

ABRAHAM.

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“LET us make us a name,” is the language in Genesis xi., of a people who are going to make themselves secure without God; like one, who, over a thousand years before, heedless that he had been expelled from that presence where happiness alone can be, sought to make himself happy without God, and builded himself a city, and perpetuated his shame by naming it after his son. The inventions and works of the natural mind such as these, though towering to heaven, can ne'er provide security or joy, while an ark of gopher wood, or even bulrushes, made on the principle of faith, not only provides security, but yields rich and copious stores of happiness and blessing. This people sought to *make* a name—the only name on record, fruit of their folly, is that which stands a lasting memorial to their shame, “the name of it called Babel,” confusion: for the Lord came down to see the work of iniquity, and then to scatter the workers of it.

In chapter xii., God calls out a man, the third unit, head of a race, to walk alone by faith. From innocent Adam to righteous Noah, and from righteous Noah to faithful Abram, all was marked with failure and calamity, as regards the creature. Faith rests, and counts alone on God, and therefore never fails; and though ever a path of triumph, provides no room for boasting, for all is of, and from, God in it. To Abram, the child of faith, God promises better things than it is recorded nature sought, large as its thought of

self-aggrandisement truly was. "A name" was Babel's builders' great ambition, but acquired only in the ruins of their purpose, while to Abram, the promise was, "I will bless thee, and make thy name *great*." The Lord give us to learn our lesson here. The answer to "let us build," must ever be a work, and name of shame, whilst the answer to the separation on our side of verse 1 of chapter xii., and the "I will shew thee," "I will make," "I will bless," of verses 1 and 2, will end in unbounded blessing. The rebel company of Babel "did the Lord scatter abroad upon the face of all the earth," but to Abram is the promise: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

In verse 4 we read, "so Abram departed as the Lord had spoken unto him;" departed to walk "a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: the lion's whelps have not trodden it; nor the fierce lion passed by it." (Job xxviii. 7, 8.) Yes, to walk a path undaunted and fearless, where the lion, the greatest energy of nature, would be a coward; and to find a way through labyrinths of difficulty, where the keenest perceptibilities of nature utterly fail—"the vulture's eye hath not seen it." But such is faith: its eyes are not in "the ends of the earth" (Prov. xvii. 24), searching out a resource below, but like the wise man's, in his head. (Eccles. ii. 14.)

I pass rapidly over the next few chapters, for it is not my purpose to take up the whole of Abram's history in detail. We find Abram hindered by a *natural* link in starting. He was to leave his country, kindred, and father's house, yet he tarries in Haran, till God severs by death the last link—his father dies! As it significantly

says, "when his father was dead, he removed him into this land." (Acts vii. 4.) Verse 4 of this chapter follows on the last verse of chapter xi.; the promises of the three first verses were made before, when he dwelt in Mesopotamia. "All their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran," is now spoken of, which they take with them to Canaan. Great possessions bring great troubles. Natural affection had hindered his journey into the land of promise, and now famine when he gets there, drives him out of it; and to preserve what he had acquired, whilst subject to natural affection, in disobedience to the word of the Lord, he goes down into Egypt, and loses his altar. And why is all this failure and loss? Because he had given up the blessed exercise of faith, and forgotten the "I wills" of Jehovah, and fallen back on the exigencies of his own thoughts. "There was a famine in the land, and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there." One little verse tells the story of his going *down* to Egypt, and it doubtless took not long to do it: it takes the book of Exodus to tell the story of a forty years' journey, *up* from Egypt to the Canaan, Abram so lightly left. Then he has to fall back on expediency again. Trouble must ever follow those who take up, but carelessly walk, the path of faith. Abram is in trouble about his wife, and though she was his sister (see chap. xx. 12), was not the nobility of faith lacking in this subterfuge? What a blessed path the path of faith is! nothing needs covering there, the truth can always be exposed; and if it sometimes brings down on us reproach and suffering, there is ever grace to meet it, abounding over all in

richest blessing. Reproach for the name of Christ carries along with it the spirit of glory and of God resting on us. (1 Peter iv. 14.) Turn aside from the path, into bye-paths of convenient expediences, or cowardice, and you will have reproach, but of a different sort, and the smart intensified by the bitter remorse, occasioned by the folly. Abram is not only reproached by Pharaoh, king of Egypt, but it is said, "they sent him away."

In chapter xiii. we get another contrast, Abram is restored—restored to *dependence*, and its rich returns; to lift up his eyes when told to do so, and see the great provision God had made him, to be where God would have him, providing an altar and a tent for the pilgrim worshipper. Independence robbed him of his altar, as he "went down into Egypt;" dependence brought him "on his journey . . . unto the place of the altar." His nephew Lot went with him, and mark the contrast: the one restored to dependence counts on being "fed . . . according to the integrity of his heart, and guided . . . by the skilfulness of his hands" (Ps. lxxviii. 72), lifting up his eyes in the obedience of faith; while the other, using no other guide than his own judgment, "lifted up his eyes" (ver. 10) in the impulse of nature, and made his own choice. (Ver. 11.) The uncle in faith, could afford to let his nephew choose; it was sure to be right with him, for God was for him; and the lot of others is ever subservient to His people. As in after days with his successors; "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" (Deut. xxxii. 8), "for the Lord's portion is his people." Lot's choice led to most fearful ruin, and to that which was a scourge in the side of Israel for ever after; while faith in almighty wisdom, power, and love, led to greatest gain, not only to the immediate vessel of it, but to multitudes of others through it. And so it ever is, where sight governs legislation, calamity must follow; but where faith is in exercise, blessing on every hand abounds. "Lot lifted up his eyes," and saw a place "like the land of Egypt." Exiled from Egypt, and not led, sustained and satisfied by something better, its attractions detained his heart, and thus he was easily captivated by a land, not Egypt, but *like* it. Subtly, the devil, acting on the flesh, leads him on: "the lust of the flesh," he remembers Egypt; "the lust of the eye," he looks towards what his heart lusts after; "the pride of life," he "dwelt in Sodom," and became a judge in its gate. Cain and Lot go in for cities, name, and place, and acquire them to their shame; Abel and Abram go in for neither, yet get all, and more in honour! their names are enrolled in the list of God's mighty and worthy ones, and their cities built by God.

In chapter xiv., Lot is taken prisoner, and faith, ever ready for all emergencies, leads Abram forward; the pilgrim, as a soldier, with three hundred of his trained servants, heedless of the disparity as to numbers between them and the foe, to meet "Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam, and Tidal, king of nations, and Amraphel, king of Shinar, and Arioch, king of Ellasar." And "through God he did valiantly," and brought back all the goods, and Lot, and the women, and the people.

The king of Sodom comes out to meet him (ver. 17), but before God suffers His servant to be tempted by him, strengthens him by the blessing of Melchizedek, who brought him forth bread and wine. The "king of righteousness" [Melchizedek] and "king of peace" [Salem], provides the bread to strengthen, and the wine to cheer, and salutes him with the blessing of the "Most high God, possessor of heaven and earth." Then the king of Sodom offers a reward for the service done him; but such a gift would have blinded the eyes that God had opened. Do good to all, and live in peace with all, as far as in you lies, but refuse their dainties; and "reward" may lead to the error of Balaam. (Jude 11.) Abram has been blessed by the "Maker of heaven and earth," he can refuse earth's kings. Faith vindicates the One who is its source; it is the gift of God, and it gives no honour to another; the king of Sodom should not say, "I have made Abram rich."

How infinitely more did Abram get in chapter xv. than he had just refused! Instead of the goods of Sodom, possessions of the wicked, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward;" and the refuser of this world claims his right to be a receiver from the One he calls, "Adonai Jehovah," acknowledging Him the Lord in blessing, and says, "What wilt thou give me?" Abram could truly say, "The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O, Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee." (Ps. lxxxiv. 11, 12.)

The answer of promised blessing to Abram's question, is far beyond the limits of his capacity to measure. As the stars were innumerable, so should his seed be. One that should come forth out of his own bowels should be his heir, and his seed so many as to be countless. Abram believed it all, and the Lord "counted it to him for righteousness." A better standing Abram could not have, a standing by no means based on his own rectitude, or merit of any kind; he has "believed:" he could not well do less, while his eye rested only on the One who promised; yet how could he well do more? for he believed against all hope. (Rom. iv.) Death stood between him and the accomplishment of the promise made him; but life and death are both alike to Him with whom faith has to do, and He makes death the womb from whence the seed of promise springs. The precious portion must however find room for little comment here, suffice it to remind the reader of Paul's commentary on it in Romans iv., where righteousness is taught as being imputed to any sinner, taking his true ground as such, and believes what God says, and accepts the provision He has made, in the One "delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification." In the next verse (7) Abram is made rich as well as righteous. "I am the Lord that brought thee out to give thee this land to inherit it." He was "brought out," separated, then made righteous and rich. Like Rahab, she was "brought out," and then "dwelleth in" (Josh. vi. 23, 25) to share with Israel its dignities and wealth. The apostle preached "forgiveness" of sins *and* "inheritance" (Acts xxvi. 18), "deliver-

ance from the power of darkness, *and* translation into the kingdom of the Son of his love." (Col. i. 13.) There is the "sanctification of Spirit," then, "belief of the truth," then the "obtaining of the glory." (2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.) God must ever be the first to act; all blessing springs from Him; He separates Himself, then gives faith to believe only in Himself; then bestows all blessing from, and in Himself. God "brought out" Abram, then gave him to believe, yet counted to him the credit, and blessed him for it; and told him that the reason why He brought him out, was that He might bless him, and make him rich, "to give him this land to inherit it."

What a lesson is here for us in this one verse! if we are to be blessed by God, we must first in heart be "brought out" of all that nature clings to. Yes, we may seem bereft of all, but at that moment God begins to give. Abram is to "get out" from his country, his kindred, and his father's house, and leave all behind, but become possessor of greater riches far, through faith. But God had to work in two ways before there was the perfect answer to His purpose. He first told Abram to leave all, but Abram only leaving part, God has to *take away* the rest. I think the "get thee out" is well worth our consideration; it finds an answer in the Gospels, full of meaning for would-be disciples. Christ said: "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple." Abram was not told to bring out, God brought *him* out, *he* brought out part of his father's house, which God has to take away. Thus Abram "gets out," or like the disciple, "forsakes," but falling short of forsaking "*all*," has to relinquish in bereavement and sorrow,

that which he had carried with him, and not forsaken. How much we often lose by not walking in obedience, taking His yoke, and learning of Him, and obtaining the rest afforded by it!

Abram then asks how he should know that he would inherit the promised land; and in a "deep sleep," when nature was resting, God revealed to His servant the ways He would take with his seed. For four hundred years they should be strangers and servants in a furnace of affliction, in a land that was not theirs; but God would bring them out with "great substance." And so it was, for Moses says at the expiration of the four hundred years: "The Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day." (Deut. iv. 20.) No plebeian company are they either, but great in power as well of "great substance:" for it is also written, that He who "brought out" Abram from Ur of the Chaldees, "brought a vine out of Egypt. Thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river." (Ps. lxxx. 8-11.) But what of the heifer, the goat, and the ram, each of three years old, divided in the midst, the turtle dove and young pigeon? Oh, these speak volumes! What of all the promises, the faith, and visions, apart from Him, whose body after three years of service, was given for us, a sacrifice to God? A "smoking furnace," telling of judgment in the presence of the burning lamp, and

putting away all that the light reveals, can pass among those pieces; but the unclean dares not touch them, the birds are driven away. Nothing expressed the perfection of Christ like His atoning death, for nought but perfection could take that place; while the gifts and calling of God, fruit of love, and according to light, are established and administered by reason of it.

Chapter xvi. gives the sad history of Ishmael's birth; Abram had left Egypt, well would it have been if he had left all Egypt's things; but his wife "had a handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar;" this proved a snare to Abram, for through her, at the suggestion of Sarai, he sought to obtain in his own time, and in nature's way, the object which could alone be obtained on the principle of faith. "Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai," and Ishmael is born unto him of Hagar, the Egyptian, Sarai's bondmaid. But Ishmael should be a "wild man, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him." First Abram got that which was natural, and when that which was spiritual came after, the first mocked. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit." (Gal. v. 17.) How often do we do the same, instead of walking by the Spirit's rule, we try first nature's schemes; the issue of which is certain shame and failure; for whenever we let this in, we shut God out.

Abram had addressed the Lord in chapter xv., as Adonai-Jehovah, the Lord in blessing. When Abram was ninety and nine years old, the Lord appeared unto him, and said: "I am the Almighty God," El-Shaddai, a God of resource. Abram had acknowledged God as a blessing God, and got great promises of blessing. God now appears

to him as a God of resource ; but Abram, looking at self, and the death that surrounds him, in spite of all the promises made by the One full of unfailing resource, "fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old ? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear ?" when El-Shaddai said : "As for Sarai, thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah and I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her." "And Abraham said unto God: Oh ! that Ishmael might live before thee!" What appeared impossible to Abraham, was easily possible to El-Shaddai ; but what Abraham thought possible, and in unbelief asked for, was quite impossible to be attained. It is impudence, without which unbelief never acts, to expect God to use for the carrying out of His designs, that which is the fruit of our own misdoings. The first man, as was soon the case with Ishmael, must be entirely put out of the field, before God can carry out His plans. Resources He has plenty—the Almighty God ! and needs no Ishmael to assist, though often we suggest it to Him, by our ways and words, in unbelief and folly. He can lead us on where faith is, in greatest triumph, against the greatest odds ; and in the valley of death, deliver from all fear of evil.

El-Shaddai, what a title of God is this for us ! Well indeed may we glory in the relationship He has so graciously set us in, the like of which Abraham never knew, for he never called God Father. Yet while this is ours, suggesting its own particular qualities, excelling everything that ever went before ; how sweet, how excellent to take up all the rest, included in this, the greater, and

appropriate the blessings that each suggests. We, in our turn, indeed have learnt to lisp Adonai Jehovah, as blessings have rolled upon us; and as He reveals Himself El-Shaddai, in our times of need, the Lord help us never to roll between the resources He commands, some Ishmael of ours; and thus seek an untimely fruition to some cherished hope, and usurp that place which He alone could fill. The promiser is alone able to provide all that is necessary for the fulfilment of the promise.

We often lose much gain too, by, like Abraham, building our hopes on something that we *have*, instead of counting on what we have not, except by faith where God has promised, where are far wider fields from which to reap rich harvests. Abraham *had* Ishmael, and thinks it would be easier to tame, train, and cultivate him, than wait for a son by Sarah; but no, Ishmael is "wild" by nature, and Hagar's child can never be the seed of promise. Faith, death, and resurrection, alone can introduce the heir of promise, and Sarah must be the channel of his existence, and God sole Author and Manager of all. And oh! what rest, what peace and riches are to be found here, if only appropriated in simple childlike faith. Resourceless, and at our wits' end as men, is our best estate; and when thus found and the poverty acknowledged, there is a platform ready for God to work on; and this is all that He requires, unless it be to look like Manoah, while He does wondrously; or "stand still" like Israel, and see His salvation, as His resources crowd upon the platform; and be found exultant worshippers; not only to witness David's victory, but, like Israel in that day, rising,

shouting, and pursuing. (1 Sam. xvii.) Victory and great spoil is ever the lot of those who thus count on God, and walk in wisdom's ways.

In chapter xviii., the Lord appeared to Abraham as he sat in the tent door. Three men stood by him, and at his request they rested with him, and partook of his bounty, bread and a calf tender and good, fetched from the herd. I shall not dwell on this, but just compare it with what took place in Sodom. (Chap. xix.) There came two angels to Sodom at even, and Lot, sitting in the gate, saw them. He said: "I pray you turn into your servant's house, and tarry all night. . . . And they answered, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night." Abraham speaks of a tent, Lot of a house. "The plains of Mamre" [Hebron], resurrection could afford no site for property, such as houses; tents or the like, are the only fitting structures for the pilgrim's shelter, whose eyes go beyond and above the plains of earth, and whose heart aspires to a heavenly city.

It is recorded in Hebrews: "He sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles," or tents. But tents and cities go not well together either. It is vain to assume the pilgrim, while the heart covets the portion of an earthly citizen. The streets of Sodom would be no place for Abraham's tent, it was therefore no place for him; his manner of life accorded with what he was, a pilgrim with a brighter destiny than all earth's brandished fortunes put together could afford. A calf, and bread too, was the simple provision made by Abraham, and the banquetting house a tree; while Lot "made them [his guests] a *feast*, and

did bake unleavened bread." Surely the calf like Abel's lamb is full of meaning, and fruit of the intelligence of faith; while the "feast" finds a counterpart in Cain's offering, where human wisdom vainly toiled, and produced abomination. The guests too, what a difference in their behaviour! in one case guests by pleasure, in the other by most unwilling sufferance, preferring the streets of Sodom to the shelter of Lot's house. But before they lay down to rest, the men of Sodom, old and young, compassed the house. How true the proverb: "Where no oxen are the crib is clean."

All was quiet till the angels came; no credit this to Lot; the world loves its own, but he who walks with God, and testifies against it, will surely suffer from it. God will not suffer half measures with His people. Lot would dwell in Sodom, and entertain the angels *there*. But this is not God's way; "come out . . . and be ye separate," are His conditions for further blessing. "Wash you, make you clean," precedes the learning to do well, and "the good of the land." Truly the angels tarried all night, but not for rest. Was there ever such a scene in which angels ministered? But the Lord was working with one of His saints, and comes down to his low estate, to help him out of that which pride, self-will, and independence of the One now active in his behalf, had brought him into. But the Lord being there, all the evil will be manifested, and things appear blacker, because in their true colours now. "Sodom," the "gate," the "house," the "feast," speak volumes for those who have ears to hear: but Lot needs a far louder voice.

The presence of the Lord brings out the hatred and malice of the world, and where there has not been rectitude and consistency, coals of burning fire will fall upon the head. Thus, though the feelings of the men of Sodom were so bitter against the angels, in their rage they threatened to deal worse with him, who they said, "came in to sojourn, and will needs be a judge," than with them. The angels here put forth their hands, and pull Lot in to them; surely with his ears smarting with the cries of censure of these sinners, and trembling for fear of his very life. Thus much for those without, but what of those within the circle of his family?

The angels acquaint him of the destruction of the city, so speedily to take place, and tell him to bring out of the place, sons-in-law, sons, daughters, and whatsoever he had; but alas! "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." He had given up God—walked his own paths, chosen his own portion, and lost all power. God had not been in all his thoughts—if in any; and in following the bent of his own will, regarding only the tastes and inclinations of his own heart, he had sown to the flesh, and was reaping corruption; he had been sowing the wind, and was now reaping the whirlwind. He was hated by those without, and to those within who knew him best, he was as one that mocked. There was no private communion, therefore no public consistency, and hence no power for helping and serving others. Private prayer is essential for public power, there will never be the latter without the former. No! impossible, for it is alone the fruit of it. The Lord give us to be prayerful that we may be consistent, and serve in power.

Lot lingered, but the Lord being merciful unto him, took hold of him, and his wife, and two daughters, and brought him forth, and set him without the city, telling him to "escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain lest thou be consumed." Lot "lingered," and was little better than his wife, who for looking back, became a pillar of salt. Both their hearts were in the city, but she disobeyed the commandment given, he lingered, she looked. Thus Lot was delivered from Sodom's overthrow, and no credit to him either; and though as Peter tells us, his righteous soul was vexed from day to day with their unrighteous deeds, yet the Holy Ghost has revealed the secret forming the ground of his deliverance; we are told that "when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God *remembered Abraham*, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow;" remembrance of Abraham was deliverance to Lot.

This is the second time Abraham had been the means of Lot's deliverance, once from the hand of Chedorlaomer, and now from the overthrow of Sodom, from whence he was ignominiously "*sent*." What a path of triumph and untold gain is the path of faith; how fraught with sorrow, shame and loss the path of sight and sense, independence and pride. Lot's history makes indeed a dark background to shew up the bright shining of the way of faith. The last we hear of him, after leaving the city of Zoar, the "little one," the little city, for which in the blind impudence of flesh he asked, is that "he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters," and there committed that, the fruit of which, as we have said before, was a

scourge in the side of Israel, God's beloved people for ever after.

But now to go back to Abraham; we left him refreshing, like every true-hearted, obedient saint, the Lord, who partook of his provision and rested with him—not a forced, but a ready guest. The promise is again made; “Sarah, thy wife, shall have a son.” Sarah heard the words and (incredulous) laughed within herself; but the Lord saw it and asked the reason; “wherefore did Sarah laugh is anything too hard for the Lord?” What a rebuke for unbelief was this! What assurance for the child of faith! What a question to herald the seed of promise in with! What assurance to start Abraham's children on their race with! What a banner to precede the company of his followers! the seed of him to whom it was addressed. Oh! that the answer to it might more be found in every one of us—even the child-like confidence of faith, which, in the sight and presence of the most adverse circumstances, asserts that there is nothing too hard for the Lord. It is what honours God and gratifies His heart, because it affords occasions for the opening of His hands, to discharge the blessings already in them, provided for the objects of His perpetual care. Blessed indeed the assurance this must have been to Abraham, but what a rebuke to Sarah, who adds to her unbelief, the sin of denying the expression of it; she doubted, she laughed, she lied.

Unbelief is like a field unkept—nature is never silent; it will certainly bear a crop, though it be thorns and thistles. Unbelief is never without a void, which the flesh ever seeks to fill, and, if

allowed, will yield a plenteous harvest of corruption; while the blessed assurance that nothing is too hard for the Lord yields present rest and lasting gain, and only calls for patience to wait His time, obedience to take His way, an eye to see His salvation, and a heart to triumph in it, as "the joy cometh in the morning." The one who is now the Captain of our salvation once took this way, and having "waited patiently for Jehovah," had His ways established, and in every thought, word, and deed, answered with a practical, and most decided negative, Jehovah's question put in the plains of Mamre, by being a perfect exponent of the rest, joy, and success inspired by it. It was always with Him, nothing is too hard for the Lord. Christ ever brought glory to God; and dependence, and obedience were the great characteristics of all He did. He lived by the word of God, and if He should call upon Him to fast more than forty days, though being hungry, nothing was too hard for the Lord; He must live by His word. He was preserved too, because He trusted, and claimed it on that ground; thus in His perfect dependence providing a reason for his preservation. (Ps. xvi. 1.) He could go fearless, where they of late sought to stone Him. (John xi.) He could not stumble in the day, and it was ever day to Him, for perfect obedience knows nothing of darkness, and nothing is too hard for the Lord. Yea, a table was spread for Him in the presence of His enemies: He raises the dead, and they make Him a supper. Death itself, too, is the way of life; truly nothing is too hard for the Lord. We desire to walk as he walked; well! if we do, the best, yea the only way to do it, is to take the rule

by which He walked—what was it? Entire self-abnegation, and dependence on the One to whom, He ever acknowledged, nothing was too hard.

Read of Jonah three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, and tell me, “is there anything too hard for the Lord?” Read of the three Hebrew children, with “no hurt,” in the midst of the burning fiery furnace, and tell me if there is anything too hard for the Fourth who was with them? Read of Daniel calm and preserved in the midst of the lions, and say, is anything too hard for the Lord? Even Nebuchadnezzar had to own, that, “He doeth according to his will, none can stay his hand or say unto him, what doest thou?” The once boasting king is found praising, extolling, and honouring the King of heaven, now that he has learned to say, “He is able.” Those that walk in pride He is able to abase; he had done the former, he had suffered the latter, and the strain of his language now is, “nothing is too hard for the Lord.”

It is the expression of faith, too, with the remnant in a future day, as told out by the prophet Jeremiah. He says, “I prayed unto the Lord, saying, Oh Lord God, behold thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee,” and the assuring answer to this cry of faith, is, “Behold I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, is there anything too hard for me.” (Jer. xxxii. 17, 27.) The Lord grant that this may be the confidence of our hearts more and more. So to walk, as though realising that there is not the smallest thing but what is too hard for us alone! but to take up everything He

puts in our way, even that which appears insurmountable, falling back in perfect confidence on our ever present resource to whom nothing is too hard. It is "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." (Zech. iv. 6, 7.) Without God, difficulties retain their difficulty, and when flesh is resorted to, become more difficult; but bring God in, with all the blessed rest and confidence of faith, and difficulty, obscurity, impossibility, all go before the "integrity of *his* heart," the skilfulness of *His* hands, and the sustaining power of *His* "everlasting arms."

Verse 17 is very precious. "The Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" Here Abraham gets the secrets. El-Shaddai had said, "Walk before me and be thou perfect." The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. He made His way known unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel. Abraham got the ways of God as to Sodom, Lot saw the acts. Abraham beheld from "the place where he stood before the Lord the smoke of the country as the smoke of a furnace." Lot shared the suffering of the act; his all was gone, his toil all wasted, his hopes all blasted in the overthrow of Sodom.

What could exceed the honour conferred on Abraham, as he thus takes the place and portion of a *friend* of God! But it was obedience that brought him into it. As the Lord said to His disciples, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you;" and then, and here comes out that which answers to Abraham's privileged place. "Henceforth I call you not

servants, for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth, but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you." (John xv. 14, 15.)

I believe it is a real thing to be a "friend;" higher relationships there may be, but the position and portion of a friend is infinitely precious, though very little valued or enjoyed, or even thought of by us. The enjoyment of a friend's portion is entirely conditional on state and practice. We may speak of it, but our hearts can never enjoy it, unless our feet run in the ways of it. Neither can we of ourselves attain to it; to have it, grace must bring it down to us. Blessed if we aspire and suit our deportment to it, but if acquired, it is only because grace has given it; the question must ever rise on the greater's side, as to how far others can participate in what is theirs. Christ has called us friends, for whatsoever He had heard of His Father He has made known unto us. The Lord give us to value more highly such a privilege as this, remembering that it cost His life to bring it to us. He died for His enemies, and having saved them, where He finds obedience calls them, and, blessed be His name, makes them in all its practical reality and enjoyment, His friends; and willingly hides no secret from them.

In chapter xxi. Isaac is born; Sarah had laughed, but God had not repented, His gifts and calling are without repentance. He "visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken." She now says, "God hath made me to laugh, all that hear will laugh with me." The tidings of Isaac's birth carried laughter with it to all that heard. How true is this in the day in which our happy lot is cast!

“Glad tidings of good things” have been announced by preachers, whose feet have been beautiful to those whose ears were opened by the Spirit’s power, to hear the “tidings of great joy,” of Him, the blessed Antitype of Isaac; truly, all that thus hear, shall have their mouths filled with laughter. As the Lord said, “Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” Here again the scripture may be applied, that, “Where no oxen are, the crib is clean;” but though the introduction of Isaac on the scene brings disaster to its peace for the moment, “much increase” is indeed also by it. (Pro. xiv. 4.)

All appears to be calm and serene in Abraham’s household up to this moment; no insubjection on the part of Ishmael, and Sarah is at least resigned to his presence with them; but no sooner does Isaac come, the seed of promise, than Ishmael mocks. What could express lack of moral power more than this? but who would look for moral power with that which is the fruit of nature and the flesh? To have taken his true place, though a much lower one than Isaac’s, would have been power, but to mock was the weakness of folly.

What an apt illustration we get of this at the cross! The two thieves were alike in nature’s darkness, folly, and ruin; and about to suffer its just judgment. One mocked, and died a mocker, to live to all eternity suffering the remorse of it, and the wages of his sin; the other took his true place and repented, to live in eternal blessedness with the One ordained to be the other’s Judge. Compare their lives on earth, and little difference could be found, but see the difference mocking or repentance makes as to eternity.

Ishmael mocked; type of the flesh which lusteth against the spirit. He was quiet enough before; the occasion of His mocking was the presence of Isaac, and the experience in Abraham's house seems from bad to worse, though the bad was little, if at all, realised before. But was it worse? indeed no, blessing was there; the fruition of Abraham's hopes, and fulfilment of God's promise; but the presence of evil is now fully manifested. People sometimes think, when they become converted, and the spirit lusts against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit, that they are worse than they were before, for they never had such sad experiences as now. But, is it so? thank God, no! but Christ is there; and there, not to make improvements in the flesh, but to be counted all. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin."

We do not read of Isaac either bowing to Ishmael, answering Ishmael, or fighting with Ishmael. The fiat of Sarah is the only remedy, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son." The scene cleared of what unbelief introduced upon it, is the only way to peace and satisfaction.

Hagar has to go, too, law is for the lawless, and is needed where they are; and law and flesh ever go together. "Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and answereth to Jerusalem which is in bondage with her children," and "the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." For peace and joy all must be grace, "we are children of promise," "after the pattern of Isaac," who was given to Abraham by El-Shaddai, his God of resource. Hagar and Ishmael can have no place with Isaac; so now, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is

liberty;" Christ everything, and flesh and bondage find no place. Not liberty to do as we like, but as happy children of the free, with power to fulfil all the righteous requirements of the law, and to yield our members "servants to righteousness unto holiness," and thus enjoy true liberty. Was there ever such a manifestation of subjection as in Isaac the son of the freewoman, except in Him who was his Antitype! See him going up with Abraham "both of them together;" up the mountain, and right on, bound to the altar as a living sacrifice, with only the descent of that uplifted knife and a span of time too small to measure, between life and death, and yet no word of remonstrance, even, or rebellion, or complaint. The Lord give us His ways, who possess His place!

Emancipation by the Spirit from law, or its principles will never lead to liberty of flesh, or insubjection to the Lord. On the contrary, the very blessing afforded in the ministration of the Spirit, that present grace in which we so rejoice, even a righteous standing in liberty before God; so that beholding the glory of the Lord we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Lord the Spirit, moral conformity to Christ is thus produced—one of whose deep perfections was, as a man down here, to do always those things that pleased God; as He said, I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."

Isaac is alone, and peace in Abraham's household is again restored, but oh, on what a different footing! It had been peace and poverty with Ishmael alone, for the fruit of the flesh is ever worse than loss. It had been persecution when

his rival came, in all the dignity of the true heir, because the seed of promise. It was now peace and plenty. The law with its bondage, and the flesh with its assumption, are fairly met, and dealt with, and all is rest, and peace, and joy, for "Christ [in figure] is all." Happy people they, indeed, who have learned for their own hearts' comfort, rest, and joy, what the casting out of the bondswoman and her son means for us to-day. Christ, in His death, has not only met the judgment due to us for the sins we have committed, which constituted us guilty, or under judgment, (Rom. iii. 19), before God, but delivered us from the principle of law, Hagar, Sinai—and from our state of, "in flesh," Ishmael; we having died with Him, and now alive in Him, and in the Spirit before God.

Abimelech, at the end of the chapter, king of the Philistines, answers to the spiritual wickednesses in high places, one of its universal lords. (Eph. vi.) He does not act exactly as a foe, and here is the greater danger; the subtilty of the enemy is found everywhere. Compare Isaiah xxxvi. 1, xxxvii. 15, 21, 36, with xxxix. 1, 2, 5. The enemy came as an enemy—Hezekiah prayed; he came as a friend, and Hezekiah was flattered. How true the statement in the next chapter, "all flesh is grass." How alike the history of Abraham (chap. xxi.) and his son Isaac! (Chap. xxvi.) At a moment of such low moral standing, and reprov'd even by the world in Isaac's case, the well of grace springs up for him to sing to; where sin abounds, grace much more abounds. If the worldly and wise man cannot ruin God's people, he will do his best to make something out of him, if he can, by dragging him

down to his own level, and making bargains and covenants.

It is striking that the first mention of a well in scripture is after the birth of Isaac; truly there could be no fountain of living water in our day, till the Isaac of the fourth of John had come to give it. Abraham called on the name of Jehovah the everlasting God, at Beersheba, fountain of an oath; the well of safety—the *seventh*—Isaac had come, perfect answer to faith, and promise, bursting the bands of death, and Abraham the man of faith having cast off the fruit of impatient self-will, can afford to be a giver, and kings bow before the pilgrim of faith. But man in nature's darkness cannot understand the perfect work of faith; the many sheep and oxen can be understood, but *seven* ewe lambs by themselves are a puzzle. Well may it be so, for what indeed but faith could fathom such infinitely perfect grace as comes out here. Ishmael, son of the bondwoman, is a figure of the Jews, who, by their law, though using the Gentile sword, put Christ to death, and thus forfeited their all; but the same hand that in righteous judgment drove them, Lo-ammi from His presence, has dug a well of exhaustless grace whereby through resurrection (Rom. xi. 15), the banished shall not be entirely expelled, but drink at mercy's stream (Rom. xi. 32), and by-and-by, be wondrously fruitful in their "fulness." Doubtless the well that Abraham is now setting up witness to, that he had digged it, was the same that had been used (ver. 19) to resuscitate him whom Abraham had banished from his presence. Grace all the work shall crown; by it a remnant has been preserved, and shall be saved in yet

future ages ; a lasting memorial to that grace of the ever blessed God, whose gifts and calling are without repentance, and whose ways are infinite in mercy, love, and grace. Beersheba, where the fountain is, also provides shelter, a grove or tree, planted by the same hand. In later days Elim provides the same, rest, shelter, and refreshment. In chapter xxvi. we find the subtle foes of Abraham and Isaac in friendly guise, had filled with earth God's people's wells of water. Let us take warning, a circumcised and heavenly people have nought to do on friendship's terms with the Egyptian or the Philistine. The toil and bondage of the one, will never afford us time to dig for wells ; and the other will fill them up, unless by spirit, prayer, and sword, we keep them.

In chapter xxii. we get the trial of Abraham. Three times in this chapter is the word "only" used. Abraham was to take his *only* son and slay him on the altar. It is also surely significant too, that the word, love, or lovest, is first used in scripture in this chapter. It is easy to part with what we do not value or want ; we can be very liberal thus. Abraham was not only to part with but himself to slay, his *son*, his *only* son, his *loved* and only son ; and this was the measure of the trial, and the value of the obedience, and the confidence of the faith that led him through it. God values our obedience or our gift, not so much by what it does, or what it is, as by what it costs us.

David entered into this when he bought the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. He might have argued, what difference would it make to the burnt-offering, or its acceptance, if the oxen, the instruments for wood, or the

threshing-floor, be accepted as a gift or bought, for "all these things did Araunah as a king give unto the king;" but "the king said unto Araunah, Nay, but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." So David bought, then offered, and "so the Lord was entreated for the land."

At another time when "David longed, and said, oh! that one would give me of the water of the well of Beth-lehem," but when it was brought, "poured it out to the Lord." With that which he had longed to satisfy himself he gratified the Lord. So who can tell the value of those two mites, of that poor widow, of whom Jehovah testified, she had cast in more than they all; she exceeded all who had done abundantly out of their abundance, for she "cast in all," and He knew it, and placed *this* to her credit and not the amount. But how far, how very far short do all these things come of that which so intimately answers to the subject of our chapter, yet is so transcendently beyond. All know the story well, found in John iii.; that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." The "only" is a measure of the love here, and the "only" and the love is the measure of the obedience of Abraham. What a complete setting aside of Ishmael is this too; truly the flesh profits nothing! he is not dead, but Isaac is called the "only" son. Blessed be God He beholds us not, nor counts us in the "perverseness" or "iniquity" of the flesh, but in the spirit: it is Isaac "only."

How manifest is here the teaching of James, justification by works, as well as faith. In verse 2 Abraham was to offer up his "only" son as a

sacrifice. In verse 12 the angel says: "Now I know that thou fearest God, seing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine *only* son from me." In verses 16, 17, 18, he gets the promises on the ground of obedience, "because thou hast *done* this thing and hast not withheld thy son, thine *only* son, and hast obeyed my voice." "Faith without works is dead," "as the body without spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." The Lord give us each to shew our faith, like Abraham, by our works.

The Epistle to the Romans, so full of the teaching of justification by faith, closes with a recognition by the apostle, of the "works" of a company of saints he names personally, who were thus evidentially justified, as well as by faith. One he says, is a servant of the church, a sister who is to be received in the Lord, and assisted in her business, for she had been a succourer of many, including the apostle. Others were helpers in Christ, who had laid down their necks for the apostle; and all the churches of the Gentiles gave them thanks with him. Paul says of another woman, that she bestowed much labour on us. "Others were fellow prisoners, and of note among the apostles." Urbane was a "helper in Christ." Others "laboured in the Lord;" and thus the work of faith, however small, is ever recognised. Feeble indeed the life where there is not some manifest expression of it.

In chapter xxiii. Sarah dies, and Abraham is a mourner. He buys a field; he will not take it as a gift, though offered him, and urged upon him thus, and though according to promise he had a title to the whole. No, he who had refused the

king of Sodom is found in the same attitude again. He weighs out the silver, the price of the field, four hundred shekels, current money with the merchant. In the saints' business dealings with the world it should be exactitude of righteousness, though necessarily his cup of blessing will ever be running over for those around, a giver ever, and on every hand. Hebron [resurrection] is Abraham's fit burying-place for Sarah. The land was his, and though death was stamped on all then, the God of resurrection in whom Abraham's faith was resting, would make that very land, with its field and its cave, the birth-place of all the promises to His servant in resurrection.

In chapter xxiv. Abraham sends for a wife for Isaac. Canaan was the only fitting place for the grave of Sarah, but for a bride for Isaac, Eliezer must go beyond those borders, to Abraham's father's house and kindred. It is interesting to notice that "mercy" (ver. 27) is first mentioned in this chapter. The servant speaks of the "mercy and truth" of which the Lord God had not left his master destitute. Mercy is the first activity of the love of God, and no matter what the blessing, mercy shines through all. Wonderful indeed is the ministry of life and righteousness, enlarged on in 2 Corinthians iii.; giving us in an open face to behold the glory of the Lord; but we are reminded chapter iv. 1 that it is "as we have received *mercy* that we faint not." So in Ephesians, *mercy* is linked up with highest privileges: "God who is rich in *mercy*, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with the Christ . . . and hath raised

us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus."

The first prayer too, is found in this chapter (xxiv.) Eliezer is the Holy Ghost in figure, and apart from the Holy Ghost there could be no prayer. Not that I would say for a moment that none ever prayed before, but surely Eliezer and prayer, appearing together in this chapter is suggestive. Eliezer in telling the story of his journey, and the success that so far had attended it, says: "before I had done speaking in my *heart*, behold Rebecca came forth." What an example this first prayer, for all those to follow; reminding us of what Paul says in Romans viii.: "He that searcheth the *hearts*, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." Before he had done speaking he got the answer, "Rebecca came forth," Isaac's destined bride. The Lord help us thus to pray. This faithful servant who afterwards would not eat till he had told his errand, felt his need. He knew that his journey, his efforts, all would be futile, unless helped and blessed by the Lord God, the Jehovah Elohim (title used in creation, in Gen. ii. 4) of his master. The Creator's blessing is therefore invoked by Eliezer, for the fulfilling of his errand; and the cry of his heart is answered before he had done speaking.

After Eliezer had told his business, Rebecca is asked if she will go with this man, and she willingly consents; and presently on the camels, carried across the country, is conducted by the servant, on to Isaac, doubtless listening with profoundest interest to all connected with the scene so soon to open up before her, and the person so soon to be the one absorbing

object of her heart's delight. It was not service that was attracting her, but Isaac, yet poor indeed would her love be, if when opportunity afforded she did not serve. The service of the hands should ever and only be, the hearty response to what the heart suggests, and a satisfied heart will ever provide such service for the hands to do. Not serving in order to satisfy the heart, but for the one who has already done it.

Eliezer tells how Abraham had become great, and given to Isaac all that he possessed. And this was the proposed portion for Rebecca to share. What a wonderful place grace has set us in to-day, who are "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." But what seems to exceed everything else, is our nearness to Christ. Had Rebecca been made rich, as Isaac, but left at a distance in the far off land of Mesopotamia, what would it all have been to her. The Lord quicken in our hearts bridal affection for the One, the Object, the Person, set before our hearts, whose coming draweth nigh; and help us to suit our deportment to such a calling. No plebeian company they indeed who thus belong to Christ! His body now, His bride their everlasting destiny; His name and His reproach, their present dignity and joy. Nor will all this puff us up with pride, for it was in mercy, in our destitution that we were called, and made the recipients of such unbounded grace. Eliezer's tale of "mercy" and "truth" is ours also. To Him be all the praise.

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