rebekah

lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac, and she lighted off the camel. And she said to the servant, Who [is] the man that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant said, That is my master; and she took the veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. And Isaac led her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. And Isaac was comforted after his mother ['s death]" (vv. 61-67).

Rebekah thus far answers more clearly than any other in Scripture to the requisite type of the church; as Isaac we have seen to set forth in parable (according to the Epistle of the Hebrews 11: 19) the Son risen from the dead, as the Head of the church is and must be. This last section of the chapter carries out the analogy no less than all the rest. Her decision was simple and true. As the servant urged immediateness of departure, so notwithstanding every otherwise strong tie of natural affection, the bride was no less unhesitating: "I will go." There was a most unusual distance that separated, a long journey to be undertaken, dangers of many kinds to be faced, deserts to be crossed; and she was a young maiden under the guidance of one entirely new to her, with no face familiar along the road but of her damsels.

"And Rebekah arose, and her maids, and they rode upon the camels and followed the man; and the servant took Rebekah and went away." What simple faith, and confidence in love, and hope abounding in her breast! There is no such combination of becoming affections in any bride that one could name among the many we read of in the entire Old Testament circle. Dependence on her conductor along the dreary way was what sustained her heart, looking on to him who was about to bring her into

the enjoyment of the most endearing of all relationships. What ample and reliable reports the wise and trusty servant, we may and must assume, told her to wean her mind from looking back on her old home and fill her with worthy expectation of such a father and such a son as awaited her!

It is just so that the Holy Spirit deigns to form our renewed souls with the love of Christ, the grace of His life and His death, the glory that was His eternally as a divine Person, and His present exaltation as the risen Man and Head to the church over all things, His coming manifestation in glory when he will make good His title and subject all things even to Him, having abolished all rule and all authority and power, but never changing in that purpose or the nearness of love He has for His bride.

“And Isaac had just come from Beer-la-hai-roi; for he was dwelling in the south country,” the Negev. It was Canaan, but that southern district of it which borders on the adjacent wilderness. There he went out to meditate in the field at the eventide. One cannot doubt what occupied the thoughts of the gentle, calm, contemplative spirit. “And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and, behold, camels were coming.”

But another also was quick to perceive as they neared the land of promise. For “Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. And she said (or, had said) to the servant, Who is this man that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant said, That is my master; and she took the veil and covered herself.”

Yes, the Bridegroom is coming! and the Spirit crying, Come ye forth to meet Him. It is good to work for Him; it is better far to wait for Him; nor is there any more needed guard or more precious guide and spring for us in the Spirit for our work than this blessed hope. We require it in a world of seduction on one side, and of destruction on the other, for purifying ourselves as He is pure; we require it even with consecrated and heavenly affection, however truly we believe on Him and His love, and ourselves love Him. Nothing can make up for this hope if it be lacking or even feeble. “I am jealous over you,” said the apostle, “with a jealousy of God; for I espoused you to one husband that I might present you a chaste virgin to Christ.”

Rebekah covered herself with her veil; and the instinct should be sure to be for Him only. Thus shall all else be the truer and holier. And our Bridegroom has no such need to hear like Isaac what the servant had to tell; yet He in the communion of the Holy Spirit, one doubts not, takes all interest in her whom He loved as His own for heaven. He had His sorrows over the present death of Israel; but He even had hope in her end, if it be not rather her real beginning. But He loved the church, for which He gave Himself and will present her to Himself glorious.

Isaac the Heir - Genesis 25:1-6

We may not now meditate on all this closing scene of Abraham’s life, for we are occupied with Isaac. Yet it presents not a little of interest in itself, and in its bearing on eastern races who are to play their part in the glorious days of the future kingdom as they have in the past. Whatever tradition says otherwise, Keturah

was not a bondmaid like Hagar, nor was she mother of the promised seed, but of six sons born to the father of the faithful.

“And Abraham took another wife, and her name [was] Keturah. And she bore him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah. And Jokshan begot Sheba and Dedan; and Dedan’s sons were Asshurim and Letushim and Leummim; and Midian’s sons, Ephah and Epher and Enoch and Abidah and Eldaah: all these [were] Keturah’s sons. And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac; and to the sons of the concubines that Abraham had Abraham gave gifts, and, while he yet lived, sent them away from Isaac his son, eastward to the east country” (vv. 1-6)

To none was Abraham indifferent, nor the God of Abraham who will remember them in the coming era of earth’s joy and blessedness. But Isaac has a place altogether distinctive. To the rest Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, to whom he “gave all that he had.”

Thus Isaac stands before us typically as the manifest heir of all things (Heb. 1:2). This title, of course, belongs only in its full sense to Jesus the Son of God. As the Creator of all, it is meet that He should inherit all (Heb. 1); and through redemption and purchase (Heb. 2) He will take all in the day of displayed glory, as the exalted Son of man. He who humbled Himself as none else ever could is beyond all crowned with glory and honour: though now given, we do not yet see all things put under Him. But unseen of man He has already this supremacy in place and title according to Psalm 8:6 (7) thrice referred to in the New Testament; a supremacy so

universal that He only is excepted who subjected all things to Him. God left nothing unsubjected to Christ, as attested by His actual seat on the throne of God, the Father's throne. But this is quite distinct from the intimation of Psalm 110:2, etc. when the Lord will reign on His own throne and actively subjugate all the enemies whom Jehovah will have made His footstool. For the Lord it is who shall rule in the midst of His enemies and strike through kings in the day of His wrath. It is an evident contrast with all He is doing now at the right hand of the Majesty on high, where till that day He sits during this day of salvation by grace.

It is seasonable to recall here the specific use in the Epistles made of the citation from Psalm 8, where the glorious result of the Son of man's humiliation, announced there for Israel's instruction and joy, is set in the full light of God's final revelation. 1 Corinthians 15 fixes the time and the condition. It is when not only Christ is raised from the dead, but they that are Christ's at His coming. The resurrection of the saints precedes the kingdom there described as dealing with all the enemies, even to annulling death, last enemy though it be. It is the proper work of the risen Man, who when all things shall have been actually subjected to Him, will Himself be subjected to Him that subjected all things to Him, giving up the kingdom to Him that is God and Father, that God [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] may be all in all.

In Ephesians 1:22 the same words are applied to Christ in His present exaltation as given to be Head over all things to the church which is His body. It is not here the risen Man, with those raised at His coming that are His, reigning to the subduing of the last foe, but the mystery

about Christ and about the church, the mystery in unique greatness of Christ set over all things heavenly and earthly, and the church united to Him in that supremacy after the nearest sort, He the Head, she the body.

Hebrews 2:5-9 completes the divine picture. Here the words from Psalm 8 are again employed to show that the glorification of the Lord Jesus is the pledge of their future fulfilment as a whole, when all things shall be seen put under Him. Also the habitable earth to come is not for angels to reign over. All the universe will be put under the Son of man, as surely as we see Him already crowned.

Thus we have in the last Scripture the blessed fact on which Christianity depends that the once-suffering Son of man is exalted to the highest seat in heavenly glory, the assuring proof that in due time all things shall be seen, as they are not yet seen, to be put under Him. Next, the intermediate Scripture lets us know that meanwhile the church is made one with Him, as the body with its Head, sharing His exaltation over all things. Hence the delay; because, as we are all aware, the body is being now formed while He is seated and waiting in the heavens. The first Scripture accordingly explains that at His coming we shall be raised and like Him, in order to join the risen Lord in reigning with Him over all things, when He undertakes to reduce to subjection all the enemies which are made His footstool. For He will not reign alone. He, the Heir of all things, has joint-heirs; as it is written in Romans 8, the Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God; and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and joint- heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with

Him, that we may be glorified together with Him. For as Hebrews 10:12, 13 shows, after having offered one sacrifice for sins, He in perpetuity sat down on God's right hand, from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made a footstool of His feet. Having suffered all and done all for His friends, He will then trample down His foes, while His own reign with Him in glory.

Abraham Dead, and Isaac Blessed - Genesis 25:7-11

We have seen the death of Sarah followed by the call of the bride. It was no longer to be "our mother," free as she was, but the type of the church, the Lamb's wife. The dead and risen Heir of all things has a spouse called out from the world and brought into that which figures the heavenlies. The mystery or secret is great, says the apostle, "but I speak as to Christ, and as to the church," its two parts. Though the grace and the glory were intrinsically His only, yet are we called all the more to rejoice; for we delight that the worth is His alone, and this gives all our security to God's glory.

Now we have another weighty and honoured link of the past removed.

"And these [are the] days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, a hundred years and seventy years and five years. And Abraham expired and died in a good old age, an old man and full, and was gathered to his people. And Isaac and Ishmael, his sons, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in Ephron's field, son of Zohar the Hittite, which [is] before Mamre, the field which Abraham bought of the sons of Heth: there was buried Abraham, and Sarah his wife. And it came to pass after

Abraham's death that God blessed Isaac his son; and Isaac dwelt at Beer-la-hai-roi" (vv. 7-11).

Here it is, the depository of promise who departs this life. For many years what had there been of divine moment to record? He was given, comparatively long before, a great place in sending his servant, honoured and trusted in the highest degree, to call and conduct the God-appointed bride for his son. And the son was not only in a new standing since the day of Moriah but exclusively associated with the heavenly land. Promise now, like covenant before, fades away before the brighter light of the mystery and its special relationship. The progenitors of many nations who had Abraham as their father as to the flesh were born, owned, given suitable gifts, and while he lived sent away, that Isaac might abide the undisputed heir of all that he had. Now in a good old age, Abraham too must expire and die. The new things were to receive their honour without a rival.

Little is said of Abraham's funeral, save to mark the link with Sarah's grave, of which the Holy Spirit made so much in Genesis 23. It had its just place for loving remembrance. Faith looks onward to the true hope for "the elders" also. It is the resurrection from out of the dead, which will be the portion of all the righteous departed. Groundless is the unbelief which imagined them in gloom, insensibility, or any other lack, unworthy of His grace who watched in love over their feeble pilgrimage for His name here below. The love of Him who in due time became flesh and died for their sins and ascended on high in resurrection life was no transient thing but eternal. Still their resurrection at His coming, so as to be not only with Him but like Him where He is, will be a blessed accession for them as well as for Him

to God's praise; and for this they wait in assured hope and full of glory.

As things were, there could be no spiritual sympathy between Isaac and the others who boasted to be of Abraham's seed. But it is here told us that "Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah," in the field Abraham had purchased of Ephron, where Sarah lay already. The son of the bondmaid was in no way forbidden thus to honour his parent. "Cast out" he must be and was in presence of the child of promise; yet fleshly relationship has its place, and the son of the free in no way disputes it, but is gracious. The feelings of the two before God may have been as widely different as spirit and flesh, by which they were respectively characterized; but there at least around the grave they were together in the sorrow of bereavement, and in loving memory of him who was gathered to his people, "the friend of God."

The conclusion of the statement here vouchsafed is that after this God blessed Isaac, the son of the deceased patriarch; and that he dwelt at Beer-la-hai-roi, the well of the living one that seeth me. Thus Isaac left alone (of the fellow-heirs before him of the same promise) has this marked distinction — God blessing him: a precious reality in a world of curse through sin; and this not in the general form which was extended to those that sprang from Abraham, but as the heir. But there is the remarkable fact noted that he dwelt at the spot first designated by a fountain of water in the wilderness, where Hagar was found of Jehovah's angel, who told her of Ishmael's birth and singular destiny. Indeed He is a God that sees, as surely as He lives. But how different the path which awaited Ishmael and Isaac! Here Jehovah

heard Hagar's affliction; here God blessed Isaac, already blessed on a still higher plane and with better blessings in hope.

The Generations of Ishmael - Genesis 25:12-18

In Scripture family connection is noticed by the Holy Spirit according to the well known principle stated by the apostle (1 Cor. 15:46): not first that which is spiritual, but that which is natural. As we have had the progeny sprung from Keturah, and Isaac in his distinct place, so now we have the sons of Ishmael before the line of promise.

"And these [are] Ishmael's generations, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's bondwoman, bore to Abraham. And these [are] the names of Ishmael's sons by their names according to their generations: Ishmael's firstborn, Nebaioth, and Kedar and Adbeel and Mibsam and Mishma and Dumah and Massa, Hadar and Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. These [are] Ishmael's sons, and these their names in their villages and in their encampments, twelve princes according to their peoples. And these [are] the years of the life of Ishmael, a hundred and thirty and seven years; and he expired and died, and was gathered to his people. And they dwelt from Havilah to Shur which [is] before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria. He settled (or, died, lit. fell) before all his brethren" (vv. 12-18), or, it may be, "to the east of all his brethren."

Flesh has its privileges speedily. Already was the beginning of what Jehovah's angel prepared Hagar to expect, "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly that it shall not be numbered for multitude." Jehovah hearkened to her affliction, and could not forget Abraham. Ishmael

was to be a wild-ass man, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him and he should dwell before or in face of all his brethren (Gen. 16:10-12). This too, as we may easily find out, has been precisely fulfilled from the beginning till now. But yet more minutely as a proximate fact, the pledge of all to follow, in Genesis 17 had God said, "For Ishmael I have heard thee: behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful, and will very greatly multiply him. Twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation" (v. 20). So it was now. They are enumerated in their order, as later (Gen. 28:9) we read of Ishmael's daughter Mahalath, Nebaioth's sister, whom Esau took to wife, besides those of Canaan.

Scripture clearly shows us the government of God providentially, and outside His covenant, in the same books which reveal the dealings of His electing grace. Nor is it the Jews only who are prone to overlook it. Unbelief rises up against God in this as in all else. Yet His Word abides worthy of all trust to whatever it applies. No more graphic a sketch was ever drawn than is given of Ishmael's posterity in the words cited. "Who hath sent out the wild-ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the onager? whose house I have made the wilderness, and the salt land his dwelling-place. He scorneth the tumult of the city, neither heareth he the shoutings of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth for every green thing" (Job 39:5-8). Such exactly are the Bedouins. No sober Christian supposes a perpetual miracle as to Ishmael, but that what God said of that race is as sure as what He said of Israel, no less than of Babylon, Medo-Persia, the Greek power, or the Roman.

No sceptical ingenuity then avails to shake the certainty that Ishmael's singular lot stands revealed from early days. The meaning of Genesis 16:12 is as plain as it is striking, and as applicable today as for thousands of years past. This is not true of any other notable people. Compare the Egyptians, the Assyrians, or the Israelites: what differing changes have they not each and all experienced? How little if at all has the Bedouin altered? Cushites have settled here or there in Arabia, or passed across the Arabic gulf to the opposite coast of Africa. Joktanites in varied lines may still abide, especially in the South and the West; but their characteristics are by no means akin. The stamp of Ishmael is unmistakable in the North and East, as well as elsewhere; and the wild-ass marks him indelibly now as of old. Exceptions there may have been in the long tract of ages that have elapsed, but mostly affecting the nomad Arabs, in Yemen far more than where they pitched their tents, but also as to Mecca and Medina; as well as for awhile in the North. But these seizures are allowed to have been temporary and local. "The body of the nation has escaped the yoke of the most powerful monarchies; the arms of Sesostris and Cyrus, of Pompey and Trajan, could never achieve the conquest of Arabia; the present sovereign of the Turks may exercise a shadow of jurisdiction, but his pride is reduced to solicit the friendship of a people, which it is dangerous to provoke and fruitless to attack."

It is easy to say that the obvious causes of their freedom are inscribed on the character and country of the Arabs. But God only could and did reveal their course from their earliest progenitor. The same unbelief which attributes Christianity to natural causes seeks to explain away the interest God felt about Abraham's offspring,

even outside His covenant, and His expression of it in His Word. The believer enjoys His communications and is grateful to the enlargement of heart and mind, as unbelief reaps darkness increasingly and death. It is good to own Him, who is not only the Highest and only true God, but our Father in that gift of His love, His written Word: whatever be its subject matter, it is worthy of Himself. And if in the Old Testament He speaks of outward things and His moral government, are we not to appreciate His condescension?

The Generations of Isaac - Genesis 25:19-26

As we have had occasion to remark in Scripture, the Spirit briefly notices the fleshly claim before giving us what is of grace: not first the spiritual but the natural; afterward the spiritual. We have had Ishmael's generations of much and speedy show; now we hear of Isaac's.

"And these [are] the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham begot Isaac. And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan-Aram, sister of Laban the Syrian. And Isaac entreated Jehovah for his wife, because she [was] barren; and Jehovah was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If so, why [am] I thus (or, do I live?)? And she went to enquire of Jehovah. And Jehovah said to her, Two nations [are] in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from they bowels; and [one] people shall be stronger than [the other] people; and the elder shall serve the younger. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, twins [were] in her womb. And the first came out red all over like a hairy

garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out; and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob; and Isaac [was] sixty years old when she bore them" (vv. 19-26).

It is of God that faith should be tried. The promise is sure; but the believer has to wait for it. Ishmael can boast of his twelve sons, with names soon notable by their villages, if not "towns," and by their encampments, if not castles. Isaac mourned for a mother beloved, and had not a wife provided for him, till he was forty years old. Even then he abides childless some twenty years. "And Isaac entreated Jehovah for his wife, because she was barren; and Jehovah was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived." As Abraham knew that "in Isaac should his seed be called," yet staggered not at God's call to offer him up for a burnt-offering, assured that this very Isaac would be given back to him and continue the line of blessing, so Isaac had His Word securing the call inalienably in himself, the type of the promised Seed on whom all hangs. It was grace; but grace revealed the channel through which the blessing was to flow, and this drew out his prayers, while patience had its perfect work. Isaac therefore entreated Jehovah, and Jehovah was entreated of Isaac. The trial of his faith was far from being so searching as Abraham's. It was suited to each in divine wisdom. Strong faith shone in the father, gracious dependence in the son, to the praise of God in the blessing of both.

We may notice too that Isaac and Rebekah were kept from the snare that involved Abraham and especially Sarah in the grief which impatience brought into their home. In Rebekah's case there was no thought of building up the desired heir to Isaac by a concubine; nor

did he on his part look to so fleshly a device. Conjugal faithfulness and purity in the main characterized the pair. They hoped for the promised boon which for so long they saw not; but with patience they waited for it, and not in vain. Isaac did not faint, but besought Jehovah according to His promise, and he was heard in due time.

There were to be twins. And the children gave anticipative token to their mother, as we are told, for her trial, so that she too went to enquire of Jehovah. Who can overlook the propriety with which the name of covenant relationship is here employed? All intrinsic value is lost by the supposition that it is due to an accidental occurrence of that designation; it is really divine purpose clothing the account with the title of moral government. Nor is there any ground to fancy that she consulted Melchizedek or journeyed to Moriah. Without either she knew where to find Jehovah and how to enquire of Him. Her faith might be weak, but it was real, and without superstitious dependence on any man or place.

Here was Jehovah's answer (v. 23): "Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and people shall be stronger than people; and the elder shall serve the younger." Predestination as to their history on earth is manifest here. It is made all the more striking because the babes yet unborn were of the same mother as well as father, nay twins. So it is that the apostle in Romans 9:10-12 deduces the truth intended. "But Rebekah also having conceived by one, Isaac our father, (for [the children] being not yet born, nor having done anything good or worthless, that the purpose of God according to election might abide, not of

works, but of him that calleth) it was said to her, The elder shall serve the younger." Divine sovereignty was thus shown to be as free as it is certain to faith. Fleshly descent on which the Jews founded their exclusive title is disproved; expressly and assuredly of Esau. For here flesh is excluded most distinctly, and the title is drawn from Jehovah's sovereign pleasure. His word made it all the more pointed by declaring that "the elder should serve the younger," and this in view of their future nations respectively.

The details of fact follow. Esau appeared first, full of evident vigour; Jacob afterward, with his hand holding Esau's heel, which gave his name of supplanter before he had power with God. But it is meet, whatever appearances say, that God should have His way, not man; and if man resists, it is to his own sorrow, shame, and ruin. We perhaps may say of Jacob, that God placed more abundant honour on that which lacked. Is our eye evil because His is good?

The Sons, Esau and Jacob - Genesis 25:27-34

Now the difference in life and manners in the two sons was an issue of deep moment for each, and a warning for every reader who needs God's grace.

"And the boys grew; and Esau became a man skilful in hunting, a man of the field, and Jacob an upright man dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau because venison was to his taste (or, in his mouth), and Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob boiled a dish (or, boiling), and Esau came in from the field, and he [was] faint. And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, pray, with the red — the red thing there, for I [am] faint. Therefore they called his name Edom. And Jacob said, Sell today thy birthright to me?

And Esau said, Behold, I am going to die, and what [is] this birthright to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me today, and he swore to him; and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave to Esau bread and the dish of lentils; and he ate and drank and rose up and went away: thus Esau despised the birthright" (vv. 27-34).

As the boys grew, it became plain that Esau had no faith, and that Jacob had. The life, far more truly than the lips, indicated where the heart turned and where the treasure lay. Of those from whom they sprang, it is written that "all of these died in faith," or according to faith. They had not received the things prescribed; from afar they saw and saluted them, confessing thereby that they were strangers and sojourners on the earth (or land), of which dwelling in tents was an express token (Heb. 11:9, 13). It was not so with Esau. He had no relish for the believing and expectant posture of the patriarchs. He threw off all the lessons inculcated by the life and confession of his father and his grandfather. Nimrod was his prototype, not Abraham; still less was He the Object, who shone before the eyes of all the elders that obtained testimony in the power of faith. He chose and gave himself up to the exciting pursuits of the chase; he became a man skilled in hunting, a man of the field. He was bent on visible and present gratification, finding his pleasure in its vicissitudes, in its demand on craft and resources of every kind, and even in its occasional dangers as well as its successes. As with that rebel whom he thus far emulated, God was not in any of his thoughts. What cared he for that bright expectation of victory over the power of evil, through One more than man who should nevertheless come of woman and taste of the sharpest suffering though triumphant? The

unseen was nothing to Esau, whose heart was filled with his own things of every day, catching and killing the animals without reason.

Jacob, on the other hand, could be described as an upright man dwelling in tents. He was an heir, with Isaac and with Abraham, of the same promise. The like faith produced like fruit. He waited for the city that has the foundations, beyond all that earth can furnish, of which God is artificer and master-maker, or demiurge. He had not a little to watch and contend against in his natural ways; but he looked beyond present scenes and so was kept from living according to motives of self-will with no object above the earth. His walk was feeble compared with Abraham, and chequered compared with Isaac. Still he could say ere he departed that God tended him all his life long, and that His Angel redeemed him from all evil. Esau could not and did not speak of any such shepherd care, of which he never felt the need and would have been ashamed. The earth as it is was his one field of enjoyment, and its wild creatures the object of his skilled toils. The future of divine glory was no more to his heart than a dream that is told. But Jacob, faulty as he was, did prove the watchful and gracious care of God now, and wait for “that day.” It is this only which gives integrity before God, without which “dwelling in tents” had been no more than to the Bedouin; but with him it was the mark of his pilgrim character and hopes.

Alas! The faults of children often betray the carelessness or worse of their parents. Partialities, as in verse 29, may be natural; but they bring inevitable chastening. A parent on the one hand may like a character the most distant from his own, as we see here Isaac did; or there may be preference given to one that resembles, as

appears in Rebekah. They had been more blessed and more a blessing, if they had commanded their children with vigilant love in faith, as Jehovah said of Abraham in Genesis 18:19. Here the inspiring Spirit had a humbling tale to tell, as we learn the retribution in God's moral government.

Passing hunger led to the gravest results. Jacob sod a pottage of lentils the day when Esau returned faint and famished (v. 29). This gave the occasion. Jacob earnestly sought that title which to his forefathers and his descendants was bound up with blessing; and he knew that his brother had no such value for it. He therefore availed himself of Esau's need to strike the bargain. "Feed me, pray, with the red, that there," said the spent hunter. "Sell me today thy birthright," eagerly replied the unbelieving believer.

Thus Esau, ever open to the present, agreed and swore to it (vv. 30-33).

"And Jacob gave Esau bread and the pottage (or, dish) of lentils; and he ate and drank and rose up and went his way," with the simple and solemn comment, "Thus Esau despised his birthright."

No doubt, the edge of his appetite was keen, and the dish before his eyes was tempting to the hungry hunter. But had he no father that loved him, no mother to pity and provide? Blame Jacob as you will for seizing the opportunity for what he valued if Esau did not. And this was now evident: no hunger and thirst for him an hour longer. "That red there" he must have at once, cost what it might. Let others be for Christ's sake "in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings, in cold and nakedness." What was that to one who lived only to

please himself? He could not fast another hour. “Behold, I am going to die, and what is this birthright to me?”

Ishmael, the bondservant’s son, was evil enough. Born of the flesh only, he persecuted him that was born after the Spirit; he mocked the son and heir of Abraham born under circumstances which pointed to God’s intervention for all who believe. But Esau was all the more guilty because according to prayer and prophecy he was born of the heir of promise, with whatever of advantage over Jacob that an earlier birth could give. Was not he equally with Jacob brought up in the familiar sound of God’s word and ways as far as this is known? But tried in a way which to a hunter should have been comparatively light, and with resources at hand which never had failed, and which it would be monstrous to conceive could fail his urgent need, he deliberately sold his own birthright “for one meal” (Heb. 12:16), and thus incurred from the Holy Spirit the awful stigma of a “profane person.”

Jehovah Appears to Isaac - Genesis 26:1-5

The chapter opens with the account of Isaac tried by “famine in the land,” as Abraham had been a hundred years before. It was meant to put faith to the proof passingly, as the Canaanite then in the land tried it permanently. But well did father and son know that the time had not arrived for possession. For this the object of their hope must come in power; and the prospect of Christ’s day, we may be assured, filled the heart of Isaac with joy, as we are expressly told of Abraham (John. 8:56). Meanwhile they were content to dwell in the land of promise, as not their own, looking for the coming glory, not on earth only but in heaven too. Here

therefore they bowed to whatever tribulation God might send. We shall see, however, distinctions as interesting as they are instructive.

“And there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine which was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines to Gerar. And Jehovah appeared to him and said, Go not down to Egypt: dwell in the land that I shall tell thee of. Sojourn in this land; and I will be with thee and bless thee; for to thee and to thy seed I will give all these lands; and I will establish the oath which I swore to Abraham thy father. And I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and to thy seed I will give all these lands; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (vv. 1-5).

Here we have Isaac’s distinctive trial of faith. Abraham was called to get out of his land and from his kindred and from his father’s house to the land that Jehovah would show him, as He did. But Isaac was charged not to leave, but to sojourn in that land. This had its own difficulties, which grace does not spare. Blessed is the man that endures temptation or trial; for having been proved, he shall receive the crown of life which He promised to those that love Him, and meanwhile the proving of our faith works patience. Isaac accordingly, expressly forbidden by Jehovah, did not go down into Egypt even under the pressure of famine in the land. Abraham, as we know, did go; but there he dishonoured Jehovah, his wife, and himself, however rich he became in consequence.

Personally Abraham was a man of faith far more thoroughly than his son. And the son was forbidden where no interdict was laid on the father. Isaac was called, whatever it might cost, to abide in the land, and not go down to Egypt. The land, as all know, typifies heavenly places, as he does Christ, dead, risen, and in heaven, though the Philistines were there as yet uncleared.

This is the trial now. If we have been given to know that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, our responsibility is to walk worthily of the call wherewith we were called with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. It is in this very association that we are prepared to face the sharpest trial. We must expect to be visited by every wind of the teaching which is in the trickery of men, in craft for the systematizing of error; but we are exhorted to be truthful in love and grow up unto Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ. Our conflict is not against blood and flesh, like Israel in their day, but against principalities, against authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies. For this reason we need to take to us the panoply of God; and withal we need to pray at all seasons with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching “hereunto with all perseverance. Our exposure is all the more because our blessing is of the highest: just as Isaac was the object of incomparable favour then, and called to abide where he was.

So are the saints now. What can match their revealed and blessed relationship? Is it possible to conceive

greater privileges? Nothing is easier than to despise the pleasant land, and to cast longing eyes on Egypt. There flourish the resources of the world, the incentives to flesh, the pleasures of sin for a season. In the land such attractions are not; there was a famine as to all that feeds nature. But the word to those whose blessing lay in Canaan is, Go not down to Egypt: dwell in the land that I will tell thee of. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee and bless thee.

We are diligently to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as also we were called in one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in us all. Far beyond the oath to Abraham is our security, far beyond the lands of Israel or earth is our inheritance, though we rest on the same One who is the Seed of blessing for them and all the nations; and we boast a Father infinitely above their father Abraham.

Isaac in Gerar - Genesis 26:6-11

What candour is in Scripture! How truly divine! Isaac was saved from going down into Egypt, whither famine had driven his father. He was guided so as to be a suited type of Him who is now for us only in heaven. But he sinned in Gerar, as Abraham sinned before him. This ought to have been to him a solemn admonition, if he had remembered it as he ought in God’s presence. Out of it the failure of one we love becomes a snare to repeat it, and it may be an excuse as not pretending to be better.

“And Isaac dwelt in Gerar. And the men of the place asked him about his wife. And he said, She [is] my sister;

for he feared to say, My wife, lest the men of the place slay me on account of Rebekah; because she was fair in countenance. And it came to pass when he had been there some time, that Abimelech, king of the Philistines, looked out of the window and saw, and, behold, Isaac [was] sporting with Rebekah his wife. And Abimelech called Isaac and said, Behold, she [is] certainly thy wife; and how saidst thou, She [is] my sister? And Isaac said to him, Because I said, Lest I die for her. And Abimelech said, What [is] this thou has done to us? Lightly might one of the people have lain with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought on us a trespass. And Abimelech charged all the people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely (dying) be put to death" (vv. 6-11).

For the Christian it is the sure proof of a low and earthly state of soul to palliate a lie by toning it down to "incorrect speech." One thus panders to the world's code of honour, where the truth is unknown, and an impeachment of veracity, however certain, demands wiping out with blood. Still more deplorable is the delusion which plays into the enemy's hand, as if no saint can be guilty of lying. Even the New Testament warns of the danger in Epistles such as those to the saints in Ephesus and Colosse, which treat of the highest privileges of the church. "Wherefore putting away falsehood, speak ye truth each with his neighbour; for we are members one of another." "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." The repeated warning proves how readily it might be even among the best taught. Only ignorance or worldliness could think otherwise. In fact it is recorded

for our admonition that such was the first sin after the great Pentecost.

But it is intolerable to compare or class with lying any mistakes of inadvertency or hearsay, particularly when there is care to correct them after the facts are better known. The essence of lying is the wish to deceive, whatever the motive; which may be to exalt self or to injure another, to evade through fear or to gain a desired end. There is no difficulty in discerning where the eye is single. Even the least esteemed or those of no account in the church are quite capable of judging matters of wrong or falsehood, though it would be absurd to expect from such a sound judgment on deeper questions. But as the Old Testament does not hide or extenuate the fathers, so the New Testament lets us know how far in this very way might fall an honoured apostle, who trusted himself and let drop the warning words of the Lord.

Is it not a most humbling element presented in Isaac's case as in Abraham's, that a saint may sink below the world's standard of morality? The king of the Philistines reproved Isaac for untruthfulness, and this in exposing that wife to dishonour and his own people to guiltiness; as either he or probably his predecessor had similarly denounced the same case of deceit in Abraham, made yet worse by his previous failure in a like way with Pharaoh in Egypt. Had Isaac borne all holily in mind, it must have proved a safeguard by grace, instead of a cloak for the flesh yielding through unbelieving terror. Let ourselves now see to it that we profit by the written Word all the more, because He who is the truth, now fully revealed, makes all such failure appear in its full heinousness.

There is an added element in the untruth of Abraham and of Isaac: the betrayal of the relationship of their wives, Sarah and Rebekah, by their own shortsighted selfishness. How blessed is the contrast of Christ, as the Husband of Israel, and the Bridegroom of the church! Compare Numbers 30.

Isaac Blessed of Jehovah - Genesis 26:12-16

It is well to note the manner of Scripture. God does not need to vindicate His holy character, and still less does He attenuate or excuse the faults of His people. He demands and deserves our trust. He tells the unvarnished truth now of Isaac's prevarication, as before of Abraham's. He makes known the successive and humiliating reproofs of Philistine kings. On His part is no hiding of what man would have gladly ignored. The sin was too sadly true; and inspiration preserved the record for warning and profit at all times to His servant's shame but to His own glory. There He stops, leaving us to infer the inner exercises of Isaac. Yet striking is that which follows in the way of external blessing.

"And Isaac sowed in that land and found in the same year a hundredfold; and Jehovah blessed him. And the man became great, and went forward and grew great; until he became very great. And he had possession of flocks and possession of herds, and a great store of servants; and the Philistines envied him. And all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped them, and filled them with earth. And Abimelech said to Isaac, Go from us; for thou art become much mightier than we" (vv. 12-16).

Here it is the silence of Scripture which we do well to heed. For nothing is told us of what must have passed in such a man's soul. Did he not review the unworthy cheat by which he sought to screen himself from danger at the cost of his wife? Was he not humbled by its just exposure by Abimelech? Isaac was a gracious and prayerful person, who knew what it is to meditate in the fields at eventide. Is it conceivable that one of such habits would fail to sit in judgment on his own deliberate untruth, stumbling to the world, dishonouring to his Almighty Protector, to his beloved wife, and to himself as a saint? His father's sin in the same way, ought it not to have admonished him all the more, instead of ensnaring him to follow so bad an example? Can one doubt then, that the fear of Isaac (Gen. 31:42) wrought in his conscience to humble and to clear his spirit from guile.

God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap. For he that sows unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that sows unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life eternal. Did not Isaac judge himself? How else can we understand the blessing vouchsafed in so marked a way and degree to the patriarch at this juncture? It was no doubt of an external sort; but so it is that Jehovah wrought of old, and thus did He act then. There was no longer a moral obstacle in the way. The defilement, even when publicly known, grace had removed. "And Isaac sowed in that land and found in the same year a hundredfold; and Jehovah blessed him. And the man became great and went forward, and grew until he became very great," etc.

Isaac's increase, especially in the great year of famine, drew out the envy of his neighbours. Nor did ill-will stay there. The Philistines stopped with earth the wells dug

before by Abraham's servants. But Isaac was a man of meek spirit. It was a felt loss to one whose household and herds were dependent on such supplies; it was no less insulting than injurious; but Isaac bowed before the wrong. "If when ye do good and suffer, ye shall endure it, this is acceptable [grace] with God." None of the fathers manifested the passive virtues equally with Isaac. Even Abimelech failed to rebuke the unkindness and enmity. "Go from us," said he, "for thou art become much mightier than we." Even so, He who is higher than the highest walked in His grace. Indeed it was His portion from a babe and onward, for Satan is "the prince of the world" — the personal enemy of the Lord of glory. There was no room for the Son of God in the inn: was not the manger good enough for Him? But is the slight nothing in God's eyes? The reproach of Christ ought to be dear to the hearts of His own. Yet is it excellent discipline for the godly, if indeed they walk by faith, not by sight. They declare thereby that they belong to the One crucified on earth but glorified in heaven.

So the Lord in Matthew 5 opens the principles of the kingdom of heaven, that those who follow Him now may clearly know His mind till the Father's Kingdom come, and His will too is done on earth as it is in heaven. Then must evil vanish divinely and judicially, for unrighteousness shall disappear from the earth when the Lord reigns in power; it is His patience as yet. Hence for the present the enemy rules. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens; blessed they that mourn, for they shall be comforted; blessed the meek, for they shall inherit the earth; blessed they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled. In the day that hastens, as Jehovah will govern

manifestly, His people shall dwell at ease, and the oppressor be broken in pieces; the righteous, instead of suffering, shall flourish, with abundance of peace till the moon be no more. For the Great King shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him. Can contrast be more complete with what the Lord taught us to expect till that day? We shall know His sufferings, with the assured prospect of reigning with Him then, as the Epistles no less than the Gospels and the Revelation so amply and plainly attest to Him that has ears to hear. For the world it will be Jehovah reigning as could not be now.

Isaac Up to Rehoboth - Genesis 26:17-22

Gerar was a district as well as a town. When the patriarch removed from the king's neighbourhood, it was still the same country, the valley or "torrent" of Gerar, a wadi in our more modern term. At times of much rain a stream ran for awhile through the valley.

"And Isaac departed, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac again (returned and) dug the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham; and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. And the servants of Isaac dug in the valley and found there a well of living water. And the herdsmen of Gerar strove with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, Ours [is] the water. And he called the name of the well Esek (Strife), because they quarrelled with him. And they dug another well; and they contended for that also; and he called the name of it Sitnah (Hatred). And he removed thence, and

dug another well, and they strove not for that; and he called the name of it Rehoboth (Broadways); and said, For now hath Jehovah made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" (vv. 17-22).

Neither sense of his own failure in the past depressed Isaac now, nor did the unmerited goodness of Jehovah puff him up. It was a pain, though it ought not to be a surprise, that the Philistines envied his prosperity; nor was it wonderful that Abimelech should gratify the popular feeling, and prompt his departure. But if he departed from their vicinity, he kept the word of the Lord and did not deny His name. Egypt was forever barred to him. He encamped in the valley of Gerar and dwelt there.

With none of the wandering fathers do we find wells of water so largely and conspicuously connected as with Isaac. This is manifestly characteristic. In that quarter of the earth they were of the greatest value. They were a needed and welcome part of his blessing here below, not so much for one that sowed and reaped abundantly, but in the possession of flocks and herds with a great retinue of servants, who suffered from the spite which sought to render useless what men did not need for themselves.

But the typical interest is no less instructive. Where but with Isaac should the pledge of spiritual use and refreshment be appropriately sought? The washing of water by the word, and yet more the fountain of water springing up unto life eternal, and the rivers of living water flowing out richly, have we not this and more in the New Testament as the figure of the Holy Spirit's operations, now that the Son of God is come, redemption

accomplished, and the Man (who is no less God) glorified consequently in heaven? What can be plainer than the fact here attested? What less worthy than for believers to allow that inspiration had no divine motive or end in recording such facts as these and very few others in the lowly and peaceful path of Isaac? He dug again the wells of water, dug in the days of his father: even this is reserved for the account of Isaac, and his perseverance in the face of that enmity which has its pleasure in opposing and destroying the unused good.

Another feature in the case it is well to notice, because the blatant scepticism of the hour, more audacious and malicious than Philistinian hatred, perverts it to dishonour God's Word as well as to injure needy man. "He called their names after the names by which his father had called them": a very natural and proper thing for any upright soul to do, and peculiarly suitable to such a son as Isaac showed himself uniformly to be.

But here in verses 19-22 we hear also of wells unheard of before. "And Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found there a well of living water. And the herdsmen of Gerar strove with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, The water is ours; and he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarrelled with him." Change of place does not see change in man. "And they dug another well, and they contended for that also; and he called the name of it Sitnah." But Isaac did not change from that meekness which becomes the man of God, gentle to all, and forbearing to such as opposed themselves. Nor was his dependence on God without a speedy answer. For removing thence he dug another well, and they strove not for that; and he called the name of it Rehoboth, and said, as accounting for the name, "For now hath Jehovah

made room for us; and we shall be fruitful in the land." Contention was as far from his spirit, as ingratitude to the Almighty Protector of him who must not strive. How is it with us? Do we indeed know that all things work together for good to them that love God? Do we give thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to Him that is God the Father?

Isaac at Beersheba - Genesis 26:23-35

We cannot avoid seeing, at least when it is pointed out, how truly Isaac typifies the part of the Christian who is not of the world as Christ is not. He does not resist evil. Smitten on the right cheek, he presents the other also. He does not contend for the goods of which he was deprived, but when his cloak was taken away, he does not fight even for his coat. Neither Abraham nor Jacob was so tried, nor did their patience shine so eminently; the one fought for Lot (Gen. 14), the other for himself (Gen. 48), but never Isaac. The Christian, the church, has this call to suffer still more as a living principle, for which not only the Pagans of old taunted, but no less the sceptics who inherit their enmity.* Christ was the perfect exemplar.

*"The Christians were not less averse to the business than to the pleasures of this world. The defence of our persons and property they knew not how to reconcile with the patient doctrine which enjoined an unlimited forgiveness of past injuries, and commanded them to invite the repetition of fresh insults. Their simplicity was offended by the use of oaths, by the pomp of magistracy, and by the active contention of public life; nor could their humane ignorance be convinced, that it was lawful on any occasion to shed the blood of our fellow-

creatures, either by the sword of justice, or by that of war; even though their criminal or hostile attempts should threaten the peace and safety of the whole community. [This is nowhere taught in the New Testament, which only lays it down for the individual believer.] It was acknowledged that under a less perfect law [the Mosaic], the powers of the Jewish constitution had been exercised, with the approbation of heaven, by inspired prophets and by anointed kings. The Christians felt and confessed [in contrast with Socinians, Anabaptists and Quakers, that such institutions might be necessary for the present system of the world; and they cheerfully submitted to the authority of their pagan governors. But while they inculcated the maxims of passive obedience, they refused to take any active part in the civil administration or the military defence of the empire [Compare John 18:36]. Some indulgence might perhaps be allowed to those persons who, before their conversion, were already engaged in such violent and sanguinary occupations; but it was impossible that the Christians, without renouncing a more sacred duty, could assume the character of soldiers, of magistrates, or of princes. This indolent [!], or even criminal [!!], disregard to the public welfare, exposed them to the contempt and reproach" of the Pagans, who very frequently asked what must be the fate of the empire, attacked on every side by the barbarians, if all mankind [!!! "little flock" says Christ] should adopt the pusillanimous sentiments of the new sect? To this insulting question the Christian apologists resumed obscure and ambiguous answers as they were unwilling to reveal the secret cause of their security: the expectation that before the conversion of mankind was accomplished, war, government, the Roman empire, and

the world itself, would be no more. It may be observed, that in this instance likewise, the situation of the first Christians coincided very happily with their religious scruples, and that their aversion to an active life contributed rather to excuse them from the service, than to exclude them from the honours, of the state and army" (Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, ch. 15, vol. 2, pp. 104,105, Oxford ed. 1827). Separation to God from mere man as such or the world is proper, in differing characters and degrees, for Israel His people under law, and to the Father now for Christians, His children under grace. This is the true key.

"And thence he went up to Beersheba. And Jehovah appeared to him the same night, and said, I [am] the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I [am] with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. And he built an altar there, and called upon the name of Jehovah, and pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well. And Abimelech, and Ahuzzath his friend, and Phichol the captain of his host, went to him from Gerar. And Isaac said to them, Why are ye come to me, seeing ye hate me and have sent me away from you? And they said, We saw certainly that Jehovah is with thee; and we said, Let there now be an oath between us, between us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; that thou wilt do us no wrong, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done to thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou [art] now blessed of Jehovah. And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink. And they rose early in the morning, and swore one to another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. And it came to pass the same day,

that Isaac's servants came and told him concerning the well that they had dug, and said to him, We have found water. And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

"And Esau was forty years old, when he took as wife Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basmath, daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they were bitterness of spirit to Isaac and Rebekah" (vv. 23-35).

Patience had a perfect work with Isaac. If the old wells were stopped up out of spite, if the new that were found excited envy and ill-will, he contended not. Enmity on his side there was none. He departed when the ruler bade him, till at last a well was found beyond for which the opposing herdsmen did not strive. Yet thence, however promising it looked, he went up to Beersheba; and Jehovah again appeared to him "the same night," and bade him "fear not"; His presence and blessing were assured for Abraham's sake. And there a fresh spring was dug, where he raised an altar and pitched his tent.

Nor was this all. The very king with his friend and chief captain seek Isaac, not he them; and on his remonstrance own that they saw plainly that Jehovah was with Isaac, and seek an oath and covenant that he would do them no hurt, though they explained away their own shabby course. "Thou art now blessed of Jehovah." Yes, this is emphatically Isaac's position, the Philistines themselves being judges. They came and paid homage at his feet, and acknowledged that Jehovah loved him. And as a prince he treated them with a feast and the pledges they sought; for indeed he desired their blessing, as will one day be fully in the Promised Seed to

all the nations of the earth. And “the same day” a new well was found, which he called Shebah, and renewed the name of the old city adjoining.

But verses 34 and 35 reveal a bitter sorrow in sad contrast. Not content with despising his birthright, profane Esau took to him at mature age two daughters of Heth, to the grief of both his parents. Was this a man to receive or value the blessing of Jehovah? It was He who was dishonoured most by such a marriage, to say nothing of the family.

Isaac Old and Seeing Dimly - Genesis 27:1-5

Humbling for Isaac, and for all concerned yet more, is the scene which opens for our admonition. No such failure stained the testimony of his father nor yet his son Jacob’s. His life of comparative easy-going blinded him for awhile to distressing forgetfulness of Jehovah’s mind and declared purpose. Alas! it was not a new thing that Isaac loved Esau, not simply as his son on account of his natural boldness, but because venison was to his taste. Whereas Rebekah loved Jacob, whose character in its fleshly traits resembled her own in Syrian craft and selfishness; but in neither was there lukewarmness to divine promise.

“And it came to pass when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, that he called Esau his son, the eldest, and said to him, My son; and he said to him, Here [am] I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death. Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and hunt me venison, and make me savoury meat such as I love, and bring [it] to me that I may eat, in order that my soul may bless thee before I

die. And Rebekah heard when Isaac spoke to Esau his son; and Esau went to the field to hunt and bring venison" (vv. 1-5).

No doubt the words of Jehovah, before the sons were born, the more impressed Rebekah because they were said to her, "The elder shall serve the younger." But Isaac was wholly responsible as one that loved and feared Him. Then again did not Esau, when arrived at years of discretion, sell his birthright for one mess of food? And was not this profane act aggravated by indifference to that separateness which the chosen family were bound to maintain before Jehovah in the midst of the doomed races who possessed the land? His Hittite wives were bitterness of spirit to both parents: how sad that the father should now treat it so lightly!

The Holy Spirit puts the matter simply and livingly before us for our profit. Nor let us fail to adore our God for His wondrous patience. Let us delight in the wisdom of His ways, overruling carnal partiality which would make His Word void, and securing His purpose, however faulty they were who remembered it. And as they resorted to unworthy expedients to correct the wrong and insure His promise, they each fell under His righteous chastening of their crooked policy. God loves dearly, but rebukes and chastises.

What a grief it is to one who feels for God and His saints to look on this household of faith reversing that godly order which long before characterized Abraham's in His estimate! "For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah to do righteousness and judgment, in order that Jehovah may bring upon

Abraham what he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19. Yet what He spoke of Abraham was the Seed of promise, and not only a great and mighty nation, but all the nations of the earth blessed in him. Now the type of that very Seed was oblivious save of present gratification of the flesh, and this with the intention of conveying the blessing to the profane line and away from the divinely designated heir! Again she who once turned her back on kin and country to become the bride of the father's only son and heir in distant Canaan, plotting against her husband, and teaching the true inheritor of the promises to cheat against the father's shortsighted folly! O what shame before God, men, and angels, even if we say not a word of him who hoped through his father's weakness to retrieve his hopes, ruined by his own rash and unbelieving self-seeking!

But, if we anticipate, Isaac's words certainly filled Rebekah with alarm. Instead of enquiring of Jehovah as in days of more lively faith, she heard them now to devise her own wretched way of deceit, in order to defeat the wrong her husband had in mind to do. Esau meanwhile went, we may be sure, with alacrity as unbounded as his surprise, to gratify his father after his own fashion, and regain what had seemed lost irreparably. But be not deceived. God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life eternal. Even if all faithlessly fail and receive rebuke from above in righteous government, God abides faithful; for He cannot deny Himself; and His Word is as sure for the future as it has ever proved in the past and the present.

Rebekah’s Advice - Genesis 27:6-17

Every Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable. How much is passed by without notice in the life of Isaac! Inspiration implies special purpose. When a grave lesson was to be taught, there is no sparing the reputation of a saint: God speaks and writes holily and all is for our profit.

“And Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak to Esau thy brother, saying, Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat and bless thee before Jehovah before my death. Now therefore, my son, hearken to my voice according to that which I command thee. Go, I pray thee, to the flock, and fetch me thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make of them savoury meat for thy father such as he loveth; and thou shall bring [it] to thy father, that he may eat, so that he may bless thee before his death. And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother [is] a hairy man, and I a smooth man. My father perhaps will feel me, and I shall be in his eyes as one that mocketh, and I shall bring on me a curse and not a blessing. And his mother said to him, On me [be] thy curse, my son: only hearken to my voice, and go, fetch me [them]. And he went and fetched and brought [them] to his mother. And his mother prepared a savoury dish such as his father loved. And Rebekah took the clothes of her elder son Esau, and put them on Jacob her younger son, the costly ones that [were] with her in the house; and she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands, and on the smooth of his neck; and she gave the savoury meat and the bread into the hand of her son Jacob” (vv. 6-17).

We may assume that Rebekah acted on impulse in circumventing her husband's forgetfulness of the Lord's word, and Esau's profane and evil character. Who can suppose that she "went to enquire of Jehovah," as when troubled by appearances before the birth of the twins? The sly Syrian character of her family asserted itself, in the assurance that Isaac was altogether in the wrong. But if right in her judgment, how sorrowful to tarnish it, not only by her own means of giving it effect, but by drawing her beloved child, the object of divine promise, into conduct so unworthy of faith!

In nothing be anxious, wrote the apostle; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God, as our gentleness should be known to all men. We walk by faith, not by sight. Do you say that this applies to faith since redemption? But what of the three young Hebrews in view of the burning furnace of fire? What of the aged Daniel with the den of lions before him? No petition, nor visit to the king juggled by vanity into the impious decree pressed by the ruling princes. No hiding of his devotions to God, so well known to those that were envious of his position. "And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem); and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. Then these men assembled together and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God." He obeyed God rather than men, and he took the consequences to His glory.

Rebekah and Jacob took the way of the flesh; and as they sowed, so they reaped; for God is not mocked, while He

showed Himself faithful to His promise, and Isaac's folly was of no avail to reinstate the son who sold his birthright. But how humbling to the family all around, and not least of all to him who ought to have obeyed God in subjection to His express will, and have upheld in faith the dignity of its head! How foolish and unworthy in Rebekah particularly! She of all best knew Isaac's piety, as she beyond doubt had the liveliest remembrance of the divine sentence that the older should serve the younger. It was therefore the graver failure in her not to be open with her husband in Jehovah's name who would have blessed all around instead of having to chastise.

Even Jacob felt and expressed his qualms, lest the deceit of his mother which he was about to practice should elicit a curse, instead of a blessing from his father. But Rebekah's will was too much committed to her device; and she displayed no little aptitude in guarding her son from the danger he anticipated. In neither do we find conscience at work, still less any reckoning on God's gracious power to bring to naught the carnal design of Isaac to bestow that title to the blessing of Jehovah which Jacob truly valued, and Esau made of less account than one mess of food.

On me, said Rebekah, be thy curse, my son: only hearken to my voice, etc. Certainly Isaac had no curse to call on Rebekah; but as she was the prime mover in the wrong way to gain a right end, so had she most to feel the chastening of God's unfailing moral government. For soon after the transaction here recorded Jacob took his leave for the land of the sons of the east; and the mother never again saw her beloved child. He too through sorrowful years had to smart under the wily cheating

schemes of his mother's brother, his own father-in-law. No flesh shall or can glory. It only remains to glory in Jehovah. He never fails; and alone, when every other failed as in this case, He accomplishes His purpose in mercy and wisdom. How worthy is He of all trust!

It was all skilfully done to deceive Isaac; and Jacob only too ready to comply with his mother to God's dishonour, who would surely have defeated the father's desire to favour Esau. But unbelief is ever far from God, and is nowhere so low and hateful as when it works in believers.

The Common Sin and Shame - Genesis 27:18-29

The Scriptures do not spare us the needed lesson of what man is, even elect man. It is painful reading, and meant so to be, but full of profit; for many believers are slow to allow that flesh is no better in them than in the patriarchal family. Every one of them betrayed at this point the bad state morally of each. The usually blameless Isaac was so overcome by self-indulgence in his appetite as to lose sight not only of the profanity of the elder son but of Jehovah's will and choice of Jacob. Rebekah, however right as to the end in view, was utterly unscrupulous as to the means; and Jacob, not without conscience and fear about the deceit he was to practice on his blind father and lying personation of Esau, dreaded a curse instead of the blessing which he valued. But O what a God have we to do with, unmoved in His purpose of grace (else never could it stand)! unchanging in His righteousness which chastened every one of them for good even now, yet with pain because of their sins, that they might not be condemned with the

world. It may not be that He brings good out of evil, as men say; but His own good to do us good, rising above every fault and dishonour. Thus “We know that to those that love God all things work together for good, to those that are called according to purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

“And he (Jacob) came to his father and said, My father: and he said, Here [am] I: who [art] thou, my son? And Jacob said to his father, I [am] Esau, thy firstborn; I have done according as thou didst say to me, Arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of thy venison, in order that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac said to his son, How [is] this [that] thou hast found [it] so quickly, my son? And he said, Because Jehovah thy God brought [it] before me. And said Isaac to Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou [be] my very son Esau or not. And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him and said, The voice [is] Jacob’s voice, but the hands [are] Esau’s hands. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy as his brother Esau’s hands; and he blessed him. And he said, Thou then my very son Esau? And he said, I [am]. And he said, Bring [it] near to me, and I will eat of my son’s venison, in order that my soul may bless thee. And he brought [it] near to him, and he did eat; and he brought him wine, and he drank. And Isaac his father said to him, Come near now and kiss me, my son. And he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his clothes, and blessed him and said, See, my son’s smell [is] as a field’s smell which Jehovah hath blessed. And God give thee of the dew of the heavens, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and new wine. Let peoples serve thee and races bow down to thee. Be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother’s sons bow down to thee. Cursed [be]

every one that curseth thee, and blessed every one that blesseth thee" (vv. 18-29).

Undoubtedly for the time Isaac was blinded in the eyes of his heart worse than in his physical sight, even in his foolish partiality to thwart the declared mind of God. And this Rebekah overheard and sought to counteract with a woman's craft and quick fertility of resource. Had she looked to God instead of her feeble husband and her fond son, how different all would have been! Even Abraham listened to Sarah's voice when he was deeply moved for Ishmael: how much more ought not Rebekah to have counted on her appeal to Isaac's conscience, backed by the divine oracle even before the birth of the twins, that "the elder should serve the younger"! But she did not now inquire of Jehovah as of old; she yielded to a low deceit, as sinful before God as it dishonoured her husband and herself, reckless of its direct demoralizing of the heir apparent of the promise.

Alas! Jacob showed himself an adept to the manner born. "I am Esau thy firstborn," replied he to his hesitating father; "I have done as thou didst say to me." Not content with audacious falsehoods, he went on to hypocritical lying; for no sin grows less or better in the use. He meets his father's wonder at the quickness of the supply by his daring answer, "Jehovah thy God brought it before me." His voice made a difficulty even to dull Isaac; but the feeling of the goat skins which overlaid his neck and hands so cunningly, and the smell of Esau's best clothes, especially after savoury food and wine, removed further question from the aged father. And the blessing was given, both from Jehovah in covenant, and from God in sovereignty. Yet did its terms mainly consist of earthly abundance from the favour of

the heavens, and the subjection not only of peoples and races of mankind generally, but also and specifically of his brethren and of his mother's sons, closing with a double sentence of larger and deeper import: "Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be every one that blesseth thee."

Neither Esau's "running" nor Isaac's "willing" could set aside God's purpose. As the apostle says in Romans 9:18, "So then it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." Without His mercy not one could inherit the blessing. But this does not at all hinder His moral government meanwhile, which passes over no fault on their part of His children, and this because He detests their wrongs, and loves themselves. Were they spurious and not His sons, He would leave their iniquities to meet just doom at the last day.

Isaac Blessing Esau - Genesis 27:30-40

We have now to hear of Esau and his blessing.

*The distinction of Jacob from Esau in the blessing which Isaac pronounced is stated strikingly in Hebrews 11:20, though in a way which, as far as I know, is peculiar to the Greek language. The article is attached to each of their names, the Jacob, and the Esau. The intention was to present them respectively as distinct objects before the mind. It would have been enough ordinarily to have put no article before either. We may see a similar usage as to Paul and Barnabas in Acts 13:2, 43, 46, 50 as compared with Acts 7 and Acts 14:14, and in Acts 15:2 both forms in the same verse. A further variety of the two names combined under one article is

in Acts 15:22. These are but a few instances of what is common in Greek.

“And it came to pass when Isaac had ended blessing Jacob, and when Jacob was hardly gone out from before Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came from his hunting. And he also prepared savoury meat, and brought [it] in to his father, and said to his father, Let my father arise and eat of his son’s venison, in order that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac his father said to him, Who [art] thou? And he said, I [am] thy son, thy firstborn, Esau. And Isaac trembled with a trembling exceedingly great, and said, Who then [is] he that hunted venison and brought [it] to me? And I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him: also blessed he shall be. When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a cry great and exceeding bitter, and said to his father, Bless me, me also, my father. And he said, Thy brother came with subtlety and has taken away thy blessing. And he said, Is he not rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: my birthright he took away; and behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved for me a blessing. And Isaac answered and said to Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren I have given him for servants; and corn and new wine have I supplied him; and what then shall I do for thee, my son? And Esau said to his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, me also, my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. And Isaac his father answered and said to him, Behold, of the fatness of the earth shall be thy dwelling, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and thou shall serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when

thou shalt rove about, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck" (vv. 30-40).

It is all very touching in a natural way. One's indignation kindles at the underhand course of Jacob and Rebekah; one feels for the erring and deceived aged saint; one pities the bitter disappointment of Esau, worthless though he was, and ungodly as he had already proved. But we rejoice at the turning-point of grace in Isaac's soul when he bowed to God's thwarting his endeavour to gratify the son who had ministered to his appetite, forgetful alas! of the already declared will of Jehovah as to Jacob. When God's overruling broke on him, instead of reviling the wife and younger son, he bowed in self-judgment and trembled with a trembling exceedingly great, sealing in faith what his lips said unwittingly but under God, "also he shall be blessed." He felt that, however others were to blame, the error was his own. God was but securing now what He had said before the sons were born. Faith now wrought, unhindered by the flesh which had lately darkened his eyes. And so says the Spirit in Hebrews 11. It was not according to his proclivities, but against them; "By faith Isaac blessed," not Esau and Jacob, but "Jacob and Esau [even] concerning things about to be."

Jehovah, as the Lord God, is and must be free to act according to the good pleasure of His will, whether for the heavens or for the earth; for man to assert his is alike folly and sin. As a saint he is set apart to obey God, not merely in the Ten Words, but in every respect; as a sinner, he is Satan's slave, and only deceives himself when he boasts of liberty, freewill, and what not. Obedience is the essential duty of the creature; and no reasoning can lessen the obligation, though it may blind

man already fallen. But it is a believer's shame to be deceived, as the whole habited world is. Satan may accuse, but ought not to deceive him who has God's Word and Spirit; as we have seen Isaac deceived for awhile, but restored.

Still there was a blessing for Esau, and one far more suited to his nature than that which was reserved for Jacob. What did Esau care for the promises or the covenant? What relish had he for Messiah's kingdom? What reverence or readiness of subjection to Messiah Himself? The fatness of the earth was more to his taste, and the dew of heaven from above. Heaven itself was only a sentiment he gladly left for others to enjoy. He was, he flattered himself, a practical man; and the present world was to him a scene of enjoyable pleasures. Then what a fine thing to live by the sword when men opposed! He did not envy the poor spiritless creatures who lived, or said they did, by God's Word. Such fanaticism he despised. It was true that the word declared that he, Esau, should serve his brother. This was a disagreeable sentence, which had to be proved, and he would do all he could to prevent it. Meanwhile the same sentence said, that he should some time get loose, or rove about, and break the yoke from off his neck. Well, this would be a joy indeed: let his brother have the rest. Esau was profane; and it is a growing sin in our day, more glaring in Christendom than among the heathen. Without doubt the end of the age is at hand. The day of the Lord hastens; but the apostasy must first come, and the man of sin be revealed, the lawless one, in his own time, whom the Lord Jesus shall consume by His breath and annul by the appearing of His presence.

The Family Distracted - Genesis 27:41-46

Grace alone secures salvation to sinful man, yet only to such as believe. But God ever carried on, as now also, a righteous government, whereby He deals with every fault among His own. So it was then. The sin of Isaac threw all into confusion, and gross evil ensued on the part of Rebekah and Jacob. So great indeed was the complication, that Esau, ungodly as he was, at this sad and shameful moment seemed more an object of pity than any other concerned, whilst those who really cared for Jehovah's will and blessing exposed His name to dishonour by the deceitful means they employed to gain it. O what sorrows and shame they make for themselves who forget that God cannot fail to accomplish His own purpose, and who in their haste for a good end do not scruple to adopt wicked means!

"And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him. And Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand, and I will slay my brother Jacob. And the words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah. And she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said to him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, comforteth himself that he will kill thee. And now, my son, hearken to my voice; and arise, flee to Laban my brother to Haran; and abide with him some days, until thy brother's fury turn away; until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget what thou hast done to him: then I will send and fetch thee thence. Why should I be bereaved of even both in one day?

"And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob take a wife of

the daughters of Heth, such as these, of the daughters of the land, what good should my life be to me?" (vv. 41-46).

Thus Esau soon turned from wailing and tears to murderous hatred. It was not Jehovah that he valued, but the blessing; as he had already proved how far he estimated the birthright when he sold it for one mess of food. He was a profane person. This was no real excuse for the misdoing of Rebekah and Jacob; but it aggravated the sin of Isaac. Henceforth hatred of his brother, even to take his life, filled Esau's heart, though he had received the promise of all he cared for, save the supremacy of his brother which his pride could not brook. So he plots with himself, when his aged father departed, or at least the days of the mourning were over, to slay his brother. Truly Esau went in the way of Cain.

But He whose eye is over all hearts kept aged Isaac for a long while to come, and the days of mourning did not arrive before Esau with four hundred men met Jacob to his sore distress; but God turned the heart that meant to slay him to receive the trembling man with kisses and tears. So truly does God dispose, let those propose as they may who know him not. Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?

Rebekah was the one to send her beloved child away, whatever it cost her. It was meet that she should be the instrument of his exile whom she had so guiltily instructed; it was meet that she should never again behold in the flesh the one whom she knew was the object of God's favour and the true heir to the promises, as Isaac also was, to the exclusion of both Ishmael and

Esau. God is, and must be, and ought to be Sovereign; but God is just, and cannot look on cunning with impunity, while He can have no terms with profanity and ungodliness. She herself therefore has to do the greatest violence to her own feelings as well as Jacob's, and urges his fleeing to Haran, that he might abide with her brother Laban. "Some days" did she say? Ah, poor Rebekah, for many a long year to be cheated by Laban, as you and Jacob cheated Isaac! No, never will it be thine, whatever come of Esau's fury and anger, to send and fetch thy Jacob thence. Indeed it is striking that her death is in Scripture without notice. We know from Genesis 35 that Deborah, her nurse, died in Jacob's company, and was buried beneath Bethel under the oak which thence derived its name of Allon-Bachuth, Oak of Weeping. It is certain that Rebekah is not spoken of when Esau and Jacob met at the funeral of their father; whence we may fairly gather that she had died, we know not how long before the most aged of the patriarchs.

But this at least can be said of Rebekah that she shared with Isaac bitterness of spirit over the Hittite wives of Esau, and that she was the more faithful of the two in grief at Esau's godless ways. This was what she pressed on her husband as to Jacob, that he might be saved from so ill an example. Yet there was an impatience in the tone which left not a little to be desired. But Scripture tells us things as they were, even of the saints: as it alone reveals God to us.

Isaac's Charge to Jacob - Genesis 28:1-5

Rebekah did not speak in vain; Isaac acted on her word as to Jacob; as God directed Abraham to listen to

Sarah's voice when she demanded the dismissal of mocking Ishmael and his mother.

"And Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-Aram, to the house of Bethuel, thy mother's father; and take thee a wife thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest become a congregation of peoples. And may he give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings, which God gave to Abraham. And Isaac sent away Jacob; and he went to Padan-Aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother." (vv. 1-5).

How pointed the distinction from the blessing Isaac heard from the angel of Jehovah when he called to Abraham! Then on the gift of his son, his only son, to die as far as he knew, came the promise of blessing in the widest terms, and seed multiplied as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand on the seashore. Nor was it only for the numerous seed to possess the gate of the enemies, but "in thy seed" (where no number is named, the one Seed of the apostle's interpretation), the true Son raised as truly from out of the dead, "shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." So indeed they are now as Christians. Nothing of the kind is in the blessing Isaac gave Jacob. Nor is this in any respect faulty, but faith speaking according to God's mind in a wholly different case, as we shall see more fully in the sequel.

Indeed it was a charge with which he opens, “Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan.” So Isaac in his day was to marry not from the people of the land, but from Abraham’s land and kindred; yet how different the manner! Most emphatically he, the bridegroom, must not leave Canaan; but Abraham’s servant, the elder of his house that ruled over all that he had, goes under solemn oath to fetch a wife thence for Isaac. Here on the contrary Jacob is asked to go to Padan-Aram, and take a wife thence of the patriarch’s kin, of Laban’s daughters. So early must Jehovah visit Jacob according to his ways. “Jacob fled into the fields of Aram; and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept [sheep].” He became an exile from the land of promise, to be cheated in a strange land by his kindred, the sad recompence of his own crooked ways to gain what Jehovah had given and would have secured in His holy way of faithfulness and truth.

“And God Almighty bless thee,” prayed Isaac, “and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee that thou mayest become a congregation of peoples.” So it was of old, so it will be yet more in the future. Here, as before, it is strictly blessing on earth. Not a word drops that points to heaven or eternity. Enlargement on earth is assured, but nothing is said of a higher order. Even when Isaac asks God to give him “the blessing of Abraham,” to him and to his seed with him, it is narrowed to this, “that thou mayest possess the land of thy sojournings which God gave to Abraham.” The stopping short thus of higher and deeper and larger things is surely significant, where Jacob comes before us. Such precision is as marked in this earliest of the Scriptures; and the lack of observing it is not less apparent in critical eyes, which, failing to

learn what is immeasurably above them, set up to judge them as human documents to God's dishonour and their own shame.

Of an opposite school are those who seek to read the church into every Scripture, because they do not see that the glory of Christ will have an object of His love on earth as well as for the heavens. They have fallen into the Gentile conceit, which Romans 11 was written to denounce and correct. God has not cast away His people Israel. They stumbled at the stumbling-stone, and rejecting their own Messiah, are rejected themselves, while the Gentiles are called, and the church is being formed wherein is neither Jew nor Greek, but Christ is all. But the Gentiles have been as faithless to their privileges as Israel, and must as surely be cut off. Divine mercy will then restore His ancient people when Christ returns and brings in His Kingdom in power and glory.

Israel is here in question for the earth, as the call of Rebekah to be Isaac's spouse typifies the bride for the heavenly Bridegroom. As to the administration of the fullness of times, which will only be when Christ appears, room must be left for all things to be headed up and centred in Christ, the Heir of all, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth — in Him, in whom we also were allotted a portion being marked out beforehand according to God's sovereign purpose. The Christian is not part of the inheritance, but heir of God and joint-heir with Christ. This truth was early lost. The church judaized wholly after the apostles. Even Irenaeus, one of the best of the early ecclesiastics, betrays this confusion, which has gone on deepening ever since.

Isaac’s Death - Genesis 35:27-29

It was a long while before the close of this life came for Isaac; indeed his was a greater span than fell to Jacob or even to Abraham. But the last forty years of it gave no occasion for the Spirit of God to dwell on. He had cancelled his sorrowful desires on behalf of Esau, when he trembled at the discovery of his wilfulness; and this was confirmed afterwards, when he summoned Jacob to repair to Padan-Aram with his renewed blessing.

Jacob too with his large household and retinue had come back to the land of promise after an absence of more than twenty years, with many a sin and a sorrow, among his children. This delayed his steps; but he now found his way at length to his father’s house. The record is brief but affecting.

“And Jacob came to Isaac his father to Mamre, Kiriath-Arba, which [is] Hebron; where Abraham had sojourned, and Isaac. And Isaac’s days were a hundred years and eighty years; and Isaac expired and died, and was gathered to his peoples, old and full of days; and Esau and Jacob his sons buried him” (vv. 27-29).

As the Holy Spirit says little, it is not for a believer to say much. But one may remark how truly our patriarch lived to the end of his long life, confessing himself a stranger and sojourner on the earth. Isaac had not even to require a foot of the land of promise, as did Abraham a burying place for Sarah and those who followed. He too knew what famine in the land was, but he did not, under its stress, go down into Egypt like his fathers. And his marriage stood in the strongest contrast with Jacob’s, who was forced to leave the land for the country of his kindred, and there cheated of the wife he loved to

have another, parents of the twelve tribes of Israel, with many an experience of sorrow, yet blessed and bright in his end, while waiting for the end of God, when glory shall dwell in the land. Isaac remains in the land peaceful and comparatively unseen, but in no way signalized by victorious energy like Abraham, nor even an exile and wanderer like Jacob. His very wife was sought for him, and evidently given him by God from afar, brought across the desert by the father's trusty and honoured servant, object of purpose, prayer, and thanksgiving beyond all other brides of whom Scripture speaks, as already in due place shown by her typical bearing.

Now Jacob, after varied vicissitudes, comes to Isaac his father. It was at Mamre, or Hebron, once the city of the four, where was the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah rested in hope of the resurrection. For this was ever the faith of God's elect; and as they, so in due time slept Isaac in or according to faith, having not the land but its promise, and assured of its fulfilment in Christ's day, but waiting patiently till closes man's day of corruption and violence, when Jehovah alone shall be exalted.

For the burial of their aged father, old and full of days beyond the good old age even of Abraham, came Esau and Jacob; as Isaac and Ishmael had buried their father. Death has a powerful and subduing voice for the heart of man, even where faith is not; and it was surely not for those who believed to forbid the presence of their near of kin at the grave, but rather to welcome them where many a self-seeking and haughty soul has been bowed under the solemn issues of salvation on the one hand and of judgment on the other. The days of mourning

were not at hand, when Esau's rage turned to kill his brother Jacob; and when they came, God who has power over all hearts so wrought that no such intention remained. Jacob too had passed through dealings of God which turned to good account his manifold and humiliating trials, at length strengthened in heart to confide in His mercy, above fear of human vengeance, and ashamed to betake himself to any further device of his own. Esau still lived to himself and for present enjoyment of the world and its things, Jacob saw the promises, and from afar greeted or embraced them, like his father and his grandfather; and they that say such things show clearly that they possess not but seek after a better fatherland, that is, a heavenly.

1 It may be noticed here that the error in question gave rise to the spurious reading πάυτωυ at the end of Galatians 4:26, and to the no less unfounded misinterpretation of "Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16, as if the phrase meant all the saints, though two classes are here distinguished.

Jacob

Chapter 1 - Jacob Born And Young

Gen. 25:30-34

If scripture speaks briefly of Isaac, it has much to say of Jacob, as it had not a little of Abraham. Yet the difference between the divine accounts of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is marked and instructive. The grandfather was pre-eminently a man of faith, in whom God's call was conspicuous, head of a chosen race, as Adam of mankind. Isaac was distinctively the son of Sarah the freewoman; "in Isaac shall thy seed be called," Abraham's child and heir. In wandering Jacob, supplanter of Esau yet wrestler of God, His merciful purposes for the earthly people appear in their rich and striking variety. Jacob gives occasion to the exercise of God's sovereignty as to the twin children of Isaac and Rebekah. For they being not yet born, nor having done anything good or bad, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him that calls, it was said to their mother, The elder shall serve the younger. It had been shown before in casting out the bondwoman and her son; but so it was now far more emphatically in Jacob chosen, not Esau. No flesh shall glory; in Jehovah certainly, as it ought to be. Is man only to think and talk of his rights? Sinful man! Has God alone no rights? Is He to be a mere registrar of man's wrongs? Ah! his wrongs, not rights: this is the truth, as no believer should forget from the dawn of a vital work in his soul.

Without dwelling long, we may notice the youth of Isaac's sons, already traced in the sketch given of their father. Esau did not become a sojourner in the land of promise; but, being at home there and without a heavenly hope, he made the early career of Nimrod his own, if he never thought of him. From the outset he was as unlike Abraham as one of the family line could be. His love of excitement and of reckless adventure made him despise the parental circle, and the monotonous duty of caring for the herds and the flocks. Others might look for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God; but it had not the least place in Esau's heart. For him the present life was all, and the chase in particular as giving scope to courage and address in overcoming difficulties and gaining personal distinction. Therefore was he a cunning hunter, a man of the field; whereas Jacob was a homely or quiet man, dwelling in tents, with warm domestic affections; and he valued too the link with God, though with a heart as yet little if at all cleansed by faith. So the history appears to intimate for many a day.

But those who seek their pleasures without a thought of God like Esau do not find their own path free from the world's sorrows. And his extremity became Jacob's opportunity. The cunning hunter came in from the field without his venison, hungry and faint; and the keen edge of appetite, so whetted yet foiled, made him the more sensitive to the dish of red lentils which Jacob had cooked. And so he, who at other times would have been too proud to ask a favour of his brother, whom he heartily despised as a milksop, stoops to beg: "Feed me, I pray thee, with the red — the red there, for I am faint." Quick as thought, without prayer to God, but full of that

which his mind at least prized, Jacob makes his bargain: “Sell me now (or, first) thy birth-right.” Truly it was the worm Jacob,” and different indeed from the Israel” of a later day. But scripture tells the truth; and the two men were seen as they really were. “Behold,” said Esau, “I am going to die; and of what use can the birth-right be to me?” Why so impatient? Could he not hold out a quarter of an hour? The mother’s tent was near; could he not wait long enough to ask of those who had never refused his cry of need — never put him off with a stone or a serpent?

No; he must have the tempting food on the instant. In his impetuous haste and self-will it seemed death to wait a few moments longer. Alas! Jacob took advantage of it; and brought in God, whom he himself was selfishly slighting, to bind Esau who had no fear of Him whatever: “Swear to me first.” And he did swear to sell his birth-right to Jacob. How fleshly the act on both sides! Instead of securing Jacob in the sight of God, it was part of those evil days on which he had to look back with shame and sorrow when grace really governed his soul. And it could do no more than widen the gulf between the brothers, rankling as it might, and not unnaturally, in his heart who was drawn into the oath by the pressure of a passing need. So Jacob gave his bread and dish of lentils; and Esau “eat and drank, and rose up, and went his way” in the graphic terms of the history, with the solemn comment: “so Esau despised his birth-right.” What great moral principles are for us in these apparently so simple tales of domestic life in early days! Let us not, like unbelievers, leave God out of the account, none can, save to his irreparable loss.

Chapter 2 - Jacob Deceiving Isaac

Gen. 27.

This is a cup to the brim full of sin and shame for all concerned. Isaac in comparison seems an object of compassion, though here really profane and without the fear of God; so were inexcusable not only Isaac, but Rebecca and Jacob. In speaking of his father we have sufficiently looked at the mother. It remains to say a little more of the one immediately before us.

Oh, the witness to what a saint may be allowed to stoop! What a witness also to that which God is in His long-suffering and grace! If He were not the Eternal who changes not, assuredly Jacob must have been consumed with his sons, as the last of the O.T. prophets tells us. Nevertheless as His moral government dealt with them, so too we may read in Jacob's history as God gives it in His holy word. The beginning was as wretched as could be conceived in either case; but Genesis lets us see in large measure the brightness which divine mercy shed on Jacob's close. Far different was it with Isaac, who disappears from view long before his departure; nor was there anything to distinguish the later years of Abraham's life comparable with Jacob a-dying. Then those eyes, which in youth were too keen for "his own things," were opened to see clearly the future of his sons to, and at, the end of days. Of a truth no prophecy comes of its own interpretation; for no prophecy was ever brought by man's will, but men spoke from God, borne along by the Holy Spirit, Who rests not short of His glorious purpose for Christ in the latter day.

But in this evil day what have we not to confess? What does not God recall in scripture for our admonition and

warning? Humbling it is, but is it not truly good and profitable? Is it not then made evident, that He does not find in us what suits Him, but in love produces it where was a blank and worse? God alone gives the victory through faith; whilst every fault on our part is noticed, and fully, under the chastening of His moral government. Is not this as it should and must be, God being what He is, and man also? “He that hasteth with his feet sinneth.” No flesh shall glory before him; he that glorieth, let him glory in Jehovah. Who but He could have said by Isaiah (Isa. 41:13, 14), Fear not, I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith Jehovah, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. We can find no solid ground of rest but in what He is to us, not in what we are for Him. All shall be beaten small who in their pride of heart refuse to believe, and who trust in themselves that they are righteous. Only those who have Him for righteousness shall rejoice and glory in Him.

Hence it is that the Spirit refrains not from laying the scene before us in all its sad ignominy, where the righteous broke down utterly, because not one of them was then walking by faith but by sight; and he who had no faith appeals to our natural feelings as the injured party. And verily he, Esau, had his reward; for of the fatness of the earth was his dwelling, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by his sword he lived, though he served his brother; and the time came when, breaking loose, he broke that yoke from off his neck. What did he care for “the promises?” What was the covenant to him who lived only to gratify himself and his lusts?

Badly as Jacob behaved under his mother’s crooked advice, doing evil that good might come, he really

valued what the Almighty did and pledged in words that could not lie; but so much the greater was the sin, which in son as in mother distrusted Him in the face of Isaac's unworthy effort to indulge his favourite against the purpose of the, Lord. But so it was. "There are many devices in a man's heart; but the counsel of Jehovah shall stand." Flesh wrought its dark way all round. God was forgotten. Deceit prevailed; but the word of our God abides for ever. He who had no faith received none of the everlasting portion of grace; all who had done dishonour to God and their faith reaped sorrow from their fleshly measures. The mother parted soon after from her darling, never more to see him; and he who turned from the Lord to follow her devices became long an exile, cheated by his father-in-law as he had cheated his father, and put to many a shame by his own children.

But God was good as He is holy. Therefore because of sin Jacob had to learn all in suffering and self-judgment. Far better to have learnt it in His presence, which would have preserved him from exile even when pressed urgently by a fond mother. For conscience speaks to one's own soul, and ever refers to God, whose relationship, being nearest and most authoritative, ought not to be gainsaid or thrust aside even for her that bore him. In this case indeed she, a pious woman, by her ardour in a cunning enterprise, betrayed her self-will in boldly offering to take on herself instead of a blessing Jacob's curse, if so it should be through his father's possible discovery of the fraud (vers. 12, 13). But her persistence overruled or at least silenced his fears; and encouraged him to dare a no less impiety, as we read in vers. 20, 21. So candid is scripture, unveiling the desperate wickedness of which the heart is capable in

saints left to themselves, or at least leaving God's presence to achieve God's promise in their own strength and wisdom. We shall see in the sequel what conflict and humiliation befell Jacob, as the necessary discipline to which God subjected him in order that the flesh should be put down, and the saint restored to the ways of holiness from such shameless tampering with evil.

Chapter 3 - Jacob Blessed And Sent To Padan-Aram

Gen. 28:1-9.

After the humbling scene in which Isaac and Rebekah with Jacob, to say nothing of Esau, played so unworthy parts, it is refreshing here to read of Isaac's pious care over Jacob; and all the more, that grace made use of Rebekah to recall the spirit of her husband to faithful and righteous ways about their son called to blessing (Gen. 27:46).

And Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-Aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. And God Almighty [EI-Shaddai] bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a company of peoples. And may he give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest possess the land of thy sojournings, which God gave to Abraham. And Isaac sent away Jacob; and he went to Padan-Aram, to Laban Son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau. Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan-Aram, to take him a wife thence;

and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; and [that] Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padan-Aram. And Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father. And Esau went to Ishmael, and took, unto the wives which he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife" (vers. 1-9).

We may notice this peculiarity in the blessing here pronounced on Jacob by his father that a "charge" (ver. 1) accompanied it. Jacob must not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. For they were accursed in Jehovah's eyes, though the execution in any measure tarries till the cup of the Amorites was full. For the wanderer Jacob there was to be as distinct a refusal of alliance with the Canaanite as for Isaac. Only the latter was in the strictest way forbidden to go out of the land (Gen. 24:6, 8), and the bride must be fetched thither: whereas the former goes in quest of a wife to the house of his mother's father (2). Thus are Jacob's earthly place and relations made no less evident than Isaac's heavenly ones. As the prophet Hosea puts it, Jacob fled into the field of Aram, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept [sheep]. So God decided for him in righteous government. Isaac's history is the type of sovereign grace calling a bride to the Heir of all things in heavenly places.

But it is also to be remarked in verse 3 that Isaac says, "God Almighty bless thee," and in verse 4, "And may he give thee the blessing of Abraham." But it is distinctly limited to a "multitude of peoples," and to his inheriting, he and his seed with him, "the land of his sojournings

which God gave to Abraham." Yet we never hear that God appeared to Isaac in that character of revelation, as He did to Abraham very expressly in Gen. 17:1; and it is even contrasted with the name of Jehovah made known to Moses in Ex. 6:3 as the covenant name thenceforth for the children of Israel. But Isaac had it not directly like Abraham and Jacob.

Another trait of distinction is of much interest, to which Gal. 3:16 directs attention. "Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed." And the apostle reasons on the one Seed which is Christ, as contrasted with the numerous seed referring to Israel. So we read in Gen. 12:3 of it to Abraham, and confirmed to Isaac in Gen. 22:18, though the countless earthly seed had been just mentioned in 17. This however is absent from Isaac's blessing on Jacob.

Scripture tells us in vers. 6-9 of Esau's imitating his brother as nearly as he could in appearance, because his Canaanite wives displeased his father. But God was not in his thoughts; and his imitation fell miserably short. For in addition to the daughters of Heth he took a daughter of Ishmael to wife, the bondmaid's offspring cast out from Abraham's house. There was no faith, but a natural and ineffectual effort after better ways. Apart from faith it is impossible to please God; for he that approaches Him must believe that He is, and becomes a rewarder of those that seek Him out. This was true of Jacob, in no way of Esau.

Chapter 4 - Jacob At Bethel

Gen. 28:10-22.

This scene is remarkably characteristic of the outcast from his father's house, but of God's care over the destined progenitor of His earthly people. Fathers and Puritans have alike missed their way; for, not seeing the grand place reserved for Israel in the latter day and Messiah's millennial Kingdom, they turn all blessed persons and things to the church's aggrandisement, and thus deny at the end to God's ancient people their restored and enhanced dignity here below. This by necessary consequence lowers the Christian and the body of Christ to an earthly place, however favoured and exalted. It is to efface the true future; while it balefully reacts on the present also, enfeebling if not blotting out His glory on high and our proper heavenly privileges in the Spirit.

"And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted on the place, and lodged there, because the sun was set. And he took of the stones of the place, and made his pillows, and lay down in that place. And he dreamed, and, behold, a ladder set up on earth, and its top reached to the heavens. And, behold, angels of God ascended and descended upon it. And, behold, Jehovah stood above it, and said, I am Jehovah, God of Abraham thy father, and God of Isaac: the land on which 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 break forth 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, and will keep thee in all [places] whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee till I have done that of which I have spoken to thee. And Jacob awoke from his sleep and

said, Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I knew [it] not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful [is] this place! this [is] none other but God's house, and this the gate of the heavens. And Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he made his pillows, and set it [for] a pillar and poured oil upon its top. And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city was Luz at first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and keep me on this road that I go, and give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, and I come again in peace to my father's house, then shall Jehovah be for God to me. And this stone which I have set [for] a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (vers. 10-22).

The place on which Jacob lighted was to be notable for the chequered fortunes of Israel; it had no bearing typically on the church. Jehovah made Bethel a pledge of assured mercy to Jacob when utterly forlorn, whatever the king raised up to be a scourge to the people might pervert it to in honour of a strange and rival god. There tarried Jacob all night, with nothing but the stones which he put for his pillows. But he dreamed, and saw set up on earth a ladder, whose top reached to the heavens; and Jehovah stood above it, declaring Himself Jehovah, God of Abraham his father, and God of Isaac, with the promise of the land, whereon he lay so desolately, to him and to his seed; and the seed to be as the dust of the earth (not a word about the stars of the sky), which should break forth on every side to the blessing of all the families of the earth in Jacob and his seed. Whatever the sad and lonely beginning, this should be the glorious end.

All is prophetic and for the earth, a dream from and of God, not such speech and open vision as Abraham had enjoyed, unless when on one occasion of deep sleep a horror of a great darkness fell upon him, when he too learnt the power of death in order to establish covenant security for the earthly seed, whatever came meanwhile, and the land was strictly defined and delivered from its usurpers, as the people had been from their oppressors. Isaac had only Jehovah appearing to him whether by day or by night to bless him in Canaan, and multiply his seed as stars of the heavens, and set him above fear. Jacob, however guaranteed by the striking sight of the ladder from earth (where he lay) to Jehovah at the top in the heavens, was afraid, and with angels of God ascending and descending on the ladder could only say, How dreadful this place! none other this but the gate of the heavens! Yet had Jehovah promised to keep him in all places whither he went (and which of the patriarchs such a wanderer?), and never to leave him till He had done all of which He had spoken to him. Could words more explicitly portray the Jewish portion, or stand in more marked contrast with the peace, liberty, and heavenly access of the Christian, while suffering With joy here below like Christ?

Yet the closing verses which. give us Jacob’s acts and words add still weightier confirmation. For he at once set up his stone pillow for a pillar and anointed it, and called the name of the place Bethel, and vowed the first recorded vow, strikingly different from Isaac or Abraham. Therein he rises not above providential care, and the supply of present wants, yet God with him (for the root of the matter was there as his first thought), so that he should come to his father’s house in peace.

Jehovah should be to him for God, and this stone pillar His house, and of all He should give him he would Surely give the tenth to Him. It is, indeed, not Christians blessing the God and Father of our Lord, as from the first blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. How Jacob's vow differs from Abraham in Gen. 14 refusing to be made rich by aliens and giving unasked tithes. of all to Melchizedek, priest of the most High God, possessor of heavens and earth!

Chapter 5 - Jacob Meets Rachel At Haran.

Gen. 29:1-14.

Jacob, strengthened by his dream, pursues his journey to the land of his kindred. The first phrase is an uncommon one; the nearest to it is used of the priests in quitting the channel of the Jordan for Canaan (Joshua 4:18), which hardly confirms the alacrity ascribed to it here.

"And Jacob went on his journey (lifted up his feet), and came into the land of the sons of the east. And he looked, and, behold, a well in the fields, and, behold there, three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks, and the stone on the well's mouth was great. And when all the flocks were gathered there, they rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the sheep, and put again the stone on the well's mouth in its place. And Jacob said to them, My brethren, whence [be] ye? And they said, Of Haran [are] we. And he said to them, Know ye Laban son of Nahor? And they said, We do know [him]. And he said to them, [Is it] well (peace) with him? And they said, Well; and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep. And he said, Behold, [it is] yet high (great) day; [it is] not

time that the cattle Should be gathered together: water the sheep, and go, feed [them]. And they said, We cannot till all the flocks be gathered together, and they roll the stone from the well's mouth: then we water the sheep. While he was still speaking to them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she kept them. And it came to pass when Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. 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. And it came to pass when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house; and he told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, Thou [art] indeed my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him a month of days" (Gen. 29:1-14).

How strange that pious eyes of old and to our day should see in Jacob's foregoing journey and arrival in Haran a type of Jesus, Son of God and Heir of all things, despised and rejected of men, Jesus leaving heaven's glory to become a wanderer in the world, to accomplish redemption, and to espouse the church to Himself! Here evidently it rather typifies a contrast with Isaac, only son of his father, the dead and risen bridegroom of her that was fetched by Eliezer's guidance, the bride that must pass through the desert to be His bride in the heavenlies. Here it is one that leaves the land of promise after the saddest failure, but not without blessings in grace, with Jehovah assuring him in the dark night of

His care, and not to leave him till He do so with His hand what His mouth had spoken. Jacob does not rise above the house of God on earth, the gate of heaven but not glory on high; and his vow, and anointed pillar, and tithe, and hopes, are all in unison with Israel, yet a prince with God here below. He is a type at most of the earthly side of the Lord; which tradition and theology, not discerning, have lowered so as to narrow the truth. These, seeing only the church position, have reduced the Lord's relationship accordingly, and appropriated Israel's place to the loss of the Christian's, as well as to the denial of the predicted blessings of the Jewish people as the head of the nations on earth under His coming reign.

Jacob is characteristically here under God's providential care, even when we hear only of the shepherds of Haran; and Rachel appears and Laban follows. It is His sure but unseen and unnamed direction. Yet we may remark the difference from Eliezer's distinct prayer of faith and immediate worship in Gen. 24, also from God's prompt answer, and from the bride's ready response and journey to join him whom unseen she trusted, and for whom she forsook all her existing ties of nature.

Here it is a touching scene, and the quick emotional outburst of Jacob's nature is in keeping, and even Laban's. But the deep communion with God, when it is the type of calling the bride for heaven, and the entire absorption of heart in the risen bridegroom's glory, are as wanting here as they are indelibly apparent in the unique episode of Isaac and Rebekah.

Chapter 6 - The Marriages Of Jacob

Gen. 29:15-30.

It is well to bear in mind that Jacob, however vigorous, was no longer a young man, being seventy-seven when he arrived in Haran. There he must bow to the divine discipline which had already forced him to leave his father's house, and the late unhappy influence of his mother. So it is with each of God's children. Grace is sovereign in calling even the most untoward; but they pass under a moral government which takes notice of every fault, that they may become partakers of His holiness. Compare John 15, Heb. 12:5-11, and 1 Peter 1:15, 16.

"And Laban said to Jacob, Because thou [art] my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what [shall be] thy wages? And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder [was] Leah (Weariness), and the name of the younger [was] Rachel (Ewe). And the eyes of Leah:[were] tender; but Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of countenance. And Jacob loved Rachel, and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy youngest daughter. And Laban said, Better [that] I give her to thee than [that] I should give her to another man: abide with me. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they were in his eyes a few days, for his love to her. And Jacob said to Laban, Give [me] my wife for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her. And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. And it came to pass in the evening that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in to her. And Laban gave to her Zilpah his maid-servant [for] maid-servant to Leah his daughter. And it came to pass in the morning that, behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, What [is] this thou hast done to me? Have I not served with thee for

Rachel? Why then hast thou deceived me? And Laban said, It is not so done in our place, to give the younger before the first-born. Fulfil the week of this one; and we will give thee the other also for the service that thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. And Jacob did so, and fulfilled the week; and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife. And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his maid-servant for her maid-servant. And he went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years" (vers. 15-30).

It is no small contrast to remember Isaac the heir, the son abiding in his father's house, and the honoured servant Eliezer sent to represent him and his father, with suited equipage and costly gifts for the bride. Here the outcast wanderer has nothing to recommend him but his relationship and his service. Nor was Laban slow to discern the value of so capable a man for interests dearer to him than all other considerations. So the bargain was soon struck, and the warm offer of Jacob instantly accepted. But when the full time of service for his bride arrived, the crafty uncle, under all his show of the wedding-feast to Jacob's honour, felt no scruple in the cruel deceit of substituting Leah for Rachel, the object of his heart from the first.

Then followed the humiliating temptation of the younger daughter offered on like conditions of long service, which to Jacob seemed but a few days, for his love to her. But we must not measure this case any more than others in Old Testament times by the light which the Saviour cast on marriage as on everything else. Yet it is refreshing to notice what He could draw from what was instituted at the beginning, before sin entered to throw

into confusion the ways of God, by those manifold lusts of the flesh which war against the soul.

Here it was Jehovah dealing with Jacob that he might judge himself, and learn in his own experience the hatefulness of yielding to deceit, even if it were to gain the birth-right or the blessing over a profane brother, who cared only for himself and never had God as a living object before his soul. Such experience is made profitable to a weak or careless soul. One is thus habituated to the reality of having to do with God in the little things of life, as men are apt to count, as well as in the greatest. What goodness on His part to occupy Himself with every detail to teach us what a simpler faith had learnt in the happier and holier light of His presence. And scripture with divine largeness has room for all. If we have an Abraham comparatively firm and faithful, and an Isaac sheltered and with abundant favour in his weakness, we have a Jacob with his chequered life and faulty ways, yet chastened, kept, and blessed of God after a strikingly instructive sort.

Chapter 7 - Leah And Her Four Sons

Gen. 29:31-35.

The righteous government of Jehovah is clearly seen here also. Jacob was grossly wronged by Laban in what must deeply touch a man’s heart, and Leah was beyond doubt a consenting party to the cheating breach of the marriage compact as to Rachel. She might and ought to have told Jacob the unworthy trick her father was playing by her means. But God would have His servant Jacob learn more deeply in his own wounded affections the vileness of self-seeking deceit; and hence He

permitted what He would use for chastening and good in the end.

“And when Jehovah saw that Leah [was] hated, he opened her womb; but Rachel [was] barren. And Leah conceived, and bore a son, and called his name Reuben (See! a son); for she said, Because Jehovah hath looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me. And she again conceived, and bore a son, and said, Because Jehovah hath heard that I [am] hated, he hath therefore given me this one also; and she called his name Simeon (Hearing). And she again conceived, and bore a son, and said, Now this time will my husband be united to me, for I have borne him three sons; therefore was his name called Levi (United). And she again conceived, and bore a son, and said, This time will I praise Jehovah; therefore she called his name Judah (Praise). And she ceased from bearing” (vers. 31-35).

It will be observed that it is not Elohim here, but Jehovah, God in special relationship and moral dealing. He looked on the sorrowful and despised wife, and gave not to Rachel but to Leah, the comparatively “hated,” the consolation of a son. Rachel happy in her husband’s love was left barren! We can notice how the firstborn loomed in the mother’s eyes, and how much she counted on the call to Jacob’s heart. But Jacob was slow to forget the wrong done him about Rachel, or to feel his own wrong to Leah. Nor was it only that Jehovah looked tenderly on her aggrieved spirit, but she acknowledged Jehovah’s compassion in the matter. Jehovah, said she, hath looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me. This seems premature: we hear as yet not a sound of it on his part.

Again however she has a son, and says, Because Jehovah hath heard that I am hated, He hath therefore given me this one also. The even stronger expression of her husband's alienation does not weaken but renew her sense of the favour Jehovah was showing her; and as with Reuben, so now the naming of her second son bespeaks it: Jehovah heard as well as saw. We do not learn of any relaxation on the offended man's part: he had his Rachel. And again she bore him a third son, and said, Now this time will my husband be united to me; for I have borne him three sons. Therefore was his name called Levi. It is not as before that she called it. All seems more vague and in a lower key here; and Jehovah is not named. But He never fails; and again she bore a son, and said, Now this time will I praise Jehovah; therefore she called his name Judah. Never do we hear of her soul rising so high; the sorrow-stricken woman breaks forth into praise of Jehovah; and her fourth son bears it in the name she gave him that day. Yes, of Judah came according to flesh the Christ, Who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. How much His grace rises above our praise!

There can hardly be a plainer warning of the danger to which even pious men are exposed in treating of types than that of the excellent Dr. J. Lightfoot with his vast Rabbinical learning. His knowledge of divine truth was too slender to warrant it. Like others in that day and in almost every other, he was superficial in gospel truth, ignored the Spirit's presence and the church's union with Christ on high, and His coming again to consummate God's counsels for heaven, earth, and all creation, being also utterly wrong as to the restoration of Israel in that consummation. Hence he held that

“Leah and Rachel are figures of the two churches; the church of the Jews under the law, and the church of the Gentiles under the gospel: the younger the more beautiful, and more in the thoughts of Christ, when he came in the form of a servant; but the other, like Leah, first embraced and taken to wife.”1 A deeper acquaintance with scripture would have avoided such mistakes. For Rachel represents Israel, Messiah’s first object of love on earth. But this fails by no fault on His part. And He has Leah, who thus represents the intervening call of the Gentiles during Jacob’s servant state and mighty sorrows, when “more are the children of the desolate than of the married wife, saith Jehovah” (Isaiah 54:4, cf. Gal. 4). In due time the barren one bears Joseph who typifies Christ rejected and exalted, but making Himself known to His brethren at last; and also Benjamin, the only one born in the land, son of his mother’s sorrow but of his father’s right-hand, bringing millennial power before us, as Joseph does its blessing.

Chapter 8 - The Wives And Their Maids

Gen. 30:1-13.

Though revelation of and from God is the essential difference of scripture from all other writings, there is much more of the utmost value. We have man as he is, as nowhere else: the truth is told us that we may know ourselves as well as God. Hence the interest and importance of inspired light in what the proud selfishness of man’s mind is prone to despise as mere domestic jars. To the believer they not only are full of salutary instruction but suggest the witness of divine concern and compassion, in what must all be manifested

before His holy eyes to Whom we shall give account of the things done in the body whether good or evil, yea, of the hidden things of darkness and the counsels of hearts. Assuredly no flesh shall glory; and it is well and wise to learn it now, that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

“And when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob’s anger was kindled against Rachel; and he said, [Am] I in God’s stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? And she said, Behold, my maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear on my knees, and I may also be built up by her. And she gave him Bilhah her bondmaid as wife; and Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and also heard my voice, and given me a son: therefore she called his name Dan (Judge). And Bilhah Rachel’s bondmaid again conceived and bore Jacob a second son. And Rachel said, Wrestlings of God have I wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed; and she called his name Naphtali (my Wrestling). When Leah saw that she had ceased to bear, she took Zilpah her bondmaid, and gave her to Jacob as wife. And Zilpah Leah’s bondmaid bore Jacob a son. And Leah said, What fortune! and she called his name Gad (Fortune). And Zilpah Leah’s bondmaid bore Jacob a second son. And Leah said, With my happiness; for the daughters will call me happy! and she called his name Asher (Happy)” (Gen. 30:1-13).

One understands too well, too sadly, why Rachel should view her own childlessness and her sister rich in children with chagrin. Self wrought and blinded her to her sister’s lack of Jacob’s heart of which she had the

monopoly. It was envy, that base feeling which cannot endure another, even a sister's, having what she had not; and this broke out in unreasonable and impious repining to her husband, as if her barrenness were his fault. No wonder that his anger resented her unworthy state in his rejoinder, Am I in God's stead Who has withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? But he yielded to her proposal, and takes Bilhah that she might obtain children by her maid. Had not honoured Sarah done the like? Yes, but through Ishmael its fruit did it not issue in the expulsion of both Hagar and her son? Was this encouraging? How different from Hannah the sorrowful under Peninnah's provocations, or even the high-priest's misjudgment! She broke out into no unseemly murmurs against her husband, but wept and prayed and vowed to Jehovah, and was heard of the God of Israel.

It is the striking difference of the N.T. from the Old that perfection was only established when God spoke, and wrought also, in the Son. The law made nothing perfect, though a divine witness to what was coming and the just measure of human righteousness on earth. And the Lord was able to vindicate on Jehovah's part that, if Moses in view of the people's hardheartedness allowed them even to put away their wives, from the beginning it was not thus. Male and female made He them. Christ alone represented God adequately, and as Son the Father; and this in man, God and man in one Person. This is all to God the Father's glory.

But of old God permitted what was far from His mind, as we see here, till He makes all things new. Jacob was not Jesus, nor was any other He, though a man of faith. Jesus is Himself, not a man only, though this He was

‘completely and perfectly, but true God no less than the Father.

The names Rachel gave the sons of Bilhah expressed the state of her soul, and toward her sister. Dan and Naphtali do not tell us of grace, but of satisfaction in gaining points of strife on her own part. Leah was drawn into the snare and through Zilpah would equal that advantage. And the names she gave Zilpah’s sons, Gad and Asher, though not reflecting the contention which governed Rachel’s spirit, by no means rose to the level of faith she had shown in naming her own sons. But it is the prerogative of God, while every wrong has its effect among men and its judgment before Himself, to cause all things to work together for good to them that love Him, the called according to purpose. He at least is good and does good, whatever man has to mourn.

Chapter 9 - Leah And Rachel Again

Gen. 30:14-24.

There is a twofold lesson in these divine sketches, which eludes the erudite unbelief which sits in judgment only to despise, and remains in really self-satisfied ignorance. For they present, to the life, the humbling history of the ancestor of a people destined to be God’s possession for the earth by His own choice, spite of these petty ways. They also let us into the secret of that grace in God which rose above all that was immeasurably detestable to His nature in light and love, and even looked on to Him who was to come of this very family, the Christ that is over all, God blessed for ever, as truly God as His Father. It may well be doubted if such glorious hopes were then before the two wives, as the pious Bishop Patrick credits them with; but we are assured that such

halo as this did faith give to many a Hebrew matron, grounded on the promises to their fathers, and stretching on to Him who should appear to make them all good. Besides, was there not food for reflection in that Moses was inspired to write these things down imperishably for their children throughout ages and generations, too sorrowfully like those from whom they sprang? And for us who come in on their downfall and before their restoration, for us who inherit better blessings as joint-heirs with. Him who is glorified in heaven, and is coming to take us into the same glory on high, is there not abundant profit for our souls? The flesh never changes to spirit: in it good does not dwell. If we live, it is by the faith of the Son of God: and Christ it is, not the old self dead to God, that lives in each Christian.

“And Reuben went out in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field; and he brought them to his mother Leah. And Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son’s mandrakes. And she said to her, Is it little that thou hast taken my husband, that thou wilt take my son’s mandrakes also? And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee tonight for thy son’s mandrakes. And when Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, Thou must come in to me, for indeed I have hired thee with my son’s mandrakes. And he lay with her that night. And God hearkened to Leah; and she bore Jacob a fifth son. And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I gave my bondmaid to my husband; and she called his name Issachar (There is hire). And Leah again conceived, and bore Jacob a sixth son; and Leah said, God hath endowed me with a good dowry: this time will

my husband dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons. And she called his name Zebulun (Dwelling). Afterward she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah (Judged). And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived and bore a son, and said, God hath taken away my reproach. And she called his name Joseph (He will add); and said, Jehovah will add to me another son" (vers. 14-24).

No veil is cast over their deplorable unbelief and mean jealousy, no excuse for their superstitious trust in the efficacy of love-apples, just like other Syrian women given only to the vanities of the heathen. It is clear that Rachel profited nothing by the child Reuben's discovery; but that God pitied Leah who sought to share her husband's affection, and bore him now a fifth son and a sixth, besides a daughter. But how strangely low Leah's state in regarding Issachar as her hire from God, because she gave her bondmaid to Jacob; and in calling Zebulun from her fond hope that her husband's love would prove abiding! Nor did the daughter's name indicate any higher view, being akin to that of Dan.

Rachel at length, as we read here, becomes the occasion of refreshment for the heart in the considerate tenderness of God's ways; Who, after her long humiliation because of her unworthy self-seeking, was pleased to pity her and give her a son so earnestly desired. Then she Paid, God hath taken away my reproach; for notwithstanding her lofty bearing she was sensible that she was under chastisement. The name she gave her firstborn is striking; for Joseph means He will add. As she said, Jehovah will add to me another. Her faith saw in Joseph the promise of Benjamin. Never

before had she reached this level of expectation. For the mouth tells the secret, or certainly the abundance, of the heart. God — Jehovah — was now before her. Yet how little she knew that Benjamin would be Benoni, of his father's right hand, of his mother's sorrow; for his birth must prove her death. How much better to confide in unfailing love and wisdom than to set the heart on any object here below!

When Messiah takes up repentant Israel for everlasting joy and blessing under the new covenant in. the last days, how will not the children ponder these early annals of their progenitors, so long reproduced in their own history of painful failure under the law! How sweet to their hearts to recognise that their blessing and glory, under Him whom alas! they long despised blindly, are all and only of divine mercy!

Chapter 10 - Jacob And Laban

Gen. 30:25-43.

We need not dwell on the incident that next claims our notice. As the marriage life of Isaac and Rebekah was very different from that of Jacob with his wives and their maids, so does the bearing of Abram toward Lot present a strongly marked contrast with that of Jacob and Laban. We are now in a far more cloudy atmosphere, though in the main Jacob was a faithful servant, and Laban deceitful and selfish. But God is not mocked, even in the day when evil is allowed to work its dark way till judgment return to righteousness.

"And it came to pass when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, Send me away, that I may go to mine own place and to my country. Give me [my] wives

for whom I have served thee, and my children, that I may go away, for thou knowest my service which I have served thee. And Laban said to him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes: I have discovered that Jehovah hath blessed me for thy sake. And he said, Appoint me thy hire, and I will give it. And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and what thy cattle hath become with me. For it was little thou hadst before I came, and it hath increased into a multitude; and Jehovah hath blessed thee as I turned [lit. at my feet]; and now how shall I also provide for mine own house? And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shall not give me aught. If thou doest this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock. I will pass through all thy flock today, removing thence every spotted and speckled one, and every black one among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and [such] shall be my hire. And my righteousness shall answer for me hereafter, when thou comest about my hire before thy face: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and black among the sheep, let that be stolen with me. And Laban said, Behold, let it be according to thy word. And he removed that day the he-goats that were ringstraked and spotted, and all the she-goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white in it, and all the black among the sheep, and gave [them] into the hands of his sons; and he set three days journey between himself and Jacob. And Jacob fed the rest of Laban’s flocks. And Jacob took him fresh rods of white poplar, almond, and maple, and peeled white stripes in them, uncovering the white which was on the rods. And he set the rods which he had peeled before the flock in the gutters at the watering-places where the flock came to

drink; and they were ardent when they came to drink. And the flock was ardent before the rods; and the flock brought forth ringstraked, speckled, and spotted. And Jacob separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flock toward the ringstraked and all the black in the flock of Laban; and he made himself separate flocks and put them not with Laban's flock. And it came to pass whensoever the strong cattle were ardent, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the flock in the gutters, that they might become ardent among the rods; but when the flock were feeble, he put them not in: so the feeble were Laban's and the stronger were Jacob's. And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and bondwomen, and bondmen, and camels and asses," (vers. 25-43).

Jacob was a man of faith, but failed in spirituality, and comes under the Lord's discipline that he might bear more fruit and better. As he had cheated at home, he suffered abroad, and at the hands of his mother's brother most of all. His patience under Laban's hardhearted wrongs testifies that he bowed to God. He could now bear to be lifted up by slow degrees. And the story of divine retribution here recorded is the turning-point.

Rachel's faith too was real and has the Spirit's attestation in the N.T. quite as distinctly as in the Old. But it is evident that, energetic as it was and in the face of the utmost peril, there was the manifest alloy of her old self which accompanied the precious metal. She did not hesitate to mislead. So here, whatever the gracious intervention of God for His injured servant, we could not conceive either his father or his grandfather adopting such an expedient as Jacob employed to acquire the fruit

of his long and patient service that was due. Yet God condescended to use what without His power had been, if not in vain, but very partial.

Laban's covetous desire to profit by Jacob's strange bargain turned to the impoverishing of the self-occupied master, and the new and growing affluence of the long defrauded servant. Neither compunction appears on Laban's part for the advantage he had taken of his nephew, nor the least considerate affection for his daughters or their children. It was a righteous thing, as far as it could go in its way, to requite the evil-doer and recompense the sufferer. Nor can one fail to observe, at least as here it is pointed out, how peculiarly appropriate such a divine dealing was toward that one of the patriarchs who, more than any other, sets forth the chosen people. They derived their corporate name from him; their ups and downs were like his endless vicissitudes, failures, humiliations, to be turned at the end through divine mercy into everlasting blessing at the feet of their long rejected (but then how endeared!) Messiah. They too become wrestlers with God and men, and prevail. Great indeed shall be the day of Jezreel. But it will be a greatness due to God's grace and mercy, and deserved only by Him Who died for them, as for us and all others, when they at their worst proved themselves His bitterest foes. Thus shall no flesh glory; but he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Chapter 11 - The Flight From Haran

Gen. 31:1-21.

Here we are in quite another atmosphere from that of Abraham or even Isaac. Kindred blood surrounds Jacob; yet what selfishness and deceit in the uncle, what

planning (at least) to protect himself in the injured nephew! But God thwarted the covetous man and helped the long-suffering one. The result was abundance on this side and decay on that, which touched Laban and his sons to the quick: and their connection with Jacob soon came to a close, to his heart's relief. But how weak the faith!

"And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken all that [was] our father's; and of what [was] our father's hath he acquired all this glory. And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban and, behold, it [was] not toward him as beforetime. And Jehovah said to Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee. And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock, and said to them, I see your father's countenance, that it [is] not toward me as beforetime: but the God of my father hath been with me. And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. And your father hath mocked me and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me. If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages, then all the flock bore speckled; and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy wages, then all the flock bore ringstraked. Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and hath given [them] to me. And it came to pass at the time of the ardour of the flock, that I lifted up mine eyes and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams that leaped upon the flock [were] ringstraked, speckled, and spotted. And the angel of God said to me, in a dream, Jacob; and I said, Here [am] I. And he said, Lift up now thine eyes and see: all the rams that leap upon the flock [are] ringstraked, speckled, and spotted: for I have seen all that Laban doth to thee. I [am] the

God of Bethel where thou anointedst the pillar, where thou vowedst a vow to me. Now arise, depart out of this land, and return to the land of thy kindred. And Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, [Is there] yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not reckoned of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath also quite devoured our money. For all the wealth that God hath taken from our father [is] ours and our children's: and now what God hath said to thee, do it. And Jacob rose up and set his sons and his wives upon camels; and he carried away all his cattle, and all his substance that he had acquired, the cattle of his possession that he had acquired in Padan-Aram, to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan. Now Laban was gone to shear his sheep. And Rachel stole the teraphim that [were] her father's. And Jacob deceived (or, stole the heart of) Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled. And he fled with all that he had; and he rose up and passed over the river [the Euphrates] and set his face [toward] the mountain of Gilead" (vers. 1-21).

Truly Jehovah is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in loving-kindness. For when the words of Laban's sons, and the looks of Laban himself disclosed their discontent (and no wonder), Jehovah told Jacob to return. to the land of his fathers, and to his kindred. Divine providence paid Jacob in some five or six years the wages of which Laban had defrauded him for twenty years. They, really wanted to get rid of Jacob, but shrank from saying so: for after all what was Laban's substance before Jacob appeared on the scene? Jacob also was too timid to act openly, but, encouraged from above, calls Rachel and Leah into conference. He could truly say that if Laban showed ill-will, the God of his father was with

him; and that if he had sought to cheat him, God did not suffer his, hurt. He refers to the recognition of Jehovah as became him, and recalls how God took away Laban's cattle and gave them to himself. Even Jacob was too like Lot, and far from Abraham's superiority to earthly gain. But He that had wrought to repay the servant his kinsman's injustice recalled Bethel to forgetful Jacob, bidding him depart and return to the land of his kindred. The two wives. quite fell in. Their father had lost all hope of either. love or respect on. their part; so that they, low as there thoughts were, encouraged their husband to do as God directed. The moment was opportune. Laban was shearing his sheep, when Jacob without delay set wives and children on their camels, and stole away in hot haste with all his cattle and substance to go to his father's house in Canaan. Jehovah's compassion was clear and wondrous; but how mingled is not the other side? It is a lesson wholesome for us all, and will be so specially for Israel in the coming day.

How affecting is the mention of Rachel's theft! "And Rachel stole the teraphim that were her father's." It lets us into the secret root of Laban's iniquity. The fear of God was not there. Personal and family idolatry is disclosed which so often accompanied the profession of the true God. But what can be more offensive to God than to make him a senior or a sleeping partner in a partnership of the gods? Think too of Rachel's stealing at all from her father's goods! It is a queer note of the good Non-conformist, Matthew Henry, that "we are willing to hope (with Bishop Patrick) that she did not take them away as being covetous of the rich metal they were made of, much less for her own use, or out of any

superstitious fears lest Laban, by consulting his teraphim, might know which way they were gone. Jacob, no doubt dwelt with his wives as a man of knowledge, and they were better than so; but she might design hereby to convince her father of the folly of his regard to those as gods, who could not secure themselves, Isa. 46:1, 2." This is all amiable but unwise. For we may gather the true reason from Israel, just after the solemnities of Sinai, bowing down to the golden calf "they made, which Aaron made," and from Israel's history down to the captivity in Babylon. We are bound to believe the profane and evil infatuation of man's heart instead of imagining other things. Jacob was deceived at the time; but Gen. 35:2 proves that his house was not right with God in this respect, and that later he too became aware of it.

But there is a grave lesson lost by those who think there can be no danger of tampering with idols even for believers. There is no reason to suppose that Rachel intended to give up the one true God; even Laban scarcely went so far as that. Yet the fact that meets us here and throughout scripture is, that there was an evident tendency from early days to the latest in those who acknowledged the living God to indulge more or less in idolatry. The case of Solomon is the flagrant proof how great a snare this was for Israel in its brightest days. For what could be more solemn or humiliating than for the pages of inspiration to record, that the wise king, who built the magnificent temple to Jehovah's glory, the house where the Shechinah deigned to dwell, did also build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and this in the mount that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of

the children of Ammon. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

How remarkable is the closing appeal in the First Epistle of John! “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.” We cannot conceive that those to whom he wrote bowed to images of gold or silver, of wood or stone. There was a more subtle form of the evil which the apostle dreaded for saints in the apostolic day. But there can be no more powerful witness to the peril even for saints, than that the same Epistle which begins with the fullest manifestation of the True God in our Lord Jesus, so as to bring us into fellowship with the Father and with His Son, should end with such a warning. When anything outside the Godhead now known in Christ becomes an object to the heart religiously, it is an idol.

Nor was it long before distinct and shameless idolatry overspread Christendom, east and west, north and south.

Chapter 12 - Laban And Jacob In Covenant

Gen. 31:22-55.

Jehovah was faithful and gracious, Jacob a fugitive. Laban soon pursued in hot haste with no friendly intent, but was compelled at the last to bow to God’s protecting Jacob.

“And it was told Laban the third day that Jacob had fled. And he took his brethren with him and pursued after him a seven days’ journey, and overtook him on mount Gilead. And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, Take care that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. And Laban came up with Jacob; and Jacob had pitched his tent on the mountain;

Laban also with his brethren pitched on mount Gilead. And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done that thou hast deceived me, and hast carried away my daughters as captives of sword? Why didst thou flee away covertly and steal away from me; and didst not tell me that I might have sent thee away with mirth and with songs, with tambour and with harp, and hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Now thou hast acted foolishly. My hand is as God to do you hurt; but the God of your father last night spake to me, saying, Take care that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. And now thou must needs be gone, because thou greatly longedst after thy father's house, why hast thou stolen my gods? And Jacob answered and said to Laban, I was afraid for I said, Lest thou shouldest take by force thy daughters from me. With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live: before our brethren discern what [is] thine with me, and take [it] for thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them. And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the two handmaids' tents, and found nothing, and he went out of Leah's tent into Rachel's tent. Now Rachel had taken the teraphim, and put them under the camel's saddle, and she sat upon them. And Laban felt about all the tent and found them not. And she said to her father, Let there be no kindling in my lord's eyes that I cannot rise up before thee; for the manner of women is upon me. And he closely searched, but found not the teraphim. And Jacob was kindled, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What [is] my trespass, what my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? Whereas thou hast felt all about my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? Set [it] here before my brethren and thy brethren, and let them decide between

us both. These twenty years I [have been] with thee: thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and rams of thy flock I have not eaten. What was torn I have not brought to thee; I bore the loss of it: of my hand didst thou require it, stolen by day or stolen by night. [Thus] I was; in the day drought consumed me, and frost by night; and my sleep fled from mine eyes. These twenty years I [have been] in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy flock; and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Had not my father's God, the God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac, been with me, surely empty now thou hadst sent me away. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked [thee] last night. And Laban answered and said to Jacob, The daughters [are] my daughters, and the sons my sons, and the flock my flock, and all that thou seest [is] mine; and what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their sons whom they have borne? And now come, let us make a covenant, land thou; and let it be for witness between me and thee. And Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. And Jacob said to his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones and made a heap and ate there on the heap. And Laban called it Jagar-sahadutha (Heap of Witness), and Jacob called it Galeed. And Laban said, This heap is witness between me and thee this day. Therefore is its name called Galeed and Mizpah (Watchtower); for he said, Watch, Jehovah, between me and thee, when we are hidden one from another. If thou afflict my daughters, and if thou shalt take wives besides my daughters, no man is with us; see, God [is] witness between me and thee. And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold the pillar which I have set up between me and thee. This heap [be] witness and the

pillar [be] witness, that I pass not over this heap to thee, and that thou pass not over this heap and this pillar to me for harm. The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us. And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. And Jacob offered a sacrifice upon the mountain, and invited his brethren to eat bread: and they ate bread and lodged upon the mountain. And Laban rose early in the morning, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them; and Laban went and returned to his place" (22-55).

The state of both comes out so plainly that no words can give any help when speaking of them. Here all is set in the light; and Laban brings on himself the proofs of his selfishness and dishonesty. Jacob was under no bond to stay. Laban and his sons gave ample signs how distasteful to them were his growth and their decay. He wanted a word from God Who gave it to him. His wives were of one mind with his own. He therefore seized the first opportunity, which Laban's shearing furnished, to be gone. Now that Laban with all the clan overtook Jacob on mount Gilead, what righteous objection could be urged? Undoubtedly the warning God gave Laban alarmed his guilty conscience, though no true fear of God was there, no sense of his injustice, even if Jacob had been no more than a faithful servant. Still on both sides, what a contrast with the day when Rebekah left the same roof-tree, it seems not with mirth and songs, nor with tambour and harp, but with love and honour and the fear of God and the assurance of His blessing, which had much fled from that homestead. If he dreaded spoliation or violence, he complained of his stolen gods. These he prized next to his gains, with no shame for his

avowal of heathenism; for where this is, Satan has already brought in darkness and death.

How little Jacob knew that Rachel had really stolen Laban's teraphim, to her own shame! Jacob's house too was not so with God as to make it hateful to her in every way. She had already shown herself the prey of low and vile superstition, which paves the way for idolatry in secret. But Jacob had no suspicion that his beloved was really guilty: else he had not been so quick to propose that such a one should not live. And she that had played false to God little scrupled to deceive her father as well as to rob him. Jacob, ignorant of it, broke into unwonted anger with Laban, whose greed and lack of all justice, to say nothing of affection, he exposes unsparingly, and could well say, that but for God's over-ruling he had now been sent empty away. What could Laban reply but that all were his, wives, children, flock? God was in none of his thoughts, any more than love for his daughters, or their children, or his son-in-law. But he tries to put a good face on the matter, and asks for a covenant between himself and Jacob; who leaves all the terms to Laban, and his wretched thoughts and fears, but solemnly gives execution to it, as well as the name that stood. Not only did he swear by the Fear of Isaac, but he offered peace-offerings; and they ate bread together.

It is a sorry spectacle to the eye of faith; retribution for Laban, rescue for Jacob and his house through God's overruling hand and goodness: but within the chosen family idolatrous images stolen by the wife and unknown to the husband, who, instead of being crushed by Laban, is besought for a covenant with himself. For, as he feared not God, he had no confidence in his own nearest connection. But what had not Jacob to learn, as he

weighed his old self-seeking and scheming before Jehovah?

Chapter 13 - Jacob In Distress, And Praying

Gen. 32:1-12.

Laban went and returned to his place, as we have seen. Of him we hear no more.

“And Jacob went on his way; and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This [is] the camp of God. And he called the name of that place Mahanaim (two camps). And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother into the land of Seir, the field of Edom. And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak to my lord, to Esau: Thy servant Jacob speaketh thus. With Laban I have sojourned and tarried until now; and I have oxen, and asses, sheep, and bondmen and bondwomen; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight. And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother, to Esau; and he also cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that [was] with him, and the sheep and the herds and the camels, into two companies (camps). And he said, If Esau come to the one company and smite it, then the company which is left shall escape. And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, Jehovah, who saidst to me, Return to thy country and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee; I am less than all the mercies and all the truth that thou hast shown unto thy servant; for with my stall I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two companies. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from

Esau's hand; for I fear him, lest he come and smite me, [and] the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will certainly deal well with thee, and make thy seed as sand of the sea which cannot be numbered for multitude" (1-12).

When a lonely fugitive from his father's house Jacob beheld in a dream on his way to Haran a ladder from earth to heaven, with angels of God ascending and descending on it, but above it Jehovah promising His presence and eventual blessing. Here again angels of God met him, a fugitive, so that, when he saw them, he recognised the gracious aim, This is God's host, and named the place accordingly. But neither the dream nor the sight of angels sufficed for Jacob's need. The fear of Laban was soon followed by his sorry terror of Esau. So it must be, just because Jacob was born of God, but with an unpurged conscience and a heart not at rest to enjoy the only object that satisfies. Even visions in this case are of little power and would soon be forgotten.

We see the lesson of faith feebly learnt. Again he has recourse to his plans, and sends messengers to his brother in Seir, with words skilfully framed to conciliate "my lord Esau," and "thy servant Jacob." Esau was not to fear that Jacob needed to encroach on a brother or a father; he had ample resources of his own, and only sought grace in his sight. But no answer from Esau filled Jacob with alarm and distress; especially as the messengers told him that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. Why, but to overwhelm him? It was unbelief of Him who cannot forget His promise but can control and turn the most alien spirit.

Again, he betakes himself to his devices, dividing the people and the stock into two companies, saying, If Esau come to the one and smite it, then shall the other escape. How short and sad is man's prudence! He that arrested Laban in his hostile intentions and made him depart with a kiss all round, could he not bring Esau to Jacob with an embrace and not without tears? It is his state that the Holy Spirit here recounts for everlasting profit, that we be not anxious for the morrow, but cast all upon the God of all grace, because He cares for us. Jacob had as yet a bad conscience, and never yet faced it all out in God's presence. Yet God was faithful to him, not he to God.

After the trembling man had made his plan, he betakes himself to God, and we may trace the work slowly going on in his soul. He reminds Jehovah the God of his fathers Abraham and Isaac, that it was at His bidding he was returning to his country and kindred. He owns his unworthiness of the least of all His mercies and of all His truth. He compares his destitution when he first crossed the Jordan with his two companies at present. He earnestly entreats his deliverance from the hand of his brother Esau, whom he dreaded both for himself and for the mother with the children. Then finally he reminds Him of His promise of a surety to do him good, and make his posterity as sand of the sea innumerable. We can readily perceive that it was faith, but as yet mingled with human expedients. Hence was he far from peaceful reckoning on God, and even in abject terror of Esau.

The fact is that he was dissatisfied with himself, and feels the need of drawing near to God in a way he had never yet known. The interesting details of this we find in the next page of the divine story, a very important

epoch in Jacob's experience. His plans did nothing toward softening Esau, any more than relieving himself from his dread. But he was now to be alone with God who took him up in a way worthy of Himself, and laid the basis for the deepening work in his soul ever after, and a blessing which. at length shone in Jacob's declining years beyond his father or even his grandfather. But in his then low estate spiritually grace was about to meet him that very night, little as his troubled soul looked for it, and in a manner foreign to all natural thoughts.

Chapter 14 - God Wrestling With Jacob

Gen. 32:13-32.

The vision of two bands of angels did not deliver Jacob from fear for himself and his two bands. He was not at ease with God, though a believer. All that hindered communion was not yet judged; and hence his abject dread of Esau, of whose change of feeling toward himself he had no idea. Making his own plan of defence, he then prayed for Jehovah's blessing for deliverance from Esau. Further details are given in vers. 13-21; and the rest follows, where God takes Jacob in hand.

"And he lodged there that night; and took of what came to his hands a gift for Esau his brother; two hundred she-goats, and twenty he-goats; two hundred ewes, and twenty rams; thirty milch camels with their colts: forty kine, and ten bulls; twenty she-asses, and ten young asses. And he delivered [them] into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself: and he said to his servants, Go on before me, and put a space between drove and drove. And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meets thee, and asks

thee, saying, Whose [art] thou? and whither goest thou? and whose [are] these before thee? then shalt thou say, Thy servant Jacob's, it [is] a gift sent to my lord Esau; and, behold, he also [is] behind us. And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, According to this word shall ye speak to Esau when ye find him. And ye shall say moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob [is] behind us. For he said, I will propitiate him with the gift that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face: perhaps he will accept me. And the gift went over before him; and he himself lodged that night in the camp (or, band)."

Next we come to God's dealing with him that he might be blessed more abundantly.

"And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two maidservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford of Jabbok; and he took them and led them over the stream, and sent over what he had. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the rising of the dawn. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh: and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was strained as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the dawn ariseth. And he said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me. And he said to him, What [is] thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Not Jacob shall be called henceforth thy name, but Israel; for thou hast wrestled with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked and said, Tell, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore askest thou after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And the sun rose upon him as he passed over

Penuel, and he halted upon his thigh. Therefore the children of Israel eat. not the sinew that shrank, which [is] upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip (or, that shrank)" (vers. 22-32).

Jacob must be alone with God. He was not yet at Bethel, but had a needed meeting meanwhile in the dark. Not so much as men say, Jacob wrestling with God, true as this may be in its measure, but yet more God wrestling with Jacob. "There wrestled a man with him until the rise of the dawn." It was grace that gave him perseverance and to prevail, but in a way contrary to man's thoughts; not in any degree Jacob's goodness, wisdom, and power, but God's faithful mercy. Hence He touched the hollow or socket of Jacob's thigh, so that it became out of joint. This would render powerless the strongest; but it was not so here. His grace enabled Jacob to hold on. He deigns then to say to Jacob, Let me go, for the dawn ariseth: as Jacob answers, I will not let thee go except thou bless me. Thereon Jacob gets his new name, no more the supplanter but a prince of God — Israel, "for thou hast wrestled with God and with men, and hast prevailed." So wrought divine mercy while withering natural strength; but there is no revelation of His name as to Abraham; and instead of drawing out his intercession for others, God wrestles with himself. Prevail he must in order to be blessed; but there is no communion. The name is undivulged as later to Manoah, before the man of overcoming strength was born, who wrought heroic wonders, yet with surprisingly little moral power. And so it is here with Jacob in his way, who called the name of the place Peniel; "for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." Think of the

totally different issue when Jehovah appeared to Abraham both in Gen. 17 and Gen. 18. Then “He went away as soon as He had left communing with Abraham.” The wife of Manoah understood God better than her husband.

Thenceforth Jacob halted upon his thigh. God would have him permanently learn the lesson of His strength displayed in human weakness. So the sun rose on his halting as he passed Penuel; and therefore the children of Israel eat not the sinew that shrank which is upon the hollow of the thigh, to this day. Would to God that they read its meaning in the light, instead of going about to establish their own righteousness and refusing to submit to His righteousness! Nor is it Jews only that need to learn this great truth; for it is ever fading more and more away from Christendom, where flesh is increasingly gloried in, and superstition and rationalism contend for the mastery against God and His Christ.

Chapter 15 - Meeting Of Jacob And Esau

Gen. 33:1-15.

The bringing of Jacob into communion with God was not yet complete; and as God’s dealing with him in the last chapter indicates it, so does this chapter confirm it. He lifted up his eyes and looked; but God was greater than his fears, though he still devised the best he could whether Esau came as a friend or as a foe. Jacob can hardly be said here to walk by faith, not by sight; but God was faithful in His providence.

“And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children to Leah and to Rachel and to the

two maid-servants; and he put the maid-servants and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindmost. And he passed over before them and bowed to the earth seven times, until he came near to his brother. And Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him; and they wept. And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children, and said, Who [are] these with thee? And he said, The children whom God hath graciously given thy servant. And the maid-servants drew near, they and their children, and they bowed. And Leah also drew near and her children, and they bowed. And after drew near Joseph and Rachel, and they bowed. And he said, What [meanest] thou [by] all this band (or, camp) which I met? And he said, To find favour in the eyes of my lord. And Esau said, I have much, my brother; let that which [is] thine be to thee. And Jacob said, No, I pray thee: if now I have found favour in thine eyes, then receive my present at my hand; for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen God’s face, and thou wast pleased with me. Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought thee, because graciously hath God dealt with me, and because I have all. And he urged him, and he took [it]. And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go; and I will go before thee. And he said to him, My lord knoweth the children [are] tender, and the flocks and the herds with young [are] with me; and overdrive them one day, then all the flock will die. Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant, and I will lead on softly according to the pace of the cattle that are before me, and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord unto Seir. And Esau said, Let me leave, I pray thee, of the people that [are]

with me. And he said, Why this? Let me find favour in my lord's eyes" (vers. 1-15).

None of the patriarchs passed through such inquietude as Jacob. So it must be if one is out of communion with God; who avails Himself of anxiety and change and danger to do us good and restore the soul at length. Even after God wrestled with him and enabled him to wrestle with God for His blessing, it was as yet far short of God's mind. For how poor that he could say no more than "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved!" God "talked with" His friend Abraham, revealing His Name as the Almighty, covenanted to make him father of many nations with things to come of Him, and revealed what He was going to do to the guilty cities of the plain, so as to draw out his intercession for righteous Lot.

But here Jacob was still far from peace as he considered Esau. He never thought of God's power over the hearts of all, and His intention of over-ruling Esau's resentment, to fill his heart with warm natural affection. As Jacob passed before the carefully arranged company of women and children, and bowed to the ground abjectly till he came near his brother, Esau ran to meet him, embraced him, fell on his neck, and kissed him. In his dread Jacob had prepared Esau for his abundant substance, but was silent about his family. Hence the enquiry, "Who are these with you?" to which Jacob, now getting more at ease, answers as became a believer, "The children whom God hath graciously given thy servant." But when Esau asks the meaning of all the band, or drove, he had met, he says, "To find favour in the eyes of my lord." To this Esau rejoins, "I have" (not only enough but) "much, my brother; let what is thine be

to thee," and Jacob goes yet further in pressing its acceptance, "for I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. Take, pray, my blessing that is brought thee, because God hath graciously dealt with me, and because I have all." In fact it was a gift meant to avert the anger and strong wrath he apprehended; but the manner and the terms in which it was couched hardly deserve the appreciation commonly expressed thereon. God had wrought pitifully: to Him indeed he owed thanksgiving; while he might well be touched by brotherly affection instead of all that he feared.

It may be painful to notice, but it is well to heed, what follows as showing Jacob's state even then. When Esau proposes that they should proceed, and himself lead the way, Jacob pleads the tenderness of the children and such of the flocks and herds as would all die, if overdriven one day, and begs his lord to pass over, whilst he should lead on softly, till he came unto his "lord" in Seir. Then on Esau's offer of some of his trained convoy he replies, "Why this? Let me find favour in my lord's eyes." The truth is, that he was most anxious to get rid of his brother, and that he had not the smallest intention of going to Seir. He was going to Succoth. Viewed in the light of God, Jacob was not truthful in what he said to his brother. There was evil still unjudged in those around, and he spoke with little scruple but with characteristic fertility of excuse.

Chapter 16 - Succoth And Shechem

Gen. 33:16-20.

God was faithful to Jacob, but not yet Jacob to God, Who still kept up reserve, and could not yet reveal His name

as He did to Abraham and Isaac, and would in due time to Jacob (Gen. 35:11). There was not the self-judgment that made the way for it. Hence with all his obsequiousness to his brother there Was not even candour, and still less faith in activity.

“And Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him a house, and for his cattle he made booths. Therefore the name of the place was called Succoth (Booths). And Jacob came [in] peace [to the] city Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he. came from Padan-Aram, and encamped before the city. And he bought an allotment of the field where he had spread his tent, at the hand of Hamor’s sons, father of Shechem, for a hundred kesitahs; (lambs). And he set up there an altar, and called it El-Elohe-Israel” (vers. 16-20).

Esau returned the same day to his own place, the scene hostile to Israel, and hateful to God, all the more because of the near relationship which drew down His deepening abhorrence. For vengeance belongs to Jehovah who will not permit unauthorised and guilty man to take it in hand. Jacob evasively journeys to Succoth, which should be marked east of the Jordan,2 though there was a place so named west of that river, as elsewhere too Ex. 12:37, Num. 33:5, 6). But the Succoth of Jacob’s dwelling was the place given to the Gadites (Joshua 13:27) and made memorable by the princes who refused bread to Gideon and his three hundred, and were threshed for their baseness with the thorns of the wilderness and briers.

There Jacob built him a house, as he made booths for his cattle which gave occasion to the name of the spot. But

the serious indication of the patriarch's state was the building of a house for himself in manifest departure from the pilgrim practice of his fathers, and indeed his own, as is described in Heb. 11:9, "By faith he (Abraham) became a sojourner in the land of promise [which gave it special emphasis] not as his own, having dwelt in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the joint-heirs of the same promise." It is incorrect to say with Matthew Henry that Jacob "was glad of booths," as contrasted with his descendants in houses of stone. The very point of God's word here is that he "built him a house," whereas his fathers dwelt in tents even in the land of promise. It was marked indifference and declension in this respect; and the more because Jacob was only on his way to the land. It was yielding like other men to the desire for the ease and convenience of a more settled and convenient abode.

At length however a movement was made. "And Jacob came in peace to the city Shechem which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padan-Aram, and encamped before the city. And he bought in allotment of the field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of Hamor's sons, father of Shechem, for a hundred kesitahs (lambs)."3 It is hardly needful to justify "in peace" from "to Shalem" as in the A.V. following the Sept., Syr. Pesch., and Vulgate, nor from the "safe and sound" of the Targum of Onkelos and the Rabbis, with most Germans, in the desire to exalt Jacob, and pretend that his halting passed quite away, contrary to any simple impression conveyed by the end of Gen. 32. There is indeed a seeming confirmation of the first sense in the fact of a place still called Salim between Shechem and the Jordan. But this is a mere coincidence, though it

weighed with Jerome and Epiphanius. For “in peace” is in contrast with his perturbation of mind through dread of Esau between Peniel and Succoth, which is surely pertinent to the purpose. Yet as he failed in Succoth, so did he yet more in Shechem, which had a pointed claim on him beyond Shalem; for there it was that the father of the faithful had his first manifestation of Jehovah in Canaan, and the promise to give that land to his seed; and there he built an altar to Jehovah that appeared to him. “And he bought an allotment of the field where he had spread his tent, at the hand of Hamor’s sons, father of Shechem, for a hundred kesitahs.” How different from him who had none inheritance given him in the land, no, not to set his foot on, save what he bought to lay his dead in at a later day! Jacob thus departed more and more from the position of a sojourner.

But did not Jacob redeem his character as saint by his subsequent act? Not quite as yet. “And he set up an altar there and called it El-Elohe-Israel.” In setting up an altar, where he first spread his tent in the promised land, he was undoubtedly right. He had not raised, nor could he properly raise one, outside the land of God’s gift. But he also made evident his falling short of God’s mind by the name he gave it. “God, the God of Israel” (ver. 20) did not rise up to the due patriarchal title of relationship; it was not promise, but his own measure of experience. It was short of Bethel; and Jacob must go through more and more humbling experience, and God must dislodge him from settling on the field he had purchased from the Hivite, to bring him to the place of his vow, where he would make an altar to God that appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother. Not even yet were the strange gods that defiled

his household put. away. How could there be true communion till then? Yet there was unfailing, patient, and tender mercy. But only there and thus could he enjoy the portion of God as He then revealed Himself. How blessed and holy are His ways!

Chapter 17 - Dinah And Her Brothers

Gen. 34.

One wrong step in departure from our true position before the Lord leads to many a sin, scandal, and sorrow. So we find here as the consequence of Jacob's buying the land of the Hivite, and building himself a house. His stay at Succoth and Shechem covers some ten years. He must be unsettled to get him back to his pilgrim place; but the way was painful for all, and a deep shame and humiliation and fear for the patriarch.

"And Dinah, daughter of Leah whom she bore to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. And Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the land, saw her, and he took her, and lay with her, and humbled her. And his soul clave unto Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spoke to the heart of the damsel. And Shechem spoke unto Hamor his father, saying, Take me this girl to wife. And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter; and his sons were with his cattle in the field; and Jacob held his peace until they came. And Hamor father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to talk to him. And Jacob's sons came from the field when they heard [it], and the men were grieved, and they were greatly inflamed, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; for so it ought not to be done.

“And Hamor spoke to them, saying, My son Shechem’s soul longeth for your daughter: I pray you, give her him to wife. And make marriages with us, [and] give your daughters to us, and take our daughters unto you. And ye shall dwell with us; and the land shall be before you: dwell and trade in it, and get you possessions therein. And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give. Ask of me very much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say to me. but give me the damsel to wife. And Jacob’s sons answered Shechem and Hamor his father with deceit, and spoke, because he had defiled Dinah their sister, and said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man that is uncircumcised; for that [were] a reproach unto us. But only in this will we consent unto you: if ye will be as we, that every male of you be circumcised; then will we give our daughters unto you, and take your daughters unto us; and we will dwell with you, and be one people. But if ye hearken not unto us, to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go away.

“And their words were good in the eyes of Hamor and in the eyes of Shechem, Hamor’s son. And the youth deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob’s daughter; and he [was] honourable above all his father’s house. and Hamor and Shechem his son came unto their city’s gate, and spoke unto the men of their city, saying, These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein. And the land, behold, [it is] wide on both sides before them. Let us take to us their daughters for wives, and our daughters let us give to them. Only in this will the men

consent unto us, to dwell with us, to be one people, in circumcising among us every male as they [are] circumcised. Their cattle, and their substance, and every beast of theirs, [shall] they not [be] ours? only let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us. And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city, and every male was circumcised, all that went out at the gate of his city" (vers. 1-24).

The only daughter of Jacob had no doubt a difficult part to play in the midst of so many brothers, to say nothing of other characteristics of the household. As the destroying incident of the chapter was soon followed by all quitting the scene, she may have been about fourteen or fifteen years old. With or without the sanction of her parents Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land. Josephus alleges a festive gathering. What had she to do with them in any way? All but the profane knew that the time would come for their judgment, that the seed of Abraham should possess the land; and their iniquity was great though not yet full, Apart from that, how giddy she and dangerous! She seems to have been as independent of her mother, as the young men certainly were beyond taking counsel of their father. Her gadding curiosity exposed her to the young prince of the land, who, smitten with her and carried away by his passion, seduced if he did not by force outrage her. Her poor father was silent till the sons returned from work. Meanwhile Shechem earnestly sought marriage at any price, and his father repaired to Jacob, pleading hard for his son's set desire to have her as wife, and offering the readiest terms of peace between the peoples, as Shechem urged for himself.

Thereon Jacob's sons interposed with guile the condition of circumcision for every male. Not the smallest thought or wish had they for inviting the Shechemites into the covenant. It was the basest treachery in order to ensnare and massacre them. Jacob had nothing to do with the cruel secret. Their pride and revenge ignored God as it did their father. Shechem was guilty of a great wrong; but Dinah too was in fault. Neither their mothers nor their grandmother came of circumcised fathers; nor did any pious or delicate reluctance appear in their own marriages. The condition was a lying and cowardly pretext to carry out their resentment to the uttermost. Hamor and Shechem fell into the trap, and had influence enough to persuade all their townsmen with themselves to submit to the painful rite, and its unexpected peril.

Then, when the inflammation was at its height for the beguiled Hivites, the bloody crisis came, executed by the two of the least scruple.

"And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took each his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And Hamor and Shechem his son they slew with the edge of the sword; and they took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out. Jacob's sons came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. Their flocks and their herds and their asses, and that which [was] in the city, and that which [was] in the field they took; and all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives, they took captive and spoiled, even all that [was] in the house" (vers. 25-29).

How solemn is the calm with which scripture recounts this whole affair of corruption and violence, covered and effected by odious hypocrisy, in which the chosen race were the perpetrators and Canaanites were the victims! Still it is going too far to say that Jacob felt only the consequence, not the appalling iniquity. It is related here, “And Jacob said to Simeon and to Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and I [am] few in number, and they will gather themselves together against me, and smite me, and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. And they said, As with a harlot should he deal with our sister (vers. 30, 31)?” Jacob was no doubt filled with alarm, so as to forget God’s promise; but who can forget the sense of this dark and hateful day he expressed on his dying bed in words of prophetic power?

“Simeon and Levi [are] brethren; Instruments of violence their swords. Come not thou into their council, my soul; With their assembly be not thou united, mine honour; For in their anger they slew men, And in their wantonness they houghed oxen. Cursed their anger, for [it was] fierce, And their, wrath, for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, And scatter them in Israel” (Gen. 49:5-7).

Chapter 18 - Go Up To Bethel

Gen. 35:1-8.

The humbling experiences of Jacob had not come to their close; but the way was being prepared for better blessing than he had yet known, and a nearer, truer, approach to what had been the cherished portion of Abraham and Isaac. Had he forgotten his vow at Bethel?

Why so slow after so many mercies? Why the delay at Succoth, and yet more disastrously at Shechem? where only God's overruling hand sheltered them from vengeance after the cruel plot of. Simeon and Levi. No doubt Shechem had behaved unrighteously, but Jacob's sons hypocritically and without mercy. God in grace interfered, and this leads to a decisive change.

"And God said to Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwelt there; and make there an altar to God that appeared to thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. And Jacob said to his household, and to all that [were] with him, Put away the strange gods that [are] among you, and cleanse yourselves, and change your garments; and we will arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar to God that answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way that I went. And they gave to Jacob all the strange gods that [were] in their hand, and the rings that [were] in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth that [was] by Shechem. And they journeyed; and the terror of God was upon the cities that [were] round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. And Jacob came to Luz which [is] in the land of Canaan, that [is], Bethel, he and all the people that [were] with him. And he built there an altar, and called the place El-bethel; because there God had appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother. And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died: and she was buried beneath Bethel, under the oak; and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth" (vers. 1-8).

Jacob was now to meet God, as he had never hitherto done. This he realised from the words spoken to him. And the effect was immediate and great on his

conscience. Put away, said he to all that were with him, the strange gods that are among you. We may be assured that he was as much deceived by Rachel's trick as her father, and that his indignant denial of false gods, stolen and secreted, was simple and genuine. "With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live." Never would he have spoken thus if the least suspicion of his beloved Rachel's dishonesty and dishonour of God had crossed his mind. But he had learnt it since, and had taken it quietly. But to meet God thus woke him up from his indifference. Even the lawless vengeance it Shechem weighed not so heavily. "Put away the strange gods that are among you" took the first place in his charge. This did not trouble him at Succoth, or at Shechem; but God's call to Bethel at once cast light on his carelessness, and produced self-judgment.

Far was Jehovah from saying of him, "I know that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice, in order that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham what he hath spoken of him." It was the reason of their being to the fathers chosen, called, and faithful. Even Terah was an idolater; and Abraham was separated to the one true God by the promises of which sovereign grace made him and his seed in the line of Isaac the depositary. Yet now his son was forced to feel and confess the sinful presence of strange gods in the midst of his household.

No wonder that his was a chequered lot; but how great the goodness that had watched over his trials and intermingled mercy at every time of need, and at length summoned him to Bethel, that he might clear himself and his house from their veiled ungodliness, and return

to consistency with his calling! “Put away the strange gods that are among you, and cleanse yourselves, and change your garments; and we will arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make there an altar to God that answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way that I went.” Who of us has followed the Lord without the proofs of the same fidelity on His part? chastising our waywardness too that we might be partakers of His holiness?

“And they gave to Jacob all the strange gods that were in their hand, and the rings that were in their cars; and Jacob buried them under the terebinth that was by Shechem.” Idolatry pervaded even their little ornaments, all of which had therefore to disappear. “And they journeyed; and the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them; and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob.” The living God knows how to control and dispose the heart, not only of enemies, but of those naturally resenting injury. Let His children fear and withal trust Him.

“And Jacob came to Luz which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. And he built there an altar and called the place El-bethel; because God there had appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother.” It is not now an altar called by a name that limits God to himself like El-Elohe-Israel. His faith is now cleared, and fuller. He is the God of God’s house, which is richer, better, and higher up the source of blessing.

“And Deborah Rebekah’s nurse died; and she was buried beneath Bethel under the oak; and the name of it was called Allon-bachuth,” the oak of weeping. It is

remarkable that she should have joined Jacob's household, no doubt after Rebekah's death. There her heart turned, her mistress gone, to Rebekah's beloved son. That they requited her love is plain from the record of their tears.

Chapter 19 - The Patriarchal Name Of God Revealed To Jacob

Gen. 35:9-15.

Slow indeed had been Jacob's steps to Bethel. Long his stay in Padan-aram; and afterward delay followed in Succoth and in Shechem, till he was dislodged at last by sin and sorrow, shame and fear, yet with God ever faithful and true.

"And God appeared to Jacob again, after he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him. And God said to him, Thy name [is] Jacob; thy name shall not henceforth be called Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name. And he called his name Israel. And God said to him, I [am] God Almighty [El-Shaddai]; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings out of thy loins shall come; and the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee will I give it; and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured on it a drink-offering, and he poured on it oil. And Jacob called the name of the place, where God spoke with him, Bethel" (vers. 9-15).

It was no mysterious conflict in the dark as at Peniel with sentence of death put on the flesh. Nor was it a vision of the night as at this same Bethel long before,

when Jacob dreamed, and Jehovah stood above the ladder reaching to heaven, with angels of God ascending and descending on it. Still it is not here Jehovah as such, but, “God” that now appeared to Jacob in grace, when come after so many vicissitudes to the scene of his vow, and blessed. O what a God is the only true God!

God to him as to his fathers reveals Himself as God Almighty. There is not a word about the faults which rendered chastisement necessary, but simply God blessing him. But no such rich and enlarged scope appears as we have in Gen. 12, no such oath as Jehovah swore on the virtual sacrifice of Abraham’s only-begotten, raised from the dead in a parable, with its wonderful distinction between the numerous seed with power over their enemies, and the seed to which no number is attached, the one seed with blessing for the Gentiles, as the apostle draws it out in Gal. 3. Nor are there such terms as when Jehovah appeared to Isaac when He bade him not go down into Egypt, but sojourn in Canaan, spite of famine there, where He would be with him and bless him as He did.

Yet it was no longer Jacob entreating God for His blessing: God of His own accord appeared and blessed him, returned as he was out of the land of the stranger, and taught many a lesson about himself “in the way” as well as out of it. But the blessing however gracious is in a lower key and of a more general character as befitted the name Elohim rather than Jehovah. Still Jacob has Him, truly and unasked, revealed to him, as to Abraham and Isaac, by the proper patriarchal title of El-Shaddai, God Almighty. Nor did any one of the fathers need that assurance of protective might so much as that “worm” Jacob.

His name too is not to be henceforth called Jacob, the supplanter, but Israel, the wrestler or prince of God. The manner is striking. For God speaks of it as if it had been then given, and not merely confirmed, as suited to one who was come back to the land, and not a fugitive from his father's house (though greatly by his own sins, whatever the wickedness of Esau might have been and was). He has like Abraham in Gen. 17 the promise of nations and kings of his line; but nothing here goes beyond the bounds and glory of Israel and the land.

"And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him." We may compare this favour to Jacob with the similar terms as to Abraham in Gen. 17:22. What grace to both! and what an unspeakable difference from the mythological dreams of the intercourse of the gods with Gentile mankind, even if these had been true! But as lies go with moral corruption, and spurious religion degrades man below natural conscience, what a joy to know that the bright side is yet to come for both Israel and the Gentiles! Then the promises, so long inert through unbelief, will be by divine grace bound up with a rejected Messiah and an everlasting redemption and the new covenant in its literal and direct force, and the people, so long blind, will look to Him whom they pierced, and mourn for Him as for an only son. Meanwhile between His two comings the heavenly counsels of God are revealed in Christ dead, risen, and glorified in heaven, and now made known to the church His body, truly the great mystery.

But great too will be the day of Jezreel in the land, and great the blessing of the nations, under Him who will be the head and centre of all glory heavenly and earthly (Eph. 1:10). For nothing less than this will accomplish

the purpose that God intends for the glory of Him who suffered to the uttermost that His Father might be glorified even as to sin. The universe will be reconciled and set under Him to the joy of every creature, and to the praise of God.

Can one wonder that Jacob set up a pillar of stone to mark that spot of divine grace, and poured a drink-offering and oil upon it, and called its name Bethel with a fulness of honour unknown before?

Chapter 20 - Rachel's Death

Gen. 35:16-20.

It was not without aim and interest that the Holy Spirit recorded the decease of Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, and the oak of weeping under which she was buried at Bethel. God means His people to feel the blank of a faithful domestic, and all the more if that fidelity covered a long space backward. Remarkable is it too that she should now be heard of, not in Isaac's tent but in that of Jacob. What many have inferred hence of Jacob's visits to his father ere this we leave: scripture is silent even as to when Rebekah died. But we may be sure that the aged nurse abode with her beloved mistress at least till then. A nearer bereavement was at hand.

"And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was yet some way to come to Ephrath; and Rachel travailed, and it went hard with her in childbirth, And it came to pass when it went hard in her bearing, that the midwife said to her, Fear not; for this also [is] a son for thee. And it came to pass as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Benoni [son of my sorrow]; but

his father called him Benjamin [son of right hand]. And Rachel died, and was buried on the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave, which [is] the pillar of Rachel's grave to [this] day" (vers. 16-20).

The moral government of God, now by the way, no more fails than His grace from the beginning to, the end. Rachel had greatly sinned and kept her husband in the dark, when he unconsciously said that one guilty should not live. Her theft was not only a sin against her father, but in what she stole a heinous insult to God. Nor evidence have we that there was soon, if ever, adequate self-judgment. It is plain that Jacob at length became aware of idols in his household; the sin of which God's call to Bethel laid on his conscience, as we have already seen. To take his beloved away was a chastening, not to her only but to him also.

1 Cor. 11:27-32 is a most instructive teaching on the application of this truth, in which we learn the security of grace on the one hand, and on the other the Lord's dealing with the inconsistent ways of those that are His. The ignorance of the truth even among pious men, notwithstanding their ability and learning is strikingly betrayed in the mistranslation of a word all-important for the true sense. It is not "damnation" but "judgment" in ver. 29, expressly contrasted with "condemnation" in ver. 32. The Lord was then judging by sickness and even death the faulty state and walk of the Corinthian saints, that they should not be condemned with the world, that is, because they were His and to be kept from "damnation." They were judged in this temporal way for the blessing of their souls. It is a universal principle of God, and as real in the O.T. as it is plain in the N.T. For

God is and must be God everywhere. Only the display of grace under the gospel brings out, not only His sovereign grace but, His moral government with special clearness.

Rachel's name for the new-born child expresses her sorrow; Jacob, whatever his natural feelings over the dying wife of his heart, looks forward in hope. But it is not in any degree a heavenly hope in Benjamin, as Abraham had in Isaac, received from death to resurrection in a parable. It is the pledge of Israel in power, when she that represented the former state passes away by death. Israel must at the close be brought through deep if not deadly affliction before emerging into victory through their long disowned Messiah over all their foes on the earth.

"Fear not" from the attendant was well-meant. From the Lord it had been a word of power. But He was calling her away from a scene where she had failed in testimony to Him, and compromised her husband too. How could she be trusted for training her offspring in His fear? God had added another son, as she had said in faith when her firstborn was given. It was fitting that she should depart.

Little thought Jacob, when he erected a pillar of thanksgiving at Bethel in the place where God talked with him, that he would so soon after erect another pillar, and this of sorrow upon Rachel's grave. But he bows to the hand of chastening: whom the Lord loves, He chastises, and scourges every son whom He receives. Jacob could not know, as it was not yet revealed, that near this very Ephrath should be born the King of Israel, the pledge and type of great David's greater Son, whose

goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. The smitten Judge of Israel, who gave up His guilty people, will surely restore them, so that they shall abide, and He be great unto the ends of the earth. And the day hastens.

Rachel dies, but the pillar that records it stands in Israel's land and history till the kingdom. And her weeping for her children, as the weeping prophet wrote, is with truth and pathos remarkably applied when the King was born, and preserved from the murderous intent of the usurping Edomite, the Rome — favoured enemy within.

Benjamin himself, the son of his father's right-hand, typifies Christ, not at all as head of the church, but as the conquering Son of might when the kingdom is established in the land as indeed the earth, and the enemies parish before Him. This evidently looks on to the future day of power and glory for the earth: a manifest contrast with Him who suffered and sits hidden in the heavens.

But we may also observe that the two wives of Jacob aptly represent, Leah the fruitful, and mother of the nations, and Rachel, Israel's first love, but only a mother after Leah had borne abundantly. Then of her who typified Israel after the flesh comes Joseph, the bright witness of Christ sold and separate from His brethren, at the right of Him who had the larger rule of the world while the Jews were disowned. But at length she dying gives birth to the son of her sorrow, but son of his father's right hand; who shall devour the prey in the morning and at even divide the spoil (Gen. 49:27).

“Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.”

The effort of ancient fathers and modern theologians to make every type point to Christian association is the fruit of ignorance as to the extensive and varied glories of Christ, if not effacing yet assuredly lowering the proper brightness of His heavenly exaltation and of the church’s union with Him. The late Bp. Chr. Wordsworth was a learned and pious man; but his commentary here and everywhere yields the fullest evidence of this theological bias, shared by the Puritan, the Low, and the Broad Schools, no less than by his own, the so-called High, little as he might relish such companions. Faith alone rises to the enjoyment of heavenly things. Tradition has classes in its school to suit the lovers of antiquity and of novelty, of the law and of free thought. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Not the church, but Christ, is the true centre of divine purpose, which embraces the things which are in heaven as well as the things that are on earth. Both are to be, not only set under Christ, but this in visible display at His appearing and kingdom. Making the church all, instead of maintaining its real position, invariably has the effect of lowering and confusing the truth. For the church in this case takes the place of Israel, and seeks earthly things, ease, honour, riches, and power. Our true calling is now to suffer with and for Christ, waiting for heavenly glory at His coming; and our right witness is that God will then restore Israel to more than pristine blessing in the promised land to the joy of all the nations of the earth under the great King.

Chapter 21 - Israel Put To Shame, And Isaac's Death

Gen. 35:21-29.

Jacob had not yet reached the end of his journeyings, any more than of his sorrows, a man of the most varied experience among the fathers, as Isaac had the least. So he said later to Pharaoh, Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. Yet this painful experience under the governing hand of God was blessed to his soul; and the Spirit of God marks it here by the name of "Israel," not conferred only but here used historically, as we find it again when years after he took another journey still more eventful (Gen. 46:1, 30; Gen. 48:2, etc.).

"And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent on the other side of Migdal-Eder (Tower of the flocks). And it came to pass when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine; and Israel heard of [it]. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: the sons of Leah, Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun; the sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin; and the sons of Bilhah Rachel's handmaid, Dan and Naphtali; and the sons of Zilpah Leah's handmaid, Gad and Asher. These [are] the sons of Jacob that were born to him in Padan-Aram. And Jacob came to Isaac his father to Mamre, to Kirjath-Arba, which [is] Hebron; where Abraham had sojourned, and Isaac. And the days of Isaac were a hundred and eighty years. And Isaac expired and died, and was

gathered to his peoples, old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him" (vers. 21-29).

There is a day at hand when Jehovah will assemble her that halteth, and will gather her that is driven out, and her that He hath afflicted; and He will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast off a strong nation. And Jehovah shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth even for ever. And thou, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, yea the first dominion shall come, even the kingdom to the daughter of Jerusalem. So brightly Micah (Micah 4) was given to prophesy of the flock of Israel, as in the next chapter of the Shepherd through whose sufferings alone could come such blessing and glory. Meanwhile he, the father of the twelve tribes, halted slowly in his keenly felt bereavement, who had known both to be driven out and afflicted.

But the time was not come for Him whom he too awaited, even to be smitten on the cheek, much less for the birth of that grand change when He returns in power. In that. land, which is to be the glory of all lands, through Him who will restore all things to God's glory, dwelt the desolate man. It was a lingering that presented a dismal snare to his firstborn, and, sad to say it, to the concubine of his father, the mother of his brothers Dan and Naphtali. Dinah had been a grief already; but what was that compared to the two-edged dagger that pierced his bosom? "Israel heard of it." But we are not told of a word that escaped him then. It was a grief too deep, if not for tears, for a passing burst of feeling; but his heart had sense of it when the sons gathered together round his dying bed, and he was given to tell them what would befall them at the end of

days, not for the eternal scene, but for “the regeneration” and indeed before this comes. The dishonourer of his father, and in a way not even among the Gentiles that know not God, was forgiven, but lost his birthright and could have no pre-eminence either now or when God’s kingdom comes for the earth, and Jesus is the head over all things heavenly as well as earthly.

The enumeration of the family is pathetic at this point in the patriarchal story. No flesh shall glory. Let him that glorieth glory in the Lord. Yet God takes pleasure in recording their names, both early and late in the O.T., and finally in the last book of the N.T., but with instructive variations. For the Bible is not only God’s word, but an intensely moral book, little to be discerned by those who make mind their all.

The death of Isaac, with his great age, exceeding Abraham’s, is here named, though we must bear in mind that it did not happen till Joseph was not only sold into Egypt but rose, unseen and unknown of Israel, into the seat next the throne. But here it is recounted, as the burial at Mamre brought again together the two sons in a sorrow that set aside strife. Notwithstanding the hatred which God hated was to come out afterward even to the close of the O.T. It must meet its doom in the day of Jehovah’s indignation against all the nations, and His sword Shall come down on Edom, when the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose, and Carmel and Sharon shall See the glory of Jehovah, the excellency of Israel’s God.

Chapter 22 - Jacob And Joseph

Gen. 37.

All thoughtful readers will understand why the purpose in hand excludes dwelling on Gen. 36 Jacob has nothing to do with the chapter. It has its own important place of sketching the earthly lot of Esau. Indirectly however it is instructive, as showing that which is natural first coming into power, afterwards what is spiritual. The family of promise remain shepherds and herdmen, wandering here and there, without the land and within it, and even grievously oppressed; while the generations of Edom rise rapidly into importance, away from Canaan, in Mount Seir. The posterity of Edom claim soon the distinction of chiefs. “These are the dukes of the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau; duke Teman, duke Omar, duke Zepho, duke Kenaz, duke Korah, duke Gatam, duke Amalek. These are the dukes that came of Eliphaz, in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Adah. And these are the sons of Reuel Esau’s son; duke Nahath, duke Terah, duke Shammah, duke Mizzah. These are the dukes that came of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Bashemath Esau’s wife. And these are the sons of Oholibamah Esau’s wife: duke Jeush, duke Jaalam, duke Korah. These are the dukes that came of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau’s wife. These are the sons of Esau, and these are their dukes: the same is Edom” (Gen. 36:15-19).

Others, too, posed as grandees, the sons of Seir the Horite or cave-dweller, the inhabitant of the land, summarised in vers. 29, 30: “these are the dukes that came of the Horites: duke Lotan, duke Shobal, duke Zibeon, duke Anah, duke Dishon, duke Ezer, duke

Dishan. These are the dukes that came of the Horites according to their dukes in the land of Seir."

Nor was this the acme of their development. "And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel." No less than eight kings are successively traced from Bela to Hadar, though it is carefully said that we have Esau's dukes again (vers. 40-43); and so we hear in the song of Moses Ex. 15:15), but "the king" in the later history.

Even in Gen. 37 it is much more the history of Joseph that now begins, typifying the Lord in humiliation, and how He fared at the hands of His brethren according to the flesh. Our present task is to mark Jacob in it.

"And Jacob dwelt in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These [are] Jacob's generations. Joseph, [being] seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and he [was] a lad (or, doing service) with the sons of Bilhah; and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives; and Joseph brought their evil report to his (or, their) father. And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he [was] son of his old age; and he gave him a coat of many colours. And his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren; and they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him. And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told [it] to his brethren; and they hated him yet more. And he said to them, Hear, pray, this dream which I have dreamt. And, behold, we [were] binding sheaves in the midst of the field; and, behold, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about and bowed down to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Wilt thou indeed reign over us? or wilt thou

indeed rule over us? And they hated him yet more for his dreams, and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream and told [it] to his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun, and the moon, and eleven stars bowed down to me. And he told [it] to, his father, and to his brethren. And his father rebuked him, and said to him, What' [is] this dream that thou hast dreamt? Shall indeed I and thy mother and thy brethren come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father kept the saying" (vers. 1-11).

We leave the early piety of Joseph till its own season, and the divine communications with which he was favoured even as a youth. But it falls within Jacob's history to note the special affection which bound Joseph to him, and the dress of honour which was to play a heartless and cruel part toward their father in the unscrupulous revenge on Joseph with which they answered all. Jacob, though moved by the singular honour implied in the second dream, could not but treasure up its as yet dim import. Joseph's simplicity and candour, for there was an absence of all presumption, only kindled more fiercely the spite of his brethren, which soon found occasion to vent itself in outrageous malice. How like the way of the Jews with Him who was long after to be the blessed Antitype!

"And his brethren went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. And Israel said to Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed [the flock] in Shechem? Come, that I may send thee to them. And he said to him, Here [am] I (or, Behold me). And he said to him, Go, pray, see after thy brethren's welfare and the flocks' welfare; and bring me word again. And he sent him out of the vale of Hebron; and he

came to Shechem. And a man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field; and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, pray, where they feed. And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went to his brethren, and found them in Dothan. And they saw him afar off, and before he came near to them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another [lit. a man to his brother], Behold, this master of dreams cometh. And now come, and let us slay him, and cast him into one of the pits; and we will say, An evil beast hath devoured him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams. And Reuben heard, and delivered him out of their hands, and said, Let us not take his life. And Reuben said to them, Shed no blood: cast him into this pit that [is] in the wilderness; but lay. no hand upon him (in order that he might deliver him out of their hand, to restore him to his father). And it came to pass, when Joseph was come to his brethren, that they stript Joseph of his coat, the coat of the colours that [was] on him; and they took him and cast him into the pit; and the pit [was] empty: [there was] no, water in it. And they sat down to eat bread; and they lifted up their eyes, and looked, and, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites came from Gilead; and their camels bore tragacanth and balsam and ladanum, going to carry it down to Egypt. And, Judah said to his brethren, What profit [is it] it we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand he upon him; for he [is] our brother, our flesh. And his brethren hearkened. And there passed by Midianitish men, merchants; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for twenty silver

[pieces]; and they brought Joseph into Egypt. And Reuben returned to the pit; and, behold, Joseph [was] not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned to his brethren and said, The child [is] not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a buck of the goats and dipt the coat in the blood, and they sent the coat of the colours, and they brought it to their father, and said, This have we found: know now whether it [be] thy son's coat or not. And he knew it, and said, [It is] my son's coat: an evil beast hath devoured him; - surely Joseph is torn in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons rose up, and all his daughters, to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, For I will go down to my son into Sheol mourning. And his father wept for him. And the Midianites sold him into Egypt to Potiphar, chamberlain of Pharaoh, captain of the guard" (vers. 12-36).

Jacob had yet much to learn experimentally of God as well as of himself, even though then he was disposed to have his idols. His most recent lesson was in Rachel's death, his new one prolonged it every way in Joseph her firstborn, his most loved son, not dead, it is true, as he feared, but only at length found to be risen into that exalted seat of honour which disconcerted even him when first announced. Like the Lord was Joseph in his measure, a vessel of divine wisdom in humiliation deepening into the shadow of death, rejected and scorned most by his brethren, and sold to the Gentiles: the very errand of love on which his father sent him to them furnished the opportunity for wreaking their hatred on his lowly and blameless head. How little his

envious brethren could anticipate that in the approaching hour of the earth's need and distress he alone was to bear up the pillars, and deliver from death not the chosen family alone but the world of that day, and turn by his wisdom a tribulation so deep and widespread into the greater glory of the sovereign power which exalted him! More than this, as we learn later on, his brethren were to be brought down to true self-judgment and have their hearts opened to grace when he should lead them into the truth, and at last make himself known to them as their saviour, the saviour of the world too in the figure, he once humbled to the uttermost, and then highly exalted, entirely outside and above Jewish limits. But we forbear to anticipate more, even of what the history of Jacob makes known necessarily.

Chapter 23 - Two Sons Of Jacob Contrasted

Gen. 38, 39.

As the chapters henceforth till much later refer rather to Jacob's sons than to himself, there is the less reason for dwelling on them now; they may, at least most of them, come for more particular notice under the proper head. But as they furnished not a little for the experience of Jacob also, under divine government, we may survey them by the way.

"And it came to pass at that time, that Judah went down from his brethren, and turned in to a man of Adullam whose name was Hirah. And Judah saw there the daughter of a Canaanitish man whose name was Shua; and he took her and went in to her. And she conceived and bare a son; and he called his name Er; and she again conceived and bore a Son; and She called his

name Onan. And again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah; and he was at Chezib when she bore him. And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of Jehovah, and Jehovah slew him. And Judah Said to Onan, Go in to thy brother's wife, and fulfil to her the brother-in-law's duty, and raise up seed to thy brother. And Onan knew that the seed would not be his; and it came to pass when he went in to his brother's wife, that he spilled [it] on the ground, lest he should give seed to his brother. And what he did was evil in the eyes of Jehovah; and he slew him also. And Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, Remain a widow in thy father's house, until Shelah my son is grown; for he said, Lest he die also as his brothers. And Tamar went and remained in her father's house. And the days were multiplied when the daughter of Shua, Judah's wife, died. And Judah was comforted, and went up to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah, the Adullamite, to Timnah. And it was told Tamar, saying, Behold, thy father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep. And she put off from, her the garments of her widowhood, and covered herself with a veil, and wrapped herself, and sat in the gate of Enaim, which is by the way to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as wife. And Judah saw her, and thought her [to be] a harlot; because she had covered her face. And he turned to her by the way, and said, Come, pray, let me go in to thee; for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. And she said, What, wilt thou give me that thou mayest come in to me? And he said, I will send a kid of the goats from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give a pledge until thou send [it]? And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and

thy lace, and thy stall which [is] in thy hand. And he gave [it] to her, and came in to her; and she conceived by him. And she rose and went her way, and laid by her veil from her, and put on the garments of her widowhood. And Judah sent the kid of the goats by hand of his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand; but he found her not. And he asked the men of her place, saying, Where [is] the prostitute (dedicated one) that [was] at Enaim by the wayside? And they said, There was no prostitute there. And he returned to Judah, and said, I have not found her; and also the men of the place said, No prostitute has been there. And Judah said, Let her take [it] to her, lest we be put to shame. Behold, I sent this kid, and thou hast not found her. And it came to pass about three months after that it was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter-in-law hath played the whore; and also, behold, she is pregnant by whoredom. And Judah said, Bring her forth, that she may be burned. When she was brought forth, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, By the man to whom these [belong] I am pregnant; and she said, Acknowledge, pray, whose [are] these, the signet, and the lace, and the stall. And Judah acknowledged and said, She is more righteous than I, because I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he know her again no more. And it came to pass at the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb. And it came to pass, when she travailed,. that lone] put out [his] hand, and the midwife took and bound on his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. And it came to pass as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? on thee [be the] breach. And they called his name Pharez (Breach). And afterward came out his brother that [had] on his hand the scarlet

thread, and they called his name Zerah (Rising)" (chap. 38).

The chapter needs few words to impress its proofs of Judah's low state morally, as the next does for displaying Joseph blessed and a blessing. The name of "Jehovah," not "God" merely, is marked in both: in Gen. 38 judging the manifest violation of His will, in Gen. 39 causing him to prosper who sought to please Jehovah, and this in the most adverse circumstances, first as a slave, secondly as a prisoner, through the wickedness of Jew and Gentile. And we may notice that it is not Reuben or any other of the tribal heads, but Judah that proposed the sale of Joseph, and now evinced in his house the evil which drew down curse on curse, till its chief had to own the sad shame of Tamar, more righteous than himself who adjudged her to die by fire. Yet by this guilty Judah, and by Tamar, came He who cleanses from all sin by His blood, and will reign over the universe to God's glory, far beyond all that Joseph prefigured, as He went far lower in humiliation and suffering.

"And Joseph was brought down into Egypt; and Potiphar, a chamberlain of Pharaoh, captain of the life-guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hand of the Ishmaelites that brought him down thither. And Jehovah was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that Jehovah was with him, and that Jehovah made all which he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found favour in his eyes, and he served him; and he made him overseer over his house; and all he had he put into his hand. And it came to pass from the time he had made him overseer in his house and over all that was his, that Jehovah blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake;

and the blessing of Jehovah was upon all that was his in house and in field. And he left all that was his in Joseph's hand, and he knew not anything with him save the bread that he ate. And Joseph was beautiful of form and beautiful of countenance. And it came to pass after these things that the wife of his master cast her eyes on Joseph, and said, Lie with me. But he refused and said to his master's wife, Behold, my master knoweth not what is with me in the house, and he hath put all that is his into my hand. None is greater in this house than I; nor hath he kept back from me anything but thee, because thou art his wife; and how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?4 And it came to pass as she spoke to Joseph day [by] day, that he hearkened not to her to lie by her [and] to be with her. And it came to pass about this time, that he went into the house to do his business; and none of the men of the house was there within. And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me; and he left his garment in her hand and fled and ran out. And it came to pass when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled forth, that she called to the men of the house, and spoke to them, saying, See, he hath brought in a Hebrew man to mock us: he came in to me to lie with me, and I cried with a great voice. And it came to pass when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me and fled and went out. And she laid his garment by her until his lord came home. And she spoke to him, according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant whom thou hast brought to us came in to mock me; and it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me and fled forth. And it came to pass when his lord heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him, saying, According to these

things thy servant did to me, that his wrath was kindled. And Joseph's lord took him and put him into the tower-house, a place where the king's prisoners were bound; and he was there in the tower-house. And Jehovah was with him, and extended mercy to him, and gave him favour in the eyes of the chief of the tower-house. And the chief of the tower-house committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that [were] in the tower-house; and [of] all that they were doing there, he was the doer. The chief of the tower-house looked not to anything under his hand, because Jehovah [was] with him; and what he did Jehovah made to prosper (Gen. 39).

It is as lovely a picture in the simple fact of grace moving under Jehovah's guidance in purity and integrity where man and woman had dealt villainously; as Judah and his house, passing from one shame to another under His chastising hand, are a serious and humbling lesson.

Chapter 24 - Jacob's Lowly Son Exalted, And The Proud Abased

Gen. 40 - 45.

Here we must be brief, as we have to do, not with Jacob, but with his sons; so that a mere sketch is all that we would now attempt. As man's and his brethren's part was evil toward the righteous Joseph, God wrought in His admirable providence, and caused what they did to injure only the more to accomplish His purpose of good, as well as to set him in honour who deserved it, but had to pass from one humiliation to a worse.

First we see Joseph concerned with the unhappy looks of Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker, bound in the same prison with himself. They had each his dream, and

were grieved that there was none to interpret. But Joseph, replying that this belongs to God, asks to hear, and furnishes the desired light; which was exactly verified in the death of the baker and the restoration of the cupbearer (Gen. 40). Next, Pharaoh, at the end of two full years of prison trial to Joseph, has his dreams which not all the Scribes nor the sages of Egypt could explain. This woke up the forgetful heart of the restored chamberlain who tells the king of the Hebrew youth; and he, hastily sent for from the dungeon, disclaims any source but God for the king's need. But on hearing he is equally clear that God had sent the dreams to Pharaoh, and enabled him to let Pharaoh see what He Himself was about to do. The word came so simply yet convincingly home to the king and his servants, that none was so fit to direct aright the divinely given light as he who had been the means of making it known; and at one bound Pharaoh set the captive over all the land of Egypt, next to himself on the throne. And here again the prophetic dreams were punctually fulfilled to the immense relief of suffering man (Gen. 41). Among the sufferers (Gen. 42, Gen. 43) were Jacob and his sons, all but Benjamin being sent by their father to buy the food which Joseph alone could supply. "And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him" (8). And a marvellous forecast follows of the way a greater than Joseph, first suffering from His brethren and the Gentiles, interpreter too of God's wisdom in His humiliation, and exalted to the right hand of the Highest, not only administers the richest blessing to the Gentiles, unknown to His Jewish brethren in their dark unbelief, but adopts deep and efficacious means to bring these to repentance and make Himself known as their Brother and gracious Friend in the day of His glory.

On the details, however instructive and necessary to a life of Joseph, we need not here dilate, beyond pointing out the critical part of the contrivance to make Benjamin prisoner, which drew out Judah's confession and plea at all cost to let this youngest brother return to, his father (Gen. 44). Thereon follows (in Gen. 45) Joseph making himself known to his brethren. And here we look on all as living pictures of that great event which will as surely be accomplished when all Israel shall be saved, by a distinct act of divine grace and power, when the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in (Rom. 11:25-27). As touching the gospel the Jews are still enemies for the Gentiles' sake; for God is still working among the nations, and not at all yet in a national way with the Jews, who are still unbelieving that He who came of themselves, the rejected Messiah, is exalted on high and has long been the source of salvation and blessing to the Gentiles.

But assuredly the time is at hand when the famished Jews will be brought under His gracious hand, and after secret mercy will be brought to own that the man of God's right hand, the Son of man whom He made strong for Himself, is none other than He whom they so shamelessly rejected and forced on the Gentiles to crucify Him, who in His glory will not be ashamed to call them brethren. In order that this should be a real work in their souls, not as often of old a mere external deliverance, but truly of those written in the book and characterised by genuine faith and repentance, they must pass through a special tribulation which will be disastrous to all who having no conscience toward God become apostate. But it will be blessed greatly to those who are born of God and exercised by their most bitter

experience, and at length are brought to fully judge all when they behold in His glory for their rescue and blessing Him whom they recognise as the Messiah they had pierced.

The Psalms and the prophets, as well as the prophetic part of the Revelation, to say nothing of the synoptic Gospels also, cast much light, not on the glorious change only, but on the process employed by the Lord to make Himself known to His brethren. Here tradition has been guilty of a double wrong: by appropriating to Christians all that divine light which will surely be afforded gradually and increasingly when God begins to prepare His ancient people in darkness and error and suffering through a work of grace, however ignorant at first, for the blessed and exalted place they are to have under Messiah and the new covenant in the days of the kingdom, the kingdom no longer in mystery but in manifestation. And how precious will those chapters be, when conscience is truly awakened and exercised, and light dawns surely if slowly on their souls, and the true Joseph is at length made known to His brethren! The work will not be complete, until the sins are judged in the light of His personal presence, His glory and His grace. And what type could be clearer than this Gen. 45 affords us? Does this diminish our interest and profit too in anticipating the future? Nay, nor this only; for we may see in Joseph's marriage and his sons the shadow of Christian or church blessing, while He is not yet at all known to His brethren as such.

How sad it is to realise, as we enjoy the various light of Christ's humiliation and glory, that the very principle of the higher criticism is nothing but withering and blinding unbelief. For if there be anything more

distinctive of it than another, is it not the denial of true prophecy? And what can be more characteristic of scripture than that such simple narratives as this should be so pervaded with that light divine? Alas! it is equally blind to the heavenly light of Christ, of which His miracles were a very real though far from the highest part. For this reason the apostasy is worse in Christendom than in Israel, however grievous and gross this may have been.

The root of the evil lies deeper still. It is fundamental unbelief in the glory of Christ's person, to which the emptying of Himself is perverted. Decorous language is observed, in England especially, not to openly violate the Athanasian creed, along with the strongest desire to get rid of it by efforts direct and indirect. Yet enough escapes the pen and lips to convince men of any discernment, that Christ's Deity is no more accepted in reality than the plenary inspiration of the scriptures. Craft avails itself of the facts, that God or gods way be employed of men in a merely representative sense as rulers, and that divine inspiration is vulgarly and in the Prayer-book applied to what is simply natural when exhibited in a surpassing degree of excellence. But all such reasoning is a wicked and destructive cheat, when the question is of the Lord of all, and of God's word. And these unbelieving men are only hurrying on that revealed departure of Christendom from the faith of God's Christ to bring on the predicted vengeance of God on the most loathsome and detested objects of His judgment.

Chapter 25 - Israel And His Sons Go Down Into Egypt

Gen. 46, 47.

Parental affection answered in Jacob, both when he believed not for joy fainting at the news that Joseph was alive and governor over all the land of Egypt, and reviving when he said “It is enough: Joseph my son is yet alive, I will go and see him before I die.”

But it was not quite enough. Divine goodness wrought in his soul when he reached the southern limit of the land. “And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beer-Sheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here [am] I. And he said, I [am] God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up; and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes” (Gen. 46:1-4).

What grace on God’s part! Abram had gone down into Egypt through the pressure of famine, and sadly failed there, whatever riches he gained. Isaac too, when famine in the land might have drawn him off like his father, was expressly forbidden to go thither and enjoined to dwell in the land under the assurance of His blessing. Israel needed and had God bidding him not to fear going down there, where He would make of him a great nation, with special comfort nearer still to his heart.

The rest of the chapter from ver. 5 presents the chosen family in Pharaoh’s wagons with their cattle and goods, “Jacob and all his seed with him: his sons, and his sons’

sons with him, his daughters and his sons' daughters, and all his seed brought he with him into Egypt." In the list that follows Joseph's sons are given in their due place according to Hebrew usage. "And he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to direct his face to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. And 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 to Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou [art] yet alive" (vers. 28-30). The close of the chapter gives Joseph telling his brethren what he proposed to say to Pharaoh, that they might have Goshen to dwell in.

In Genesis 47 we have them presented to Pharaoh accordingly; and the still more interesting interview of Jacob with the king. "And Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob, How old [art] thou? And Jacob said to Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage [are] a hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh" (vers. 7-10).

How wondrous the grace of God toward Jacob! It was his to bless Pharaoh. Abram deceived the Pharaoh of his day and for Sarai's sake had "sheep and oxen and he-asses and men-servants and maidservants, and she-asses and camels"; and he again deceived Abimelech similarly; as did Isaac at a later day in like forgetfulness of his Almighty protector. Not so the "worm Jacob." In weakness was he made strong, and enabled to bear himself with dignity before the greatest man on the

earth. Not a favour did he ask, when, we may be sure, he might have had anything. He blessed Pharaoh when he went in, and before he came out. “And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.” Yet there was in this neither vanity nor pride, but a soul that had come to know divine goodness; and then a better thing was his portion than the world could confer. Besides there was treasure enough in God for Pharaoh; so that his heart overflowed on the king’s behalf.

As to Joseph’s administration of which the body of the chapter (11-26) treats, this is not the subject in hand. But the latter part tells us of Jacob’s living in the land of Egypt seventeen years more; and the time drew nigh for Israel to die. So he called Joseph; and with the same solemnity as Abraham employed in sending Eliezer for Isaac’s bride, he made Joseph not only promise but swear to carry his body out of Egypt and bury it in the burial-place of his fathers. Joseph’s splendour did not in the least wean his heart from the land of promise. There would he be laid, as his spirit waited for the King of glory and the kingdom.

Chapter 26 - Jacob Blessing Joseph’s Sons

Gen. 48.

In this chapter scenes of profound interest follow as to the dying patriarch, for his blessing on the sons of Joseph; in the next for his dying words to his own sons in general. Few words are here needed however much may be conveyed.

“And it came to pass after these things, that [one] told Joseph, Behold, thy father [is] sick. And he took with him his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. And [one] told

Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee; and Israel strengthened himself and sat upon the bed. And Jacob said to Joseph, The Almighty God appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me and said to me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a company of peoples; and I will give this land to thy seed after thee, an everlasting possession. And now thy two sons, who were born to thee in the land of Egypt before I came to thee into Egypt, [shall be] mine; Ephraim and Manasseh Shall be mine as Reuben and Simeon. And thy family which thou hast begotten (or, shalt beget) after them shall be thine: they shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance. And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan on the way, when yet a certain distance (way) to come to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath, that is, Bethlehem. And Israel beheld Joseph's sons and said, Who [are] these? And Joseph said to his father, They [are] my sons whom God hath given me here. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee unto me, that I may bless them. Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age — he could not see. And he brought them nearer to him; and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face; and, behold, God hath also let me see thy seed. And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and bowed down with his face to the earth. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought [them] near to him. And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid [it] on Ephraim's head — and he [was] the younger — and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding (others, crossing) wittingly

his hands, for Manasseh [was] the first-born. And he blessed Joseph and said, The God before whom walked my fathers Abraham and Isaac, the God that tended me all my life long till this day, the angel that redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth (land). And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it was evil in his eyes; and he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, Not so, my father, for this [is] the first-born: put thy right hand on his head. But his father refused and said, I know, my son, I know: he also will become a people and he also will be great; but truly his younger brother will be greater than he; and his seed will become a fulness of nations. And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee will Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh; and he set Ephraim before Manasseh. And Israel said to Joseph, Behold, I die; and God will be with you, and bring you again to the land of your fathers. And I have given to thee one slope (shoulder) above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow" (Gen. 48).

It is well to note the peculiarity of the phrase in verse 19, not "a multitude of peoples" but "a fulness of nations." The Septuagint is lax in verse 4, where it gives "congregations of nations," (συναγωγὰς ἐθνῶν) instead of "an assembly of peoples;" but it is nearer the truth in verse 19, where it has πλῆθος ἐθνῶν, "a fulness of nations." It is notorious, that in contrast with Judah and

Benjamin, who had a distinct place, all the rest of the tribes fell under Ephraim as Israel.

Such was this affecting and instructive incident: Jacob clear, where Isaac had been dim; Jacob clearer than Joseph, hitherto given beyond other men of God to be of penetrating insight into divine things. What deep self-judgment must have passed through Israel's spirit, as he reviewed the blessing once stolen by his own guile! Could not, would not, Jehovah have, somehow to His own glory without his servant's shame, have crossed Isaac's hands to make good His word of promise to Jacob? How sad not to have trusted Him!

Jacob was deceitful no more; nay he even stedfastly opposed the will of his beloved Joseph in subjection to God who directed him. What a change through His grace!

We may not pass over the reference to this chapter in Hebrews 11:21. Dying, Jacob was stronger in faith than in all the vigour of his life, tried and energetic as it had been. Then it was that he by faith blessed each of the sons of Joseph above nature's thoughts; as Isaac, overruled of God, blessed Jacob and Esau according to His purpose. Nor is it without force that Jacob's worshipping on the top of his staff is here mentioned, in contrast with his father's fear when he discovered his folly in striving to please himself contrary to God's word. With his staff he passed the Jordan a lonely outcast; in due time he had become two bands, though in fear of Esau's resentment, whom God had recalled to natural affection. Now, so soon to depart, he is strong in faith, adoring and giving glory to God; whilst he opens his lips as God's mouthpiece over his grandsons,

Chapter 27 - Jacob’s Last Words To His Sons, His Death And Burial

Genesis 49

On no dying bed of the patriarchs shone light more brightly than on Jacob’s. They all were prophets, and Abraham, even when faulty, was so designated to the Philistine king, who could not but see his faults; but none was given so much as Jacob to scan Israel’s future.

“And Jacob called his sons and said, Gather yourselves together, and I will tell you what will befall you at the end of days. Assemble yourselves together and hear, ye sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father.

Reuben, thou [art] my first-born, my might, and the first-fruits of my vigour, excellency of dignity and excellency of strength. Bubbling up as the waters, thou shalt have no pre-eminence; because thou wentest up to thy father’s couch: then defiledst thou [it]; he went up to my bed.

Simeon and Levi [are] brethren, weapons of violence their swords. My soul, come not into their council; mine honour, be not united to their assembly; for in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will houghed oxen. Cursed [be] their anger, for [it was] fierce, and their rage, for [it was] cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

Judah, thee will thy brethren praise: thy hand [will be] on the neck of thine enemies; thy father’s children will bow down to thee. Judah [is] a lion’s whelp. From the prey, my son, thou art gone up. he stoopeth, he coucheth as a lion, and as a lioness: who will rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver

from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and to him will be the obedience (or, gathering) of peoples. He bindeth his foal to the vine, and his ass's colt to the choice vine; he washeth his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes; his eyes [are] red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

Zebulun shall dwell at the breach of the seas, and he [shall be] for a haven of ships; and his border [shall be] upon Zidon.

Issachar [is] a bony (or, strong) ass, couching between two hurdles; and he saw rest that [it was] good, and the land that [it was] pleasant; and he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a tributary servant.

Dan shall judge his people, as another of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned serpent in the path, that biteth the horse's heels, so that his rider falleth backward. I wait for thy salvation, O Jehovah.

Gad — troops shall press upon him; but he shall press upon their heel.

Out of Asher his bread [shall be] fat, and he, shall yield royal dainties.

Naphthali, [is] a hind let loose; he giveth goodly words.

Joseph [is] a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a fountain; daughters (i.e. branches) shoot over the wall. The archers have provoked, and shot at and hated him; but his bow abideth firm, and the arms of his hands are supple by the hands of the mighty One of Jacob. From thence [is] the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel; from the God of thy father, He, will help thee, and from the Almighty, He will bless thee, with blessings of heaven

above, with blessings of the deep that coucheth beneath, with blessings of the breast and of the womb. The blessings of thy father surpass the blessings of my progenitors unto the bounds of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separated from his brethren.

Benjamin [is] a wolf that raveneth; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and in the evening he shall divide the spoil.

All these [are] the twelve tribes of Israel, and this [is] what their father spoke to them; and he blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them. And he charged them and said to them, I am gathered to my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that [is] in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that [is] in the field of Machpelah which [is] opposite to Mamre in the land of Canaan; which Abraham bought of Ephron the Hittite with the field for a possession of a burying-place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebecca his wife; and there I buried Leah. The purchase of the field, and of the cave that [is] in it, [was] from the children of Heth. And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered his feet into the bed, and expired, and was gathered to his people."

It is sadly instructive to observe how post-apostolic tradition lost the heavenly testimony by effacing Israel's hope, and appropriating its earthly place. We need not expend words in repeating these ecclesiastical vanities of Christendom; he that would know how far they reached can find them in Bp. Chr. Wordsworth's Commentary.

The true bearing is on Israel's future. For Scripture is prophetic generally and here avowedly so, as Jacob said. It begins with Israel in the flesh, anything but the Israel of God. Reuben, Simeon, and Levi indicate ruin through corruption, and violence: the two characters of human evil from the beginning to the end of man's sad story, saddest in God's people according to privilege and responsibility. Then, in Judah, only the blind can fail to see God's purpose in Christ born of the tribe but as King (not as the glorified Head in heaven), to whom shall be the gathering of peoples; but withal the failure for the time, because Shiloh was not received of the Jews. Yet the purpose stands firm in Him who came. Next, we see Zebulun going out in commerce of sea and ships among the Gentiles; in Issachar depressions and compromises for selfish quiet as the world's slave; and in Dan, though claiming to judge, falling under Satan's power worse than idolatry; yet at this crisis a remnant looking for Jehovah's salvation. Thereon the oppressed rises to press an oppressor, as shown by Gad; while Asher points out Israel's enjoyment of their proper blessings; and Naphthali, freedom in a gracious witness for God. The whole rises to the fitting climax in Joseph, after being separated from his brethren and exalted to a wider and loftier sphere, bringing in abundant and unfailing blessing clearly identified with the true Shepherd, the Stone of Israel once sorely wounded, but flowing forth over all enclosures: blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep beneath, blessings of the race and the creature, blessings beyond bound and comparison, centring in Him Who is worthy. And with Joseph goes Benjamin, the son of his father's right hand, when power in Israel will put down every rival and share the spoil.

Thus is Israel to be blessed and exalted, because in faith under Messiah and the new covenant at the end of days.

As Gen. 49 ends with Jacob's death, the closing chapter (Gen. 50) tells us of his sons carrying him to the field of Machpelah in Canaan, where his fathers were buried: a grievous mourning in the eyes of the people of the land. What a difference for those conversant with Christ glorified in heaven when they "not of the world" depart to be with Him!

1 Lightfoot's Works, ii. 98, 1822.

2 Burckhardt identified this Succoth, or Sukkot as he calls it from the Arabic. Dr. Robinson and Van de Velde speak of the western place called Sakut which ought not to be confounded with the eastern. Jerome (Quaest. in Gen. 33:16) had long before made the just discrimination.

3 According to Gesenius k - "equivalent," but Sept., Vulg., and Onkelos give the meaning of a "lamb."

4 "God" here is perfectly in place. The sin was against His nature, and independent of special relationship. But it is also a striking evidence of the folly of such as fancy an Elohistic writer to account for what is due to intrinsic grounds and spiritual feeling.

Joseph

Preface

The history of Joseph in detail, here brought before us, only carries us to Gen. 47:12, where his father Jacob is presented to Pharaoh, for at this point the Author's closing days of his pilgrimage were rapidly being fulfilled. His pen was now laid aside, and he has since passed away to abide in the presence of a greater than Pharaoh or any earthly potentate — yea, of Him who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Intermitting therefore any comment upon the deeply interesting account of Joseph's skilful administration of the land and people of Egypt given us in the remainder of the chapter of the inspired record, as also the two following chapters (Gen. 48, Gen. 49), which the Author has already treated in his history of "Jacob," we may be allowed to pass on to the closing chapter of this first book of the Bible, and add here the following words thereon by the same pen, which appeared many years ago:

"The last chapter gives us the conclusion of the book, the burial of Jacob, the reappearance of his sons left with Joseph, and at last Joseph's own death, as lovely as had been his life. He who stood on the highest pinnacle in the land, next to the throne, type of Him who will bold the Kingdom unto the glory of God the Father, — that single-eyed saint now breathes forth his soul to God. "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones." His heart is out of the scene where it enjoyed but a transient and at best typical glory. In hope he goes onward to that which

would be lasting and true unto God's glory, when Israel should be in Emmanuel's land, and he himself be in a yet better condition — even resurrection. He had been exalted in Egypt, but he solemnly took an oath of the sons of Israel, that when God visits them, as He surely will, they will carry up his bones hence. He had served God in Egypt, but to him it was ever the strange land. Though he dwelt there, ruled there, there had a family, and there died fuller of honour than of years, an hundred and ten years old, he feels that Egypt is not the land of God, and knows that He will redeem His people from it, and bring them into Canaan. It was beautiful fruit in its season: no change of circumstances interfered with the promise of God to the fathers. Joseph waited as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Earthly honours did not settle him down in Egypt." (Lectures Introductory to The Pentateuch).

"Now unto the King eternal, incorruptible, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

Introduction.

Of the many biographical sketches in the Bible none for interest exceeds that of Joseph. It therefore attracts those of tender years not yet. hardened by intercourse with the world, or sophisticated by the spirit of the age. It is distinguished even among the patriarchs by domestic affections no less than hatred of evil, by personal purity sustained and guarded by faith, by the favour of Jehovah that communicated His secrets to one that feared Him from youth, throughout an unusually diversified life and the extremes of slavery, of prison, and of the highest position next to the greatest throne then on earth without a cloud, the most prudent and

kind of viziers in times of abundance no less than of famine, the most skilful of statesmen for his master's interest. Again what can one think of his filial honour to his father? what of his gracious returns to his envious and spiteful brethren (only short of his blood)? And though for a believing Israelite he seems to have gone far in complying with the words of a heathen, and to have risen up to the airs of a great lord as to the manner born, his heart sustained the divinely given hopes of Israel, as evinced by his punctual heed to his father's burial, where lay Jacob's father and his father's father.

Nor did his earthly rank in Egypt dim his own faith before his death, that God would surely visit his brethren and bring them into the land promised by His oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He too took their oath when that day came to carry up his bones hence along with them.

The long desired son of his mother Rachel, - herself his father's first and tenderest love, he derived a name from her (Gen. 30:23, 24), Joseph i.e. adding; which pointed to another son, the son of his father's right hand, who was to be the occasion of her death. Sadly impatient with God's dealings in her case, grace opened her heart to Jehovah's goodness and gave her to look on through her son of unexpectedly wondrous destiny to another son, about to be born in Palestine, the little one who should become great both in the land and to the ends of the earth in its own season. For Benjamin figures in that day of earthly power and glory. Joseph is the vessel of divine wisdom in humiliation, despised by his brethren, suffering from them, and sold to Gentiles who punish him yet more; but, unknown to Israel, exalted to the right hand of power for unmeasured blessing to both,

and married to a Gentile wife, the names of whose sons testify to his forgetting his past toil with his kin, and his fruitfulness in another land. Yet at the end like Christ he that was separated makes himself known to his brethren whom he established in the best of the land. Even from this brief summary the reader will gather how hard it would be in all O.T. scripture to find so rich a mine of typical wealth, so varied and comprehensive a figure of the Lord Jesus.

Hence the history of Joseph abounds in the forecasting of the lights as well as the shadows of Christ, and thus is singularly instructive in the ways of God. This is all the more striking, because it is found in an unvarnished and perfectly reliable history, when man's annals, or even monuments, afford but a flickering gleam. But all that these remains tall us goes to prove the perfect accuracy of that which the closing chapters of Genesis disclose of that land which was to be the nursery of Israel. There they were led on from a family group to become a people, Jehovah's people, waked up under oppression to the knowledge of their peculiar relationship to the Eternal, and at length from the furnace of affliction to that deliverance, which had His blessed dwelling in their midst, of which the second book of the Pentateuch treats so copiously.

It appears (for we must not say more when we go outside scripture) that the ordinary succession of native rulers was interrupted for more than two centuries by the invasion of Shepherd Kings from Syria (Hittite or Khita); and that the sudden rise of Joseph occurred during the reign of Apepi, the last of this foreign or Hyksos dominion.1 If this be so, it accounts in a great measure for the rupture made with the set ways and

jealous forms of an old civilization, in the exalted place to which Joseph was advanced, in his long continued rule, and his marriage with the daughter of Potipherah the priest in On (Heliopolis); still more perhaps for the readiness with which a shepherd people were given a quarter so valuable as Goshen, not far from either the royal residence on one side or the frontier of Palestine on the other. The abomination of a shepherd lay in the native eye, not in those who favoured Joseph and his brethren, but in the, restored native rulers, who soon after regained the upper hand, knew not Joseph, and proceeded to persecute the chosen people. This providential concurrence we leave. God is above circumstances, though His wisdom is often shown in His availing Himself of them on behalf of His plans.

But whatever be the worth of these thoughts as to the then circumstances of Egypt and its rulers, there is certainty of God's directing hand, in His allowance of all the unworthy ways of Jew and Gentile in Joseph's early history, to bring about that very position of lofty distinction which, when foreshadowed, drew out the hatred of his brethren. His duty changed its form from his father's house to that of a foreign master, and from shame, even in the keep of a prison, to the highest rank in the realm.

But it was everywhere the same obedience in the sight of Jehovah, the same prosperity for all that he touched. He was tender even to tears as he was firm of purpose, clear of insight too, and resolute in execution, a man of mark and modesty, who rose to the command of every occasion without the least self-seeking. Jehovah was with Joseph, as Joseph was subject to Jehovah: a rare

man among the Jewish people or any other, look where and when you will.

Chapter 1 - Joseph's Early Days

Gen. 30:22-25, Gen. 33:2, Gen. 37:2-11

Joseph, it appears from comparison of clear dates in scripture, was born in his father's ninety-first year. He was the elder son of Rachel, long desired by his mother, and at length given of God, when her impatience had met its just rebuke. Leah had her six sons already born; and a daughter followed who later became the occasion of shame and grief to her kin, of a reckless and revengeful desolation to a city of Hivites, far beyond the demerit of the one that wronged her.

We need not repeat the tale of Joseph's birth, and of the remarkable utterance of his mother with the name given and the anticipation of the one, who was to be son not of her Sorrow only but of her death. In Jer. 31:15-17 is a very touching reference to Rachel and a connection with the affliction of "her children" in the day of the captivity to Babylon, but looking to the blessed time of gracious reprisal when Jehovah will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. "Thus saith Jehovah, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, bitter weeping: Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are not. Thus saith Jehovah, Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears; for thy work hath a reward, saith Jehovah; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for thy latter end, saith Jehovah, and thy children shall come again to their own border." Between the prophecy and its fulfilment in the coming days of Israel's restoration and national

blessing, it is applied to the murderous onslaught, in vain meant for Jesus, which Herod brought on all the boys from two years and under that were in Bethlehem and in all its borders. In all their affliction was He afflicted, though exempted from that blow for the anguish of His rejection unto death, under the hatred of His own people and the infinitely deeper suffering in atonement at God's hand for their sins, and ours.

Not only was the birth of Joseph an epoch for the spirit of his mother (elsewhere dilated on), but we find Jacob thereon awakening to his due place and to his country associated with the promises of God. And it came to pass when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, Send me away that I may go to my place and to my country." The needed discipline was not ended: Jacob had yet to learn more of himself under the good dealings of God. There was still a sadly mingled crop to be seen. But thence we see his heart turned toward the land from which he had been long an exile through his mother's devices and his own. If he served Laban longer, God took care to bless his own portion so conspicuously that the sons of Laban wished him gone, and the word was given which decided him to flee. Then the return by God's grace, notwithstanding his crippled weakness, became no less an epoch for Jacob.

Next, we turn to chap. 37, "The generations of Jacob," where Joseph, young as he was, becomes the leading figure, with his brothers a dark background, and God at work in a remarkable way.

"Joseph, being seventeen years old, was tending the flock with his brethren; and he was a youth with Bilhah's sons, and with Zilpah's sons, his father's wives; and

Joseph brought their evil report to his father. And Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons, because he was his son of old age; and he made him a sleeve-coat of many colours. And his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, and they hated him and could not speak to him peaceably. And Joseph dreamed a dream, and told his brethren, and they hated him yet the more. And he said to them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed. And, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves came round about, and bowed down themselves to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed rule over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more, and, behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down themselves to me. And he told [it] to his father and to his brethren; and his father rebuked him, and said to him, What. [is] this dream that thou hast dreamed? shall I indeed come and thy mother and thy brethren, to bow down themselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying" (vers. 2-11).

The witness of their evil ways and his father's love made Joseph hateful to the sons of the servile mothers. Nor did the distinctive robe which Jacob gave Joseph soften their asperity, nor yet his two dreams. "Fury is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before jealousy?" Whether it was wise or comely to rehearse his dreams to those who had no love for him may be a, question; but the dreams were of God, as the effect on

his brethren was of the enemy. Even to his father the second was distasteful, though he kept it in mind. But as all that is recorded stamps Joseph as a pious youth, of moral courage, of faithfulness toward the erring, of a lowly mind that wondered at the dreams as much as any or more; so he too like his father could hardly shut put from his spirit that God betokened some singular exaltation in due time; and the strengthened repetition could not but confirm, as indicating, that they were not casual, but from above. This however always provokes adversaries to madness and revenue, while, strange as it may be in their eyes, God turns even their spite and wicked ways to the accomplishment of His purpose, as we shall see beyond fail in the history.

But we may not doubt on the one hand, that God had His gracious purpose of exercising Joseph's spirit and strengthening his heart for the distress and manifold troubles which were to be his portion before those remarkable prefigurations were to be fulfilled. On the other hand, it is no less plain that his fleshly-minded brothers, as they hated his piety and dreaded his moral judgment of their evil ways, were stung to mad malice in hearing of his dreams, which they were quick to interpret rightly enough. And we may hope that in the end God turned to their soul's profit what Joseph was given to tell them in the days of his youth. Thus, if they could not easily forget dreams so simple and striking that nearly touched all the family, the sufferer still less could not but remember in the midst of many a grief and shame the visions of strange dignity that awaited him in his and their life-time.

Chapter 2 - Joseph And His Brethren

Gen. 37:17-36

The dreams of Joseph were God-sent, and as real in the event, as realities of others are but daydreams. And what a mercy it was for his half-brothers, who were not in heart brothers, that their cruel purpose took effect but in part, and was turned in divine goodness, wisdom, and power to bring about the elevation which they hated as much as they envied. Cain-like their intent was to slay their brother. And wherefore? Because, at the bottom of all, their works were evil, and their brother's righteous.

"And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. And when they saw him afar off, and before he came near to them, they conspired against him to put him to death. And they said one to another, Behold, there cometh that master of dreams! And now come and let us kill him, and cast him into one of the pits, and we will say, An evil beast devoured him; and we will see what becometh of his dreams. And Reuben heard, and delivered him out of their hands, and said, Let us not take his life. And Reuben said to them, Shed no blood; cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness; and lay no hand on him (in order that he might deliver him out of their hand, to bring him again to his father). And it came to pass, when Joseph came to his brethren, that they stripped Joseph of his coat, the coat of the colours that [was] on him; and they took him and cast him into the pit. And the pit was empty: no water [was] in it. And they sat down to eat bread; and they lifted up their eyes and looked; and, behold, a caravan of Ishmaelites came from Gilead, and their camels bearing tragacanth and balsam and ladanum, going to carry [it] down to Egypt.

And Judah said to his brethren, What profit [is it] if we slay our brother and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he [is] our brother, our flesh. And his brethren hearkened. And Midianitish men, merchants, passed by; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph for twenty [pieces] of silver to the Ishmaelites, who brought Joseph into Egypt. And Reuben returned to the pit, and, behold, Joseph [was] not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned to his brethren and said, The child [is] not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took the coat of Joseph, and killed a buck of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; and they sent the coat of the colours, and had [it] brought to their father, and said, This we have found: discern now whether it [is] thy son's coat or not. And he discerned it, and said, My son's coat! an evil beast hath devoured him. Surely torn in pieces is Joseph! And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, For I will go down to my son mourning to Sheol. Thus for him wept his father. And the Midianites sold him into Egypt to Potiphar, a chamberlain [lit. eunuch] of Pharaoh, captain of the executioners (or, lifeguard)" (vers. 17-36).

Such is the simple but most touching account Moses was inspired to give of the atrocious wickedness on the part of Joseph's brothers, heads though they were of the tribes of Israel. Who but God would have told the tale, with whatever difference in Reuben and Judah? How evident that in Jehovah alone can one boast, and that the objects of His choice are in themselves nothing and

worse than nothing! Yet in the midst of heartlessness toward the guiltless sufferer and the father who had sent him in love rises the fore-shadow of Him that should come, a greater infinitely than Joseph. He too was the Beloved of His Father, and sent as Son of man in quest of the lost. It was His to arouse the enmity of His brethren after the flesh and beyond all as the Faithful Witness who drew out man's evil by divine good, and in all things pleased God the Father.

But in how many soever ways of love, enough was done and is written to show how the, Holy One of God was before His eyes who knows how to effectuate His deliberate counsel and foreknowledge, not only in spite but by means of the apostate unbelief of the Jews, and of the hands of lawless Gentiles, in their blind pride alike knowing not what they did, yet knowing more than enough to make both utterly inexcusable. O, what a Father! O what a Son, given up by His brethren after the flesh, Messiah and withal Jehovah, ready to die for their sins, as none other could or would! For His price too was silver paid, as in the case of another Judah: a goodly valuation for the Lord of all! O what is man, be he Jew or Gentile! and what is God but the God of all grace! And what Jesus, full of grace and truth, who if He drew out by His perfection, as God to man and as man to God, the causeless and uttermost evil of man as a. whole, died as the efficacious propitiation to purge every sin in those who repent and believe the gospel of God in His Son's death!

Nor is it only that peace was made through the blood of Christ's cross for believers, who once were alienated and enemies in mind by wicked works, yet now reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, by

which and nothing less it could be. But in virtue of the same death He will at His appearing reconcile all things, whether the things on the earth or the things in the heaven. God's blessed work of gathering out His heirs, the joint-heirs with Christ, to reign with Him in that day must first be completed. Then man's and Satan's accursed work of the apostasy and of the man of sin, the spurious Messiah set up in God's temple and worshipped as God by Jews and Gentiles, will bring down summary judgment by the appearing of His coming. But the manifestation of the Son of God, and of the sons of God in the same glory, is followed by the deliverance of the whole creation that now groans together and travails in pain together unto now. The work that followed Joseph's elevation over Egypt, so striking for its beneficence not only to the heathen but to all the Israel of that day, how small in comparison of a deliverance worthy of His person and of His reconciling work wrought in the cross, wherein God was glorified even as to sin for ever; for there met face to face man's sin in its height and God's love in its depth! But where sin abounded, grace more exceeded; and God could send His glad tidings, yea His best, to the worst of men, "beginning," as the Lord Jesus told them, "with Jerusalem."

Chapter 3 - Joseph Prospered In Potiphar's House

Gen. 39:1-6

It is not without a profoundly moral purpose that, before Joseph's history is continued, the Spirit of God, in Gen. 38 discloses the debased state of Judah. We have already seen that the sensual Reuben was the only brother to show the least natural affection, or at least pity, to

Joseph. It was he who suggested the pit, from which their offending brother could not escape, in order to bring him to his father again. But Judah, in Reuben's absence, took the lead in taking him out and selling him to the Ishmaelites, who in turn sold him to an Egyptian master. What a presage of Christ, suffering first from a faithless Judah; then too from the Gentile world! Divine history is as truly predictive in the types of the law as in the heart-breathing of the Psalms, or the more direct prophets. And so all must be, if scripture be God revealing His grace in Christ, His own delight, and the only salvation for wretched guilty man.

Judah, about to be not only the pre-eminently royal tribe but the progenitor of the King of kings, is to take profanely to himself a daughter of Canaan. No wonder that wickedness slew his firstborn, and infamy his brother. No wonder that the widow had no regard from the third. But how shocking her shameless and incestuous vindication of right! how self-righteous Judah's readiness to burn the mother of babes unconsciously his own, one of whom is carefully marked out in Messiah's direct line! Such is man, and such Judah; but such too is God. Where heinous sin abounded, grace much more exceeded. Let us now turn to what follows.

"And Joseph was brought down into Egypt; and Potiphar, a chamberlain of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian man, bought him of the hand of the Ishmaelites who had brought him down thither. And Jehovah was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man, and he was in his master the Egyptian's house. And his master saw that Jehovah [was] with him, and that Jehovah made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found

favour in his eyes, and served him; and he made him overseer over his house, and all [that] was his he put into his hand. And it came to pass, from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that was his, that Jehovah blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of Jehovah was on all that was his in house and in field. And he left all that [was] his in Joseph's hand, and took cognisance of nothing with him save the bread which he ate." (vers. 1-6).

Little did the Egyptian anticipate the treasure one small purchase brought to his house. But the explanation is not far to seek, and it makes all clear. "Jehovah was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man." Never before was the word so emphatic. Not that Jehovah had not been with him at home or abroad hitherto. Jehovah was with him when he gained his father's confidence and love. Jehovah was with him when by his fidelity he earned the envy and hatred of his brethren. But now of him, a bondman in a strange land, it was said with marked force. Yet who but one inspired of God would have so written of one torn from his father's house, and this by his own brothers, who sold him for a slave, instead of taking his blood or leaving him to perish of hunger. But Jehovah was with him all the more because the need was greater. The favour of divine light shone on him even then; and it made him hateful in the eyes of wicked kinsmen who ought to have loved him, if they understood not but only disliked what seemed to his honour, besides the rancour for their evil report which he felt bound to carry to the father for their good.

In the Egyptian's house he recognised a new sphere of duty, and looked to Jehovah that he might serve Him and

thus best serve his master. His eye was single, and the whole body full of light. Delivered from a cruel death which seemed imminent, he humbled himself under the divine hand, and sought to do diligently and conscientiously what lay before him day by day to please the Master above. Hence the prosperity that surrounded him and made him master of the situation. Never had Potiphar or any other such a slave: in him was neither self-seeking nor eyeservice. “And his master saw that Jehovah was with him, and that Jehovah made all that he did to prosper in his hand.” One cannot wonder that things went wrong under such a mistress, when no Joseph was there, only, the bondmen. But now there was a force for good at work with the most marked results of blessing which the discerning eye even of a heathen did not fail to see. “And Joseph found favour in his eyes, and served him.” Not heart only, but faith was in his work; and this gave a new character and power, which a shrewd master with large experience of human deceitfulness and incompetence made him appreciate all the more.

As he was faithful in the least, his master promoted him to greater tasks and much more honourable. And he set him over his house, and all that was his he put into his hand.” This was no small sphere of service, and involved the administration of an immense establishment. For there is ground to accept the view that Potiphar had command of the White Castle at Noph (or Moph) of the prophets, the Memphis of Greeks and others of later times. But extensive, varied, and new as it was to him who had been so lately and singularly introduced, “Jehovah blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of Jehovah was on all that was his in

house and in field." For "A wise man's heart is at his right hand," says Solomon.

At a later day, when Israel had become a kingdom and so rebelled against Jehovah that even Judah was carried into captivity to Babylon, we have like faith and allegiance to Jehovah in Daniel and his three companions. On them too for their separateness to His honour the favour of Jehovah rested; and, in a way similar to that of Joseph yet to come, Daniel rose to the highest elevation in the empire of Nebuchadnezzar, and the rest also to high honour. But they knew no such sufferings as fell to Joseph, nor were they proved in such experience of slavery from its lowest form as was his lot. For there was all the difference possible between the house of Potiphar, to say nothing of the dungeon to which he was afterward assigned, and the palace of the first Gentile world-kingdom wherein they were tried. Yet the trial of faith and its bright results were beautiful in their case as in Joseph's before he rose to his great eminence. Here it was manifest blessing in his servitude, and his master's trust at last without limit. "And he left all that was his in Joseph's hand, and took cognisance of nothing with him, save the bread which he ate." Corruption was in that house, as it came out soon in a shameless guise; but till then "Jehovah blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake."

How wondrous His grace then shown! how much more now, if the eye of faith were not dim! Beyond doubt the splendours of the coming Kingdom under Messiah and the new covenant will exceed all that the earth has ever witnessed; when Zion shall have the first dominion, and the nations shall not only submit but rejoice, and this for a thousand years unbrokenly, while the very beasts

renounce their fierceness, and the earth shall yield her increase. Yet that day of righteous power and blessing is really and far transcended by the heavenly glory into which the risen Christ has already ascended, where He sits on the throne of God, and whence He is coming to gather to Himself on high the heirs of God and joint-heirs with Himself, the Head over all things to the church, which is His body. Only for the present it is a work of faith for those who are His on earth; and the Holy Spirit, sent forth from heaven at Pentecost after He went above, still abides to carry it on to the glory of the Lord Jesus. When He and they appear in glory, then shall the nation long blind see Him whom they pierced, He shall reign to the joy of a restored universe. It will be sight then, and not faith as now. Because Israel shall see, they will believe: blessed they who had not seen and believed!

Chapter 4 - Joseph Suffering For Righteousness

Gen. 39:6-18

Every reader of the book of Genesis can see the larger space given to his life than to any of his fathers, even to the first and greatest of them all. We may profitably ask why; nor is the answer doubtful, for it is the key to all the O. T. No one in these early days was in so striking and varied ways the type of Christ. Nor did any other arise till David was given pre-eminently that place, both in humiliation and on the throne, to say nothing of his own inspired outpourings in the Psalms.

As seeing Him who is invisible, Joseph repelled the temptation, through which he passed unsullied, and meekly suffered under the false imputation of the

shameless lady who sought his seduction. It is evident that he, a young man, not only resisted her importunities, but was careful not to wound his master by the proof of the wife's guilty passion and still guiltier revenge on the blameless. For lust, whether gratified or not, soon turns to hatred: so we see in Amnon, as in this depraved woman.

"And Joseph was beautiful of form, and beautiful of countenance. And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife raised her eyes on Joseph,... But he refused and said to his master's wife, Behold, my master takes cognisance of nothing with me: what is in the house, and all that he hath, he hath given to my hand. None [is] greater in this house than I; nor hath he withheld from me any thing but thee, because thou [art] his wife. And how should I do this great wickedness, and sin against God? And it came to pass, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, and he hearkened not to her,... And it came to pass about this time that on a certain day that he went into the house to do his business, and none of the men [was] there in the house. And she caught... and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and ran outside. And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled outside, that she called to the men of her house, and spoke to them, saying, See, he hath brought in to us a Hebrew man to mock us: he came in to me.., and I cried with a loud voice; and it came to pass when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and ran outside. And she laid up his garment by her till his master came to his house. And she spoke to him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant whom thou hast brought to us came in to mock

me; and it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled outside" (vers. 6-18).

Egypt, a land of strange anomalies, was remarkable for the combination of a very high standard of morals in theory with extremely lax practice. If one cannot accept the exaggeration of Brugsch (Histoire d'Egypte, 17), we may safely receive Prof. Rawlinson's statement that "the Egyptian women were notoriously of loose character, and, whether as we meet with them in history, or as they are depicted in Egyptian romance, appear as immodest and licentious. The men practised impurity openly and boasted of it in their writings," etc. (Hist. of Ancient Egypt, I. ch. iii. 104-107, 147, 292, 552; II. 361, 362, 404). There is extant "The Tale of the Two Brothers," which experts believe to have been written near the age of Joseph, which tells the tale of female dissoluteness from an Egyptian witness, a romance or novel seemingly written to warn of the ruin to which such courses lead. Herodotus, as is well known, charged them with no less immorality at a later day (ii. 60, etc.).

Another remark may here fittingly be made. Learned sceptics have too hastily objected to the freedom which the incident supposes for the mistress of the house, apart from anything wrong. But such men only betray their prejudice, and, it must be added, their ignorance of Egyptian domestic life in that day. The very monuments bear testimony to the liberty which women, and especially the wife or mother, then enjoyed; but these objectors are as ready to credit that testimony as to distrust the Bible. Yet we need not labour so small a point.

Here then we have the holy youth resisting the tempter, and enduring grief, suffering wrongfully. And this is grace in the day of trial. For what glory is it if, when ye sin and are buffeted, ye shall take it patiently? But if when ye do well and suffer, ye shall take it patiently, this is grace with God. For hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow His steps; Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; Who when reviled reviled not again, when suffering threatened not, but gave [it] over into the hands of Him that judges righteously; Who Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that, being dead to sins, we may live to righteousness; by Whose stripes ye were healed. Of the atonement Joseph could be no real type; but of Christ's suffering unjustly and in grace he was a blessed foreshadow.

Chapter 5 - Joseph Blessed In The Tower-House

Gen. 39:19-23

We can readily conceive the difficulty for Joseph's master created by the wife's perfidy. On the one hand was the proved unimpeachable trustworthiness of his slave; on the other a wife capable of such solicitation must have long betrayed her evil character in many ways if not in that, so as to make her credit dubious. Still she was his wife; and whatever her bold, impudent, and malicious fraud, we hear of no effort on Joseph's part to vindicate himself by exposing her wickedness. A simple denial of the evil she laid to his charge would not avail against the natural indignation of a husband unwilling to search narrowly into the terrible alternative.

“And it came to pass, when his master heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him, saying, After this manner did thy bondman to me, that his wrath was kindled. And Joseph’s master took him and put him in the tower-house, a place where the king’s prisoners [were] confined; and he was there in the tower-house. And Jehovah was with Joseph, and extended mercy to him, and gave him favour in the eyes of the chief of the tower-house. And the chief of the tower-house committed to Joseph’s hand all the prisoners that [were] in the tower-house; and whatever they were doing there he did. The chief of the tower-house looked not to any thing under his hand, because Jehovah was with him; and what he did Jehovah made to prosper” (vers. 19-23).

Unnatural as was the cruelty of his brothers which ended in his slavery, baser still was the fresh trial through a woman’s guilty race. In them both Joseph suffered, for love and for righteousness’ sake. In both Jehovah stood by His wronged servant, and caused His favour to rest on him even during the time of his sufferings. Never had his master a slave so efficient and prosperous. Never had chief of the tower-house such a prisoner. Which of the king’s grandees in disgrace had ever so won his confidence? In both cases the secret of all was that Jehovah was with Joseph. Brothers, strangers, or jailers made no difference. Violence did not overcome him, any more than corruption: he overcame evil with good; and the heathen recognised it, if the evil state of his brothers blinded them for a while. It was hard enough for a free man to be sold into slavery; it was harder still for a pious man to be condemned for a crime, to which the false accuser had invited him in vain. But Jehovah was with Joseph, and extended mercy

to him, and gave him favour where it might least have been expected. Slaves and felons do not as such approve themselves in the eyes of their guardians, as everyone knows.

But God abides the same for ever, and in fact now reveals Himself more endearing still as Father to all that believe since the Son came thus to reveal Him. The enmity of the world was even more pronounced when the true Light shone, and made the darkness visible universally, and the ancient people of God deeper in their enmity than the blind Gentiles. In Christ was no sin; and thus He, the righteous One, convicted them as only the guiltier sinners, because of their blasphemous unbelief along with religious pretension. And what were Joseph's sufferings compared with His? Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures. Once (and it was ample) He suffered for our sins, Just for unjust, that He might bring us to God, cleared of all charge or condemnation. None but Christ could thus suffer for us; for all others had sins to be atoned for. He alone who knew no sin could be made sin for us, as God made Him on the cross. His sacrificial suffering there furnished the efficacious ground for God's righteousness, not only in raising Christ from the dead, but in justifying all that believe on Him. Thus, where sin abounded, did grace all the more surpass; and man's total failure in righteousness is answered in the cross which lays the necessary, adequate, and blessed ground for God's righteousness which we become in Christ.

But though none but Christ could suffer for sins, we who believe on Him are called, when doing well, to suffer and take it patiently, as grace with God. So the apostle suffered the loss of all things, and went on counting

them but refuse to win Christ on high, and be found in Him, not having his righteousness that is of law but what is through faith of Christ, the righteousness of God on faith: to know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed to His death, if anyhow he might arrive at the resurrection from among the dead. This was undoubtedly the bright personal experience of the apostle; but it is divinely communicated to us for our like edification, and open to every saint in the power of the Spirit Who alone can make it good in our spirit and conversation. See how his faith shone in what he wrote at the last to Timothy, when with a slight exception all those in Asia turned away from the apostle, “ashamed of his chain.” Yet looking for the punishment of death, he sees the crown of righteousness laid up for him, and tells how, when no man stood with him, the Lord did, and should deliver him from every wicked work, and preserve him for His heavenly kingdom.

Chapter 6 - Joseph With The Dreamers In Prison

Gen. 40:1-8.

It is the way of God to give prophecy in a time of present ruin, that those who sin may be finally warned, and those who believe may be sustained by the hope of “some better thing” in His grace superior to all the powers of evil. Such it was in the midst of His earthly people when He was mocked in His messengers, and despised in His words rising up betimes and sending, because He had compassion on the Jews and on His dwelling-place, till there was no remedy. As His wrath arose and fell upon them was exactly the time when the

prophets, not content with oral predictions, wrote more formally and fully. Such is the plain matter of fact in the O.T. Here too we find the same principle in the first book of the Pentateuch, given through Joseph the witness of supernatural light in very dark circumstances, and of divine interest. even in the comparatively insignificant changes of man; as He had already both gloriously and graciously intervened in announcing for faith the Second man, on the fall of the first in a lost paradise.

“And it came to pass after these things, the cup-bearer of the king of Egypt, and the baker, offended their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was wroth with his two chamberlains, with the chief of the cup-bearers and with the chief of the bakers; and he put them in custody, in the captain of the life-guard’s house, into the tower-house, the place where Joseph [was] imprisoned. And the captain of the life-guard appointed Joseph to them, and he served them; and they continued for days in custody. And they dreamed a dream, both of them in one night, each his dream, each according to his dream’s interpretation, the cup-bearer and the baker of the king of Egypt that [were] imprisoned in the tower-house. And Joseph came in to them in the morning, and looked on them, and, behold, they [were] sad. And he asked Pharaoh’s chamberlains that [were] with him in his lord’s house of custody, saying, Why [are] your faces sad to-day?” (vers. 1-7.)

Joseph had served as a bondman in Potiphar’s house. Now he served as a criminal in the tower-house, falsely accused of what was true of his accuser. But his faith remained simple, peaceful, and bright; and we note its effect on those who had no faith themselves, yet highly valued faithfulness. Joseph was charged by the captain

with the care of the king's chamberlains. As before in the house of his master, so now in the governor's state-prison, he became the responsible agent: whatever was to be done there, he did it. Jehovah was with him in each place of trial; and what he did, Jehovah made it prosper.

But it is in God's hand to work out His purpose. And as in Joseph's dreams much had been divulged, while he was a young freeman in his father's house, which drew out the envious spite of his brethren, grace gave him now the opportunity of light from above on the dreams of his fellow-prisoners. So little were they instructed by their having each a suited dream the same night, that their visage presented similar sadness to their gracious and sympathetic attendant the next morning. His soul entered into the iron; but love rose superior to evil, and flowed out readily.

In all this Joseph typified Christ who shone to the eye of faith in His humiliation with a grace even beyond glory. He was manifestly the wisdom of God, where human wisdom proved itself utterly weak, foolish, and malicious. He was the prophet raised up from among His brethren, like to Moses, yet greater and with the highest authority. The deeper the enmity, the more He opened things to come, as not only the Christ for Israel, but the still more glorious if rejected Messiah, the Son of man, that all the peoples, and languages should serve Him: a day not come yet though fully revealed, when He shall be displayed as the power of God.

How awful the portion of those bearing His name who help the world to despise His words which will surely be accomplished to the ruin of all His adversaries! Christendom is even more guilty and pretentious than

His poor blinded people who cried, His blood be on us and our children; as alas! it is till they repent, as they surely will in God's mercy. But this is not to be now while the church is here; yet the church should be a city of refuge for the homicidal Jew while he is out of the land of his possession, if peradventure he may be cleansed from his guilt by the blood of Him whom he blindly slew; till the priesthood on high closes, and the day comes for the manifested kingdom, and Israel repentant shall be saved and enjoy the new covenant under their long ignored Messiah.

"And they said to him, We have dreamed a dream, and [there is] no interpreter of it. And Joseph said to them, [Are] not interpretations God's. Tell me [them], I pray you" (ver. 8).

As they had a presentiment that their dreams were pregnant with significance for themselves, Joseph had faith, and not in vain, in Him who had once sent to him also dreams, though he had comparatively long to wait for their fulfilment. And with faith God gave him wisdom and patience. "But hope seen is not hope; for what one seeth, why doth he also hope? But if what we see not we hope, we expect with patience."

Chapter 7 - The Chief Cup-Bearer's Dream

Gen. 40:9-15

God had tried His dear child, and would try him longer. Yet this was an honour to Joseph, who was given not only to believe but to suffer for His sake. But the chain of providential links was being forged which would raise the suffering Israelite from the dungeon to the highest

position in Egypt next to the throne. The dream of the chief cup-bearer was an important link in that chain.

“And the chief of the cup-bearers told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine [was] before me; and in the vine [were] three branches; and it [was] as though it budded, its blossoms shot forth, its clusters ripened into grapes. And Phara6h’s cup [was] in my hand; and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh’s cup, and gave the cup into Pharaoh’s hand. And Joseph said to him, This [is] the interpretation of it: the three branches [are] three days. Within yet three days will Pharaoh lift up thy head, and restore thee to thy place; and thou shalt give Pharaoh’s cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his cup-bearer. Only have me in thy remembrance when it shall be well with thee, and deal kindly with me, I pray thee, and make mention of me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon” (vers. 9-15).

God works often by simple means, as here by such a dream as fell very naturally to this official of Pharaoh’s court. Yet was it truly prophetic; and only a prophet was enabled to give its unequivocal meaning. Here the wisdom of God was as evident as in sending the dream. No one looks for the unities of time and place in such a vision. The events of months, or years, might he crowded into a single transaction, as in the vine budding and blossoming and yielding grapes, and wine fit for a monarch’s cup. Nobody ever heard historically of so rapid a result in the hands of a cup-bearer, without a winepress or vat, or the storage in jars, seen on the

monuments and some tomb-walls dating even before the Hyksos. For wine-drinking to excess is known to have prevailed, especially at certain festivities. So that it is without warrant to assume that the liquor pressed out into the king's cup was meant to imply literally mere grape juice from the cluster rather than the fermented issue. But this is an insignificant point, save to a teetotaller's mind.

The remarkable point which Joseph was given to seize is the precision of the three days indicated by the three branches. No priestly interpreter in Egypt would have ventured to say, as Joseph did at once, "The three branches are three days. Within yet three days will Pharaoh lift up thy head, and restore thee to thine office." it might, if a guess, have been more probably three months; but no. The secret of Jehovah is with them that fear Him; and even more was given here, the exercise in Joseph's spirit, and the divine wisdom that sent the vision to the Egyptian official, with a sadness at its arrival so soon to end in his joyful reinstatement. Interpretation of what God says or does belongs to God, who communicates it as He will, and as the rule, to those whom He loves, even in circumstances of the deepest humiliation. For in this Joseph aptly figured what was verified in the blessed Lord Himself here below.

We too may have dreams; and one may not say that all spring from the busy working of the brain, or that God may not deal thus as of old in slumberings on the bed, to withdraw man from self-will and hide pride from him. But we have as believers, and especially as Christians, far better than such comparatively vague intimations. We have the scriptures in all their fulness, revealing

God, His counsels, work, will, and ways, from eternity to eternity. We have also the Holy Spirit sent from the Father and the Son in heaven, never to leave but to abide with us and in us; Who when come undertakes to guide us into all the truth, and declare to us the things to come, glorifying our Lord Jesus in both. He is the standing, intimate, and ready interpreter, not like one among a thousand, as Elihu says, nor even as Joseph supernaturally endowed, but a divine Person dwelling in us. May we have grace to abjure all that grieves and hinders, and to cultivate what is of Himself so as to enjoy the privilege and the fruit more and more. For though God was ever faithful from the earliest days, no saints ever had this wondrous privilege till the Saviour died, rose, and ascended, whom the Holy Spirit thus honours.

Chapter 8 - The Chief Baker’s Dream And The Issue

Gen. 40:16-23

The fellow-chamberlain ventures to rehearse his dream after the chief cup-bearer. How little did he anticipate its dread import!

“And when the chief of the bakers saw that the interpretation was good, he said to Joseph, I also [was] in my dream, and, behold, three baskets of white bread [were] on my head. And in the uppermost basket [there was] all manner of victuals for Pharaoh that the bakers make; and the birds ate them out of the basket upon my head. And Joseph answered and said, This [is] the interpretation of it: the three baskets Care] three days. In yet three days will Pharaoh lift up thy head from off

thee, and hang thee upon a tree; and the birds will eat thy flesh from off thee."

"And it came to pass the third day, Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast to all his bondmen. And he lifted up the head of the chief of the cup-bearers, and the head of the chief of the bakers among his bondmen. And he restored the chief of the cup-bearers to his office of cup-bearer again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. And he hanged the chief of the bakers, as Joseph had interpreted to them. Yet the chief of the cup-bearers did not remember Joseph but forgot him." (vers. 16-23).

It is clear how far the chief baker was from seeing anything to discourage his telling his dream to Joseph. But God gave Joseph the discerning ear which perceived the immense difference of the cup-bearer's action that Pharaoh should drink, from that of the birds (not the king) eating out of the basket upon his head. In no way is the credit given to mere natural intelligence. The secret of Jehovah is with those that fear Him. Joseph was one whose faith was habitually in exercise; who knew that God remains the same in the midst of heavy trials, which had changed only from each great sorrow into a greater. In his lowest abasement he looked up for wisdom to its only source, and was called by His power to solve the enigma for good or for ill in the cases which came before him. For if he confided in Jehovah, his love too went out in compassion to fellow-sufferers whose countenances without a word betrayed the anxiety which their dreams cost them. Was it not faith working by love?

That both should have dreamt characteristic dreams in one night he did not impute to what men call chance. If

they were sad because there was no interpreter to explain what they instinctively felt to be of the nearest interest to themselves, Joseph as simply reckoned that interpretations belong to God, the giver of every good gift, and of every perfect giving. So He is the answerer of faith's cry to Him, though unheard by any other ear.

Yet Joseph could not but know the serious and speedy fate that hung over the chief baker. We may notice therefore that he made no appeal to him for remembrance. To the chief cup-bearer only did he say, "Think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, to me and make mention of me to Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house." There was nothing random in his words; nor was there any selfish desire for such royal favours as men expect. He sought simply to be delivered from the strange parody of judgment inflicted on the righteous one through disappointed lust and falsehood.

In both cases the time was short, as indicated by the dream and interpreted by Joseph. On the third day the two chamberlains had each his head lifted up by the king, on his birthday; but the chief cup-bearer rose to his office near Pharaoh's person, the chief baker to the gallows. It became the cup-bearer to remember the striking service rendered by the prophet in the dungeon. But as far too commonly occurs in this world of sin and self, the spiritual benefactor was quite forgotten. For we are expressly told, that two full years passed away to try the faith of Joseph, when God wrought in His providence to make the same difficulty felt in the royal court as in the tower-house. Thus was rebuked the ingratitude of the cup-bearer, oblivious of him who had been stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews, and who also had

done nothing why they should put him into the dungeon. “They hurt with the fetters his feet; into iron went his soul, until the time his word came [to pass]. Jehovah’s saying tried him.” Yet he that sowed in tears would in due time reap with rejoicing. Joseph was but matured for the vast and difficult task to be assigned him without the least ambition on his part. How this was brought about the chapter that follows explains with all simplicity.

It may be noticed that Joseph is ever the interpreter, if not also the mouthpiece, of God’s mind, and this in the future far off or near, beyond all creature prognostication. He was now at his lowest point of humiliation (as a dead man out of mind among the Gentiles, as before doomed to death by his own brothers), yet here the herald of restoration on the one hand, and of extreme judgment on the other. Little his brothers knew that they in their envious hatred were only the means of bringing to pass his exaltation for their own homage and preservation. Little could the Gentiles anticipate that the punishment so unjustly inflicted on him the guiltless was the necessary link in God’s wonderful chain to have the administration of the world-kingdom committed to his hand! Yet from the prison which he endured for years, as an evil-doer of the worst imputation, he was about to pass at one step to the highest dignity and the largest power. “Only in the throne,” as the king said, “will I be greater than thou.” “Without thee shall no man lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt.”

Chapter 9 - Pharaoh’s Dream

Gen. 41:1-7

God however did not forget, but kept Joseph in mind. Faith is tried to our profit (ver. 1), and never disappointed in result.

“And it came to pass at the end of two full years (years of days), that Pharaoh dreamed; and, behold, he stood by the river. And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, well-looking and fat-fleshed; and they fed in the reed-grass. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them out of the river, ill-looking and lean-fleshed; and they stood by the kine on the bank of the river. And the ill-looking and lean-fleshed ate up the seven well-looking and fat kine. And Pharaoh awoke. And he slept and dreamed a second time; and, behold, seven ears of corn came up on one stalk, fat and good. And, behold, seven cars, thin and parched with the east wind, came up after them. And the thin ears swallowed up the seven fat and full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, [it was] a dream” (vers. 1-7).

We may notice how appropriate the dreams were, as ordered of God throughout for each case. In Gen. 37 what more simple and suited to those in view than Joseph’s sheaf rising up and continuously standing, whilst the other sheaves came round about and bowed down to his sheaf? or the even more emphatic vision of the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowing down to Joseph? A dream so plain, vivid, and startling as to need no interpreter, and to incur the rebuke of his dearly loving father. Darker and more adapted to an Egyptian were the dreams of the chief cup-bearer and of the chief baker in Gen. 40, and as matter of fact beyond any interpreter among the experts of their race, the lack of whom they lamented. He who owned a living God alone was enabled to expound its prophetic meaning, soon to

be punctually verified as he said. But here in the chapter before us, how wild and strange and portentous the double dream sent to arouse the king! Yet the “river” is expressed by a word pointing beyond question to the Nile, and so is the marsh-grass on its brink which cattle loved to browse. But egregious as dreams may often be in confusing the proprieties of person or object, of time and place, here it is heightened to the utmost, first by the ill-looking and lean kine eating up the fine-looking and fat ones, next by the thin and parched ears of wheat devouring the fat and good ears that grew on one stalk.

Who that believes God’s word can doubt that the wonders so opposed to nature were all the more evidently of divine purpose? But that purpose was worthy of His goodness and compassion. In a world of sin. and suffering, of death and moral ruin and wretchedness He works alike by uncommon bounty and by the hard pinch of want; and for the good of souls yet more by the pain than by the prosperity, that in his anguish the heart might consider why such an affliction came from such a God. The teaching of the two dreams was enigmatic in their forms, but identical in the aim; abundance to the fullest followed by the most abnormal consumption. But why the seven kine and repeated? why the seven ears of corn no less repeated? This needed His interpretation who sent the dreams. Man’s power was powerless to open the lock. Wisdom was essential, not that which is earthly, sensual, demonish, but what comes down from above.

To whom did God give the key? To the humbled sufferer in the dungeon. The hour of his vindication was about to strike, and his exaltation at a bound from the deepest though unmerited dishonour to the highest position a

subject could fill, always excepting the Antitype foreshadowed by both, yet with whatever resemblance beyond all comparison. But even then what a scheme of goodness while the evil day still dragged its slow length along! The abundance was not to be wasted in a luxurious and injurious waste; the famine was to be alleviated by a wise policy so as to consolidate the king's authority and power and means, instead of breeding discontent and despair and revolution. Joseph had the place of honour and administrative wisdom, after his long endurance of shame and grief at home and abroad; his father to be permanently comforted, and filled with joy overflowing after his life of trial and change beyond his fathers; and his brethren to be rebuked and humbled before his grace and glory, with verification of those dreams in his youth which then only increased their base envy and aggravated their hatred of his purity and love.

But if we may not run on longer in the anticipation of this great and sudden change, let us think of the deep and divine prophetic outlook which underlies even such a history as Genesis supplies. Let us abhor the blind and destructive incredulity, which perverts by false-named knowledge, or by the modern veil of "higher criticism" over real infidelity. Let us delight in the written word of God, which would and does unite a simple unvarnished and true tale, which even a child can take in and enjoy, with moral wisdom at the time and for all time. It is the Holy Spirit's vision of Christ's coming both in humiliation and rejection by Jew and Gentile, and in His administration of the Kingdom in power and glory to the blessing of both in the mercy of God at the end. Then He who chastised the unbelief of them all shall show mercy

to all manifestly, and with universal confession of the once despised Jesus. O depth of riches both of wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable His judgments, and untraceable His ways! For who know Jehovah's mind? or who became His counsellor? or who first gave to Him, and it shall be given to him in return? Because of Him, and through Him, and for Him are all things: to Him be the glory for the ages. Amen.

Chapter 10 - Faults And Forgetfulness Confessed

Gen. 41:9-14.

The trouble of the king, the failure of the world's resources, the magicians of Egypt and its wise men summoned in vain, touched the chief-butler's conscience and recalled to his memory what he ought never to have forgotten. He who still lay unremembered of man in the dungeon had been years ago used of God to interpret truly his dream and his fellow-prisoner's. The king's perplexity reminded him of their sadness before light from above came to his own immense relief and on his comrade's shameful end. Might not the same interpreter who so justly forecast the servants' future be enabled to help their king?

"And the chief-butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying, I remember my faults this day. Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard's house, me and the chief-baker. And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; we dreamed each man according to the interpretation of his dream. And [there was] with us a young man, a Hebrew, servant of the captain of the guard; and we told him, and he interpreted to us our dreams; to each man according to

his dream he interpreted. And it came to pass, as he interpreted, so it was: me he restored to mine office, and him he hanged. Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they hastened his exit [made him run] out of the dungeon; and he shaved, and changed his raiment, and came in to Pharaoh." (vers. 9-14).

Here as ever, man's extremity is God's opportunity. The chief-butler forgot Joseph's service, so rare, opportune and unremunerated, which no money could have bought, which God alone could have enabled the blackened but blameless prisoner to render. Was it not inexcusable that the sure fulfilment of his own restoration to honour, and of his companion's fatal degradation, awoke no speedy gratitude, not to say burning sense of justice, on behalf of the suffering prophet? But the patience of God is as instructive as His wisdom is reliable, and His love never fails. Who that weighs the fact can doubt, that, while man has every ground for humbling himself, God timed as well as wrought for the greatest good of His servant and for His own glory? Joseph was allowed still to endure grievous things, the chief-butler to confess his faults, the king to be as agitated as his imprisoned chamberlains, and Joseph to come forth in a lustre incomparably brighter that through any possible rehearsal of his predictions in the dungeon.

It was the Egyptian monarch that was now at his wits' end, and full proof afforded that the nation's boasted wisdom was as unavailing for its troubled king, as their help would be in vain for Israel at a later day against the Assyrian.

Repentance, too, is for sinful man the necessary condition of blessing to the soul. It is God's goodness

that leads to it, wholesome and steadying for him who really judges himself before Him and honestly owns it. “I remember my faults this day.” It was no mere terror of consequences that confessed how much he was to blame. “Pharaoh was wroth with his servants, and put me in ward in the captain of the guard’s house, me and the chief-baker.” He hides nothing of his shame or danger; and he tells how they two had dreams the same night, and repeated them to the young Hebrew (their fellow-prisoner in the state prison), who interpreted them forthwith; as they were fulfilled with a markedly different issue to each and no less surprising than distinct and immediate: “Me he restored to mine office, and him he hanged.” The same God, who sent the dreams to the two Egyptian chamberlains, explained their prophetic bearing through Joseph, and accomplished them by Pharaoh in His providence.

No wonder that Pharaoh was so deeply moved as to send and call the long and deeply wronged prisoner from the dungeon to the royal presence. No wonder that the officials lost not a moment in bringing one of whom such good things were attested by the best possible witness to the king. Gates and guards, bars and bolts, must yield him up without delay. Yet would and must he come with due care and respect for the proprieties of the court. There was strong and sound ground to expect the light which not the king only but all the sages of Egypt craved the more to receive, after a testimony so weighty and energetic as they had heard from the chief-butler. How little any then could anticipate God’s gracious wisdom, when he came in to Pharaoh, by his means both to enlighten the anxious mind of the monarch, and to provide for the husbanding of the exceptional plenty

about to come in, for aiding not only Egypt but those of other lands during the extreme dearth to follow! But God meant, and not least of all, to rescue the blameless Israelite from the shame and punishment he never deserved, to raise him at once to a higher honour which was only his due; and to make him as wise, just, and pious an administrator as any king ever appointed, and any realm ever enjoyed. Of a design yet nearer to His affections, in caring for those He had separated to Himself, as witness for the true and living God against all strange gods, we need not speak now. This will appear self-evident from Gen. 42 and onward, and, higher than all, as the fore-shadow He was giving of the Coming Anointed One, as to whom more remains to be said in its place; for God ever loves to speak of Him, if deaf and dead man may but bear and live.

Chapter 11 - God's Interpreter

Gen. 41:15-32.

Long had been the trial of Joseph's faith and patience, and the keenest morally and physically at the close, though Jehovah was with him all the while. But then "they hurt his feet with fetters: his soul came into iron, till the time that his word came; the word of Jehovah tried him. The king sent and loosed him; the ruler of peoples, and let him go free" (Ps. 105:18-20). How sudden the change from the king's tower-house to the perplexed king's court, and the baffled sages of Egypt!

"And Pharaoh said to Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and [there is] none to interpret it. And I have heard say of thee, thou understandest a dream to interpret it. And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, [It is] not in me: God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace. And Pharaoh said

to Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood on the brink of a river. And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine fat-fleshed and fine-looking, and they fed in the reed-grass. And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor, and very ill-looking, and lean-fleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness. And the lean and ill-looking kine ate up the first seven fat kine; and when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had come into their belly, and their look was as at the beginning. And I awoke. And I saw in my dream, and, behold, seven ears came up on one stalk, full and good. And, behold, seven ears withered, thin, parched with the east wind, sprung up after them; and the thin ears. devoured the seven good ears. And I told [it] to the scribes; but [there was] none that could declare it to me. And Joseph said to Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh [is] one. What God is about to do he hath declared to Pharaoh. The seven good kine [are] seven years; and the seven good ears [are] seven years: the dream [is] one. And the seven lean and bad kine that came up after them [are] seven years; and the seven empty cars parched with the east wind will be seven years of famine. This [is] the word which I have spoken to Pharaoh: what God is about to do he letteth Pharaoh see, Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt. And there will arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine will consume the land. And the plenty will not be known in the land by reason of that famine which followeth; for it [will be] very grievous. And for that the dream was doubled to Pharaoh twice, [it is] because the thing [is] established by God, and God will hasten to do it" (vers. 15-32).

The king forthwith tells Joseph of his dream and of none to interpret it; of him he had heard as one that could. Joseph replies with modest and pious disclaimer for himself, but with faith in God's willingness and goodness in the matter. Thereon Pharaoh recounts it in yet more energetic terms than originally, the two-fold kine, the two-fold grain, the lean and ill-looking devouring the good and well-favoured, who came before. Joseph explains that both dreams related to one event, seven years of plenty, followed by as many of famine, beyond parallel. Both were of God's doing for extraordinary ends; as was His making all known to Pharaoh, outside the ken of man. The doubling of the dream indicated not only its certainty, but the speed of its accomplishment. God deceives not, nor is He mocked. Behind His good-will to man and those providentially set in authority, He cared intimately for the prophet who had suffered long for righteousness and His name's sake; as He had designs for humbling his brethren, chastising their evil ways, but eventually bringing them in the fourth generation into Canaan, with great substance, out of the land of their slavery, whilst He judges the nation that oppressed them. And this He did as punctually and plainly before the world's eyes, as He now wrought to save life generally and cause the wise dealing of His servant to be at once welcomed.

Indeed Joseph was the type of One incomparably higher, Who shall astonish many nations, and shut the mouths of kings on account of Him, and melt the proud heart of His ancient people; for in their self-will they esteemed Him not but despised Him. Yet it was the reality of His humiliation and of its infinite grace, not only in bearing their griefs and sustaining their sorrows, but far more

deeply in being wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities. These gave the enemy occasion to aggravate their unbelief, as unwilling to allow their sins as to feel their need of a Saviour from God independently of themselves: at bottom the difficulty insuperable to all flesh, of Gentiles as well as Jews. But, strictly speaking, Joseph typified Him, first, in being “the Prophet that should come” and endure all griefs and shame, but be God’s wisdom during His humiliation, rejected by His brethren, punished unjustly (though the righteous One) by the Gentiles, yet raised out of the depths to wield the authority of the kingdom outside Israel and the land, to the great relief of Israel and Egypt, before the day come to put the children in fulfilled possession of the promises made to the fathers.

It is intelligible that an ungodly reasoner like David Hume, or a dissolute sentimentalist like J. J. Rousseau should deny prophecy as well as miracle. One can understand too the trifling speculation of philosophers, who talk of alleged miracles or prophecies falling under a higher law which transcends the ordinary rule of natural causes and effects. The common and fatal defect of all such schemes is the sin that forgets and leaves out God, in a day particularly when there was neither the completed word of God or the scriptures, nor the presence of the Spirit imparted as the fruit of Christ’s redemption. How sad that their erring and rebellious steps should be followed by men, who are not only professing Christians, but bound by their position to proclaim all revealed truth, and expound it faithfully in its fulness and precision to all disciples as well as opposers. It is both scandalous indifference and real hostility to God and His Son, and in fact less honest than

those unworthy sceptics. But the apostasy must come before the day of the Lord, who will execute judgment on all evil among the living here below.

The Jews, once so stubbornly given to idol after, have long been remarkable for their incredulity and opposition to the word of truth, the gospel. And both the old evil will reappear, and the still more frightful unbelief will take the shape of accepting the man of sin, the lawless one, as both Messiah and God. But the apostasy of Christendom must be all the more shameless and desperate, as the rejected light of the gospel transcends the word of righteousness in the law. And who are the instruments most active in the preparatory work of Satan in our day? Beyond doubt those who call themselves the “higher critics.” It is they who are now diligently destroying God’s authority in the Bible by their vain theories miscalled “historical methods.” And those who once trembled at God’s word become increasingly dead to so great a sin in the critics, and so great a danger for themselves in listening. But so it must be as the end of worldly religion and life.

Chapter 12 - Joseph’s Counsel, And Promotion

Gen. 41:33-14.

Nor was Joseph content only to interpret the dreams of the king, though this he did with a quiet simplicity and decision which so approved itself to Pharaoh’s conscience, that he too had not the least doubt that God was in the matter. He saw that the case demanded the most energetic and prudent measures to turn to account the light given from above on the long super-abundant plenty against the no less long, sure, and extreme years of scarcity which were to follow. He therefore rose

above all scruples which ordinarily would hinder one emerging from the obscurity and the shame of a prison from tendering advice to a king and his courtiers on affairs of state and of the most urgent and important kind. Confidence in the revealed mind of God took away the fear of slight, as it also drew out his heart in goodwill to the king and his people, not to speak of others, so intimately concerned. Otherwise they might soon forget the dream and its interpretation, as a nine days' wonder, and fall into the usual listlessness of unbelief, wasteful of the coming plenty, and heedless of the scarcity to follow. God indeed was not before the eye of the vast majority, ready on second thoughts to accredit Joseph with no more than ingenuity or, as even professing Christians would say, a lucky hit. The king at once was struck and solemnised, as the rest in measure; so that Joseph was encouraged to advise with prompt seriousness.

"And now let Pharaoh look himself out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do [this]: and let him appoint overseers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt during the seven years of plenty; and let them gather all the food of these good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and keep [it]. And let the food be a store to the land for the seven years of famine which shall be in the land of Egypt, that the land perish not through the famine. And the word was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants. And Pharaoh said to his servants, Shall we find [one] as this, a man in whom the Spirit of God [is]? And Pharaoh said to Joseph, Since God has made all this known to thee, there is none

discreet and wise as thou. Thou shalt be over my house, and according to thy word (mouth) shall all my people order themselves: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in clothes of byss, and put a gold chain about his neck. And he caused him to ride in the second chariot that he had: and they cried before him, Bow the knee (Abrech)! and he set him over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, I [am] Pharaoh: and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or his foot in all the land of Egypt" (vers. 33-44).

Thus without an effort of his own was Joseph elevated from the unmerited depths of suffering and ignominy to be prime minister of the greatest kingdom then on earth. Who could deny that it was God's doing in His providence, though not without extraordinary means in His Spirit's power working in His servant? And how plain the type of a greater than Joseph, Who suffered first from His own people that received Him not, afterwards unto the death of the cross from Gentiles who knew Him not, yet in the midst of both the vessel of divine wisdom far beyond Joseph or any other born of women! For He was indeed the wisdom of God in the days of His humiliation, as He is now at the right hand of power while His people are estranged from Him, and blessing flows to the nations (little as they too know Him yet), besides the little flock of faith, the sheep out of both that do hear His voice and follow Him. All authority meanwhile is given Him in heaven and on earth, though He still waits for the kingdom and the restoration of His alienated people; when all the ends of the earth as well

as Israel shall see the salvation of God, and the earth shall make a joyful noise to Jehovah, breaking forth and singing for joy, yea singing praises. For it will be manifested power and glory then when He has remembered His mercy and His faithfulness to Israel, no longer haughty and self-willed, but humbled by grace, self-judging and submissive at the feet of the crucified Messiah come to reign.

No, Christ is not yet on His own throne as it will be then. He overcame the world and its prince that adjudged Him the cross; and, rejected by Jew and Gentile, He is received up in glory to sit for the little while on His Father's throne, while the heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ are being called out to await His coming to receive them to Himself for the Father's house above. To this end the gospel of God's grace goes out which the Holy Spirit, sent forth from heaven on the Son's ascension, uses to call them out. This done, the world question will be raised; for He is Heir of all things, and the Jew with Israel must come into the foreground for their deliverance, as distinctly as punitive dealings on His, and their, Gentile foes.

Chapter 13 - Governor Of Egypt

Gen. 41:45-57.

Had Joseph been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, had he like Moses been trained in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, had he enjoyed the king's favour as fully as that of the princess his daughter, we could scarce conceive of a stranger acquiring such confidence with the king and his servants at court as to be made grand vizier earlier than his thirtieth year. Then he stood nearest to the throne. It was God's doing; and at once

represented by Pharaoh's seal-ring put on Joseph's hand, by his array-the court attire of byss [the finest cotton], and by the gold chain put on his neck, and by his riding in the second chariot of the realm with the suited proclamation of the honour due to his office. And we hear more; yet his elevation was wholly unknown to his brethren after the flesh.

"And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah, and gave him as wife Asenath, daughter of Potiphera priest of On. And Joseph went out over the land of Egypt. And Joseph [was] thirty years of age when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and passed through the whole land of Egypt.

"And in the seven years of plenty the land produced by handfuls. And he gathered up all the food of the seven years that were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities; the food of the fields of the city which [were] round about it, he laid up in it. And Joseph laid up corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left oft numbering; for [it was] without number.

"And to Joseph were born two sons before the year of famine came, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera the priest of On bore to him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh (for God made me forget all my toil and all my father's house). And the name of the second he called Ephraim (for God caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction).

"And the seven years of plenty that were in the land of Egypt were ended; and the seven years of the famine began to come, according as Joseph had said. And there was famine in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there

was bread. And all the land of Egypt was famished; and the people cried to Pharaoh for bread; and Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, Go to Joseph: what he saith to you, do. And the famine was over all the face of the earth. And Joseph opened every storehouse [all in which was grain], and sold to the Egyptians; and the famine was grievous in the land of Egypt. And the whole earth came into Egypt to Joseph, to buy, because the famine was grievous on the whole earth" (vers. 45-57).

Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name, as to which the learned question whether it means "Saviour of the world," or "Sustainer of life." Either way it points to the eminent service rendered, not in word only but in deed and truth, though the Rabbis and Josephus incline to "Revealer of secrets." But God had especially His purpose for the people of His choice, not Joseph only but the ungrateful and envious brethren, who led the way in his sufferings, and were yet to behold his glory and share his grace.

The two sons were born before the years of famine; and their names are the more remarkable as indicating the striking difference with those of the sons of Moses, notwithstanding a strong moral and typical resemblance between their respective fathers. Manasseh means I causing to forget"; as Ephraim means "fruitfulnesses"; and they express their father's affections in his remarkable exaltation outside Israel for blessing. The names Moses gave his sons express, not his forgetting his brethren, but his sense of "strangership" in being separated from them, and counting on "God my help." Both meet in perfection in our Lord Jesus.

The details that follow reveal the admirable administration of Joseph. Exuberant plenty with most leads to prodigality and waste. But he knew in Whom he believed, and entered wisely into the duty which devolved on him more than on any in the land of Egypt, and provided accordingly for the years of excessive want. Thus all living on the soil were to benefit in the highest degree from the sovereign to every subject, and far beyond that land. The superabundance affixed the first seal on the prophetic truth afforded and divinely interpreted; the famine affixed the second, still more impressive to such as hardly credited a change so disastrous to comfort and increasingly dangerous to life. But the monarch had unbroken confidence in his prime minister and his measures. When the Egyptians, in their distress and fears, cried to him as the father of the country, his one answer was, Go to Joseph: what he saith to you, do."

Grievous was the famine, not only in the outside countries, but in the land which at a much later day became the natural granary for the Empire; the crisis passed without riot, still less a revolution rising against the government. Yet in a simple and righteous statesmanship, which none questioned, the people were fed throughout, and gave up their lands and all they had; so that royalty was thus beyond doubt set on the most favourable position, beyond the ruler's ambition, and with the nation's gratitude to Joseph as their best friend. In all the history of the nations is it possible to find a match for what came to pass under Joseph's ministry for crown or for subject?

Faith marked Joseph's policy throughout, and his wisdom which became increasingly apparent. And if this

were so with the type, what is it with Him whom he represents on high? And what will it be when He takes the world under His sceptre, and all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Jehovah? None can expect, in a pious Israelite called to rule Egypt, the light which the Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension afford to the Christian, and the responsibilities which attach to his relationship as not of the world even as Christ was not. But, according to the measure then vouchsafed, Joseph was a bright witness of faith in that day, as incorrupt in his lofty charge as when a slave of the foreigner, and the persecuted of his brethren.

In scripture however we are entitled to remember its prophetic character habitually, and never to forget that the great function of its real Author, who ever may be the instrument, is to glorify the coming One, as ever since He came to take of the things of Christ and announce them to the Christian. How could it be otherwise if we believe what an unceasing object of delight the Son is to the Father?

This is the true key to all scripture, differentiates it from every other book, and indicates the folly and guilt of confounding it with any other. Nor could one who knows it to be divine, as none else, allow for a moment the impiety of man setting himself up as a judge of that will judge him at the last day. But fallen man, though he may be credulous, is essentially unbelieving and as slow to feel his own evil as to trust God's goodness in Christ, because his conscience is bad.

Yet the truth abides the same whether received to salvation or rejected to perdition; and love is active to bear witness of it that benighted man may hear and live,

believing the testimony of God concerning His Son. Life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life.

Chapter 14 - Joseph's Brethren Bow Down To Him

Gen. 42:1-9.

How often God is pleased to use straits for His own purposes and in His ways for the good of all, saints and sinners! So it is here. The pinch of want fell on Jacob and his sons; "for the famine was in the land of Canaan."

"And Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob said to his sons, Why look ye one on another? And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is grain in Egypt: go down thither, and buy for us from thence, in order that we may live and not die. And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn out of Egypt. But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said, Lest mischief may befall him. So the sons of Israel came to buy among those that came; for the famine was in the land of Canaan. And Joseph, he [was] the governor over the land; he [it was] that sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brethren came and bowed down to him, the face to the earth. And Joseph saw his brethren, and knew them; but he made himself strange to them, and spoke roughly with them, and said to them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food. And Joseph knew his brethren; but they knew him not. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said to them, Ye [are] spies; to see the nakedness. of the land ye are come (vers. 1-9).

The righteous Jehovah loves righteousness and had a controversy with those brethren of Joseph who had wronged their faithful brother, and had not judged their cruel envy and evil deeds. But this must be for the very reason, that they were His chosen family for His earthly plans, as none other could pretend to be. If therefore they had sunk below natural equity, God in His admirable patience and wisdom knew how to deal with their conscience, vindicate fidelity, chastise self-will, and cleanse from a defiled state. This first meeting of the ten brothers with Joseph had its importance in the moral government of God; who, as He had exalted His wronged and abused servant, was about to break down the hardened, and to clear their hearts from old iniquity which falsified their relationship as bearing His name.

But it was also the first step in the accomplishment of His word to Abram in Gen. 15, “Know assuredly that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall oppress them four hundred years. And also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge; and afterwards they will come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. And [in a] fourth generation they shall come hither again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (vers. 13-16). Of course ill-will turns what it does not understand to aspersion; yet all was made good in due time. God was faithful and accomplished as He spoke, but with His wonted patience toward the corrupt and hostile usurpers, as well as their hard taskmasters, whilst using both as a moral test of His stiff-necked people. It was His way now in progress to effect discipline for the past and present, and to increase family life into a national one under

circumstances which soon changed to such as justified His intervention for His afflicted people, and gave a deep moral lesson to Israel when called to avenge His honour on the abominations of the Amorite. No forecast of man could have anticipated such a future. The God who made it known to Abram was now working in providence to bring it to pass.

Famine had wrought before in Abram's day, and not at all to his honour; but grace brought him back to his tent, and the altar as at the first (Gen. 13:3, 4). Isaac was absolutely forbidden, under similar pressure, to migrate; he alone abides in Canaan: the instructive reason has been considered in its own place. But Jacob and all the family were expressly to sojourn there, and for a long though limited season: an altogether different lot from those before him as type of Israel, whose name he alone bore and remarkably represented.

Our chapter opens with the perplexity of the sons, and their father's proposal that they should go down into Egypt for supplies. Only Benjamin must not go lest mischief might befall him like his brother Joseph, for that burden though unexpressed ever weighed on his heart. How little he could foresee that ere long Benjamin must go too! But God was working out His good and holy design surely if slowly; man's will or intelligence had nothing to do with bringing all to pass according to His word (vers. 1-5). Things as yet were far from His mind. As it was said in Gen. 12:6, "The Canaanite was then in the land," so now "The famine was in the land of Canaan." How different when Christ reigns in Zion, and Israel is under the new covenant!

Next we hear emphatically of Joseph as governor over the land, the administrator of the vast stores of corn against the predicted and now fulfilling years of famine. “And Joseph’s brethren came, and bowed down to him, the face to the earth. And Joseph saw his brethren, and knew them.” This is all simple and true. The change in him, from a mere growing youth in their own lowly sphere, to be prime minister and a great deal more in the greatest kingdom of that day, must have seemed immeasurable in their eyes. They, grown men, remained much the same for his observant glance. Yet the fulfilment of his early dreams rolled out so unmistakably as must have brought no small emotion, even to him already familiar with God’s relationship and their certain verification.

We need not wonder that one in his position, not in the least through pride or lack of affection, “made himself strange to them and spoke roughly with them.” So he “said to them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.” He was entitled to prove them; as his conduct equally proved his prudence and goodwill. They deeply needed the moral probe, which lay with him above all else; especially as he “knew his brethren, but they did not know him,” as is repeated here.

But there is another element which ver. 9 draws attention to. “And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamt of them; and he said to them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness (or, exposed parts) of the land ye are come.” The reality of God’s interest in those who honour Him was plain before him, and the humiliation too of those who slight Him by their unbelief. One might not expect such a measure or

manner adopted by an apostle, or a spiritual Christian; but it was quite in keeping with the governor of Egypt, although a pious man, and albeit brother of those who had never fully judged their persecution of one who had given them no just ground of offence. It is not love to be indifferent to flagrant evil, even in a brother. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. In remembering his dreams Joseph had God before him, and sought the good of his brethren, who as yet remembered nothing as they ought.

But God is faithful, and so was Joseph in the main, notwithstanding the spiritually uncongenial air of Egypt. Yet the circumstances called for prayer, the guidance and blessing of God, filial consideration of his father, entrance into the feelings of his brethren, and due care for the prejudices of Egypt. It is plain from the history that Joseph was a man who weighed all the circumstances fully.

Chapter 15 - Proves His Brethren

Gen. 42:10-20

Here a quite different scene opens for Joseph, yet recalling his earliest associations and God's dealings with him since he last saw his brothers: he discerning the past, the present, and in his measure the future; they as yet nothing aright. In his natural home he told the true dream of the exaltation which God purposed above not only his brethren but his parents, which they were soon to own. In his rejection only short of death he was the interpreter of life for one man and of judgment for another. Out of prison he was called to interpret for the Egypt-world a full period of plenty followed by as long a period of dire want; and not predicting only, but

chosen to administer in power, as he had wisdom to impart, according to God. How it was to probe the hardened consciences of those dear to him notwithstanding their baseness to Jehovah, to their father, and to their brother! We left off with his knowing his brethren who knew not him, his remembrance of his own early dreams, and his imputation that they were spies come to see the nakedness of the land.

“And they said to him, No, my lord; but to buy food thy servants are come. We [are] all sons of one man; we [are] true; thy servants are not spies. And he said to them, No, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. And they said, Thy servants [were] twelve brethren, sons of one man, in the land of Canaan: and, behold, the youngest [is] this day with our father; and one [is] not. And Joseph said to them, That [is it] that I have spoken to you, saying, Ye [are] spies. By this ye shall be put to the proof: as Pharaoh liveth, ye shall not go forth hence unless your youngest brother come hither. Send one of you that he may fetch your brother; but ye shall be bound, and your words shall be put to proof whether the truth [[is] in you; and if not, as Pharaoh liveth, ye [are] spies. And he gathered them all into ward three days. And Joseph said to them the third day, This do that ye may live: I fear God. If ye [are] true, let one of your brethren remain bound in the house of your prison; but go ye, carry grain for the hunger of your households; and bring your youngest brother to me, in order that your words may be verified, and that ye may not die. And they did so” (vers. (10-20).

Joseph had no thought of vengeance; nor would he invoke or trust process of law. He with grace in his heart does not spare profitable lessons for the conscience of

the guilty. So he speaks like a governor as he truly was of Egypt, and makes himself strange to them for no other end than their real good. If God wrought by the pressure, he who had His mind would lead them, by his words and ways which troubled them, to awaken their long-slumbering conscience, that they too might fear God as he did. It is just so in principle that grace wrought with every one of us who has been truly brought to God. The affections are not to be trusted, unless conscience also cries out to God in a true sense of our own ruin and deep distress. We must approach Him about and in our sins, yet in the name of Jesus.

As they were all guilty, which no one on earth knew so well as Joseph, he committed them all to custody. But as underneath the frown of the governor lay compassion to them all, he on the good witness of the third day proposed that one only should remain in prison, and the rest, with the food he supplied them freely (though this they never suspected), should return to the comfort of their kin. But there was one condition, which for their sakes as for his must be stipulated: “Bring your youngest brother to me.” No doubt such a word sent a pang into their hearts; for well they knew what Benjamin was to his father and theirs with the then difficulties. They had sinned against their father and especially about one brother, who to their conviction was not alive yet the very lord who now confronted them. But if the way of transgressors is hard, the way of grace is beyond all thought of man good or bad. Here is nothing but goodness from first to last, if we can rightly say last of that which shall have no end. Only the sinner must learn his own badness, all the more guilty in presence of the love of the Father who sent His Only-

begotten into the world, not only that we might live through Him, but that He might die for us as propitiation for our sins.

Chapter 16 - Joseph’s Brethren In Self-Reproach

Gen. 42:21-28

On the third day we have seen the governor of Egypt relented; and instead of keeping all in prison while one was sent to bring Benjamin, he offers the terms of keeping one as the pledge in custody, while the rest convey back the grain which their households required. But he dropped a few words of great significance to the sons of Jacob, and to them also exceedingly unexpected from the great lord of a people so idolatrous as the Egyptians. And he uttered these words as the explanation of a proposal so just and considerate: “I fear God.” Who can doubt that this following their serious position and the relief just proposed was calculated to act powerfully on conscience?

“Then said they one to another, We [are] indeed guilty concerning our brother whose anguish of soul we saw when he besought us and we did not hearken: therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them saying, Did I not speak to you, saying, Do not sin against the lad? but ye did not hearken; and now, behold, his blood also is required. And they did not know that Joseph understood, for the interpreter was between them. And he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them, and took Simeon from among them and bound him before their eyes. And Joseph commanded to fill their vessels with corn, and to restore every man’s money into his sack, and to give

them provision for the way; and so it was done to them. And they loaded their asses with their corn and departed thence. And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the lodging place, he saw his money, and, behold, it was in the sack's mouth. And he said to his brethren, My money is returned, and, behold, it is even in my sack. And their heart failed, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What [is] this God hath done to us?" (vers. 21-28).

Their sin against Joseph as well as their father, their sin against God too, after being hid for some twenty years, had now begun to be brought home to them. God would work not the grief of the world unto death, but according to His goodness repentance unto salvation, that the truth they had heard from their father might be no longer a mere theory but a living reality, as it was in Joseph's soul. Think how their confusion must have touched his loving heart, as he heard them acknowledge the sin of their heartless turning away from his agony when he besought them as his brethren in vain; first in leaving him to perish, and next in selling him as a slave! Who but God ordered the matter so that he should now hear their self-reproach who then conspired to their sorrow and shame in devising one mischief after another? If it was amazing to him that God was giving such a token for good in his hardhearted and envious brethren, how much more would it not have been to them had they known that Joseph was now listening to their penitence?

Reuben who had shown some compunction then recalls to them their wicked deed and his remonstrance. Altogether Joseph was so overcome that he could only turn away and weep. Those tears were not of selfish

feeling but of gratitude to Him who had watched over all his sufferings and dangers. Now too he could see God's working not only to humble and to bless his brethren but to cheer his father's heart, both by his own restoration to him as one from the grave, and as to his other sons who had been so little a solace and so often a shame. Their distress must deepen yet, for God does not spare the flesh; but the profit would be all the greater at last.

Joseph soon rose above his emotion and returned to them, and before their eyes bound Simeon (not Reuben) on adequate ground. No chastening seems to be of joy but of grief; but the end is worthy of God, even if we have to wait and trust Him in the trials we need by the way.

But Joseph followed up what he began by directing the money of each to be returned in their respective sacks. He sought to deepen the work beyond the sense of retribution for their past evil toward himself. Provision for their journey alone might not have had any such effect; but the money restored would strike them as not at all the way of sale or of man. And it came on them by degrees. For in their halting-place one only opened his sack to feed his ass and saw his money in the mouth of his sack. And this he told the others, to the consternation of all, who could but say to each other, "What is this God hath done to us?" A bad conscience brought God before them; for why should the governor act so kindly who suspected that they were spies, had one brother in his custody, and imperatively demanded the one on whom their father doted? Surely it was God working for good, which they did not yet at all realise. Part of that good was that they should judge themselves

thoroughly, still more that they should learn God’s ways and end as they had never done.

Chapter 17 - Jacob Resists The Demand For Benjamin

Gen. 42:29-38.

The way of restoration is not easy when souls have got astray like the sons of Jacob. But conscience had begun its deep and wholesome work, however much might be needful. Joseph knew far better than themselves that God was really at work, and using their self-judgment for their blessing through the very trouble which pressed on them and resulted in Simeon’s detention in Egypt, confirmed for one by the discovery of the money in his sack’s mouth. Their heart failed through fear, and the question was raised, What is this God has done to us?

“And they came into the land of Canaan to Jacob their father, and told him all that had befallen them, saying, The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us, and treated us as spies of the land. And we said to him, We [are] true; we are not spies; we [are] twelve brethren, sons of our father: one [is] not, and the youngest [is] this day in the land of Canaan. And the man, the lord of the land, said to us, Hereby shall I know that ye [are] true. leave one of your brethren with me, and take [for] the hunger of your households, and go and bring your youngest brother to me; and I shall know that ye [are] not spies but [are] true: your brother will I give up to you; and ye may trade in the land. And it came to pass as they emptied their sacks, that, behold, every man [had] his bundle of money in his sack; and they saw their bundles of money, they and their father, and were afraid.

And Jacob their father said to them, Ye have made me childless: Joseph [is] not, and Simeon [is] not, and ye will take Benjamin! All these things fall on me. And Reuben spoke to his father, saying, Slay my two sons if I bring him not back to thee again;. give him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again. But he said, My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left; and if mischief should befall him by the way in which ye go, then would ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to Sheol" (vers. 29-38).

The terror of the brethren was greatly increased by the evident purpose of the money in every man's sack. Even one case alarmed them, now that conscience was awakening. Yet this might have, seemed a singular accident; but not so the nine. Jacob too was afraid with them. It appears too that it was not mere goodwill on Joseph's part, but done in communion with God to work yet more in consciences so long scared. They were far as yet from understanding the way of the Lord with them; even Jacob was occupied with the wounds to his heart, and at once recalled the loss of Joseph and Simeon as a reason for utterly refusing to let Benjamin go.

Yet these blows which fell so heavily on his affections were the needed path for blessing and joy to all. And such is the end of the Lord for all that fear him, however trying the way. Joseph too had known it and far more deeply than any, in which he was rather typical of Christ, faithful amidst unfaithfulness; his brethren and even Jacob were buffeted for their faults, a very different alternative; and so it will be in the latter day for the Jewish saints during that hour of Jacob's sorrow.

But even for Joseph, and a far greater than Joseph, humiliation was the path to glory. And so with the Christian now. Our place is to suffer with Christ in a spirit of uncomplaining grace. But even the godly Jewish remnant will bow before the retributive dealing of moral government. They shall by sovereign grace “be saved out of it,” and they shall look upon Him whom they pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only one, and shall be in bitterness for Him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. And the answer will be, Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of Jehovah’s hand double for all her sins. Yet without Christ’s cross all had been vain: on Him Jehovah laid the iniquity of all that believe. But this does not hinder governmental dealings also on Jehovah’s part with His people that they may learn His ways of faithfulness, and their own ways when they forget Him and confide most in themselves that they are righteous, whilst they have least reason for it.

Chapter 18 - Jacob Lets Benjamin Go

Gen. 43:1-15.

The sons quietly left the difficulty till the family need forced Jacob to speak, which gave Judah opportunity to plead without impropriety. Feeling would yield to famine. Yet God was in Jacob’s thoughts, and in a measure in those of the sons, as compared with the past. But the mercy that fails not would shine through the dark clouds.

“And the famine [was] grievous in the land. And it came to pass, when they had finished eating the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to

them, Go again, buy us a little food. And Judah spoke to him, saying, The man did positively testify to us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, unless your brother [be] with you. If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food; but if thou do not send [him], we will not go down; for the man said to us, Ye shall not see my face unless your brother [be] with you. And Israel said, Why dealt ye so ill with me, to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother? And they said, The man asked very closely after us and after our kindred, saying, [Is] your father yet alive? have ye a brother? And we told him according to the tenor of these words. Could we at all know that he would say, Bring your brother down? And Judah said to Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and thou and our little ones. I will be surety for him: of my hand shalt thou require him; if I. bring him not to thee and set him before thy face, then shall I be guilty before thee for ever. For had we not lingered, we should now certainly have returned already twice. And their father Israel said to them, If [it is] then so, do this; take of the best fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a gift, a little balm and a little honey, tragacanth and ladanum, pistachio-nuts and almonds; and take double money in your hand, and the money that was returned to you in the mouth of your sacks, carry [it] back in your hand perhaps it [is] an oversight. Take also your brother and arise, go again to the man. And the Almighty God give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin “And I, if I be bereaved [of my children], am bereaved. And the men took that gift, and took double money in their hand, and Benjamin, and rose up, and

went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph" (vers. 1-15).

It is in a world of evil and sorrow through sin, where grace works for good. As long as the food lasted, the dreaded condition remained in abeyance. But when their supply came to an end, facts must be faced, and God be found above their hopes as much as their fears, turning their faults to their profit, but abundant in suited mercy to His own glory. The sons left it to their father to propose a fresh visit to Egypt; and not Reuben but Judah states the case. They were absolutely forbidden to see the ruler's face without Benjamin. With him they were ready to go down and buy the needed food; without him they durst not go. Thereon Israel yielded to their complaint; for they could well plead the ruler's keen inquiry. It is indeed a vivid transcript of the situation, and of the agitated feeling on all sides growing out of iniquity, with God not only to exercise and chasten but to carry out His own way for blessing all round.

So it will be with the generation to come of Israel's sons, guilty of far deeper dereliction and against an immeasurably greater than Joseph. Him "this generation" spurned in their blindness and consigned in their hate to a far more ignominious doom than their fathers over conceived for their brother. And the repentance of the coming day will be proportionate, as the necessary trials through which they must pass retributively in God's government will be immense. But the end of the Lord will be rich in promised blessing, not only for Israel but for all the nations of the earth. And how deep and loud will be their thankful praise and joy and triumph in Him their own Messiah, to whom they owe it all in mercy without measure or end!

Here Judah again pleads with his father, with touching effect offering to bear the blame for ever. Now Israel yields, however it might wring his heart, and with careful instructions that all should be done honestly and with comeliness, he surrenders his beloved, the more beloved because of the missing link, recalling the proper patriarchal name of strength in their weakness. It was after a long interval, when God recalled it thus to Jacob, and along with El-Shaddai, the name of Israel (Gen. 35:10, 11) with glorious promises yet to be fulfilled in Israel's sons. But this glory turns, as does their salvation, on their long, rejected, soon to be received, Jesus Messiah.

Chapter 19 - Benjamin With The Rest Meets Joseph

Gen. 43:15-34.

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. So it will be for Israel when existing shadows yield to the reality Christ's appearing will bring in to the glory of God. So it was for the dawn of heavenly light and blessing in Christ for the Christian; and so it will be when this age ends, and a new one begins for Israel and the nations of the earth.

"And the men took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin, and they rose up, and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph. And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, Bring the men into the house, and slay, and make ready; for the men shall dine with me at noon. And the man did as Joseph bade; and the man brought the men into Joseph's house. And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house;

and they said, Because of the, money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses. And they came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they spoke to him, at the door of the house, and said, O my lord, we came indeed down at the first time to buy food; and it came to pass, when we came to the lodging place, that we opened our sacks, and, behold, [every] man's money [was] in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight; and we have brought it again in our hand. And other money have we brought down in our hand to buy food: we know not who put our money in our sacks. And he said, Peace [be] to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money. And he brought Simeon out to them. And the man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave [them] water, and they washed their feet; and he gave their asses provender. And they made ready the present against Joseph came at noon; for they heard that they should eat bread there. And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which [was] in their hand into the house, and bowed down themselves to him to the earth. And he asked them of [their] welfare, and said, [Is] your father well, the old man of whom ye spoke? [Is] he yet alive? And they said, Thy servant our father [is] well, he [is] yet alive. And they bowed the head and made obeisance. And he lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin his brother, his mother's son, and said, [Is] this your youngest brother of whom ye spoke to rue? And he said, God be gracious to thee, my son. And Joseph made haste, for his bowels yearned upon his brother; and he sought [where] to weep; and he entered into [his] chamber, and wept there. And he washed his

face, and came out; and he restrained himself, and said, Set on bread. And they set on before him by himself, and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians who did eat with him by themselves; because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that [is] an abomination to the Egyptians. And they sat before him, the first-born according to his birth-right, and the youngest according to his youth: and the men marvelled one with another. And he took messes for them from before him; but Benjamin's mess was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and drank largely with him" (vers. 15-34).

The inspired narrative in its own beautiful simplicity shows us God's working in the conscience of the sons of Israel. How little they yet understood that His goodness was leading them to repentance, and that the brother they had so deeply wronged and bitterly hated was but accomplishing their best good by the exercises they passed through! That they were invited into the governor's house filled them with uneasiness. ''The men were afraid because they were brought into Joseph's house; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses." Hence their eagerness to tell the story of their mysterious discovery, and to repay the money that was not theirs. But the steward assured them that all was right on that score without further explanation. God would work more deeply yet.

Meanwhile Simeon rejoins them; and all are treated with the kind attention due to guests, and their beasts of burden too. And they made ready the gift for

presentation to Joseph when he should appear. And very graphic is the meeting, and the enquiries on his part out of the love which he felt, as they bowed down again and again in obeisance. “And he lifted up his eyes and saw Benjamin his brother, his mother’s son, and said, [Is] this your youngest brother of whom ye spoke to me? And he said, God be gracious to thee, my son. And Joseph made baste, for his bowels yearned upon his brother, and he sought [where] to weep; and he entered into [his] chamber and wept there.”

Who can fail to realise it as a scene of human feeling? But it has also a far deeper character to him who reads in faith, and knows the blessed import of grace to be held out by a far greater than Joseph in His restoring His guilty and long alienated brethren to the knowledge of Himself and of themselves. How glorious the consequences when the blessing shall be on the head of Jesus “in that day” which is coming, “and on the crown of the head of Him that was separate from His brethren!” No wonder that those who limit the language to the past think scripture hyperbolical. Christ is not only the key to, but the fulness of, the truth, which here so nearly concerns, not the church of the heavenlies, but the earthly people of God, who must be inwardly fitted for the place to which they are destined before all the nations of the earth, “the glory of Thy people Israel.” For figuratively Benjamin, the son of his father’s hand must be joined to Joseph, “the separated from his brethren,” in order to the accomplishment of their glory which awaits to be fulfilled in its own time. It could not be at this time while the church is being completed in which is neither Jew nor Greek.

Nothing more deplorably hinders the due understanding of the scriptures, both the O.T. and the N.T., than confounding the church's portion, and duties with those of His people Israel. These have lost their place for the while because of their idolatrous apostasy from Jehovah even in Judah and the house of David. Next when a remnant was brought back after the fall of Babylon, they returned to compromise His name especially under Antiochus Epiphanes, when the mass sunk into his guilty schemes, and into still more defiant rebellion against Jehovah in rejecting His Christ and demanding His crucifixion of the Romans, though the heathen procurator well knew His innocence and their spiteful wickedness. Wherefore wrath came upon them to the uttermost, and for a longer continuance. This further and more thorough rejection of the Jews gave occasion to the revelation of grace and truth in Christ, and to the call of the church into union with Him in the heavenlies as its Head, enjoyed even now on earth by the Holy Spirit's presence who baptised us into one body according to the promise of the Father and the Son.

It is the more important for the Christian to take heed; for it was overlooked and misunderstood by the earliest of the Fathers who more and more judaised till the so-called Catholic Church sunk in the darkness of the Latin and Greek rivals with other relies yet more heterodox. The Reformation more or less cast off the papal yoke by means of the Protestant powers who heard the cry for the Bible and justification by faith. But Lutherans and Calvinists never recovered the truth, least of all those who boasted most of tradition; and the Puritans earlier or later, who sought individual piety, wandered into

greater darkness as they justified separate denominations without end.

Chapter 20 - The Crucial Test Applied

Gen. 44:1-17.

It was needed in the moral government of God that the brethren should be searched still more thoroughly; and Joseph is His instrument in devising a still more trying means, not only to carry out self-judgment to the uttermost but to prove their affections now sound and fervent to their father and their brother, after their deep guilt in both respects of old. Love joined righteousness in thus working for their best good.

And he commanded [him] that [was] over (or, the steward of) his house, saying, Fill the men's sacks with food as much as they can carry; and put every man's money in the mouth of his sack. And put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, and his corn-money. And he did according to the word of Joseph which he had spoken. In the morning when it was light, the men were sent away, they and their asses. They were gone out of the city, not far off, when Joseph said to his steward, Up, follow after the men; and when thou overtakest them, say to them, Why have you rewarded evil for good? [Is] not this [it] in what my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth? Ye have done evil [in] what ye have done. And he overtook them, and spoke to them these words. And they said to him, Wherefore speaketh my lord such words as these? Far be it from thy servants to do such a thing! Behold, the money which we found in our sacks' mouths we brought again to thee out of the land of Canaan; and how should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold? With

whomsoever of thy servants it is found, let him die; and we also will be my lord's bondmen. And he said, Now also [be] it according to your words: he with whom it is found shall be. my bondman, and ye shall be blameless. And they hosted and laid down every man his sack on the ground, and opened every man his sack. And he searched carefully; he began at the eldest, and left at the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they rent their clothes, and loaded every man his ass, and returned to the city. And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house; and he [was] yet there; and they fell before him on the ground. And Joseph said to them, What deed [is] this which ye have done? Know ye not that such a man as I can indeed divine? And Judah said, What shall we say to my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we [are] my lord's bondmen, both we and [he] also in whose hand the cup is found. And he said, Far be it that I should do so! The man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my bondman; but as for you, go up in peace to your father" (vers. 1-17).

Severe as the trial was, love dictated it in the fear of God, though we may feel that the mode adopted was in no way what the N.T. would suggest to the Christian. Unfriendly eyes ignorantly misapply the light of Christ to such as had not that light as we have, to disparage the ancient scriptures, and set the one against the other. Joseph acted according to his measure, impaired no doubt by the Egyptian life which surrounded him; and scripture tells us the facts as they were, without sanction or apology. So it is even in the N.T. when the true light was already shining: the record is not a divine

sanction. But the written word is always the truth of things, be it what it may; and this is what God alone gives; and it is what we need and cap find nowhere else. And the steward knew well what his master intended.

How blessed for us, and to God's glory that we have the unfailing and ever holy wisdom of God in Christ! Here the unbeliever may spy as he pleases; his carping malevolence may assail or pervert. But the wisdom abides without a flaw. By-and-by He will be reigning in power; but when He too suffered as Joseph never did, His every word. and way was God's wisdom for us. And so it is when accepted on high and in the highest glory, though it be not yet His promised glory on His own throne, but exalted exceptionally as Joseph was with Gentiles in immediate view, not Israel under Him as when He reigns according to the prophets. He is God's wisdom alike in heavenly glory as in earthly humiliation, as the later revelation of God abundantly proves to our joy and blessing.

His type Joseph was here to carry out the necessary probe for the clearance of all the past mischief, and the forming of a new heart and a new spirit in his brethren. It was for God's sake and their sakes, rather than his own, that there might be the reality and the evidence of a divine work in their conscience and heart. This dictated the cup in Benjamin's sack. No doubt the shock of its discovery there acutely troubled the brothers. But so it must be where sin of the deepest kind lay at the bottom of all; and this was but a means that it might be duly felt and judged. After all, the pain of the means employed was very brief (not more than a few hours compared with what Joseph drank so deeply for years),

and the same day followed with forgiveness and joy and tender love.

To reward the governor's good with such an evil as stealing his cup filled the brethren with all the more anguish that it was found with Benjamin. No wonder that they rent their clothes, and loaded every man his ass, and returned to the city heartbroken. And now more than ever they paid Joseph the fullest obeisance in unconscious accomplishment of his dreams, as they fell before him on the ground. In the latter half of the chapter we shall learn the depth of their renewed feeling for their father and their brother: the very issue which Joseph desired, as he on his part proved the reality and depth of his own love for all. But we need not say more now, as we have a pleading to hear which touched and delighted the heart of Joseph, as it has spoken to innumerable hearts since to our day. And what will it be when the type is fulfilled, and the Lord Himself appears to the Judah of the future day when they look on Him whom they pierced, and mourn as for an only son, every family apart, and the wives apart (Zech. 12)?

Chapter 21 - Judah's Plea

Gen. 44:18-34.

What can be found more candid, and lowly, or more affecting, than the appeal to Joseph of the man once so hard and heartless?

"Then Judah came near to him, and said, Ah! my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's cars, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant; for thou [art] even as Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother? And we said to

my lord, We have an aged father, and a child born to him in his old age, a young one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother; and his father loveth him. And thou saidst to thy servants, Bring him down to me that I may set my eyes on him. And we said to my lord, The lad cannot leave his father; for [if] he should leave his father, he [his father] would die. And thou saidst to thy servants, Unless your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more. And it came to pass when we came up to thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. And our father said, Go again, buy us a little food. But we said, We cannot go down: if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down; for we may not see the man's face unless our youngest brother [be] with us. And thy servant my father said to us, Ye know that my wife bore me two [sons]; and the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces, and I have not seen him since. And if ye take this one also from me, and mischief should befall him, ye will bring down my grey hairs with evil to Sheol. Now therefore, when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad [is] not with us, seeing that his soul is bound up with the lad's soul, it will come to pass, when he sees that the lad [is] not [with us], that he will die; and thy servants will bring down the grey hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to Sheol. For thy servant became surety for the lad to my father, saying, If I bring him not to thee, then I shall be guilty toward my father all the (or, my) days. And now let thy servant stay, I pray thee, instead of the lad a bondman to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brethren; for how should I go up to my father if the lad [were] not with me? lest I see the evil that shall come to my father" (vers. 18-34).

The immense change God had wrought in his brethren was thus made manifest to Joseph. Their envy and selfish cruelty had given way to tender love to their father and his affection for the younger son of Rachel. The old jealousy was supplanted to the root; and he who took the lead was ready to become a slave to the governor, that Benjamin might return to be his father's joy and consolation, instead of death if he remained a bondman. What Joseph had sought was given him, though none as yet knew what he realised. The fraternal guilt how gladly forgiven! the father about to taste comfort beyond all his hopes! Also his own pious heart recognised God's goodness and wondrous ways in bringing about all that was about to be the portion of the family of promise.

Good M. Henry casts about for reasons why Judah should be here so prominent. But those who favour either Patristic expositors or Puritans will pardon me if I point out the great loss which all sustain who do not study the dispensational ways of God in scripture. They consequently are too little versed in the prophets, who render invaluable and indispensable aid for apprehending the types. There is no real ground for conceiving Judah "a better friend to Benjamin than the rest were," or "more solicitous to bring him off." Nor need we think that "he thought himself under greater obligations to endeavour it than the rest, because he had passed his word to his father for his safe return; or the rest chose him for their spokesman, because he was a man of better sense and better spirit, and had a greater command of language than any of them." I am not aware that anything is extant from Origen, Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Cyril which treats of this, or from

Augustine, Jerome or any ancient Latin father. For they too entered so little into the study of the purposes of God as revealed in scripture that we could not expect gleanings of weight on this score.

Yet to those who have profited any thing to speak of from prophecy, it is evident that to a romancer Reuben would have seemed from Gen. 37 the natural one to have taken up the case, and Judah far from promising, especially when we read the revolting figure which he cuts in Gen. 38. But the truth according to God is that Judah was the one whom grace had now fitted for the work. And this harmonises with the divine disposition of the land, where Benjamin had a special nearness in their respective lots. “Of Benjamin he said, The beloved of Jehovah-he shall dwell in safety by him; he will cover him all the day long, And dwell between his shoulders” (Deut. 33:12). And so it was ordered of Jehovah, that notwithstanding the almost extermination of the tribe for their defiance of their brethren in a gross case of sin, and later still their natural repugnance to the anointed king of Judah who superseded Saul’s line and their tribe, they became attached to Judah and the house of David beyond and unlike all the others.

So it will characterise the future and its bright hopes when the heart of Jerusalem is spoken to, and she will hear the cry that her time of toil and trouble is accomplished, and her iniquity is pardoned. The ten tribes will share the blessing later; but Judah and Benjamin precede. They rejected the true Christ; they will receive the Antichrist. Hence Judah here has a. place with and for Benjamin quite peculiar; and He who inspired the scripture did not forget to point to this fact only known to God, which gives it a meaning full of

interest to those who honour the word as truly His and not man's, all of it worthy of Him. As Joseph clearly prefigured Him that was rejected by and separated from His brethren, yet exalted in a sphere outside them now for the blessing of men in all the world, so Benjamin typifies Him in His tearing to pieces the enemies of the Jew in the day of retribution that is coming, not for blessing only like Joseph, but for power, executing divine judgment on the adversary.

One quite understands how few since apostolic days in the past or present exhibit a state to apprehend or enjoy the things to come. But this, thank God, does not enfeeble the truth, nor hinder faith's delight in looking beforehand to the glorious things for Israel on the earth then made ready for them. Our portion is with Christ for the heavens; for besides our individual blessing as Christians by faith of the gospel, we are by the gift of the Holy Spirit made members of His body whilst He is exalted as Head over all things at the right hand of God.

Chapter 22 - Joseph Made Known To His Brethren

Gen. 45:1-15.

The dealing with the conscience of the guilty had done its work. So it will be with the righteous remnant of the latter day. The chastening seemed at the time grievous, but was really in love and for profit, in order to the partaking of God's holiness. After that grace can display itself freely.

"And Joseph could not control himself before all those that stood by him, and he cried, Put every man out from me. And no man stood with him while Joseph made

himself known to his brethren. And he gave forth his voice in weeping; and the Egyptians heard, and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said to his brethren, I [am] Joseph: does my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were terrified at his presence. And Joseph said to his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I [am] Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. And now be not grieved, and let it not be an occasion of anger in your eyes, that ye sold me hither; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine [hath been] these two years in the midst of the land; and [there are] yet five years in which [shall be] neither ploughing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a remnant in the earth, and to save you alive by a great deliverance. And now [it was] not you sent me here, but God; and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and governor over all the land of Egypt. Haste and go up to my father, and say to him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down to me, tarry not. And thou shalt. dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near to me, thou and thy sons and thy sons' sons, and thy flocks and thy herds and all that thou hast. And there will I nourish thee, for [there are] yet five years of famine; in order that thou be not impoverished, thou and thy household and all that thou hast. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that [it is] my mouth which speaketh to you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. And he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept on his neck. And he kissed all

his brethren, and wept on them; and after that his brethren talked with him" (vers. 1-15).

Judah's appeal gave full and conclusive proof that the means employed by Joseph had wrought its designed effect. What a true sense of their cruel wrong toward their guiltless brother! What intense feeling for their father, only less wronged of old than their brother Joseph, and now to be seemingly smitten in his old age by the loss of his beloved Benjamin! Judah craved as the greatest favour to remain instead of the lad as slave to his lord; for how could he go to his father without Benjamin? Joseph could not, would not, hold out longer, but without delay yields to his pent up affection; and, that he might do so freely and fully, charged every attendant to leave his presence. No stranger must intermeddle in such a scene. "And no man stood with him, while Joseph made himself known to his brethren" (ver. 1). All must be out now; and as in Gen. 42:30 he sought to weep apart, and refrained himself, he now gave vent to his feelings without measure that they might be delivered from their fears and be assured of the love which was ever in his heart. For well he knew that the discovery must fill them with dread no less than astonishment. And he yielded to weeping so loud that the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard (2). And Joseph said to his brethren, I [am] Joseph: doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were terrified at his presence" (3). Who can wonder that they were mute? But his love would cast out their fear. "And Joseph said to his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near." And not content with divulging the great secret, as "he said, I [am] Joseph your brother whom ye sold into Egypt," so he at

once seeks to remove their terror by the words, “Now therefore be not grieved nor angry, with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God sent me before you to preserve life” (vers. 4, 5).

Now what a lesson follows in rebuke of the shameless unbelief of prophecy that prevails among this generation of professing Christians! Joseph speaks with the calmest confidence to his brethren, as he had to the king and court of Egypt, of the five years of famine in addition to the two which had led his brethren to repair to the stores, which the years of exuberant plenty enabled him by his faith to provide against the years of want. Near or distant is alike easy to the revealing Spirit of God: both are beyond man’s power. Incredulity would explain both away. All the more the grace of God which was pleased to make the future known in a veiled shape, that the sufferer in the dungeon should not only be vindicated, but become the witness that God gives wisdom to the wise, and reveals the deep and secret things as He sees fit, and on behalf of His people even in their lowest estate.

We can truly and rightly judge how low the fathers of Israel’s tribes had fallen; and how calculated Joseph’s words were to give them a new confidence in God’s interest in them, far more intimate than His beneficence to Egypt’s king and people and the lands which profited by His wondrous ways. “And God sent me before you to establish you a remnant on the earth, and preserve your lives by a great deliverance.” Here was the true key, not merely the discovery to Pharaoh and the rescue of Joseph, and the provision generally in the singularly long plenty and the equally long dearth, but the accomplishment of His plans, long before divulged to

Abram (in Gen. 15), whereby His ancient people should grow up from the family of Jacob in a stranger land of bondage and affliction, the oppressing nation to be judged, and themselves to emerge with great substance.

Who can fail to see that the prophetic powers for Abram, and now for Joseph, were equally from God, whether for centuries beforehand, or for running septads of years? What difference can this make to God, known to whom are all His works since time began, yea, from all eternity? It is only a question of His pleasure directed by wisdom and love. And if Israel were called to own and witness the privilege vouchsafed, how much more Christians who are entitled by the Spirit to search all things, yea, the depths of God! For we can discern a greater than Joseph herein and anticipate, the day when the Jews shall be brought to learn by grace their incomparably worse conduct to Him, who, though God over all, deigned to become their Messiah, Who died to save and will restore them as a people to their land, and to reign King not only there but over all the earth, equally Jehovah as Messiah. In that day shall there be one Jehovah, and His name one. Yea more, He shall have things in the heavens and the earth summed up and together under His headship of all the universe, and all the earth filled with His glory as truly as the heavens. We can read in Zech. 12 the recognition scene for the Jews when the long despised Jesus appears in glory to the confusion of their enemies and to their own everlasting salvation.

But to return to Joseph, what concern to console his brothers! “And now not ye sent me hither, but God; and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and governor throughout all the land of

Egypt" (ver. 8). Was not this the truth by grace to faith, not to the blinded sceptic? Thereon in vers. 9-11 he bids them go up to his father without delay, tell him all, and bring him down to dwell in Goshen near Joseph, both him and all his with flocks, herds and possessions. "And there will I nourish thee, for yet [are] five years of famine," lest all should come to poverty.

And what more touching than his final words? And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin that [it is] my mouth which speaketh to you. And tell my father all my glory in Egypt, and all ye have seen; and haste, and bring my father quickly hither." Not content with this, "he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept on his neck. And he kissed all his brethren, and wept on them; and after that his brethren talked with him." Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, not only he with them, but they with him. But what is even this compared with that which is yet reserved for Israel?

Chapter 23 - Joseph Sends For Jacob And All.

Gen. 45:16-28.

Thus was Joseph led tenderly to care for his father and his brethren, as he was enabled to administer for the relief of Egypt and its surrounding peoples, that the exceeding and long plenty should not be wasted but turned to provide against the distress of the equally long famine which followed. Thus those who heard the word of God could see the hand of God accomplishing what the divinely-sent dreams portended of the ruling place which Joseph was to fill, and this not only in patriarchal limits but far beyond, while accomplishing, God's ways

with His choice line as made known to Abram in Gen. 15.

“And the report [or, voice] thereof was heard in Pharaoh’s house, saying, Joseph’s brethren are come; and it was good in Pharaoh’s eyes and in the eyes of his bondmen. And Pharaoh said to Joseph, Say to thy brethren, Do this: load your beasts and depart; go into the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households, and come to me; and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land. And thou art commanded — this do: take wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and fetch your father and come. And let not your eye regret your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt [is] yours. And the sons of Israel did so; and Joseph gave them wagons according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way. To each one of them all he gave changes of raiment, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred [shekels] of silver and five changes of raiment. And to his father he sent this: ten asses carrying the good things of Egypt, and ten she-asses carrying corn and bread and food for his father by the way. So he sent his brethren away, and they departed; and he said to them, See that ye fall not out by the way. And they went up out of Egypt and came into the land of Canaan to Jacob their father. And they told him, saying. Joseph [is] yet alive, and he [is] governor over all the land of Egypt. And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had spoken to them; and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived. And Israel said, [It is] enough; Joseph my

son [is] yet alive: I will go and see him before I die" (vers. 16-28).

No circumstances could be devised by man's wit so favourable for the entrance of Jacob and his sons into Egypt; and none could be conceived more simple than the plain facts of the case, to give Joseph the administration of the land, attaching to him alike the king and his subjects.

If they did not surpass fable, they were true; and they bear thus the clear impress of God's ordering, as they prefigure that which the prophets pledge in Jehovah's name of what a greater than Joseph was exalted to do when rejected by His brethren to sit on God's right hand in richer supplies to a famished world, and about to make Himself known "the second time" to His brethren with broken hearts and deep repentance, entering for the first time their real and unchanging history of obedience, when all the nations shall indeed be blessed in the one Seed, which is Christ as the apostle speaks in Gal. 3:16.

Even in the world that now is, how rare to find a king and his servants united through respect for an alien governor to yield a hearty and harmonious welcome to his alien fathers and brethren! And Egypt had its strong prejudices then as it is known to have had for ages afterwards; and to none could it be so strongly opposed as to those who confessed God (unknown to them), who denied their gods, with that exclusiveness which ever must be where divine truth is consciously professed. So it was with the believers of Israel; and so it is with the faithful Christian. Neutrality in God's things condemns itself as false and evil to such as know Him.

Here at any rate they had special reasons showing no doubt that the Egyptians, king or people, could not deny how warm a reception was proffered to all the kin of Israel for Joseph's sake. The very wagons suggested by the king and left for Joseph to supply played their part in assuring the father to credit the tale, which made his heart fail at first, that Joseph still lived. "The Jews ask for signs;" and there it was in the means of going down into Egypt which his sons could not have provided, as indeed in much more which his loving and bountiful son gave for the whole of them, Benjamin in particular, and his father yet more.

But we can recognise words, so characteristic of Joseph and so suitable to his piety, which Scarce one but he would have thought of at such a moment of excited wonder and self-judgment. "See that ye fall not out by the way" is the last thing for a forger to invent, the expression of godliness and affection in perfect keeping with him who uttered the words.

Chapter 24 - Israel Sets Out, And God Speaks In The Night VIsion.

Gen. 46:1-7.

Jacob had seen more changes than any of his fathers, and is especially in contrast with Isaac, who never left the land of promise; yet it was a great surprise and effort to one who after so many vicissitudes expected to die in Canaan. And if he remembered the word of Jehovah to Abram in Gen. 15, he might well hesitate, however great his longing to look once more on his beloved Joseph.

“And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beer-Sheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. And God spoke to Israel in the night visions and said, Jacob, Jacob! And he said, Here [am] I. And he said, I [am] God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt, and I will also certainly bring thee up [again]; and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes. And Jacob rose up from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, on the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. And they took their cattle and their goods which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his seed with him, his sons and his sons’ sons with him, his daughters and his sons’ daughters, and all his seed he brought with him into Egypt” (vers. 1-7).

Beer-sheba was a memorable spot to Isaac, who built an altar there, and called upon the name of Jehovah who had there appeared to him, some time after he had been forbidden, even under the stress of famine, to go down into Egypt, as Abraham had faultily done. But now God spoke to Israel in the vision of the night, after he had offered sacrifices to his father’s God who called him by his name of natural weakness, and bade him fearlessly go down into Egypt. There in the land already pointed out as a furnace of affliction they were to sojourn, yet to come out with great substance and multiplied numbers. Till then their increase had been slow. Such were God’s ways with His people, as well as with the peoples they ware to dispossess; for the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full. Jacob was not to hesitate. “I will go down

with thee into Egypt, and I will certainly bring thee up again; and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes." God entered into the anxieties of his feeble servant and knew how to strengthen his tried heart.

"And Jacob rose up from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, on the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him." But they took their live stock also and their goods which they had acquired in Canaan, and came into Egypt. Jacob and his sons had no idea of entering that land as mere dependents on its prince, whatever his desire to show all honour to Joseph, and the promise that the good of all the land of Egypt should be theirs. They therefore took their "stuff" along with them and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his seed with him; "his sons and his sons' sons with him, his daughters and his sons' daughters, and all his seed, he brought with him into Egypt."

It was a sorry spectacle to the eye of sense, not more than a troop of Gitanos in the estimate of Spaniards. Yet there was the nucleus of a people, to sojourn in a land not their own for a while, but to return and take possession of Canaan. Alas! first they accepted conditions of law, wherein they utterly broke down and suffered the penalty of their presumptuous unbelief in idolatry, as in the rejection of the Messiah later. At length they shall be restored on the ground of pure mercy, under the new covenant, with repentance and faith in the returning Messiah, who will set them at the head of all nations, when He will reign over all the earth in righteousness, power and glory. Never till then shall there be the days of heaven upon earth. Even Pentecost

was no fulfilment, but the strong pledge of it to come. Compare Acts 3:19-21.

Chapter 25 - The Names Of Jacob's Sons Who Came Into Egypt.

(Gen. 46:8-27).

If we honestly wish to avoid serious mistakes and rightly understand Scripture, it is important to read the genealogies according to their aim, and not modern ideas. And it is plain on their face that they present difficulties, which no forger nor compiler would have left but have avoided with all care. The writer, on the other hand, knowing details which we might not, expresses simply what he knows to be true without stopping to clear them up. Special motives govern each case; and if this be under the direction of the Holy Spirit, as a Christian is bound to believe, the mistake must be in judging according to his own mind, and method, not after the divine design.

"And these [are] the names of the sons of Israel who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons; Jacob's first-born, Reuben; and the sons of Reuben, Enoch and Phallu and Hezron and Carmi; and the sons of Simeon, Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Saul son of a Canaanitish woman. And the sons of Levi, Gershon, Kohath and Merari; and the sons of Judah, Er and Onan and Shelah, and Pherez and Zarah; but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan; and the sons of Pherez were Hezron and Hamul. And the sons of Issachar, Tola and Puah, and Job and Shimron; and the sons of Zebulun, Sered and Elon and Jahleel. These [are] the sons of Leah whom she bore to Jacob in Padan-Aram, and his

daughter Dinah: all the souls of his sons and daughters [were] thirty-three.

“And the sons of Gad, Ziphion and Haggi, Shuni and Esbon, Eri and Arodi and Areli; and the sons of Asher, Jimnah and Ishyah and Ishvi and Beriah, and Serah their sister, and the sons of Beriah, Heber and Malchiel. These [are] the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and she bore these to Jacob: sixteen souls.

“The sons of Rachel, Jacob’s wife, Joseph and Benjamin. And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath bore to him, daughter of Potiphera, priest in On; and the sons of Benjamin, Belah and Becher and Ashbel, Gera and Naaman, Ehi and Rosh, Muppim and Huppim and Ard. These [are] the sons of Rachel who were born to Jacob: all the souls [were] fourteen.

“And the sons of Dan, Hushim; and the sons of Naphtali, Jahzeel and Guni and Jezer and Shillem. These [are] the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and she bore these to Jacob: all the souls [were] seven.

“All the souls belonging to Jacob that came into Egypt, that came out of his loins, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives: all the souls [were] sixty-six. And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt [were] two souls. All the souls of the house of Jacob which came into Egypt [were] seventy.” (vers. 8-27).

It is God’s register of Jacob and his house, “seventy” souls including Jacob, and Joseph with his two sons, “sixty-six” without these. The Sept. cited by Stephen speaks of seventy-five, because it adds Manasseh’s son

Machir and grandson Gilead, and Ephraim's two sons, Shuthelah and Tahan with Shuthelah's son, Eran or Edom. The time approached when they should exchange the life of a family, already in Genesis enlarged into twelve families, for that of a people; and their growth is one of the initiatory facts of Exodus, the second book of the Pentateuch. Scripture reveals the interest God took in recording things little in man's eyes. Nature revels in what it counts great in its own eyes and before the world.

The fact is that the sons of Jacob were even less than would be reckoned in a modern census. For the principle stated in Heb. 7:9, 10 seems to have been here applied to Judah's offspring, and to Benjamin's also, as we may gather from the previous history, but inserted here, as the heads of future families, as we see confirmed by the list in Numbers 26 of independent families of the tribes of Israel in the day when Moses and Eleazar were directed to take the sum of the whole assembly of Israel's sons from twenty years old and upward. This is a solution suggested by those versed in such genealogies; and it is but one of several. It was no mistake, but intentional, however outside ordinary thought. Thus the immense increase during the sojourn in Egypt became all the more marked, notwithstanding the cruel and murderous oppression which characterised its latter part, and gave the occasion for Jehovah their God to show Himself greater than all gods; for in the thing in which they acted haughtily He was above them.

Chapter 26 - Joseph Meets Jacob And Advises His Brethren

Gen. 46:28-34.

Now then the father was to meet the cherished but long-separated son; and his brethren also were to be settled in Egypt through the loving care of him whom they in their hatred had sold to be carried there. Not one of them probably had ever till now expected to meet there, not even Joseph. But God had spoken long before what was just beginning to be accomplished, with much to follow, which may before have not engaged their attention. It was a prophecy, all the more vaguely remembered because it was not yet written as in Gen. 15: a great favour to be spoken at all, a greater still to be read in the written word long after it was uttered in God's grace.

"And he sent Judah before him to Joseph, to give notice before he came to Goshen. And they came into the land of Goshen. Then Joseph got ready (yoked) his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen; and he presented himself to him, and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said to Joseph, This time let me die, since I have seen thy face, that thou livest. And Joseph said to his brethren and to his father's house, I will go up and tell Pharaoh and say to him, My brethren and my father's house, who [were] in the land of Canaan, are come to me; and the men [are] shepherds, for they are men of cattle; and they have brought their sheep and their cattle, and all that they have. And it shall come to pass that when Pharaoh shall call you and say, What [is] your occupation? then ye shall say, Thy servants are men of cattle from our youth even till now, both we and our fathers; in order that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians" (vers. 28-31).

Civilisation was not what characterised the fathers, as it did the line of Cain in the antediluvian earth, and Egypt and Asshur and Babylon, to say nothing of others, after the deluge. But there was a dignity that accompanies the fear of God which is far better than any such worldly gloss, however pleasant to fallen nature. We see the pious sense of propriety as in Abraham and Isaac, here too of Jacob in sending Judah before him to Joseph to give good notice of his own coming to Goshen. Again, we may notice the faith and wisdom of Joseph who had already in Gen. 45:10 sent the message as to Goshen, before he had said a word to Pharaoh. It was the outlying part of Egypt, where they could retain their old occupation best, and were least exposed to the idolatrous and moral corruptions of that land. Into Goshen accordingly they came. And Joseph on his part got ready his chariot and went there to meet Israel his father; and on presenting himself he fell on his neck and wept on it a good while. The affection was great on both sides, and Israel said to Joseph, Now (or, This time) let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou yet livest. Worldly splendour had not weakened that love which knit father and son together in the promised land.

But we also may remark the prudent administrator in his words to his brethren, “I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and say to him, My brethren and my father’s house, who [were] in the land of Canaan, are come to me. And the men [are] shepherds, for they are men of cattle; and they have brought their sheep and their cattle, and all that they have. And it shall come to pass when Pharaoh shall call you and shall say, What is your occupation? then ye shall say, Thy servants are men of cattle from our youth even till now, both we and our fathers; in

order that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen." Two things made this advice acceptable to the king, and even his people. For Pharaoh had already, as is stated in Gen. 45, declared his wish to give them the good of the land of Egypt, that they might eat the fat of the land (vers. 18-20). And as "every shepherd [is] an abomination to the Egyptians," there would not be the least objection to Israel's settling to this occupation on land most favourable to it, and from its site one farthest off from meeting their eyes day by day. Thus Joseph was enabled to advise his brethren from the start, so as to live where it was best for them, and least offensive to the Egyptians.

Chapter 27 - Joseph Presents His Brethren And His Father To Pharaoh

Gen. 47:1-12.

As yet however the king had not seen the kindred of Joseph. This now follows.

"And Joseph went in and told Pharaoh and said, My father and my brethren, and their sheep and their cattle and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and behold they are in the land of Goshen. And from among his brethren he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said to Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we and our fathers. And they said to Pharaoh, To sojourn in the land are we come; for there is no pasture for thy servants' flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen. And Pharaoh spoke to Joseph saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come to thee: the land of

Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and thy brethren dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell. And if thou knowest any men of activity, among them, then make them rulers over my cattle. And Joseph brought in Jacob his father and set him before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob, How many are the days of the years of thy life? And Jacob said to Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred-and-thirty years: few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household with bread, according to their families" (vers. 1-12).

We read of Joseph's becoming attitude towards Pharaoh. On every point of view Goshen was the land most appropriate for his father and his brethren. The land lay nearest for sojourners in Egypt, for those who were destined by God to enter Canaan as the land He had promised long before when their father had not even one son (Gen. 15). Again, it was near Joseph, and the king also; and further, it was the least frequented by the people of the land, to whom herdsmen, shepherds and the like, were an abomination, as Joseph let them know. Even apart from this, we were already informed of their general objection to eat bread with foreigners (43:32). Such was the severity of caste among the Egyptians, as we know it is among strict Hindus. But it was of moment

that the king should come to the same conclusion as his minister of state, and decree freely without any pressure from one so near to the sons of Israel. The presenting of an adequate number of his brethren was ordered wisely. When they plainly stated their occupation, as handed down from their fathers, the king not only fell in with Goshen as the most fitting place for their dwelling, but gave hearty welcome. He also laid it on Joseph that he should set capable men from among them to undertake the charge over his own cattle there.

But another deeply interesting interview is next brought before us. “Joseph brought in Jacob his father and set him before Pharaoh.” The aged patriarch was in no way abashed in presence of the world’s most exalted monarch. “Jacob blessed Pharaoh.” Never had the king of Egypt stood so high. Through his God-instructed administrator, he had been led to wise and equitable measures, which during years of super-abundant plenty provided for the years no less of famine, relieved the poor amply, enriched the sovereign beyond example, supplied the wants of adjacent lands, and especially for the chosen people, and brought them where they were to multiply, arouse the wicked hostility of their neighbours, and in due time furnish a wondrous spectacle of a deliverance from Jehovah, to declare His name throughout all the earth in plaguing the proud king of that day and vanquishing his false gods, as conspicuous as His mighty hand and outstretched arm on behalf of Jacob’s seed in their most feeble and abject state.

“And Pharaoh said to Jacob, How many are the days of the years of thy life? And Jacob said to Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and

thirty years: few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage" (vers. 8, 9).

"And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household with bread according to [the mouths of their little ones" (vers. 11, 12).

The humbled heart of Jacob felt justly in comparison with Abraham and Isaac, but rose up. without question of pride to bless the king. God was before his faith, and he could bless Pharaoh simply, out of a full heart. And beyond all gainsaying, the less is blessed by the better. (Heb. 7:7).

[Left unfinished by the Author's death].

1 So says George the Syncellus in his Chronographia, Script. Hist. Byz. 48 c. folio, Ven. 1729: ἐπὶ γὰρ πᾶσι συμπεφώνηται. This, long doubted, has been conclusively established by recent research.

Joshua

Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Earlier Historical Books of the Old Testament.

London: W. H. Broom, 25, Paternoster Square. 1874.

Preface.

The volume before the reader has been long delayed through more than usual press of other work on the author. Even late as it now is (for the lectures were delivered some years ago), less has been done than is desirable in the way of developing remarks thrown out orally, which seemed to call for enlargement when correcting the report for the printer. Nevertheless, it is committed to the gracious blessing of the Lord on the Christian reader, with the earnest desire that some help may be afforded in retracing the books of Scripture from Joshua to 2 Samuel. They are books dear to every heart that values the word of God; yet do they often present difficulties to those that know not how to distinguish dispensations, or to read with precision the Old Testament, its types especially, in the light of the New. May He, who alone can make the work edifying to His own or to any souls, deign to use it to the glory of His name.

December, 1874.

Lectures On The Earlier Historical Books. - Joshua 1-4.

The book of Joshua naturally follows the five books of Moses, and indeed is connected more manifestly with those that go before it than might appear to an ordinary

reader. It opens not with a mere particle of time nor of transition but of connection. This is not expressed in the English version, but it is the fact in the Hebrew text. Undoubtedly it was the Holy Spirit writing by another servant of the Lord; but He was carrying on the same testimony, and a testimony too for which the book of Deuteronomy more particularly prepares us; for all that book was uttered by Moses when the children of Israel were upon the eve, as it were, of entering the promised land. Here, as elsewhere, it is of great importance that we should clearly apprehend the special object of the Spirit of God in the book. I shall make a few remarks therefore of a general nature in order to present it as clearly as the Lord enables me.

No spiritual person who considers the matter can doubt that what the Spirit of God has been pleased to give us in Joshua, if we take it as typical of blessing to us, is not our passing out of the world into heaven. We are all familiar with the usual way of representing the Jordan as death, and the crossing of the Jordan as the leaving the world for heaven at death. But this is not its true force, though it is a matter of immense importance practically for the soul. If you thus assign its import for heaven after death, you miss the prime object of God in giving it to us for the earth. If you put it off till the future state, present application of its meaning can evidently have no direct place. Not of course but that there may be blessing gathered from particular passages here and there. We know that even those who apply the crossing of Jordan to our departure to be with Christ do not scruple to use the deliverance of Rahab in Joshua 2:6, as they would seek to glean moral profit from every chapter. But I am not now speaking of an application or

use in which we all agree, but of what some of us, it may be, have to learn, of what we all, I am sure, have had to learn at one time or another.

On the face of the book there is one plain fact which shows us its real nature or bearing, and that is what the children of Israel did when they crossed the Jordan. Did they enjoy rest? Not so; it was still labour; nay, further, it was conflict with the enemy, and not only the patience of faith in which they had been tried as they passed through the wilderness. There was a beautiful moral order in God putting the hearts of His people to the test where there was nothing around them but the barren sands and Himself. In the desert God was there alone to teach them themselves as well as Himself. This was the great lesson for forty years of pilgrimage; but it is clear that it was, as far as the circumstances were concerned, by no means the place where direct positive blessing was displayed. God was there and then turning every circumstance into blessing by His own grace, by what He said, by what He did, and by what He was to His people. This is most true of the earlier time and scene; but in the book of Joshua we enter upon actual and distinct blessing — the bestowal of His gifts in love to Israel according to His promise to the fathers, though as yet on the tenure of their fidelity to the covenant of the law. Thus, it was not merely taking them out of what was evil, neither was it the lesson of God in the wilderness — His proving of and dealings with His people: God was giving what He had promised to give them; and now He was accomplishing it in His power; He was bringing them into the goodly land of Canaan. But all the while in the book of Joshua we hear of the wars of the people. Now this simple fact shows us its true character.

Certainly when we leave the world to be actually with the Lord, we shall not have wars. Plainly therefore the crossing of the Jordan does not answer to the quitting the world for rest in the presence of God; but applies to the full change of position for Christians while they are still in the world. How can they be said to cross the Jordan? This is what one desires to bring out simply according to the light furnished by the New Testament, at least as far as God gives ability. We shall find that divine light is abundant, so that we may see the mind of God distinctly.

It is obvious to every thoughtful Christian that a strong link of connection exists between the crossing of the Red Sea and of the Jordan. It is found in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus; but there are two effects sensibly different and of great importance that we should distinguish. Regarded in the type of the Red Sea it is simply setting us apart to God from the world, making us pilgrims while we are passing through it; crossing the Jordan, or the death and resurrection of Christ in this point of view, does far more. It is the power of that mighty work as bringing us into the possession of our heavenly blessings before we go there. We are made consciously of heaven; we have still to fight before the time is come to rest. In both cases it is not that merely is Christ dead and risen, but this applied to us by the Spirit.

On the one hand the passage of the Red Sea is our being dead with Christ and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord as a question of righteousness. We are thus justified from sin, and effectually delivered from Satan’s power. There is no longer a question of dread as to the judgment of God. On the other hand the crossing

of the Jordan means our introduction according to the fulness of Christ's title, even now, into heavenly places. On this basis the Spirit would familiarize us with heavenly things.

Accordingly we are called to set our affection on things above, filled with that which is no doubt altogether a matter of faith, but is none the less real because it is so. There is no more grave error than to suppose that the things of sense are substantial, and that the things of faith are not. There is nothing so true as faith; nor does anything so endure as what rests on God's word. Grace has given us in Jesus Christ our Lord a kingdom which cannot be moved. I grant you we have to trust Him; we have nothing to show. Are we the poorer for that? Incomparably richer! It is a blessed thing when we learn to trust God's eyes and not our own, and this is what faith always does. Instead of faith abridging our vision, it enlarges our range infinitely. We may be feeble in seeing, according to such a measure, and undoubtedly we are; but there is such a thing as growth carried on by the Spirit, revealing more of Christ in the scriptures. Having in the word as in Christ that which is divine, there is infinite fulness to grow up into. This is what Christ introduces us to, not when we die as a literal fact, but when we know the power of His death and resurrection, not merely from Satan but from self. Such is the line of truth shadowed in the crossing of the Jordan. It is not deliverance from Egypt: the Red Sea has this import. There in type the world, the scene of Satan's slavery, is left behind; but across the Jordan is the entrance into the heavenly land.

We shall find therefore by and by another most important difference, which can be merely touched on

passingly now. Here circumcision comes in, expressly contrasted with the previous state of things. Whilst they marched through the wilderness there was no such practice. Not a single person was circumcised that was born in the wilderness: no doubt some were there who had been circumcised before. But when they crossed the Jordan, they must not delay; it was imperative then to be circumcised. Clearly therefore it became a question of death to self by Christ, who is gone on high and united us to Himself there; and this is just the point that is meant by it. Thus the person is free to enter into what God gives above; and there is nothing that hinders this more than self unsubdued and unmortified. Circumcision therefore takes place directly the Jordan is passed. However I am now somewhat anticipating; nevertheless it seemed to me necessary to give these few words of a more general nature in order that there might be a simple and clear impression of the exact difference between the two.

Plainly then we have common ground in the Red Sea and the Jordan, but each has that which is special. All is found in Christ our Lord. Only it becomes us that we should not be content with the vague and general thought that we have it all. God means that we should know what we have received as His children, as it is what He has given us. Here the energy of faith comes in; that we be not content with the recognition of the truth that all things are ours, but that we diligently learn of Him what they are. God keeps back no good thing from us. We slight His love if we do not press on to learn and enjoy everything He has revealed. The Spirit that elates, and the conflicts in order to possession.

This then is one of the distinctive points of the Book of.Joshua; that Israel is here seen brought into the promised inheritance, and not merely out of the house of bondage into a waste howling wilderness. What mercy to have God in that waste as their companion! It was God leading them into the land where His eyes rested, and in which He could take pleasure — He did not in the wilderness; He took pleasure in His people there. And He was surely showing them what He was, and that He would eventually bring them into the good land; but it was not then a question of entering into the given blessings of Emmanuel's land. This we shall find in the Book of Joshua.

Let us now look a little more particularly into some details of the chapters I shall glance over tonight.

Moses is dead, and Joshua takes his place; that is, Christ is represented both by him who was dead and by him who is alive. Thus it was Christ whether bringing out of the world or conducting through the wilderness, and now Christ in a new type — the captain of salvation who is at the head of Israel in the land of Canaan. But, as we know, it is the self-same Christ in another point of view who was about to lead the people of God into the better country. We must carefully remember, as indeed involved in the truth I have already shown, that here we have not the death of the body and the separation of the spirit from it: still less is it the resurrection condition. Such is not at all the point in the Book of Joshua. For the same reason it is not Christ returning in glory: Joshua does not represent Christ coming again. It is Christ now in Spirit leading the people into the land, that is, the power of the Spirit of God who thus, answering to Christ's glory, enables the Christians now to appropriate

and know their place in heaven where He is. In short then Joshua represents Christ not as coming in person by and by, but acting in spirit now, and giving us therefore to receive and to realize our heavenly blessedness.

Again we shall find in this book, that there is first the reception of what God gives, and next that the people have to make the gift their own. These two distinct truths divide the Book of Joshua into two parts. The first twelve chapters are simply the question of our recognition of the grand truth that, having the heavenly land in title, we have to fight for it. The last portion of the book shows us the duty of grappling with the difficulties when we have received the truth, and puts us on our guard against the various ways by which Satan would enfeeble our sense of the blessing, and hinder its being made truly our own practically. It must not remain only an objective fact: we must make our title available and respected.

This divides the book, accordingly, into its earlier and its later parts.

In chapter 1 there is another thing to which I would call attention: Jehovah, after stating the new form in which Christ's power was to be shown in Joshua, says, "Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses." The land was given of God, but had to be won; the country over Jordan was open to the people of God. The book being devoted to this as its special aim, there is given at the starting-point a general notice of

the extent of the land — “From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates.” Strictly speaking, this stretched much beyond Canaan. So we find what remarkably answers to it in that Epistle of the New Testament where the proper heavenly portion of the saints is brought before us. There is nothing more evident in the Epistle to the Ephesians than the two features I am about to state.

First, God has given us heavenly blessings in and with our Lord Jesus, and this now; only without doubt, it is for this reason a matter of faith as far as we are concerned till Jesus come. We are on the earth, but “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” And secondly, the very same chapter shows us not our Canaan only, but “from the wilderness and this Lebanon to the great river, the river Euphrates.” So God gives us a measure of outreaching blessing far beyond that which is proper to us. In short, inasmuch as it is not merely the type of Christ but Christ Himself, so too the blessing is equally enlarged. “All things,” and no measure short of all things, must be put under Christ; and if Christ be head universally, He is given head over all to the church. He, in connection with the church, does not take anything less than the whole universe of God. Thus we see what is special — the heavenly things answering to Canaan; but along with this a great extent of territory, stretching from Lebanon on the north to the river Euphrates which was in the east beyond. Does it not bring before us that God, if He gives at all, must give as God? He will make good His promises, but He cannot act below Himself. And how this will be verified in the day for which we wait! We

shall have our own (Luke 16:12); but we shall have Christ's own, and God keeps nothing back from the rejected but glorified man, His own Son.

Further we find for the difficulties in the way, which in truth are immense, that God gives proportionate comfort and assurance. — "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage." The last words one sees are very emphatic, and even in the first chapter repeated over and over again. Let me ask my brethren whether they have really understood that this is what they are called to, — what we are called to now. Not a few sincere Christians err greatly here. They confound good courage with presumption; that assurance in the Lord with the lowest, basest, proudest feeling of the flesh; mere thoughtless audacity without an atom of believing confidence in God. From presumption may every child of God be kept! On the other hand, God forbid that a child of His should be cheated out of the good courage and single-eyed confidence due to God by that which defames them. No, my brethren; we are called to be strong and of a good courage.

What is presumption then as distinguished from the courage of faith; and how are we to discern the difference? Is it not important to avoid mistake in so grave a matter? Presumption is man's courage founded on self — on the first man. The strength and good courage of the Christian is founded only on Christ. The difference therefore is complete. We cannot be too great-hearted if Christ be the one source of our courage: we owe it to Him. If it be a question of standing against

the enemy or withstanding his wiles, we need indeed to be watchful. If it be a question of cherishing calm trust in what Christ is, and what He has given us, we cannot abate one jot of the full exhortation conveyed by these words to Joshua on that day. Was it for Joshua alone? It was for Joshua, who bound himself indissolubly with the people of God; it was to cheer the leader and those led by him. But so, beloved brethren, it should be with the children of God; for He does not, could not, complete a mere fraction of them. The best blessings we have got are those God designed for the church — for every member of Christ's body.

Alas! we find ourselves in a state and day when but few members of Christ believe in their own blessing. If God has recalled our souls to faith in His grace, let us thank Him; but when we think of the infinite mercy which has caused us to see that God is for us, and what Christ is to us, and working too by the Spirit in us, — let us adore Him that all is for all that are His. This will deepen our sense of the ruin of Christendom where their lack of faith refuses the good things God is giving, where flesh feebly judged mixes what is of self and the world without rebuke. At least we shall see what God is towards all saints, though we shall feel the more what they are towards Him in spite of all His love. First of all do we owe our freshest feelings to Himself; but also it becomes us, if we desire the blessing of others, that we should humbly — yet at the same time courageously — seek to enter in and possess the blessings ourselves. There is nothing that more conduces to the blessing of another than enjoying what His grace gives in our own souls. "Be strong then," says He, "and of a good courage; for unto this people shalt thou divide for an

inheritance the land which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous." We know that He whom Joshua set forth cannot fail us. There were moments when even Joshua quailed; time was to be when Joshua would sink into the dust, when Jehovah would bid him rise with a measure of reproof too. Our Joshua never needs a check more than a stimulus; and all power is given Him in heaven and on earth. May His power rest on us in our weakness! We shall learn where the hindrances are and what.

But there is another point also in the preliminary chapter. "This book of the law," says Jehovah, "shall not depart out of thy mouth." Along with the entrance of the people, through the power of the Spirit of Christ, into their heavenly blessing, comes increased need of the word of God. The value of every word is not so felt when souls are content with barely receiving Jesus as a Saviour, when they want no more than to be assured that they will not come into judgment. Then a vague and general hold of the word of God suffices for the need. But when we are awakened to see the truth which sets forth Christ on high and the heavenly place of the saints of God, and for desire to have a positive and definite hold of our own proper portion in Christ before entering there in person by and by, then indeed we need, and the Spirit of God does not fail to give us, the value in principle of every word. We feel we want it all; we know that it is good for us too that we should be searched and tried, and that we should not be shut up only to that which ministers direct comfort to us. We can bear that word which makes us conquerors over Satan by making nothing of self; and indeed it is particularly this which it is the object of the book of Joshua (typically viewed at

any rate) to bring before us. “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for Jehovah thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.”

Here is another point of immense importance. We have not only the word but God Himself. Granted that in principle the same thing was true while Israel were passing through the wilderness. But it is good to have the sense of the presence of God with us in the introduction of our souls into our own proper inheritance. This then is afresh assured to the people; and need I say how truly we need to be under such a safeguard even in joy, and how good it is always! The time comes when the fresh bloom of truth is apt to pass. If it be no longer a new thing, what is to sustain a soul then? God Himself in the sense that He is with us — in the sense of His will as alone wise and good and holy. Then it is that, even though there may be trial, difficulty, and a thousand things exceedingly repulsive to our nature, yet the consciousness of His presence supplies what is lacking, and outweighs every seeming drawback. What can be wanting when God is with us, and in perfect love?

It is evident then that the distinct assurance of the presence of God with His people, put as it is here with the entrance of the people into Canaan, is full of instruction as well as of consolation for our souls, which have it guaranteed in terms no less precise than full. We

shall need it too, my brethren; and we do need it. Nothing else endures.

Then we have Joshua acting upon it; so do the Reubenites also, while choosing to dwell on this side of death and resurrection. It might have been thought that it was not for them to speak. They had been eager to seize the good land for their flocks and herds on the other side; but even so, remarkably enough, they cross the Jordan with the rest. There may be and are saints that stop short of their proper blessing; but God's mind is that all His people should enter in. Hence therefore there is particular care to single out these Reubenites and Gadites and half the tribe of Manasseh, whom we find so impressed with the word of God, and with the task in which Joshua was just about to engage, that they themselves now take the place of exhorting him: "Only be strong and of a good courage." Such is the first chapter.

And where is the peculiar beauty of the second chapter? and why have we the story of Rahab here? Can we not at once discern? Possibly more may when a few words are added. Why did we not see a Rahab when the Red Sea was passed? Why here more than there? Is it not here that, along with the bringing of the people of God into their proper heavenly relationship, God must give a fresh sign that the distinctions of flesh and blood are worthless? that it is precisely when the saints of God are called heavenly that the fulness of the Gentiles must come in? There was nothing of the sort at the coming out of Egypt — no particular witness of grace to the Gentiles then as now. Undoubtedly all is ordered aright; and there was no such propriety, no such special force, in that witness of a Gentile being called then. Now there

is. Therefore I conceive that, as we have in the book of Joshua a general resemblance to the Ephesian epistle, so we may say that Joshua 2 answers to Ephesians 2 or the latter part of it. Indeed the same principle runs through both, the one typically, the other in plain reality. For, after the new people who are called the church are shown as put into relationship with Christ at the right hand of God, then we have the bringing in of the Gentile particularly and expressly. Of the Jew it was not so requisite to say much. It was perfectly plain that the ‘dew was brought out of his Judaism; but the Gentile who had not a single religious privilege is declared to be the object of the fullest divine favour now in Christ. Without Christ, without hope, without God in the world, without promise even, a stranger to the covenants, spite of all their spiritual destitution and their actual degradation, the Gentiles are now brought nigh, and this with a wholly new kind of nearness unknown to Israel of old. Hence therefore it appears to me that we cannot doubt of the truly admirable wisdom of God in bringing in such an one as Rahab. Not merely was she a Gentile, but chosen by grace from the ranks of the fallen; she was avowedly, what is most degrading to a woman, a harlot. I know there are those who have by small points of philology endeavoured to argue that this was not necessarily the fact, and that the designation may have imported no more than that she kept a kind of public lodging. Men have thus sought to save the character not of Rahab only but of God’s word. But they need not take the trouble. It is better to accept the Bible with simplicity. Flesh, all flesh, is grass. Indeed there is beauty in the humbling fact just as it is. For if God is going out in the might of His own grace, and showing what He is for His people, why should He not take up

one that might seem to human eyes too far steeped in depravity for His blessing, more particularly at such a time? So mistake greater in truth could be made about it. When God raises up His own to the highest, it is the very time when grace goes down to the lowest. Therefore, far from finding a difficulty in that which was the character of Rahab, it appears to me that a great deal of the moral weight of divine truth, and of the beauty of the tale of grace here introduced, is lost by those who wish to make her a more respectable person than she really was. My brethren, it is not what we were, but what grace makes us, that is everything to the believer now; and so Rahab proved then.

We need not dwell upon that which would have the deepest interest for an evangelist's appeal. Nor is it my present aim to pass all in minute review, more especially such a part of the subject. Suffice it to say that Rahab shows us a faith strikingly in keeping with what God was now doing. Indeed this being always true must be more or less manifest. Faith is never a mere repetition in any case. There are hardly two souls whose conversion is exactly alike. Even though they may be converted at the same time, under the same discourse of the same preacher, still each has a speciality; and the more they are understood, the more anyone really gets into the heart of those who are converted, the more decided is the difference seen to be. But this is just what it should be; as it also gives a more living interest to those who really love souls and the ways of God with individuals. Assuredly it is worth learning what a soul is to God, and the manner of God's grace with every soul He brings to Himself. So there was distinctive character in Rahab's conversion. Who would mean to say that everything was

as it should be with the object of His mercy? Far from it. The soul that is saved is not the Saviour; nor can it ever rise up to the Saviour, though we all shall be like Him. Unquestionably there is a mighty chasm which grace crosses; and the results are not small in those who believe even now. Still we may see in Rahab what appears to be connected with her old habits; for even at the very time when the truth had told powerfully on her, she lets out a little of what was, I suppose, her old character in her ways and words. There is no doubt she judged that it was all for a good cause; but can one deny that there was a spice of deceit along with the shelter she afforded the spies? Now I do not believe anybody is ever called or allowed of God to deceive in the smallest degree or for any end whatever. We sometimes meet the fact, even in saints of the Old Testament; but never the least justification of it. In short we may find as here the drawback of flesh at the very time when God's grace is blessing in the Spirit. We find it in others who ought to have known better than the Gentile harlot of Jericho. If we hear of such a fault in Rahab, there was at least as great in an Abraham even, none less in Isaac, and yet more. in Jacob. If they after their knowledge of God could so fail, we must not wonder that, when this poor heathen was in but the transition state of coming to the Lord, she betrays what she was in herself, as truly as her faith shows what she had received from God. But this at least she was certain of, that God was with that people. This she saw clearly, — that she was in the midst of the enemies of God; and in spirit she had done with them. Faith made her turn her back on her oldest associations of nature. Her heart now was with God and with God's people; and it is a good thing, be assured, that one should have one's heart set upon being not only

with Him but with them, and this more particularly considering the world through which we are passing.

To have confidence in the link that is between God and His people is of great practical moment. To many perhaps it might sound and pass muster as more spiritual to say, “I am content with God only: as for His people, I am content to be apart from them. So grave are their faults, so many ways and words that are unworthy, that I must be excused if I seek them not. Do not talk about the people of God: God Himself alone for me.” This, I say, was not Rahab’s feeling; nor is it God’s, who loves them, as we should also. He loves them, spite of what they are; and if we are led of His Spirit, if we have communion with Him, we love them too, and their faults will not alienate our hearts from them: who would put value on the love that could be turned away by a failure? Besides, who and what are we, so ready to criticise the failings of brethren? Have we none to confess of our own? Does it never occur to us that we may be a trial and grief to others, if not a stumbling-block by this very haste to judge? Let us rather learn to judge ourselves more, and to esteem others better than ourselves. I do not say this to make light of evil: God forbid! But assuredly true love labours and loves spite of faults, and seeks to get its object free. Indeed, sometimes we may rather rivet a fault by our own foolish way of dealing with it; but if we are truly led of God, we shall love those whom He loves. Rahab understood this very simply when she identified not God only but herself with the spies she hid in the flax. And this expressed a better, stronger, more real faith, than any words could have done in the circumstances. She proved her faith by her good works, and this in loving

not merely the God of Israel but the Israel of God. Was not this its character and meaning? Because of what she had heard (faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God), she connected by a true and single instinct Israel with God; and she was right.

Hence, if even the king of Jericho came before Rahab's mind with a claim that would otherwise have been paramount, faith changed everything. No doubt it had its risk. She carried her life in her hand. It is for God to see to that. He did then as He always does; He acted for His own glory, magnifying Himself whether by our life or by our death for His name's sake. She at any rate had her mind made up. She might be put to death for what the king would call an act of treason; and an act of treason undoubtedly it was after the flesh, judged by its rules. It must have seemed to the men of Jericho selling her country and her king; but she measured every thing by God. This is faith's reckoning. Not only are there cases where one must take one's side thus, but the principle extends to the most ordinary occasions. It is really incumbent on every one who is brought to God. In that most solemn change for the soul, what is every body else in the world as standing between us and God? And what is the effect of faith? That the more you are brought out simply into confidence in God's mind toward His people, the more you must love those whom God loves. Rahab in a striking and practical way apprehended this. Hence she risked her own life in giving effect to this divine conviction; for faith is most real, and can stake everything on God and His way. So she counted it no foolish speculation to risk the loss of life and all things for the spies, because they were the spies of,Jehovah's people, whose success to her mind

was a certainty; and faith assures itself of His mercy in that day.

But she lets us know a little too of the state of feeling in Jericho. Her reasoning was sound, according to faith. It was no mere sentiment, nor sudden feeling either. There were many that shared her fears; but who shared the faith of Rahab? The warriors of the city were not without the same apprehensions. But in her case, as often in ours, God's Spirit wrought where at first there was simply dread. This God followed up, replacing it by living faith in Himself and in His love for His people. "We have heard," says she, "how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when ye came out of Egypt." She at least attributed their crossing to no second cause; nor did the men of Jericho share the unbelief of moderns who feign that Moses knew and used a ford in passing the Red Sea. She understood the truth because she had faith. "I know," she said, "that Jehovah hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how Jehovah dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for Jehovah your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by Jehovah, since I have showed you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father's house." (Verses 9-12)

Again I do not believe that it was for her only a question of saving natural life, though of course lives were preserved according to the oath of the spies. But her faith rose above the mere outward circumstances. The comment of James supposes a higher character, as it seems to me. Hence she was not merely incorporated in the line of Israel generally; she was actually brought into the line of Messiah, and sat in the most honourable place into which a woman could be brought after the flesh. The basis is laid in the book that shows us death to flesh, but God acting according to His own grace and accomplishing salvation in the midst of judgment. Accordingly an appropriate sign was given her not only for her own sake but for her family. Salvation came to her house that day, though they were poor and guilty Gentiles. Their deliverance shines the more brightly in the destruction of all the rest. The executors of judgment on Jericho guarantee the safety of Rahab and all her house.

Then comes the new scene in Joshua 3. “And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over. And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the host; and they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of Jehovah your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it.” It is plain that in this case there are some notable points that differ from those of the passing of the Red Sea. There was no such solemnity there as here. The ark of Jehovah had no place in that scene; nor any assertion of His right to all the earth — the Lord of all the earth. There was no such order as the

priests entering in with the ark first, and then the waters failing for the people to pass over. In the main substance there appears the same general truth: that is, God's power acts in grace, and His people enter into death and come victoriously out of it. But when this has been said, we have heard perhaps all that is common.

Let us now look a little at the differences which seem of chief moment. Jehovah there tells the people to sanctify themselves, "for tomorrow Jehovah will do wonders among you. And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people. And Jehovah said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan." So Joshua tells them to come hither and hear the words of Jehovah their God, assuring them that "Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and, the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of Jehovah of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of Jehovah of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap." Such was to

be the principle: God's ark was to go before; the people would follow, yet with a space intervening. (Verses 3, 4) Even in the deepest mercy or the richest conference of privilege as God cannot lose His reverence, so His people shall not make haste.

"And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; and as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest)," etc.; that is, the difficulties were greatest at this very time. Jordan was peculiarly full. Therefore it was rather harder, if anything, to have crossed then. How then was it that God met the difficulty? "The waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap, very far from the city Adam that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of Jehovah stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan." When the priests' feet bearing the ark touched, the waters shrank; and in the midst the priests abode till the people crossed. Faith was thus in lively exercise.

"And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over Jordan, that Jehovah spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, and command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones, and ye

shall carry them over with you, and leave them in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night." (Joshua 4:1-3) Twelve stones were laid in the Jordan where the priests' feet stood, and twelve stones taken out of the Jordan; being, it is evident, the memorials one more particularly of death, as taken into the river, the other of resurrection, as taken out of the waters. They were the signs not only of Christ's death and resurrection, but of the connection of the people with Christ in it. The Adam life cannot enjoy Canaan, and must go down into death. Beyond the Jordan it must be the power of a better life. For this very reason therefore there were twelve. Wherever man is made prominent — wherever his administrative place is found in Scripture — it has been suggested that twelve is the number ordinarily employed. It is the regular number for completeness in that point of view; that is, where human agency as such is brought before us. Though a familiar truth, still it seems well to notice it by the way.

Such is the reason then why we find twelve stones on this occasion. It was the sign that the people had been there, but having passed through death they had come out of it to the other side. It was the association of the people with the risen Christ Himself. Hence in this place we have the full sign of the glory of the person of Christ as far as a type could convey it. There was none more complete than the ark. Here we do not read of a rod stretched over the waters. The rod was used at the Red Sea; for it was the sign of judicial authority, and so it appropriately appears on that occasion. Judgment fell upon Christ in order that we should be delivered. In the passing out of Egypt it was a question of God's power grounded on His righteous judgment. His judicial

authority interfered there, as we see in the destruction of Pharaoh and his hosts. But was not Israel both guilty and ruined? Have not we been also? Christ bore this completely for us, being delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.

But at the river Jordan there are new wants. Judicial authority has fully run its course. It is not merely a question of Christ bringing us out from the judgment of God by His own bearing it, but of what Christ going down into death entitles us to enter into according to the rights of His work and the glory of His person. Christ, dead and risen, having perfectly glorified God on the cross, could not be adequately glorified short of heavenly glory. Born the Son of David, He ever called Himself the Son of man. Undoubtedly He had therefore a title to both the kingdom of God in Israel and the still wider empire over all nations and tribes and tongues. But is this the full extent? Not so. There could be no measure. These are the boundless ways of God's glorifying Christ, not only in the highest seats of heaven but, as far as a creature could be a witness of it, in all creation put under Him. It is the same spirit we find here with the symbol of His person in death and resurrection as entering into that place which alone suits One so glorious. Where is it? Heaven alone suffices. Is there one part of the creation of God higher than another? It must be the place for Christ. If there be one sphere that could show exaltation more than another, Christ must be placed there. But Christ, if He goes there, will not be severed from us.

This is therefore what the ark represents. It is the fullest witness of the glory of Christ that could be found in Israel as a type. Hence therefore this is the way in which

He is looked at. I repeat, it is not merely righteousness but glory. It is not entering into death to bring us out of what was wrong, but going into death by resurrection as a title to bring us into all that is good and glorious too. Into that connection, my brethren, we are brought now. The object of God's doing so is to deliver us from the false glory of the world, in order that all that is of man, all that occupies his heart, or that could be an object here, should be left behind us. How? By an effort? Exclusively by belief of the truth — by Christ received and known — by the attractive power of the grace and might of God which, in so giving and raising up and exalting Christ in glory, has bound us up with Him for ever, and has bound us up with Him now. This then is what I shall endeavour to bring out still more fully as we look at the book farther.

Let me only add a few words more now as to this. It is not pleasant to the flesh to die; yet in these things is the life of the Spirit. For man it is an impossibility, but with God all things are possible. "All the Israelites passed over on dry ground." "Ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God," says the apostle to the Colossians for all Christians. We shall see that the attention of the people is particularly called to the event: — "On that day Jehovah magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life. And Jehovah spake unto Joshua, saying, Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan. Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of Jehovah were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry

land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For Jehovah your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as Jehovah your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: that all the people of the earth might know the hand of Jehovah, that it is mighty: that ye might fear Jehovah your God for ever." (Ver. 14-24) It is not now judgment. There is no question of destroying Pharaoh or his hosts. It is not the dealing with what is evil; but the power of Christ's resurrection in bringing us into what is glorious and heavenly. And very certainly we need them both, and we need them in this order too. A person who looks at Christ simply as bringing into what is good is in danger of constantly allowing what is bad. It is not merely the gift of what is good that delivers the sinner. There must be the solemn sense in our own souls that we are evil ourselves, and are most righteously obnoxious to God's judgment, because of our sinful ways; and that nothing could deliver us, had not Christ Himself borne it, putting Himself under it and exhausting it for us, and that thus — thus only — could we be saved according to God.

Therefore, it was then a question of Israel being saved; but here it is God magnifying His own love for His

people according to His counsels for His own glory. It is God giving the magnificent proof of what He is for His people in the face of Satan and his hosts. If I do not enter into this, I shall only be occupied with my personal salvation and my own blessing. This is all right at first: all else is but theory then. But having gone through, in my own soul, the sense of my guilt and ruin, and of my deliverance in Christ from both, then I am free in spirit to enter into the scene of glory before going there actually; for the blessed Saviour even now has brought me into His things, and not merely delivered me from mine of the first man.

This then is the double truth. This is what Christ has been for us and what God has given us in Him. May we value Him everywhere, delighting in all that grace has given us in the word! The same Israelite could not at the same time be a pilgrim in the wilderness and a conqueror of his Canaanitish enemies in the land. But we ought to know them both together; for in truth all things are ours, and we are now seated in heavenly places in Christ and in conflict with spiritual wickedness there, whilst we are journeying in patience through the desert.

Joshua 5 - 8.

The passing of the Jordan was a wondrous and significant event; but it was not everything. It sank deep into the consciences of the Canaanites on all sides; but there was more that was needed, and more that was wrought by God in Israel. At once it brought into prominence a remarkable fact — that those who had been born in the wilderness had never yet been circumcised. The Spirit of God uses this occasion to

draw attention to a necessity that could be overlooked no longer. Here there is no question of any imagination of man's. We have the plain fact before us; we have the Spirit of God dwelling upon it with no little precision; but we have more. The light of inspiration in the use made of the institution in the New Testament must be taken into account. We have therefore divine certainty as to its intended meaning and its importance. The children of Israel who had been in the wilderness had no doubt been objects of the tender mercy of God; but there was altogether another measure that became necessary when they were brought into the land of Emmanuel — when His good hand conducted them into that land where He was pleased to dwell with them. If He deigned to dwell in their midst, they must at least be taught to feel what was due to the place of His habitation.

Here then circumcision becomes imperative. We may readily discover, from the Holy Spirit's doctrinal allusion to it, what spiritual truth lay under the form. There is more than one passage in the apostolic writings in reference to it. I will take two of the more prominent places where an express mention is introduced, and it is not merely therefore open to us to gather the idea intended; for in this case the very term is so used as to preclude question, which is by no means always the case in the types of Scripture.

In the epistle to the Philippians the apostle says, "We are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." It is plain that he means Christians; but at the same time he means such as are conscious of, or at least been taught, what Christianity means. I do not mean by

this that others are not so privileged; but it is no uncommon thing to find a Christian who walks below or even contrary to his principles; not of course dishonestly, but sometimes through ignorance, sometimes through will, unjudged in ways here and there which ignore his very calling. Now it is clear the Spirit of God does not contemplate this, but always addresses Christians according to the will of God and the glory of Christ our Lord. It could not be otherwise. If the word spoke with calmness of children of God while walking apart from His will, I need not say what an excuse for unfaithfulness it would give, if not an apparent sanction. Men are ready enough to take license to themselves when in a poor condition before the Lord, gathering some apparent allowance of their wretchedness from the slips of good men who may have fallen into bad ways. Yet habitually in Scripture nothing can be more marked than the jealous care with which God renders inexcusable all such misuse of His word. I consider then that Scripture does wisely and holily as a rule address the children of God according to His thoughts and intentions about them. This alone could suit His glory; this alone is wholesome for us. Hence the apostle has his heart tried greatly by some who, having borne the excellent name of the Lord, were seeking earthly things, as he says here, “Many of them walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.”

But here in the beginning of the same chapter he addresses the saints according to God’s mind concerning them in Christ, and says, “We are the circumcision.” Thus he predicates of them what God has

made them in Christ. The meaning is that nature is judged, sentence of death being passed upon it. It is not only that the saint is brought from under condemnation because of his sins, but the nature fallen into rebelliousness against God, evil, and selfish, has now had sentence of death executed upon it in Christ; and the believer is spoken of accordingly. “We are the circumcision,” therefore, says he, “which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

Again, in Colossians 2, we find another plain allusion. He says not only, “Ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power,” but “in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” Thus he looks at the mighty working of divine grace in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. I need not say that the text has nothing at all to do with the historical fact of circumcision as related in Luke. It is a circumcision “made without hands;” whereas the literal act of course was done by hands. This is in contrast with it. The ordinance was an obligation for the Israelite, a figure simply, and nothing more, as to truth. But here we are told of what God had wrought in Christ and His cross, where He had dealt with everything belonging to us that was contrary to His mind.

We accordingly are said to be circumcised. This is particularly laid down here. He does not say merely, “In whom we are circumcised,” but “ye.” He was speaking of these Gentile believers — persons to whom the apostle had been a stranger after the flesh. That they had never seen him we may, I believe, fairly infer from

an earlier part of this very chapter. Here he says that they were already circumcised by a better circumcision rite than man could observe. This was more especially seasonable for such as were in danger of attaching inordinate value to ordinances. There has been a tendency also to claim special value from the fact of having been personally under the teaching of the apostle. This was an early superstition. The Holy Ghost therefore seems to have taken care that some epistles should be sent to such as were strangers, and Gentiles also as well as to Christians who had been Jews. Every point was guarded; and amongst others the most distinct testimony to the only stable means of blessing — the solemn fact that all that is offensive to God, all that savours of the fall, of the pride of nature rising up against God, is judged, cut off, and set aside before Him.

There is no greater comfort to the soul that really values being set in perfect purity and righteousness before God. Here it is not a question of what we have to attain. There is ample scope, as we shall find presently, for the practical power of the Spirit of God; but then that power for practice is based upon what God has done already, and always flows from His work in Christ. The Holy Spirit carries on an answering work; but surely there is something to be answered to, and this is what God Himself has done already for us in Christ our Lord. So he says that they were circumcised with the circumcision made without hands in putting off the body [of the sins] of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ.

We return therefore to our chapter, and we see thus the proper force, as it appears to me, of the blessing foreshadowed that day in crossing the Jordan. Canaan could not be entered as a place where flesh was to be

gratified, or its evil to be allowed. Not that there was no dealing with the flesh in the wilderness; but it could not be said to be done with; it was not yet treated as that which had come under the final judgment of God. From the Jordan we see this: death is treated as the only door of deliverance, and the knife of circumcision must pass over all the males of Israel before the good fight. Thus it is not only that death and resurrection with Christ makes it possible for the people of God to enjoy heavenly things and enter into their own proper position, as we were seeing in the last lecture, but there is a further effect, though all be part of the same work of God, brought out distinctly in the type.

Just as we find various offerings to set forth different parts of the work of Christ, so, whether it be the Red Sea or the Jordan, or, again, the circumcision that follows, they each represent distinct aspects of that which God has given us in and with the Lord Jesus dead and risen. Very clearly we derive from circumcision at this point the fact that fallen nature in us is judged completely, and that we are entitled to take our stand peremptorily as against flesh in ourselves. We are then also fitted to have to do with one another, being all as to this upon the same common ground. God could not sanction anything less. He has given us Christ, and with Him, to faith, the full portion of His death and resurrection. That portion necessarily supposes the work in which He has completely done with fallen nature in all its forms before Him. Not a trace of evil was in Christ. He was man as truly as the first Adam — Son of man as Adam was not, but Son of man which is in heaven — a divine person, yet none the less a man. But for these very reasons He was capable and competent

according to the glory of His person, to be dealt with by God for all that was unlike Him in us. Had there been the smallest taint in Him, this could not have been done. The perfect absence of evil in this one Man furnished the requisite victim; as in Himself and all His ways the divine nature found satisfaction and delight. Would He then bear all? be willing to go down to the depth of the judgment of all men, according to God's estimate of the evil of our nature? The entire, unbroken, unmitigated judgment of God fell upon Him in order to deal with it and put it away for ever. No less, I believe, is the force of Christ's death for us.

Hence we start now, no longer viewed simply as pilgrims and strangers, but as those who are ushered into the land of God even while we are here — who take our place as heavenly persons; for this is our character now. So says the apostle, "As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." Accordingly nothing of the old man is spared; all that is really self is seen in its hatefulness. The necessity that all this be put away is brought before us; but, wondrous to say, for us united to Christ the thing is done. What we have to do now is, first of all, to believe it — without question to take our stand before God as dead and risen with Christ, that through grace, Gentiles or not, if Christ's, we are the true circumcision. Only such can mortify their members on the earth intelligently and thoroughly. Otherwise it is an effort either to die or to better the flesh; and both are vain. In presence of this the carnal circumcision now is a poor and pitiful thing at best, yea, a rebellious snare. The true circumcision is what God has made the Christian in Christ, and that through death and resurrection. Those that of old were content with their

Jewish place rejected the truth it symbolized, proving that they understood nothing as they ought; those who in Christendom can leave the truth of Christ to occupy themselves with the mere shadows are far, far worse. The reality of the truth is given to us only in Christ our Lord. All is ours in Him.

Can we wonder then that the Spirit of God dwells upon this at considerable length, calling the place where the people are circumcised Gilgal? We shall find the importance attached to this elsewhere in looking at the book. No flesh must glory in His presence. Made heavenly by grace, consciously dead and risen with Christ, we are called to mortify, for this reason, our members in the earth. “And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho.” (Verse 10)

Again, another fact of interest is brought before us: the passover is kept now. Undoubtedly it had been instituted in Egypt, and kept even in the wilderness. Grace made provision, as we are aware, for the casualties of the dreary way. But all this is passed away. There is deeper communion henceforth with God’s mind. The passover itself is now celebrated in Canaan with solemn Joy. It is exceedingly precious for us that advance in the knowledge of God makes foundation truths to have a profounder character to the soul. To remember Christ in the breaking of bread was sweet and strengthening from the first: how much more where the revelation of the mystery wove into that showing forth of His death our oneness with Him and with each other! I am persuaded that the man who values most the gospel is he who has the deepest acquaintance with the mystery of Christ.

There can be no error more offensive, and, I think, none which shows a shallower spirit, than to suppose that the great fundamental truth of God in meeting our souls in grace loses its importance because of entering into the counsels of glory or of any other advance in the truth, no matter where or what it may be. Contrariwise, we learn to see more in all we saw before; we value Christ better everywhere; we enter more, not merely into questions of our own need, or into a retrospect of Egypt or of the wilderness, but into the mind of God. Hence, as it appears to me, the force of introducing the passover here. The less we are occupied with the circumstances, the more calm, free, and deep is faith's enjoyment of the deliverance of grace and of God Himself in it "The children of Israel kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho."

But there is also another remarkable notice — "And they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the selfsame day." That is, we find the witness of Christ risen in a way that was never connected with the passover before. New food was used and supplied now. "And the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land; neither had the children of Israel manna any more; but they did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year." We too are given to eat of the old corn of the land: for this we do not wait till we reach heaven. As He is our peace on high, so is He risen our food and strength. Thus characteristically do we know Him no longer after the flesh, but glorified on high.

There is, however, a needed remark to be made along with this. In our case (for the Christian enjoys the most

singular advantages) it would be a grievous mistake and a real loss to suppose that Christ as our manna has ceased. For Israel there could not be such a state of things as the eating of the manna and eating of the corn of the land continuously going on together. The Christian has both unquestionably. And for this very simple reason: Israel could not be in the wilderness and in the land at the same time; we can be and are. Thus, as we have often seen, the Christian stands on altogether peculiar ground. It is not only the wilderness and its mercies we now have to do with, but also the heavenly land and its blessings and glory. Hence therefore we have to be on our guard in looking at such a type as this. There could scarcely be anything more dangerous than to suppose that we had passed out of the circumstances of trial, or that the gracious supply of the Spirit of Christ was no longer needed. Here below we are ever in the place of weakness and danger and sorrow. Here we are but passing through temptation. Emphatically this is the wilderness. Here the daily manna is vouchsafed to us, and we own and feel that only the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ever living and interceding Priest, could bring us safely through. I do not mean the power of resurrection alone: this we have; but the grace that brought Him down, and that enters into every daily need and want, and that sustains us in all our infirmity. But this is not Canaan; and in such pitiful and tender consideration we have nothing at all to do with the characteristic blessings of Canaan. We have then to do with power: here the manna meets us in our need and weakness.

The Lord Jesus then ministers to His saints in both ways. Everywhere we have Christ. Take the same epistle to the

Philippians already used for the present force of circumcision. We have not only Christ according to Philippians 3, but according to Philippians 2; for the second of Philippians shows us the very trait that I have been referring to — the grace of the Lord coming down where we are; whereas chapter 3 would fix our eyes and hearts on Himself where He is now. Surely we need both, and we have both. So here we find not that which takes away the manna, but the new condition and place of Israel, and the due provision of God for it. The old corn of the land points to Christ risen from the dead; and so the apostle Paul loved to present Him, though never to the disparagement of the Lord in His grace and mercy toward us in all our circumstances of exposure as His saints. We are more indebted to the same apostle for this than to any other of the twelve; but then Paul does associate us truly and distinctly with Christ risen from the dead and in heaven, as no one else does. This he was specially called to make known. Not that he exclusively gives us the heavenly place of Christ, but that he, above all, brings us into it, while he magnifies the grace that watches over us here below.

This then is the eating of the corn of the land. It is what spiritually answers to the apostle's word in 2 Corinthians 5 — "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." This is our form of relationship to Christ the Lord in what is peculiar to us now as Christians. What distinguishes us is that we have Christ risen and glorified; we are entitled to take all the comfort of knowing old things passed away, all things become new; we are brought triumphantly into it ourselves, and have Him in all His

heavenly glory as an object before us; nay, more, as One to feed upon. The Spirit of God brings out the Lord Jesus particularly in the epistle to the Ephesians, where His first introduction is as One dead, risen, and exalted in heaven. In Colossians, in a similar way, we have our Lord there. All this then is the old corn of the land. But then if we take the Gospels, and, further, if we look at John's epistles, it is not thus we see Him. We behold our Lord here below particularly thus indeed as the object of the Spirit. It is clear then that all is brought out to us. We have Christ everywhere, and cannot afford to do without Him anywhere. What saint would have a part only of our blessing? God gives us a whole Christ, and in every way.

There is another point too in the chapter which may well claim a word. When God enters on a fresh action, or calls His people to a new kind of activity, He reveals Himself accordingly. The same God that made Himself known to Moses displays Himself afresh to Joshua, always, it need scarce be said, (for could it be otherwise?) manifesting Himself in the way which establishes His glory, and binds it up with the new circumstances of His people. There is no repetition of Himself — the very same One, unchanged of course, but withal real in His ways, and occupied with us in order to identify us with His glory. Hence therefore there is now no burning bush. Nothing was more admirably suited to the wilderness; but what had this to do with Canaan? What was wanted there? A witness not of One judging, but of one that would preserve, spite of appearances, the emblem of utter weakness yet of all that weakness sustained. Was not this suited to the wilderness? But how or what in Canaan? As the captain of Jehovah's

host. Here it is a question of conquering the foe, the power or wiles of Satan. God forbid that we should have any other foe! Others may be foes to us; but these emissaries of Satan only we have to count foes, and to deal with as such. It is not so with men. These may become our enemies, but never we theirs; while we have nothing to do with Satan, save to treat him, when discovered, as an enemy. We are entitled, steadfast in the faith, to resist him who only seeks in his workings and ways to dishonour the glory of God in Christ our Lord, and so ruin all that are blinded by him.

This then is the revelation that Jehovah makes of Himself for the new work to which His people are called — a man of war to lead those who have henceforth to fight.

But there is another remark to connect with a previous part of the chapter. Joshua was not given to see a sword in the hand even of the captain of the host, till the knife was put in the hand of each Israelite to deal with himself. The call to circumcision had done its work before there was a moral fitness to have to wield the sword against others.

Further now, just as much as in the wilderness — more, I think, we shall see as we go on — the solemn word, even to Joshua, is this — “Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.” There was the more need to insist upon this, because the task in Canaan was one of putting down the enemy. This necessarily calls for severe blows, continual watchfulness, incessant opposition. So much the louder call to begin and go on with reverence and godly fear. (Verse 15)

And now they are before the doomed city; and “Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.” (Joshua 6) In Joshua it is the standing type of the power of Satan in the world. “And Jehovah said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour. And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once. Thus shalt thou do six days.” But let it be remembered that it is the power of Satan put forth by the world to hinder our entering into our heavenly blessings. It is not simply the world as a means of dragging us back to Egypt; this is not the point here. But Satan adopts fresh snares according to the blessing that God gives. Whatever would arrest the progress of the saints altogether; whatever might hinder their setting their moral mind, their affection, on things above — to further this now Satan bends all his force.

Jericho then gives us a lively image of Satan’s power as that which stood right in the way of the people entering the Holy Land. Jericho was the key of entrance into Canaan, and must, be taken: God would have it wholly destroyed. Hence Jehovah takes the whole case under His direction of His people. Not that He enters upon the work single-handed. It is not as was once done with the host of Pharaoh. Here the people must fight; they must have each their portion; they must take expressly and personally an active part in the war with the Canaanites. “Ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war, and go round about the city once.” It was a well-walled and strong city, and Israel had but poor appliances for siege or storming; yet never did city fall so easily since the world began.

But then there is striking instruction in the manner of it: “And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets.” There is the greatest care to insist upon the word of Jehovah. The city was to be taken, and would surely be taken; but this could only be in God’s way. There is no book in Scripture which demands obedience more rigidly than the Book of Joshua, which exhibits the people entering on their heavenly portion now by faith. “And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.” So Joshua and the people do. He directs the priests and people accordingly, and they are found carrying out the instructions of Jehovah, whatever they might appear to the eyes of others, with the most careful obedience. All is persevered in exactly during the full term of waiting. (Joshua 6:1-7)

Not only were their means seemingly inadequate, and really so if God had not been in them, but His ark is again prominent. “And it came to pass, when Joshua had spoken unto the people, that the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams’ horns passed on before Jehovah, and blew with the trumpets: and the ark of the covenant of Jehovah followed them. And the armed men went before the priests that blew with the trumpets, and the rereward came after the ark, the priests going on, and blowing with the trumpets. And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, neither shall any word

proceed out of your mouth, until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout. So the ark of Jehovah compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp." (8-14)

At length comes the crisis when faith had its answer: "And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city." Can anything be more remarkable than the way in which Joshua calls the people, in the use of means wholly and evidently insufficient on human grounds, to the settled and thorough assurance of what is going to befall Jericho before it takes place? There is communion with the mind of God. It is as fully set out before Joshua and all the people as if the city already lay in ruins. And so it should be with us. We are intended of God to know what He predicts before the event. (2 Peter 3) The world itself cannot but own when His word is fulfilled. Hence we are told that "we have the mind (or intelligence) of Christ;" and this goes far beyond prophecy. But then there may be hindrances to this as a practical fact. Thus, where the saints are mixed up with the world, there can be no full enjoyment of nearness to the Lord. His glory is in this denied, and so the Spirit of God is grieved. The allowance of fleshly arrangement in the church, or of anything that is a departure from His word, hinders the genuine simplicity of God's light from shining upon the soul.

But here all was sufficiently clear, as far as man could see, though we shall soon find how, as everywhere, the first man fails. "And ye, in any wise," says he, "keep yourselves from the accursed thing, lest ye make yourselves accursed, when ye take of the accursed

thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto Jehovah: they shall come into the treasury of Jehovah. So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down fiat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her." (18-22)

And so it was done: grace exempted before judgment. "And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of Jehovah." Nor was the word of mercy forgotten in the hour of victory: "And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and sue dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho." But a curse also is pronounced: "And Joshua adjured them at the time, saying, Cursed be the man before Jehovah, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates" — a word fulfilled in its due season. "So Jehovah was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country." (24-26)

There is not a blessing that God gives to man which does not furnish an occasion to Satan; and so it was at this moment of the capture of Jericho. The children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing, and God called His people to such a close and comprehensive clearance of the evil by the judgment of the wrongdoers as never was heard of in the wilderness. The more magnificent the display of the gracious power of God to His people, the more tenacious He is and must be of that which belongs to His own character and nature. Had there been the allowance on God's part of hidden evil, where were the testimony to His presence with the children of Israel? It had been irreparably ruined. This could not be. God must prove Himself there in their midst. And have we less now? Is He gone because of our ruined state? Did the Holy Ghost come down to be in us for a brief season, or for ever?

We shall find that God took a way to secure His glory not more effectual than humbling. And this is the more striking too, because it was at the very time when God had drawn the attention, we may say, of all the world to that which He was doing for His people. It had been confessed that their hearts were melting. The report of Israel had spread far and wide. But can it be supposed that men heard of the triumphant passage of the Jordan, or of the divinely directed overthrow of Jericho, and that Israel's shameful defeat before the little city of Ai was kept a secret? Is that which does honour to God and His people spread abroad, and their disgrace concealed or unknown? Far from it. There is one who sees to it that anything which lowers God in His people shall quickly circulate through such a world as this! Nor is it well that evil should be hidden; for grace makes it morally good

for God's people to bear the burden and approve themselves clear, besides the fact of discipline in the individuals concerned. Whatever the pain and shame of the case itself, it is good for those exercised thereby, not for such as make an evil use of it.

But God will have His people walking in the truth of what affects His glory; and this comes out more now than ever. He manifests His watchful care, and insists on what is suited to Himself, for no less than this is the standard. It was not merely with reference to the people, but God measures everything henceforth by His own presence, who had brought them into His own land. He had particularly set aside the silver and the gold of this city, pronouncing a curse upon any one who should alienate it for himself; and now no Canaanite but a man of Israel dared to trifle with the mighty power of Jehovah — to act as if Joshua were but the crafty master, yet slave, of an idol that had neither eyes nor ears. To pass over such an act would have been fatal. "Achan, the son of Carmi the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of Jehovah was kindled." (Joshua 7) Against whom? Achan? Nay, more, "against the children of Israel." The same principle applies yet more strikingly to the Church. If "one member suffer, all the members suffer with it."

But to proceed: — "Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Beth-el, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country." We do not read at this time of any seeking the Lord; we do not hear of prayer to ask from the Lord counsel as to that which they were to do. I assuredly gather from all the facts that here the children of Israel failed in this. A little place seemed not to need God's

power, wisdom, and guidance as a great. It is not merely a question of the most guilty party. There may be fidelity in much, but withal the need in God's eyes to deal with His people as a whole when He thus puts them to shame before the world. When we shrink from this, we only defraud our souls of the blessing; and, further, we induce a distrust of the Lord instead of cherishing perfect confidence, spite of what seems perhaps outwardly hard. Many an one, I dare say, may have thought it strange that Jehovah's anger should be kindled against Israel, all because of one individual who, unknown to them, had been thus guilty. But He is always wise and good; and our wisdom lies in unwavering trust in Him. Joshua then, instead of enquiring of the Lord how the matter stood, and whether His holy eyes had discerned that which offended Him, is all for action. Now, where there is activity before men, there is especial need of previously drawing near to God. For one step taken is apt to involve many more, and there is danger. Here too we may well learn a lesson. We have the Lord's anger kindled against them, and Joshua quite unconscious that there was anything amiss. Those sent go; "and they returned to Joshua, and said to him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people labour thither; for they are but few." (Joshua 7:3)

There is self-confidence instead of dependence on the Lord. There was a looking at the comparative strength of the town; there was a fleshly judgment, reasoning after appearances, which for the believer is never safe, that it would call for no such serious action as in the taking of Jericho. There indeed that city with its high walls made them feel, and compelled them to own, that

nothing but the power of God could bring it down; and there they found His strength made perfect in their weakness. God was their implicit trust; but now it was in their eyes a mere question of comparing the resources of Ai with their own. Thus the easy victory with which God had crowned them at Jericho became a snare. To those that had gained at once a city like Jericho, the capture of Ai seemed a matter of course. The inhabitants were but few. There was no reason therefore for the host of Jehovah to go up in force against such a place. “So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai.” And not only so, but “the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down: wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water.”

It was no longer the hearts of the Canaanites melting; no longer their kings who became as water; but Israel. What are we without God, my brethren? It is wholesome that we should feel it. Our only boast is in what He is not only to us, but with us. They had not God with them; they were utter weakness. And Joshua now is filled with chagrin and humiliation before God. “And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of Jehovah until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas! O Lord Jehovah, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?” They had failed in not seeking direction from God. “Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of Jordan!” There

was repining, if not a reproach, cast on Him who had thus failed them. (6, 7)

I do not mean to say that there was not the working of real sorrow and shame of heart before God but certainly patience had not yet attained its perfect work in the soul. “O Jehovah, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?” There at least he was right, and there it is that God answers — “And Jehovah said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff.” (8-11)

But mark, it is not Achan, it is not the ill-doer only but Israel. There was no such identification before the crossing of the Jordan. There was the principle, no doubt, of an evil thing affecting the-camp. This was always true; but now it is made far more precise and definite. The greater the blessing of God to His people, so much the more their responsibility. So now, they being all identified with God, there was done in their midst a daring sin against God, who will make them feel it for the express purpose of their purging themselves from it. “Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed.” “Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed.” (13) Whatever may be the rich grace of God in dealing with

all our evil and putting it away, that which dishonours Him when God has so blessed us makes us nothing before the enemy. The worst evil disappears before the power of redemption; but what man would count a very little evil, if cherished or overlooked, becomes afterwards a source of incalculable weakness in the presence of Satan. Is this a reason for distrust? Not the least. It is the greatest possible reason for watchfulness and care. And more than that, beloved brethren — for who are we, and what are our eyes worth, and where has been our watchfulness? — our strength lies in this, that we have God to watch over us and for us. Here was precisely that in which Joshua had been lacking. He had not sought the Lord about it; he had not enquired. God accordingly makes the shame of it to appear, and Joshua now painfully learns it, and the people.

“Up,” says Jehovah to His servant, “sanctify the people, and say, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow: for thus saith Jehovah God of Israel, There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you. In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes: and it shall be, that the tribe which Jehovah taketh shall come according to the families thereof; and the family which Jehovah shall take shall come by households; and the household which Jehovah shall take shall come man by man. And it shall be, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire.” Thus, although God would make them all feel that they were involved, there is careful provision in His own goodness that the particular offender shall be brought out, now that they are really waiting upon God, and humbling themselves because of

it. Thus, when unwatchful and unprayerful, all are involved in the sorrow; but when His people draw near to God the sorrow is traced home to the one who is guilty. There is a clearing of themselves by the fact that they all humbled themselves before God. This very act shows that they have no wilful connivance at evil; and, God therefore taking the matter into His own hands, the offender is soon brought out.

“And Joshua rose up early.” He was as much in earnest about this as he was about the fall of Jericho. “So Joshua rose up early in the morning, and brought Israel by their tribes; and the tribe of Judah was taken: and he brought the family of Judah; and he took the family of the Zarhites: and he brought the family of the Zarhites man by man; and Zabdi was taken: and he brought his household man by man; and Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.” God was faithful; but Joshua would have man vindicate Him, that others also might fear, not to speak of his own soul. Hence more follows.

“And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to Jehovah God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against Jehovah God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it. So Joshua sent messengers, and they ran unto the tent; and, behold, it was hid in his tent, and the silver under it. And they took them out of the midst of the tent,

and brought them unto Joshua, and unto all the children of Israel, and laid them out before Jehovah. And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? Jehovah shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones." They all took their part in it. God insists that there should be thus the clearing of themselves before His own name. "And they raised over him a great heap of stones unto this day. So Jehovah turned from the fierceness of his anger." But notice how "all Israel" have their part, as in the consequences of the sin, so now in every step of its judgment from God.

And now we have the Lord's full restitution of the people. They had gone forth in self-confidence; they had received the most serious check; but, now that the sin was judged, Jehovah was free to act on their behalf. Even then He had His own way. And now it was not a question of great things, it was no season to show the resources of the all-overcoming power of God, which, before a blow was struck, brought down the towering walls of the city. I am persuaded that there is quite as practical and deep a lesson to learn hence as from the fall of Jericho; but it is a different lesson. And this is a very important thing, brethren; because, we being so ready to contract the ways of God into one single groove, it is a very good thing for us to leave room for His wisdom to shape its own course suitably to the new circumstances, in view surely of His own glory, but also

in His goodness, always taking account of the condition of His people. Hence He says to Joshua, “Fear not, neither be thou dismayed: take all the people of war with thee, and arise, go up to Ai: see, I have given into thy hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his city, and his land.”

So Jehovah adds at this juncture, and such injunctions might surprise some. First He summons Joshua to take all the people of war; then He promises to give all into Joshua’s hand. He next lays down a plan, not the one that brought in the ark and the priests, where it was pre-eminently a question of following His own word and the power of Jehovah’s holy presence. But here he says, “Lay thee an ambush for the city behind it. So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai: and Joshua chose out thirty thousand mighty men of valour, and sent them away by night. And he commanded them, saying, Behold, ye shall lie in wait against the city, even behind the city: go not very far from the city, but be ye all ready: And I, and all the people that are with me, will approach unto the city: and it shall come to pass, when they come out against us, as at the first, that we will flee before them, (for they will come out after us,) till we have drawn them from the city; for they will say, They flee before us, as at the first: therefore we will flee before them. Then ye shall rise up from the ambush, and seize upon the city: for Jehovah your God will deliver it into your hand. And it shall be, when ye have taken the city, that ye shall set the city on fire: according to the commandment of Jehovah shall ye do.” That is, even more care and implicit obedience in every particular are insisted on as to the preparations against the little Ai than had been employed in the capture of Jericho. All

this is set out with the utmost minuteness for our instruction.

“Joshua therefore sent them forth: and they went to lie in ambush, and abode between Beth-el and Ai, on the west side of Ai: but Joshua lodged that night among the people. And Joshua rose up early in the morning.” He himself “numbered the people, and went up, he and the elders of Israel, before the people to Ai. And all the people, even the people of war that were with him, went up, and drew nigh, and came before the city, and pitched on the north side of Ai: now there was a valley between them and Ai. And he took about five thousand men, and set them to lie in ambush between Beth-el and Ai, on the west side of the city. And when they had set the people, even all the host that was on the north of the city, and their liers in wait on the west of the city, Joshua went that night into the midst of the valley.” The all-importance of heeding the Lord and His word was felt now; and recovery after haste must be humbling, however sure.

The enemy, as we shall see, is never so self-confident as when his hour is come. So men shall cry, Peace and safety, when sudden destruction cometh upon them. “And it came to pass, when the king of Ai saw it, that they hasted and rose up early, and the men of the city went out against Israel to battle, he and all his people, at a time appointed, before the plain; but he wist not that there were liers in ambush against him behind the city. And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. And all the people that were in Ai were called together to pursue after them: and they pursued after Joshua, and were drawn away from the city. And

there was not a man left in Ai or Beth-el, that went not out after Israel: and they left the city open, and pursued after Israel. And the Lord said unto Joshua, Stretch out the spear that is in thy hand toward Ai; for I will give it into thine hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city. And the ambush arose quickly." They were on the other side. This is the more remarkable, because it might appear as if it were merely a signal but it seems evident, as it has also struck others, from the disposition of the forces, that such was not the thought, but a far deeper intimation than a simple sign. It is rather a lively witness of God causing all things to conspire, where we do not trust in our manoeuvring, but cherish subjection of heart to His word, after the-evil was seen and judged which made it impossible for God's presence to be with His people in power. You will always find this the case.

Where Christians bring their own plans into the difficulty, they defeat themselves instead of the foe; and even though they may be thoroughly upright in the main, the Lord has a controversy with the self-sufficiency which trusts to plans instead of being subject to His will. The Lord is surely with His own. Dependence and trust in Him is the wisdom of those who are engaged in conflict with the enemy. And, beloved brethren, we (Christians) are all engaged in it. We are called to this now, if ever men were — called to it doubly, because it is not only that God has; brought us into the consciousness of heavenly blessing through His grace, but He has recalled us to it when long let slip. Surely this ought to be the conflict of all saints' though in fact it is scarcely understood save by such as know the mystery of Christ and the church. Sorrow to think that it should

be so! But thanks be to God that there are any! Thanks surely we owe that we have been favoured by infinite mercy so entirely above and apart from any question of ourselves at all. But have we not known this — and do we not always find it so — that where we are' on the ground of the Lord, and know ourselves so much the more called to obedience, as we have to face the subtlest wiles of the foe, so the most unexpected conjuncture of circumstances is ordered of Him in our favour) He knows how precisely to time everything for us.

In the case before us the mere sight of the eyes could hardly have availed for men so distant and also hiding: was it not of God Himself? Did not He cause Joshua to stretch out his spear? What serves to make it plain enough that more is meant than the human notion that ordinarily supplants the truth here is that we are told a little afterwards (verse 20) that "Joshua drew not his hand back wherewith he stretched out his spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai" Had it been merely a signal for man, where would have been the reason for keeping his hand thus stretched out? To stretch out the spear, if he had drawn it back soon, would have been quite enough. The work was done, had it been a mere preconcerted act. But no; it appears to be a sign on God's part, a significant token, that called them to the taking of the city. It was seemingly and strikingly intended to give them the certainty that Jehovah was with them now, Jehovah undertaking the lead, Jehovah prospering all in the very place where they had been put to shame; Jehovah would retrieve the glory of His own name. Let us always trust to Him so. No doubt it may be by no means a question here of that

which would strike the mind of man with the same wonder as the capture of Jericho; but still it was no small cheer to Israel after their grievous check.

If God puts the sentence of death on us now, it is to help us the more really in result by leading us to trust only in Him that raises the dead. If we submit, He can use us. So here; it was the place of previous defeat, where the Lord, having purged out that which was the hidden cause of the mischief, and brought to light the failure of all in dependence, can lead them to victory. At the same time, while recalling to their mind every part of their fault, He impresses upon them more than ever the all-importance of subjection to His word, and, further, of dependence upon Himself. The word of God, blessed as it is, is not everything. We need the God of the word as well as the word of God. What weakness if God Himself be not with us! What assured victory when He is, as we find in this twofold history! It is true that only God knew Achan's trespass in their midst. But God would have brought it all out if they had waited on Him for light; for He had no pleasure in the shame that haste entailed on Joshua and His people. He will be enquired of, and must rouse His people to learn from Him, sooner or later, that which they knew not, but which He knew and would make known, for it concerned His honour as dwelling with them.

Thus then the taking of this little city is turned into weighty and most needed instruction for the people of God, we being such as we are here below. The men of Ai we have in all their distress when they looked behind and saw the snare in which they had been taken, the ambush rushing in on one side, and those that seemed to flee from them advancing to attack them on the other.

The case was soon decided now, whatever the pains and trouble He demanded for it. “And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them, and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. And so it was, that all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai. For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai. Only the cattle and the spoil of that city Israel took for a prey unto themselves, according unto the word of Jehovah which he commanded Joshua.” They are allowed the prey now, having been tested at Jericho.

Observe this other fact too: “And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until eventide: and as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his carcase down from the tree, and cast it at the entering of the gate of the city, and raise thereon a great heap of stones, that remaineth unto this day.” God caused the word He had laid down as to these very matters to be brought to mind. Is not this an intentional instruction for us here? The conscience of Israel was roused by Joshua to the nicest care for the will of Jehovah. It was not a command that had been just then given, but one that had been laid down on the other side of Jordan. It was remembered now; as the circumstances indeed first called for it at this time. It was God’s land, and must not be defiled, but be regarded according to the rights of divine holiness. He had forbidden them to leave one

hanged on a tree till the sun went down. They must never forget what was due to Him, and to His land.

“Then Joshua,” as we are told — and this too is in evident connection with the same principle — “built an altar unto Jehovah, God of Israel, in mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of Jehovah commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron: and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto Jehovah, and sacrificed peace offerings. And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses.” All shows the exercise of conscience and sense of the glory of God according to His revelation. It was the expression of thanksgiving offered: to the Lord, but we see care for the law under which. they were. “And all Israel, and their elders, and officers, and their judges, stood on this side the ark and on that side before the priests the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of Jehovah, as well the stranger, as he that was born among them; half of them over against mount Gerizim, and half of them over against mount Ebal; as Moses the servant of Jehovah had commanded before.” It is a fresh proof of the jealousy which Israel felt for the word of Jehovah, and the Christian may learn from their reverent attitude before it. “And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them.” Every word was read, and read to every man, woman, and child, yea, to the strangers among the Israelites. As His authority

extended over all, so each and every word was caused to fall on their ears thus solemnly, and the stranger that sojourned in their midst must hear the law, though there were privileges which none but Abraham’s seed could share.

I shall not proceed farther now, desiring to dwell more particularly on these chapters where the moral principles of the book are apparent to me. We have seen, first, the secret of victory; next, that of defeat; then we had, thirdly, the means and process of restoration; and, fourthly, the great practical lessons that resulted from all. May the Lord grant us, beloved brethren, to read every word as the revelation of the living ways of the living God with our souls! Those of the children of God will feel its application seasonable who have been brought in some little measure to appreciate the place given to all, but which all alas! have not taken. If we have, let us rejoice and fear not, though God will surely deal with us according to that which He has given us in His grace, not as on ground which our faith has left behind as none of His, whatever be His considerate care for such as have never learnt better.

Joshua 9 - 24.

In the wars of Jehovah it was not always a question of hostile power. Indeed this is not the most serious evil which the people of God have to encounter in this world. The very same principle which was true of Israel then applies to the Christian now. The wiles of the evil one are much more to be dreaded than his power; and Satan as a serpent acts far more grievously to the injury of the Lord’s name among His people than as a roaring lion. Undoubtedly it is an afflicting thought, how far the

adversary can, and does, employ the world to the hurt of God's people and God's dishonour; but grace is ever above evil, and through its full revelation in Christ we have now a new standard to judge of good and evil, more particularly for the Christian. He can thus say that all that is wrought by the mere enmity of the world, set on by Satan, cannot harm; for he is not like a Jew, called to the preservation of life in this world, or to any circumstances of ease and quietness; but, on the contrary, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

The rejection of Christ has to Christian faith changed everything to us here below, and the possession of Christ for heaven has made all plain to us, supposing there were the loss of anything here, of life itself; for what is aught now in presence of eternal life? And Christ is that life in resurrection power. Having Him as our life therefore, we have to do with a hostile world which Satan turns against us; but, in exciting the world against the saints, we only learn the strength of our blessing; for supposing the world, filled with hatred, inflicts its stripes or contumely, and deprives us of this or that necessary (it might seem) for subsistence, certainly for anything like a measure of comfort in this world, what then? If the effect of all that Satan can do is that we give God thanks, what does he gain? Praise to the Lord. Suppose, again, he put forth the world's hatred to imprison or to kill, we shall not give the Lord less thanks then, but rather praise Him that He counts us worthy of suffering these things for His name's sake.

So it is only a question of going forward at the will of the Lord. Just in proportion to the malicious keenness of Satan's strokes does the Lord give more grace. Thus are

sufferings in the world, trials, persecutions, all invariably turned to the good of the souls that accept all; and we are entitled to do so, as Christ always did. It mattered not who the person or what the thing was; it might be Herod or Pilate as instruments. The Lord, viewed now as the blessed witness for God here below, always took them from God. “The cup which my Father giveth me,” He says, “shall I not drink it?”

No doubt there lay behind what was, if possible, deeper than the outward fact of rejection. For the expiation of sin God must act according to His immutable nature in righteousness, and not merely as Father. But whatever might come, the effect on our Lord Jesus was that He justified God, even when in atoning for sin there could be no sensible enjoyment nor expression of communion. It is impossible that the eternal Son, the perfect Servant, could welcome or be indifferent to divine judgment, when He for us became its object, which He necessarily must be, if we were to be cleared from guilt and ruin by His bearing sin away. Hence we find the Lord Jesus then, but in the expression of abandonment, not of fellowship, not in doubts or fears, as some have said blasphemously, but realising what it was when God made Him sin for us. Anything else would have been morally impossible and unsuitable at such a moment; but even then did He cherish unwavering confidence in God, reckoning upon Him, feeling the reality of His own position, entering in all the depths of His soul — and those depths were unfathomable — into all that God’s moral nature must demand when the question was of sin, even though with Christ Himself, His only begotten, suffering for us in atonement.

We speak here of the cross of Christ in view of atonement. This doubtless is the one solitary exception. It belongs to Christ in atonement, and to none else but Christ there and then; and out of Him came, not only His praises for ever, but ours with His, His in our midst. Apart from that which thus stands necessarily alone, where thanksgiving would have been wholly unseasonable and unsuited, not to say a mockery — apart from this one stupendous fact which refuses comparison with all others, because of its nature, and where failure could not be, because He was then as always absolutely perfect, ever do we hear Him blessing His Father. Jesus in all things glorified His Father; and in the final suffering His perfection shone most of all; not because He was one whit more perfect then than at any other time, but because never before had it been His so to suffer, and it never could be again.

Take the Lord at any other moment than His suffering for sins, and no matter what came upon Him, the effect was thanksgiving. Take Him gradually, yea, utterly rejected; take Him most despised, where He was most known, where He had done such works, where He had spoken such words, as never were before. Thoroughly He felt all, and He could say “Woe” upon these places. It could not be otherwise; for they had refused the gracious and rich testimony of the Messiah. But He turns to God with “I thank thee Father,” at the same time. So we see victory in Him always. We too are entitled to look for it. Only remembering that to stand in presence of the wiles of the devil, as we are called to do now, is a harder thing than before his power already broken for us.

So it turns out here. We have seen that, when the full strength of the enemy presented itself after Jordan was crossed, Jehovah gave His people the most magnificent victory that this book affords. Alas, that it should be so! that the first occasion should be brighter than the last! Ought it so to be? It was far otherwise with Jesus. His way was a shining one; but the brightest of all was the light that shone forth when it seemed to go out in death, only to rise again, to be enjoyed now by faith, then to be displayed in the kingdom and throughout eternity.

In this case we find Israel more than checked. There had been a severe repulse from Satan's power, and this because the people ventured to act without the guidance and protection of Jehovah. Having already proved the Lord's presence with them, they did what we are apt to do. They assumed that Jehovah must follow them, instead of their waiting on and following Him. It was human inference, and this is never safe in divine things. They took for granted that, Jehovah having brought them into that land, there was nothing for them but to go forward. What was that? A forgetfulness of the enemy and themselves? More than that — a forgetfulness of God. Would it become men of faith to do without the Lord in the wilderness, not to speak of contending against the enemy in Canaan? Certainly not, if our souls had the sense of having to do with One that loves us; with One without whom we are nothing; with One who! having been glorified, has called us and saved us for the purpose of being glorified in us. Absolutely do we need Him; but besides it is our heart's earnest desire, though we are apt sometimes to forget it.

It was so with Israel, and even Joshua, upon this occasion. After having been victorious at Jericho, one

can well understand the sad mistake in the matter of Ai. But was the profit now lost when, by the intervention of the Lord's gracious power, the mischief was retrieved? The Lord had put Israel in their proper place, disciplined them, broken down confidence in their own power. He had made them feel that there was nothing for Israel but to be subject to Him. They must not think, like the Gentiles, that it is a question of marshalling strength against strength. Such thoughts leave out God, and are utterly unbecoming to those who are called to walk in the consciousness of His presence.

This was a most wholesome lesson. But there was more to learn; and now they must be tried after a new sort. "It came to pass when all the kings that were on this side Jordan, in the hills, and in the valleys, and in all the coasts of the great sea over against Lebanon, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, heard thereof; that they gathered themselves together to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord." In all probability these tribes were encouraged by the check before Ai. The fall of Jericho had struck them with dismay; but they learnt through what took place at Ai that Israel were not necessarily invincible. So far they were right. They had learnt that Israel might be beaten, and disgracefully beaten. They had learnt that a much smaller force sufficed there to arrest that wonderful host of Israel, which before had filled them with consternation, and made their hearts melt at the very thought of their approach. They seem, however, to have consulted together, and judged that with a union of their forces the people whom Ai had stayed for awhile might be defeated. Even that little town, with its feeble resources, had contrived unaided to

delay the advance of Israel, and was only afterwards, when too confident and off their guard, taken by stratagem.

Evidently the Canaanites had no notion of the lesson God was teaching His people. Nor need we wonder; for the people of God themselves had not learnt it thoroughly They had profited, yet it had not so convinced their souls of the need of God's guidance, the one thing which ensured victory, but that now, in presence of all this muster of nations against them — Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, Canaanites, and so on, when the inhabitants of Gibeon came forward and offered an alliance with them, this seemed to many a desirable and welcome aid. Israel then had some friends who would succour them against the enemy. It is true that a certain uneasiness was felt. "They went to Joshua, unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country." This naturally threw the children of Israel and Joshua off their guard. They knew perfectly — and it is important to see how well understood it was that God had called His people to no peace with the Canaanites — that they were a doomed nation. It is hundreds of years before God had given that land to Abraham. The Canaanites were then in the land, but they had gone on undisturbed for centuries, and until lately had allowed themselves to think their settlement there not so dangerous. But, when the passage of the Red Sea was heard of, terror struck their hearts. Then when the people, after their long pause in the wilderness, crossed the Jordan, fresh pangs warned them of approaching destruction if they defied the God of Israel. No doubt they might have fled. It was open to them to leave Canaan. What title could they

pretend to seize the land of God? Had God no sovereignty? Is He the only one who possesses in this world no right? What a thought of God prevails in this world!

But there is more to consider. We may have noticed, and it is important to bear it in mind, that it was under the fullest title on God's part that the Jordan was crossed. His was the ark of "the Lord of all the earth." He would not abate His claims; He would not deny His rights. It was on this very ground, and with that banner as it were, that they entered the Holy Land. It was at the peril therefore of any who, knowing that God destined that land (and it was well known) for Israel, and who, having the warning voice of all that had befallen Pharaoh, and Amalek, and Og, and Sihon, and Midian, still dared to brave His host. Assuredly then they must take the consequences.

But the Gibeonites set to work after their fashion. If the mass of the nations trusted to force, the Gibeonites betook themselves to crafty counsel. There we may see typified the wiles of the devil. This represents some of them at least. The epistle to the Ephesians gives us divine authority for the solemn fact, that we need the whole armour of God in order to resist the two things — the power of Satan on the one hand, and the wiles of the devil on the other, and this with pointed reference to this very book of Joshua. Chapter 6 teaches us in contrast with Israel that, as they wrestled with flesh and blood, we, on the other hand, have to contend with spiritual wickedness in heavenly places.

Thus the nature of the case comes before us very plainly. The Gibeonites denote those that are energized with

Satan’s craft to deceive the people of God into a false step, and how far this succeeded we have now to learn.

“They went to Joshua, unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country. Now therefore make ye a league with us. And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us.” To my mind this is painfully instructive. It was not Joshua that suspected the trick, nor yet the elders or princes of the congregation, but the men of Israel. How often simplicity is right where the best wisdom fails: God makes us feel the need of Himself. And if this was true of Israel, it is still more needful in the church of God. We cannot be independent of a single member of the body of Christ; where the simple-minded man has a suspicion roused that is given of God, it were well that the wise should heed what the Lord would use to bring all to a right conclusion. But it was not heeded at this time. It is not often, and it seems not natural, that men accustomed to guide and rule should listen to those who are used to obey and follow. But in divine things those who despise the least must pay the penalty; and so it certainly was now.

“The men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us, and how shall we make a league with you?” Feeling, no doubt, that it was dangerous to talk more on so delicate a subject, they said, “We are thy servants.” This again seemed fair-spoken; but when Joshua put the question, “Who are you, and from whence come ye?” they said unto him, “From a very far country thy servants are come, because of the name of Jehovah thy God.” Here the unscrupulous deceit of the enemy comes out thoroughly. It was extraordinary to

hear from the lips of a Canaanite the confession of the name of Jehovah; and this they knew well would tell more particularly with such an one as Joshua. He who most values the name of Jehovah would be apt to welcome it most where he least expected it. Accordingly, this weighed powerfully with him, when they added, “We have heard the fame of him and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and to Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth. Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us. This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you, but now, behold, it is dry, and it is mouldy. And these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey. And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of God.”

The bait had taken, the mischief was done, and its effects wrought long. The men of Israel, who were not without fears at the beginning, allowed themselves to be ensnared. If Joshua led, we must not wonder that the rest followed. They “took of their victuals” — the sign of fellowship in its measure — “they took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of Jehovah.”

The enemy had defeated Israel. It was a fatal act, though the consequences did not yet appear. How much may be involved in what might be called the simple act of taking victuals! So another day, when it is rather the

converse of this, we find in the New Testament. Thus to Paul's mind, who ordinarily made so light of meats or herbs, the truth of the gospel might be staked on eating or not eating I do not even speak of the Lord's Supper, but of a common meal, when it was a question between the Jew and the Gentile, and this tried before no less a person than the great apostle of the circumcision. For a time was Barnabas carried away, and Peter too, by the old traditional feeling of the Jew. The good man and the fearless withdrew from the uncircumcision, ashamed or afraid of thwarting the feelings of the brethren at Jerusalem. Thus Satan gained a great point for the moment; but there was one at hand to vindicate grace promptly. Thank God, it was not yet that Satan had drawn away the whole church, or even those that best represented it. If there were together Peter and Barnabas, there was a Paul who resists, and Paul promptly decides, at cost (you may be assured) of every feeling. On the other side stood the man who had once shown him generous love, on the other side Peter, chief among the twelve, honoured of God most signally among Jews and Samaritans, and even Gentiles (Acts 2-10), most to be honoured of man therefore, and very justly so.

But who is to be honoured if the Lord is to be put to shame in His grace? And so it was that Paul rose up in the might of his faith and in the simplicity of his jealous vindication of the truth of the gospel; for this was the question, this was what he saw involved in it. Who would have seen it but himself? But so it was; for there, and on that very occasion, the whole point of the gospel would have been surrendered, if Paul had consented to withdraw like the rest from the uncircumcision. Thank

God, Satan did not succeed altogether in his wiles, though he did to a considerable extent.

But here it was God who was not consulted; and it is a more serious thing, beloved brethren, when it is not merely the men of Israel, but the elders, the princes, the chiefs of the congregation, yea, Joshua himself who thus left Him out of a matter which He only knew. And so it was on this occasion. They “asked not counsel at the mouth of Jehovah. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them to let them live, and the princes of the congregation sware unto them.” There they bound themselves by the name of Jehovah, and it is a very striking thing for us also to see that at this time there was no trifling with the honour of that name. They felt that they had been beguiled. This was true; but they did not therefore consider that it was open to them to break the oath of Jehovah because they had been deceived into it. We too must take care how, where we have committed ourselves to that which is wrong, we lightly deal with that name. No; the thing was done: it could not be undone. They could have asked counsel of the Lord again; we are not told that they did so. They had made a double error: they entered into it without the Lord, and when the thing was done, we do not find that they spread the difficulty before Him. Thus it is most manifest the enemy gained an immense advantage over the host of Jehovah on that day.

And may we be watchful in our day, beloved; for “these things are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come.” Nor is there a more important thing in difficulty, trial, or anything that may involve the feelings, and perhaps drag us into practical obligations, than that, before we venture on an opinion,

before we take a measure, before we allow ourselves to be engrossed on this side or that, we should ask counsel of the Lord. This would spare us from many a sorrow, and it would hinder much shame and defeat before our enemies, and more particularly, I must say, in men that have wisdom, that are accustomed to guide; for there are few things harder than for such to retrace their steps, and the more so, the higher the character, the greater the experience, in the ways of God. If Satan gains such an advantage, the difficulty is enormous. We have only to apply it to ourselves. It is very easy to speak about what another should do; but let us only consider for a moment it to be publicly our case. It is easy to say what ought to be, and there is no doubt of it; but those who in any measure approach to it, and know the seriousness of such a position, cannot ignore, whatever others may theorise, that this mischief is incalculable. Therefore let us pray for one another; let us pray for those that most of all need counsel from God, that they may be ever kept from hasty words and measures either for themselves or for others, especially where the name of the Lord is involved with the adversary.

This then is, as I judge, the grave teaching that is brought before us in the account of the men of Gibeon. It is true that God permitted that they should bear a certain stamp of degradation in consequence. They were enslaved as the only course left open righteously. There was wisdom given so far to those who led the host of the Lord that the Gibeonites should be hewers of wood and drawers of water. After the treaty it would have been fresh sin, a crime, to have put them to death. The name of the Lord had been solemnly passed, and that can never be trilled with; but on the other hand, the

Gibeonites were reduced to the most menial services for the sanctuary of Jehovah. Thus it was made plain that nothing preserved them but His name. Hence they were attached to the sanctuary, but this with the brand of slavery on them.

Nevertheless the wrong in the matter of the Gibeonites was of the most serious kind. It was not even like what had occurred before, where they sustained a temporary defeat, for there God looked to and brought them out of their humiliation; but here was a permanent difficulty that rose up witheringly for Israel at a later day, as we find elsewhere in Scripture. So grave and injurious were the consequences of the wrong step now taken through want of seeking the counsel of Jehovah.

In the next chapter (Joshua 10) we find the threatened coalition of the Canaanite nations consummated, not checked, by what had just taken place, and directed against Gibeon. “Now it came to pass, when Adoni-zedec king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them; that they feared greatly, because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty.” Accordingly the king of Jerusalem turns to the kings of Hebron, and Jarmuth, and Lachish, and Eglon, saying, “Come up unto me and help me, that we may smite Gibeon.” This is the shape that it takes. Gibeon becomes an object of attack; but Jehovah accomplishes His designs. This is a great and gracious consolation. There is never ground to distrust the Lord, no matter what the circumstances may be. We

may have been foolish, hasty, and drawn into a snare, but we are never justified in distrusting Him. When we justify Him, which in such cases necessarily supposes our taking the fault to ourselves, there is a moral victory gained over our souls; and victory over self is the direct road to victory over Satan.

So it was on this occasion. The Canaanites joined together: “The men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp to Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us; for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us. So Joshua ascended from Gilgal;” that is, from the place where circumcision took place. Such was the earliest result of peace with Gibeon. Joshua had to help them, not they Israel, as was expected. As this was never repeated, it is a fair question suggested by the Book of Joshua, what we are to gather from Israel’s constant return to encamp there. We have seen the force of circumcision to be the judgment of our fallen nature in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, which, once done, cannot in itself be repeated. But if so, what is the force of Gilgal always recurring? Why was the camp pitched there rather than anywhere else? We might have supposed that the camp would be naturally pushed forward. The victories of Israel gained, why do they always take the trouble of going back to that point? Why there rather than anywhere else in the land? The reason is most important, and it is this, that, founded upon the fact that the old man has been judged in the cross, we are always to rest as it were on that fact, and always to dwell upon what has been done there.

In short; then, it will have been seen that practical mortification is the answer to Gilgal, as the judgment of the flesh is the answer to circumcision. Thus the constant encamping in Gilgal is the continual recurrence to mortify self before God. Self-mortification would be useless unless the judgment had taken place in the cross of Christ. So far from being from God without the cross, it could only puff up the flesh. A man without Christ crucified as the expression of his own total ruin, judgment, and means of deliverance by grace, always thinks himself so much the better for his efforts in this way. There is no more insidious snare sometimes than even a man confessing a fault; he really seems greater in his own eyes when he has done so than before. He arrogates a certain credit of lowliness to himself because he has owned himself wrong. Now it is plain that the reason of that is, because the cross of Christ is so little, self so great, in his eyes. There then the importance of the encamping at Gilgal is felt, because Gilgal is not merely a man striving to mortify himself, but self-mortified on the ground of what God has done in Christ our Lord. This only is of grace, and hence by faith; that is something humiliating in appearance, but exalting self because it is self-occupation, not God's judgment in the cross.

There is another thing to be observed. It is an important thing that we should, according to the language of this book, encamp at Gilgal. I have not the slightest sympathy with one who says that it is enough for him to find all his nature already judged in Christ. Yes, my brother; but what about returning to encamp at Gilgal? What about your mortifying yourself? Remember this always; for one is just as true as the other, though no

doubt God's great act of judgment in the cross takes due precedence as the ground of our habitual self-judgment. It is granted cordially that our mortifying self is nothing without the work of grace in the Lord Jesus; but when we have known it, are we to allow the thought that we are not to judge ourselves? that we are not to be ashamed of our inconsistency with the cross and with the glory of Christ? that we are not to use both as the best of reasons for not sparing ourselves?

Of course nature at once rises to argue stoutly, and defend itself if it can, for the last thing a man fairly and fully gives up is himself. But the moment the heart turns to Christ, and considers that all my blessedness is bound up with the solemn truth that all flesh has been made nothing of, and a new man brought in, and that God has done both in One who, having no evil, nevertheless suffered all for it, there only is the soul brought back to its true starting-point. When we fail in our souls to judge ourselves, God sends some painful circumstances to help us. Were we always walking in the power of divine truth before God, and judging ourselves, we should not come into so many sorrows of our making, nor require so much chastening from our Father. But supposing we fail in self-judgment, God is faithful; He takes good care of us, and makes us feel what cuts us every now and then, just because we have not returned, as it were, to the camp at Gilgal.

We have been going forward, desirous, it may be, to add victory to victory, or perhaps settling down without identifying ourselves as we should with God's people and testimony and conflicts as a whole. For I am not now supposing our rest on the other side of Jordan; still less do I put the case of going back into Egypt; but it is easy

in Canaan to forget the need of returning to Gilgal, yet there is Gilgal, and we need it in the scene of our blessing. Not only was Christ crucified for me, but I am crucified with Him. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts;” and therefore, if we fail to walk consistently with the cross, snares from the enemy, and from God grief and bitter humiliation, come to us, it may be, exactly where we are most sensitive. He will have us back to Gilgal. Thus I think it is not hard to see the practical moment of the type. It is not only that Gilgal saw Israel circumcised. There it was done; but there is also the keeping up of the place of circumcision as being the only proper place for the host of Jehovah to encamp in. They must always start from Gilgal, and always return there.

“So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valour. And Jehovah said unto Joshua, Fear them not.” Why should they? yea, why should they not? “Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee. Joshua therefore came unto them suddenly, and went up from Gilgal all night. And Jehovah discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Beth-horon, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah. And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Beth-horon, that Jehovah cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died; they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword.”

“Then spake Joshua to Jehovah in the day when Jehovah delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel.”

How truly the intervention of that day is all felt to be Jehovah's doing! He uses His people, and it was a gracious thing in a certain sense that He should; for He could now, as at the Red Sea, have done all without them; but He would employ the people of God according to the dispensation. Thank God, we have a better calling than this, even an heavenly; but still, in its own place it is short-sighted and irreverent folly to overlook the honour of being employed in doing the then work of the Lord — clearing the land of what was an ulcer and plague-spot, not merely for that locality, but for the whole earth; and such the Canaanites were. If there was to be a people of God at all, what other way was open than sweeping the land clean from the world-polluting Canaanites? And so Jehovah then "delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel."

But mark the beauty of the truth. It was to Jehovah Joshua spoke, not to the creature, for Him only did he honour. How admirably clear of all creature worship even when creation was to be used marvellously! "And he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies." A memorable day it was in every point of view — the cavil no doubt of the infidel, but the joy of every believer. I grant you that the men of science have their difficulties, as they usually have in what is above them; and I am afraid that we shall not be able to help them much. The truth is that the main, yea, only thing which lifts out of every difficulty, is confidence in God and in His word. Let us not essay to measure God by difficulties, but

measure difficulties by God. Alas! it is the last thing that man thinks of doing.

Another thing not a little remarkable is that on this occasion Joshua addresses not merely the sun (a bold enough thing to do, to bid the sun stand still), but the moon also. It was not that the moon could give any appreciable increase of light when the sun thus ruled the prolonged day. There must therefore have been some other and worthy motive why the moon should be joined along with the sun in Joshua's command, if, as I have not the slightest doubt, Joshua was guided by God in so singular an appeal to the sun and moon, when divine power was exerted to arrest the apparent course of the sun. We all know, of course, that it is the earth that moves; but Scripture does not speak in the technical language of science, which not only would have been unintelligible to those for whom it was intended, but unnatural in the ordinary language of the greatest philosophers. Sir Isaac Newton talked about the sun's rising and setting just as much as the simplest countryman, and quite right. The man who does otherwise has no common sense. Here then Joshua employed so far the only language proper to his purpose. But this does not explain his call to the moon. Not only was no knowledge then possessed by Jews or Gentiles, but one may doubt whether our men of science would have thought of it even now: at any rate one has never heard it from them. Yet, if there had not been an action of the power of God with regard to the moon as well as the sun, the whole course of nature must have been deranged. How could Joshua, or any Jew who wrote Scripture, have known this? There was no astronomic science for two thousand years afterwards

adequate to put the two things together; and mere observation of phenomena would certainly have been content with the light of the sun alone. But so it was. He whose power wrought in answer to the call guided his voice and the pen of the writer of the book. If there could have been an interference with the sun without the moon; if the moon's course had not been arrested as well as the earth's, so as to give this appearance to the sun, there would have been confusion in the system. It seems to me therefore that, so far from the sentence affording a just ground of cavil against God's word, it is none of the least striking instances of a wisdom and power incomparably above science. So faith will always find in Scripture.

But there is one remark more to be made. Whenever you hear men talking about science against Scripture, fear them not. There is not a man of them that will stand before you if you only cleave to the word of God. Do not dispute with them: there is no moral profit, in it, and seldom anything of value to be gained by it: on the contrary, one may have the spirit ruffled if we do not try others by it. But God's word is sharper than any two-edged sword, and can only be wielded aright by the Holy Ghost. And God will be with you if you trust in the perfectness of His word, and will deign to guide you if dependent on Him. Look the adversaries full in the face, and hear all they have to say to you; but confront them only with the written word of God. Cleave to the word in simplicity, and you will find that the difficulties urged against revelation are almost all due to wresting a passage out of its context. When they take this passage, they try to ridicule the voice of man telling the sun to stand still; whereas the moral truth is strikingly grand

and beautiful. These scoffers never think of his including the moon in his command, still less of its force, as already hinted.

I merely use the instance that comes before us in this passage; but you will find that the principle applies to every part of the word of God. Read it as a believer; read it not as one that doubts or that distrusts God; for you have known it, you have fed upon it, you have lived upon it, you have been blessed by it, you have been cheered in every sorrow by it, you have been brought into peace and joy by it, you have been delivered from all your fears by it, you have been set free from follies and sins by it, you have gazed on the glory of God in the face of Jesus by it. All this and more you have enjoyed thereby, and you have thus learnt by it, what science never teaches, because it never knows, the reality of God's grace and love in Christ; yea, you thus know God Himself. Am I not then entitled to say, beloved brethren, confide in that word in the smallest detail, in every difficulty, whatever arises? Take it, looking up to God, and He will be with you in all your need.

But what is the main purport of the wonder of that day? For there surely is no miracle without a divine or moral reason attached to it. I doubt that there is a mere display of power in the Bible. And here let me add a needed observation on the usual notion of a miracle. Men constantly lay it down that it means a suspension of the laws of nature. This is really defective and misleading. The laws of nature are never suspended as a rule; but God withdraws from the action of those laws either a thing or a person as to whom He wishes to show His special interest. For instance, to give an application of this by examples taken anywhere from the word of

God, when Peter was sustained upon the water, or when the iron was caused to swim, the laws of nature were not really suspended; they went on all the same. Everywhere else iron sunk, and had any other ventured to follow Peter, he must have failed to walk on the water. Thus it was no question at all of suspending the laws of nature. But Peter, by the direct power of God, was sustained, spite of those general laws. That is, he was exempted from their application; but the laws themselves were not suspended. Just so in the case of one raised from the dead before the day of Jehovah. There is no change in the reign of death as a law; but unequivocally the power of God interferes for the particular person that is exempted from the operation of those laws — nothing more; so that it is all a mistake to speak of the suspension of the laws themselves. This observation will be found to be of some use in meeting not a little sophistry that prevails on the subject.

But to what end was it that God interposed on this occasion? Why this singular intervention? It was the most wonderful sign of a manifest kind up to that moment of the direct interest of a God, who was not only the God of Israel, but evidently the Lord of the heavens as well as of all the earth; and this was exhibited on that day particularly for man here below, but more especially in behalf of Israel. And what makes it so much the more surprising was this: it was not wrought when Israel had walked without mistake. Grace was much more apparent than when they were crossing the Jordan. It was in an hour of need, after they had erred and been defeated before the little city of Ai; and it was done after they had been thoroughly deceived by the great city of Gibeon. It was evident therefore that the people of God had no

great might or depth of wisdom to boast of. They had been more than once at fault, but only so because they had not sought counsel of Jehovah. There is no enemy that can stand, and there is no defeat that can succeed, where the people of God wait in dependence on the Lord. But it is better to be defeated when we depart from the Lord, than it would be under such circumstances to gain a victory. If there could be victories gained at the expense of dependence on the Lord, I do not know that it is possible to conceive a greater snare. No, beloved brethren; far, far better to be broken, to suffer and be put in the dust, than to be allowed to triumph where we are really far from God and without His direction. The moral import of the wonder is thus plain; and God's part in it appears to me most wholesome, needed, and weighty instruction for the children of God now.

We are approaching the end of the chief lessons of the book as to the wars of Jehovah. The latter part of Joshua does not so much consist in that. The middle and end of this chapter (Joshua 10) lets us see the dealing of Joshua with the kings that were taken in the land, by which Joshua caused it to be felt that the victory was in Jehovah's name, who would completely put down the power of the world before His people. They might combine; but they must be broken if Israel looked to Jehovah. Stronghold, city, army, people, all fell before Joshua. "And all these kings and their land did Joshua take at one time, because the Jehovah God of Israel fought for Israel. And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal."

In the next chapter (Joshua 11) are some further matters on which a few words may suffice before noticing the

latter portion of the book. “And it came to pass, when Jabin king of Hazor had heard those things, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon, and to the king of Shimron, and to the king of Achshaph, and to the kings that were on the north of the mountains, and of the plains south of Chinneroth, and in the valley, and in the borders of Dor on the west, and to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and to the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite in the mountains, and to the Hivite under Hermon in the land of Mizpeh. And they went out, they and all their hosts with them, much people, even as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude, with horses and chariots very many. And when all these kings were met together, they came and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. And Jehovah said unto Joshua, be not afraid because of them: for to morrow about this time — “How gracious is Jehovah! He speaks to Joshua now, not merely Joshua to Him, and we have both. Do not overlook either; we have both. It is not only that we need to pray, but we have His word. And we need both.

Let none in his ignorance slight the word, nor think that, because His word is written, it is not Himself speaking to us. What difference does the writing make? What there is is in our favour. If we could have the Lord speaking directly to us, without His written word in a permanent shape, would we be gainers? No; but losers, unquestionably. And therefore it is that our Lord (in John 5) puts the Scripture, as a weapon to use with others, above His own words: this we all know familiarly. The Old Testament may not by any means enter so profoundly into the truth as the words of the Lord and His apostles; but the Old is just as much God’s word as

the New; one writer is just as much inspired as the other; still, though God made the heavens and the earth, it will be allowed, I presume, there is a great difference between them. And so it is, that though the words of the Old Testament are as truly divine as those of the New, it has pleased God in His later revelation to bring out deeper and more glorious things according to His own perfection, as declared in His Son, not merely in the measure in which man could bear it, as He was doing of old. Still the Lord Jesus, spite of all that difference, tells the incredulous, as must be well known to most of you, that He did not expect His words to convince where the Scripture was slighted. If they did not believe Moses' writings, how should they believe His words? Such is the way in which He treats unbelief as to Scripture.

I therefore use this fact the more readily, because many a simple soul might think what a delightful thing it would be to have the Lord saying now, "Go up tomorrow, and I will give thee the victory." But, beloved brethren, do not forget that although it may not come home to feeling, to nature, in so direct and explicit a manner, the possession of God's word, which we can weigh and consider, and pray over, and take up again and again before God, not only gives His mind and will with assurance, but with permanency to those who are apt, through carelessness, to lose its force. Who does not know that a word or letter may make a most important difference, easily let slip by negligent eyes and thoughts? God has provided against this in His written word. Whether it be prayer, in which they are encouraged to ask counsel of the Lord, or whether it be the Lord Himself anticipating their wants, both are true; but they are not true of them merely, but of us, and, as

we have seen, even more fully and definitely true of us. Let us not complain, as if we had not a God to count on to direct us by His word; and the less as He has given us His Spirit whereby we search all things, even His depths.

Here then He says to Joshua, “Be not afraid because of them: for tomorrow about this time will I deliver them up all slain before Israel: thou shalt trough their horses, and burn their chariots with fire. So Joshua came, and all the people of war with him, against them by the waters of Merom suddenly; and they fell upon them. And Jehovah delivered them into the hand of Israel, who smote them, and chased them unto great Zidon, and unto Misrephoth-maim, and unto the valley of Mizpeh eastward; and they smote them, until they left them none remaining. And Joshua did unto them as Jehovah bade him: he houghed their horses, and burnt their chariots with fire.”

It is well known that not a few have found a difficulty in these extreme measures of Joshua, as expressing Jehovah’s will. The exterminating severity with which the work was pursued in the land of Canaan shocks them. But they forget, or do not know, that these Canaanites were the most daring enemies against God, the most openly depraved and shameless on the face of the earth; not only morally the grossest, but this bound up most of all with idolatry of the most corrupt kind. They were the chief originators and patrons of unnatural crimes, which were as common as possible in their midst. If then God meant that the seed of Abraham should be His people in the land, how possibly could those who must be in evils moral and idolatrous the most infectious to Israel be tolerated there? I repeat,

they might have fled elsewhere if they did not repent of their iniquities. It had been long revealed that God meant to bring His people to Canaan. It was therefore their rebellious unbelief if they did not look for it; for God had long ago said it plainly. But then, as we are told in the book of Genesis, the cup of the Amorites was not yet full. If God was waiting for His people to go through the necessary discipline in bondage and sorrow, all that time Satan was working up the Amorites to their abominable excesses of evil. The cup of their iniquity was full when the divine dealings with Israel were sufficiently ripe for bringing His people in.

Again, it is evident that God has been pleased at various times to judge the world, as notably and on the largest scale at the time of the flood. If it was consistent with God Himself to deal with a corrupt earth, then surely He was equally free to employ the Israelites later as His instruments for the land He gave them.

Besides, it was accustoming Israel to feel, by that flagrant example, what iniquity, corruption, idolatry, rebellion were against God. Their having to do it was of moral importance for their souls and ways: sharp discipline; but what of the cause? If God so judged the Canaanites, would He spare Israel? There was the reflection it was intended to produce on their consciences. And God, as we know, was far more unhesitating in dealing with His own people when they yielded to any of these enormities. In point of fact their own ruin was largely due to the fact that the children of Israel failed to carry out the will of Jehovah as to the Canaanites, perhaps yielding to sloth and cowardice, to amiability in some cases, though, I have no doubt, far more frequently because they were not really up to His

mind in the matter. Thus they spared themselves far more than they spared the Amorites, and God was forgotten by them.

The moment you know the will of the Lord, leave all appearances with Him, who will take care of you. Do not you be afraid to do His will. You may be charged with harshness; you may be accounted as having no love. Do not you trouble about that; go on with what you know to be the will of God. He will vindicate your doing His will, though it may not be all at once. Faith has to be tested, and patience must have its perfect work.

Thus we find the Lord strengthening Joshua at this time to do His will to a very considerable extent. The chief cities were dealt with, and every creature that breathed was destroyed. “As Jehovah commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that Jehovah commanded Moses. So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same; even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings.”

They may plot and fight awhile, but cannot hinder; for they have to do with Jehovah, and not with Joshua only. “There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. For it was of Jehovah to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle.” Not that Jehovah made them that they should be

wicked, but it was of Jehovah that they, being wicked and indifferent to His will and warnings, should not now believe their danger — that they should be blindly daring at last to their own destruction. God never makes a person a sinner; but when men are wicked, and are following their own lusts or passions, He may close and seal their eyes to the folly of what they are doing and the danger they are incurring, and till their extermination becomes a moral necessity. But these races deserved to be an example before the Israelites arrived; it was no hardship, boldly as they disputed God's will, if they suffered in this new way. They deserved to suffer before they were led in this path in which they were devoted to death.

Justly therefore, "It was of Jehovah to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as Jehovah commanded Moses. And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities. There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza) in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained. So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that Jehovah said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war." So it will be in the day that is coming: there will be war and resistance then, but war in order to rest — the rest that remaineth to the people of God.

Then in Joshua 12 we have a catalogue of the various kings that they conquered, with their kingdoms, all given in detail. It is a retrospective glance at the victories which the people had won, and the natural close of this portion of the book. The rest of the book does not consist of the wars of Jehovah so much as of the details of plotting the several portions of the land which had been already gained. They had defeated some of the Canaanites, but still there were many of the accursed that were not yet dispossessed of the inheritance given by God to. Israel. On this I do not dwell, but merely refer to it. The important principles which lie beyond can only be brought out now in a cursory view.

Thus Joshua 12 is a summary of the conquests of Israel: first, those of Moses on the other side of Jordan (verses 2-6); next, those of Joshua on this side (verses 7-24). It will be noticed, however, that the kings are made prominent here. These were smitten if their people were not quite subdued, and their possessions became Israel's; nevertheless we must distinguish between title and actual entrance on it, as we shall see in the half of the book that follows.

To the believer it ought not to be a question whether Israel was justified in the conquest of Canaan; and the endeavours to soften the matter, whether by Jews or by Christians, are vain. It was righteous vengeance on earth, not wrath from heaven, still less grace reigning by righteousness as in the gospel. It is not well founded, if Scripture be our authority, that Joshua proposed flight or peace, with war as the unwilling alternative; nor is there any ground to suppose that the Canaanites would have been spared in case of surrender, whatever the

mercy to individuals exceptionally. The Canaanites were devoted, in the most stringent and solemn manner, to utter destruction. It was not vengeance on the part of Israel, but of God, who was pleased to make His people executors of judgment.

On the other hand, Deut. 32:8 should be weighed: “when the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.” God might have justly claimed all the world, but He was pleased to claim only the land of Canaan for the seed of Abraham. This is no Jewish fable, but the revealed will of God; and from the very call of Abraham it was certain that a land was to be distinctly given him — a land soon understood to be Canaan, however long the chosen people might have to wait for it. (See Gen. 15) Scripture therefore is very far from being silent on God’s resolve to take that land for Israel, though it was a part of His ways that their fathers should be pilgrims and strangers, while the Canaanite was then in the land.

Along with this would coalesce the moral necessity of judgment on its actual inhabitants. (Gen. 15:16) Natural right of course it was not, but a divine gift, to be made good by the extermination of the enemy. But for this very reason it is absurd to argue that the God of the Old Testament is the same in character and working as the God of the New, unless earthly righteousness be the same as heavenly grace. It is to play into the hands of infidels if theology countenance such an illusion as the denial of the difference of dispensation, on the pretence that the difference is in form only with an essential agreement: only we must bear in mind that the former is excellent in its season, the latter perfect for eternity.

Undoubtedly, ever since sin came into the world, God is its righteous judge and avenger. In this very land the destruction of the cities of the plain was a standing witness to it; so did Israel prove in the wilderness, as well as in the land, and this up to the destruction of their city by the Romans. But New Testament time is not necessarily New Testament principle; nor is providential government in the world to be confounded with the principles of Christianity; nor temporal judgment with that of the secrets of the heart, the issue of which is the lake of fire.

But every Christian must feel that Jehovah was thoroughly justified in visiting their iniquity upon the Canaanites; for indeed the land, according to the energetic language of Scripture, could not but vomit out its inhabitants because of their abominable idolatries and their unnatural crimes almost unspeakable. They had many warnings also, both in the judgment executed on the most notorious in the land at the beginning of God's ways with the fathers, and then again at the end when the children were brought out of Egypt and through the wilderness, with such wonders as did speak to their consciences, however they might brave all at the last.

But it is ridiculous to contend that the practical principle of the gospel, suffering for righteousness and for Christ's sake, is not in direct contrast with the calling of the Israelite, the appointed executor of divine wrath. The Christian ought to know better than either to question the propriety of the past, or to assimilate it with the present. He ought to know also that the Lord Jesus is Himself coming again, and this not more surely in grace to take us to be with Himself in the Father's

house, than to appear in judgment of His adversaries, let them be Jews or heathen, or falsely professing Christians; for God is about to judge the habitable world by that man whom He has raised from the dead, even Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is the confusion of the two distinct principles which does the mischief: for Christians in making them worldly-minded; for unbelievers in affording material for their unseemly scoffs. He who holds both without confusion alone adheres to the truth intelligently, and affords no countenance to the infidel, while he maintains his own proper separation from the world unto Christ. There are judgments yet to be inflicted, but upon apostate Christendom, and even apostate Judaism. Never will the church have in her hand a two-edged sword to execute vengeance on the heathen. This is an honour reserved for all Jewish saints (Psalm 149:6), not for Christians. We shall be at that time glorified. The only vengeance which the church can rightly execute is of a spiritual kind. (2 Cor. 7; Eph. 6) It is the sheerest confusion to pervert such intimations as these into the work of the gospel, and to interpret them of destroying men's condition as heathen by the sword of the Spirit, and turning their antagonistic into a friendly position. God has made it as clear as light in His word that there is to be an outpouring, first of providential judgments, ending with the ruin of Babylon, next of the Lord's own intervention in vengeance at the close of the present dispensation and the introduction of His reign of peace for a thousand years. But all this is as distinct from the ways of the gospel as from the state of things in eternity.

It is curious also to notice how modern Rabbinism approaches in this to modern theology. They do not hold

the execution of divine vengeance in its plain and natural sense at the end of this age. They both soften down, the one for the Jew, the other for Christendom, the solemn threats of God into a sort of moral suasion — a conquest to be effected not by external violence, but by the exhibition of truth and righteousness putting to shame the adherents of falsehood and corruption. Alas! it is not only with sneering infidels we have to do, but with real but half-hearted and wholly unintelligent believers who have ceased to be, or even understand, a true witness in the church for Christ, rejected in the world, but glorified on high. Hence they court and value worldly influence themselves, instead of maintaining our true place as a chaste virgin espoused to Christ, above the world through which we pass, and cast out by it, till we are caught up to meet the Lord, and He appears for its judgment.

In Joshua 13 Jehovah says to Joshua, “Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.” He was jealous for His servant, and rouses him to the fulfilment of his commission. For the Israelites had been slothful; they were slow to act upon the full grant of Jehovah They would have rested when they had acquired enough to sustain themselves; but not such is the mind of God for us any more than for them. He will have us care for the things of others, yea, for the things which are Jesus Christ’s; for indeed all things are ours, and the more we make them our own in the power of the faith, the more is:He glorified and the church blessed. For there is no better way to help on another saint than to win upon Satan and make progress ourselves.

Hence the land that remained is set out in detail: “All the borders of the Philistines, and all Geshuri, from Sihor, which is before Egypt, even unto the borders of Ekron northward, which is counted to the Canaanite: five lords of the Philistines; the Gazathites, and the Ashdothites, the Eshkalonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites: from the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that is beside the Sidonians, unto Aphek, to the borders of the Amorites: and the land of the Giblites, and all Lebanon, toward the sunrising, from Baal-gad under mount Hermon unto the entering into Hamath. All the inhabitants of the hill country from Lebanon unto Misrephoth-maim, and all the Sidonians, them will I drive out from before the children of Israel: only divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee. Now therefore divide this land for an inheritance unto the nine tribes, and the half tribe of Manasseh.” Thus Joshua is commanded to divide by lot even what was not yet wrested from the hands of the inhabitants. What an encouragement to advance without fear! Is not Jehovah worthy of trust? Nevertheless He will have His people to fight for Canaan; not for redemption from Egypt, but for their inheritance in the promised land — to fight as those who are dead and risen with Christ, blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Him. And most minutely does Jehovah point out the borders of what He was giving them, and the enemies who must be-dispossessed of their present hold, even as He deigns to mark out precisely what the two tribes and a half had already acquired under Moses, though it was short of the proper inheritance of His people.

We may note also how repeatedly, even in this chapter, attention is drawn to the tribe of Levi as without any such portion by the will of God. (Verses 14-33) To the Levites was given no inheritance in the land. The sacrifices of Jehovah God of Israel made by fire, yea, Jehovah Himself, was their inheritance, as He said unto them. The workmen of the Lord stood on a different footing from the rest of His people, and were called to special confidence in His provision for them and His word about them. If they failed in this, could they wonder that their words had little power?

In Joshua 14 we find Eleazar and Joshua, with the heads and the fathers of the tribes, distributing the lands by lot in the land of Canaan. The first who comes before us is Caleb with the children of Judah, who reminds Joshua of what Jehovah had said unto Moses concerning both in Kadesh-barnea. According to his faith so was his strength now, though forty-five years were added to the forty; and in his confidence, still as simple-hearted as ever, he asks for the mountain to be given him of which Jehovah spoke in that day. “For thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be Jehovah will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as Jehovah said. And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance.” Caleb is the striking witness to us of one who was strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, here for conflict (compare Eph. 6:10-12), as before for patient endurance in the wilderness. (Col. 1:12) Nor do the words, “if so be Jehovah will be with me,” etc., imply the least doubt of His presence and succour in making God his hope, but a pious and becoming expression of his own distrust of

self. Again, there was no covetousness in this, but confidence in the Lord, which made him the more value what He had promised. We cannot too much have our mind on the things above: to this Caleb's request answers for us. And this becomes the more evident, when we remember that the dreaded sons of Anak were there with their great fenced cities, in the face of which Caleb had to wrest it out of their hands, as, on the other hand, the city itself was afterwards assigned to the Levites. Caleb indeed was a lowly, or, rather, faithful man; and, though fearless, it was for peace he fought, not for love of war. "And the land had rest from war," says the Spirit at this point. Indeed it was the lack of faith that prolonged the need of fighting so long; otherwise the people had soon taken possession of what God gave them, and the enemy had vanished away before the people leaning on Him.

In chapter 15 we have not the tribe of Reuben, but that of the children of Judah's lot for themselves, a very considerable one indeed, independent of the special portion of Caleb, as traced in the last chapter, from the Dead Sea to the river of Egypt, to Jerusalem on the north, and the Mediterranean on the west. This, however, was modified by the introduction of Simeon afterwards, as we shall see. But here again Caleb is introduced, as he had a part among the children of Judah, with details of his generosity to his daughter Achsah, whom he gave to Othniel. Thus early does the lot of Jehovah give the first place to the royal tribe, according to divine purpose and the prediction of Jacob. Grace makes a difference.

In Joshua 16 we have the lot of the children of Joseph, that is, of Ephraim, and the half-tribe of Manasseh

(compare Gen. 48 end). They receive, in consonance with the fruitfulness of their father, the centre of Canaan from Jordan to the Mediterranean. But here we find even greater failure than at the close of chapter 15. For as it is said, the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites to this day, as was said of the Jebusites or inhabitants of Jerusalem. There was this great difference, however, that the children of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites, but the Canaanites dwell among the Ephraimites to this day, and serve under tribute. Josephus is wrong in his way of putting the case; for he says the Benjamites, to whom belonged Jerusalem, permitted its inhabitants to pay tribute, and that the rest of the tribes, imitating Benjamin, did the same. Scripture discriminates. The men of Judah could not drive out all, the men of Ephraim did not; and these latter turned their remissness into a source of gain.

So following up this naturally, in Joshua 17 we have a lot for Manasseh, the first-born son of Joseph, and once more the case of the daughters of Zelophehad among the rest. Yet the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of their cities, but the Canaanites willed to dwell in that land. (Ver. 12) Had Manasseh looked to God the obstinacy of the Canaanites would have proved a slight defence. “And it came to pass, when the Israelites were waxing strong, they put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out.” They suited their own convenience, without care for the word of the Lord. The unfaithful are apt to complain, as the children of Joseph did to Joshua, as we learn from verse 14: “Why hast thou given me one lot and one portion to inherit, seeing I am a great people, forasmuch as Jehovah hath blessed me hitherto?” Joshua

answered them on their own ground. If a great people, why not get up to the wood, and cut down for themselves? On their rejoining that the hill was not enough, and all the Canaanites of the valleys had chariots of iron, Joshua repeats his word to Ephraim and Manasseh: “Thou art a great people, and hast great power: thou shalt not have one lot only: but the mountain shall be thine.” He does not swerve from nor add to his former decision; still less would he humour their vaunting pusillanimity or their sluggishness.

Joshua 18 shows us the whole congregation assembled together at Shiloh, and the tabernacle set up there. Now that five of the tribes had entered on their portions, seven remained to receive their inheritance. What a picture of lack of energy, in spite of the visible tokens of God’s presence, to go forward against the Canaanites, according to His word, yea, command! The very fact that the land was subdued became a snare. It was not otherwise even with the apostles, not to speak of the church in apostolic days. “O faithless generation! how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?” said the Lord, aggrieved with their unbelief, not their mere weakness or the power of the adversary. He is superior to every need, to every demand; but what can, what must, be the result, if His own people avail themselves not of His presence and love and power?

His servant makes a fresh appeal, and takes measures suitable to the occasion. “And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the Jehovah God of your fathers hath given you? Give out from among you three men for each tribe: and I will send them, and they shall rise, and go through the land, and describe it according to the

inheritance of them; and they shall come again to me. And they shall divide into seven parts; Judah shall abide in their coast on the south, and the house of Joseph shall abide in their coasts on the north. Ye shall therefore describe the land into seven parts, and bring the description hither to me, that I may cast lots for you here before Jehovah our God. But the Levites have no part among you; for the priesthood of Jehovah is their inheritance: and Gad, and Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh, have received their inheritance beyond Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of Jehovah gave them." He would both rouse the people to feel what they ought to possess, and keep up before them in the way best adapted to their state that the whole disposing of the lot is of Jehovah. The separate position of those who served the sanctuary is carefully maintained: a striking testimony in the midst of the earthly people.

And so it was done. This Domesday-book was made according to their survey and description (ver. 8, 9): "And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before Jehovah: and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions."

Benjamin's lot is next described, borders and land and cities, to the end of the chapter. (Verses 11-28)

The second lot came forth to Simeon; and this is described similarly in the beginning of Joshua 19:1-8, with the added statement that it was out of the portion of Judah Simeon's inheritance was taken, the part of the former being too much for them: and therefore the latter had their portion within their part. (Ver. 9)

The third lot fell to the children of Zebulun, according to their families; their landmarks are laid down in verses 10-16.

In the fourth place comes Issachar's allotment, described in verses 17-23; in the fifth, Asher's, in verses 24-31; in the sixth, that of Naphtali, in verses 32-39; and in the seventh; Dan's, in verses 40-48.

Beautifully is it shown (ver. 49-50) that "when they had made an end of dividing the land for inheritance by their coasts, the children of Israel gave an inheritance to Joshua the son of Nun among them." Nor is this all: "According to the word of Jehovah they gave him the city which he asked, even Timnath-serah in mount Ephraim: and he built the city, and dwelt therein." Self-seeking was not in Joshua more than in Moses. Each had his part in what was given to their leader — Jehovah's word, Joshua's petition, and Israel's gift: but not till they had ended their dividing of the land.

In Joshua 20 we have for the last time the cities of refuge, of which we heard repeatedly in the books of Moses; and my mind has no doubt that the introduction of their appointment here connects itself with the scope of Joshua. It is the shadow of God's provision for His people after they shall have lost the land of their inheritance through blood-guiltiness, unwittingly and without hatred as grace will make good account in the godly remnant by and by, when apostates and rebels perish in their sin. "And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among

them. And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled." It is at the end of the age that the return of the slayer takes place — at "the death of the high priest that shall be in those days." The dew returns, when Christ closes that intercessional priesthood which He is now carrying on within the veil for us. As long as He is now in heaven, pleading as the true "great priest" over the house of God, the manslayer abides outside his possession; but when it comes to an end, Israel, the "all Israel" of that day, will be restored as well as saved.

Joshua 21 gives the list of the forty-eight Levitical cities, with their suburbs, including the six cities of refuge just spoken of. "And Jehovah gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And Jehovah gave them rest round about; according to all that he sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; Jehovah delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which Jehovah had spoken,unto the house of Israel; all had come to pass." (Verses 43-45)

The two tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh are then called and blessed and sent away by Joshua in Joshua 22. On their return to their possessions beyond Jordan they built an altar by Jordan, "a great altar to see to." The report of this altar at once roused

the whole congregation of the children of Israel, who gathered together at Shiloh. Before proceeding to war however, they sent Phinehas, and with him ten princes representing the other tribes, who taxed them with their trespass against the God of Israel in rebelling against Jehovah As yet they realized the solidarity of Israel and the honour of Him who dwelt in their midst, and urged on their brethren's consciences the iniquity of Peor and the sin of Achan, offering them room on this side of Jordan, if their land were unclean. To this the two and a half tribes called the God of Israel to witness how far from iniquity or rebellion it was that they had built the altar, for it was with no thought of offering upon it in independence of God's altar, but lest their children should cease from fearing Jehovah: "A witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of Jehovah before him with our burnt-offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace-offerings; that your children may not say to our children in time to come, Ye have no part in Jehovah." This appeased the rising wrath of their brethren, who owned themselves delivered from the hand of Jehovah for the trespass they had dreaded. Whether it was not an invention of man — in divine things always dangerous, as being a substitute for faith in God and His memorials — is another question.

In Joshua 23 Joshua calls for all Israel, their elders, heads, judges, and officers, and lays before them what Jehovah had done and would do for them if faithful, warning them against affinity or religious fellowship with the Canaanite: else Israel must perish — not their enemies — from off the good land He had given them.

The final charge of Joshua follows in Joshua 24, where we learn the striking fact, never told us before, that their fathers were idolaters, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor, on the other side of the river (i.e. the Euphrates) when Jehovah took Abraham as the root of promise, and began that line whence they were born. His deliverance of the people from Egypt, care through the wilderness, and gift of the land, are next recounted, all of His grace; on which Joshua challenges them and their allegiance, to which the people answer, owning His mercy, and repudiating all other gods. But Joshua lets them know their insufficiency (ver. 19, 20) and danger, which draws out their resolve to serve Jehovah repeated again and again in various forms. A covenant was made that day, and Joshua wrote the words in the book of the law, and set up a great stone in witness, lest they should deny their God. Then the people departed, and Joshua died; but the people served all the days of the elders that prolonged their days after Joshua.

Joseph's bones too were buried in Shechem, in the ground bought by Jacob of the son of Hamor, the father of Shechem, naturally mentioned with the death of Joshua in mount Ephraim as well as that of Eleazar, Aaron's son, buried in a hill of Phinehas his son, which was given him in the same mountain. Joshua brought the people into the land, as Moses led them out of Egypt, in accordance with the faith of Joseph. But a greater than all will give a deeper meaning in His day.

Stephen the Christian Proto-Martyr - Acts 6

I trust it may be of profit as well as interest to look a little into the inspired account of so blessed a saint. This closes the first phase of the church, confined to Jerusalem. Philip's work opens the second, when the word of grace goes to the Samaritans and farther still. The Gentiles are to hear through (not only the great apostle of uncircumcision, and the mission of Peter too, but) the free action of the Spirit in such of those scattered by the persecution as evangelised the Greeks also in Antioch.

Acts 5 attests power in every form: the Holy Spirit that indwelt the church avenging by Peter hypocritical deceit within, followed by blessing inward and outward; unseen power delivering the injured apostles from the world's persecution; and power over men's hearts as in Gamaliel's intervention.

Increase of numbers was followed by internal weakness: the waning of love, and the rise of jealousy, were it only fed by so slight a difference as that which divided the home-bred Jews from those who freely used the Greek language and the Greek version of the scriptures, the Septuagint. "There arose a murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily ministration. And the twelve, having called the multitude unto them, said, It is not proper (or, pleasing) that we, forsaking the word of God, should serve tables. Look out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men attested, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we will set over this business; but we will

persevere in prayer and the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and, having prayed, they laid [their] hands on them" (Acts 6:1-6).

The daily ministration of food1 grew out of that singular and touching fruit of the Spirit produced among the saints since the day of His descent at Pentecost. For all that believed were together and had all things common, selling their possessions and substance for distribution to all, according as any might have need; and this in pure grace, not by requirement. To carry out the duty holily and efficiently needed time and judgment as well as diligence and wisdom, especially as the sphere extended daily. The apostle justly felt that it was not for them to curtail the claim of prayer and the ministry of the word. Hence men of God, not set in their place, might profitably devote themselves to this labour of faith and working by love, without which nothing can go well, even for external things.

Here we have to remark the wisdom with which the apostles ruled. They did not choose the seven men of attested fitness for the work. They bade the multitude of their brethren to look out such men, full of the Spirit and wisdom. Yet they gave it an official stamp which neither the whole multitude, nor any individuals but themselves could confer, as acting for the Lord, the source of their own apostolic authority. For the apostle was in the highest degree, not only a gift from the ascended Christ, but an authority called to confer it also in His name. "The seven" were no immediate gift from

the Head to the church, like evangelists or pastors and teachers (Eph. 4). They had a charge needing appointment by the due authority; and so the apostles established them in their place of administration which concerned earthly wants, and lent them solemn ground of responsibility in the eyes of all as well as their own. But the multitude of the disciples chose them.

It was not so in the case of elders or presbyters, as we learn from Acts 14:23; where the apostles Paul and Barnabas are said to have “chosen” (compare Acts 10:41; 2 Cor. 8:19) elders for the disciples in each assembly. Accordingly, when the apostle left Titus in Crete to act for him in his absence as an apostolic delegate, he directs him to set or establish elders or bishops in every city as he gave him charge. In other words, the apostles directly or indirectly chose and set the elders in their places. The multitude did not act. Elders were chosen for them, and established by apostolic authority.

There was nothing arbitrary nor inconsistent, but a divine principle in each case. It was the multitude which gave the funds for the public distribution. To all therefore was given a voice in the selection of acceptable ministrants. This in no way applies to elders. Theirs is a question of spiritual, moral, and even circumstantial qualities fitting them to preside or rule. Hence for choosing right men a nicety of discernment was requisite, which was far beyond the saints generally, and, if we bow to scripture, reserved to an apostle or his delegate. Gifts (δόματα) were given directly by the Lord: whether those that laid the foundation, as apostles and prophets; or those that build on that foundation, as evangelists, pastors and teachers, who needed no such

apostolic establishment as the local charge of “the seven” or that of the elders.

Though “the seven,” for an office peculiar to the state of things then existing in Jerusalem, are not called “deacons,” their work was generally analogous to that which was designated by the latter term, when the peculiarity vanished. The deacon was the regular title for those charged with the duties of external service; and so appropriately styled. If grace for such a work is overlooked, the diaconate degenerates into a mere demand for business tact to the dishonour of God in the church, helping on the descent to the world’s level.

The word of God, with the prayer which drew down application in power and unction, was the fitting work of the apostles. Men might beat and threaten worse; but it was in vain to forbid or oppose their speaking in the name of Jesus, seeing they were witnesses that God raised up and exalted by His right hand Him whom the Jews by instigation of the priests slew by hanging on a tree: God must be obeyed rather than men. “They therefore went their way from the council’s presence, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonoured for the Name: and every day in the temple and at home they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus [as] the Christ” (Acts 5:41, 42).

But remembrance of the poor saints is precious in the Lord’s sight; and it was wise and gracious to cut off occasion from those that murmured. The twelve, like Paul later, were as the rule averse from meddling with money, and only touched it under strict provisos that the ministry might not be blamed. But what do we see here? If Hebrews of course in Jerusalem preponderated over

Hellenists, it is notable that the names of all “the seven” whom the multitude chose, and the apostles appointed with prayer and hands laid on them, seem Hellenistic. If they were not Hebrews (for we know that Andrew and Philip among the apostles were not Hellenists), it was grace abounding practically, not man’s way of prudent compromise. Now grace inspires confidence as it expels suspicion. Grace indeed is to the Christian and the church what law ought to have been to Israel. But the heavenly people no less than the earthly forgot their calling; and judgment will surely be executed on the evil at His coming who is to be exalted with His own in heaven and on earth. Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come; it will not tarry.

The appointment was followed by marked blessing on the word of God, so that the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was very greatly multiplied; and a new evidence appeared of which nothing was said till now: “a great crowd of the priests obeyed the faith.” We should not be justified in inferring that they as yet in the least suspended their sacerdotal duties in the temple, but rather that the truth gave them more zeal and conscientiousness in their discharge. It was at a comparatively late day, and in fact only a little before the destruction of Jerusalem that they received the call to go forth unto Jesus without the camp, bearing His reproach, and possessed of no abiding city here, but seeking the one to come. How little they yet realized that this one sacrifice for sins now supersedes, because it more than fulfils, all sacrifices!

Another fact of immense moment came to view. “Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people.” That divine

energy had nothing whatever to do with his being one of "the seven," for this was simply and solely to serve tables and care for the widows, etc. But as hitherto many wonders and signs were wrought by the hands of the apostles (Acts 2:43, Acts 5:12), so now did Stephen in Jerusalem and Philip afterwards in Samaria (Acts 6:8, Acts 8:6, 7). Yet we have no ground to suppose that so it was with the other five. In neither Stephen nor Philip had this divine energy to do with their duty as official curators, but with the teaching of the one, and with the preaching of the other who is elsewhere described as "Philip the evangelist" (Acts 21:8), which is not said of Stephen greatly gifted as he was. But his power in wielding God's word was great, and roused the determined opposition of others, as it must in such a world as this, where His word pierces the conscience.

And there rose up certain of those of the synagogue that was called of freedmen, and of Cyrenians, and of Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke." Power is not noisy or vainglorious, but makes itself or rather God and the truth felt, which the devotees of form and tradition cannot endure. Hence their animosity has recourse to the basest means as here. "Then they suborned men saying, We have heard him speaking blasphemous words against Moses and God; and they roused the people and the elders and the scribes. And coming upon him they seized and brought him unto the council, and set false witnesses saying, This man ceaseth not speaking words against the holy place and the law. For we have heard him saying, This Jesus the Nazarene shall destroy this place, and shall change the

customs which Moses delivered to us. And all that sat in the council, gazing on him, saw his face as an angel's face" (Acts 6:9-15).

Clearly the spiritual activity of Stephen in Jerusalem, as of Philip outside, was wholly distinct from their official functions: so much so, that it appears to be the express aim in these chapters to intimate this very working of the Spirit in power and liberty, that all saints might know the rights of the Lord Jesus, and God's mind for their guidance. They each had received a gift from Him, as all gifts come, and were bound to exercise it to His glory. Unbelief, regarding Him as a hard man is afraid, goes away, and hides the talent in the earth; whereas the man of faith knows Him to be a good and faithful Lord, becomes a good and faithful bondman, and gains for His pleasure in the measure of his own grace and fidelity. Such is the principle of all Christian ministry. It is the exercise of a gift, confiding in the Lord's goodness and zealous for His will and honour; and such as are faithful over a few things, as Stephen and Philip, shall surely have His gracious recognition in that day (His day), be set over many things, and enter into the joy of their Lord. Office in due order, to which competent authority alone can validly appoint, is quite another thing, and from its nature is a local charge. But gift from the ascended Lord has no such restriction, as scripture amply proves; and so even the parable implies in its manner, under the figure of going and trafficking or gaining by trade with the talents entrusted by Him.

It was a principle of marvellous value not only then but for any time among Christians, that the Lord so wrought directly and placed His servant so wrought on in immediate dependence on Himself by the agency of the

Holy Spirit. The fact that all the apostles were there, and that they had appointed “the seven” to an honourable office, only gave the greater effect to the Lord’s giving to at least two of them a gift not given (it seems) to the other five, who were ministers of the tables, as two were also of the word.

“There are distinctions of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are distinctions of services, and the same Lord; and there are distinctions of operations, but the same God that worketh all in all. But to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for profit. For to one through the Spirit is given a word of wisdom; and to another a word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; and to a different one faith, in the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healing, in the same Spirit; and to another Working of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discerning of spirits; and to a different one kinds of tongues; and to another interpretation of tongues. But all these things worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each in particular according as he pleaseth” (1 Cor. 12:4-11).

Christendom looks to form and office, and overlooks the living power of the Lord Jesus, which thus wrought then as He works now, seeing that He is alive again for evermore. And. it is written that we may believe and obey: for the Spirit who is the agent of power was sent forth to abide for ever; and He is faithful to His work in thus glorifying Christ.

It would seem from the false accusation that Stephen was led of God beyond even the apostles in seeing and following the power of the Christian testimony. He may have profited by the Lord’s prophecy on Olivet beyond

the four who heard, or by other kindred discourses of our Lord, which no doubt in some way percolated among the faithful and convinced him that the temple was doomed to fall, and the Jews to suffer a still wider dispersion than to Babylon. This might readily give occasion to a charge of blasphemy; and the allusion in chap. 7 to the prophet's words confirms it. All proves that he was a teacher of marked intelligence and power.

The Appeal: Abraham

Acts 7:1-8

It is notable how mild was the challenge of the high-priest. He like the rest seems for the moment overawed by the radiance that shone in Stephen's face. It could not but have reminded them of Moses at a critical point in Israel's history as well as of his own; and now he was accused of speaking against Moses, the sanctuary, and the law, yea of threatening the temple's destruction.

"And the high-priest said, Are these things so? And he said,2 Brethren and fathers, hearken. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he, was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, Go out of thy land and out of thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then going out of the land of the Chaldeans he dwelt in Haran; and thence, after his father died, he removed him into this land in which ye now dwell. And he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot-plant; and he promised to give it him for a possession, and to his seed after him when he had no child. And God spoke thus, that his seed should be a sojourner in a strange land, and they shall enslave them, and entreat [them] evil four hundred years. And the nation to which they shall be slaves will I judge, said

God; and after these things they shall come out and serve me in this place. And he gave him a covenant of circumcision; and thus he begat Isaac and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob, the twelve patriarchs" (vers. 1-8).

It might seem astonishing (if we did not know from God what the heart is) that so many men of ability and learning have failed to apprehend the admirable power and nice relevancy of Stephen's answer. But evidently the inspiring Spirit attached to it signal importance, as shown in more space devoted to it than to any other in the book of the Acts. Its force as an appeal to Jewish conscience assembled in council, sealed in Stephen's blood, is another though awful proof of its cogency. Had it consisted of, or only contained the "demonstrable errors" which some have dared to impute, it must have fallen at once through its own impotence under men's contempt. Not so; it was the energy of indisputable truth which pierced through forms to their hard hearts; as it roused their indignation to white heat, when their own sad history of unbelief, disobedience, and opposition to God was proved from holy writ to be as applicable to their present state as it had been to their forefathers in early days.

"The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia. What unanswerable evidence of sovereign grace! To overlook it springs from a wicked heart of incredulity in turning away from a living God, and hardens the soul in self-sufficiency, so that His voice is distasteful, disliked, and dreaded. Yet had they not often heard and read Joshua's testimony (Joshua 24:2, 3)? "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, our fathers dwelt of old time beyond the river, Terah father of

Abraham and father of Nahor; and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from beyond the river, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac." Assuredly it was not Stephen who slighted Jehovah's call of him who was to be dignified pre-eminently as "the friend of God." It was many centuries before the law, far away from Canaan, expressly before he dwelt in Haran; it was in Mesopotamia, infamous as the mother of idolatries, and the prison to which idolatrous Judah was sent, judicially, captive, for that sin.

Nothing can be conceived finer than the exact discrimination given to this holy man of God in beginning with Abraham. He first was not only chosen by grace, but called out of open departure from the true God, from country and kin devoted to other gods, to be the head of a family, and at length a people, whether in flesh like Israel, or (when Israel lost place for a while by apostasy) by believers spiritually as now separated to God for Himself, His own peculiarly. It was first outward, first what was natural, not spiritual which only came to light when the Jews rejected their own Messiah. The principle was plain in Abraham, though even in his case darkened and delayed by yielding to human feeling. For though he went out of his land, he did not get out of his kin, but dwelt with his father in Haran till Terah died. Then only God removed him into the land in which the Jews gloried as their dwelling.

It was not so with Abraham. He was a pilgrim and stranger in Canaan; and this by divine design: so far was Jewish boast from God's mind which Abraham enjoyed by faith. Faith brought him out of the land of the Chaldeans; but how in Canaan? "By faith he became a

sojourner in the land of promise as not in his own [land]; for he looked for the city which hath the foundations" (Heb. 11:8-10). The Jews, like unbelievers at all times, are on the ground, not of faith but of tradition and external privilege. But the God of glory gave Abraham no inheritance in it, not even a foot-plant, and He promised to give it him for a possession, and to his seed after him when he had no child. Abraham thus lived on promise and walked by faith, not by sight. This has its highest form and power in Christianity; and its opposite is in Judaism as then, especially in such as hated Stephen.

How strange that any Christian should be so dull as not to perceive that this very exordium is brimful of what exposes the Jewish antagonists of fighting against their own scriptures and the God who sent the Lord Jesus in their hatred of the gospel testimony! We shall see that all the statements which the chapter records follow up the same yet ever-growing evidence urged on their hearts, if peradventure they might hear and live. But none are so impervious as those who rest on an ancestral religion with godly men in the line, who suffered in their day for their living faith from those who had not faith, the predecessors of those who resist the truth today.

"And God spoke thus, that his seed should be a sojourner in a strange land, and they shall enslave and entreat [them] evil four hundred years. And the nation to which they shall be slaves will I judge, said, God. And after these things they shall come out, and serve me in this place." At no time was there a more conspicuous proof of God's interest in them, than during those centuries, and the time of deliverance studded with miracles and

still more glowing prophecies which followed: a time in every way striking both in Egypt and in the wilderness, but entirely apart from establishment in the land of promise. Never was there a more awful display of His displeasure and of blows in His wrath which befell their oppressors. Never was there a more wonderful witness in the past of His adoption of Israel as His own people, redeemed from the world's bondage, and its then mightiest and proudest monarch. When was a people like Israel carried through the desert by His own constant presence and faithful care, spite of as constant refractoriness even to rebellion on their part, kept as they were solely by Him with not a merit or a resource of theirs?

As His mouth had threatened judgments on injurious enslavers, so did His hand perform in due season. And this dealing of Jehovah the God of Israel fills the Law, and the Psalms, and the Prophets, which predict yet greater glories to come when they own not only their idolatrous evil but the still more heinous one of rejecting their own Messiah. Could any line of argument more lay bare the character of Jewish opposition to Stephen, or more powerfully support his testimony? For "this place" where they were to do Jehovah religious service in Acts 7:7 was as different as possible from "this holy place" or "this place" in Acts 6:13, 14. The one had the magnificence of "great stones and costly," and the splendour of gold and rich array; the other, the awe-inspiring and evident display of divine majesty in the true God proclaiming His law to His people in the wilderness of Sinai. Was the sublimity greater in Jerusalem or the temple from which the glory has departed? "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

Men are apt to boast when they have least ground for it, nay, every true reason for humiliation; and this was Stephen's plea.

Another word is added in ver. 8, the pertinence of which one could not expect to be felt by those who only see the surface of scripture. "And He gave him a covenant of circumcision; and thus he begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob, the twelve patriarchs." God after the deluge had established His covenant with Noah and with his seed after him; "and with every living soul that [is] with you, of bird, of cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that go out of the ark — every beast of the earth;" henceforth, no flood is to destroy the earth. Of this everlasting covenant God set His bow in the clouds (Gen. 9) as sign. It was God's covenant with nature, and as permanent as nature itself for an earth inaugurated by sacrifice (Gen. 8). But the covenant with Abraham, of which circumcision was the sign, had a far deeper significance.

Important as God's institution of government was for man on the earth, the foundation of a stock in Abraham, separated from demon worship to the one true God, the Almighty, to he their God in their generations for an everlasting covenant, was incomparably more so. But even this was far from the narrowness to which Judaism reduced it; for if the covenant of circumcision was with Abraham, he should be father of a multitude of nations, and kings should come out of him. Hence its sign was not to be in the clouds for every eye to see, but in the flesh, with which it dealt war to the knife, proclaiming death on it as unclean; not merely purity demanded, but death in figure of Christ's death for His own, naturally

as unclean and ungodly as others. It was not of Moses but of the fathers, as the Lord told the Jews (John 7:22), proud of the law which none of them really kept, as thus too all came under its curse. But as a shadow, whereof Christ was the substance, it was most instructive, as the confession of flesh cut off unsparingly to be God's people, instead of the vain endeavour to ameliorate it by ordinance, morality, or philosophy.

With Abraham therefore circumcision began and was to be perpetuated in his seed after the flesh, and even with any stranger born in their house, the imperative sign of Jehovah's covenant in his flesh. But the Christian enjoys it in the better way of the spirit, circumcised with circumcision not done by hand, in the putting off of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of the Christ (Col. 2:11). Here we are carefully told that "thus he (Abraham) begot Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day" (the day of resurrection and its glory according to that new estate for the believer according to the counsels of grace). In Gen. 15 he believed God, who reckoned it to him for (or, as) righteousness; he had been called out, and obeyed the call, as separated to Jehovah, both in uncircumcision. But it was after his circumcision, and in the full order of the covenant that he "thus begot Isaac and circumcised him the eighth day." So it went on henceforth regularly in the line: and Isaac [begot] Jacob; and Jacob the twelve patriarchs. It was a privilege conferred on strangers, on slaves; though so requisite for every male in Israel that he who neglected it was to be cut off from his peoples for his breach of the covenant. Who best maintained its spirit — Stephen, or his adversaries? Who can intelligently aver that Stephen beat the air in this brief outline? Great

men are not always wise, indeed never so, when they judge scripture.

Joseph And His Patriarchal Brethren.

Acts 7:9-16.

At this point the defence carries us on to the first of two signal types of our Lord, which yield overwhelming evidence to every true heart and exercised conscience.

“And the patriarchs, envying Joseph, sold him into Egypt. And God was with him, and delivered him out of all his tribulations, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he appointed him chief over Egypt and all his house. But a famine came upon all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and great distress; and our fathers found no food. But Jacob, having heard of there being corn in Egypt, sent out our fathers first; and at the second [time] Joseph was made known to his brethren, and the family of Joseph became known to Pharaoh. And Joseph sent and called down to him his father Jacob, and all [his] kindred, seventy-five souls. And Jacob went down into Egypt and died, he and our fathers, and were carried over to Sychem (Shechem), and laid in the sepulchre which Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Emmor of (or rather, in) Sychem” (vers, 9-16).

Here it is no question of unclean Canaanites or oppressive Egyptians, nor is it the failure of a saint through amiable feeling, or the pinch of want. The heads of the tribes of Israel betray their evil state from the first. Nor was there any just ground of provocation, but insubjection to the father, hatred of their godly brother, and rebellion against the mind of God. They envied

Joseph and, even when they gave up their deadly purpose, sold him away into Egypt. Pride of position hates the faith that rebukes it, the spirit of grace in deed and truth, and proceeds to enmity beyond measure, more cruelly than the world.

Not a word does Stephen say of the Lord Jesus, yet who could fail to see the parallel between the Just One, and the guiltless object of patriarchal jealousy? Could any one doubt that his was no ingenious device to serve a desired turn, but the unquestionable lesson of their own scriptures? Had not the first book of the law God's moral aim and spiritual purpose in laying bare the base conduct of the fathers, and the sufferings of Joseph? Even their scribes did not limit scripture to a passing person or circumstance; the Pharisees confessed its divine authority; the chief priests, the elders, and the doctors of the law owned that under the surface it is full of reference to the Messiah, the hope of Israel. To confine it to its more immediate bearing literally was to deny its prophetic character, and betray oneself a sceptic or Sadducee.

So plain and direct were the facts in Genesis that it was enough to state them with all brevity. Yet when they are duly weighed, their more profound application becomes apparent; and God's design thereby is as important for souls as it is worthy of Himself. Israel's wickedness through unbelief is as manifestly foreshown as Messiah's humiliation and rejection by His brethren. Such was Stephen's thesis, which he could not but speak out if he cared for the Lord and for their souls. Disdain it they might, but it was just the truth they needed then as they do still. But if the Jews be prominent as they are,

Gentiles share the same sin. It is at bottom the common guilt and ruin of all mankind, as the cross proclaims.

Equally certain is it, that as God was with the abhorred Joseph, so was He in all fulness with Jesus, the object of divine delight as He was the depositary of wisdom to His glory; and when delivered out of all His tribulations deeper than ever befell any, God highly exalted Him and set Him at His own right hand. But if it was not the Israelitish kingdom, of which Zion is the centre, this only confirms the propriety of the type. It was the administration of a kingdom wholly different from the day when He shall be the one king of all the earth as well as of the chosen people, coming in manifested glory on the clouds of heaven. That day is in no way arrived, as it surely will. But the despised and rejected One is exalted on His Father's throne, not yet on His own; and He has all authority over a kingdom as extensive as the world in a form quite special which He received when cast out and separate from His brethren. Of this Joseph's exaltation by the king of Egypt is the striking shadow, made chief over Egypt and all his house.

But as Joseph predicted in his sphere, so did the Lord in His far higher and greater deal with all the world. Yet famine and great distress of every kind His grace can use for even that mercy and blessing. But in order to be blessed the sinner must feel his evil state, and Himself work too that He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from him, deliver his soul from going to the pit, and give him to see the light. Food for the inner man is only from Him, as the sons of Jacob found none in Canaan; and their father, bearing of it in Egypt for the fulfilment of divine purpose, sent them there, where Joseph had provided for a famished world, and his heart

yearned to supply his father and his brethren, little as they knew who sold him away there. They thought evil against him; but God meant it for good, and to preserve them a posterity in the earth and save their lives. How much more was this verified in the greater than Joseph!

Nevertheless the blindness was to pass from the guilty brothers. No thanks to them, but to his grace who on the second visit was made known to them. So it will be for the Jew when the Lord fulfils, yet exceeds, the type as He ever does. The repentance will be as deep as their faith will be living. "And I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for an only one, and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for a firstborn." How touchingly even the type exhibits this inward word in Judah's plea with Jacob that Benjamin should go as was required, and with Joseph for Jacob when he owns that God had found their iniquity, offering to abide as bondman in lieu of Benjamin! How yet more when Joseph weeping aloud made himself known to his brethren! Yes, it was to save their lives, and many more, with a great deliverance.

Nor was this all. "In the best of the land," said the great king, "make thy father and brethren to dwell"... "And Joseph placed his father and his brethren in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded." For this type looks at a far wider circle of blessing than Canaan; just as the rejected Son of man is destined to have dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages, should serve him. Compare too Isa. 49 — "It is a light thing that

thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth." But this in no way hinders the special honour and nearness of Israel; for the Gentiles shall bring Zion's sons in their bosom, and carry his daughters on their shoulders; 19 and kings shall be thy nourishers, and their princes thy nursing mothers. They shall bow down to thee with face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet." This future earthly glory however is not at all noticed by Stephen, who speaks here to conscience in view of Jewish unbelief and sin against the Lord, as this only was then seasonable.

As no small objection has been taken to verses 14-16, suffice it to say that Stephen cites the number (75) of Jacob's kin, not as the Hebrew gives it (70), but as in the Greek version, the Septuagint, which adds these to the two sons of Joseph in their descendants, etc. It is only a further addition; as in the Hebrew itself we find 66 as well as 70 according to a differing point of view. The difficulty in the last clause of ver. 16 is more considerable, and lies mainly in the name of Abraham where Jacob might have been expected with burial of his sons in Sychem. That Stephen was ignorant of the Hebrew enumeration (66, and 70), or confounded the sepulchre in Hebron with that of Shechem, is too absurd save for a rationalist. How impute it to one so perfectly at home with the inspired history, not only in its obvious facts, but in their spiritual and prophetic import, to which the natural mind in the learned is as blind as it is in the unlearned? It was not without motive that he should draw attention by the way to the burial of the

heads of the tribes, not with their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but in the seat of their Samaritan rivals. To account for the insertion of Abraham here, and for the peculiar description of the purchase from the sons of Hamor in or of Sychem, is another thing.

Appeal To Moses Next.

Acts 7:17-28.

Still more prolonged is the use made of an even fuller type of Messiah. This we may examine according to the three divisions of his life; each of forty years, in Egypt, in Midian, and in the wilderness.

“But as the time of the promise drew near which. God assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until there arose a different king over Egypt who knew not Joseph. He dealt subtly with our race, and evil-entreated our fathers, to make their babes outcast that they might not live. At which season Moses was born and was fair exceedingly [unto God]; and he was nourished three months in his father’s house. And when he was cast out, the daughter of Pharaoh took him up and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was instructed in every wisdom of Egyptians; and he was mighty in his words and works. And when a. space of forty years was being filled to him, it came up on his heart to visit his brethren the sons of Israel. And seeing one wronged, he defended and avenged him that was oppressed, smiting the Egyptian. And he thought that his brethren would understand that God by his hand was giving them deliverance; but they understood not. And the next day he appeared to them when contending, and urged them unto peace, saying, Ye are brethren: why do ye wrong one another? But he

that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who established thee ruler and judge over us? Dost thou wish to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday?" (vers. 17-28).

The time of promised deliverance drew near, but it was not yet come. A different king over Egypt arose, who knew not Joseph, and looked askance at the growth and rapid increase of the Israelites. The providence of God raised up a fitting instrument for His merciful purpose. But even Moses must learn dependence on Him, and that neither the advantage of his person, nor the training in Egypt's wisdom, nor the court influence of Pharaoh's daughter, could avail to effect that purpose to His glory. Yet who was ever more strikingly marked out by divine providence, and who had better human means and opportunities? Though an outcast for death, he nevertheless was nourished by the princess royal as her own son. Not only instructed in all that Egypt could teach, but mighty in his words and works, who so proper as he by the favour of the king to lead God's people peacefully, out of Egypt and their frontier sojourn to the promised land? But no: this would have been man's method and the world's wisdom to the praise of Moses' genius and prudence, and in no way a foreshadow of Christ.

Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ: as Joseph was a witness of it even in Canaan, so was Moses now in Egypt. "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be evil-entreated with the people of God than have temporary enjoyment of sin, accounting the reproach of the Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked off unto the recompence" (Heb.

11:24-26). Thus grace wrought in practical righteousness; it ought ever to do so in the believer, as it perfectly and always shone in Christ. It was in Moses the eminent proof of his faith, relinquishing advisedly every gain which providence had given him of a circumstantial kind, that no flesh should glory, but that he who glories might glory in Jehovah. Nor was it only that he turned his back on the world's power, splendour, and pleasures, for Jehovah, leaving any, charge of ingratitude to the royal preserver and munificent patron of his life up to mature manhood. He chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, His poor faulty people in their present low and degraded estate, rather than enjoy what was sinful and ungodly. He appreciated the actual bond of God to His people, and unreservedly acted on it in faith. Grace enabled him not only to see but to do the truth.

The reasoning of prudence would have kept him where providence cast his lot without will of his own. Faith pierces through all such pleas or excuses, because it follows God's love to His own, even in their abasement; as Christ did thoroughly, who never yielded to premature energy but waited in patience, suffering meanwhile to the uttermost. Any other principle however it be disguised is worldliness; and Moses is a blessed sample of fidelity, whatever mistake may have mixed up with it. The word to the Christian is plain: "not minding high things, but going along with the lowly." It is the very reverse of "condescending" to them; for this retains pride of place while affording countenance. Compare our Lord's words in Matt. 20:25-28. "Not so shall it be among you: but whosoever would become great among you shall be your servant; and whosoever

would be first among you shall be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

Thus holiness to God is ever separateness from evil, but also identification in heart and way with His people. But faith is now tried, and its path never long runs smooth. And here we are shown that Moses, when about forty years old, had it on his heart to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel; and seeing one wronged, he defended and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian. Hating unrighteousness, he punished the oppressor of his brother, heedless of the consequence. But the following day his love met a rude repulse, and this not from an Egyptian but from an Israelite, whose wrong was now worse; for he rejected the intervention of Moses to make peace, when he spoke to their heart of their unworthy contention. He that did the wrong to his neighbour — it is ever so — resented the love that sought their good, and thrust Moses away. He did worse still. “Who,” said he, “made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian yesterday?

The time of deliverance was not yet. Moses so far was mistaken. He had not yet fully judged himself; he unconsciously was off his guard in using his might in words and deeds. The people must be brought down lower — must cry to God under their bitter burdens, the Egyptians be forced to wish Israel good, and proud Pharaoh be crushed to nothing under God’s mighty hand. Moses thought that his brethren would understand that God by his hand was giving them deliverance. But they understood not. And this is a far more searching trial than any fear of Egyptian anger.

The Lord, who never failed, as Moses and others, suffered incomparably more than all from His people's unbelief, yea from His apostles' inability to understand Him, till He died and rose and sent His Spirit from heaven to lead them into all the truth. Man despised Him, and the nation abhorred. "We hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not."

The saddest and most painful thing was His brethren's alienation. In this Joseph and Moses were types of Him; but each in a somewhat distinct way, the better to foreshow Him. Joseph was separated from his hating brothers, to rise through a humiliation still deeper where he was as a man that has no help, cast away among the dead and remembered no more. From all this he rose at once to be the highest next to him on the throne, quite outside Israel over the Gentiles. Moses was forced to flee from his brethren who would have valued his turning to account the world's influence, and cared not for his going down in love to share their affliction. But his heart was ever with them in his separation from them, and awaited the time to return for their deliverance from Egypt. Nor can any fact more clearly mark the difference than that he called his son Gershom, "a stranger"; while Joseph called his eldest Manasseh, "forgotten." For such Moses was, in no way settled down in Midian; but his affections were with his poor brethren, and he looked for the day when by his hand deliverance would come for them.

In Joseph's name for his eldest we have the other side of what was so fully verified in Christ; for God had made him forget all his toil, and all his father's house; as the second was named Ephraim, or fruitful, in the land of his

affliction. But Gershom expressed that Moses was a stranger in a strange land, and Eliezer's name only comes in later, My God a help, when Moses under Jehovah's power had delivered the people. So carefully does the inspiring Spirit deign to keep us even in typical shadows from the narrowness of the human mind or will, and lead us on to delight in the largeness of divine grace in our Lord Jesus.

Moses In Midian.

Acts 7:29-35.

Moses then was rejected like the Messiah, rejected by his own people, God's people, for whose sake he had given up his earthly ease, honour, and prospects. His faith was thoroughly of and in God, yet to be vindicated in due time. But the energy that slew the Egyptian evil-doer was before the season, and gave occasion to the heartless Israelite to repel his gracious intervention and expose him to the vengeance of the oppressor. Moses must flee from his beloved but unworthy brethren, and wait on God's time and word in a strange land. He had not yet learnt to say, like the perfect Messiah, "Waiting I waited for Jehovah."

"And Moses fled at this saying, and became a sojourner in the land of Midian where he begat two sons. And when forty years were fulfilled, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai, in the flame of fire of a bush. And Moses as he saw wondered at the vision; and as he went up to consider, there came Jehovah's voice, I [am] the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. And Moses, all a trembling, durst not consider. And Jehovah said to him, Loose the sandal of thy feet, for the place on which thou standest

is holy ground. I surely saw the ill-usage of my people that [is] in Egypt, and heard their groaning, and came down to take them out. And now come, I will send thee unto Egypt. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who established thee a ruler and judge? him God sent a ruler and a deliverer (or, redeemer) with the angel's hand that appeared to him in the bush" (vers. 29-35).

The second period of forty years is full of spiritual instruction for us. Moses must learn the nothingness for God of that long span of his early life when trained in all wisdom of the Egyptians. Might in his words and deeds of that sort had no worth in His eyes, that no flesh should boast before God; that according as it is written, He that boasteth, let him boast in Jehovah. It is what answers to the Christian principle, My grace sufficeth thee; for power is perfected in weakness, as its exercise must take its start from the word of the Lord, as one is guided by the Spirit. Thus is it obedience, without which is nothing that glorifies God. This is all the more striking, because in Egypt it was during the earlier period that we read of that distinctive faith, which, as it flowed from God, also delighted Him, of which we have the record in Heb. 11:24-26. Yet the spiritual dealing that follows is as invaluable for the soul in His service, as the blessing that lays the foundation for it is indispensable. Natural energy, which is man's glory, must be judged in and by the saint to God's glory. Then ensues true practical dependence on God, and the felt need of His direction. Even thus, when the call comes to act for God, what hesitation, and even shrinking, and sense of difficulty to the verge of unbelief! What a contrast with his self-confidence in the earlier days!

But it was not only the wilderness as the scene of continuous trial, nor. the quiet seclusion with God which the lowly life of a shepherd furnished, to unlearn as it were what Egypt had taught, nor the long daily proof to humble and prove what was in the heart (so blessed to Moses who bowed, and so fatal afterwards to Israel who did not bow). Moses had God's manifestation in the way most suited to the work given him to do, in a flame of fire out of a bush that burned but was not being consumed. It was holy ground: Moses was told to unloose his sandals from off his feet, and heard he divine voice say, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. It was for the fathers' sakes to whom He had pledged His promise and whose God He was. But He had also heard His people's cry under bitter oppression, and came down to deliver them. They indeed groaned and sighed by reason of the bondage; but they had not the faith to cry to Him. Yet their cry came up to God; and God heard their groaning, and remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, which they had forgotten, long sunk in the. darkness and idolatries of their cruel masters. But God looked on the sons of Israel and acknowledged them, and called His servant Moses, at this point of their depression,, to the great work of crushing the pride of Egypt, and pouring contempt on their gods in the redemption of His people.

But more we may note in passing: observe the force of his quoting the call to unloose his sandal. Holy ground is where God manifests Himself. It was not merely Jerusalem. So Jehovah decided with Moses in Midian; so afterwards with Joshua when he crossed the Jordan. Their idolising the courts of the sanctuary was out of

season. But religious pride is like other pride, and often lifts its head higher in abject poverty. And the case of the Jews who charged Stephen falsely with blasphemous words against the holy place was yet more desperate and unfounded. For they had rejected their own Messiah, and God had raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, far above every principality and authority and power and lordship, and every name named not only in this age but also in that to come, and subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him as Head over all things to the church. Hence the centre of divine glory and attraction is no longer on earth but in heaven. What once had holiness relatively has lost it by unbelieving contempt of the Lord of glory, whom both. the Jews and the world's princes crucified. The only holy place God owns now, as faith too accepts, is above where Christ is. But though Stephen does not argue here but simply cites the scripture they all acknowledged, they are thus each way shown without excuse in their petty and malevolent jealousy. God's words exposed and refuted any such charge of blasphemy.

Jehovah must take the initiative. It must he manifestly His work, as Moses had learnt. And he became a type of a greater than Moses, as Joseph too before him, in being rejected by and separated from his brethren so dear to him, before God used him to become their ruler and deliverer. In very deed this was, for the cruellest and haughtiest of Pharaohs was raised up to show him His power, and that Jehovah's name might be declared in all the earth. Instead of energy to go forward, Moses was hesitating and diffident in the extreme, and the people hearkened not for anguish of spirit and from hard

service. It was Jehovah that set out in tender words and with all assurance His undertaking Israel's cause, not only to deliver them from their sorrow under Egypt's oppression, but to bring them up out of that land unto a good and spacious land, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.

No doubt another reason was before His all-embracing mind. Gross evil enveloped that goodly land: abominable idolatry with most debasing immorality. Jehovah would judge the iniquity of the Amorites, while He made Israel to take possession of the land, which had been so plainly marked out from Abraham's day for his descendants. Yet the O.T. yields ample evidence that Joseph and Moses were but types, and that all that Israel have yet enjoyed is but provisional, and, as far as the people and kings were concerned, an utter short-coming till He come who, fulfilling these types and many more, will bring in the blessing for Israel, no less than accomplish the judgment on their enemies. Then too shall be the higher glories of the heavenly things, and the boundless reconciliation of all things, over which Christ is the appointed Head, who will share all with the glorified heirs of God and joint-heirs with Himself.

This, as Eph. 1 clearly shows, is the true purpose of God as made known to the Christian. The future kingdom, with Israel as His earthly centre over all the nations is but a part of it, and if it engross the mind, necessarily drags down to the earth to no small loss. For God has made known to us, what He did not in the law and the prophets, the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself for administration of the fulness of the fit times: to sum (or, head) up all things in the Christ, the things in the

heavens, and the things upon the earth. Nor is our part confounded with either, but associated with Christ. Therefore is it added “in Him, in whom we also obtained inheritance, being marked out before according to the purpose of Him,” etc. We are Christ’s joint-heirs, and sealed with the Holy Spirit for redemption’s day.

Moses In The Wilderness

Acts 7:36-43

In the last forty years of Moses the evidence adduced is no less striking both morally and typically to convict the Jews from age to age of the same unbelief and rebellion, and to display the ways of God in Christ, notwithstanding their self-will and blindness. “Who [is] a God like unto Thee that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth [in] mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities, and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, the mercy to Abraham, which Thou hast sworn to our fathers from the days of old” (Micah 7:18-20).

Here the scene lies mainly in the desert, after Israel’s redemption through Moses’ power in Egypt. “He led them out, having wrought wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness, forty years. This is the Moses who said to the sons of Israel, A prophet shall God raise up to you out of your brethren like me. This is he that was in the assembly (or, congregation) in the wilderness, with the angel that spoke to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers; who received living oracles to give us, to whom our

fathers would not be subject, but thrust [him] aside, and turned back in their hearts unto Egypt, saying to Aaron, Make us gods who shall go before us; for this Moses, who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. And they made a calf in those days, and offered a sacrifice to the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their hands. But God turned and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven, as it is written in a book of the prophets, Did ye offer me victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? And ye took up the tent of Moloch and the star of the god Raiphan, the figures which ye made to worship them; and I will transport you beyond Babylon" (vers. 36-43).

When things are at their worst for the Jews, not only the apostasy but the lawless one, the antichrist revealed, and the godless of Christendom and of Judaism worshipping Satan and the man of sin as the true God in His temple, a greater than Moses shall appear to the destruction of His adversaries and the deliverance of an afflicted and poor remnant, who, small though it be, shall become a strong nation, as He will hasten it in His time. Not only will He redeem Israel from the hand of the enemy, but gather them out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. Wonders and signs shall be, not in one land only but for all the world, "signs in sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the sea roaring and billows, men swooning from fear and expectation of what is coming on the inhabited earth; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming with power and great glory." "And the Redeemer will come to

Zion, and unto those that turn from transgression in Jacob;" and Jehovah's covenant with them, being of His own grace after their manifest and utter ruin, will be from henceforth and for ever. So Jehovah says: what matters that which others say?

Now professing Christians are not entitled to prophesy smooth things for themselves, but to learn that they happened to Israel, and were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are met. For are the saints waiting in patience for Christ, dependent and subject to Him who is gone on high? Do they not act as if they wet not what is become of Him? and instead of being led by His word and Spirit, have they not set up calves of gold, idols to go before them, rejoicing in the works of their own hands? And has not God delivered by far the majority to worship images, pictures, crucifixes, dead men's relies, angels, saints, and the Virgin Mary, like Israel serving the host of heaven as madly as any heathen?

Consider the serious lesson in what Stephen quoted from the Greek Version of Amos 5:25-27. When the Spirit of prophecy set forth their coming captivity, He goes back, not to the wicked kings of Israel, nor to shameless sons of David who ruled Judah, but to the idolatry in the wilderness at the very time when they outwardly honoured the tabernacle of Jehovah and the priesthood of Aaron. But God saw all the while the hollowness of their victims and sacrifices in His name; for in their hearts and secretly, they took up the tent of Moloch and the star of the god Raiphan (or, Romphan), the forms which they made to worship them. However God may wait in His admirable patience, it is the early unjudged sin that decides, though the execution of

judgment may not come for many centuries afterward. The writings of the earliest uninspired men of the Christian era prove the fallen state which undermined and destroyed the apostolic teaching; whilst the centuries that followed kept ever growing worse and worse, till the highest arrogance sat enthroned on the ruin of the church's heavenly association with Christ in entire separation from the world.

If it was rebellion against Jehovah for "our fathers," as Stephen pointed out, to renounce subjection to Moses and thrust him away, and turn in their hearts unto Egypt, how much more heinous is the guilt of those who read but reject the Lord's ways in worship and service for their own pandering to the world and man's will in divine things! Is not the Holy Spirit now sent from heaven to be in and with us for ever in glorifying the Lord and His written will? The true question for the saint is, not comparing the evils of this or that denomination in order to choose the least offensive, but to cleave to Him with purpose, obedient to His word, and counting on the Holy Spirit's readiness to help, guard, and guide to God's glory.

The Tent Exchanged For The Temple

Acts 7:44-50

The worship of God according to the ritual of the law was no security against idolatry, as Stephen proved from the words of Amos the prophet, who goes back to the days of Moses in the wilderness for the sin which transported them after long patience to the lands of captivity. "The holy place and the law" were in vain for God's glory then as now; this was his answer to their boast, and his defence to their accusation. But he had

far more to say, and as conclusive that faith in Christ was and is the true safeguard.

“Our fathers had the tent of the testimony in the wilderness, as he that spoke to Moses appointed to make it according to the model which he had seen: which also our fathers, receiving in their turn, brought in with Joshua when they entered on the possession of the nations, which God thrust out from our fathers’ face unto the days of David, who found favour in God’s sight, and asked to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him a house. Howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in things made with hands, according as the prophet saith, The heaven [is] my throne, and the earth footstool of my feet: what house will ye build me? saith [the] Lord (or, Jehovah); or what a place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things” (vers. 44-50)?

Stephen, far from denying, insists that the tent of the testimony was made as God appointed by His word through Moses according to the model seen above, and that their fathers, receiving it from those before them, brought it with them when they entered on the possession of the Gentiles thrust out from before them, till the days of David, whose son built the house for the God of Jacob. But he no less insists on that to which the Jews were blind according to the prophet Isaiah: that the Most High does not dwell, save figuratively, in places made with hands. For the heaven is His throne, and the earth but the footstool of His feet. They exaggerated in what they had done, and forgot that He made all these things, which far outdo any structure of man. So that when they abused and perverted the outward form, He gave it up to the Chaldeans, as He would again to the

Romans. Could their vain trust meet a sterner rebuke than God had already given and would give? For that Stephen knew our Lord's threat of the destruction soon to fall on the temple who can doubt, though He purposely lets the truth tell without His name in all this speech? It was His rejection that was shadowed in that of Joseph and of Moses; and now is shown God's rejection of the earthly house: each one the proof of Israel's unbelief and rebellion against Himself, which is Stephen's plea and demonstration throughout.

But there is more, and what could not be hid, the triumph for the truth in each case at the last. For, as we have seen, the rejected Joseph is raised to the height of power in the larger sphere of the world which Egypt figures, yet full of gracious care for Israel owning him at length; and the rejected Moses is made their redeemer and judge to lead them as a people set free from the house of bondage. And we may add the house of God, no longer "a den of robbers" as the Jews made it according to their own prophet's witness, is to be "a house of prayer for all the peoples." For then the Messiah is no longer despised, but "exalted, and lifted up, and very high" not only in Israel's eyes, but to the astonishment of many nations, and kings shutting their mouths at Him. Yea "from the rising of the sun even to its setting, my house shall be great among the nations of the earth; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure oblation; for my name shall be great among the nations, saith Jehovah of hosts."

How striking that no inspired writer applies Malachi's text to the gospel (as some do ad nauseam), but leave it for the day, when the kingdom is restored to repentant Israel! Both the renewed waiting for Christ's coming,

and the immense growth of apostate unbelief, proclaim how near the time is. See the extraordinary contrast which never was as it is now. For the cry is gone forth at midnight: “Behold, the bridegroom! Go forth to meet him.” There have been times in Christendom when the dreaded day was thought arrived (and so it was on a small scale in Thessalonica till the apostle corrected the false report. So it was in the Middle ages more than once. So it has been at a recent day. But what has this in common with the revealed hope of the Bridegroom? Terror reigned then through consciences far from purged and at rest in His love; and so it must be when He is revealed in flaming fire when the day of the Lord dawns on a guilty world. But the Bridegroom’s coming has associations of joy in itself, and for all who watch, however feebly; and grace takes care that those who are truly His awake and with trimmed torches welcome Him.

If others prefer to say, “My Lord delayeth to come,” we may and ought to grieve over an unbelief which betrays a liking for present things. But in presence of a hope which attaches to His person, His grace and truth, we need not occupy ourselves with contention. His word is plain enough, though tradition is a broken reed which if leaned on fails and pierces. But having His Spirit by grace, let us cleave to Him and the word of His grace.

Appeal To Conscience

Acts 7:51-53

We can see from the use made of the prophet Isaiah respecting the temple, what an advance was made by Stephen, beyond the Twelve even as the spiritual precursor of the apostle Paul (dead in sins as he was

then, and the avowed antagonist of Stephen). But now he speaks directly to the conscience of the Jews, exasperated by his trenchant application of the O.T.

“Stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers, ye too. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand concerning the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye now became betrayers and murderers, being such as received the law at angels’ ordinances (or, injunctions), and kept [it] not” (vers. 51-53).

Loving and devoted even to death that his Jewish brethren might judge their sins and receive the grace of God in Christ, he thus delivered the most scathing summary of the people’s sins from first to last. Yet he did not go beyond what all, in whom God spoke from Moses to Malachi, had testified here and there in their pleadings with them for the glory of Jehovah. With all their self-complacency they were “stiff-necked” in heart and ears. The outward sign in the flesh only made their total lack of its spiritual meaning more glaring. The flesh was strong instead of being judged as evil.

It was themselves who were resisting the Holy Spirit, “ye” pre-eminently. Without doubt, as already proved from Holy Writ, their fathers had so done: this ought to have been a warning to them. Alas! they also followed the same baneful course; and they did so “always.” They had no just sense of God’s grace in calling out Abram. They were like their ancestors who opposed Joseph and Moses. They broke the law, before it was deposited. They resembled the generation which had the tent of the testimony in the wilderness, but did homage to false

gods. They boasted of the temple of Solomon, but rebelled against the Most High who is far above all that the hand makes. They killed the prophets who announced the Messiah; and in their own day they did worse than all before them by delivering up and murdering the Righteous One Himself.

It was no exceptional outbreak, but their habit. And so the Lord had told them in Matt. 12:31, 32. “Every sin and injurious speaking shall be forgiven to men; but speaking injuriously of the Spirit shall not be forgiven to men. And whosoever shall have spoken a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in that which is to come.” The evil and adulterous generation only waxed worse, after Christ’s atoning work; so that when they spurned the gospel, nothing but judgment could be their portion; partially when the Romans under Titus took away both their place and their nation; fully under Antichrist, when the mass perish, and a believing remnant becomes a strong nation, the generation to come.

God’s faithful grace had raised up true prophets in face of the many false, and those were persecuted by their fathers as faithless as themselves. Could they mention one who escaped that lot? And if any were more than usually gifted and privileged to announce beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, they were killed by their unrighteous ancestors who could not endure His coming to destroy them and their idols, with the corruptions in their train. Their rebellion against Jehovah and His anointed had only very recently culminated in their cry (not like those who said, Blessed

be He that cometh in the name of Jehovah, but) Crucify, Crucify Him, “of whom ye now became betrayers and murderers.” Yet He was the Holy One who, as He drew near and saw the city just before, wept over it, saying, “If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are shut out from thine eyes. For days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall make a palisaded mound round about thee, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children in thee, and shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone, because thou knewest not the season of thy visitation.”

And what was their glorying in the law but a vain and empty boast? They received it no doubt with the most solemn inauguration at Sinai. He shone forth from Paran, and He came from the holy myriads: from His right hand went forth a fiery law to them; or as Stephen said of their characteristic position, ye “received the law at angels’ ordinances, and kept it not.” A law that is not kept must only condemn the guilty. What blindness to brag of a law which they did not obey! But so it ever is, where man without faith in the Saviour pretends to honour God. There can be no reality of fruit acceptable to God. Their language may be timid and doubtful as to their own relation to God, presumptuous in setting one scripture against another, and in no way either submissive to God’s word or enjoying fellowship with Himself in the grace it reveals. If we profit not by His grace, what remains but His judgment?

His Sight Of Jesus On High, And The Fury Of The Jews

Acts 7:54-56.

Intense exasperation followed Stephen's appeal; and the words he added redoubled their fury to madness and murder.

"And as they heard these things, they were cut to the heart and gnashed their teeth upon him. But, being full of the Holy Spirit, he looked stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Lo, I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God."

Impossible to conceive a more solemn issue on the testimony of Stephen, or a more awful proof of the Jews' hatred of the truth in direct antagonism to the Holy Spirit. His sketch of their history was indisputably true. Their recent behaviour and their present truculence were due to the same inheritance of alienation from God and His word which had already entailed woe upon woe. And darker clouds would gather round them, and still darker await them in the consummation of the age; when at length another godly remnant shall be raised up by grace, not to form part of the church as now, but to be the nucleus of the generation to come. Of these Micah 5:3 speaks as the residue of His brethren, when the Ruler in Israel is about to stand and feed in the strength of Jehovah, in the majesty of the name of Jehovah His God. And they shall abide (or trust), with the unbelieving mass devoted to destruction; "for now shall He be great even to the ends of the earth," instead of being hid in God as now, the Head of the church, and they, instead of being merged in the church, "shall return unto the children of Israel:" the work which divine mercy and power will accomplish in that day.

But Stephen, like ourselves, had to withstand in the evil day, while the Lord is rejected on earth and crowned with glory in heaven. He was one of those whom the Lord before His prophecy on Mount Olivet had prepared His adversaries to expect. “Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes; and of them ye will kill and crucify, and of them ye will scourge in your synagogues, and will persecute from city to city; so that all the righteous blood shed upon the earth should come upon you, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things, shall come upon this generation.” Stephen’s words penetrated their hearts, and their visage betrayed their murderous intent without even the sham trial they gave His Master. No defiance met their fierce gaze. But being full of the Holy Spirit he looked steadfastly into heaven, where grace gave him to see God’s glory. It was a miraculous vision without doubt, admirably fitted to comfort the spirit of the faithful servant, who was as full of compassion for his brethren after the flesh as of zeal for the Lord. But how pointed the contrast! they always resisting the Holy Spirit; he full of the Holy Spirit.

He was given to see another sight still nearer to his heart, “Jesus standing at God’s right hand.” This opened his lips to confess His name in the most direct terms, and in the concentrated power of all he had testified. “Lo, I behold the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at God’s right hand.”

There had been a transitional testimony up to this. The Messiah was rejected on earth, and the Jews were the most extreme in urging the deepest shame and ignominy

for Him who was born King of the Jews. Thus they in their blindness fulfilled the scriptures that so it must be, if even privileged man be as wicked as God is good. But, as Peter preached, God raised Him up and made the very Jesus whom His people:. crucified both Lord and Christ. No apostle exceeded this till now. In Acts 3:13 and Acts 4:27 it is still the Messianic title of "servant" (not "Son"). Stephen, on the utter refusal of Israel to bow his stiff neck, testifies to His being "the Son of man:" an enlarged and judicial title of His glory, well known even, in the O.T. in the Psalms and Prophets, as the Lord had pointed out its force from the time that rejection began decidedly. So that Stephen was quite in keeping with the truth; for the Jew stood in dead opposition to the glorified Messiah, no less than to the Messiah in humiliation. Jesus was still standing at God's right hand. But the Judge was at the door. So he saw Him on high and proclaimed Him as the Son of man, who will surely come in the clouds of heaven, judging Israel and all the nations.

Nor should we overlook that, as he said, "Lo, I behold the heavens opened." To him it was a literal sight, as none should doubt who believe in God's power and grace. It is recorded for our comfort in faith. For it is meant to be as real in its spiritual significance to the Christian, as it was in every way to him who saw and bore witness. As for us the veil is ever rent, so the heavens are always open. Jesus is there, the Son of God, sent that we might live through Him, and that He might die for us as propitiation for our sins. He is there now for us, man entered into the glory of God, and Saviour of all who believe, the fore-runner for such there. And the heavens which were opened on Him, heaven's object,

are open for us, that we may be at home in spirit there, before He comes to fetch us. Here we are unknown; our citizenship is there where He is. It is our joy and privilege to be heavenly, and not of the world as He is not. We are already delivered by His grace from that judgment which the Name imports for Israel and the nations; for we belong to Him, no longer to them. We say it, not of pride but of faith, being not even our own but bought with a price, and what a price! And shall we not seek to walk consistently with it, and to exhort our brethren equally brought to own it

The Christian's Death Under Man's Hatred

Acts 7:57-60

None so recklessly cruel as those who have the highest religious prestige, and reject the testimony of God which is their guilt and His rejection of their claims. So it was then in the great council of Jerusalem. They like their ancestors always resisted the Holy Spirit; Stephen, "full of the Holy Spirit," not only rebuked their present state (however decent in appearance) as worse than all the past, but testified such grace and glory in Jesus on high as never had been announced by God before With eyes fixed on heaven he saw by the Spirit's power not only God's glory but Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said (as already given) "Lo, I behold the Son of man standing at God's right hand."

This drove them to mad fury. "And they cried out with a loud voice, and held their ears and rushed upon him with one accord; and having cast [him] out of the city they stoned [him]. And the witnesses laid aside their clothes at the feet of a young man called Saul. And they stoned Stephen praying and saying, Lord Jesus, receive

my Spirit. And kneeling down he cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge; and having said this, he fell asleep" (vers. 57-60).

It is to be noted that Stephen spoke of the Lord as "the Son of man." So the Lord spoke of Himself, as the rejection of His Messianic dignity came out more and more. If the Jews refused Him as Jehovah's anointed Son of David, He, bowing to the deep humiliation, comes as the Son of man to seek and to save that which is lost. But He as such shall be seen sitting on the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven. Stephen told them that he beheld the Son of man standing at God's right hand. It was an important step forward in promulgating the truth. Peter presented the heavens receiving the exalted Messiah until times of restoration of all, things of which God spoke by mouth of His holy prophets since time began; and he therefore urged on the men of Israel to repent and be converted for the blotting out of their sins, so that seasons of refreshment should come from Jehovah's presence, and Jesus be sent to bring them in. And this awaits Israel's conversion. Meanwhile the heavens are opened for. the believer on earth; though he be not given to behold it like Stephen, it is no less his portion by faith. And the Lord Jesus receives our spirits above on death as surely as He did Stephen's.

Circumstances may differ; but, the inspired record of Stephen's death, is. ours now to appropriate fully. We, too are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18); and it, is our shortcoming and shame not to he so. We too are entitled to fix our eyes on heaven, and we lose much. if we do not. There is no veil to hinder us now more than then. For the Christian, for the church, the

veil is for ever rent, and the heavens opened. As is the heavenly One, so are also the heavenly ones. It is the Christians' part with Christ before they are translated there at Christ's coming again; when, we shall bear the image of the heavenly One, as we have borne and still bear the image of the dusty man Adam. The Lord could say, Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit; and we with Stephen can say, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

No doubt timid unbelief of the gospel (which alas! often accompanies faith in Christ's person) may follow the ancient corruption of the truth, and dream of an intermediate chamber of dimness at the least till the dawn of our resurrection. But this is utterly false and anti-scriptural. Paradise is no prison nor dark abode. The paradise of God is not merely in heaven; but as man's paradise in Eden was the choicest spot for unfallen Adam, so God's paradise is the choicest domain above. There Jesus went after He accomplished redemption and glorified God even as to sin — the hardest task He ever undertook. Thither too the crucified but believing robber followed Him that very day, the unimpeachable witness that His blood cleanses from every sin. Therein all that overcome shall be in the day of glory, and eat of the tree of life when there is no tree of responsibility more to test, or threaten death (Rev. 2:7). Stephen bears a direct and full witness to the Christian, not of the future change for the body, but of departure to be with Christ, which, as says the apostle Paul, is "very much better" than remaining as we are, absent from the Lord.

Whilst this was the first thought of Stephen's heart, how precious the grace that shone next in his kneeling and crying "with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their

charge” He does not say now as the Lord did before He died, “for they know not what they do.” The Twelve, he himself, to speak of chiefs only, had laid that sin fully on their conscience. It was the practical grace of a Christian, doing well, suffering for it, and taking it patiently with earnest intercession that the evil-doing Jews might be forgiven. O what a contrast with the Latin and Greek cursing communities, as well as with the poor Jews themselves!

As Christians we confess and would fain follow the Blesser. So He consecrated His last charge, His last act and attitude as He ascended to heaven. “And he led them out as far as Bethany, and having lifted up his hands, he blessed them. And it came to pass as he was blessing them, he was separated from them, and was carried up into heaven” (Luke 24:50, 51).

1 It is straining scripture with Bp. Pearson to make these tables partly ecclesiastical; and to say as Bp. Wordsworth of Lincoln did is to mislead, that “having been so chosen and ordained, they performed the sacred functions of baptizing and preaching the word” (Acts 8:36, 38). Scripture nowhere connects the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper with these or any other officials; and Philip’s baptizing followed his evangelizing, not his office as one of “the seven” the attempt to assimilate with the modern diaconate being as great a failure as to find warrant for the other two orders.

2 It may be needed to point out that there are only two classes here addressed, elders and youngers, “men” applying to both by a well-known idiom.

Paul The Apostle at Athens

With appeals to Souls now.

Paul At Athens. - Acts 17:16, 17.

The apostle had fared no better in Europe than in Asia. He was persecuted and evil-entreated in Philippi, and had to flee for his life from Thessalonica and Berea. Now he was alone in Athens, waiting for Silas and Timothy. He found no pleasure in the mother of arts, and eloquence, and philosophy. Its beauty of sculpture and statuary, its splendour of architecture, was contaminated with idolatry. As was said by a satirist, it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens; so that his spirit was stirred to its depths within him, as he beheld the city full of idols. What a sight for him who in his unrenewed days was brought up in another city which boasted that not one idol defiled it!

For Paul such boasting was now vain. He had learnt from God, and learnt it for his own soul, that there is none righteous, no, not one; none that understands, none that seeks after God. Such is God’s sentence even on those under law (for there was no question of Gentile evil); that every mouth may be stopped and all the world be under judgment to God. In short, there is no difference as to ruin; for all sinned, and fall short of the glory of God, as he himself said by inspiration at a later day.

But the love of Christ constrained the lonely saint. The eye and altar of Greece had not a single charm for his single eye and devoted heart. What to him was the far-famed Acropolis with the gigantic statue of the tutelary

goddess Pallas Athene, helmet, shield and spear gleaming in the sunlight? What the Areopagus with its dark sanctuary of the Eumenides? What the still striking temple of Theseus? What every public building, every available place, with altars dedicated to deities of besotted mankind, yea, abstractions not merely of an elevated sound, but down to Insolence and Impudence, a religious cover for all lusts, depravities, dishonours and dishonesties? They were nothing but horrors to his spirit; for they simply displayed a people that gloried in slavery to Satan, in religion so false and base as to consecrate the most shameless dissoluteness, and in the most senseless ignorance of the only true God.

Instead of being stunned by such profound iniquity and darkness, isolated as he was and valuing fellowship beyond any known to us, he looked to his Master as a faithful servant; and with unflinching courage he dared to testify Him Who, being light and love, demonstrated it by sending His Son to make Him known to Jew and Gentile. That very city compelled one of its most enquiring citizens to drink a cup of poison for teaching the duty of heeding the monitor which God has lodged in fallen man. It was what we more rightly call conscience, but regarded by him as a sort of divinity. But on his own showing it only warned him at best against wrong, had never communicated any positive good, and evidently failed to apprise him of the folly of having a cock sacrificed to Aesculapius on his death.

Undeterred by such a fate, the apostle was led to throw himself heart and soul to make known the truth. “So he kept reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout, and in the market-place with those he met with.” Alas! the ancient people of God needed the gospel, no

less than the Pagans. They owned one living God: a great and blessed truth, where it has also living power. But rejecting their own Messiah, even to the death of the cross, they were now the open and extreme enemies of God and His Son. The only hope therefore, for them, “the rebellious” as their own scripture calls them, lay in confessing their fatally unbelieving error at His feet, Who suffered for sins that He might bring them to God, whiter than snow by His precious blood; for no less than this does His word assure.

Equally is the Lord Jesus the Saviour of the Gentile through faith in God’s testimony to His Son. Such is the gospel, the glad tidings, of God. And we learn from the few and plain words of the inspired historian how assiduously the apostle gave himself up to the work of publishing it, the most gracious message God ever sent to sinful guilty man. If diligent in the synagogue on the sabbath, he discoursed in the agora, or marketplace, every day to those he met: deep their need, burning his zeal. The cross of Christ proved that the Jew was no better in heart than the heathen, nay, that he was worse because he turned his greater privileges to pride, and after a deadlier sort hated Messiah and God Who sent Him.

But what and where are you who read these lines? Have you profited by the darkness of the Gentile and the downfall of Israel to judge your own self? Is not all your life fitting you only for judgment and the lake of fire? Or are you setting up the wretched plea that all the world has gone wrong, and that you are no blacker than others? Will this be the smallest comfort to you in the endless punishment of hell? O the folly and the madness of turning away from Him Who speaks to you in the

gospel, as He did through His bondman alike to the idolatrous Athenians, and to the Jews, with such Gentiles as found their way to the synagogue to hear the Law and the Prophets, awakened to discern the abominations of heathenism, however adorned by poetry or the fine arts.

You have privileges still greater than the Jew. You have been brought up where the New Testament is accepted as God's word, no less than the Old. You have in a general way heard of the Son of God come as the Saviour of sinners. You have read that God sent Him that, believing on Him, you may have life eternal and everlasting redemption, without money and without price. How reckless then to go on impenitent and unbelieving! Sinners are perishing every moment: is this no warning to you no less a sinner than they?

Another apostle warns of idols still more engrossing and prevalent than those which shocked Paul at Athens. Invisible though they be, they govern the heart, and will quite as much as, or more than, those of gold, silver, or stone, graven by man's art and imagination. What are ease, pleasure, power, honour to all sorts and conditions of men, high or low? What is Mammon but the basest of false gods? Riches, more eagerly worshipped by man universally than any one or all idols together of the heathen world, as the means of gratifying every other passion and desire? Forget not the Lord's solemn word, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Who can deliver you from this innate evil but the same One Whom God raised from among the dead, Jesus the Deliverer from the wrath to come? He is equally the Deliverer from present sins and lusts to serve a living and true God, and to await Himself from the heavens.

O sinner, delay not but hear Him now speaking in His word to you personally, that the salvation of God may be yours by faith, now for your soul, then for your body at His coming again.

The Philosophers, Epicurean And Stoic. - Acts 17:18.

A new adversary of the gospel encountered the apostle at Athens. It was not, as at Philippi, the insidious effort of Satan through the spirit of Python, which essayed to flatter or patronise the servants of the Most High, but was spurned and cast out with holy indignation, whatever might be the enmity of disappointed selfishness and the world's persecution. Nor was it, as at Thessalonica, the old and ever active jealousy of Jewish unbelief, which took advantage of Paul's preaching the Lord's kingdom to accuse of rebellion against Caesar. At Athens philosophers now figure for the first time, never suspending their baneful influence till its career is closed in the coming apostasy. For philosophy occupies itself with phenomena, never rises above second causes, and will not bow to God's authority revealing Himself in the written word, still less in the personal Word. It is but man's mind, without real activity of conscience or the truth.

"But some also of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers assailed him. And some said, What would this chatterer say? and others, He seemeth to be an announcer of strange demons, because he preached [or evangelised] Jesus and the resurrection."

We do not hear of the Academicians or of the Peripatetics. The schools that followed Plato and Aristotle respectively lay in the north-west and in the

north-east of the suburbs. But those of Epicurus and of Zeno adjoined the marketplace, where they crossed the apostle's path, and heard words of grace and truth, not only altogether new to their ears, but wholly subversive of their systems. And their systems did not emulate the idealism of Plato, nor the comprehensive earthly knowledge which was the boast of Aristotle. The Epicureans and the Stoics occupied themselves far more than the others with man's actual life of every day, opposed flatly to each other, but both utterly and directly to God's revelation of Himself in Christ.

With these the gospel preached by his ambassador came into open collision: first, Jesus in person; secondly, the resurrection. But philosophers, with all their speculative activity and lofty soarings above the vulgar, are ever apt as here to show themselves the dullest of mankind in the things of God. The Jews, spite of intense prejudice and envious hostility to a new revelation, never manifested such stupidity as this case betrayed; nor did the gross and half-barbarous Lycaonians or other heathen denizens of Asia Minor. These philosophers seem to have conceived that Paul set forth Jesus and the resurrection, as two divinities, male and female, a division of the gods common to perhaps all forms of idolatry except Tsabaism.

The Epicureans were materialists and practically if not professedly Atheists, though they admitted the existence of gods taking no notice of any one. The Stoics were Pantheists, and equally excluded one true and living God with Whom every soul must have to do, but held a soul of the world as god. Chrysippus rather than Zeno of Citium formulated this school, which also held the soul to be a body and perishable; but the Soul of all things, of

which the souls of animals are part, imperishable. Both denied creation; both fancied matter to be eternal. Divine judgment was equally set aside, sense of sin before God, and relationship with Him, on which really depends all moral duty. Chance, according to the Epicureans, characterises the world; Fate, according to the Stoics: the one as easy-going, as the other was severe, issuing in pleasure for the former, and pride for the latter.

How completely was this learned ignorance exposed as corrupt imagination, and condemned by the glad tidings of God! When sin entered to the ruin of our first parent, He then pointed out in a rather mysterious way (till the fact explained in all simplicity) the woman's Seed Who was to crush the serpent, Satan, and deliver such as looked to Himself in faith and repentance. He had marked out the Blesser, as the Seed of Abraham and, yet more restrictedly, of David. He had later still shut up the Saviour even more narrowly to the Son of "the Virgin" of David's house, thus clearing, seven centuries before, the unique personality of Him, Who should be truly Immanuel, God with us yet man. "Jesus" alone centres all this and more in Himself, Who was to give His life a ransom for many; Jesus, that cured the sick and raised the dead, yet hated and slain by those to whom He did nothing but good; Jesus, Who thus proved man's enmity to God, and God's love unbounded to man. For in truth by that sacrifice alone could those who believe be forgiven, receive life eternal, and be cleansed from every sin.

God had from of old testified all this by the law and the prophets. But He had recently crowned His old and written word by the new and stupendous fact, which the

Lord had openly and repeatedly attested by His lips, in His resurrection from the dead. Him whom man killed God raised up again, as He in due time received Him up in glory. How blessed the tidings for all that believe! How awful the guilt of those who cleave to empty philosophy, Epicurean, Stoic, or any other!

For those it is the indifference of man, insensible of his sins, and blind to the true God Who so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son that the believer might not perish but have life eternal. For these it is the haughty self-sufficiency which admires itself, spouts about virtue, and scorns to own the sins, and to receive a Saviour from God in Jesus. Yet He meekly bore the shame of the cross at man's hand, and God's judgment of our evil, that He might save one from his sins: alike God's grace, and His new justifying righteousness, to which His resurrection of Christ affixed a divine seal.

And now, my reader, be assured there is no other Saviour for you, or any other. You may be unlearned or a philosopher. But sin levels all to the dust of death. O through Jesus believe in God that raised Him from among the dead and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope may be in God. There is no other way to God. As God is one, so there is but one Mediator, the man Christ Jesus Who gave Himself a ransom for all. Now God's testimony claims your faith. To the believer only is the blessing. How could it be for those who do not repent of their sins, nor receive God's glad tidings? O doubt not, delay not, but believe His word that abides for ever!

"This New Doctrine" - Acts 17:19-21.

The more familiar one may have been with the demoralising vanities of Greek mythology, the less one

can wonder at the surprise which greeted the apostle's words in the market-place of Athens. If some were contemptuous, others were curious. Mental activity works all the more freely where conscience slumbers, and the soul is not purified by obeying the truth to unfeigned love. As political importance too had long vanished thence, quips and quiddities were their resource to fill the vacuum. "And having laid hold of him they brought him unto the Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would therefore know what these things may mean. (Now all Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent their time in nothing else than either to tell or to hear last news)."

Though there was and had been for some time a remarkable scarcity of brilliant men in Athens, they had, as they boasted, a rich inheritance of the beautiful in art, of exercised and daring thought in philosophy, of finished elegance in poetry, eloquence, and history, along with utter corruption and unnatural depravity in morals, and their gods the magnified image of their own degradation. At that time appeared Jesus the Son of God, the woman's Seed. In Him shone the light of God, and the love of God. To announce Him was indeed new teaching. He, and He only, was the perfect image of the invisible God. "He was in the world, and the world was made [brought into being] by Him, and the world knew Him not." How besotted was the world! how vain, useless, blinding was its wisdom! The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib. But the world in its highest civilisation knew not its own Creator. And no wonder. It had long stumbled on in the darkness of evil and of gods that were only demons.

But the Jews? They were no better; they were even guiltier. “He came to His own things, and His own people received Him not.” They had the law and the prophets, and John the Baptist to prepare His way. But their will was engaged against Him. They would have relished a Messiah to put down the Romans and to set Israel at the head of all the nations. This will be when He comes again in power and glory. But He with God made it the first work to save sinners. What would be the worth of His kingdom if sin were not first atoned for? A lowly, gracious, holy, and suffering Messiah was hateful to their proud hearts, because He was infinitely better and higher than they had conceived, and they themselves immeasurably worse.

Philosophy had never found out that “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” It never learnt even that when man was made, he and every thing around him were “very good;” still less that he is fallen under sin, and the creature subjected to man, like man, under the power of death. It was to meet this state of sin and ruin that, when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under law, that He might redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship.

What had this to do with science unable to rise above causes and effects? and, when pursued to its utmost height, finding only a blank wall which it cannot pass? So acknowledged one of earth’s sages just departed. Science cannot get beyond phenomena, and the general laws deduced from them. Science is but the classification of what exists and the discovery of what the philosophers are pleased to call nature’s “laws.” But Who produced the phenomena and imposed those laws?

There it is blind and dumb; and the utmost it confesses is the existence of primordial facts or causes, of which it can give no account. And why not? Because they point to the First Cause, the Uncaused One, Who is the cause of all secondary causes. But this men refuse, and prefer to remain Agnostics, strange stronghold of the pride of knowledge. “The world [not by folly only, but also] by wisdom knew not God.”

Yea, there was the awful sight of man with all his pride bowing down to his own handiwork, idols of metal or stone, in blank ignorance of the true and living God Who had sent His Son to die for sinners and rescue all who believe from the present evil age. Is He the only potentate, the alone Good, King of kings and Lord of lords, Who must not punish rebellion? And is it not plain and deadly rebellion against Him to worship, as they were doing, false gods? and gods so vile!

But He is love; and He has proved it by sending His Son to become man (while always God), that He might suffer for sins, and thus save all sinners that submit to Him. To the acceptance of this, the only efficacious sacrifice, God has borne witness by raising the crucified Saviour from the dead. Hear it, ye who are under the spell of haughty scientists. The risen Jesus testifies to His Father’s glory, and to the love He is showing even to His worst enemies that repent. If His own birth of the virgin is wholly above the sphere of causes and effects, much more His resurrection proclaims that God acts in that power equal to His love, and righteously interposes to save all that believe. Not even a philosopher could argue that death is the cause of resurrection. No, it is God that raises the dead; and He it is Who in the gospel announces these

glad tidings that you may believe, and, though a lost sinner, be saved by His grace.

Yes, the gospel is “new doctrine;” and the truth of God is of all things strangest to fallen man — stranger far than fiction.

An “Unknown God.” - Acts 17:22, 23,

In the vast throng of strange gods at Athens the discerning eye of the apostle observed an altar with an inscription which unconsciously acknowledged the ruined estate, not only of its inhabitants, but of all the heathen world. Not that they thereby intended a humbling admission; yet the words told the fact to him who knew the truth. It appears from adequate witnesses that there were several altars thus inscribed. Paul certainly saw one, and spoke accordingly. In their grossly polytheistic zeal they devoted shrines, not only to all home and foreign deities, but to unknown gods, that not one should miss due honour. This furnished Paul with his plea; and how immeasurably superior to the Apology of Socrates is the appeal of the “apostle of nations!”

“And Paul stood amidst the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, in all things I behold you more [than others] in awe of divinities (demons). For coming through and beholding your objects of worship, I found also an altar on which had been inscribed, TO AN (or, THE) UNKNOWN GOD. What therefore ye reverence without knowing, this I announce to you.”

Grace with single eye laid hold of what was true, to reach conscience and judge the false. No introducer of strange divinities was the apostle, but made known the

God whom this altar openly acknowledged to be "unknown." Which of them could deny that the gods of Olympus, the most honoured in their midst, were by their own account the most arbitrary, corrupt, and violent personages within their ken, and afforded to their devotees a basis not of morality but of the vilest and even unnatural indecency? And if this was the religion of the multitude, kept up by sacerdotal selfishness and sanctioned for state-craft by politicians, what had proud or sceptical philosophers done? Nothing but aggravate the evil by vain efforts to reconcile a world of sin, sorrow, and death with a feeble god, with gods unavailing or indifferent, who left it for guilty presumptuous men to make progress and improve things here below.

For not one of their divinities claimed to be eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent in self-being. Not one of them said, I AM, or was ever said to be Light morally, or Love in the energy of his nature. Yet there is in every human being, unless he be drunk with superstition or fatally poisoned by scepticism, what has been called God-consciousness, and is forced to own, that God there must be. And though no one could by searching find out His nature; yet when presented to man by revelation, his conscience owns that these attributes and this nature are alone worthy of Him.

What then makes the insurmountable difficulty? That little word, but awful, personal, and universal reality, SIN. Yet it alone accounts for the ruin, the confusion, the darkness, the uncertainty, and the misery for man everywhere. And what is it for a good, and holy, and righteous God? Bible or no Bible, a world wicked and wretched is a fact before all. But it is a notion worthy of

the arch-enemy that the eternal God made it as it is; it negatives all just thought of His goodness, wisdom, and power. That it fell into its actual condition through the transgression of its head is the sole reasonable key, as the Bible distinctly declares it to have been the simple fact. Idolatry and philosophy only added to the mischief by denying the good state which a faithful Creator made to hinge on the obedience of the first man. For man was constituted and tried as a moral being. But they do still worse; they lead men to disbelieve in the Second man, Who being God came in the light and love of God to save all who believe on Him; and Who, also becoming man, died as the one efficacious sacrifice for the sins, and rose for the justification, of those who repent and believe the glad tidings. O how worthy of God and His Son!

Man from the first departed from God, Who left him to feel his exile from the paradise of Adam, though not without both sentence of judgment and a revelation of a suffering Deliverer, the woman's Seed. But the race willingly, contentedly, did without His presence and favour, save a few men of faith; and the rest gave themselves up to corruption and violence, till He intervened by the deluge which swept them all away. Only Noah and his sons, and their wives, with animals clean and unclean, were saved in the ark; and the present age began. But it was soon marked not only by fresh institutions of God, but by a new evil. As the apostle tells us, "Knowing God, they glorified him not as God, nor were thankful; but fell into folly in their thoughts, and their unintelligent heart was hardened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into likeness of an

image of corruptible man, and of birds and quadrupeds and reptiles. Wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness." It is his holy account of paganism, and of its utter absence of truth, piety, and moral decency.

Such was Athens, with an unknown God. Such were heathen men who through faith of Christ turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God made known to them in His Son, the risen Saviour. Believing on Him, it was not pardon only they received, but life eternal: the basis of a new nature and walk, seen and made known by chosen and inspired witnesses. Some were as dark and dissolute as any in Athens or Corinth, to whom the apostle wrote after they believed, "But ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified." How was this wondrous change? In virtue of what? "In the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

Thus is God known in His Son and by His Spirit, as scripture abundantly testifies. Take our Lord's few words in John 17:3: "This is life eternal, to know thee [the Father] the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou didst send." O turn not away from such grace and truth, but "believe in the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house."

The God That Made The World - Acts 17:24.

Creation is a great truth, which unbelief never recognised. It seems not to have been denied among men before the Deluge, though of no value or effect because of their growingly vile condition. Scripture implies that idolatry sprung up after that solemn judgment of God. They were without excuse; because the things that are made, the very reverse of a

development, pointed to the invisible, His everlasting power and divinity; and also because when they knew God externally and without dispute, they glorified Him not as God, and were not thankful. Such guilty indifference led them into folly which their darkened heart accounted wisdom; so that they exchanged the truth of God for the lie of the great enemy, and honoured and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed for ever. Amen. The shameful lusts before became shameless afterwards; and no sadder proof could be asked than Athens then presented to a godly and discerning eye. They even gloried in their shame.

With admirably delicate tact the apostle, in making known an unknown God, begins with the miracle whose effect is before all eyes, in spite of the disorder everywhere through the fall. Instead of being an announcer of strange demons, he was the first, at their own invitation to the Areopagus, to assert gravely, graciously, and with all plainness of speech the rights of the one true God. When they themselves sought or at least asked to know what this new doctrine meant, how little they expected such a simple and noble testimony carrying its own self-evidencing power to every unbiased conscience!

“The God that made the world and all things that are in it, he being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made by hands.” Every clause, every word one might say, undermined paganism without a syllable justly to offend. The grand yet elementary truth left no room for the myths of priests and poets, or for the reasonings of sages in pitch darkness. The remarkable fact is that none of the jarring leaders of religion or philosophy claimed for their gods, home or foreign or

unknown, to have made the world and all things that are therein. They attributed that wonderful work neither to any one approaching supremacy, nor to all working together in respective spheres to that common end. So far they unwittingly told the truth. The demons had nothing to do with making the world, or any one of the things that are in it. The true God whom they knew not made them all.

They had their varied dreams. But their schemes as to the origin of all around and above and beneath, their cosmogonies, so called, are but one speculation more absurd than another. The only rare resemblance to the facts is found in whatever bit of early tradition they might adopt which lingered in men prone to forget. The prevalent idea of the philosophers is eternal matter. So pantheism ruled for ages in India, whence it spread south and west, more and more, as it grows now in Europe and America. Brahm or God had no personality, and hence no creation could be, but the Darwinian development idol. The wretched details of emanation which made polytheism a necessary result are not worth refuting or repeating.

What a contrast are those dark and foul vapours with the clear light of scripture and creation, brief yet adequate before man, with ample and interesting and all-important accounts when the earth was formed, and he was ushered into a scene which was equally suited to prove God’s beneficence and to furnish the proper sphere for man’s responsibility. The apostle here states, without controversy, the fact which delivered from human dreams derogatory to the truth.

Nor is the God that made all only a Creator. He is Lord of heaven and earth. His authority is constant everywhere. Fallen man writhes under this truth, because it at once appeals to conscience. As a man, I am His creature, and by that tie necessarily His servant. Am I doing His will? Am I pleasing Him as the motive of my life? But now I am a fallen man, departed from Him, and I like to do my own will, though knowing it is opposed to His. But if He is Lord of heaven and earth, He must call me to account for my misdoing; and what and where must be my portion, especially if I go as I am? He could not be the good and holy and righteous, as He must be as the true God, if He were indifferent to His own honour, and to His creature's dishonour, habitual too as it is.

He does "not dwell in temples made with hands." So implied the prophet Isaiah to those who rested on that boon in their midst, soon to fall. So Stephen precisely said; and Paul who then heard with unbelieving ears now proclaimed it in faith and love to the Athenians more devoted than any on earth to that show in honour of the demons that consecrated every vile lust. Will the Lord of heaven and earth endure or pass by such iniquity? Will He not execute judgment not only on the demons but on their votaries because of their rebellion against Himself?

Therefore it was that the apostle had preached Jesus and the resurrection in the busy haunts of men, before they hied to the Areopagus. Therefore it was that God was sending to all mankind the glad tidings of a dead and risen Saviour. The God that made the universe, the Lord of heaven and earth, Who dwells not in temples made with hands, deigns to look on one that is poor, and

of a contrite spirit, and trembling at His word. His goodness leads the sinner to repentance; and where shone His goodness as in Jesus? It was this that attracted the woman that was a sinner; it was this that won the hard robber to penitence and faith on the cross; it was this that overwhelmed Paul the crusader of law into the most lowly saint and sufferer for Himself.

This is the One that is now announced to you. If you, who have no righteousness fit for God, have not yet submitted to the righteousness of God in Christ, your need, your danger, is as real as that of the Athenians. O look to Jesus, the life, the life eternal, that you may live to God now and ever more. The gospel is not only remission of sins to every one that believes, but life through Christ's name. He that suffered for the sins of every believer is the giver of life eternal now, and will raise him up at the last day.

The Self-Sufficing Giver Of All Things To All.

"Nor is he served by human hands as needing something, himself giving to all life and breath and all things. — Acts 17:25.

The God unknown at Athens, as everywhere else among the nations, the apostle first made known, as the maker of the world and of all things therein. Even this man soon gave up. He heeded not the evidence of His everlasting power and divinity in the world of creation. He forgot the traditional knowledge which all had at first, weary of glorifying Him, and unthankful for His mercies. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into nature worship, and next into deified humanity if we so may call the chief object of their adoration invested with sex and

the like human properties. The multiplicity of religions attested the loss of the one true God: no splendour of image or of temples could hide but only publish the imposture. How circumscribe the Omnipresent Lord of heaven and earth within man's work?

Next in verse 25 witness is borne not to His creative majesty alone but to His goodness. "Nor is he served by human hands as needing something, himself giving to all life and breath and all things." In these respects too God was an unknown God to the heathen world. They thought Him morally such a one as themselves. Their conviction was that the gods had no pleasure in man's happiness, but rather in casting down the exalted and reversing the prosperous. Thus none was to be called blessed till his life came unscathed to an end.

The apostle set before the Athenians One who, good in Himself, does good actively, even in the world out of course as it is now, since man's fall brought in sin and death universally. Yet He who needs nothing for Himself makes His sun rise on evil and good, and sends rain on just and unjust. Nor has He left Himself without witness in doing good, and giving from heaven fruitful seasons, and filling hearts with food and gladness. So it was among all the nations whom in times past He suffered to go in their own ways of ignoring Him: He gives to all life and breath and all things. How simple and self-evidencing the plain fact to make known the God whom confessedly they knew not! What a contrast with all the false gods (the real demons) of the world who debased their devotees to their own rebellious evil and mischievous selfishness, enabling also their priests to prey on the guilty fears of mankind.

The true God gives to all life and breath and all things. Even in a ruined world this active beneficence went out impartially. He makes the grass grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man, to bring forth bread out of the earth, and wine that gladdens man's heart, making his face shine — shine more than with oil; and with bread he strengthens man's heart. He makes darkness, and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest creep forth, the young lions roaring for their prey, and to seek their food from God. The sun rises: they retreat, and lay them down in their dens. Man goes forth to his work and to his labour till the evening. How manifold are Thy works, O Jehovah; in wisdom hast Thou made them all; the earth is full of Thy riches. They all look to Thee, that Thou mayest give them food in its season; Thou givest them, they gather; Thou openest Thy hand, they are filled with good. Thou hidest Thy face, they are troubled; Thou takest away their breath, they expire and return to their dust. What a comment is Psalm 104 on God's sustaining goodness!

Yet Athens had little ear to hear though the truth carried its proof to every unbiased ear. The apostle was cut short on Areopagus. The pleasures of sin monopolised his hearers in general. God's judgment was an intolerable idea. Let us eat and drink, talk and laugh; for to-morrow we die. But God is not mocked. Nor is man a mere animal with higher mental capacity than the brute, but made in God's image, after His likeness. The Judge of all "formed" him alone of earth's denizens, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, man only having his soul in immediate association with Him as His moral governor, and in direct responsibility to Him in his peculiar nature and place. Whatever men shamelessly

speculate, no beast has a conscience toward God, as man has, drug or deny it as he may. Hence infinite compassion flowed to man in his sin and ruin.

He who was God but became man, the woman's Seed, deigned to be the unparalleled gift of divine love, that lost man might believe and be saved. For God so loved the world that He gave His only- begotten Son, that whoever believes on Him shall have life eternal. For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes on Him becomes a child and a son of God; and if so, he receives the gift of the Spirit, the Spirit of adoption, crying Abba, Father.

No doubt that the new relationship creates fresh wants. But God is ever the same bounteous giver; and if He be for us, who against us? He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him grant us all things? Who shall lay charge against God's elect? It is God that justifies: who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died, yea but rather that was raised up, who is also at God's right hand, who also intercedes for us: who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? According as it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we were reckoned as sheep for slaughter. But in all these things we more than conquer through Him that loved us. Truly every good gift, and every perfect giving, comes down from above, from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation or shadow of turning.

Why then should you, my reader, if you have never yet believed, die in your sins? Why longer yield to the

destruction and bondage and lie of Satan against the Saviour God? The truth alone can and will set you free. Behold and believe on the Son; He shall set you free, and you too be truly free.

Every Nation From One Source, And Under God's Control.

"And of one [blood] he made every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having defined ordained seasons and the bounds of their dwelling." Acts 17:26.

The apostle next adverted to the providential arrangement for man as he is over the earth. If men departed from God so as not to know Him, as they assuredly desired not the knowledge of His ways, it might have been thought that the origin of nations was not utterly forgotten. But man readily lets slip what humbles him, as he accepts or invents the fable of moral progress, because it humours his vanity. Nor was any part of the race more inflated with self- satisfaction than the Greeks who then heard of the true God, not only in His creative and sustaining goodness, but in His forming those communities called "nations."

After the deluge, sent judicially to sweep away a generation corrupt and filled with violence, sacrifice was made the ground on which the world that now is was set. The principle of government too was introduced; "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." Flesh, not the herb only, was now free for his food, but not the blood, reserved for God to whom life belongs.

But the renewed earth saw man renewing his iniquities. Even Noah the governor failed to govern himself, and disappeared from further notice, as Adam after the fall. As men journeyed from the east they found a plain in the land of Shinar where they decided to dwell, instead of replenishing the earth as they had been enjoined. Their device was to centralise by erecting a city and a tower, and make themselves a name, for God was in none of their thoughts, lest they should be scattered. Union was strength; and they would be independent. But Jehovah scattered them abroad by the new, simple, and effective means of confounding their mutual communications by differing tongues; for hitherto the whole earth was of one lip and of one speech.

Thus, instead of a vast commonwealth of all mankind, the divine Governor brought about man's dispersion first, and at length in Peleg's day the division of the earth. Whatever might come by migration or resolution, the nations after their families and tongues occupied their lands to the apostle's day and to ours. God is not mocked.

"And of one [blood] he made every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having defined ordained seasons and the bounds of their dwelling."

So the prophets from Moses to Malachi, confirmed by the New Testament, declare that the King of kings and Lord of lords at His coming in power and glory will judge them as nations in their respective measures before the eternal judgment, not only the dead works individually, but the secrets of darkness and the counsels of hearts. Compare for the former Deut. 32:41-43, Deut. 33:26-29; Ps. 2:5, 9-12, Ps. 9:8, 9, 15-20,

Ps. 10:16-18, Ps. 45:4, 5, Ps. 48:4-7, Ps. 76:10-12, Ps. 110:2, 5, 6, Ps. 149:6-9; Isa. 2:10-22, Isa. 13:6, 11, Isa. 14:26, Isa. 17:12-14, Isa. 24:1, 21-23, Isa. 26:9-11, Isa. 29:5-7, Isa. 34, Isa. 63:1-6, Isa. 66:15-16; Jer. 25:30-33; Ezek. 38, 39; Dan. 2:44, 45, Dan. 7:23-27; and even more pointedly if possible in the twelve shorter Prophets, in particular Joel 3:1, 2, 9-14; Obadiah 15-21; Micah 4:11-13, Micah 7:15-20; Nahum 1:2-6; Hab. 2:13, 14, Hab. 3:12, 13; Zeph. 3:8, 19, 20; Haggai 2:6, 7, 22; Zech. 9:13, 14, Zech. 10:3-9, Zech. 14:1-4; Mal. 4:1-3.

Vain imaginations can alter neither facts nor His control who will soon prove that, whatever the wicked rebellion of man, He works all things after the counsel of His own good and holy will. All the nations sprang from one forefather — all were involved in common sin, as ignorant of God as of themselves. Death from the first entered for parents and progeny. None can dispute that so it is now. The Athenians to their great loss knew not why it was. Revelation alone explained how sin came in; and happy he who on God’s authority believes it and looks to the only Deliverer. Man could ruin but not save himself. Yet is it by His Son become man, Christ Jesus, that God righteously saves the chief of sinners, but only on his faith, not surely in his unbelief; for faith honours God, and the Son no less than the Father.

It is true that all nations from their rise forgot God, and that no one manifested the evil more than those to whose conscience the apostle was appealing. Notwithstanding their willing ignorance, God interested Himself in their actual circumstances, defining the appointed seasons of their national life, progress and fall, with the bounds of their dwelling. Their fresh trial as world-powers, on the ruin of Israel and Judah, only

eventuated in greater pride, in compulsory idolatry, and in persecution of such as clung to the confession of the true God who had ordained them to rule.

Thus we see the prophet Jonah sent even before the catastrophe of the chosen people to the capital of the Assyrians; and the correction of the narrow selfishness which never appreciates goodness to the bad outside its own limits. God on the contrary would let His warning fall in presence of repentance. But as this touched the self-importance of the messenger, he fled till humbled by God's mighty hand. Even then in his fear that divine mercy might arrest judgment, he sulked till he took to heart the moral of the withered gourd that had sheltered him from the burning sun, and wrote the tale of his own folly, and of the pity that delighted to spare a mourning city of Gentiles, "wherein are more than six score persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle." Such was the God that Israel little knew, and the heathen not at all.

If it be so in only the seen and the temporal, how much more does His goodness in Christ extend to sinners, in view of man's loss of relation to Himself and its everlasting consequences! For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and forfeit his own self? and what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Only what God gives and does can save the lost. None but the Only-begotten Son of God has life to bestow on the dead in sins when they have heard His voice. None but the Son of Man on the cross could avail to bear God's judgment of sin. Do you not know that Himself tells you so, that believing on Him you may not perish but have life eternal? What then clearer than that the Lord Jesus

is the object of faith? Him the sinless One God made sin for us, who were His enemies, whether Jews or Greeks.

How plainly then salvation is not of works but of faith, that it might be according to grace, God's grace, not ours. Thus it avails for Gentiles in all their deadly ignorance and evil, equally as for Jews in their high-minded pride as to the law which only condemned them. Grace in Christ opens the blind eyes to see and judge self with all its sins, and the dumb lips to bless the God who commends His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. What has not God meant and found and given to the believer in that death? What does it not proclaim in the gospel to every lost creature? Thus it is that God has answered human distrust and disobedience and ruin by giving His best and unspeakable gift to save His worst foes, and make them through faith in His Son to love and serve Him who first loved them with a sovereign and creative love only possible to Himself.

To Seek God.

"To seek God, if indeed they might feel after and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us." Acts 17:27.

The diversity of nations gave the heathen of old, as it gives the unbelieving now, occasion to deny the unity of the race. But God made of one (blood) every nation of men to dwell on every face of the earth, whatever local traditions aver, whatever the dreams of early poets or of later philosophers or geographers. Man readily forgot himself, as well as God. If God was unknown, so was man's origin and creation: the very formula of si deo, si deae, betrayed his ignorance. Religiousness is natural

even to the most corrupt of mankind; faith acceptable to God is supernatural. Superstition suits the devil not less than scepticism. Neither pleases God, who never left man that left Him, as he was justly banished by Him but not without the testimony of creation without and of conscience within.

Hence the apostle by the simple statement of divinely attested facts sets aside alike a multitude of independent deities and of independent nations derived from these Satanic impostors. He asserts one true God and one common race, whose fears, with independence of God and self-centring confidence in man, and means of effecting it in direct opposition to God's declared will, brought on dispersion by the different languages in their lands, after their tongues, their families, and their nations. For up to the deluge mankind was but one community, and, whatever their growing corruption and violence, no strange gods were set up against God. Nor had God inaugurated government as a human institution having authority from Him. When He did, it was left neither to fate nor to chance, but He determined the seasons, and the limits of their dwelling. Job 12:23, etc. from early days shows how distinctly this was known by those who had the fear of God; and Deuteronomy 32:8 goes even beyond what the apostle declared to the Athenians.

But providential disposal of the nations was far from all His care. He felt graciously for every soul of man, who in losing Him had lost the only and the necessary centre for the heart, and the basis for all true morality, of which known relationship to Him must be the corner-stone. This is touched in verse 27 as His great aim for them individually — "to seek God,1 if haply they might feel

after and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." For man was fallen from God, and sin reigned in death; and thus death passed upon all men, for that all sinned. The sad fact is patent and undeniable. But God remained the God of goodness and mercy, ready to hear and forgive. But man must seek Him, conscious of sin, misery, and darkness. Hence God from the garden of Eden held out to guilty man, even before he was expelled as an inexcusable rebel, the hope of a Deliverer from the power of Satan, and, O what grace! to be born of woman, though the woman drew the man into her disobedience.

From the day of man's departure from God, one must seek God in grace and by grace. God uses means of all kinds to exercise the conscience as well as attract the heart. And He whom we know as the Lord Jesus Christ was ever the object of faith in some true way, however small the measure. God's goodness leads to repentance. The grace of Christ emboldens the weary and burdened sinner to confess his sins to God; and now that He is come, all is deepened and sure by the glad tidings of His grace. Even for the Jewish saints much was lacking which is now revealed in the gospel: how much less did poor benighted souls among the nations apprehend? Yet there were Gentiles who believed throughout the law; and we see in the book of Job believers before the law who were not of Israel. We may enter into the apostle's cautious language, "if haply [or indeed] they might feel after and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." Compared with the gospel after Christ's work, it was groping in the dark, save at least where the True Light was shining.

In every case of real conversion to God faith supposes the sinner brought to judge himself and own his sins to God, to renounce self-defence and to cast himself on God's grace in Christ. It was this grace that secretly drew, hindered despair, and sustained faith in the face of the most varied and serious difficulties; to know what God has wrought for the sinner in Christ's death and resurrection brings the believer into solid and abiding peace. But even before the Son of God came, and gave us an understanding to know Him that is true, God was not far from each one. If He interests Himself in a nation and its king and the meanest subject, if He will call into account national responsibility, as well as every soul that comes into judgment at the close, how He yearned over every troubled soul that sought Him! He that counts every hair of the believer's head and takes notice of each sparrow that falls took deep concern in the perplexed Gentile who hated his sins, and yet turned to God about them: it might be through the slightest gleam of the Light of men. No, He was not far from each one then; and now we hear the fullest clearest testimony that there is no difference of Jew and Greek; for the same Lord of all is rich toward all that call upon Him. "The word is near thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith which we preach: that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in thy heart that God raised him from out of the dead, thou shalt be saved."

In Him We Live.

"For in Him we live and move and are, as also some of the poets among you have said, For we are also his offspring." Acts 17:28.

Not in ourselves, but in Him do men exercise their activity, and have their being when they no longer live and move as in their existence here below. Death that closes all for every other animated creature on earth does not close man's being. Through one man, Adam, sin entered into the world, and death through sin, its present wages, but only in part, before its full payment, judgment, everlasting judgment. This is the second death, neither the first nor the second being extinction; for not only does man's soul exist for ever, but the Son of God shall call from the tomb both those that have done good to a resurrection of life, and those that have done ill to a resurrection of judgment: an unchangeable state respectively of bliss or of woe. So says the word of God: how bright for the believer, and how unutterably solemn for him that rejects the Father and the Son!

It is intelligible in a physical point of view to describe man as the sole species of his genus, and the sole representative of his order. But the apostle rises far above the natural philosophy, and regards him in his relation to God, and with that consciousness of it, which no other animated being on earth possesses. This the great enemy of God and man seeks to darken, if he cannot destroy it; but as revealed truth asserts that relation in the clearest terms, so the echo of it was heard even where the true God was not known. Hence the apostle could cite from Greeks themselves, centuries before he spoke: "As also some of the poets among you have said, For we are also his offspring." These precise words occur in the astronomical poem of Aratus, a Cilician like himself, the Phaenomena, extant to this day, and again with but one letter different, in the Stoic Cleanthes' hymn to Zeus, also extant.

It is so far infidelity, and very low infidelity, to doubt that man has an immortal soul. As to him only God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the skies, and over the cattle, and over the whole earth, and every creeping thing that creepeth on the earth. And God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Think of so exceptional a dignity given to man. But there is more in Genesis 2:7, where relationship is treated, and not creation only. “And the LORD God formed man, dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Compare it with Genesis 1:24 “Let the earth bring forth living souls after their kind; cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth, after their kind.” Into none but man did Jehovah Elohim breathe the breath of life. He is thus doubly distinguished. from the rest of creation subjected to him as head, and alone brought into relationship with Him who inbreathed. Hence his soul had, by its constitution apart from grace and a new life, an association with God morally, peculiar to man. And he alone, while favoured beyond all, had a test of obedience applied in Paradise. Such a creature was responsible to obey God and must give an account to Him. Think of a horse or cow, a dog or a cat, levelled up to man’s position, or man levelled down to theirs! Is it not rank insubjection to God’s word? The sensuous and sensual Egyptians did not sink so low; they doubted not the soul’s existence after death, and a future judgment, however crude and debased by their deification of the powers of nature.

Yes, in God man lives, moves, and is of quite another sort than those creatures whose soul is as evanescent as their bodies, and has no moral link with God. Man, no doubt, shares with them the “dust of the ground;” but even so, his position is naturally erect, his eye looks up, not down, his hand is unique as Sir C. Bell proved, to suit a soul and spirit and even a body peculiar to the race, to fill a responsible relationship with God, or the consequence of rebellion against Him. Hence in scripture “mortal” is never said of the soul, but of the body. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die,” has a quite different force, and means the person, the living human being, because the individuality lies in the soul, and led to such common phrases as “all the souls,” etc., in Genesis 46:15, 18, 22, 25, 26, 27. They were God’s offspring, and so were the Athenians, though pagans, because all mankind shares the relationship, even if they make the grossest use of their natural privilege, deny their responsibility, reject the glad tidings of God’s grace in Christ, and become objects of His judgment.

How then is it with you who read these words? Grace, God’s grace, in Christ can alone save you, a guilty and lost sinner. Life for you, whose old life is forfeited through sin, is nowhere but in the Son; and now is proclaimed to sinners everywhere and of every sort, but only to such as believe God about His Son. Do you speak of your sins as fearful, and your state as an active source of evil in His sight? It is sadly true; but I rejoice if you own it humbly, frankly, and fully to God. Confess your sins to Him who sent His Son as propitiation for our sins, whose blood cleanseth the believer from every sin. It was He, not you, that paid redemption’s price, a price beyond the value of all worlds, the precious blood of

God’s Son, God’s Lamb. What could you offer as a sinner but sins? Are you not altogether sin in your nature as it is? So His word declares: what are your words, your thoughts, your feelings? Redemption lies wholly in the worth and work, not of the redeemed, but of the Redeemer.

Beware of bolstering your case on God’s natural Fatherhood. Were not the head fallen and the race sinful, this might plead for living and against death. But as you are, you need a new and eternal life and an everlasting redemption; and the Saviour God of all grace calls you to receive both by faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus.

The Divine.

“Being therefore God’s offspring, we ought not to think the divine is like gold or silver or stone, graven by man’s art and thought.” Acts 17:29.

Men are God’s offspring, not because they have a body, as all animals have, nor even a soul and spirit, as they too have, suited to their place and function in creation, but because they have an inner man direct from God by His inbreathing. This we know, as no Athenians did, and as not a few Christians forget, from the only reliable account in Genesis 2:7: “and Jehovah Elohim formed man [of] dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul,” or person. This assuredly explains why of all on earth man alone has an immortal soul for good or for ill beyond calculation, and why he must give account to God. But here the apostle used this relationship (from the peculiarity of the immaterial part of his nature) to prove the folly of an idolatrous image to represent God.

No doubt, man's body was formed in divine wisdom with a view to the soul and spirit communicated by a subsequent and intimate act of Jehovah Elohim in giving him only the inner man from His own breath. From this fact flows his moral relationship to God; and he alone of earth's beings has it.

But this fact refutes the irrationalism of idol (or image) worship of God. For it is in the immaterialism of his nature that man is thus God's offspring. His soul and spirit only are from God's inbreathing; and in this he stood alone here below. Therefore, as urged, "we ought not to think the divine is like gold or silver or stone, graven by man's art and thought." The sculpture of these material substances by man's skill and imagination only adds absurdity to absurdity. For the material was but a creature of God; and the shape given to each was man's fancy and manufacture. "God is a spirit," and so can be omnipresent, as man's conscience bears witness to His penetrating energy throughout all mankind, unless stupefied by sin and infidelity, which drown thought of Him. But He is behind all ineffaceably, though Satan poses as the god of the world, deifying men's lusts to gratify them, and the pride of deceased ancestors, and the powers of nature above and below, as he works by demons who personate the various national divinities which are but names to deceive.

But there is a true and perfect image of the invisible God, Jesus the Lord, not only unknown to the Greek and the nations universally, but unwelcome to the Jew in his unbelief, Who revealed God in His essence and attributes and relationship of Father, as He the eternal Word and Son knew Him; Who brought God nigh to man in His life and service, and brought nigh to God all who

believe, be they Jew or Gentile. To this end He is, as He must be, both true God, and perfect man, in one Person. And He is the only safe-guard from false gods and from idols, from idols of the mind no less than material images. He too is the one mediator of God and men, Christ Jesus, not only God but man; Who gave Himself a ransom for all, the testimony in its own times, when Jew and Gentile condemned themselves as reprobates and lost sinners by condemning the only Righteous One and hating the God who sent His Son in saving grace.

O what a contrast between the enemy deifying sinful men and their fears and passions and their ideas of vanity, with real demons unseen becoming thus objects of worship; and God the Father giving the Christian fellowship with Himself and His Son by the Holy Ghost! Therein is God kept in His own supreme place, and man, believing man, put into his true position of dependence and subjection, yet brought even now into the relationship of His child in all the confidence of His perfect love which has cast out all fear through our Lord Jesus. All other images are but the shameless rivals of the great enemy's hatred of Him; the resuscitated spawn of Paganism, which the Lord vanquished in the seeming defeat of His cross, when He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them publicly, leading them in triumph by it. And to what is Christendom returning but homage to these spectres of darkness, as the Jews will shortly in these last days, before grace creates the "generation to come?"

Repentance Enjoined.

“The times however of ignorance God overlooked, but now enjoineth men that all everywhere repent.” Acts 17:30.

The apostle refers to “the times of ignorance” before the gospel came, not only to believers personally, but also in all the world bearing fruit and growing. It was an immense change for Gentiles as such, predicted by Simeon as he held the infant Saviour in his arms and said, “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou preparedst before the face of all the peoples, a light for revelation of Gentiles [or nations], and glory of thy people Israel.” Israel’s glory is postponed because of their unbelief, but Christ meanwhile is a light for unveiling Gentiles till Israel’s heart turns to the Lord when he shall be saved.

Thus for a season the old condition is reversed. The chosen people who had the only religious privileges enjoyed on earth lost them for their rejection of their own Messiah; and “Be it known therefore to you, that this salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles; they also will hear.” Accordingly too he wrote to the saints in Rome (the then Gentile metropolis), “By their fall [there is] salvation to the Gentiles to provoke them to jealousy. But if their fall [be the] world’s wealth, and their loss Gentiles’ wealth, how much more their fulness?” And so the fulness of Israel will prove under the Messiah and the new covenant. Truly it will be the glory of His people Israel when their brightest hopes are more than realised, and the earth shall yield her increase, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him, yea, the whole earth shall be filled with His glory.

Here the apostle confines himself to the fact that God, instead of executing judgment on the times of deplorable and inexcusable ignorance, in His goodness overlooked the past, and now calls to repentance. It was no longer the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea; it was no longer the Twelve sent only to the lost sheep of Israel's house, and expressly not into a way of Gentiles nor into a city of Samaritans. Now that the rejected Christ died as propitiation and was raised up, He Himself marks the change now come: "Go therefore, make disciples of all the Gentiles;" "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all the creation;" "Thus it is written and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the Gentiles, beginning with Jerusalem," the guiltiest of all on earth!

How true it is that the message of God's love in salvation to every one that believes is His own command! The apostle (himself called as apostle of Gentiles by the Lord from heaven) was then acting as His ambassador, when he proclaimed to the Athenians that "God now enjoineth men that all everywhere repent." The Gentiles who ignored the true God, and set up idols to His dishonour and their own shame, are no more ignored of God. "The true light already shineth." Coming into the world it lightens every man. It is true that the world was so blind as not to know Him. But the God of all grace does not leave them to their folly; He sends this charge to them, that they should "all everywhere repent." What compassion for and concern in "all everywhere"!

No sinner, no child of fallen man, had ever turned to God in faith as all did from Abel downward without

repentance. It is faith that produces it if real and Godward, though it may not be yet for many souls faith in the glad tidings. But faith in God's word invariably causes it; and its character is self-judgment before Him. Not only one's ways, but one's self, is laid naked as seen by His holy eyes with whom we have to do.

Without doubt, there is a changed and new mind about God, which is rather the effect of faith; but this in itself is never repentance. For repentance is by grace the soul's eye turned on itself and seeing only and continually its guilt, its evil. Faith which produces repentance is in no way repentance; it looks away from self to Christ for the remission of the sins which repentance condemns, and condemns one's self for without an excuse before God.

Feeble faith, like the absence of it, shrinks from this moral weighing and estimate of ourselves as God sees us; it is in a hurry to get pardon at once, content with that, or with zeal turning preacher, and thus slurring over so essential a work in us, because of joy in Christ's work for us. But this negligent haste is as unscriptural as it is a wrong to God and a dangerous lack for our souls.

The apostle then, having already preached Jesus and the resurrection in the market-place, speaks on the Areopagus of their life of idolatrous rebellion against the One True God, and presses on their conscience God's present injunction to men, that they all everywhere should repent. He waits on all, and graciously welcomes in Christ's name all who repent and believe the gospel.

O my reader, have you repented? Do you repent now of your thoughtless, guilty, selfish life? You need to repent

as truly as the Athenians. The door is open; and Jesus is the door to God and all His grace. The true sense of your badness is morally in you the beginning of goodness. May it be the goodness of God “leading thee to repentance.” Repent and believe the gospel. The Father hitherto and the Son work; they had not found as yet an adequate ground for the true and everlasting sabbatism. There was perfection in Jesus; but till He died atoningly, He abode alone. Divine love would have much fruit through His death for and in us who believe.

The Risen Judge.

“Because he set a day in the which he is about to judge the inhabited earth in righteousness by a man Whom he appointed, affording proof to all in that he raised him from among the dead.” Acts 17:31.

Here the apostle applies the truth to the conscience. He had preached “Jesus and the resurrection” in the market-place; but in this, whether to wit or ignorance or both, he seemed a setter forth of strange divinities. Now on Areopagus he proclaims the risen Jesus, whom God ordained to be the judge of living men on the earth, after having insulted the One living and true, the Creator and sustainer of the universe, by their many gods and many lords, the demons of the Pagan world. But he also points to the new and fatal sin of that generation, which the Gentiles shared with the still more guilty Jews, the crucifixion of His Son and righteous servant Jesus, God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

It was divine love coming down from the height of glory, and deigning, in the person of the Son, to become man in the midst of sinful and wretched men to seek and to save the lost. This they would not have but disdained.

When He fed the hungry, cured the sick and raised the dead, cast out evil spirits, rebuked the wind and the waves, they wondered and admired. Such a man exalted mankind; but it was another thing to convict them of guilt, warn them of everlasting judgment, and speak of giving His life as a ransom in God's grace toward His enemies, that whosoever believed on Him should not perish but have life eternal. For where man did his worst, there also God did His best; and human enmity was far exceeded by divine love. The soldier's insolent spear drew forth from the dead Saviour's heart water and blood: the emblems of what purifies the unclean, and what atones for the guilty. Compare John 19:32-37, and 1 John 5:6-8.

O my reader, is not this what the sinner needs? So I have found by faith: if you have not, lose not a moment and submit to the truth. God in His word presents it to you and any other, as to me and every one who has already believed. The Holy Spirit attests the three witnesses in the gospel to every creature. O the sin of despising such love! To refuse it is to make your case worse than a pagan's.

The resurrection of the Lord is alike the ground of faith God has given you, and the warning of a day when He will judge the quick. For Him whom man condemned to the cross God raised up again, as He Himself over and over uttered to the dull ears of His disciples. When He hung on the tree God laid the awful burden of sin upon Him, made the sinless One sin for us, that we who believe might become His righteousness in Christ.

It was God's righteousness, not ours, for we were the sinners for whom He became substitute. Thus is God

just in justifying the believer, who owns his sins and finds Him not sparing His own Son that we might be washed clean for His presence. Jesus is ready to judge the habitable world which cast Him out. The world and all in it inherit this load of guilt unremoved to this day. The only way to escape judgment is to repent and believe the gospel. This God enjoins on all men everywhere, as we saw. Is not this grace to every creature? But grace rejected seals your guilt. Jesus is coming, first to receive His own for His Father's house; secondly, to judge in righteousness the inhabited earth, not yet the dead but living man everywhere. He, knowing well how incredulous most would be, said, "when the Son of man cometh [i.e. for His second and judicial act], shall he find faith on the earth?"

Beware then that you trifle not, lest you prove His words true in your everlasting ruin. He tells you in Luke 17 how that day is to be. "As it came to pass in the days of Noah, so also shall it be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank; they married, they were given in marriage; until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed all. And in like manner as it came to pass in the days of Lot. They ate, they drank; they bought, they sold; they planted, they builded. But on the day that Lot went out from Sodom, it rained fire and sulphur from heaven, and destroyed all. After the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed."

The judgment of the dead is under wholly different conditions, which it is folly to confound with that of the quick. More like it in a slight degree was the destruction of Jerusalem, and on a far smaller scale. But the words added by our Lord are incompatible with either, and

describe what will be when He appears for the judgment of living man. “In that day, he who shall be on the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not go down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember the wife of Lot;” and so to the end of the chapter, I might cite words quite inapplicable to the siege of Titus, still less to the judgment of the dead before the “great White Throne,” when the earth and heaven shall have fled before the Judge’s face; whereas every word tallies with His coming to judge the living.

Is it not truly ominous — the unbelief of man so nearly concerned, and with issues so incalculable? Jews have no difficulty in looking for a divine judgment on the living, and expect the verification of their national hopes in a destruction to fall on all the nations of the earth when they are gathered to their land for more than pristine glory under David and Solomon. But they are little alive to the clear account of the judgment of the dead. Christendom acknowledges the judgment of the dead, but puts it off indefinitely and mixes it up with the judgment of the quick; so that the power of neither tells, as both ought, on the conscience. Nor can there be a plainer proof of this error than its effect in confounding two scriptures so distinct as Matt. 25:31-46 and Rev. 20:12-18; for in the first is found not one dead man, in the second not one living. Tradition blurs them into one, and makes both interpretations erroneous. Thereby is lost the profit from each, which rightly understood is very great. A vague muddle takes their place, which is not only inconsistent with what God has revealed, but helps on unbelief in defiance of every word which proceedeth from His mouth.

But the resurrection of Jesus disarms the believer of all fear, whether from the judgment of the living at the beginning of the Kingdom to come, or from the judgment of the dead at its end. The believer will be manifested before His judgement-seat, and will give account of all done in the body; but as the Lord unmistakably declared, he “cometh not into judgment,” being already justified. Now it is God that justifieth; and if God be for us, who against? Till the disciples understood it in the light of scripture, they were filled with perplexity and gloom, as we read in the beginning of Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20, yet soon dispersed by His blessed light and joy. He that was so dear and well-known stood in the midst on the resurrection day, “and saith to them, Peace to you. And having said this, he showed to them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” Does He change? or the efficacy of His death? or the triumphant peace and joy of His resurrection? He that had the power of death was vanquished, the sins blotted out by His blood, the judgment of God borne on the cross, man in Him entering on a new order of being, fit for the presence and glory of God above, and for the Holy Spirit to indwell here below meanwhile.

Such was the virtue of His death displayed in the power of resurrection, and given as the portion of every Christian thenceforward able to say, His Father and my Father, His God and my God, while looking forward with assurance to a hope as glorious as the faith is certain, both flowing out of God’s love from eternity and to eternity, known by His word and enjoyed now in the power of His Spirit. For there is no privilege of Christianity more characteristic than the gift of the

indwelling Spirit, as seal of the Christian and earnest of his inheritance of glory. Nor is there any truth more feebly, if at all known, in Christendom; which glories in the first man and his science, not in the Second; as indeed they are, as the scripture shows, incompatible and mutually exclusive.

The Result, — Then As Now.

“And when they heard of resurrection of dead [men], some mocked, and others said, We will hear thee again concerning this. Thus Paul went out from their midst. But certain men clave to him; among whom also was Dionysius the Areopagite. and a woman by name Damaris, and others with them.” Acts. 17:32-34 Resurrection once more aroused resistance and derision. Some mocked; and others said, “We will hear thee again concerning this.” To hear the apostle again was more than man could insure. Mockers and doubters shall certainly hear the voice of the risen Jesus, when the hour comes for a “resurrection of judgment,” which will vindicate the truth to His glory, and prove the worthlessness of the unbeliever, and his deeds evil in God’s sight; as those who believe receive life eternal now, walk in obedience, bear good fruit, and rise to a “resurrection of life.”

Creation is a standing witness of God to all mankind, did they but stop to consider. It was in its final shape complete before man (the head by God’s appointment of all the earthly sphere) was formed, and formed in full vigour of mind and body to look upon it all around him and to hold converse with God without a cloud or suspicion. Creation was a vast miracle; but Adam was

not there to see its several parts. He saw the effects in their beauty where all was very good.

Such is the testimony of the Bible as afterwards written by Moses, admitted to divine intercourse beyond others save the Son of man who could say when on earth that He was in heaven; Man but infinitely more than man, who cites Moses as giving God's truth as far as then revealed. And when we think out what we are told of man and every other on earth created not in embryo but in full growth, we cannot but feel how such an account approves itself to us as befitting both God the Creator and the creature.

The most pronounced Freethinkers, the Positivist Mill, and the Agnostic Spencer, admit that secondary causes fail to explain the universe, and that primeval causes (for they thus own a causa causans) must have operated before, behind and above all that men can apprehend. How much more is One who announces His death by lawless hands, and His rising on the third day, with the amplest evidence that so He did rise! Then seen, heard, felt by unimpeachable witnesses, manifestly not a result of natural causes, it is God's action for the worthiest reason and His own glory in the midst of this world's evil and unbelief.

But resurrection is a tremendous shock to the race as reversing all the system of causes and effects with which they are familiar day by day, which they call reflective life. Man is painfully familiar with death and tries to think it natural. But it is not, though appearing so now. God made man with provision to live, if he did not disobey Him. Man disobeyed, and death, as God warned, entered as a penalty through his transgression. But even

then the LORD God appeared, convicted Adam and Eve respectively of their sin, traced it up to the enemy, the old serpent, and in sentencing the deceiver announced the triumph of grace in the woman's Seed, who, in His body however bruised, should crush the enemy for ever.

Thus was the Saviour's death to be turned to endless gain for all who believe, and to the glory of God who gave His Son to be born of woman that it might be so. But His death was followed by His resurrection, as it must be both on His own account as a divine person no less than from the Father's glory, truth, and righteousness, for the peace, joy, and blessing of His own. It is too the witness to His foes that, alive again for evermore, He is coming to judge the habitable earth, where men listened to the old enemy and put Him to death: the awful sin of man, and the wondrous grace of God as the propitiation for our sins. His resurrection and going up into His glory is a pledge that He died a sacrifice for all that believe, and that God has accepted the sacrifice on our behalf, and Him who offered it for His glory.

Christ's resurrection from among the dead is the witness of perfect deliverance from sin and all its consequences, and of entrance on a new life in imperishable blessedness. It is not only that the Heir of all things should be glorified; but He now acts in the power of that grace which will bring all who believe to share His absolutely new order of things, in our souls now by faith, next in our bodies, and in the inheritance itself, when He comes again in glory.

Some think like certain Athenians after Plato of the soul's immortality, but forget their responsibility for sin,

and look not to God to be saved from their sins and His judgment. Man glorifies himself in that; yet the soul's immortality does not save from everlasting ruin, but "Jesus only." And resurrection then becomes our joyful hope founded on His; "Because I live, ye shall live also:" a life now for our souls, at His coming for our bodies; a life of victory over death and judgment, a life of heavenly and everlasting glory.

The hopes of man are through science, politics, education and the like to ameliorate the old and fallen creation. But they might see if not blinded by Satan that evil men and impostors wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. The fashion of this world passeth; yea, the world itself is passing, and its lust; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. Resurrection declares the unmistakable power of God in Christ vanquishing Satan. In Him Man has conquered to bring those who believe into His wholly new state according to God's counsels.

Whenever souls fail to apprehend this in the Spirit, they get occupied with man and the world, striving to amend society and improve the general state. Never did Christ any thing of the sort; nor did the apostles and prophets essay such measures. They taught that man is dead, that life is in Christ, that He only is the all and in all; that He is coming to take His own to the Father's house; and that He and they will shortly after appear in glory to judge the inhabited earth in righteousness, before the judgment of the dead.

But man, as he dreads God out of a bad conscience, either derides openly or politely puts off. Nevertheless God does His gracious work. A man of weight bowed to

the truth and the grace he heard, Dionysius the Areopagite, as did a woman named Damaris and others. But the rest abode in their unbelief, and the apostle went forth from their midst with the message of God's good tidings for such as have an ear to hear.

How is it with you, dear reader, as you scan these lines? By man came sin and death; but by man, the Second man, came the resurrection. This points to the Lord as the Deliverer of those who believe on Him, and the Judge of all who are indifferent and turn away from Him. But why should you perish, when He is at hand, the Life and the Saviour for all that call upon Him? Remain as you are, and you are lost for ever. Receive Him, and you are born of God. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them life eternal; and they shall never perish, and none shall seize out of my hand. My Father who hath given [them] to me is greater than all, and none can seize out of the hand of my Father. I and the Father are one."

1 "The Lord," as in the Authorised Version is a bad reading: "God" is in the best copies, and required by the truth intrinsically. What had the nations to do with "Jehovah"? What could they know of Him whom God made Lord and Anointed?

Job

Lecture 1. - Job 1 - 14.

My object in taking up Job now is a general one. It is to help souls towards a better understanding of a book full of interest and of great practical profit, but not so easy for most to seize, either in its design and scope as a whole, or in the way in which the different parts of it conspire to effect that design. There is nothing which can make up for the constant, habitual study of the word of God for our souls. And indeed ministry would be a positive curse, instead of a blessing, if it did not make the word of God itself to be more precious because more entered into, and God Himself more enjoyed. And this is exactly the measure of the value of that kind of ministry, at any rate of what has to do with the interpretation of Scripture; for every truth must ultimately rest on that word. Indeed not merely is the word the source and supply of truth, but God alone is capable of presenting thereby the truth perfectly and livingly. When therefore truth is taken out of its connections in Scripture, there is always danger. Hence it is of the greatest moment that our souls should have the habit of reading the word of God. And I do not now mean merely as a matter of intelligence, but for the soul’s healthy condition, that we might be refreshed day by day in the reading of it. In order to this, however, it is a very great help where we are enabled, by the grace of God, to take in the word as a whole, and not merely to have the blessing, of certain parts which we all feel to be precious as isolated communications from God. But my object now, whatever it might be in speaking from time to time in an ordinary

way, is to help to a general apprehension of what it is that the Holy Ghost intended for the people of God in the book of Job.

The first thing which it is well to bear in mind is that the book was written in the earliest days of revelation. It would be hazardous to say that any book of Scripture preceded it. That the writer of the book of Job (writer I say advisedly; for God of course is the real author of all Scripture), that the one used to give us the book was a contemporary of Moses, if not Moses himself, would seem to be not far from the mark. Of course one can only give a conjecture on such a point. Scripture has not defined the author; and, in my opinion, it would not become any man to do more than express a judgment as far as the Lord gives him a moral estimate of its character, without now discussing certain other marks of a more external kind But it is very plain that, whether Moses was the writer or a contemporary of the writer, the groundwork of the book lies in a day previous to Moses. Nor should we doubt that it is the authentic account of all, a real history of Job and his friends, which is presented in the book. We see from the book itself, for instance, that the age of Job was extended after his trial, and he was by no means a young man when the trial came; so that, unless there were some singular exception in his age of which Scripture never speaks, Job himself must have been previous to the days of Moses. Now Moses was an exception, and Scripture itself speaks of Moses living so long in his day as a remarkable feature; and indeed it follows from his own words, from his own prayer, in Psalm 90, that the age of man, as a general rule at that time, had been reduced practically to very much what it is at the present. Moses

was one that stood out from his fellows in more ways than one, even of an outward nature, not to speak now of his faith; for it is plain that both he and his brother were remarkable exceptions. Job, however, must have lived somewhat before them from the way the facts are stated.

There is another thing still more important to consider before we enter into the book: Job lived outside the chosen people. Surely this is a surprising fact in the midst of a revelation which, as a whole, has its root in Israel. The Old Testament, for that very reason, is called the law. Not merely the Pentateuch, or the Psalms, or the Prophets but the whole book, as we know, is comprehensively and repeatedly called “the law.” The reason is, because what was said afterwards to the people who had the law of God affirmed that character of revelation. Every part of the Old Testament derived its name from the central characteristic fact of the law that was given by Moses; and yet there, in the midst of it, from its earliest days, stands one book at least, where the person who most of all is brought before us is the object of the deepest concern to God, drawing out such terms as God never applied even to the fathers.

Abraham might be and is called the friend of God; but not even Abraham similarly arrested the attention of God, not even he was pointed out to Satan as a worthy object to be put to the proof. There is nothing, in my opinion, therefore more striking than that God should guard against the narrowing effect of ritual. He was about to give the law by Moses. He was about to make one people — a small population in a little land — the peculiar object of His dealings. And these dealings too were for a long while to come; it was no merely passing

season. He was taking them up to be His people for ever; and at that very time, not later than His call of Moses, not later than the law given to Israel, God gave a book entirely devoted to a single person, an individual. The nation must not blot out the grand truth that God interests Himself most deeply about a soul. And this is exactly the snare into which Israel came, spite of the book of Job.

But God took care that there should be not more surely the Pentateuch than the book of Job. In Genesis everything prepares for the chosen nation. When the law was given, God treats the Gentiles as entirely outside. So they were. Alas! we see Israel narrowing more and more in their feeling, and denying that a Gentile was anything but a dog in the sight of God. We find them shutting up their bowels of compassion from others, and in every way denying, after all, what God took care, even in the law itself, to correct and condemn. But even before the law was given we see God, in this most remarkable book, guarding against the snare into which they were subsequently drawn. Is it not an anticipative and blessed vindication of God? Job was a Gentile; and one who, as far as the locality is concerned, seems to have been in anything but a favourable quarter. The land of Uz is connected by the prophet Jeremiah with the land of Edom. Nothing could be more suspicious to an Israelite. If there were any people that had a hatred toward the Jews, it was the Edomites; and this was not at all a new feature. It is not meant that Job was an Edomite; but to a Jew, ready to take fire at anything which did not allow the peculiar place of the chosen nation, I say that his locality was suspiciously near. For it was at the borders of Edom; and the reader of Genesis

knows that hatred had shown itself from the earliest days, even in the forefathers; and hatred that had never been extinguished in the children up to the latest days, from Genesis to Malachi; Edom's undying enmity to Israel, if not on the part of Israel against Edom. The hatred is apt to be in that which has neither God nor His blessing; nay, which resents those that have it. So it was therefore with Edom, and there it abode, and the Jew would the more feel the testimony to one who lived near their borders.

The grace of God then was pleased to work in this individual man; and there was the great fact of one solitary soul being an object of the deepest interest to God Himself, and this revealed in His word, not merely before His heart silently. It was far more than this. There was a wise and worthy purpose in causing it to be written. It was expressly to be the revealed interest of God in Job, interest that He made known to heaven at once, interest that He has revealed to all time in the Holy Scriptures; so that when the day came for Israel to lose their place, and when the mighty grace of God could be pent up no more, when it refused to flow only in the narrow channels which He had been pleased to employ before in His government, when it was now a question of His grace undertaking to work for the glory of His own name, as well as by Him who came down Himself in His own person to make it known, and by His own work to cause it to flow out according to all the large thoughts and purposes of God, here was the book that could prove it was no afterthought. Here was the book that could at once be appealed to as the witness of His condescending mercy outside Israel. Could the Jew say it was a strange thing? Could he venture, with the

book of Job before him, to say that God thought nothing of a Gentile? Where of old was the man that God ever spoke so highly or so much about? They might search through all the books of the Old Testament: where was there one who has an entire and a long book devoted to his experiences?

And this is felt so distinctly that in modern Judaism — always the leader of infidelity — what does its spokesman say? That Job cannot have been a real person at all, seeing that it is impossible God should have spoken in such terms about a Gentile! But there is the pith and beauty of the book. It was about a living man, if we are to believe the prophet Ezekiel and the apostle James, and a man outside that elect people, but none the less a man in whom God had graciously wrought for the admiration of heaven and the provoking of Satan, which gave occasion to unheard of trial, so as to set forth the best reality till Christ came; not a single act of faith in the giving of what was most dear (and given of God for blessed and glorious purposes) at His word, as in Abraham's trial, but where Satan was allowed to wreak his malignant and destructive power in vain on property, family, person, followed by the deepest trouble and exercise of soul before God. What could there be deeper until He came who above all suffered perfectly for righteousness, and alone for sin as it deserved from God? What there could be there is. The book is the witness and revelation of God's dealing with souls, and turning all things for their good, even where Satan, and men, and the saints fail. Hence experience of all these things come before us. But in the end God shows what He is; and He is exceeding pitiful and of tender mercy.

As the first thing, however, we have Job himself introduced. We see a man sincere, true, and blameless; in the enjoyment of every element of happiness on earth, blessed in his circumstances as well as his family, and God-fearing habitually. If he was the greatest of the sons of the east, this was what gave the more point to the trial. But was he not blest? Exceedingly so. He had seven sons and three daughters. He had the most ample possessions of that in which wealth lay in those early days, and in that quarter; for it was not a pilgrim and a stranger that we find in Job. To that God called out the fathers. But Job was not of the fathers; he was outside the covenant of Abraham, yet evidently blest, and expressly by God. God doubtless blessed the fathers; but in keeping His promises He never bound Himself not to step beyond them. This is what we see in Job, and it is exactly what grace loves to do. Grace is never limited to promise; while it does faithfully accomplish the promise, as it most surely will, in the fullest manner and before all the world, by-and-by; but grace maintains its own sovereign title to bless beyond that measure. Covenant is in no way the measure of grace, which can go forth in its own boundless strength where promise cannot follow. Nor is there any excuse for us at least not to know this well, because, as individual Christians and as the church of God, we are in Christ brought into a fulness of blessing, to the glory of His grace, incomparably beyond the promises. And indeed it is one of the saddest causes of the ruined state of Christendom, and the low character of that which is taught, that men seldom rise beyond the promises, even those who hold what is called evangelical doctrine. For the very essence of evangelicalism as a system is to deny the special favour and glory displayed in the mystery of Christ and the

church, and make the law the rule of Christian life, thus reducing the New Testament to the standard of the Old, instead of learning that each of the so-called Testaments has its own proper character and distinct aim; and that it is no mere question, therefore, of promises for the earth, nor even of a deeper and higher promise than they, but that there had been always a secret in God, which in other ages and generations was undivulged, and, consequently, that our richest blessing in Christ was no question of promises revealed to man at all. If it is at all to be called a promise, it was a promise between the Father and the Son; but this is not what men commonly mean by promises. It was entirely outside Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. What did they know of the purpose for heavenly glory revealed by the Spirit, as between the Father and the Son? But now it is made known; and therein is seen to be exactly where the New Testament claims for itself a totally new character, impossible to exist while God was dealing with Israel, till the rejected Christ had accomplished redemption, and the Holy Spirit was sent down from heaven in consequence to baptize Jew and Gentile that believe into one body. It is Christ exalted on high and the church united to Him, a mystery hid in God till the time came to reveal it all, and now to us of the Gentiles, who least of all could have expected it; for God would thus show out the full character of grace on every side — on the heavenly, in its being entirely above the fathers, however honoured; on the earthly, in its going far beyond the children of Israel in indiscriminate mercy, and consequently finding objects, not only for salvation, but for union with the heavenly head among the most despised and abject of this world.

Here, then, we find Job in the most marked place of a man blest of God in everything that heart could desire. It is needless to tell you that without one divine element there could have been no stable blessing according to God, but only a deception and a snare. And what was that? He was a man of God, “perfect and upright, one that feared God and eschewed evil.” He was not an angular or one-sided man, not defective in some and remarkable for other qualities. He had whole-heartedness and integrity; and this based on the fear of God and marked by the refusal of evil. The inner and the outer life were right all round. The word “perfect” gives no countenance in any degree to the foolish dream of the extinction of sin in the flesh. This is not the force of “perfect” in Scripture, but completeness of character spiritually with integrity. He “feared God and eschewed evil.” There we come to the roots of things. He was one who gave God His place, and abhorred the evil surrounding him here below which was contrary to God. He was clearly a man born of God, one who walked in simplicity and trueness of purpose before God. Nor was this said of him in a merely general way. His position is brought before us, his family life, with remarkable beauty; his zealous, nay jealous, piety; for even if sons and daughters met together on a special occasion, of what was Job thinking? He had his fear. How often is such a gathering a moment of danger for the soul! How it affords an opening for Satan! And so Job dreaded lest anything might have crept in and be a virtual renunciation of God, lest, as it is said, they should have cursed [literally, blessed] God in their heart. We need not suppose anything formally uttered or done, but the heart thus failing at such a season in an unguarded moment. And this too was not merely on some particular

occasion, or at a peculiar crisis when his sons stood exposed to the enemy. There is a still higher feature that characterises him: “Thus did Job continually.” It was the tenor of his life. Such was the man whom God could single out in love; that He did so the book shows us.

But there was something more. It is not only that evil abounds in the world. There is an unseen enemy, and if we do not take account of him adequately according to God, we are in no small danger. We shall be perplexed and fail gravely in knowing how to estimate that against which we have to watch and with which we have to contend.

There is another thing here made apparent, that events on earth turn on the springs of heaven. Now doubtless the Christian is admitted to look into the opened heavens; but before this could be, through Christ’s ascension and the descent of the Spirit as now, God could and did give glimpses of heaven. Not merely was there no great movement of the powers here below which did not turn on the mind of heaven, but the opening chapters let us know that it is as true of a single saint. Satan might pervert the truth into his lie of astrology for curious but unbelieving man: still the truth abides. The world might be in confusion, the eyes of the judges be blinded, oppression in the place of righteousness, groaning and misery everywhere; but, spite of misrule and rebellion, in heaven is the spring and centre of power. It is not yet the day to put down evil, and enforce the government of God; still even Satan himself cannot act without God. What an immense comfort! But there is another and a greater comfort for the child of God, that it is never Satan who begins the movement, but God Himself. It may be the direct

calamity, the extremest suffering. Even so; God is at the helm, and God alone gives the word. The consequence is, that there is another feature attaching to it. Not only is God at the beginning, but He will surely be at the end; and meanwhile God puts limits on it. The way may seem dark and hard; and surely this book shows that Job at last proved utterly unequal to the strain; for he was not Christ. But Job learned at the end, if not at the beginning, that it was the gracious God who opened his heart at length and gave his lips to justify Him frankly and absolutely.

Here then is communicated to us what could not else be known, that it was God, and not Satan, who began the whole transaction. It was God who took notice of His servant Job, and it was His delight in His servant (for He does delight in His saints) which roused the malice of Satan.

Another thing may be here added by the way. It may seem very peculiar to some minds, but this is simply a consequence of not knowing the Scriptures; namely, that Satan should come in among the sons of God. At first sight it may strike one as out of place, Satan coming in among the sons of God! meaning clearly the angels of God in His presence. But it appears to me that one better acquainted with Scripture would see it as part of that mystery of God (Rev. 10) which forbears as yet for the highest ends to put down evil. He that is imbued with the mind of God in the word would feel rather that it is just what we might expect. Do you know who and what Satan was? Had he not been among them? Yes, of them. This helps us to understand quite simply how such a being, though fallen, should be allowed access till judgment come. For it is not man only that has sustained

a fall. There was another and an anterior fall, and from a higher estate; though men are not wanting who, as they are now giving reins to their unbelief about man's fall, are bold enough to deny Satan altogether. And no wonder. Men easily disbelieve what they dislike, and the truth of the fall is offensive to their pride, so still more is their slavery through sin to Satan.

But why is the fall of both angels and men so repulsive to man's mind? Because it is the confession of creature guilt and ruin. It supposes the reality of creature weakness; and it enforces the need of dependence on God. The state of the creature before either fell testifies manifestly to God's goodness at a time when there was no evil above, no evil below; yet the creature left his first estate. Here we are let into a sight of Satan, the restless leader of sin. He is powerless to deceive the holy and elect angels; he can accuse the saints with a show of truth. Here the earliest and the latest revelation meet. One ceases then to see any unintelligible peculiarity in his coming, among the sons of God, into His presence. Alas! we are reminded that he well knew what it was to be there under very different circumstances. Among those sons of God he had once shone. What was he now? A rebellious and miserable being, who had made self his object and not God; and now, self failing to satisfy itself, he goes forth in malice against every other, especially against the objects of God's love, occupied in thwarting God and in hating man, in hating most of all such as God delights in.

But is there not a measure of comfort to the heart in the fact that the enmity of Satan, so bitter in its effects in our experience, bears witness to the love of God, which provokes him against us? If we know in sorrow the

reality of Satan's efforts and assaults, let us not forget for our joy whence they spring. Is it not because of what we are to God? Is it not because of what He says and Satan hears of any? If we have the same spirit of faith and are walking faithfully, Satan dislikes us no less than Job, and we are entitled to the comfort of this as of other Scriptures. The same principle is true of every believer now. Christ is not ashamed to call them brethren; and the Father, one may say, does not withhold His love to them as children: each one is an object of the deepest interest to God Himself. Satan knows it well, and for that reason he cannot endure them. It may be very trying to experience what the malice of the devil is; but what a comfort to know of God's love, and gracious care, and personal delight. Yet just this it is which excites the enemy to do us all possible damage.

Accordingly then, on the day when the sons of God, the angels, came to present themselves before Jehovah, Satan came also among them. "And Jehovah said unto Satan, Whence comest thou?" He would bring it out. It could not be, of course, that God did not know; but, as in Genesis so here, we are in the atmosphere of those early days when God dealt as with children, and brought out things plainly for those who needed the plainest truth. Hence therefore we see Him elsewhere coming down to look after man. He knew perfectly well without calling after him in the garden of Eden; but it is for us that He reveals it thus. And so it grieved Him at His heart when He saw man's wickedness great in the earth. Further, if it is a city and a tower that they unite to build in the land of Shinar; if the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, He comes down to see whether things are really so bad as they seem. All things are naked and open to

His eyes; but God would give us the grave lesson of never being precipitate in the judgment of evil; He knows right well how hasty we often are. Even God Himself will go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it which is come unto Him; and if not, He will know. Appearances deceive men at least, and God would teach us how to guard against mistake. He loves patience in judgment. His word implies the utmost possible care. It is the same God who afterwards ordained that the priest should judge in a suspected case of leprosy; but what waiting, and what shutting up again and again, unless there could be no mistake! What cherishings of the least hope of good! of any diminution in the evil! But what solemn sentence of judgment when the evil was all out! It is the same God everywhere; but what varied lessons on lessons for us!

So here: God speaks graciously in presence of all, and brings out the restless hate of the evil one, in contrast with Him who would come down in love to seek the lost. “Come unto me,” said He in the hour of His rejection — not unchafed only, but in overflowing love — “and I will give you rest.” Satan knows nothing of it, nor do the wicked. They are like the troubled sea; but Christ gives rest to all that labour and are heavy laden. I do not say it is all rest. There is such a thing as the work of faith and the labour of love in an evil world; but there never can be true labour unless there be a foundation of true rest — rest in Him. There must be Christ giving us rest first, if we are to acceptably labour in this scene which so loudly calls for it, and so deeply needs it. But here is the enemy of God and man, who knows no rest and displays his unrest in malicious activity, as we find afterwards, till wholly baffled he disappears. He is not only a murderer

but a liar; still he is obliged to tell out, as God is pleased to draw from him, his thoughts and wishes.

First of all he tells himself the tale of his restless going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it. God is then pleased to single out and speak of His servant: “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?” What does Satan? He turns the divine blessing into an insinuation. Job does not fear God for naught; he has a selfish motive; it is all for what he can gain by it. An evil mind cannot conceive motives other than its own. Have not You hedged him in on every side, blessing him in every thing that he has? “But put forth thy hand now, and touch all that he hath, and — if he curse [bless] thee not!” “And Jehovah said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power [hand]; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.” This was to be the first trial.

Soon are seen on earth the results of the permission. The rest of the chapter shows us disaster following quickly on disaster. Not a finger of Satan appears; yet his hand was in everything. They are earthly events accomplished by ordinary instruments, falling doubtless with extraordinary rapidity, and this was no small part of the trial. It would not have sufficed to allow any very long interval to elapse between the blows. It was most skilfully arranged by the enemy that these calamities should wear the appearance of divinely-sent judgments — unsparing judgments; and yet by outward and earthly means. So, first of all, when the day came, and his sons and daughters were eating and drinking in their elder brother’s house, there came a messenger who announced a raid by the Sabeans on the cattle. “The

oxen were blowing, and the asses feeding beside them: and the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword" (Satan's hand most manifestly — the destroyer); "and I only am escaped;" just so far as to tell the dismal news, and thus as the solitary survivor to give the more poignancy to all. Had in each case not one escaped, the news could never have come after such a sort. The mischief was consummate yet Job felt, as we too should, that all was under the eye of God. Never let us forget Him. If Satan's hand was hidden under these afflicting strokes, God's hand was above Satan. How sure and great the comfort!

So accordingly, unseen again, comes the rest of these troubles. "While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep" (of course, referring to lightning), "and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans" — an enemy from a totally different quarter — "The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: and, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness." Thus we find it from all quarters, and then too the weightiest of all, the destruction not merely of property but of all that he had, taken to the very letter. Had he not sons? Had he not daughters? All was swept away, and swept away too in a manner

peculiarly distressing to the heart. Was not God above? Does not God take an interest in everything? Had not this been the history of Job's life — the interest and the blessing of God, not merely upon himself, but upon all that he had? And now in one day all that divine blessing had given is gone, and gone most painfully. Had God forgotten? Did God take no heed? "Nay," says Job, "naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." So said this righteous man, as he arose and rent his mantle and shaved his head — for he felt it, and was right to feel it — and fell down upon the ground; but then he worshipped, and said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither. Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly;" nothing unsavoury or abnormal. The first assault totally failed. Stripped of all, Job sinned not.

Another day came when the sons of God presented themselves once more in heaven, and Satan not only came in their midst, but, here it is added, to present himself before Jehovah (Job 2). One might have thought that surely he will now be ashamed. He had had all his way, and God was only the more magnified. But no; the unjust — and one need not say that Satan is the leader and spring of such — knoweth no shame; at any rate, there he is. And Jehovah again questions, and brings out too that His servant Job, although Satan had tried to set him against Him, "holdeth fast his integrity." He could add, "although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause." Satan asks for one more trial, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." "Skin for skin," like for like, as many take it; or it may be

that he lowers all that had passed to a superficial trial, that it had merely touched the surface of things — “Skin for skin.” But he says, let there be something deeper now, and we shall see. Let it not be “skin for skin,” or a skin-deep trial; “but put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And Jehovah said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thy hand; but save [literally abstain from] his life.” The reserve of his life was not with the view of mitigating the trial, but in order to the triumph of God for the good of the afflicted, the moral of the book. The trial, in fact, would have been less in every way, and its purport lost, if God had been pleased to let His servant Job be removed like his children; and, when Job broke down, death was exactly what he impatiently desired. It would have been the readiest relief to have died. He had no fear whatever as to God’s loving, him, if he were only with Him; and the most calamitous plight into which he was reduced by the enemy after this would have found an instantaneous close in quitting the scene of such suffering. But God reserved his life when allowing Satan to do his worst, not, in my judgment, to spare Job anything, which was far indeed from the point, but because it would have interfered with His own gracious purpose of blessing in the face of evil and the enemy. And this is what we find in the book, that God had such a purpose, and that, even great as He is and infinite in His resources, each saint is an object of care to Him, and His purpose alone prevails. Whatever of sorrow may come in, they are but the circumstances of the way, and this not merely now, but then, even in the days before redemption. The great principle is always true, because God is always God, if there be not the manifestation of Christ as yet.

So Satan goes forth, “and smote Job with sore boils [the collective singular, a grievous sore] from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him” — it was a great aggravation of his suffering that she should fall, yet not Job; but she who ought to have been a helpmeet to him was wearied of the strain, and says in her bitterness — “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse [lit. bless] God, and die.” It was a frightful speech, but through Satan’s instigation wrung out of her, and as undoubtedly through her lack of looking up to God. Indeed we do not know what or who Job’s wife was; it forms no particular part of that which God brings before us; it is her one appearance in the history of the book. “But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one” — for even here we find a wonderful measure of patience in his words. He does not say, “Thou speakest as a foolish woman;” he goes no further than, “Thou speakest as one of the foolish ones.” It is well known that the word “foolish” has a morally bad sense in Scripture. It is no question of feeble intellect, but of that worst moral depravity, which blots out God, and so makes nothing of His word. Ill as she had spoken, he does not charge her with this; but simply that she spoke like such. “What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.” Satan had no resource more. Job owned God’s title to take all he had, and smite himself from head to foot. It was evident that Job served God at all cost.

But at this point a change ensues, and a new trial. It is the more to be observed, because not merely does the wife disappear from view, but, what is still more striking,

Satan also is spoken of no more. We never hear a word of him again. Satan is completely defeated. And it is an immense comfort for all assailed by him to know that Satan is never the conqueror, though he may gain temporary success. It does not matter what it is you look at, Satan never triumphs but for a little moment. He may win a battle, but is beaten in the war. He who always has his way is God Himself; and when we know who and what He is, what a comfort! Of course I am speaking now of the children of God, and of God's dealings with them; and I affirm that Satan only comes in by the way, does his worst, fails, and vanishes. Such has been and is his history, and it will be so to the end. So it was found here. Not a word more is said about him. The great problem remains, which God still pursues. God would bring, out the true lesson of trial, and the supremacy of Himself over evil.

Three friends then, pious men too, heard of all this evil that was come upon him, and "they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him." The trouble must have evidently gone on for a considerable time. We are not to suppose that Job's trial was measured by a few days. It was limited by God, but this was not necessarily of a brief time. The terrible disease which had followed after the destruction of his property, family, everything here below, was known to friends who lived at comparatively distant points; and so they had to make an appointment to come together. This alone supposes the lapse of some time, and what we find in Job's complaints afterwards entirely falls in with and corroborates it. "And when they lifted

up their eyes afar off, and knew him not" — so extreme the change in what, after all, could have been no long while, so distressing the change, whatever the time might be — "they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven." Those wrong them who deny their true affection for Job: the failure lies altogether elsewhere. It is an entire mistake of the point and instruction of the book to conceive that their feelings were shallow, or that they had but little love for their friend. Not so: God is showing us the insufficiency of every one and every thing but Christ. This the book of Job proves; and consequently, the more you lower Job or his friends, you gather the less of its profit. Let us give them each and all their value, still they are immeasurably below Him in and by whom we know the Father. We are told then that they came and; "sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights" — one does not often find such friends with such reality, or at any rate such depth and display of sympathy — "and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great."

Here begins the great action of the book. Job, who stands such a model of patience up to this point; Job, who had bowed to God under such a weight, and such a breadth, and such a rapid succession of calamities as never met a single individual from the beginning of the world till then; Job, who had honoured God even more in his trouble than in his prosperity — who could find fault with him? Had the trial stopped at this point the lesson of the book would have been lost. We should have missed the ways and the end of the Lord. We should have heard of the patience of Job and seen him honour

God as unflinchingly in abject misery as when blessed on every side. We should have seen what Satan is in his unwearied and audacious and causeless malice, and seen him defeated utterly; but we should have lost that which it was the great object of this book to communicate in what follows.

But now God brings forward three men of weight, old, real, and worthy friends that felt deeply for him. Who can reasonably doubt it? The description of their grief proves it. For all that, here begins the saint's failure, which we shall find running its course through. It was their theory which misled them on the one hand, while Job on the other adhered to his conscious integrity, till he was driven from all thought of self to stand on what God is to him, not what he had been and was. For God loves His saints too well to allow anything derogatory to Himself unknown to themselves which would hinder the fullest blessing, and He graciously employs trial in order to accomplish that blessing. He gives us the inexpressible consolation of knowing that it is not Satan who purposes and effects aught, but Himself, and that it is Himself in perfect wisdom and righteousness, but withal the God of grace, spite of even these tremendous calamities which sin has introduced, and which Satan is allowed to wield against His servants.

This is unravelled gradually in what follows. Job must know himself, as he never could have conceived otherwise. To know one's self is a very different thing from being converted to God, and necessary if we are to be fully blessed. Further, the friends had to learn as well as Job, being objects of similar grace, though far below Job. They were pious men; but a man might be so and have never been practically in the presence of God for

himself: I mean now for thorough judgment of self measured by God Himself. This is what the book opens out to us, as far as: it could be before Christ came.

We hear the outburst of passionate grief at last from Job. (Job 3) He could not stand the presence of his friends. Many sorrows and bitter suffering he had borne; but these friends came and looked on his misery without a word. It was too much for Job. Did they suspect him? He could not endure doubts Godward, especially from them. Were they not friends? If they loved him, why that silence — that ominous silence for seven days and seven nights? It might begin with deep feeling for him; but why not a word? Why not one drop of comfort for his parched lips? They began to think; and thinking is a dangerous thing. In God's presence we judge self and hear Him. These thoughts of ours, how often they mislead! What we want is to pray and hear, that we may from God receive His word. Ah, this is another thing, and exactly what is wanted! Their ear was not open. There was One who was wakened morning by morning, and whose ear was opened, who never knew our dulness of hearing God. But the three friends! — they first preserved this dead and distressing silence toward Job, who soon and bitterly had to learn what came out of that silence. Though he began, they followed; but it was their own thoughts and not the mind of God.

Job then bemoans and curses his day — not God, nothing of that kind; but still he unbecomingly expresses his horror of the day in which his birth was announced. His whole birth-scene was before him, wrapped in gloom, Everything connected with his coming into the world was horrible in his eyes; and so he bitterly launches forth: "Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the

night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness." And afterwards, "Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein." He asks why he had ever been born, one who was destined to such wretchedness? why he was not rather left, as he says so scathingly, "with kings and counsellors of the earth, which build desolate places?" Is this what the greatness of this world comes to, kings building ruins for themselves? "or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver?" But gold and silver cannot redeem from sorrow or death Was this life? or the work in which the kings of Egypt sought renown, the building of their own tombs? But his seemed more dismal still. Why had not he a lot to be laid in a desolate place like theirs? or why was he ever born at all?

Then opens the first debate of his friends, founded on this outburst of Job. We may notice these friends speaking with a certain difference of character and always in a similar order, throughout the three great discussions in the book. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar follow in regular succession, Job replying to each of them. In the third discussion it may be observed that one of the three — Zophar — drops off, while Job continues his discourse so long that we might almost think it an answer to that unspoken speech; that is, what Zophar would have had to say if he had spoken, Job completely refutes. In short, the main central portion of the book is occupied with what I have just described: three lines of arguments, sustained by the friends of Job on the one hand, and answered, each separately and fully, by Job on the other. Then follows a new personage, Elihu, who silences Job as decidedly as Job had silenced the three; and finally Jehovah closes all, solving the

problem of the book at the last. We shall look a little into the first discussion, if it please God; but I must be brief on what I draw your attention to at this time.

Eliphaz the Temanite, who appears to be the oldest and the more dignified of the three friends, rebukes Job first of all for want of firmness in meeting the deep distress which had befallen his family and himself. Not content, however, with this, he reproaches Job that he who had so well known how to meet others in their sorrows, failed when the trouble came on himself. He stands to the sure righteousness of God's way, who could never forsake the innocent any more than spare the guilty. He goes farther, and gives an account of that which appeared to him by a spirit, as he says, what was secretly brought to him, and his ear received a little thereof in thoughts from the visions of the nights. He describes graphically the apparition in these visions, which uttered a deeply solemn word in his hearing; the gist of which was the presumptuousness of mortal man daring to arraign God in any way. He insists on the folly of turning to creature help. All things are in the hand of Him who suddenly deals with the foolish who thought himself secure. Lastly, he calls on Job to repent; that if he would only humble himself before God, this trial would not only be turned away, but leave him more blest than ever. This, I think, gives very briefly the general purport of the first discourse of Eliphaz, in Job 4, Job 5.

Yet it is too remarkable to be passed by, that we have the Spirit of God employing as Scripture the very words subsequently treated by Jehovah as a false estimate not merely of Job but of Himself. It is not what Jehovah said at last, not what Elihu says as interpreter by the way, not even what Job pleads. The words of Eliphaz are

quoted by the apostle Paul in the New Testament. This is very striking. God Himself pronounces what they had said to be not right words; but for all that the Holy Spirit gives all by inspiration, and employs the words of one as Scripture. Assuredly these two things can be reconciled, and very simply. One has only to examine the words of Eliphaz in order to see that in themselves they contain nothing but truth; but if we weigh them as applied to Job, they are inexcusably wrong How wise is the way of the Lord! how admirable the depth of what is given us in the Scripture! The New Testament, both in the first epistle to the Corinthians and in the epistle to the Hebrews, quotes the words of Eliphaz; but then the application is perfectly good. In the history given in the Old Testament the application was wrong, and the speakers were reproved for it. In the New Testament the application is as right as the words themselves; all is in place. It is a marked instance, therefore, of the wonderful way in which God meets all in His own wisdom. But this merely by-the-bye.

Job then answers him in Job 6, Job 7, but with considerable pain: “Oh that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! For now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.” Thus Job’s piety made him own that God not only must be, but was, concerned in all these calamities; and he was right so far. Job did not lay the blame on the Sheba or the Chaldeans, the lightning, the hurricane, or the elephantiasis, but looked far beyond the secondary instruments. He was right in bringing

God into the trouble; only he was wrong, as we shall find at the end, in either supposing that there was nothing to correct in his soul, or that God could be anything else to him than gracious while faithful, and long- suffering while righteous. He did not take into account the power of evil and of Satan which is permitted but measured by God. He did not hold fast as he ought that it is in love to His own God allows them to be peculiarly sufferers in this world. All this practically he had to learn, so that at first sight his very piety made the difficulty greater in attributing everything to God, apart from His way and end; if so, how objectless seemed the crushing blows which had fallen thick and fast upon him! how could he reconcile it all? He was sure that God is righteous and holy, that He must be good and true and faithful; and yet it was from God that all these miseries came on him, a saint! It was a difficulty, and so much the more terrible for the man who lay under the anguish of these troubles at the moment, and not a person calmly reflecting afterwards. How different for one who reads in the book of God the solution of all! We must remember this when we look into these matters. This then is what I would suggest in weighing that which follows in the reply of Job, who in his despondency desires to be cut off by God; especially as he had only disappointment from his brethren, as a thirsty caravan before the dried-up bed of waters they had longed for. He does not deprecate reproof; but theirs were but words cavilling at his words, They had in no way reached the case. He could only again wish for death, and even expostulates with God, but soon owns his wrong, and implores forgiveness, but death too.

Next comes Bildad the Shuhite (Job 8), who succeeds Eliphaz, but with a great deal more of asperity, and consequently bringing out from Job a greater tartness in his rejoinder. He does not scruple in reproving Job to suppose that his children had brought on themselves the due reward of their deeds, and throws out hints that he himself could not be what he seemed. He speaks and thinks only of justice, yet urges repentance on Job, which would assuredly be followed by more blessing than ever. The juiciest and greenest herb is the first to wither, and the hope of the hypocrite or polluted is no more than a spider's web, whose place will deny the sight of him, whilst the upright is filled with joy.

In Job 9 and Job 10, Job repels the insinuation of Bildad, and maintains still that the very majesty of God made it impossible for him, a poor weak man, to stand up against the blows of such a God. This is the great point. It shows therefore, that, even if he wished, he could not, however righteous, plead his righteousness before God — that God's all-holy eye must see sheer failure and imperfection in him; so that his only wish was that there might be a daysman between them both — some one who would be able to adjust the balance between God and man. He could only wish for death in his incompetence to resist the overwhelming might which had crushed him. This seems the chief peculiarity of Job's reply to Bildad.

Then follows Zophar, in Job 11, who is the keenest of the three, and the least considerate. He taxes him with moral blindness as well as mere bluster. He takes up the harsh thoughts of those who attacked, and gives no value at all to the pleadings of Job in his wretchedness. On the contrary, he begins to harbour that sad thought,

which gets expression from them all, of some grave and secret evil which must lie at the bottom, the cause of the manifold and unparalleled calamities of Job. He is as decided as an evil surmise makes one. We shall find, however, considerably more of this when we come to look into the second argument between Job and his friends. Upon this we may not enter now.

But I close with stating that Job replies to Zophar, setting forth very completely the weakness and wretchedness of man doomed to die on the earth. None then could speak of the power of life. Christ, who has alone gained the victory over evil, was as yet in the future; but Job looks at man on the earth, and owns, in a most pathetic way, man's utter weakness, as born to trouble, before the incomparable majesty of God Himself. In this reply Job opens with some sarcasm. But he meets the hypothesis of present retribution with the most distinct negative and disproof, "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure." Nor was this confined to man. Every form of animate nature proclaims the same fact: the beasts of the earth, the fowls of the air, the fishes of the sea, declare plainly that the violent carry it over the weak. God is sovereign; but for that very reason their law of government is a sophism, and to apply it to him unjust. God does as He pleases, and among men above all reverses all calculation.

Such had been the fruit of Job's observation (Job 13), and he was conscious of being more right than his friends. It was with God he wished to speak, not with such quacks as they, whose wisdom would be to hold their peace. What they had said he counted to be said wickedly and deceitfully for God, who had given them no

such authority, and would surely reprove them, as in fact He did. His integrity he would hold fast before Him, say what they liked, and he knew he should be justified. He asked but a reprieve from suffering, and that His dread should not overwhelm him; he wished to find out all that was wrong in himself, and begged to know why he was driven to and fro like a leaf or dry stubble. He did not yet know the grace that was giving him self-judgment. He sees only a record kept of bitter things, and himself made to inherit his youthful iniquities, his feet put in the stocks, his ways watched, the very soles of his feet marked, whilst he was but consuming as a rotten thing, or a moth-eaten garment.

He closes his answer (Job 14) with more general reflections on man's miserable lot in this world, frail and faulty in nature, and hopeless of revival in this life, unlike a tree, which may sprout again if cut down ever so low. But man cannot till the heavens be no more: then he too will wake from sleep. Again Job prays that he may be hidden in the grave till his change or renovation come, when God will call and he answer. Meanwhile he sees no ground of hope; for as even the strongest things fall to ruin, man passes so completely that, whether his sons come to honour or are brought low, he knows nothing.

But I hope to pursue a little more, on this day week, the chapters that follow, so as to present the scope of the great argument carried on between Job and his friends, and in its course to give a few hints — for I do not pretend to more — towards helping, the children of God to the more profitable study of the book for themselves.

Lecture 2. - Job 15 - 31.

In following up the further discussion between the friends of Job and the sufferer himself, I shall endeavour to give a sketch which by the Lord's grace may help souls. It cannot pretend to be more than suggestive; for it is needless to say that no more could be attempted in the few lectures now proposed. But this is what a considerable part of those conversant with Scripture most need. There is a time and a place for the most minute search into every word of God; but many a Christian craves something of a distinct outline, brief perhaps but comprehensive, so as to seize what it is that the Spirit of God is here setting before us; what is the main truth that God is now teaching us, as well as Job in that day. And this seems the first requisite if we would read the book intelligently and to profit, that we should have an adequate sense of the grand object of God in giving it to us. Of this then, as far as the central part of the book is concerned, I hope to speak so far as time permits.

The first thing to which your attention may be well called, is the mistaken principle underlying the thoughts of not Eliphaz only but also Job himself. It falsified the application of every word of his friends; it was rebuked finally by Jehovah Himself at the close of the book. In due-time we may the better for this show where it was that, with all his faults, Job was right, while his friends were wrong; for this is the clear issue at the end, although there was that which needed correction and called for self-judgment, as it surely came and was carried on deeply in his soul at last. This is not at all a question of anyone's opinion; it is the sentence of God for every believer's instruction.

Where was it then that there was so wrong a start? Wherein consisted a view that offended God so deeply? The three were friends of Job, and unquestionably pious men; yet did they err grievously, and needed God's pardon as we know. What was it then which vitiated the wisdom, experience, and friendly purpose of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar? What irritated Job, and made all their appeals powerless to deal with his conscience? What, in short, made them not only without ability to help his soul in the tremendous extremity to which he was reduced, but, further, exposed themselves to the unsparing rebuke of God Himself?

Their error was by no means a singular one, more particularly among the righteous, who, knowing God, have nevertheless never been thoroughly broken down as to themselves. Such persons one finds still among His own people on the earth. It was common to them all, yet there must have been some ground of righteousness in their thoughts, as every believer would allow. But here was where they went astray; they assumed that the present aspect of the world is an adequate expression of His judgment of men's ways. This assumption we find running through the speeches of the three friends, at first expressed with comparative calmness, but ripening at length into severity, as Job's passionate outburst resented what they increasingly imputed as the hidden explanation of the facts. Here was a soul suffering a succession of troubles beyond all example. Who could point out the man subjected to such dealings since the world began?

The difficulty increases at first sight, when we remember how precious he was to God, and the tender mercy of God to His children; when you think of such

trial on earth, after hearing what God said about him in heaven. But then a main part of the profit which the book discloses depends on the fact that both God's estimate and Satan's trial were only made known in heaven; that the reason of the trial was a secret for the present — a secret not there. but here. Neither Job nor his friends knew anything of what God had said about him. Satan well knew; but could not conceive disinterested suffering integrity.

Consequently here we have the other side, not what was on high, but what was seen here below. No contrast could appear more complete. The whole reasoning of the friends of Job assumed, on the contrary, that what was permitted on earth must be the adequate reflex of God's mind in heaven. Hence, therefore, the more that Job had seemed pious and prayerful, and that his life had been one of the most even character — that he had been singularly blest, as indeed he had walked with habitual dependence on God, the more was all now turned to his disparagement as mere subtlety. We must remember that it was only a process of conviction going on. They did not arrive at this conclusion at first. There was anxiety first, then suspicion; and I have already passed with you over the chapters where the suspicion is seen growing up in the minds of his friends. Then was shown Job not only yielding to complaint under the unexplained trial, but stung and touched to the quick by the imputation of his friends.

Henceforth there was no more disguise. He treated them as those who had no knowledge whatever of his case, no sound understanding of God's ways. Nor had they really. Consequently there comes out on the one hand the impatience of Job, weakening their confidence

in the reality of his goodness; on the other their yielding to the spirit of evil surmise and suspicion; so that all power, either of consolation or of godly reproof, was entirely destroyed on both sides.

This then seems exactly where we find ourselves at the end of Job 14. So Eliphaz takes up the word in Job 15 with no small degree of disgust at the state of Job's soul. He had judged from the surface. "Should a wise man," he says, "utter vain knowledge, and fill his belly with the east wind? Should he reason with unprofitable talk?" This he considered to be the character of Job's defence. "Yea, thou castest off fear." Now it is no longer insinuation; he ventures to pronounce on Job. "Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God." How did he know this? He had come too hastily to the inference; and it was false. Job had in no way restrained prayer before God, as we may find not only from his character but from his answers soon.

There cannot be a more instructive lesson to us of the danger of judging by appearances. It is beyond question a main point in this marvellous book. A superficial survey is never the way to form a righteous judgment; as the Lord Himself warned in His day. If it was wrong then in them, much more censurable is it in us. Here we find an entire book devoted to the purpose of guarding us from such a snare. "Thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer from God. For thy mouth uttereth thine iniquity, and thou choosest the tongue of the crafty." Therefore they found no more in their judgment than a gloss in all his expression of desire to draw near to God, and of confidence in God's acquitting him of the suspicion they had formed. Passing all the bounds of loving solicitude, they feared not to utter direct judgment. But their

failure is exactly the way that God takes to warn us of like danger in our own ways. Appearances were against Job. “Thine own mouth condemneth thee,” says Eliphaz, referring to his undoubtedly improper expressions. “Thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I: yea, thine own lips testify against thee. Art thou the first man?” Then he lets out a little of the evident feeling that Job had shown them disrespect. No doubt they were more aged than he, and from a distance had come to him as those best suited to console and comfort. But if disappointed, had they not themselves abandoned the ground of dependence on God? They had indeed done so, although they had preserved their silence for a considerable time. It was not merely a question of Job’s breaking out; but what about them? It was not merely that God was holding up before all that tried sufferer, and how He would carry to a good end the bitter lesson that Job was passing through; but God was also showing the danger of misjudgment even for holy men of God. The profit of the book is entirely lost if we regard them as mere self-righteous men in the bad sense of the word. Not that there was not self-righteousness in them, or even in Job; for God convicts them all of it There is no denying therefore, that flaws and faults were found in the friends and in Job; but we may rightly seek to gather wherein they wholly and he in part missed the truth, and what it is that God would use the book to guard our own souls from.

Eliphaz then deals such a severe rebuke, that it is anything but in keeping with the calm with which the debate had begun; for he passes into a comparatively bitter setting down of Job as one who should feel his inexperience as compared with them, and the

impropriety of such freedom of speech addressed to his elders. But all this shows us how solemn it is, and what a danger, even for a saint, to have self rather than God in one's thoughts, and this not meaning God in general, but above all the God of grace. The friends spoke much of God, but the manner in which they looked on Him was purely as a judge. This was surely a great defect, and the correction is just the moral of the whole book. Those who make the one question that is before God now to be His marking our deserts in the present life, must fail entirely to understand that God has taken advantage of the evil that is here to show the grace that is in Himself above the evil. It is true that the time was not yet come to show evil completely baffled and set aside, because this could not be till Christ and the cross. For all this, God is God and loves to be known as the God of grace, and it came out in the midst of all the evil that was in this world. Could it be said to be a new thing? The pledge of grace in Genesis 3 had testified, even when sin had just entered man's heart, that God is the God of grace. The woman's Seed to bruise the serpent's head was the very first intimation after the fall of man. I do not deny that there was judgment too; but while there was an expression of present judgment in the earth becoming a scene of curse and trial with thorns and thistles externally, with death and sorrow for the future life of man and especially of woman, there was the resource of grace above all, the suffering but victorious destroyer of the evil one, the Seed of the woman.

Is it not remarkable that not a thought of the woman's Seed is breathed through the friends of Job? On the contrary, in the portion that comes before us at this time, the Seed of the woman had a most central place in

the heart of Job. It is not in the least denied that the others were believers; but “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” Why is it that they never once touch on that blessed One that was to make good and manifest the superiority of grace over all evil? Why was it that they could not rise above the fear of evil underneath? that they thought it useless, along with bright promises of present good in repentance, to do more than censure and warn and threaten, turning even to bitter account now the testimony of Job’s former life? Their conclusion was that his evil was finding him out, that judgment was pursuing the hypocrite. Alas! not one man among them knew what it is to overcome evil with good. Doubtless there was present and open failure in Job, though not the hidden evil of their suspicious minds. But grace overcomes evil with good. Why did they not? There was deplorable failure in all but God; and this too the book clearly shows.

But there is another lesson which we find the more that they advance in their injurious insinuations. It is hard to conceive anything that is more crushing to the spirit of a godly man; for, as there is no plain distinct charge, so they allege no facts to be laid on the conscience. The judicial spirit that governed them withdrew their hearts from waiting till God manifested the truth of things, and disposed them hastily to take advantage unconsciously of the sufferer’s intemperate speech, to found on it the suspicion of worse deeds behind it all. They could say here, “Thine own mouth condemneth thee; thine own lips testify against thee.” And what could poor Job say? Was it quite false? It was too true; but what did they gather from it? Some dark deep iniquity that God was judging. Nay, but they were judging, and judging

wrongly. There was faith underneath, and a believing in God incomparably stronger and truer in Job than in any one of those that blamed him, as God failed not to bring out in the end.

Let us pursue the book a little. Eliphaz then, after reproving Job for his disrespect to his elders, comes to what God is in His perfect holiness, and on the other hand to man in his sinfulness. Perfectly true; but how did this meet the difficulty? Is that the whole case as it stands? Is there nothing but man suffering for his abominations in the world? Is there no room for a righteous man to suffer in this world? Is there no enemy to afflict, no God to chasten? To them there was but the one thought of judging sins. Their heart had never yet faced the solemnity of the righteous tried deeply, of God allowing His own to be put to the proof peculiarly and to suffer. They had narrowed their minds to the one thought that, whenever severe blows fell on a man, they were the unerring indication of something uncommonly bad. If therefore unparalleled troubles had befallen Job (and who could deny it?), it must be that Job was the worst of men.

Such was the theory, and their application of it. They were thoroughly wrong. It was not sin, nor was it illwill; yet equally uncharitable in result was the working of their ignorance of God’s ways. And surely there is in this history grave matter for our reflection if we would Not thus fail. There was no intentional flagrant mischief; nor indeed is this the usual way in which a child of God injures or is injured. As a rule, it is partial truth that damages his spirit. An unconverted man is swept away by his own will and Satan’s lies; but he that fears God may be misled grievously by a partial view of God or

man. Hence the immense moment of our seeking not merely a truth but the truth. For us too there is the less absence of excuse now, because of the unspeakable privilege that we have the truth fully revealed in Christ, who is not merely a truth, but the truth objectively, as the Spirit is in power.

How then are we using the grace thus shown us? Is it Christ or our own thoughts that we bring in as a standard to judge whatever comes before us? Now had the friends turned, I will not say to such a revelation of God as we possess, but to what is given in the very first communication of God, that third chapter of Genesis to which we have referred, what would have been the result? How does God speak of Him there, and how would it have applied to the case in hand? Would it not have kept them from unrighteous judgment in this way? There surely, if anywhere, is the pattern of all perfection in this world. Was He to pass through without suffering? Would the serpent spare Him? Before his own head should be bruised he was to bruise His heel. The first revelation of God then about the Seed of the woman, the coming Deliverer, ought to have guarded them, like others, from the sad mistake which the book of Job is designed to correct. It is a bruised One that is to bruise Satan finally. He must suffer many things, whatever the glories that should follow. And what believer could think of evil in His case? Does suffering, if unequalled, suppose evil in Him? In no wise. The theory therefore, that the sole cause of suffering for a man in this world is the evil of which God sees him guilty, is false, and not the less but the more mischievous a falsehood, because of a certain measure of truth in it. A narrow view may be most pernicious.

For it is untrue, on the other hand, that evil has nothing to do with man's suffering in this world. If there were no evil, there had been no suffering. Sin then, no doubt, has an immense deal to do with it as the general rule. Take man here below; take any one indulging in any evil: does he not suffer? Of course he does. Thus it is a positive principle of God's righteous government that evil never can be indulged in without entailing the solemn dealing of His hand, though room be left for the distinct working and even suffering of grace. It is true, not only in the future, but also in the present, that one reaps as one sows. But is it the sole or the whole truth? Is God limited to His government? In no way. There was where Eliphaz and his companions were wrong; and Satan knows well how to bend to his own purposes that particular side of truth which we either choose or overlook.

There comes in the immense importance of seeing the early lesson of the book, which is that we have to do with not only God but Satan. We have to resist one who is not only an accuser before God, but, as the last book of the Bible teaches like the first, a deceiver among men. It is inexcusable that we should be deceived, because we have now that scene, and a vast deal more, made known to us plainly. That which could not have been then rightly laid before Job and his friends, as it would have been altogether premature, is as a whole laid bare to us, who are now by redemption, and in a new life, responsible to walk according to the light of God fully revealed in Christ.

The Christian is now not in the dark, as they comparatively were. We walk in the light. And carefully remember, my brethren, that to "walk in the light" does not mean merely according to the light, important as

this is, and our clear duty. That we walk in the light is universally true of the Christian. Thereby is not meant, as many assume, the special attainment or high measure of spirituality reached by some Christians. That we walk in the light flows from our being brought to God, who is light, and is the revealed place of nearness where grace has put all that are brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of God, that is, every Christian person now. We are light, and in the light; we are walking there, and not in darkness. And because by grace we walk in the light, we are bound to walk according to the light.

But our responsibility to walk according to the light is wholly different from, though founded on, our walking in the light. If we are Christians really, we follow Christ, and have the light of life; and so we walk in the light, as men do literally while it is day. It is precisely where the knowledge of Christ as the light places us all. For now no man can follow Christ, or, in other words, can be a Christian, without walking in that light. It is not the spiritual only, but every Christian who enjoys this as his settled constant privilege. But although we walk there, it does not follow that we walk faithfully according to the light. This is where we see practical differences abound among Christians; but there is no difference at all in the great truth, that now we all walk in the light as God is in the light. As yet, however, it was not the time for that light to shine, and therefore we are far less excusable than they if we forget it; for all this is made known to us to preserve us from the mistakes into which even good men then fell.

Next, in the answer of Job (Job 16, Job 17), we may observe that he expresses his deep sense of their complete failure in meeting his case. “I have heard many

such things," said he: "miserable comforters are ye all. Shall vain words have an end? or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest? I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead," he adds very affectingly, "I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you." Just let them change places, had this been possible; let those three friends be in the position of Job; let them have, not only their possessions, but their families, completely swept away by the besom of destruction, and in a manner that looked like the effect of divine displeasure; let their persons too suffer in a way as marked and excruciating as Job's, so as to afford to the most careless eye the most unmistakable sign of some peculiarly tremendous dealing with them; let them be only in such circumstances, and Job be the friend that comes to speak with them: could he not have indulged in words and looks quite as severe? I cannot but think the answer here a most touching appeal, especially when he goes on, "But I would strengthen you with my mouth." There he has the unquestionable advantage in grace over them. "I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief." Not a word had come from them with such a character or purpose.

"Though I speak, my grief is not assuaged: and though I forbear, what am I eased?" Certainly he did not disown what they interpreted to his disadvantage, the depth of his desolation. Had they pressed against him the fact that God had permitted it all? It was this very thing he felt so keenly. Thus far Job was, beyond contradiction, pious. He acknowledged the truth. He does not lay his ruin on the Chaldeans, or other secondary causes. He does not explain it away by instrumental circumstances.

He saw God's hand without in the least entering into His mind about the trial, still less His love; and that was just the reason why all was at present so inexplicable to his soul. He holds fast his integrity, perfectly sure that there was nothing of that which they imagined against him, no dreadful secret, no burdening sin, which God was therein avenging. His conscience was good. Job could not tell how or why it was, while he mournfully felt that God was in it all; but he was no less certain that his friends foully wronged him; and that, if they stood in his shoes, far different would his words have been to them. "But now," says he, "he hath made me weary: thou hast made desolate all my company. And thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me." There was no hiding, no hard pretension in any way that he was suffering less than the reality. Nay, he goes to the opposite extreme, and uses language exceedingly to be regretted: "He teareth me in his wrath, who hateth me: he gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me." This is strong language when we remember whence Job felt his troubles came, whoever might be the means or instrument of them. Still he admits, and holds to it firmly, that the enemy could not have discharged his vials of wrath upon him unless God had given the word. He saw then the twofold truth, on the one hand, of God holy, just, good; on the other hand, of God visiting him with trials unexampled and utterly overwhelming. But he could not solve the problem, still less his friends, who misread both to growing doubt of Job's faith and probity.

But Job clung still to God, though he complained bitterly and unbecomingly. How and why such trial of himself could be, wherefore God should reverse His ways with

him, he could not understand; but he does not deny the truth for a moment. He does use language painfully descriptive of the distress his soul was passing through: “They have gaped upon me with their mouth.” It is not at all the only time that we may have to take notice of language that remarkably connects itself with that of the Psalms. Anyone that will take the trouble to compare the two books, may readily see a number of expressions pointedly similar. The instance before us may illustrate. Who in the Psalms speaks of their gaping like a ravening lion? It is the Lord on the cross. But what a difference! “But thou continuest holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.” Not a word of this is heard on Job’s part. In consequence of the fiery trial that Job was passing through, he speaks as if God were dealing hardly with him, as if He were become mysteriously his enemy; consequently he breaks out into bitterness, the natural effect of such a thought. The state of the soul must always depend on how one looks, or fails to look, at God. How all-important, therefore, that one should have and enjoy the knowledge of God as He is, that the soul should be at ease and at home with Him, self-judging and resting in His love.

The effect of real enjoyment of God’s love of course is that love flows from us. It was not so with anyone there. Job was right enough in feeling that God had to do with his sore trial. Little did he know what had taken place on high, which afforded the key at least to part of it. Still he could leave God out of no part, which, as it wrought in his friends to judge unduly of Job, and falsely of God — for they were wholly wrong — so it tended for the moment to give Job hard feelings about God. He murmured as if he were dealt with hardly. “God hath

delivered me," says he, "to the ungodly, and turned me over into the hands of the wicked." He avows with the utmost frankness that without Him none of these trials could "happen." There was real faith, although he was imperfectly instructed as yet. "I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark. His archers compass me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare; he poureth out my gall upon the ground. He breaketh me with breach upon breach, he runneth upon me like a giant. I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and defiled my horn in the dust."

But was it true that he restrained prayer before God? Listen to his own words: "My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death; not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure." Eliphaz had thoroughly wronged him. "O earth, cover not thou my blood, and let my cry have no place. Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high;" that is, he as to this can turn to God. Whether prayer had been restrained could be judged absolutely by none but God Himself. Job acts upon it here, it would seem; and, if I be not mistaken, this is just his appeal: "My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God." It was utterly false that he did not cry to God. "O that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbour! When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return."

And so through the next chapter (Job 17), where he pours out his lament, we find this. Had the suspicion — one might call it the charge — of his friends been true,

there is one thing that, above all others, would have been terrible in his apprehension. Need I say that it would be death? So far from this, however, that there was nothing that Job so much desired as death. It was in vain to talk to him about any change for him on earth; it was vain to talk to him about his family, or any retrieving the disasters that had swallowed all up. None of these things would have afforded the smallest comfort to the heart of Job; but if he could only die, if he could only approach near enough to God to plead before Him, not even now did he doubt what he would find there. How plain that, if it was only a partial revelation which had formed the heart of Job, still the substance of the truth was his.

Assuredly there is nothing that could more thoroughly test a man than that. A bad conscience would have shrunk from death, as the stripping it of all disguise, and destruction to the soul. Job, on the contrary, proved not his reality alone, but the state of his conscience, by the fact of his earnest desire to depart and be with God. We see his confidence in God then, even while he spreads out his sorrows, with no other thought than death before him. “If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it? They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust.”

Then (Job 18) the second of Job’s friends takes up the word. As we noticed in the former debate, Bildad has much less gentleness of spirit, and less self-restraint, than his older friend Eliphaz, who takes the lead in all these discussions. He therefore is much more

unscrupulous in bringing out his doubt of Job, his implication of hypocrisy; for this is really what soon comes out. “How long will it be,” he says, “ere ye make an end of words? mark, and afterwards we will speak. Wherefore are we counted as beasts, and reputed vile in your sight? He teareth himself in his anger: shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his place? Yea, the light of the wicked” (was this what he insinuates to be in Job, “the light of the wicked”?) “shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him. The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare. The gin shall take him by the heel, and the robber shall prevail against him.” “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”

Such is the spirit of Bildad. He was satisfied that, whatever might have been the appearances, they were all hollow, and that now the truth could no longer be hid: God’s judgments and Job’s language were making it manifest that he had been simply a prosperous fool, with its just and usual end in this life. We all understand of course what is meant in Scripture by the “fool” — a man without God. No folly is like it. So he believes it to have been with Job. Is it not humbling and solemn that we may be ever so sincere in what we believe, but completely wrong? We are just as responsible for what our convictions are as for what we do or say. The only one that is competent to give us the right thought or feeling is He who alone gives the wisdom and strength to carry it out. It is God Himself. We are entirely

dependent on Him to form our thoughts and feelings according to His mind just as much as for our ways.

But to proceed. Bildad adds, “He shall have neither son nor nephew among his people.” It is painful to see how his hard spirit takes advantage of the pitiful calamity that had blotted out the children of Job. “Nor any remaining in his dwellings. They that come after him shall be astonied at his day, as they that went before were affrighted. Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him that knoweth not God.” Was Job such in the estimation of Bildad?

As this was the worst of the speeches hitherto, Job under the hand of God is led far out of and beyond himself. It may be slowly, and but for a little; still following this comes a bright glimpse at Him that is coming, the Seed of the woman, for whom saints waited from the first. “How long”“ answered Job, “will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?” for he felt that in their reproaches there was no weight, nothing but words.

I turn now to what Job says in reply to Bildad: “Be it indeed,” says he, “that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself.” He felt that they had in no wise corrected it. “If indeed ye will magnify yourselves against me, and plead against me my reproach” — too hasty to take occasion by his deep and accumulated afflictions — “know now that God hath overthrown me.” How boldly he speaks out. And this, as far as it goes, could not have been without real faith, though it was far below the meek submission of our blessed Lord. Did they say that God was against Job? “God hath overthrown me,” he acknowledges. If it was any comfort

for them to know, he confesses that his trouble came from His hand, that He “hath compassed me with His net. Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment. He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths. He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head. He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree.” He himself points, not they, to his universal desertion, to the desertion of his wife, of his brethren, of his servants, of his household: in short, even youngsters acting contemptuously towards him. Those who once revered had all now deserted him. “I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I intreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I intreated for the children’s sake of mine own body. Yea, young children despised me.” So complete, as well as sudden, was the descent of Job. “All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me.” It was the painful truth; and he allows it all.

“Have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me.” This, so far as it went, seems to be excellent on Job’s part. It was not the whole truth; but it was true, and not at all enfeebled because he holds fast the certainty that it was not for any wickedness that was in his hands. No evil had he been consciously cherishing; yet there was the undisguised fact — God was smiting him. He did not lay the blame on others; he would not attempt to account for it by human reasoning; just because he felt it to be from God, he felt it to be so painful. Whatever might be the means employed, it was God, the same God who had hedged him in and blessed him uniformly hitherto; and how to

conciliate the present with the past he knew not. For that he had to wait. The answer came at last, when patience had its perfect work.

But he does not spare remonstrances or rebuke. “Why do ye persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh?” It was distress enough that he was suffering in this way. Were they justified in destroying his confidence in God? The drift of what they were doing was to make him doubt the sincerity of his own faith, which is clearly the devil’s work. The Spirit of God never leads to a doubt. “Oh that my words were but written, that they were but inscribed in the book! That they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For I know that my Redeemer liveth.” Here we come to the very distinct confession of his faith. “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.” Beautiful too it was at such a time, in the deepest desolation and distress, where there was not one solitary friend among men, and God Himself was smiting him. How like Christ up to a certain point in his circumstances! How little like Him in the unwavering acknowledgment of God’s holiness, as free from hardness as from repining! Still here we have a blessed confession, the more so because of the gloom, pain, and desertion in which it was uttered. “I know... that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”

Some will probably have heard that people question, for one reason or another, the meaning of these words, or perhaps affirm that they mean “out of my flesh.” But then it ought to be remembered that “out of my flesh” can mean from within it, as you might look out from a

window. It does not mean the separate spirit divested of the flesh. We must not confound “out of my flesh” with “without my flesh,” which it does not at all necessarily imply. It is the expression of his holding fast what every person, more particularly in the Old Testament, would maintain; that is, the true having to do personally with God, and in Old Testament thought personality meant the person fully, not merely therefore the soul and the spirit separate, but in the body too. So it is with Job; and this is what gives emphasis to his words. He can see the dissolution of his body at hand; he beholds everything crumbling into dust, and his flesh becoming the food of worms; but none the less does he cleave to the confidence that not only shall he see God, but this from out of his flesh. The resurrection therefore is clearly supposed in these words, and all the efforts of men to destroy the force of the passage are utterly vain.

But it is surely striking that we should hear such thoughts and language from these early days outside Israel. How comes it to pass? It is very evident that, after all, if there was but little made known by God, if there was but a comparatively small volume of truth revealed at that time, the Spirit of God gave that small revelation great force in the souls of those who believed it; and so we may be constantly surprised in the book of Genesis to find the advanced sentiments of one or another. I am far from saying that they speak in the knowledge of the full light by which a Christian ought to judge now; but they display no mean acquaintance with the mind of God from time to time. Hear what Abraham and Isaac say, what even Jacob may utter, although it is granted that he has not at all the same moral elevation as Abraham; but still one learns from all that is recorded

how much more they knew and could use in testimony than we might infer from their circumstances. It reminds me of a word in Proverbs, “There is much food in the tillage of the poor.” Thus, if there were but little, God knows how to make the little go far. This seems to be what He did with the patriarchs. Our danger now is in exactly the opposite direction. Grace has now revealed in Christ the fulness of truth; but, beloved brethren, how far do we turn it to His account? How does our “much” appear as compared with what we find these saints doing with their “little”? If theirs indeed was but a little, certainly God made it mighty, as we cannot deny, in its moral power and effects.

To resume then, Job says, “In my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself.” It is not merely the hope of blessing for himself, but real personal enjoyment of God; and this without fear or shrinking in the least. “Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” He might come to nothing meanwhile; but in that day God will be everything, and prove it by maintaining His own in their full personality before Him. “But ye should say, Why persecute we him, seeing the root of the matter is found in me? Be ye afraid of the sword.” He sees too that in that day divine judgment was coming. It was not merely that there was a Kinsman-redeemer in prospect to vindicate His own people, but in that day, as all Scripture shows, would be a time of judgment. “Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword’ that ye may know there is a judgment.”

Did Job’s confession touch the hearts of his friends? On the contrary, there follows an uncommonly bitter speech from Zophar. (Job 20) He seems to have been the lowest,

morally, of the three, and, as one generally finds, the most presumptuous in word and least broken in spirit. “Therefore do my thoughts,” he says, “cause me to answer.” And truly it was so. He gives us his “thoughts.” It was in no way that the fear of God moved his lips, or jealousy for His grace and truth. We have his own thoughts. “Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer, and for this I make haste;” which a believer does not. “I have heard the check of my reproach, and the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer. Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short?” That is the one thought of Zophar. “The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment.” Job was the wicked; Job was the hypocrite. “Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? He shall fly away as a dream” And so he pursues to the end of the chapter this reckless onslaught — for I can call it no less — on a man incomparably better than himself. What is it all but persevering, laborious, and extravagant effort to wound him whom they failed to convict or convince, if it were possible, by the words of their mouth? The words of their mouth were drawn swords.

“But Job answered and said, Hear diligently my speech.” From this point there appears to be a certain improvement in Job. It is not that his soul as yet was brought into the presence of God; for this we must wait for another dealing of God, which we may hope to have before us on the next occasion. But every view of grace is strengthening to the soul; and I think that Job never

gives way, either to the same measure of hardness in speaking of God, or of despondency; nor does he yield to such desire after death as a release from suffering. It was not unnatural for a believer who saw nothing before him but the most dismal condition here, and this from God. It would be great relief to go into the presence of God; and he knew what he would find there from Him. What marks the change not a little is, that he allows henceforth whatever there was of truth in what his friends had urged on him. Scarce anything shows a man gaining the advantage morally over his adversaries so much as this. What can be less happy than to see two debating, where they take up each a side of truth? There is never a satisfactory close to the question until you acknowledge whatever is true in him that opposes you. It is a plain enough proof that God is giving you a victory over self; and this is great gain. So we find that Job from this time acknowledges the measure of truth there was in what his friends — sad to say his adversaries, as really they were, — had said. But he does also demonstrate the folly of shutting one's eyes to God's actual long-suffering in respect of evil-doers. "As for me, is my complaint to man? and if it were so, why should not my spirit be troubled? Mark me, and be astonished, and lay your hand upon your mouth. Even when I remember I am afraid, and trembling taketh hold on my flesh. Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?" Thus, before he concedes their point, he draws attention to the undeniable fact that, so far is the present life from being an adequate expression of God's moral government, there is nothing more startling than to find wickedness so often allowed to triumph, and the righteous as often utterly cast down and tried peculiarly. This was a flat contradiction, no

doubt, of their thesis; and he draws it out before making the concession already referred to. “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?”

What have his friends to say in answer? The ground was cut completely from under them. They had assumed that, according to God’s government, no wicked man prospered, no righteous man but must prosper. A falser view of the world that now is there cannot possibly be. When the Lord takes the reins, it will be so. Then indeed the righteous are to be established, and all iniquity shall stop her mouth; then there will be no such thing as evil tolerated. But who can look upon the world as it is, and seriously allow such a thought? But how came these pious men to make such a strange mistake? There are none who make stranger mistakes than the pious when not walking in dependence on God. Their very piety gives them a stronger abhorrence of evil; and if there be not the power of grace, and the sense of their need of grace in God Himself guarding them, none will be more severe, none less just. This is a solemn warning. And how comes it to pass? Is it merely that no flesh shall glory in the presence of the Lord? There is more still; there is an adversary, the devil, as well as God, who will have us learn that only His grace is sufficient for us.

To this point tends the whole action of the book; not only the intervention of Elihu and the decision of Jehovah, but the reasonings of the interlocutors. But each part has its own moment; and it is well for us to take all into account.

Job describes then the wicked in prosperity in strong terms. “Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes.” It is not

merely that you have one here and there, but the wicked really take root in the world; they are at home there. “Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.” They come under no special chastening. “Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ.” It is they that enjoy the world, if you leave out God, and take man’s appreciation of present life. There is no disputing that such is the fact, account for it or not, if one looks at the world as it is. “They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?” In their case it would have been true to say that prayer is restrained.

Impiety has ever characterised the world. But is this all the truth? “Lo, their good is not in their hand: the counsel of the wicked is far from me. How oft is the candle of the wicked put out!” Here, it will be seen, he acknowledges the other side; and it is no less true that God does not leave Himself without witness. He presses the fact that the present world is no expression of God’s moral government; but he acknowledges that in the midst of men’s seeming prosperity a divine blow falls on them; in a moment their candle is put out. Exceptional dealings, therefore, are admitted. There was another sort of dealing that he did not yet see, and this was what he had to learn, that God acts among His own in the way of chastening, trial, or discipline, just as surely as He

may lay His hand on the wicked in the way of a solemn judgment.

But beyond a doubt the time is not yet come for all things to be manifested in power according to His mind and will. It is in vain for Israel or the church to hurry it, as both have done; for the due time cannot be till Christ comes. “Lo, their good is not in their hand: the counsel of the wicked is far from me. How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger. They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away, God layeth up his iniquity for his children: he rewardeth him, and he shall know it. His eyes shall see his destruction.” That is, it is not merely the man himself, but sometimes his family; and this accordingly is pursued fully to the end of the chapter.

Eliphaz, exceedingly taken aback by so complete an answer to his argument, tries to reply, for the last time, in the chapter before us. One cannot wonder that he fails. “Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself?” The ground taken now is, that God is above all questions of whether a man’s conduct is useful to him or not. “Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to Him, that thou makest thy ways perfect? Will He reprove thee for fear of thee? will He enter with thee into judgment?” Job’s maintenance of his integrity against their imputations he does not scruple to brand as wickedness. “Is not thy wickedness great? a,nd thine iniquities infinite?” Provoked by such a clenching answer to his argument, he now distinctly charges Job with hidden evil. He that suspects upon appearances will soon

dispense even with appearances. “Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite? For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing.” It was the very reverse of Job’s real character! “Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink” — Job gave more than ever Eliphaz did — “and thou hast withholden bread from the hungry.” What could be less true? “But as for the mighty man, he had the earth; and the honourable man dwelt in it. Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken. Therefore snares are round about thee.” “Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace:.... and the light shall shine upon thy ways.” (Job 22) Totally wrong in all his charges, this grave old man waxes bold enough to call Job to cease from his impiety, and to humble himself before God. “And thou shalt make thy prayer unto Him, and He shall hear thee.” He means that there was only one door open — humiliation of himself before God because of his hypocrisy.

Job answers, “Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find him.” Is this the language or the feeling of one conscious of wickedness before God? We never hear such language even from Eliphaz or any other of the friends. I am not denying their faith, but only saying that their state was not comparable with that of Job, in spite of all his bitter complaints. “I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say unto me. Will He plead against me with His great power?” Job knew God better. “No; but He would put strength in me.

There the righteous might dispute with Him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge." (Job 23)

Their spirit was judicial from beginning to end, and such a spirit is always wrong. There may be a measure of truth, but a judicial spirit, as it never saves a soul from death, so it profits least those who indulge in it: it does not suit a saint in such a world as this. But there was exactly where they were. They did not know God as Job did. "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there." This was his trouble. He could not enjoy God; for he had not yet the key to his distress at His hand. He desired Him, and was miserable to be practically at a distance from Him, with all these troubles intervening to cloud His goodness from his soul. "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." He knew not how it could be for His glory or his own blessing he should be so tried; but he was thoroughly satisfied that hypocrisy was the last thing that could be justly ascribed to him.

In the next chapter (Job 24) he describes, in a touching and solemn way, the nature of the of Len successful wickedness in this world. On that I need not dwell now.

Next comes Bildad, who is reduced to what might be almost called a few platitudes about the glorious power of God. Who doubted what is said? It is all true; but how did it apply to the case? How was Job's soul met? Or their suspicions justified? (Job 25)

And what does Job 26 let us hear Job saying in answer? That, after an ironical compliment to the speech just delivered for its power and wisdom, as the settlement of the question in debate, he can set forth the power of God, in spite of all his misery, far more comprehensively

as well as more glowingly than they. He adds the solemnities of the unseen world.

In Job 27 he handles another topic, not the glory of God, but the wretchedness of the hypocrite, and his awful doom, in stronger colours than they themselves had done, but still with the firmest maintenance of his integrity, though God had not yet vindicated him, and they had been unjust.

This is followed by a chapter yet more remarkable, in which he sets forth man in his eager pursuit of what is rare in this world — his restless search after gold, silver, and precious stones of every kind. But where is wisdom to be found? Man can, no doubt, steer his course across the waters; man can cut a road through the rocks; man can not only level mountains and fill valleys, in his eagerness for his own objects, but he can go where the vulture flies not and sees not; he can pierce where no wild beast ever penetrates; he can sink a shaft into the earth; he can make his way in quest of that which he values where no creature burrows, where the wildest would fear to follow. But where is wisdom to be found? The finest gold cannot buy it; the most precious gems and the finest works of art can be no meet exchange; the treasures of the deep, even pearls, fail in comparison. Man knows nothing of wisdom; but it is not here. Death and destruction have heard the report of it; they have heard that it is somewhere. It is not in this world; it is not in man as he is: avidity after present objects only excludes it. There is no wisdom here. In death and destruction there is at least a sad reality. “But where is wisdom to be found?” The answer comes at last from God Himself, and it is this: “The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding.”

To this Job brings all. Is it not solemn, yet the foundation of all, and verified in the conversion of every soul? Such is the wonderful end of a wonderful chapter. (Job 28).

In what follows we have the final defence of Job. Had he been able, Zophar might here have brought in his little word; but he was shut up to total silence. If Bildad had little to say, Zophar has absolutely nothing. Thus the friends were completely refuted, even by the sick and suffering Job. For the moment, and really as far as they were concerned, Job has it all to himself, and proceeds to speak at great length. He sets forth in an affecting manner his former brightness (Job 29), and the painful blight that had come over him and his. (Job 30) In Job 31 he protests his innocence in the most solemn way, his personal purity, his equity and consideration of his servants, his remembrance of the poor, his horror of idolatry, his freedom from vindictiveness, his cultivation of hospitality, his non-concealment of any iniquity, and this without fear before the Almighty; and if his fields could testify of fraud or force, he prays for thorns instead of wheat, and weeds instead of barley. I do not know a finer piece in this way, unless indeed when it is not merely the experience of a man under such a tremendous reverse from God, but the same man bowing down afterwards in his perfect submission to God. But on this I will not treat now, reserving the great final lesson of the book for the next lecture.

Lecture 3. - Job 32 - 42.

The first of these chapters introduces a new speaker into the great debate. Elihu, it is well known, has been the occasion of a great deal of speculation. It seems to be rather discreditable to the judgment of those who

have conjured up or yielded to such difficulties. There is scarcely more reason to doubt of Elihu than of Eliphaz, of Job himself, or any other. The historic reality of all stands or falls together. Nor is there better reason for imagining a superhuman personage in Elihu than in Melchizedek. Doubtless as Melchizedek was the type, and in a very striking way too, of the Lord Jesus as the royal priest, Scripture recording neither birth nor death, neither predecessor nor successor, and this in order to suit the more impressively His glory who was shadowed, so here comes forward one who remarkably exemplifies — for I should call him not a type, but one who exemplifies — the Spirit of Christ which we know did work in the saints of old. In some it took a prophetic character. Here it is more in the way of dealing with conscience and vindicating the character of God.

This is indeed what Job needed and had longed for, as we gather from earlier words. The very things he desired were in due time vouchsafed by grace. He had asked for one of like passions when crushed in spirit under the hand of God. He pined after a man who should intervene between God and him. And God now gives him his desire (not yet the man Christ Jesus), a man of God indeed, but with infirmities like his own. Elihu takes particular pains to insist that he presumed on no higher ground than this. Impossible, if it were any anticipative intervention of the Lord Jesus, that he should speak of his “opinion” and the like. We see how constantly he talks about giving his opinion. The Lord Jesus, let Him take the lowest place, never spoke as the scribes, but always as One giving out the word of God and the words of the Father. His mission indeed was to manifest the

Father. The only beloved Son who was in His bosom, He declared him.

Elihu takes no such attitude. He was a man, but one in whom the Spirit of God was working then, and who gives us the reason why he had not appeared on the scene before. He was comparatively young, and in those days different feelings governed from those of the present day. There was a strong sense of propriety in the deference due to elders from those younger. Saintship strengthened instead of weakening this. Elihu might, as compared with Eliphaz and the rest, enter much more into the mind of God; and it seems evident that he did so, more than Job himself, not to speak of the three friends — these “very old” men of whom he speaks. But until they were fairly silenced, until they had not a word more to say against Job or for themselves, Elihu abides in the shade. But, though he introduces himself with a good deal of preface, and apologises for one comparatively young giving his opinion, when he does speak, wisdom from God is in it. Does not all this show us how men were given to understand, even in these earliest days, what was becoming; and that the power of the Spirit, far from destroying relative decorum, does, on the contrary, set it off with a greater force than natural reverence because it judges self in the presence of God? At the same time, as there was a free opening for the light of God to enter, so it does not fail to shine.

Elihu lets us know the deep feeling that filled his soul as, on the one hand, he looked at these three men who were more vexed at their failure than humbled, because they had not really weighed the question in the light of God’s presence; and, on the other hand, at Job, who up to the present had failed to learn the lesson of subjection of

heart to God, although a terrible process was going on; and I am very far from meaning that God does not give wholesome lessons before the full blessing comes out. There is no time or form of God's dealing, beloved brethren, be assured, that is lost to the soul. Nor is it by any means what most appears that is the most important part of the blessing. One might venture to say, that in all the good that abides and bears fruit there is a groundwork that is unseen — or what goes on within — which, although it be by no means the fulness of the blessing that God intends for us, is its all-important and necessary condition.

Just so, consequently, there was a work now going on within. Job was learning himself. Neither his complaints of God, nor his collision with respected friends, could he have believed possible; he never had known such thoughts or feelings in all his previous experience. It is evident, too, that his friends were wholly unprepared for the exhibition that had taken place, quick as they were to see the faults of Job. But had they seen their own? There was a beam in their eye as truly as there was a mote in Job's. What wonder then that they should see badly? In part, therefore, this closing portion of the book is meant to bring before us the manner in which God brings the whole question to a solution, as far as this could be till Christ came. So, after Elihu has thus made his excuses for speaking, he takes the last place, really the weightiest of all, though he was so little to be thought of that we had not even heard his name before. And this is one of the things that men habitually fail to understand, that the last should be first, and the first last. To my own mind it is one of the moral congruities, not of this book only, but of Scripture, and of God's ways

generally, who brings people forward at the right moment. It is an important lesson, therefore, that God is teaching in that very fact. Man would not have done so. If he had essayed to write such a book as this, he would have prepared us for such an one as Elihu at the very outset. God acts with supreme wisdom; and the force with which Elihu comes into the scene when needed is so much the greater because of the retired and lowly place that he had maintained up to that moment.

Here let me take the opportunity of stating that we must not be misled by the word “inspiration” here. Elihu does not claim it in the same sense in which the apostle Paul applies it to all Scripture. He uses it simply as the source of that understanding which God gives to man, and in no way pretends to the unfailing, absolute, perfectly communicated word of God. When we talk about “inspiration,” we mean the mind of God conveyed so that error is absolutely excluded. Does Elihu herein pretend to any such thing? Would he talk about his opinion if it were so? This is the more necessary, because often one sees danger through a tendency, on the one hand, to let slip the force of Scripture as inspired of God, and, on the other, to weaken it by giving other men or writings such a name as “inspired,” which can only be in a lower poetic or figurative sense. The context must always direct us in deciding such questions. In the present instance of Elihu the context seems to me conclusive that inspiration, as applied to him here, does not mean what Paul predicates of every Scripture in 2 Tim. 3. Of the Scriptures, of course, the book of Job is part, and so inspired. The Holy Ghost, from whom it came, whoever might be the instrument, gave us a book as truly inspired of God as 2 Tim., which

vouches for all. But the inspiration of the Almighty of which Elihu speaks does not go beyond the source of human understanding.

But in Job 33 we find the first grand principle introduced for meeting the question of Job. He begins to open the moral reason for God's dealings, and for those trials under which Job had been groaning. "Wherefore, Job," he says, "I pray thee, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words. Behold, now I have opened my mouth, my tongue hath spoken in my mouth. My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart: and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly. The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life."

Then he puts forward the very point referred to already. "Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay." This is exactly what Job had desired, and now beyond his expectation, when he was entirely disappointed in his friends, God furnishes the help that was needed — a patient consideration of the awfully trying circumstances, with jealousy for God's glory at the right moment, and doubtless from the last quarter to which Job should have looked for it. "Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid." He had complained that God acted thus on his soul and body. Was he a land or sea-monster that God should treat him as He did? for Job indeed had used most uncomely words. But should no account be taken of his friends' provocation and of his extreme agony in soul and body? "Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee." It was God's hand that Job had so strongly deprecated. "Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I

am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me." Beyond a doubt Job had gone too far. It was quite true that there was no such unseen wickedness as his friends insinuated, but it was utterly false that God had not the wisest reasons for withering self in Job's eyes.

Job had, by the very contemplation of the grace that had wrought so much in and by him, lost sight of the source of grace. He had been occupied with its effects; and the doubts of his friends, in addition to the dealings of God, had well-nigh maddened him. Instead of directing him to the grace that is in God, Eliphaz had thrown him more and more on himself and his ways, which was precisely the error into which Job had fallen. That is, Eliphaz thought that if he made righteousness his confidence, if he had a true ground of practical godliness in his life, it was impossible that he should be afflicted of God as he had been; whereas it was really because Job had slipped into the error of thinking too much of his own righteousness, necessarily breeding not a little self-complacency in his soul, that it was a needful discipline for God to bring him down. If to be blessed fully, he must have a sound judgment of himself, as well as a truer estimate of God; and this grace did give.

Now we do need practical righteousness and a good conscience as well as faith to resist the enemy, as we see in Eph. 6. But we want something far brighter than this armour as a robe before God; we want divine righteousness here; and this Job had to learn. He had confounded the two things, as many a saint does today, to his own loss and the dishonour of God.

Elihu then puts clearly before him that he had spoken wrongfully of God, as well as too highly of himself.

“Behold, he findeth occasions against me.” Was it comely so to speak of God? “He counteth me for his enemy.” Elihu justly complained of such language. A saint should be reverent. “He putteth my feet in the stocks, he marketh all my paths. Behold, in this thou art not just.” Is it possible that a godly man should allow his lips to accuse God of injustice? “I will answer thee, that God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against him?” The three friends had failed to convict Job rightly while suspecting him wrongfully. Not only was Job judging God, but also he was not subject to Him. There was insubmission of heart. If God was dealing with him, why did he not enquire of Him, instead of murmuring? “Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters. For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction.”

In this very chapter then Elihu points out to Job a rather ordinary way of God’s dealings, though not by any means an invariable one. God is not at all limited in His methods of reaching men, but can in divers ways act on the soul. Here Elihu begins at the beginning with the greatest propriety. He begins with the first work of God in the man who does not know Him. It is grace working to awaken an unconverted soul. The reason for the remark will appear presently. Such is the first instalment to the solution of the difficulty which all had felt; but as yet it remained entirely unsolved. “In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, that he may

withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man." It is exactly what characterizes divine mercy in appealing to the unconverted man. He is carried away by his own will. But God knows how to bend or break it. "He keepeth back his soul from the pit" (such is the merciful object of God's intervention), "and his life from perishing by the sword." Here is more than a dream of the night or passing vision; here are corrective ways, as well as glimpses of God's light, or of His judgment that he was despising. "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers. If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness: then he is gracious unto him."

It was of old then as now. God, who uses these outward means of dealing with a man, works by His word, and as an ordinary rule too by a messenger that He employs — an interpreter, as we are told, one among a thousand. "Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" — a singularly vivid mode of presenting that which God was about to accomplish in due time, and not merely here in a typical form of promise. Here we have plain enough language — perhaps, indeed, as distinct words as any in the Old Testament, in anticipation of that infinite work which we now know to be finished in the cross of Christ.

What is the consequence then to the soul that thus bows to God while he listens to an interpreter, such as Elihu was himself? "His flesh shall be fresher than a child's:

he shall return to the days of his youth: he shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right."

Accordingly we find that there is not only grace on God's part, but there is wrought repentance on man's — a repentance which is given him just as truly as faith. This answers to grace; and the sinner confides in God, when He can have no confidence in the sinner. Grace puts God and man in their true place. The question in conversion is, whether man is brought down to distrust himself, and thankfully to receive the testimony of God. For the sinner awakened it is the only true confidence in God. And faith does thus confide, and shows it wherever the testimony truly enters by repentance. The language of his heart is, "I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not." And what does God in such a case? "He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man."

It is not a doctrine how grace arouses sinners from the sleep of death; but there is a sketch to the life of His detailed ways; the use of sickness and sorrow, as of dreams or visions; His employment, especially, of those who come with the light of God to deal with the conscience of man. All this is brought out graphically, and the effect produced — "To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living." Indeed it speaks to the point so forcibly, that we know how often it is a favourite theme for those who preach the gospel to the unconverted even to this day. It is not meant, by any means, that Elihu's words furnish the

fullest material or the deepest ground to preach from; but still it is a striking instance of living power that attaches to the earliest detail of God's way with a sinner in his awakening, that so many hundred, and indeed we may say two thousand, years before the gospel of God's grace was sent out, we should have so ample an anticipation by Elihu the interpreter that intervenes for the help of Job himself, converted as he was.

Elihu then takes his stand first on God's using dreams and visions, trouble and sickness, as well as more directly spiritual means for blessing to the soul. But it is for one that knows nothing of God, that he may be brought into the enjoyment of His favour. Surely it is His favour that was pleased thus to work in the man, but now he is made conscious of His favour as far as the revelation went.

Thus, although the world be a ruin before God, and although it is too evident that Satan is the restless worker of all evil here below, which is brought before us in the plainest manner in this book, God who is above it all, and who seems to take no part in it, carries on His gracious ways, and this to convert and deliver those who have been wretched, vile, and rebellious. It is not that retributive government to which man's heart would constantly limit God, but a government of souls while the world goes on in pride. Man likes to see people punished when they deserve it. It is natural to the heart. There is something in our nature which, when one is not actually suffering or dreading it, likes to find some (shall I say good or bad?) reason why another should be punished if he does suffer. This was at work in the three friends. But the book of Job is intended to show that they were all wrong in their application of this truth. Not that

there will not be perfect retribution when the time comes for it, by the only One capable of carrying it out; but that it is only partial now. Christ alone will act perfectly in it by-and-by; but the time awaits His coming. There will be no adequate retributive government till the Lord Jesus takes the reins. He Himself was in this world the greatest of sufferers, as we know; and so the saints were sufferers before Christ, and still more since Christ. At any rate, the grace now displayed is such that God counts it a privilege given us to suffer for His sake; so that we surely ought to be able to bless God for it in a way that Job and no other could, because we have Christ fully revealed. Job did not know why his gracious Master gave him up to such tremendous and reiterated trouble. He had to learn why, and to learn it slowly and painfully, but blessedly at the end. We begin where he ended. Having in Christ the true light of God, we have not only His perfect love, but that there goes on a kind of divine government quite different from retribution; that there is a gracious dealing of God for the good of souls, and connected with it a moral government, unheeded by the world, which, spite of all appearances to the contrary, never fails. It is not a government consisting in what is public, or what natural men can judge of. It is none the less God dealing with souls, and to all that bow to His word and to Himself ineffable blessing, The discipline may be painful, not to say that it must be. What blessing can there be without it in our nature and in this world? The cross tells what it cost the Lord Himself to make our blessing a righteous thing; the manifestation of the same truth in the highest and deepest way. Where is there a single joy for us, once dead in sins but now saved by grace, that had not its root in the sorrows and sufferings

of Him who bore our judgment? And so it is for those that learn what sin is in the presence of God.

But this is only the first part of God's government, what is taught by God's dealing with a sinner to bring him into the apprehension of his own guilt and need, as well as of God's goodness. He is thus delivered from going down into the pit.

But Elihu does not stop short with this. In chapter 34. he unfolds the truth farther. We may well suppose a pause. Was there anything to be answered now? Had they gleaned a better knowledge of the truth? We must wait for this. Not that Job may not have profited a little, but I fear that we cannot hope it of his friends. Till conscience judges self before God, the mind labours in vain in the field of God. Be assured that there never can be real stable blessing apart from the breaking down of ourselves.

"Furthermore Elihu answered and said" (he begins again), "Hear my words, O ye wise men; and give ear unto me, ye that have knowledge. For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat." He blames Job in very faithfulness, sprinkling reproof now and then with all these gracious words. Is not this too a needed and happy lesson for our souls? This is exactly what the apostle pressed on the Colossians so pithily. The speech of Elihu was always, we may say, "with grace, seasoned with salt." The seasoning is not wanting in this chapter. "Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment. Should I lie against my right?"

Indeed Job had been exceedingly unbroken. "My wound is incurable without transgression. What man is like Job, who drinketh up scorning like water?" He does not say

“iniquity,” as Eliphaz did; but he does impute to Job that he “Drinketh up scorning like water.” His words were unbecoming and irreverent. He did not attribute some secret crime to him which God must avenge unsparingly. But Job, sure of his integrity, was resting unduly on what he was by grace for God, of which He must make nothing in his own eyes. “Which goeth in company with the workers of iniquity.” He does not mean in his practice, but in his expressions; for Job had ventured to speak too unguardedly, provoked by Eliphaz and the others, who insisted that bad men were invariably punished, the good always prosperous in the world, to the overthrow of the afflicted Job’s faith, if it had been possible. Job had met that, but much too intemperately, in honest hatred of their false principle; for Job gave the impression not only that he was just, but that God set it aside unjustly, and that there was no need whatever for his trial — language eminently calculated to encourage evil-doers. And what did he mean by saying that to delight oneself in companionship with God does no service? It is quite evident that neither one nor other had hit the mark. The Judge of all the earth could not be unjust; and was Job justified in such thoughts or words?

Elihu then condemns Job’s words severely; but there he stops. It was not yet the time when God would call His people Israel as a whole to that special trial through which He had put Job. The Christian now is called to be always bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus; and I cannot but think that this goes more deeply than any trials then. But then Christ had not opened the door for it.

Meanwhile Job was singled out, not because there was something evil hidden beneath apparent blamelessness,

but because he was the most upright man then living on earth. The Lord plainly indicates this as the true groundwork of his unexampled trial. Before angels, holy and evil, before God and man, it was proved that instead of serving God for gain or ease, he clung to God when all was lost, and no gain save the intensest suffering for soul and body, because he took it all from God, without in the least knowing why the blessed and blessing God should so give up to torture the one He loved. In the full conclave of heaven Satan sneered at the notion of such absolutely disinterested God-service. But Satan, as we saw, was utterly baffled; and God was proved dearer to him incomparably when he was suddenly thrown down to nothingness and suffering from all the prosperity which God had hitherto poured on him. God then drew out of Job's heart what neither he nor other men nor Satan had suspected; and this by the presence and sympathy of three friends. Who could have looked for it? The patient man broke down in impatience, and, provoked by the misjudgment of his friends, gave way to the bitterness of his soul as if God were become his enemy, for he could not draw near to Him. There was just his sorrow — that thick cloud between his soul and God. And there was the reason why he was from time to time all but despairing. It was not as to death, which he knew would close his grievous calamities; but why was it that such a God should so deal with His servant Job?

Thus he had spoken so improperly of God on the one hand, and on the other so slightingly of the way in which wicked people flourish in the world, that Elihu could not but say, "He goes in company with scorners," with the workers of iniquity, "and walketh with wicked men." It was just such language as would please them; it was

language that would tend to weaken conscience, and to encourage sinners as much as it would grieve saints. “For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God. Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render unto him.” Quite true; but then God has His own time for doing all, and His own way, even short of that final retribution which awaits the workers of iniquity: “Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.” Elihu holds to that firmly, as we have seen — the greatness of God that comes down in condescending mercy to bless man even in the sorrows of this world. He gives God His honour, and stands assured of His inflexible righteousness. “If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his Spirit and]his breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. If now thou hast understanding, hear this: hearken to the voice of my words.” Then he shows how far Job was from the truth; for God not only deals with man, but as and when He pleases in His sovereign wisdom executes judgment on wickedness, even in this world. It is neither an invariable rule or facts, as the friends argued; nor, on the other hand, could Job rightly affirm that God is indifferent about it, as his words seemed to imply. That is, he corrects both to the end of the chapter.

Then again, in Job 35, he takes up his pretensions to superior right. “Elihu spake moreover, and said, Thinkest thou this to be right, that thou saidst, My righteousness is more than God’s?” Job really had ventured to speak crudely and arrogantly on this head.

“For thou saidst, What advantage will it be unto thee? and, What profit shall I have, if I be cleansed from my sin? I will answer thee, and thy companions with thee. Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him?” Thus he shows that it is not a question of man’s profiting God, but of God’s profiting man; for, besides what is due to Him — will, and love, and glory — impossible is it for man to walk in His ways without the richest recompense of blessing. In every possible sense it is God that giveth the increase. And this is independent of dispensation. It was neither the kingdom, when all will be ordered in righteousness, nor yet in the light, which could not be till the True Light shone. Still there was a witness of enjoyed favour and blessing from God for the soul, though not manifest to all. So the wickedness of man does not lower the majesty of God, but is ruin to him that walks in it; as we have seen that the obedience of man brings no profit to God, but ensures exceeding real and rich blessedness to him that is so led.

But now, in Job 36, comes in another weighty lesson. “Elihu also proceeded, and said, Suffer me a little, and I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God’s behalf. I will fetch my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.” He always takes his stand upon that — the impossibility of God either saying or doing what was beneath Himself. “For truly my words shall not be false: he that is perfect in knowledge is with thee. Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any.” There we have a beautiful intimation of the grace of God. “He is mighty in strength and wisdom. He preserveth not the life of the wicked.” He bears it. It is

not, therefore, to be called preserving. “He giveth right to the poor. He withdraweth not his eyes from the righteous: but with kings are they on the throne.” It does not matter whether it is the poor on the one hand, or the kings on the throne. They all come under the eye of God. “Yea, he doth establish them for ever, and they are exalted. And if they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction; then he showeth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.”

Here, I apprehend, it is not a question of the unconverted brought into God’s favour; rather is it the discipline of the converted under His good hand. It is the ways of God, and the righteous government that He maintains with His own. But even such might slip aside. Alas! who does not know it? And here we see that from the very beginning the ways of God were substantially what they are now. I am speaking of His moral dealings with the individual soul; not of standing, or counsels, or power, or privileges. Of course, not the smallest comparison is intended as to the depth of the grace manifested) or with the glory now seen in Christ. Nothing of the kind is meant. But the great moral principles are most instructive; and as God from the beginning did deal with souls to convert them, so He did deal with His own to lead on and correct them. The discipline of His saints then is the chief subject that we find in this chapter. “If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But if they obey not, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge. But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath: they cry not when he

bindeth them." It is not, of course, that every word of the chapter applies only to His saints; but just as in the New Testament we find that in the midst of a record of privileges that belong to those that are His there may be warning words about those that deceive, so it is found in the Old. "They die in youth, and their life is among the unclean. He delivereth the poor in his affliction, and openeth their ears in oppression. Even so would he have removed thee."

Now he applies the principles he had laid down to Job himself. "Even so would he have removed thee out of the strait into a broad place, where there is no straitness; and that which should be set on thy table should be full of fatness. But thou hast fulfilled the judgment of the wicked: judgment and justice take hold on thee. Because there is wrath, beware lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee. Will he esteem thy riches? no, not gold, nor all the forces of strength. Desire not the night, when people are cut off in their place." For he had done so. "Take heed, regard not iniquity: for this hast thou chosen rather than affliction. Behold, God exalteth by his power: who teacheth like him?" It is the teaching of God then that is the point pressed here; not merely God's saving a soul from going down into the pit, but the teaching of God. "Who hath enjoined him his way? or who can say, Thou hast wrought iniquity?" It means, Who can say it to God? "Remember that thou magnify his work, which men behold. Every man may see it; man may behold it afar off. Behold, God is great, and we know him not." And thus he continues through the chapter.

Job 37, after turning our ears in the chapter before to the ways of God in providence, which are manifestly

righteous and good, mighty as He is, and especially in corrective blessing, where men rebel not to their own shame and ruin, finally turns our eyes to the wondrous works of God in the outward world, following up the close of Job 36, which singled out the rain and the thundercloud. These, I admit, are very far indeed from presenting the depth of the truth that the doctrine of Christ or His grace affords. It is not the unseen, but the visible. Here we can understand that we are in the infant days of even God's saints, when they spelled the vast letters of heaven and earth seen before the Scriptures were read. We are in these early seasons, when God was pleased to illustrate things by the speech which day unto day uttereth, not by the gospel preached to every creature, not by the Son that had come down from heaven to show us the Father in Himself. For that very reason, because Christ was not here, the outward world is taken up to show God's majesty, faithfulness, and gracious power in all that surrounded man.

To what then have we come in the course of this book? What have we been taught by the help of Elihu? Much every way, I believe. Job had failed in understanding the purpose of God in that most pitiless storm to which he had been subjected. The friends of Job had failed far more seriously; for Job was rather negative at worst, while his friends were positively wrong at best, quite out of the mind and current of God. Elihu brings in, as far as man could in that day, the light of God. He shows that, instead of there being mere judicial dealing, there is a righteous and gracious discipline on God's part, which, as it deals with the unconverted to break him down, and save his soul, so also addresses itself to the converted for his correction where he has slipped aside, and

encourages him where he needs to be quickened in his pace while following the Lord. And so he spreads out before him and vindicates the worthy ways of God, reproving Job's self-righteousness and impatience and irreverence, but eschewing any such imputations on Job as his friends had allowed; for we have seen Job in the agony of grief, again and again giving way to the sense of desertion by God, and then uttering words rash and violent, but soon again asking pardon after each fresh outbreak, when stung to the quick by the deeply cutting words of his friends — the more cutting because they seemed quiet, but not the less severely wounding to his open and generous spirit. In Elihu we have had quite another tone and judgment — a man who does not spare impropriety, or conceal its heinous consequences; but who can see in the darkest troubles the gracious end of God in His ways, even with the unconverted, and particularly so with His saints.

What remains then? There was only one that could possibly add weight to the interpreter. There was but one thing more that fitly concludes and crowns the intervention of Elihu. And what was that? The incomparable favour that Job had also in a frantic way implored. He asked that a man rather than He might meet him; but he asked that he might find God too. And so he does. God appears. Jehovah Himself gives His answer from the whirlwind. It is not for us to say what the manifestation may have been; but, as there should be nothing more certain than that the Lord did answer Job, and this in the hearing of them all, so His words should be conclusive on this great question. How it was done would be mere speculation, and presumptuous too. That it really was, it is for us to believe; and this is

indeed the special value in the close of the book of Job, that God does not wait till the day of judgment to decide where there is faith to look for Him. Only now it is His word, and in no way a theophany. Had Job a desire to meet God? Jehovah meets him here when Elihu's word had done its work.

And you will observe therefore that it is not merely God or Eloah that is employed now. Throughout the book in general there is God or the Almighty or the like, with only one exception. (Job 12:9) In all the discussions of the book Jehovah with that exception appears not; but now, as at the beginning, it is Jehovah. This surely has great moment. The historian or writer was familiar with that revelation of Himself to the children of Israel. Not that the word Jehovah was absolutely a secret before Moses, but that it thenceforward was the name of special relationship. Job and his friends habitually spoke of God, of the Creator, and even as the fathers knew Him (Shaddai); but here there is more made known. It is the God of Israel who shows His tender mercy to the Gentile that sought Him and the revelation of His mind.

Observe also, it is not an abstract revelation. It is a distinct dealing with the case before him. The godly man had been utterly crushed, and the presence of his misjudging friends had aggravated his anguish to the core. If he had indulged in wistful longing that he could find God, Jehovah does answer him: "Then Jehovah answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins." He had asked God, challenging Him to such a meeting; and God replies: "Gird up now thy loins like a man." It is not now, "What is mortal man?" as Job had said, "What is man, that thou art

mindful of him?" He used the word "man" in the sense of mortality or weakness. But God employs a very different word: "Gird up now thy loins like a hero;" for this is pretty much the force of the word. It means a strong man. He had challenged God to this judicial trial, and he was now heard: "For I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding." Nowhere. "Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner-stone thereof?" He is silent again. Not a word did he know; and what is more, here are these words at the beginning of the world's history — not so very long after the flood, and after man began to spread himself a second time over the earth. If man boasts abundantly of his acquisitions and his skill of knowledge, science, and civilization since, why not he answer the challenge of God now?

The wisest of men are the most ready to own their incompetence, and how little they know. This at least they know, that they cannot answer God. I dare say there may be men so ignorant as to fancy that they could. It is precisely in this way that ignorance often betrays itself: An ignorant man may not flatter himself, perhaps, that he can answer; but, unacquainted with the limits of human power and knowledge, he fancies that there are behind him those of reputation who can. Some doubt not for a moment that it must be an easy affair, in the present march of intellect, and in material science above all, for somebody wiser than themselves to answer questions as to nature asked three or four thousand years ago.

The truth then is, that God appears on the scene for the express purpose of annihilating the pretensions of man;

and here in the most magnificent language, as far as I know, that was ever uttered on such subjects — language worthy of Him who is said to have spoken — Jehovah appears to put Job in his true place, and that place was dust and ashes, morally death, where self was to be withered up before Him. Who and what was Job to speak or murmur against God? Jehovah only touches the skirts of His power, the outer domain of His glory; yet what had man to say? What could Job answer? Not a word. Such seems to be the force of it. And did he who could not explain God's least things presume to judge the deepest part of His ways and designs? For is there anything so deep as what concerns His purposes, affections, and ways with the saints that He loves, and this in the face of their weakness and of a mighty and subtle foe?

You have heard a saying not unworthy of a good and great man, "that all matter never produces mind, and all mind never produces love."1 God had acted on the same principle here, in these words taking up but a small part of His wisdom and power in the outward world; and this just because they are so insignificant an object compared with the ways of His grace. They are no more than what, so to speak, His fingers have formed. If I look at the heavens, the firmament showeth His handiwork, as David says in Psalm 19. Do you suppose that His ways with us are the mere fruit of such skill? They speak of incomparably more. His heart, His thoughts, His plan of love and goodness — all that God is — has come out in the blessing of His saints, because He has Himself appeared on their behalf in Christ, the One who is not merely the alone true, but also the full, expression of what God is in Himself and towards us. Here He does

not, of course, bring out, even by the most distant anticipation, what was to be unfolded in the New Testament. He does refer, as we have seen, to the external manifestation of His power and glory: “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. Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth?” etc. It did not matter whether He pointed up to the heavens, or whether He looked down into the sea: in every part of the creation man’s ignorance and powerlessness are evident. No answer to a single question of Jehovah could be given. “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 further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?” (Job 38:4-11.)

Thus it is evident that God is here bringing to nothing all the proud talk of Job. But He does not content Himself with demonstrating man’s littleness by that which is vast; He takes up what we might think comparatively small things. After traversing the immense heavens and the uncontrollable sea, and then again the treasures of the snow and the hail, of the lightning and the waters, He notices various heavenly bodies in detail; but descends at length towards the end of the chapter to the little things of nature, where man is equally at fault. Thus it matters little whether we gaze at the greatest, or whether we look into the least, of the works of God;

everywhere meets us that which is entirely beyond the ken of man. “Who can number,” says He, “the clouds in wisdom? or who can stay the bottles of heaven, when the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together? Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion? or fill the appetite of the young lions, when they couch in their dens, and abide in the covert to lie in wait? Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat.” What could better expose the futility of man’s arraigning God? Job had even pretended to judge the depths of God morally; but he could not face, nor had he the slightest adequate idea of, what God is in the least part of His universe.

In the next chapter, Jehovah carries on the same appeal to Job, here taking up animate nature more fully. What did he know of the mountain goats and the hinds? what control had he over the wild ass or the wild ox? Let him weigh the sovereignty of God as to the ostrich and the war-horse, the hawk and the eagle. Into this we need not enter more, however beautiful may be the details.

Let me only draw your attention to His putting the question pointedly in Job 40 to Job in person. “Moreover Jehovah answered Job, and said, Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him?” He ought to be able, if he judge God. This is precisely what fills Job with shame: “Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him?” Job had contended with the Almighty. “He that reproveth God, let him answer it.” And Job does answer. This is important as connected with the unravelling of all at the close. Job was thoroughly brought down in his own conceit, and ashamed of having murmured against God and His ways without understanding the least of them. Having accepted this,

and bowed to God, assured in his soul that God must have a most worthy and gracious end in all his troubles, Job now does answer. This is important. He no longer holds his peace like the others. “Then Job answered Jehovah, and said, Behold, I am vile” — not a word more about Jehovah now — “I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.”

Thus he has been brought to nothing before God, and to this humiliation as to himself with confidence in God; for a mere withering up of man would be little but despair, unless the heart turned in confidence to God. And this is of great moment in our practical walk. Take for instance the principle of separation, without which there can be no real holiness. But what is the worth of separation, brethren, if it spring not from communion with God? Be assured there is no small danger when people get the habit of harping on separation without dwelling on its only divine power. Severed from that gracious spring and motive, it becomes not only hollow, but really repulsive. Those formed by a dry principle are mere Pharisees, instead of witnessing Christ, the Holy, the True. (Rev. 3) Thus it is of deep consequence that we should always have not merely the outward manifestation, but the root, which alone gives divine sap and the real pith.

Here then, in Job’s case, we have both manifested — his own vileness, but his confidence in God; and it was the latter, we may be very sure, that made him feel and own his vileness. His grace is the power. The last thing a man comes to is to think ill of himself.

Again, in the last two chapters of Jehovah's answer (Job 40, Job 41), on which I must be very brief, we have God surveying, not the whole realm of nature, but quite enough, and more than enough, to convict Job of ignorance and incapacity to speak before God. This he needed to learn in order that he might distrust himself as well as confide in God. In these He takes up, as we may see, only two of His creatures — one, a powerful beast of the earth, in Job 40; the other, an equally mighty monster of the deep, in Job 41. There is behemoth on the one hand, and leviathan on the other. The two chapters indeed give the finest description that ever was written of these works of God.

But His object seems to be not the least that for which men use them. Men talk as if God's object was merely to occupy us with His works. God, on the contrary, brings forward His works to turn us away from our thoughts and bow us to Himself; for if the works of God be so wondrous, who is He that wrought the work, and what is man if he dare to judge such a God? This is the point in hand. God's object therefore, in describing them in magnificent language, is not in the least to induce us to rest there, making them a study so as to occupy our minds and arrest our souls; but the very reverse. He would turn us away from ourselves to confide in Himself. Do you think that after this Job was occupied with behemoth or with leviathan? Not at all, but with God; and this was the design of it all. The people, therefore, that spend their time and thoughts on the wonders of creation, and cite these chapters to that end, do evidently show that they have not entered into the purpose of God in the least. It was not even so in the Old Testament, still less in the New.

Let us now briefly turn to the account of the final result. “Then Job answered Jehovah, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not.” He takes up the humbling words that God addressed to him in order to apply them to himself. This was right; he owns they were “things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me.’’ So had God before said, and he repeats them to his own humiliation. “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.” It was nothing external now; no mere distant rumour. “Now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself.” Do you think that searching into the structure or habits of behemoth and leviathan would have led to anything of the sort? Assuredly not. He had to do with God Himself, who used them for the express purpose, and had thereby turned Job from all to Himself. “Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” So in the New Testament the Lord used the crowing of a cock to convict the great apostle of the circumcision.

And it was so that, after Jehovah had spoken these words unto Job, Jehovah said to Eliphaz the Temanite, “My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends.” He singles out the oldest of them, who, after all, had spoken with the least acrimony of the three, but still guiltily; for he as the wisest ought to have known best. “My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath” What is that especially which God singles out as the right thing? For on the

surface of the book one might think that Job had been saying as many wrong things about God as the rest. Indeed it would appear to a superficial reader that Job had spoken more rashly than either Eliphaz or his two friends. But the truth is that the grace of God bears much more tenderly than men suppose with the random words that men utter under the pressure of so terrible a trial as that of Job.

Do not think that this in any way makes light of Job's faultiness. I repeat that there is all the difference in the world between three men that were not in trial and the man who was. It is all well for those that are not suffering to find fault with the embittered words of one under such pressure. But God felt gravely as to men, who assuming to speak properly, underneath that calm surface wholly failed to apply the truth of God to the case. And let me say that this is much to be observed, and can only be through the Spirit. Abstract truth is altogether in vain for the saints of God. There may be more harm done by things which are true, misunderstood and misapplied, than by many a thing that is false; because misapplied truth gives the apparent authority of God to an error, which has all the more weight because it comes as the truth. If a foolish thing be said, or one unequivocally false, people despise it; but no believer can slight the truth of God. If the truth of God, therefore, be wrongly used — if it be applied to crush one that is an object of intense interest to God at the time, how foreign and offensive to His mind! How hateful that His name should be so perverted! They were guilty of this. How often is the truth of God now used to exalt self; yet how utterly

opposed to His character and will! Had they not done both these things?

The mistakes of Job are palpable enough. Wherein then was the thing that was right? There was this that we can readily see. It was assuredly to say the thing that was right when he humbled himself utterly before God. I do not say it was the only thing right in Job; but this none need hesitate to accept or endorse. Job had said that which was right in his last words, his answer to Jehovah's appeal to him. There he was brought into the presence of God. There he does speak as became a man that had right feelings at the bottom of his heart; but at the surface, ah, there was many a thing wrong! But now Jehovah brings to light the depths of his heart. Now he himself had got there at length. All the rest, all that was superficial, had been judged. Consequently here we may be sure there was what was right to speak of, none else now: Job's justifying God at his own expense; Job's maintaining, not his righteousness now, but his own nothingness and vileness in dust and ashes before God whom he owns unreservedly to be perfectly right.

Then God tells Eliphaz to take unto him "seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering." At this time it does not appear that there were sin-offerings; and this is no small intimation of the exceeding early date of the book, or rather of the circumstances recorded in it. It must have been before the law. In Levitical days there would have been of course a sin-offering offered; but before the law had brought out that careful and minute prescription of what was required in the case of sin, the burnt-offering regularly was offered. So we find at the beginning, in Noah's time, as in other cases. One might have thought

otherwise that the sin-offering ought to have been here; but God speaks of burnt-offerings in that day.

This He prescribes as a solemn confession of sin: “Lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job.” It was done of course accordingly. “And Jehovah turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends:” a beautiful expression of the work of grace. It was not merely that He turned their punishment away when Job prayed, but He turned Job’s own captivity when his heart went out on their behalf. Job himself now was consciously delivered. He had felt himself a captive held in a vice up to this time, one may say; but Jehovah turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends. His heart was active in grace; he had seen grace, and now he expressed grace, and this too for the very people that had wounded him most. Job never had been so grievously wounded by any in the world as by his three friends. They were now the very persons for whom he prayed. And God loved to see it, and turned his captivity when he prayed for them.

But Jehovah also gave Job twice as much as he had before; for the book could not end without a witness of God’s goodness even outwardly. Though it be not yet the time for careful adjusting of all that is crooked, or of remembering every good or righteous deed, yet Jehovah does not allow His saint to go without a proof of His interest and of His blessing. Job therefore received even then this testimony of what God is. He did not forget the man who had passed through such a storm of trial, and who had held to Him when He seemed against His servant, though obliged to learn what he was himself when the devil left, after the first question had been

decided against the enemy. But Job only held fast God because God held fast Job. Such was the real root of the matter. It is grace after all that gives and keeps integrity. But God was not unrighteous to forget Job. He showed His sense of all, even before the day of requital came. The fullest testimony of respect and confidence poured in from all his relatives and even his acquaintances. "Then came there unto him all his brethren, and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold. So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Keren-happuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren. After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, even four generations. So Job died, being old and full of days."

May the Lord then bless His own word, and bless His saints who deeply need to cleave to that word in this day of increasing confusion and unbelief.

1 "Tous les corps, le firmament, les étoiles, la terre et les royaumes, ne valent pas le moindre des esprits; car il connoît tout cela et soimême; et le corps, rien. Et tous les corps, et tous les esprits ensemble, et toutes leurs productions, ne valent pas le moindre mouvement de

charité; car elle est d’un ordre infiniment plus élevé. De tous les corps ensemble on ne sauroit tirer la moindre pensée: cela est impossible, et d’un autre ordre. Tous les corps et les esprits ensemble ne sauroient produire un mouvement de vrai charité; cela est impossible, et d’un autre ordre tout surnaturel.” — OEUVRES DE B. PASCAL (Pensees), t. ii. p. 297: ed. Paris, 1819.