

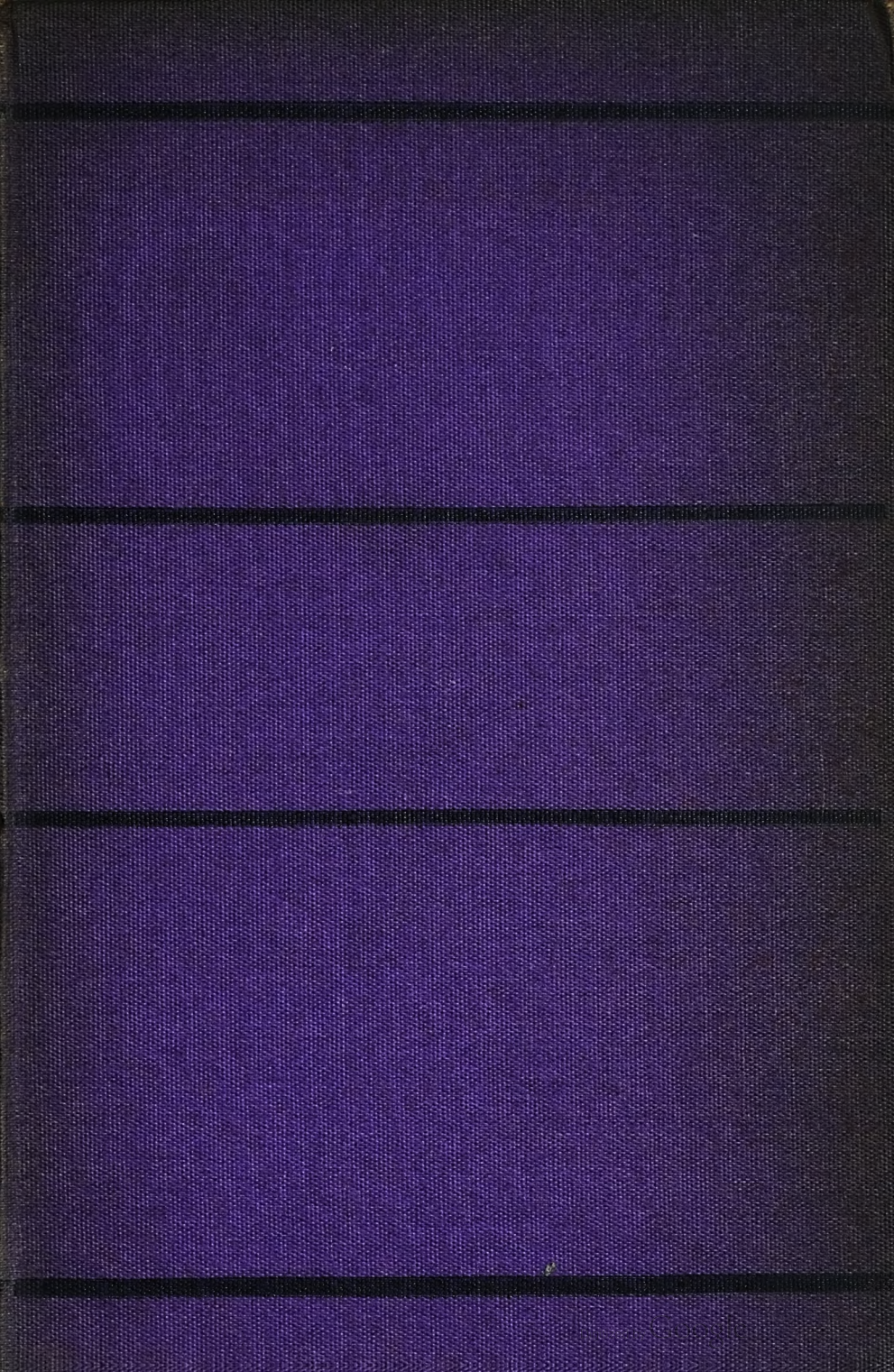
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NOTES  
ON  
THE BOOK OF GENESIS,

WITH SOME  
ESSAYS AND ADDRESSES

BY THE LATE  
REV. CHARLES HARGROVE.

COLLECTED AND EDITED BY HIS SON,  
JOSEPH HARGROVE, M.A.

Volume I.  
NOTES ON GENESIS.

*πάντα εἰς δόξαν Θεοῦ.*



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## EDITOR'S PREFACE.

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It seems almost necessary to write a few words of preface in offering to public notice a book of which the author no longer lives to speak for himself, and I would therefore briefly state the reasons which have induced me to publish these volumes.

When my beloved father fell asleep in the early part of last year, several of his friends expressed a hope that I would write a memoir of his life. This I declined to do—had there not been other and grave objections, it must have been a weighty reason that would have induced me to set aside one of his last and most earnest wishes that his life should not be written.

But though I was obliged to decline writing his life, the case seemed different as regarded his writings. In the providence of God I was left the sole possessor of a collection of MS. papers and notes on different religious subjects, written during the last forty or fifty years, and far more numerous, I believe, than my father at all supposed. These he left to me, many of his friends wished to see them



in print, and moreover there seemed to be something like an obligation resting upon me, not to hide from the Church the results of fifty years' deep and prayerful study of the word by a servant of God.

Indeed the real question which I had to consider was what I should publish and what I should reserve out of such a mass of papers, and this difficulty I solved by selecting those writings which the author seemed to have himself designed for publication. Amongst these were the Commentary on Genesis, which was written for the press about ten or fifteen years ago, though not published, partly from want of leisure and also from a modest diffidence as to its worth, and different essays, of which some have already appeared in print in different forms, and others were, I believe, delivered at public meetings. And here I would apologize to any who may be disappointed at not seeing in these volumes, what I believe many were anxious for—I allude to my father's notes on the Psalms. I know that he had some thought of writing on this portion of the Bible, but, to my great surprise, his notes were in such a fragmentary condition that, even if time had permitted, I doubt whether I could have satisfactorily prepared them for the press.

Having then settled what papers to edit, I found the work of editing a far more difficult task than I had expected. Though the subject matter had all been carefully studied by the author, he seems never to have finally revised it for the press; and while on the one hand I was most anxious accurately and carefully to revise the work, so that it should suffer

nothing from any slip in the language or composition, on the other hand I was haunted by a dread lest any verbal alteration made by me should in the very slightest degree alter the author's meaning. Beyond such necessary corrections I have done nothing more than add a few notes (always marked as my own), and in a very few places insert in square brackets a few words which I thought absolutely necessary to elucidate the author's meaning. I have often been strongly disposed to add confirmatory notes or insert quotations supporting the views here adopted, but I have refrained, feeling that to do so was beyond my competence. For the revision of those pages where reference is made to the Hebrew and the addition of a few explanatory notes of the same kind, I am indebted to the brotherly kindness of a Hebrew scholar.

If then any be disposed to find fault with the arrangement or selection of these pages let him blame me for it, but if any take exception to anything written herein as not being clearly or happily expressed, let him remember that it lacked the revision of the hand that penned it, and, if he will, let him blame me for an over-tenderness in dealing with the writings of my beloved father. Whatever be the defects of the book, I know that it was written with a view to the glory of God, and that object I have endeavoured to set before me in editing it. I would conclude with the words in which the holy George Herbert spake of his "Temple," words which I think the author of these pages would willingly have applied to them: "Sir, I pray deliver this little

book to my dear brother Ferrar, and tell him, he shall find in it a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul, before I could subject mine to the will of Jesus my Master, in whose service I have now found perfect freedom ; desire him to read it, and then if he can think it may turn to the advantage of any dejected poor soul, let it be made public; if not, let him burn it, for I and it are less than the least of God's mercies."

J. H.

CAMBRIDGE, *July 14*, 1870.

## PREFACE

BY THE AUTHOR.

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It has pleased God to reveal Himself to man, and the revelation which He has made is contained in the Bible. He has declared His will to us, so far as He thought well to reveal it, through the instrumentality of a succession of holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

No one ever discovered God or His truth by his own acuteness or sagacity ; our only knowledge is just as we receive it on the testimony of God. Man's mind has indeed its own office and exercise, but as it works independently of God and His revelation of Himself, we shall but fall into one or another form of error ; and from the most refined spiritualism or ideality to the grossest form of error, from the most rigid Pharisaism to the boldest infidelity, all are but shapings of the unregenerate mind according as it may be led by the thousand influences or circumstances which surround it.

The great object of God is self-manifestation—



nothing less would be worthy of Him, or good and profitable for us. He manifested Himself in creation, the stage on which are displayed His wisdom and power; in the fall, for man's sin is the occasion of God's grace, and in redemption, in which He exhibits His mercy and love—in all we see His grace and goodness, for what obligation was there on God to come out at all in creation? We just find blessing as we find God, but how can we find Him, except as He is pleased to manifest Himself—"Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection"? (Job xi. 7.)

Now self-manifestation in a creature would be but sin-manifestation, for all have sinned; it would be the manifestation of sin and selfishness, and pride and folly; but with God, in whom everything great and good and holy and happy exists in its fulness and perfection, self-manifestation must obviously be for blessing. How great is His goodness, and how great His beauty, and the acquaintance with this, the intimate knowledge of it, is just the blessedness of His people.

In the book which contains this revelation of God, in the Bible, we find two great subjects in which God is pleased thus to manifest Himself—creation and redemption. Many indeed are the forms in which these subjects are brought before us, and many the actings of His providence—which some might call a third subject—in reference to them, and many the little episodes which manifest His mercy and long-suffering as well as His righteous hatred of sin, and

which strengthen and encourage our hearts by the way, as we make increasing acquaintance with Him with whom we have to do; but still creation and redemption, or the old creation and the new, with all that belongs to and results from them, are the grand subjects in which God comes out and reveals Himself in the word. God may deal differently with man under different dispensations, but all will be only to show what a failing creature he is, all will develope, more or less, these leading subjects, whether in type or in vision, whether in legal enactments, in prophecy or promise.

Now, as the word was given by the Spirit, so can it only be understood by the same Spirit. The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God, and "we have received," says the Apostle, "the Spirit which is of God, in order that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (2 Cor. ii. 12). How cogent is this reasoning of the Apostle, and how conclusive as to the need of the Spirit's teaching! Man indeed without the Spirit may meddle with the letter of the word, even as we know he does, and he often brings from it, or rather to it, strange extravagancies and blasphemies—as we see is the way with many of the continental writers, a way which is unhappily spreading into our own country, and probably may spread increasingly in these latter times rife with error and evil, as we are taught to expect—but it is a serious and solemn thing to handle God's word, and that just because it is God's word, and never should we more realize the command, "Put

off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground," than when we are dealing with the word of God.

We are told in the twenty-fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel, that the Lord not only opened the Scriptures to the disciples to whom He was speaking, but afterwards He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. There was need of this double process, and the need still exists for the opening of the word and the operation of the Spirit on our hearts, if we would get the life and blessing which the Scriptures contain, for they testify of Jesus. Nothing is more needful in coming to the Scriptures than a subject heart and mind—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth;" but if we come to subject the word to our mind, instead of subjecting our mind to the word, to the mind of God, what can we expect but that they must prove a stone of stumbling, or even worse? Let us then be watchful and prayerful that we bring not our thoughts to the word, but come to get God's thoughts from it! It is in the spirit of these remarks that I desire to undertake and proceed with this work, looking for the guidance and blessing of the Lord.

I would desire to write, not in the confidence which some would advocate, but according to the light I possess; often suggestively, because I do not feel confidence, but the suggestions may be profitable to some. As one advances in years many things lose the importance which once they may have possessed in one's eyes, while the great and fundamental truths of revelation that are so plain to our sight

will only increase in value, and in their preciousness to the soul. Of such precious truths as those which touch the Person and work of the Son of God, His atonement, advocacy, and glorious appearing, I thank God that for over forty years my mind has known no shadow of change, while on many points of interpretation, and specially of unfulfilled prophecy, I cannot speak with the confidence that once I would.

As to the source whence were derived the thoughts embodied in these pages, I have been in the habit of making marginal notes in my Bible, but if any ask whence these notes, truly I cannot say. Many doubtless are from the conversation of those with whom I have held intercourse, many from the books I have read, but by far the most are the suggestions which arose from the Word as I read it. I am willing to be indebted to any source from which I may learn more of the mind and ways of God. I do not affect originality, nor do I much value the pretensions of those who do. There is but little that is original in the world; God would have us to be debtors one to another, and we are so, even when slow to acknowledge it. If the most original could trace his thoughts to the first germ he would discover this. We may indeed compare and compound, we may add, alter, or subtract, but after all we shall come to the conclusion of the wise man, "There is nothing new under the sun."

I would however make a wide difference between the servile plagiarist and the man who takes up thoughts from another and makes them his own by



thinking them over again—I may quote the language of another as more happily expressive than my own, but I have no right to take up his ideas and pass them off for my own.

Thus it may be that the reader will here find remarks with which he is familiar from other books, for many such will remain on the mind without one's knowing whence they are. I should willingly be a debtor to any for instruction, but not a servile copyist or plagiarist; I would not use the thought of another till I had in a sense made it my own by thinking it over again. I have however rather avoided looking into the more popular books, lest I should be only serving up in another form what had been better done before.

But little criticism is introduced, though some results of criticism are given. My object has been to give the plain meaning of the text, so far as it lay within my power, and to add such explanatory and practical remarks as might tend to its elucidation and be generally profitable.

I have looked at some of the objections and criticisms of the learned and highly intellectual German writers, from the nibbling at different doctrines and statements to the wholesale rejection of God's word, and to me it has often seemed marvellous, the puerilities into which learned men will fall when they reject or cavil at God's word—but learning and wisdom are different things, learning cannot make a sound or a subject mind. Indeed some of their objections seem to me little better than trifling, not to say foolery,

unworthy of notice, if it were not that the credulity of ignorance required it.

I have followed the shorter, or Usher's, chronology as being more to hand. I am aware that the longer system is more generally preferred by Biblical scholars, but feeling that the preference rests more on what is plausible or probable than on any conclusive argument, I would rather avoid change in a day when there is so much of it for the sake of change. Besides, I believe that all the argument is not on one side, and that there are objections against the longer system as well as the shorter.

## INTRODUCTION

BY THE AUTHOR.

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THE book of Genesis gives us the history of creation, the primitive state of man, his temptation and fall, and his subsequent state. His history in the Bible is all in keeping—he is a fallen creature, one without the life of God, living apart from God, in whose thoughts and occupations and pleasures God is not. We see great constitutional differences in men, and we see them greatly affected by circumstances, but still all living “without God in the world,” and herein probably is the true evidence of the sinfulness of the creature.

The book also shows us God’s remedy for sin, the promise that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head, and this gradually expanding in the after promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is manifested moreover in God’s actings—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek; His appearances to Abraham and Jacob, the elevation of Joseph, all teach us great truths respecting the coming One.

It is a book full of truth and blessing, such a revelation of God in His dealings with His creatures as to induce confidence in Him, and this is the great thing. It is indeed a book of God-manifestation, and that too after He might well have hid Himself from His guilty creature, and also it may be said to be a book of man-manifestation—the one is all good and holy and blessed, the other only evil, helpless and hopeless without God, and still the last thing that man will do is to come to God. Herein do we see the absolute necessity for the teaching of the Holy Spirit—that same Spirit who at the beginning brooded over the dark abyss—to meet man's unwillingness to come, his natural aversion to God, as well as of the blood of the Son of God to open a way to God after sin had closed it.

[The recent discoveries of the geologists have appeared to many to contradict the written word of God, and specially some parts of the book of Genesis, and thereby many have been shaken in the faith, and some have been led to reject the Bible and to prefer the deductions of science.]

The geologists have made out a case for themselves, they have formed a system that fits well together, but at times they speak too confidently, considering that theirs is the newest of the sciences, and on the other hand those who would honour the word have probably been a little too fearful—it is a fault, if any, on the right side.

Truth is truth, and cannot contradict itself whether in Divinity or Philosophy, whether in Theology, Astronomy, or Geology, if all are from God. There may



indeed be apparent contradictions, but only apparent, for truth cannot oppose itself, and when we find what seems contradictory, we ought at least to learn somewhat of modesty and patience, but it is to be feared that this lesson has not always been received. When a contradiction appears in two sciences, when the facts of one seem opposed to the conclusions of another, or to the assertions of God's word, there must be a fault somewhere—some hasty conclusion from defective premises, or some misinterpretation of the word mistaken for the word itself. The distinction cannot be too strongly insisted on, that it is one thing to contradict the word itself, and another and a widely different thing to oppose the interpretations of it—man's interpretation of the word is a little thing, the word is God's word and is everything.

Theology seems to offer us this advantage in our search for truth, that we have a written revelation before us, in plain intelligible language, and though one may indeed err in his understanding or interpretation of it, yet surely he is less likely to err, than one who has no such plain and definite word to guide him, and who must form his theories by induction. Now one little defect, one hasty step in a premiss, may vitiate a conclusion arrived at by much labour, and which therefore one may be the more unwilling to surrender, while in Theology we have results set before us, conclusions arrived at, which we receive on the credit of Him who gives them, and this, we submit, is not only more intelligible and decisive, but demands our assent, beyond any conclusions reached by process

of induction. We do not indeed make light of induction in science, but we make more of direct revelation from God: we believe that where there is not a flaw in the induction, it will harmonize with revelation, for truth will not conflict with itself, but how often have the inductions of science proved false—God's word is true from the beginning.

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God,” and here I would rest; one who has confidence in Divine revelation, in the Bible as God's word—and it is what every Christian should have—will not be likely to be soon shaken by the bold assertions of the disciples of a modern philosophy, and those who are so shaken may little think that they are yielding the alone foundation on which their souls rest. When once they yield the integrity of the Mosaic records—as strongly attested to be God's word, and as much honoured by our Lord in His references to it as any part of the Divine volume—they know not how easily their credulity may be drawn upon to yield more and more, and at length to give up the word altogether, and “if the foundations be destroyed what can the righteous do?”

Let us not be ashamed to acknowledge difficulties which we cannot solve, but let not these difficulties shake our faith—if they do, what shall we believe? if the foundation be shaken, on what does faith rest?

To my mind the key to many of the difficulties which the geologists find in the word lies in this, that the Scriptures do not contemplate things in their scientific aspect. They speak for instance of “the

four corners of the earth," but who would question their veracity on the ground that the earth being a globe cannot have corners? Their object is not to teach philosophy, but something higher than philosophy; they speak to plain men and in accordance with popular notions; they speak of things as they present themselves to the eye, and thus the whole work of creation is described as it would appear to a spectator.

Again objectors often argue as if God Himself were bound by the laws which He has appointed for the rule of this world—by the ordinary laws of matter. These laws are His appointment, but He may modify or dispense with them as He pleases. We see something of this in the life of man: how frail and feeble he is as he advances in years, and yet we know that this very same creature, with just the same members parts and faculties, and animated by the same life, lived to near one thousand years in the early ages of the world. How is this? Is it not contrary to the laws that govern him now, or that govern the matter of which he is formed?

For my own part I believe in the integrity of the word of God; and that so entirely that I think no statement of Science would upset my faith therein, or shake me from that belief, God keeping me; yet do I not feel it necessary to ignore the discoveries of the philosopher, while I do believe that there is rash and defective interpretation in the reading of both of the volumes of God—that of Revelation and that of Nature.

# NOTES ON GENESIS.

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## CHAPTER I.

IN the opening chapter of the Bible we have the account of creation, so that on this, abundantly confirmed as it is by after revelation, is our faith based, "that the worlds"—signifying the whole universe, as would seem from John i. 3; Col. i. 16;—"that the worlds were framed by the word of God" (Heb. xi. 3). Here we have an adequate cause for a mighty effect, though it may be we seldom so think of it. Faith must have a foundation to rest on, and God's own word is that sure foundation, and when man departs from this fountain of life and light, into what errors and puerilities will he not fall, as is manifested in the notions on this subject, of those who reject revelation?

Now while we honour the word of God, it is incumbent on us to see that we attain to its true meaning, else we may be only discrediting the truth we love, by zeal for opinions which we have brought to the word, and not got *from* it, or if from it, then by

some misinterpretation, or resting on disjointed texts, without reference to the connection or harmony of the whole. Probably we seldom get to the true meaning of any passage of God's word, certainly not to its full meaning, till we discover its connection, and if one will rest on isolated texts, and string them together apart from their contexts, there is no absurdity in which he may not build himself up; so that while we wait on the Lord for his light and guidance, we must nevertheless use the appointed means. He meets us in the means, they are profitless without Him, and it is a true maxim, as well for the discovery of truth as for the guidance of life, diligently to use God's appointed means, and while we use them, to trust Him only.

Into these remarks I have been led by the consideration of the difficulties which meet one in the very first chapter of the Bible, difficulties indeed which might be anticipated from the extreme antiquity and brevity of the record. Some scientific men, more attached, it is to be feared, to their science than to revelation, and with very limited knowledge of the latter, have asserted the incompatibility of the one with the other, or the impossibility of reconciling the discoveries of science with the declarations of God's word. If indeed this contradiction, which is asserted to exist, did really exist between them, then the Christian man would easily know how to make his election. He who knows Whom he has believed, and the sure warrant of that belief, even the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever, and which has come to his heart with a self-evidencing light and power that nothing may shake, such an one will cleave with his whole soul to the sure word of God, even in the face

of the most startling deductions of science. If God has really spoken, and if the Bible be the word of his lips (Ps. xvii. 4) then is it the very highest authority that it is possible for man to have, an authority as far above sense and science, as God is above all. It was after having seen the Lord in glory, that the Apostle said, "we have also a more sure word of prophecy;" what honour God puts upon his word, magnifying it above all His name!

But happily we are not reduced to the painful necessity of making such an election as that between science and revelation. They are not hostile but in harmony, and so have those concluded who have drunk most deeply of both streams—streams from the same fountain of eternal truth. It is for those who drink but of the one to undervalue the other. Science is the knowledge of God's works, and the laws by which they are governed, as He enables man by patient investigation to discover them; revelation is that knowledge of Himself and of His will, which God has been pleased more directly to communicate. He reveals to us the knowledge which we never could know without revelation; He leaves us to the exercise of thoughtful industry and sober deduction to discover the knowledge that is open to discovery. On the revelation of God depends our everlasting life, our hope and happiness, and the attainment of this knowledge is not dependent on any ability of man. It is not high order of mind, or laborious effort that acquires it; on the contrary, it requires subjection of mind, receptivity rather than energy, that we receive, and simply as recipients, that to which no state of mind or heart or life can give a fallen creature any title however a

lowly dependant state of mind may qualify us as recipients.

It is different with the objects of science, they require both mind and exercise of mind, which but few comparatively are enabled to give, and therefore however enlarging to our views they may be, or useful in the arts and commerce of life, spiritual life or blessing is not dependent on them; were it otherwise, it would only be to exclude from the blessing millions who could not thus attain to it. No doubt to a mind taught of God and humbled before Him, science opens fields of wonder and adoration at His greatness and goodness and wisdom; but to one who is awakened to feel his sinfulness before God and the penalty of sin, what is it all but the veriest trifling, in comparison with the wonders of redemption, which the pages of revelation disclose to his anxious soul! Too often we find that science, instead of producing the happy effect which it ought, only verifies that word of Scripture, "knowledge puffeth up," for such is its tendency when the soul is not in communion with God. A man of acquirement in science will feel his superiority to the crowd around him, and hence the impulse to think something of himself; but when he stands before God, he will then feel his littleness and vileness, and his language will be even as one of old, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself." What is everything in his presence!

That we may not however underrate what we do not possess, and class, as many do, the attainments of true science with the vain philosophy which the apostle reprobates—very different things—let us re-

member that all science is of God, that matter and the laws by which matter are governed, were made and appointed by Him when He went forth in creation. He not only framed the heavenly bodies, but He ordered their revolutions, and all the vicissitudes of season, and all the operations of nature, the commonest process of vegetable life, and the innumerable changes all around us of earth and sea and sky, are but His appointment, and governed by the laws which He gave them at their birth.

When it is said of the Word, even of that eternal One who took our nature, and for us became subject unto death, that "all things were made by Him," then do we see the whole body of science before Him and originating with Him, of His own order and appointment; and happy it is thus to associate science with the name of our Lord and Saviour, it disarms it of the fears with which ignorance would invest it, it gives it its title to our affections and respect, though we may have made but little acquaintance with it. In fact science and revelation are kindred, or we may say that both are volumes of God, each teaching each its own lesson, distinct indeed, but not discordant. We may but indifferently learn our lesson from either volume, and then we may be assuming and dogmatic, as partial knowledge often is, but this only proves the infirmity of the creation, and not that there is anything contradictory in the volumes of God, the great sources of knowledge, earthly and heavenly, which He in His goodness hath given us.

With these preliminary remarks we proceed to the commencement of our subject—the opening of the revelation of God. "In the beginning God



created the heaven and the earth"—here revelation first dawns on us, and here, as I believe, even in its simplicity and brevity, have we the clue to the explanations of many of those ancient, mysterious tracings, which that other volume hath of late years brought to light. The verse declares generally the creation of the heavens and the earth, of the universe, as I believe, and untold ages it may be, before it pleased God to reduce it to its present order, as an abode for man. There is no note of limitation here, either as to time or space; as one has said: "The writings of Moses do not fix the antiquity of the globe," it did not come within their scope. In the after part of the chapter we have the details of creation, when God in his good pleasure was framing and furnishing for his highly-favoured creatures this world so destined to exhibit his manifold and varied wonders.

In the first verse we have the general statement, embracing two leading thoughts—creation, and the author of this creation; here we have creation in its primary sense, producing out of nothing, causing to exist that which had no previous existence, and it is the only verse in the chapter in which the word is used in this its primary sense. The same word (בָּרָא) occurs afterwards in the 21st and 27th verses, but not it would seem in its primary sense, as is evident in the latter case, from ii. 7, where man is represented not as originated from nothing, but from "the dust of the ground." The word "made" (עָשָׂה) occurring afterwards, verses 7, 16, 25, 26, 31, which subsequently we shall have occasion to notice, is altogether different.

Here then, at an undefined period, when time began its course, we have the vast creation

of God, from which everything was subsequently moulded.

Now there does not seem anything contrary to the import of the words or to any after revelation in this view, and there does seem something very like a necessity laid on us so to interpret the words; for it is asserted, not by enemies only, but by some of the truest friends of revelation, and the assertion is now an accredited fact, that there are plain traces of certain geological changes having taken place on the earth, and moreover that fossil remains have abundantly been brought to light, both of which afford clear evidence of the world's existence ages and ages before the date which the common interpretation of the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis assigns to creation.

The man of science in this difficulty is tempted to undervalue the Divine record, while the Christian man on the other hand looks with no friendly eye on "the newest of the sciences," which seems to militate with the most ancient revelation, on which, taken as a whole, his hopes and happiness depend.

Now surely the interpretation which would remove the fears of one and the doubts of the other, or at least the ostensible cause of such fears and doubts, ought to be welcomed by us and receive from us a ready response, and such it seems is that which wise and holy men have sanctioned, and men of ages long past; for it is no new interpretation got up to meet a difficulty, but was propounded centuries upon centuries before ever the difficulty saw the light, before geology, as a science, had any existence.

It would seem as if we had something, if not

just analogous, yet helpful to us in the understanding of our subject in the opening of John's gospel. In the first and second verses we have the declaration of that which existed before creation, and subsequently the writer proceeds to the details of his subject in time, and so far we have something analogous. In the record of Moses we find God going forth in creation in the beginning; in the record of John, the Word existing then in that beginning, and not then beginning to be, for He was before time, from eternity, and in the third verse we find He is this very Creator for "all things were made by Him." Here, too we find a divine plurality in unity, even as we believe that it exists in our text, "In the beginning was the Word," hence the eternity; "and the Word was with God," hence the plurality; "and the Word was God," hence the divine unity. The writer afterwards declares the incarnation of this divine Word in furtherance of the purpose of God, the redemption of what was lost in creation, and more than redemption, "Behold, I make all things new : these words are true and faithful" (Rev. xxi. 5).

This incarnation of the Word, I observe in passing, is what John speaks of in the opening of his first epistle, in contradistinction to the opening of the gospel, where it is the eternal Word before incarnation.

To return to our subject, we have here in the opening of the volume of God creation in the beginning, long before the present order of things, and creation by God; subsequently come the details which more immediately affect us. Hence we learn that the world had a beginning, God created it, here

is the great and adequate first cause. But, as is well known to many, the Hebrew word for "God" is a plural noun and in construction with a singular verb, "create," intimating, as I believe, a plurality in the name, and further plurality in unity, as is more distinctly seen in the 26th and 27th verses, and though it is true that the plural is used in a singular sense in the original, to express emphasis or excellence, this use is limited, and we are not therefore deprived of its proper plural sense. A very learned Hebraist, though unhappily a most unsound divine, thinks that the plural form of the name in this construction may have been originally derived from polytheism; what a monstrous thought for one professing to believe the revelation! It does not seem to have occurred to him how far more likely that polytheism should have been a corruption of the truth—plurality in unity—than that the truth should have been a debtor to the lie. However from this plural form of the name in construction with a singular verb, and from the clearer intimation of the 26th and 27th verses, and the use of the same word in the plural form in Eccl. xii. 1 (as is most generally received), "Remember now thy *Creator* in the days of thy youth," supported by the abundance of after revelation on the subject; and seeing moreover that some intimation of the true God was what we might expect in the opening of His own book, and the account of His first going forth in creation, and further that God never systematically defines Himself, so to speak, but leaves us to gather the true knowledge of Himself, as well from His works as from His words and names incidentally—from

these considerations I cannot but think that we have here God in His true being, the divine plurality in unity.

Thus have we dwelt at some length on this opening verse of the Bible. How simple it is in expression, how sublime in thought, how instructive in matter, unfolding such a world of things within its own brief compass—everything that it is needful for us to know on the subject—nothing to gratify a vain curiosity—nothing that may be discovered by industry and research—the ground of faith as to creation, and the ground of the creature's submission and worship. It is God's creation on which we stand, the world is His, and He made it.

We now proceed to the second verse, and here again we are encountered with difficulties in the commonly received sense of the words, "And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." But of what time does this record speak? and how came it to be, as it is thus described? Is this the state in which it was created in the beginning? This seems the more obvious sense of the words, and yet it seems descriptive of a state of things very unlike God's handiwork. In this difficulty, as in so many more, we are helped by comparing Scripture with Scripture, for in the forty-fifth chapter of the prophet Isaiah, and in the 18th verse we read, "Thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it; He hath established it, He created it not *in vain*," (וַיַּבְרָא) or, "He did not create it without form." The prophet here includes generally the subject of the first chapter of Genesis, the word "created" twice

occurring in this verse is the same as that in the first verse of Genesis, and the "vain," or "without form" state, in which He did *not* create it, is expressed by the same word as that used in the second verse, from which I think we have some warrant to conclude that the second verse of Genesis does not immediately follow, or is not the result of the first verse; that it is not descriptive of a state of things produced by creation, but rather of creation disturbed and disorganized by some unknown cause at some unknown time. Thus arguing from analogy, and as far as practicable by induction, we arrive at a conclusion which the words easily and without forcing them admit of, which parallel Scriptures seem to require, which is not inconsistent with any after revelation, and which helps us in the removal of certain difficulties which the discoveries of science have cast in the way of the ordinary interpretation of this Scripture.

We are told by geologists of certain plain intimations of revolutions to which this globe was subjected, long before the date which interpreters have usually assigned to creation from this first chapter, and in the second verse we seem to witness the effect of some such revolution, in the confusion and disorganization which it describes—how, and when effected, we know not, for there is no record relating to it. In ages to come we may read these things, together with other mysteries, in the clear shining of God's unerring light, but it is remarkable how by the reflection as it were of the light which we now possess the darkness becomes less dark, and we come to see things with more distinctness. We find this exemplified in considering certain expressions of the prophets of old, who when

foretelling the judgments on nations, and the consequent confusion and desolation ensuing, use the self-same words that occur in this second verse, describing as we believe some revolution of our globe, and the ensuing consequences of desolation and ruin. In the thirty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, the prophet is declaring the terrible judgments on Idumea, and the disastrous consequences, and in the eleventh verse he uses the very words of our text to express the state into which the land was reduced—the “without form and void” of Genesis, and the “confusion” and “emptiness” of Isaiah, are in the original the same words; and again we find the prophet Jeremiah, foretelling the state to which the land of Israel was reduced by the wickedness of the people, uses the same words (chap. iv. 23), and thus from analogy we get some scattered rays of light which help us to see our way more clearly.

Another ray may fall on this view of creation, from some consideration of the angelic host. That they are created beings we know from Col. i. 16, and therefore they must come within the category of this verse, but when were they created? Of this Scripture does not inform us, but we learn from Job xxxviii. 7, assuming the sons of God there mentioned to be angels, that they were the joyful spectators of the progress of creation, as it was gradually reduced from its chaotic state to order and life and beauty, as we see it in this first chapter. But if the first verse gives us the first dating of time, and also describes the commencement of the present order of things, according to the usual interpretation of this chapter, then if the angels were created before, they must like the Word have been “in the beginning,” and so from

eternity, and thus we should make them as God. I judge then that they came into being, at or after creation, strictly speaking, as in our first verse, among the "all things" (John i. 3; Col. i. 16); and before the present order of things, over which they "shouted for joy," as they watched its progress.

While on this subject, and in connection with it, the thought will arise whether the chaotic state may not have been somehow connected with the rebellion of "the angels which kept not their first estate," the result it may be of that rebellion, even as the chaotic state of the land, described by Jeremiah, was the result of the wickedness of the people, Ps. cvii. 34; if so we can easily conceive of the joy of the heavenly host at its restoration, connected as it was with so much of their ministrations, and also we can understand Satan's effort in the temptation of our first parent, to seek to obtain his lost dominion on our globe.\* The thought that has occurred to me, I know not how, I find has been entertained by others also. It may be allowable thus to gather up thoughts, if not the deductions at least the suggestions of Scripture, but we have need of caution that these suggestions run not away with us and that we build not on them; they may be suggestive to other minds, and may lead to deeper searching of the word, and so to increasing light, but for the knowledge of many things, for the perfect knowledge probably of all things, we must wait till we know even as we are known, and in the meantime let us deal reverently and modestly in the interpretation of God's word and works.

In the close of the second verse we have what

\* See Appendix.



more immediately concerns us as inhabitants of this world, "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The original word (רוּחַ) means breath or wind equally as spirits, and this sense of the word many adopt. It is remarkable the tendency with some even among Christian commentators, to take the lowest sense of a word that it will admit of, there are those who cannot see anything above the prophet's child in Isa. vii. 14, and those who can see nothing more than a wind in the word before us, but how can it mean wind? Is not wind air in motion? but as yet there was no air or atmosphere, the creation of this globe as we have it, with its circumambient atmosphere had not yet commenced, and from whence could the wind be? We have then, I believe, the great active source of the creation of God, at the very commencement of things as they are. When the stillness of death was all around, the Holy Spirit moved. The third Person of the Blessed Trinity was going forth in creation, brooding as it were over the disordered chaotic mass, and fitting it for that order and beauty into which it was moulded as a habitation, meet for Him who was made in the likeness of God.

Thou, O Spirit, . . . .

Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss,  
And mad'st it pregnant.

It seems from this, as well as from Job xxvi. 13, as if the work of the third Person, the mighty agent in the works of God, was the ordering and furnishing the creation already called into existence. In regular succession from this we find the several acts of the six days, till God saw everything that He had made,

and that it was very good, and so He could rest in complacency with the works of His hands.

While we thus search for the true meaning of the word of God, and try to disencumber it of erroneous and traditionary interpretations which have proved a stumbling-block to many, let us still remember that it never was given us with the intent of teaching science, but something far more important than science, and which science could never teach, even life and godliness. On the other hand neither does it contradict the discoveries of science, the objects of science and revelation differ, but when incidentally they meet, it is not to clash; no, they are both of God, and any apparent difference must be apparent only, arising either from the imperfection of our knowledge of the Scripture or of the science, of the one volume or the other, or from the assumption of vain man, not knowing how little he knows. We may learn something from the testimony of one of the most godly men and voluminous writers of the seventeenth century, it occurs in the title-page of one of his works—  
“Knowledge and love, compared by Richard Baxter, who, by God’s blessing on long and hard studies, hath learned to know that he knoweth but little.”

Scripture, we must remember, addresses man in popular, not in scientific language, according to apparent, not actual truths, it describes things as they appear to the sense, as they would strike an observer, just as we speak of sunrise and sunset. It speaks on such subjects when incidentally they occur, according to received opinions, the only way in which it could speak on them intelligibly. If it were otherwise, and that accurate, scientific language was used,

then what would follow?—why, that no one would have understood then, and but few now. The Bible would have been a book for the learned only, where such subjects are treated of, a knowledge far in advance of the different ages through which the Bible has travelled, and equally in advance of the countless multitudes to whom it has brought peace and pardon, would have been requisite for the understanding of many parts of it, and for the faith of the simple believer. The truth abideth the same, whether of science or revelation, the expression may seem imperfect as knowledge advances, but it was an imperfection which the necessity of the case required, and which answered the exigency, and advancing knowledge will still understand the language which Scripture uses, and which it could only use in order to be intelligible. To one who is true to God it will all be plain, such an one will learn His mind, and difficulties will disappear however expressed, but he that will stumble may easily find occasion—a pebble will be enough. It was foretold of the Word, the essential Word, that He was to be a stone of stumbling, as well as a sure foundation-stone, and even so of that word which is the expression of His mind. The head alone will suffice for understanding the volume of science, but we need heart as well as head to learn God's truth, and we further need that both be in subjection to God. How remarkable as to this is the teaching in the close of the third chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians! The apostle is there leading the saints to the highest possible attainments, but it is by a process affecting the heart as well as the mind, it is deeply subjective while science is objective only, and we see

the same thing in the assurance of the understanding of God, Col. ii. 2.

If the great event narrated in the tenth chapter of the book of Joshua had been scientifically expressed how unintelligible had it been, but it was narrated according to the measure of their knowledge, according as the effect appeared to them, and more advanced knowledge will not alter the fact which took place, or the effect produced, though it may alter the way of accounting for it, or the mode of expressing it; and so also, when we speak of the moon as a great light, we speak of it as it appears, and so also of the rising and setting sun, the east and the west, the four corners of the earth, above and below, etc., etc.—unphilosophical terms it may be, but easily understood and free from misapprehension. We use these terms as the things we speak of appear to us, and just so do the Scriptures. The same necessity is laid on us in speaking of God, language fails, and so He is described by the affections and powers with which we are familiar among men. If it were possible to describe Him as He is, who would understand Him?

The after part of this chapter proceeds in the successive details of fitting and furnishing this globe in six days for God's purpose, a world which is indeed but a speck in His universe, but destined by Him who doeth all things according to His own wise and holy purpose to be the stage on which the mighty drama of redemption was to be enacted, where His own Son, His well-beloved, was to be manifested in humiliation and in glory.

In the third verse we have the first day's work, the bringing in light upon the dark and discordant

mass, all was darkness, "and God said, Let there be light: and there was light." He spake and it was done, His saying is the expression of His will, His will of His power: the light shone forth, not from the sun, for the sun did not yet appear, but light as a distinct substance, whose abode was to be the sun, by the same appointment which called it into being. And then we have His complacency in His own work: "God saw the light that it was good;" it was His first work in this world, "offspring of heaven, first-born," and what would all its beauty be without the light! "Truly, the light is sweet"!—how we learn its value, as many a treasure's worth, by its loss, and yet more by God's using it to designate Himself—"God is light." We next have the separation of the light from the darkness, "and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." This completed the first day of the new order of things, and here also we find the Scripture mode of counting diurnal time, beginning with the evening, as is the custom of many of the eastern countries still: their day commenced at sunset in distinction to ours at sunrise, or, as with some, at midnight.

It has of late been put forth by some desirous to reconcile the Scripture account with the revelations of geology, that these successive days of creation are not literal days, but lengthened successive periods of time, and as the original text will I believe admit of this interpretation, one would naturally look favourably on it as tending satisfactorily to settle the differences between the Scripture and science, but it seems difficult to reconcile it with the fact of

the seventh day being manifestly spoken of in Scripture in the more obvious and usual sense as the shorter period. Whatever truth may exist under the literal and primary meaning of this account of the seven days' work, yet the reference in Exodus xx. 8—11 to the creation Sabbath as one natural day—from which it follows that the six creation days are natural days also, for there is no note of any difference between them—seems to militate with the view above set forth. I have read the statement in Hugh Miller's book\* to meet this difficulty, but I confess that it does not satisfy my mind, and while one cannot but admire his able and interesting work undertaken with so laudable an object, yet I fear we must await further light to settle some of the differences between "the newest of the sciences" and "the old theology," it may be the light of that day that will declare all things.

In the progress of creation, the work of the second day was the firmament, "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters." Here we have the vast expanse spread out over us, and the object for which it was destined, "and let it divide the waters from the waters." We must remember that in the chaotic state, the fluid element prevailed (verses 2 and 9), and here we have the separation of the waters from the waters, the waters of the clouds as it would seem from the waters of the earth, to which Gen. vii. 11 and viii. 2 refer. "And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament,"—again God's saying is

\* See Appendix.

His doing,—the firmament came forth “and it was so, and God called the firmament Heaven.” This heaven, we must remember, is not of equal import with the heaven of the first verse, which as we have always noticed includes the heavenly bodies, the sun moon and stars, in a word the universe, as the creation of God at its remote beginning. The Scriptures frequently and distinctly enumerate three heavens, the first, the heavens of this eighth verse, the region of clouds and where birds fly; the second, the vast and distant concave, as it seems to the eye of an observer, in which the sun moon and stars seem fixed, the far-off fields of space; and the third or highest heavens above all, represented as the abode of God. It is remarkable that the three are referred to, and thus distinguished in one short psalm—in the first, third and eighth verses of Psalm viii. In the first verse we have the third heavens which are called “the highest” (Luke ii. 14), or “above all other heavens” (Eph. iv. 10), and so we read in Heb. iv. 14, “He is passed” not “into,” but “through the heavens,” through the first and second in His ascension to the throne of God. Then in the third verse we have the second heavens, the place of the moon and stars (the sun is not mentioned as the psalm was probably a night contemplation); and in the eighth verse we have the first heavens, though not just appearing in our translation, but the word “air” is the same as the “heavens” of the first and third verses, where the birds fly and the clouds float, the “firmament” of the passage before us. There may be a reference to the three in that word of the prophet Amos, chap. ix. 6, and probably in the tabernacle, the court,

the holy place, and the most holy may also shadow out the same gradation.

To this day's work alone the note of God's complacency is not added before its close, "And the evening and the morning were the second day." Of course there is a reason for it, but the Greek translation of the Bible made before our Lord's time, and from which He often quotes has the clause, and so have other ancient versions ; however the thirty-first verse includes this day's work as well as the others in the category of the "very good."

We next come to the third day's work, which is also a work of separation as the first and second day's. The light has been separated from the darkness, the waters below from those above, and now we have the separation of the waters from the earth, "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear : and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth ; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas : and God saw that it was good." Again we have the power of His Word, and again His complacency in His work, and now He proceeds further to furnish the earth with verdure and vegetation, "And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself upon earth : and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose fruit was in itself, after his kind : and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day." Here again the power and the approval ; in this day's work alone is there a repetition of the clause,



“God saw that it was good” (verses 10, 12) it is as referring to the double work of this day, but one cannot help thinking of it, as if the first clause had somehow dropt down from the account of the second day’s work.

Here we seem to have a kind of break or division in the great creation work, light has been brought in on the darkness and confusion, the firmament has separated the waters, and earth with its floral carpeting has appeared. God’s hand has been on the elements, earth sea and sky, and now God seems again to go over the same ground, so to speak, and having so far fitted the earth for its purpose, He proceeds to furnish it with its living inhabitants. But first we have the fourth day’s work, the furnishing of the heavens. “And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.” Here we have God’s purpose as to the heavenly bodies, at least the two greater, as they appear to our sense of sight (for this as we have already seen is the way of the sacred writer to describe the process of creation), and their immediate object and use, to divide the day from the night (to be for signs and seasons, and for days and years, and to give light upon the earth. The only question here seems to be the meaning of their being for signs and seasons, and in reference to this we find frequent allusions in Scripture to the heavenly bodies as signs, Isa. xxxviii. 7 8; Jer. x. 2; Joel ii. 30, 31, iii. 15; Matt. xxiv. 29; Luke xxi. 11, etc., and before the progress of science they were used in husbandry and navigation,

to guide men in their course and operations as we learn from Matt. xvi. 2, 3, and Acts xxvii. 20. Then for seasons, they marked the great seasons of the year, the summer and winter, the seed-time and harvest, the day and night, and also the great religious festivals of Israel, as in Lev. xvi. 29, xxiii., xxv.; 2 Kings iv. 23; 2 Chron. ii. 4; Ps. lxxxi. 3, civ. 19, etc. It is to be noted, that the original word (ἥμα) for these "lights," is different from that in the third verse (ἥμα), it means rather a luminary than the substance of the light, the receptacle of the light which is already created and consequently shines forth from them, the sun as the fountain of light, the moon as reflecting it. The word by which the Greek version renders it, is that applied to the saints, in Phil. ii. 15, and to the New Jerusalem in Rev. xxi. 11—the Greek is expressive, verse 3, φῶς, verse 14, φωστῆρες, verse 15, εἰς φαῖσιν.

It is remarkable that only the two divisions of time caused by the earth's revolution in reference to the sun are here noted, the diurnal and the annual, the day and the year; not the month, occasioned by the revolution of the lesser heavenly body, nor the week, a period not depending on any revolution, but having more the nature of a positive command, originating in God's rest from creation, the stated period from Sabbath to Sabbath.

In the sixteenth and following verses God gives effect to His expressed purpose. "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: He made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and

over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day." Here we have the furnishing of the heavens, the heavenly bodies set in their own place, in obedience to their own laws, subservient to the purpose of the Almighty Disposer. These two lights we are not to look upon as now first created, their *creation* properly speaking we believe to be included in the comprehensive brevity of the first verse, and accordingly we find a different word used here from that of the first verse; the "create" there is primarily, as we have seen, to originate, to make out of nothing, but the word here, "God made" (verse 16) is the same as that in verses 7, 25 and 26, and does not mean to create, but to work on a substance already created, to form or fashion or manufacture existing materials; thus we find in chap. iii. 21, that God *made*—not created—coats of skins for Adam and Eve, and so also it is the word used in reference to the making of the ark, and the different furniture of the tabernacle, and indeed it very frequently occurs in the Old Testament. In the third verse of the second chapter, we have both words occurring, "created and made," and probably their relative value, (see the marginal reading). And so when it is said that God made two great lights, it does not refer to His original creation of them, but now they are made to appear, to take their own place, and subserve their own end, they are called forth from the obscurity and ruin into which they had fallen with creation, to accomplish God's object. They may have shone brightly on other worlds, and in the ruin of other worlds have been obscured and extinguished.

It has been a question much agitated of late concerning these heavenly bodies, whether they be inhabited or not, and much ingenious reasoning has been expended on the subject, but with our present light it is a question scarcely capable of decision, nor does it seem very much to concern us.

The fifth day opens with the animate creation in distinction to the inanimate on which God had hitherto been engaged, "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven." Here we have the purpose of God, and then follows the execution of His purpose, "And God created great whales, and every living thing that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good." The word "create" here is the same as in the first verse, but probably in its secondary sense, to form or fashion from existing materials, as we know that it means in the twenty-seventh verse, compared with chap. ii. 7.

It is observable that the formation of the animate follows the same order as the inanimate creation, first we have fish occupying the waters, the first element of creation, then the fowls of the air or firmament, the next element, and lastly the beasts of the earth, the last of God's formation from the fluid and chaotic mass. The word "whale" is too limited a translation of the original, it is rendered by different words in the Scripture, as dragon and serpent, more usually the former,\* in the Lamentations of Jeremiah by "sea

\* תנינים is the word, but in Lam. iv. 3, the Keri, or traditional reading, is תניס, "jackals."—ED.

monster," which probably as well expresses the generic meaning as any other word we could use. Here then we have the first living creatures of our present world, each after its own kind or order, and then for the first time we find God's blessing, "And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day." The blessing does not come till the life comes, and this may teach us the value of life above matter. The living God, the source of all life, communicates life to the matter which He had created, and then blesses it to perpetuate the life, it may be in reference to the extinct creatures of a former world.

In connection with this blessing the exceeding fecundity of marine creatures is very remarkable. Naturalists affirm that there are some species, as the codfish and others, whose offspring would in a few years fill the ocean, if all the spawn of each successive generation was to come to maturity, and though this is not so remarkable in the case of fowl, yet if every egg of every bird was preserved, and brought forth to maturity, what flocks should we have in a few years, sufficient to incommode our motion and devour our food. It would seem from the twentieth verse that the fowl even as the fish were produced from the waters, as if this element originated all the oviparous class, and there are some features of resemblance between them, but the notion seems to militate with what is said in the nineteenth verse of the second chapter; this difficulty however is probably solved by the marginal reading, "let fowl fly."

We now come to the sixth day, in which we have

the last and greatest work of God, the most perfect and most failing, but first the earth must be provided with its living furniture, "And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the cattle after his kind: and it was so." Here we have God's order for the production of the various genera of his creatures inhabiting the earth, the domestic animals, the insect and reptile tribe, and the wild beasts; all were subject and harmless, for sin had not yet introduced disorder, and then we have His own almighty power giving effect to His will, "And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good." And now our globe is fashioned anew from its ruin and disorder, everything takes its place and subserves its great Maker's purpose, for God does nothing in vain, though we through our failure and defective knowledge often fail to discover His design; air earth and sea all respond to the will of Him who called them into being, the light shines forth on a world declaring the goodness and the handiwork of God, the orbs of heaven move in their heavenly course in obedience to their Creator's will—"No speech, nor language, their voice is not heard,"\* but each in its own mute but expressive obedience, declares the glory of God—

For ever hymning as they shine  
The hand that made us is divine.

And still untiring in their obedience they go on their appointed course, tacitly reproaching the wilful froward ways of God's most highly favoured but disobedient

\* See Appendix.

creatures. We have seen not only the fashioning but the furnishing of this world in the six days' work, and now all is ready for the reception of Him who is to be its Lord and Master, God's vicegerent over all.

A remarkable change now takes place in the language of God, it is no longer the simple fiat that gives life and place and form at its word, but we have instead the language of counsel and deliberation, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," and then in the twenty-seventh verse, "So God created man in His image." Here we have the possessive affix in the plural in verse 26, and in the singular in verse 27, while the plural name Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) is used in both, and in both takes a singular verb.

Do we not then here see plain intimation of a plurality in the name of God, and as distinctly of a unity? Some of the most learned Jews felt that there was a mystery in it, but they knew not how to unfold it, while many of the most able and learned Christian commentators settled down in the conviction of a Trinity in unity being here shadowed forth, and though many resist the conclusion, I doubt if any other will meet the exigency of the case.

But what is this image and likeness after which it was the design of the Divine Counsel to make man, man His last and greatest work, His responsible creature, the creature of all climes and regions, endowed with somewhat of Himself? Many are the thoughts on this subject, some would make it intellectual, some moral, some personal, and others circumstantial, and various opinions have been held on these different views, but on such a subject we can have no

light but what the Word of God supplies, however observation may confirm or rather illustrate it. Now we learn from our Lord's Word to the woman of Samaria that "God is a Spirit," whence it seems that the image was somehow spiritual. Doubtless there was a fitting tabernacle, a noble one, unlike the creatures around him, upright in stature to commune with God above him, for this Divine image to inhabit, but I think that the image can hardly refer to the tabernacle. Many suppose that it refers to the body which the second Person of the Trinity was to take into union with Himself for our redemption, but this does not agree with the language of the text, "Let us make man in *our* image," this is not the expression of the second Person who took up our nature, but of the Godhead in its Divine plurality, and further in the Epistle to the Philippians it is said that as to His human nature "He was made in the likeness of men," so that bodily it was He that was made in our likeness, not we in His, and spiritually we in His likeness, not He in ours, and that it was in some sense spiritual may further appear from this, that in the glory we shall be changed into His likeness *bodily*. Phil. iii. 20, 21.

The likeness then I take to be spiritual, man was made with a Godlike intelligence and capacity, his understanding could apprehend, his affections approve, his will obey his Divine Lord and Maker, and this is the true wisdom. The incidental notices in the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians of man's renewal "*after the image* of Him who created him," lead us very much to the same conclusion that it consists of righteousness, holiness, truth, and knowledge, or probably of light and love, the very graces with which



God so identifies His great name (1 John i. 5, iv. 8) the graces which are most comprehensive, adorning head and heart, the whole man, and which will be manifested just in proportion as we are conformed to His Divine likeness. Many have supposed that this "likeness" in which man was created was a subject of increasing attainment, in contradistinction to the "image" which was rather the one common feature; however this be, it is I think plain enough in the Scriptures that the great object of the Lord's people should be to press after this increasing Divine likeness, which will be perfected by and by in the glory, and meanwhile any approach to it is an approach to holiness and happiness. So far as to the image and likeness in which man was created, he had nothing but what he had from God, and so everything he had was good, but he soon found out a way of his own and the fine gold became dim; in his renewal it shines out again, but still how dimmed by his fallen nature!

We have seen reason to believe that this creation lost the original form and order which it possessed as it came from the hand of God, and that the line of confusion was stretched out over it, for some cause which we are not told, and can only conjecture from the comparison of Scriptures which remotely bear on it. As to effect it is the same as in man, but in his case we do know the cause of the image well-nigh lost, the handiwork of God defiled and deformed, and some ruined fragment here and there only serving to show how noble was the original structure. But both will arise again in a beauty and glory that will be perfect and uninterrupted, for neither Satan's enmity nor man's sin can defeat the purpose of God.

Redemption effects what creation could not, it brings in and secures the new creation. The Son of God was manifested to take away our sins, to destroy the works of the devil, and soon He will bruise Satan under our feet, and the glory shall be revealed and the joy unspeakable, and we shall see the Lord and be with the Lord in His own very image and likeness. Dear reader, is this your hope?

After God's purpose to form man in His image, we next see His further purpose to invest him with dominion over creation: "And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." Under God he is constituted lord of all, as we see in the eighth Psalm. "So God created man in his own image; in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them." He gives effect to His purpose concerning man's creation, and anticipates His purpose concerning the sex; as to this we learn God's mind which was shortly to be fulfilled, though it was not in the original creation except so far as both sexes were comprehended in the genus man—"Did not He make one?" (Mal. ii. 15)—in this there may be a mystery. And then "God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." Here we have God's blessing, the expression of his favour to His creatures, the communication of power to meet His will, to increase and multiply (see 1 Chron. xxvi. 4, 5), and hence we see His purpose as to the perpetuation of

His favoured race and the promise of dominion confirmed.

Next man's food is apportioned, and not man's only but the food of all His creatures on the earth, for nothing is forgotten of God, He openeth His hand, and satisfies the desire of every living creature. "And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed ; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat : and it was so." To man the fruit and herb is his fitting food in innocence before sin had entered, and to the inferior creatures the green herbage of the earth is their appointed food. Animal food was not yet appointed nor permitted, and it is beside the purpose to talk of certain animals being carnivorous, God made them so in anticipation it may be of what He foreknew would shortly come to pass, and until it did come to pass, He who made them could sustain them on the food He had appointed for them which was the produce of the earth, and to go beyond his appointment would have been to transgress.

Thus we find God making provision for the great instinctive laws of our being, laws which He had bound up with our nature, that His own work might not perish, appointing food to sustain life, and giving man dominion over creatures greater and stronger than himself, thereby meeting the instinct of self-preservation, and further making the distinction of sex and law of marriage in order to secure the per-

petuity of the race. All was wisdom and goodness, there was not yet room for mercy, for sin was not yet, but soon the opening is made, and then mercy also appears.

God comes forth from His own divine fulness to manifest Himself in creation and to make His creatures partakers of His blessing, and if evil came in on His work so to overrule it that it might only the more manifest the goodness and mercy, the wisdom and the love of God. Self-manifestation is God's object, probably no other object would be worthy of Him, of One essentially and eternally goodness itself. He communicates Himself to His creatures, it is His glory, it is their holiness and happiness, and the increasing communication of God is the increasing blessedness of His people. In the future state this will be perfect though in different degrees, and the greater the degree, the greater the glory.

In the close of the chapter we have God's complacency with His own work, He reviews it as it came from His own hands, before the hand of man had yet meddled with it, "And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good"—very good, according to God's mind, answering its appointed end, meeting the need of man, and showing forth God's glory. Everywhere it bore the divine impress, the traces of the heavenly artificer—

Of that unwearied love  
That planned and built and still upholds a world  
So clothed with beauty for rebellious man.

## CHAPTER II.

IN the second chapter we have the result of the first, in that we have the history of creation and without it we know nothing of the origin of man or of the globe he inhabits, in this we have the account of the original state of man and of the circumstances with which he was surrounded, before sin had cast its withering blight over all. The accounts of both as we might suppose are very different from the theories of men who reject revelation, theories which just serve to show us how weak and contradictory they are, and into what absurdities men fall who prefer to grope in their own darkness, rather than to walk in the light of God's truth.

When God finished His work He could look abroad upon all creation and "behold, it was very good," and then God rests from His work and in His work—a rest not of weariness but of complacency, and indeed to avoid any ambiguity it might have been better to have rendered the word (שָׁבַח) "ceased," as in Heb. iv. 10, where we find the same word which the Greek version uses in this passage, and as the Hebrew word is often rendered in our translation (chap. viii. 22; Josh. v. 12; Job xxxii. 1; Prov. xxii. 10, etc.). God could rest in His works then, for

there was nothing to disturb His rest, all was very good, the contrast seemingly to the void and formless state we find in chap. i. 2, and the contrast to the state which soon follows when man's sin disturbs the rest of God. His wilfulness and rebellion brings down the curse (chap. iii. 17), and God cannot rest in that which is cursed. God now rests in His love (Zeph. iii. 17)—blessed rest with which man may not interfere! He rests in Him, who is the object and manifestation of His love, and who brings in that new creation in which no trace of sin or sorrow appears, and where nothing can ever again disturb the rest of God in His people, or His people's rest in Him. But now it is the emptiness and confusion again by reason of sin, and hence the need of the new creation: probably it is in reference to this broken rest and the necessity for the continued interposition of God to uphold and redeem His own work that our Lord said (John v. 17) "My Father worketh hitherto and I work."

In the third verse we find as I believe the institution of the Sabbath. It is true that the record is here unaccompanied by any command binding it on man, neither is there any reference to his cessation from labour, or his making it a day of religious service, nor any distinct account of its being kept by the patriarchs, and this has led many to doubt or deny its institution here. On the other hand we must consider how briefly many subjects are touched on in the Scripture history, and then how can we understand God's blessing and sanctifying it but in reference to man? Further how is it possible to evade the force of that remarkable notice of the day (Ex. xvi. 22—30), before they came to Sinai, or the commandments were delivered? Is

there not the most distinct reference to a Sabbath, "a Sabbath unto the Lord," a rest from labour, and where have we the remotest intimation of its being given, if not in this passage? Moreover the wording of the command from Sinai places the weight of obligation on this, and gives this as the reason, that God rested this day from His work, and blessed it and sanctified it, and therefore they are called in the first instance to *remember* it as a fact of past history. If anything was wanting to complete this evidence, we have it I think in the plain reference to the Sabbath rest of Heb. iv. 3, 4.

From these considerations it is to me very evident that we have here that Sabbath which was made for man, a godly and wholesome institution, however its observance may vary with varying dispensations. Objections may be easily raised against any truth; it is said that we do not again read of it till Exodus, but even so, this is no wonder when we consider the briefness of the history, and what a long period there is even after the delivery of the commandment from Sinai, in which we read nothing of it, even from Moses till the close of David's reign. Besides there does seem to be reference to it, though the name be not mentioned, in Gen. iv. 3 (margin), vii. 10, viii. 10, xxix. 27, 28, the mention of the week is the recognition of the Sabbath, it was the portion of time from Sabbath to Sabbath. The other divisions of time as days, months, years, depend on certain revolutions of the heavenly bodies, this alone on Divine revelation. From this seventh-day rest after the completion of creation arises the well-known value of the number "seven" in the Scriptures as expressive of perfection.

In the fourth and fifth verses we have brought before us for the first time in recounting the origin or history of creation, the special and proper name of God, that name which is most frequently used in the Old Testament, and which is never applied to any but the true God alone. "God" is the title of the Supreme Being, the object of worship, but in the Scriptures we often find it applied to idols or false gods, as to the gods of silver and gold, "the strange gods," Baal, Dagon, etc. Baal was the god of his worshippers, and every nation had its gods, there were the gods of the Egyptians, the gods of Syria, Damascus, Moab, etc., but the peculiarity of Israel was, that their God was Jehovah, the true God, the God of gods. "I build an house," says Solomon, "to the name of Jehovah my God, . . . for great is our God above all gods" (2 Chron. ii. 4, 5; comp. Ps. xcv. 3). And now that God surveys everything in its perfection and beauty He reveals Himself in His own proper and incommunicable name, the self-existing One, that was, and is, and is to come. So revered was this name among the Jews that they would not utter it, and the true pronunciation, which in the Hebrew depends on the punctuation, is consequently lost by the disuse. In the seventh verse we have in more detail the account of man's creation, his body formed out "of the dust of the ground," an expression used only of God's intelligent creature, to remind him in the pride of his heart of his lowly origin. We next find that which was peculiar to man and gave him the pre-eminence over all creation, God breathing into him "the breath of life," imparting as it were somewhat of Himself unto him, as in John xx. 22. The expression is not often used, and never of any of the



lower creatures, it is confined to man, it might seem as if chap. vii. 21, 22, was an exception to this, but the twenty-second verse is connected with the last clause of the twenty-first, of which it is expository, "every man, every one in whose nostrils was the breath of life," and so one or two apparent exceptions are made clear by considering the connection. As I believe that there is more in this verse than usually meets the eye, and if I be not mistaken in my interpretation, what is of great moment, I dwell the longer on it.

When Moses tells us that God formed man out of the dust of the ground, I suppose that he does not refer merely to his inanimate body, but his body animated by his soul or the living principle, just as we see the same expression in the nineteenth verse. He did not form a mere lifeless figure either as regards man or beast, but a living body, and that life somehow connected with organization, existing in the blood which circulates throughout the frame. But then as regards man we see more than this, not only the living body, but God imparting to him something over and above, something independent of organization, something subsequent unto this living organized body, and this is I believe the spirit that is peculiar to man, that breath of life which God breathed into his nostrils, for I cannot but think that the peculiar language used means something more than mere animal life, though it may indeed include that also; to this Elihu refers (Job xxxii. 8, and xxxiii. 4), where "breath" and "inspiration" are the same word, and see Prov. xx. 27, and Isa. lvii. 16, where "soul" and "spirit" are also the same word as the "breath" in the passage under

consideration. This spirit man originally got vivified by the breath or inspiration of God, and this he yet has, but not as it came originally from God; he has indeed that noble intelligence or mind which raises him above all creation, but how debased do we find it now, how perverted from its original design and proper use, from communion with God, from intercourse with heaven, how many do we see scarcely using it, living almost alone on their animal instincts, how many using only to abuse it by rebellion against Him who gave it, and wherefore is it so? Because that which was the life of this spirit in man, which gave to it its holy energy, its healthy exercise, its heavenly motive and direction is lost, lost by reason of sin. By man sin entered into the world and death by sin, immediate death, as I believe, for nothing can be more definite than the language of the seventeenth verse of this chapter, "for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," and to explain it away as is usually done, by saying that man became mortal when he transgressed, is I think a very insufficient if not a dangerous mode of interpretation—true indeed he did become mortal, as also he became sinful, but is that all that the words mean, when God says, in that day "*thou shalt surely die*"? I believe that however it was man did in some sense die on the day in which he transgressed. But how could this be, for he lived in the body we read for over nine hundred years after? He died spiritually, he lost that divine life which God breathed into him with his spirit, he lost at that time, not the life of his body, but what was of far greater importance, the life of his spirit, and he became as we find man represented in the New Testament, dead in

sin, alienated from the life of God (Eph. ii. 1, iv. 18), and the evidence of this we find immediately on his fall, as we shall see in the next chapter, so that now, man is in his natural state, spiritually dead, not figuratively, but dead in his spirit, his noblest part, without the life of God to animate it, and this experience amply testifies. In reference to this I believe it is that the devil is called "a murderer from the beginning" (John viii. 44), for he was in the beginning the spiritual murderer of our first parents.

To consider the subject a little further, we find from the Scriptures that man is composed of body, soul, and spirit; the first, or organic part, he possesses in common with plants and the vegetable kingdom, the second, the soul or animal life, with its instincts he has in common with the brute creation, and the third, or spirit, is peculiar to him as an inhabitant of this world, and links him with the world of spirits. Such is man, God's favoured creature, and even more favoured, for distinct from these he had above them all what he received with that mysterious breathing of God, that life of God which was to his spirit what the soul was to his body. Everything from God was very good, and so the spirit of man was very good, quickened and sanctified of God; in this living spirit he walked with God in His very presence without fear or shame, in this he held communion with Him as a man with his familiar friend. Now this life of his spirit was lost when he sinned, he died spiritually, or in his spirit, and in this state we see man now, not delighting in God, nor in His holy will, but self-willed and rebellious, even the most amiable among men seeking their happiness and following their pursuits

apart from God, leaving Him out of their concerns and their lives, or if approaching Him, only at some stated periods, and then as the object of awe or dread rather than of love and confidence, and just because man has lost the life of God in his spirit which God originally gave, and which is restored in regeneration, when the sinner is brought back to God, and as our Lord says, passes from death to life.

The truth which I have thus endeavoured to explain might seem to be supported by the plural form of the word "life," as also by that form of expression "a living soul," but as they are applied to others besides man, I build no argument on them.\*

In the eighth and following verses we have the garden planted of God for the more immediate abode of man, and everything in it that was good and pleasant, but two trees specially noted, the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, each bearing its own fruit, the bitter and the sweet as one might eat. The latter was not a tree of evil, for as yet there was no evil in creation, but the tree was to test man; the evil was not in the tree but in man's sinful eating of it in defiance of the Divine will, the one was the symbol of Him who is the life and to eat of whom is life eternal (John vi. 57) and so showed the way of life and peace (Prov. iii. 13—18), the other the way of disobedience and all its attendant evil, the way the creature chose and ever has chosen as left to himself from the first day till the present time.

As to the immediate site of this abode of blessedness we cannot now attain to anything of certainty,

\* See Appendix.

nor is it indeed in any way important that we should ; enough has been written on the subject but to little purpose ; we know that it was somewhere on the Euphrates and the Tigris, which is the Hiddekel, probably near their source and if so in Armenia, a country still abounding we are told in regions of beauty. To allow a good margin one might safely say it was somewhere between the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean on the east and west, and the Black Sea and Persian Gulf on the north and south.

In this garden of delights, wherever its locality was, God places man to dress, to keep, and to enjoy it for ever in innocence. He will not have him idle, limiting him by one only restriction, which God saw it good to impose, which it was good for his creature to observe, and which was the only test of his obedience, of his loyalty to his sovereign Lord and Creator : he was under law, however gently that law bore upon him, and he proved that law was not the way to secure blessing to the creature. The penalty on his disobedience was a fearful one, even death, no creature of God, but the fruit of sin—awful sin and awful penalty that shut out for ever communion with a living God, if that offended God did not Himself find a remedy ! But when sin abounded grace did overabound, law was given and it gave occasion to sin, and then mercy followed.

As we proceed in the chapter we have increasing tokens of God's love and God's consideration for His creature, "it is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him an help meet for him." As the creatures of God passed in review before Adam, and as he manifested his divine knowledge in naming

each according to its nature and instinct, there was not found for Adam the help meet, the partner of his joys—for sorrow then was not yet—the one with whom in holy sympathy he could unite and raise the hymn of adoring praise for all the tokens of His love with which He had so richly strewed their path in this new world of His. There was not found an help meet suitable to him and hence the mystery. God caused a deep, a deadly sleep to fall on Adam, and He took from his opened side one of his ribs, of his own nature and substance, that of which he builded a woman—literally a female man—and He brings her to Adam, and Adam now has found his help meet. At this time he says “This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh,” for it is not as verse 20, when there was no help meet for him, no one corresponding to him of his own nature, but now he has found one of his own very substance. And what must have been the surprise of Adam on awaking from that deep sleep to have seen the woman before him in the fulness of that perfect beauty with which God had arrayed her, and without any of the infirmity which was the work of sin and not of God. God sanctions their union, the nearest, dearest upon earth, at least among creatures; for this shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and so did Adam cleave, even closer than to God. Here was his sin, but sin had not yet appeared, and so we read they were naked but they were not ashamed, they knew not what shame was, there was no cause for shame, they were as God made them, very good and beautiful as good, and sin had not yet marred His work. Ah, what has not sin done! Even the truest and most attractive delicacy, the faintest blush with

which the first alarm of female purity mantles the cheek is but a fruit of sin, and but for sin had never appeared.

We know from the New Testament Scriptures, how deep a mystery the passage before us contains, how Adam was here a type of Christ, and how from his wounded side and deadly sleep God hath builded for him a help meet, even the church of the first-born, the resurrection body, and we know too how sadly she failed of her high and glorious destiny.

### CHAPTER III.

So far as we have proceeded all was good for all was of God, but now the scene changes, sin enters, and henceforth the Bible is the history of man's failure and of God's long suffering and grace meeting that failure, till at length it calls forth judgment.

The third chapter like the first two opens to us elements, the causes of things, which here only we can discover. As in the first chapter we have the only true account of the creation of the world wherein we live, and in the second of the original state of the creature whom God made and placed over it, so here we have the account of the fall of the creature, the solution of the great difficulty, how sin entered into the world. That sin exists and abounds all confess, Christian and heathen alike, that man has got some taint is evident from all records and all experience, that he is not as we might have expected to find him from God's hand is manifest, and this has been a felt difficulty to those without the light of revelation. In this chapter we find the solution of the difficulty in man's disobedience to God, man choosing for himself in independence of God, preferring his own will and way to God's, in a word, in wilfulness. Very important is the teaching of



this chapter to us, for it is in fact the history of what is going on day after day—temptation, sin, judgment, but mercy triumphant over all. In the opening of the chapter we find Satan, that old serpent the devil, beguiling Eve through his subtlety—we stay not to inquire of his serpent form, it was the form he used or assumed, possibly the only one he might or what was best adapted for his purpose—but we get the reality of “the tempter,” as he is called in the New Testament; he finds the woman alone, apart from her husband, and this was his opportunity, and it would seem also from verse 6 as if she was near to the forbidden tree, and this also was to his advantage in the temptation, and he will lose no advantage, and therefore we have the more need to keep out of the way of danger. From his question we should suppose that it was not his first word to her, we come in as it were at the point of the conversation when it becomes instructive to us, he inquires as to God’s restriction concerning the fruit of this one tree, the one and easy law of the Sovereign, the only negative to the full liberty, the only way of proving man’s obedience, and he so inquires as to suggest to her mind the idea of injustice in this command of God, as if He was dealing hardly, unreasonably by his creatures. Here was her infirmity, to parley with one who dared to suggest a thought adverse to the goodness and love of God surrounded as she was with the tokens of both. There is a point in every temptation when we may resist and get the victory, and which if we pass we are overcome, or seldom recover ourselves, and this seems to have been that point with her, but it passes unheeded, and her

reply evinces that the poisoned arrow had taken effect, she dwells more on the prohibition than on all the gifts of God's love, "we may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." Satan evidently feels that he has gotten power over her, and emboldened by his success he denies God's word, he gives God the lie, "ye shall not surely die," and further proceeds, not to insinuate now, but boldly to charge God with a selfish or envious object, in keeping them from that to which they were entitled, "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God,\* knowing good and evil." He promises great things, liberty from all restriction, as their full indisputable right, and how often since has he made the same promise! Thus we find in the earliest period of man's history the two rival words, God's word and Satan's, the truth and the lie contradicting it. And now she yields to the tempter and she is lost. Here we note his subtlety, and oh what a dangerous element it is, either in man or devil!—there is first the false insinuation, then the lie, then the perversion and poisoning of truth; here we see him as both the murderer and the liar (John viii. 44), the spiritual murderer of God's favoured creature (see p. 40). The woman, the poor beguiled guilty creature, first listens to him (and no doubt there was something attractive in his word and appearance), she next drinks in the suspicion, she gives heed to him even when he belies God, she believes him and she disbelieves God, and "she

\* עֹלָם (Elohim) is the word in the original.

saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes,"—so far agreeing with the other trees of Eden (ii. 9)—but moreover that it was "a tree to be desired to make one wise," and she took of the fruit thereof and did eat, and here is the entrance of sin, the overt act by which God is disowned. She follows her own inclination drawn out by the tempter, she disbelieves, she disobeys God, she arrogates independence of God, she sets her own will above His, and here is the history of what has been going on ever since and is working at this day; the same tempter is busily plying his work though unfelt and unseen, and there is the same desire in the creature to follow his own will and inclination drawn out by that enemy to his hurt and ruin, and to God's dishonour. We find in the sixth verse definitely the means to which the enemy has recourse to effect his object, the weapons of his warfare so successful with our first parents, and so skilfully used ever since, the same which John in after times calls "the lust (or desire) of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life"—probably appetite, covetousness, and ambition, in their manifold and various forms. They are the very same weapons with which the enemy assaulted our blessed Lord, the second Adam, the One who overcame him, as the first was overcome, and just as we are in union with the first or with the second Adam, shall we be overcome or overcome. What a blessed promise is that made to the Church of Ephesus, "to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God"! That which the first Adam lost by sin in that he was overcome, is again brought to us by

Christ, and assured to the one that overcometh in His name.

The downfall of the woman as we have seen was progressive—it is ever so—she saw, she took, she eat, just as it was in after times with David (2 Sam. xi. 2—4). There is an ancient gloss on this passage, which though impossible to assert as true, yet well falls in with the course of the temptation, and is profitable to consider; it is that Satan taking advantage of her addition to God's word "neither shall ye touch it," induced her to touch it, and that feeling no injury from the touch, she was further and then more easily induced to take and eat.

It is dangerous to add to God's Word—"add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee and thou be found a liar" (comp. Rev. xxii. 18, 19)—and she seems to have doubly if not trebly erred in this colloquy with the serpent, not only in adding to, but also in taking from and changing God's Word. She curtails and weakens God's positive deprecation, "in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," reducing it to an apprehended danger, "lest ye die," and further she changes God's Word, speaking not of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," as He does, but calling it "the tree that is in the midst of the garden," which is the description not of this tree but of the tree of life, and Satan no doubt takes advantage of every slip.

Three things we probably learn from it,—the need of being true and faithful to God's Word, the danger to which we are exposed both in head and heart in y parley with Satan, and further how watchful we to be in every step; this may be all very obvious,

but it is what is taught by this Scripture very strikingly.

The woman having eaten of the forbidden fruit next gives to her husband and he did eat, she not only sins against God but she sins against him; he was not deceived by the tempter as she was, the occasion of his fall was the guilty preference of the creature to the Creator, the determination to share her destiny, even when it involved disobedience to God. She listened to the serpent, and he listened to her—neither of them listened to God—he loved her and cleaved to her rather than to God, he followed her down into the valley of humiliation, and now they experience the fulfilment of Satan's promise, their eyes are opened, the guilty desire for knowledge in opposition to God's Word is gratified, and they are as God knowing good and evil; the good they knew before, the evil they now know by sad experience, they know the evil, as God knows it while He hates it, for all is open to His eye.

How thickly now does the fruit of their fallen state cluster around them! Conscience awakes, that sentinel which God has placed to guard the way to man's heart and to awaken him to danger; it seems to have slumbered but now it awakes, yet not to lead them to God, but to drive them from Him. Shame the first-fruits of their sin appears, and with fig-leaves they desire to cover it, and then fear another fruit of sin they knew not before, and then ignorance and stupidity in which they think of hiding themselves from that all-seeing eye, when their guilty conscience tells them how unfit they are to stand in His presence. And then we see the effort to justify self by any

means or at any cost, the man in his fear casting the accusation on the woman, even worse, by insinuation upon God himself, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat." Ah, what a thing is sin, what bitter fruit and evil it brings forth, and how manifold! what is man apart from God! He casts God's gift in His face, he accuses the woman, she accuses Satan, neither of them accuse self: they are sinners now, but they know nothing of the remedy for their sin, for it is not yet revealed, there is no confession or supplication, they do not seek God, but seek to hide themselves from Him—but wondrous grace! He seeks them, and comes with the remedy in His hand. All is hopeless now but as He finds the remedy, creation is spoiled by man's sin, its lord is a rebel, and he drags down his heritage with him. God indeed has a remedy, but it is not to restore man to his former place, this would be but to repeat the transgression again; sin is judged, sin must be judged or God would not be true to Himself, but He brings in a new thing, a better thing that may not be spoiled by man's failure. Henceforth indeed we find through the Scriptures creation and its fallen inhabitants, but it is a dry stock, there is nothing from it of life or hope; we must now look to the new thing, the new creation, the resurrection, the Man from heaven, the One who came not to do His own will as Adam, but God's will, the unfailing One, on whom all the purpose of God is secure, and in whom are His people's everlasting life and glory.

I have dwelt the longer on this subject from its exceeding importance, and from its bearing as it does

on our daily experience; if we would be wise let us seek wisdom in God's way, the way of obedience. How fittingly does the wise man instruct us as to this (Prov. iii. 13, 18, and 35), and how aptly it bears upon our subject!

The guilty offenders are now summoned before God and judged according to their several offences; this is the first time that we meet with judgment, for it is the first time that we meet with sin, and here, if I mistake not, a principle of much importance is developed, which continually meets us in the subsequent histories of God's dealings with man. I refer to the *retributive* character of His dealings, which betoken God's hand, the fittingness or suitability of His dealing on every occasion, whether of reward or punishment. He does not with one and the same rod punish every offence, but the offence, so to speak, makes a rod for itself, so that one may see God's hand in it, and that the punishment is of the same kind as the offence. Thus He is called in Jeremiah (l. 56), "the Lord God of recompences" (comp. xvii. 10, and Isaiah iii. 10, 11), and speaking of Israel the prophet says (ii. 19), "thine own wickedness shall correct thee," and again we are told in Proverbs i. 31, "Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

Now this peculiarity characterises, I believe, all God's dealings, both here and hereafter, and I speak of it as important not only from its bearing upon our state, seeing that "whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"—what a serious cause for thought and watchfulness!—but also because it should lead us to see God not only in His word, but in His daily provi-

dence, and should check that disposition to harsh judgment upon others which is such an element of fallen man, and so mixed up with the pride which ministers to self in the depreciation of another. Now according to the principle of which I treat we have no right to speak of any calamitous visitation, whether of sickness, or accident, or reverse of circumstances, or family affliction, as a judgment of God, unless we can discover its retributive character; it behoves the person on whom the affliction comes to examine himself before God, but it also behoves others to abstain from judgment, which properly is God's work and only ours as He warrants us, till God makes it plain.

But to return to our narrative, judgment is first passed on the serpent, and though he could speak to Eve and say hard words of God, before Him he has no word, and judgment is denounced on him without one little ameliorating circumstance, and mark its retributive character. It seems as if he thought somehow to regain power and exaltation by his seduction of the creature to himself, a place, it has been thought, in a world in which once he ruled before the present order of things, and which through him was reduced to the confusion and emptiness described in the second verse of the first chapter, and now he is cursed and degraded above all cattle, and doubtless the degradation of the enemy is symbolised under terms applying to the serpent. Again, he sought to overcome her and her race with her, and his condemnation is to be overcome by one of that race, and further he sought alliance with her and her seed, and he finds everlasting enmity with her and between his seed and her



seed. I think that this is evident from the fourteenth and fifteenth verses however it may be expressed, and that the retributive dealing of God is sufficiently manifest in this judgment on the serpent. The woman is next judged, but previous to the judgment on the creature hope comes in, it sheds its holy happy light on them, it breaks through the dreary darkness to illumine their now benighted souls, the promise is given that folds up in its little compass that latitude of blessing hereafter to be fully developed. How gracious is this dealing of our God! Sin must be judged, but before its first sound reaches them they have that on which to rest beyond it, and they see him whom now they know as their enemy denounced of God. In the woman's judgment we may also see the retributive character, she chose that which was pleasant and desirable to her senses against the will of God, and she found multiplied sorrow; the original order was to increase and multiply, here it is renewed, but with a sad addition, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception, in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children;" and then, meeting what would be her natural tendency to escape the sorrow, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband," for if it was not what woman in the face of such a word, verified as it has been by the experience of all ages, would expose herself by marriage to this threatened sorrow? And further she had acted independently of her husband, she was not subject to him (in the temptation she seems to have been absent from him), she tempted and allured him, and now by the last clause of her judgment she is put in subjection to him—"He shall rule over thee"—and does not the history of all ages

and nations tell of the degradation of women? Few remember that however gross the abuse, this is still the denounced punishment; where Christianity prevails she is raised from this lowly state, but subjection is still her place, and there only may she look for the blessing—this is the doctrine of creation as well as the subsequent revelation (see 1 Cor. xi. 8, 9).

To generalize her temptation and judgment, we find the lust of the flesh, or appetite, punished with the sorrow and pains of childbirth, we find the lust of the eye, or covetousness, judged with the loss of all that was pleasing to the eye in that garden of God and its good and pleasant fruit, and we find the pride of life, or ambition, punished with subjection and with what has proved a heavy tyrannous rule. The latter point seems her greatest temptation, and I think that it is so as well from the two first notes of the sixth verse being common to the other trees of the garden (chap. ii. 9), though in the present instance doubtless they added their quota to her sin, as from Satan's so dwelling on this in his temptation, "in the day ye eat thereof then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as God knowing good and evil"; probably this was his own temptation and fall—see Jude 8; 1 Tim. iii. 6. He would persuade her that this tree and this only possesses this virtue, to make her as God, and she saw that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, to open their eyes, to give knowledge as God, to make them as God, she believes Satan and aspires to be as God, and she loses the true knowledge of God, the life of God, and the likeness of God. How evident is this in the fruit of the fall, and from those passages of the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians to which

we have previously referred, and how strikingly retributive is the judgment! How profitably too the apostle refers to this history in the close of his Epistle to the Romans, "I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil," the contrast of the woman's conduct—her's was more according to Jer. iv. 22, though the parallel is not exact, for she had knowledge—and then in the following verse (Rom. xvi. 20), he reminds them of the promise to animate them amid all the evil and the trouble until the promise be fulfilled in the coming of the Lord, of their resource in the sufficient grace of the Lord Jesus Christ—His grace is the resource till His glory is revealed.

The judgment upon Adam next takes place, and it is different from either of the preceding cases; his temptation was more single than the woman's, it was hearkening to her, not to Satan, rather than to God, and his sin was eating of the tree of which he was commanded not to eat. Now all his punishment seems to bear a reference to his sin, he eats of that tree of the ground which was forbidden, and the ground is cursed for his sake; he eats it to please himself not God, and henceforth he eats in sorrow; his work previously was to dress and keep the garden and its good and pleasant trees, and now the ground brings forth to him thorns and thistles, and in labour and travail he has to subdue it, previously he eat of the ready fruit of the tree without care or trouble, but now he eats of the herb of the field and this in the sweat of his brow. He was taken out of the ground and to the ground he returns—"dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return"—he lost the high distinction of God for him (which probably we see in the translation of Enoch),

he dishonoured God in His gift, and His gift is made a curse to him, and the very bodies they so preferred to God are made a shame to them.

Thus all the parties in this sin pass under judgment, the serpent is cursed of God, the ground is cursed for Adam's sake, but neither Adam nor Eve are cursed—"destroy it not for a blessing is in it"—the very sorrow of the woman is an earnest of salvation (1 Tim. ii. 15), the curse on man is reserved for a greater sin which we encounter in the next chapter.

It is easy on the consideration of this history to multiply questions and objections to no profit, but exhibiting the enmity of the mind in the old way, in rejection of God's ways. Thus it is said, why did God suffer Satan to ruin our first parents, and why did He make them so as to be overcome by the tempter? It would suffice to say that God has His own counsels, He does not take us into them, "things that are secret belong unto God, those that are revealed unto us," nevertheless we may be assured that they are planned in goodness and wisdom, and from what he reveals we may trust Him for what He does not. The answer of the apostle is often a healthy exercise when the spirit would yet be querulous and unquiet, "nay but O man who art thou that repliest against God? shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it why hast thou made me thus?" Yet we see this much, that man was made upright without any sin or trace of sin, but he was made temptable, even as the angels were, as Jesus was, and how could a creature be otherwise if he were not as God? And then there was the tempter, and how else could he be proved? But when everything was lost, when sin abounded, we see the riches of His

wisdom and goodness in the overabounding of grace, to the increased blessing of His creature, condemnation of the enemy, and glory to His own holy name.

We are not told anything directly as to the final state of Adam and Eve, whether they were saved or not, but there are many circumstances of hope incidentally introduced respecting them, first the promise being given in verse fifteen, next the name Adam gives his wife (verse twenty in connection with verse fifteen) also her name for her first-born which may glance at the hope, and the appointment of sacrifice which we learn indirectly but I think with some certainty, then would his forfeited life have been so prolonged if there was not a blessing for him? and further the curse did not reach them that was on the serpent and the ground, and lastly he is treated by the apostle as a type of the coming One (Rom. v. 14). From all these rays meeting in a focus there is light enough I think to give very strong hope of their being saved, and yet when Scripture is silent as to any direct statement we cannot probably be certain.

In the name Eve, which Adam now gives his wife for the first time, there is a recognition of life, though death was the result of their sin. Is it not the new life, now that the old is forfeited? True, she is the mother of all living, as all have descended from her, but is not the name rather a proof of Adam's faith in the promise, and is she not so called as the mother of that promised seed, and of all the spiritually living seed in union with Him? One might have thought from chap. ii. 17 it would have been "the mother of all dead," but faith in the promise given in verse 15 seems to rise above the ruin, and so it is "the

mother of all living.” Next we have God making them coats, not a fig-leaf covering which is man’s device, but coats of skins, and what skins if not of animals slain in sacrifice? Sacrifice we learn from the next chapter did exist, but how if not appointed of God? It could not be man’s device, for what connection is there between the slaying of an animal and the removal of guilt? Nay it would seem only to increase sin, thus to slay God’s creatures without a warrant from God to do so, and how can we suppose that the inventions of a fallen creature could be pleasing to God? We conclude then, that these skins were of beasts slain for sacrifice—sacrifice taught of God to Adam—and that while the blood atoned, the skins of the sacrifice covered their shame and nakedness—“Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.” God now speaks, and we have as it were the solemn result of the Divine counsel, “Behold, the man is become as one of Us to know good and evil.” He now has verified the truth of Satan’s promise, for there was a truth in his word and he kept it to the ear, but it was a lie to their heart and so they soon found it, they knew good, and they knew evil in their sore experience, and now they are mercifully it would seem debarred from the tree of life—“And now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever”—for the perpetuation of life in their fallen sinful state had been only the perpetuation of misery.

This tree was the symbol and means of life, but it seems not to have been eaten by Adam. They were but a short time in that garden, and they preferred the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the fruit of which produced moral evil by transgression, and

physical evil soon followed; it may be that it communicated some vices effecting considerable change in their constitution, and sowing the seed of infirmity and disease, which has since borne so plentiful a harvest.

And now they are no longer to be the possessors of Eden, it is not now their fitting place, they have lost its blessing by their wilfulness, and it is lost for ever to man by creation or naturally; Satan entered and they are turned out, but by-and-by that garden of God will bloom and blossom in the new creation, when there will be no enemy to enter, and when the people of God shall abide for ever, without anything to mar their perfect happiness—"behold I make all things new"—"the former things are passed away"—we look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, and that tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. Adam is now sent forth to till the ground from whence he was taken, and at the east of the garden the Cherubims are placed and the flaming sword, or glittering sword-like flame, symbolic of the Lord's presence, as the burning bush and the Shechinah between the cherubim in the tabernacle and the temple, a form of truth well known to the Jews. But what these Cherubims are is a question of difficulty though Moses mentions them as well-known, and so they were well-known symbols while probably they knew nothing of their symbolic import. We first find them in the present passage, next in the tabernacle where they were plentifully distributed in the inner vail and curtain, besides the two golden figures which arose out of either end of the mercy-seat, next in those remarkable passages, 2 Sam. xxii. 11, Ps. xviii. 10, where God

is represented as riding on a Cherub, and they are also noticed in Ps. lxxx. 1, and xcix. 1; they next appear in the prophet Ezekiel, if the Seraphim of Isa. vi. be not identical which they would appear to be, and then finally in the Revelation\* chaps. iv. and v.

The writer of these pages is very much disposed to say of them with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews "of which we cannot now speak particularly," whatever may have been his reason for saying so. I think that the paucity of our light is manifest in the variety of opinions which have been set forth on the subject, as will ever be the case on subjects not fully revealed in the Scriptures; they have been considered as symbolic of the four elements by which God acts on the world, of the four quarters of the globe, of the four gospels, and of the Trinity in union with the human nature: again they have been supposed to represent the attributes of God, and the providential agency of God, by others the redeemed creation, and by others the church of the redeemed, or of the first-born, to which view latterly many students of Scripture seem to lean. In Scripture they are represented as attendants upon God, and hence probably it is that they have been identified with angels, but they are not anywhere spoken of as identical with them. They are represented in the midst of the throne and round about the

\* The author takes the "living creatures" in Revelation to be identical with the Cherubim. This is, I believe, the general view, and is supported by the fact that the word ζῶα, which is translated "beasts" in Rev. iv. 6, etc., is that which the LXX use in Ezek. x. 20, where the prophet says, "This is the *living creature* that I saw. . . . and I knew that they were the Cherubims."—ED.



throne in the fourth of Revelations, as if His ministering servants awaiting His will, and the mercy-seat *between the cherubim* is the place of His abode as we see Ex. xxv. 22, Num. vii. 89, and Ps. lxxx. 1, and xcix. 1. In Psalm xviii. we have the more active agency, "He rode upon a cherub and did fly," in reference to which probably they are called "the chariot of the Cherubim," 1 Chron. xxviii. 18. The writer, though far from satisfied with the interpretation, is most disposed to consider them as representing the agency of God, agency for good. They arose out of the mercy-seat and were formed of the same solid piece of gold. In the past dispensation that agency was very much *angelic*, the law was given by the dispensation of angels; in this dispensation it is a *human* ministry, the Spirit carrying on God's work through human instrumentality, and so the ascription of praise in Rev. v. 9. The living creatures in that chapter and the fourth I have thought of as representing not so much the church of the redeemed, as the ministry in that church, possibly as Ephes. iv. 11, 12, and the twenty-four elders, it may be, the church itself gathered from the Jew and Gentile, symbolized in this symbolical book by the number twenty-four—two twelves—the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles gathered around the sitter on the throne, but in this wonderful vision the living creatures are represented as raising the praises of the church, and in the sixth chapter they are ministers to direct attention to the events of the opening seals—but I do not feel that I am treading on certain ground and therefore I leave it. The service of the cherubim in the passage before us is to be as it

were the abode of that mysterious sword of flame which was to keep the way of the tree of life, that Adam should no longer seek for life by that way ; that door was shut to him, but God in His mercy opened another, and this wonderful symbol on the east of Eden is now the place of the Lord's presence, before which Adam can come and offer his sacrifice and worship, whither Abel came and was accepted, and from whence Cain was cast out in hopeless despair. If it guarded access to one source of life which now would be only prolonged misery, it opened and kept the way to another which was life everlasting, and which in process of time was to be brought to light, when access to the very presence of the glory was to be opened through the blood of the Lamb.

How wonderful are God's ways ! God made man in His own likeness, divine, holy, perfect, but the fine gold became dim, and to recover His creature, God comes in the likeness of sinful flesh. Man is made in God's holy likeness, and God in man's sinful likeness. Man loses his likeness to God, God never loses His likeness to man. Man can keep none of the holiness, God contracts none of the defilement.

Adam's abode in Paradise was very limited, he had not eaten of the tree of life, it may be to show us the inability of the creature to stand of himself against the enemy even for the shortest time and in the most favourable circumstances. Everything was in his favour, wherever his eye might rest, it rested on some token of God's love, and yet he fell, "the very contrast of the second Adam who stood, though everything was against him (Mark i. 13).

There is no principle of permanency or fixed endurance in the creature, there cannot be; God only is enduring in good, He alone can stand by Himself, and even angels are only sustained as they depend on God, Adam failed to do so, and he fell. Dependence is God's principle for the support of His creatures, He will not have them to live without Him; independence is what the creature affects, and so the history of the creature is the history of failure, God's ways are the history of His unfailing grace and goodness.

We observe that the name used in the dialogue between the serpent and the woman is "God" simply, by the historian through the chapter it is "the Lord God." Satan himself is called god, the god of this world.

## CHAPTER IV.

IN the fourth chapter we find sin gathering strength and progressing, its bitter fruit becoming still more bitter and abounding, and here we have the distinct development of the two seeds foretold in chap. iii. 15, into which the family of man has ever since been divided, the living seed of promise and the seed of the serpent. It may seem a hard word, but is it not the truth, that all of us are of one or other of these two families, of the promised seed, or the serpent's seed? What intimation does Scripture give of a third class? "Ye," says our Lord speaking to the unbelieving Jews, "ye are of your father the Devil," and again the tares, the professors in God's Church, are "the children of the wicked one," and so "he that committeth sin," or lives in the practice of sin, "is of the devil." Surely it is a subject for serious thought, that the unbeliever, the mere professor, the sinner, is of that wicked one. Dear reader, to which family do you belong? If you are still in your natural or unconverted state, then are you only of the first Adam, on whose nature the devil has laid hold, and so of the serpent's seed: to be God's children is the new thing, to be born again of the Spirit, and made partakers of Christ, of the second Adam and not the first only. We may indeed and doubtless we

often do make mistakes herein, but still the truth abideth, God will make no mistake.

Eve now becomes a mother, new relations and new sympathies open on her, she experiences the truth of God's word in the sorrow of travail, but she has joy that a man is born into the world, and so she says "I have gotten a man from the Lord," or as many have rendered it, "I have gotten a man, the Lord," thinking that she had now obtained the promise (chap. iii. 15), but if she thought so, she was doomed to sore disappointment. Her next son—many have supposed born at the same birth—she calls Abel, "variety," probably from some feebleness or infirmity in comparison of the first, or so overruled of God in prediction of his future; if his birth was distinct from Cain's, at some future time, the name may have been suggested by some early indication in Cain of the mistake she had made in naming him, but her desires and affections seem to have twined around Cain. The children grow and we are told their occupations, the two oldest in the world, in describing which the order of nature is inverted, and we have instead the order of grace, that was not first which was spiritual but that which was natural. "Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground," glancing, it may be, at the respective occupations of the first and second Adam (see ii. 15, iii. 17—19, and John x.), the one occupied with the earth, the other with the sheep, all that earth holds of any value. In process of time, at some stated time,\* probably the Sabbath, or as some suppose the close of the year, they bring their respective offerings

\* עֵשָׂה וְיִצְחָק, literally "at the end of days," as the margin reads.—Ed.

unto the Lord, for outwardly they were both worshippers before the presence of the Lord between the cherubims, but the character of their worship was distinct and manifested in their respective offerings. Cain brought of the fruit of the ground, it was the offering of a Deist rendering his homage to God, not without a feeling of religiousness it may be, but without the feeling of his own sinfulness, or of the covering that it required before God; his thoughts of God, probably like those of many since and at the present time, were of a great and benevolent Being to be approached with reverence, but not as requiring satisfaction for sin, he did not feel the exceeding sinfulness of sin, what a blot it is on God's creation, what an offence to His holiness, what a demand on His righteous justice, and so he comes with the fruit of the ground, that ground accursed for man's offence. But not so he of that other seed, Abel was better taught, though both were probably taught alike of their parents, and it is a favourable note in the history of Adam and Eve that their children are brought up worshippers, but till He takes us in hand who teacheth not as man, however we may conform externally we shall fail spiritually to apprehend that impassable gulf which sin has caused between man and God. Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock, his was the bloody offering, the one and only way of access to God since sin entered, for "without shedding of blood there is no remission," but we have "boldness to enter into the holiest," God's own place, "by the blood of Jesus," that to which all the shed blood had reference. Abel knew of sin and he knew that which put it away, we are not left in doubt or

merely to guess at the secret spring of His acting, we are told by the Spirit of God that it was by faith he offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, faith, the vital and moving principle of the promised seed, was the principle that moved him and that more or less moves all that seed, while sense is the governing principle of the other family. Abel and his offering were accepted; some think that he brought a *fuller* offering than Cain's, that he brought of the fruit of the ground, but also in addition the offering by blood, but it does not seem of much moment, the last was the great thing, the blood offered in faith, and to this God had respect, to this He ever has respect. But faith clearly must have reference to some revelation, it could not have been a *faith*-offering in Abel and acceptable to God if it was merely a notion of his own, a piece of will-worship, and hence I think, as before noticed, that we have by a plain deduction the Divine origin of sacrifice. Divine indeed we know it is from the two succeeding books though we do not just learn its origin, which I believe was coexistent with the first promise when God made coats of the skins of slain beasts, and most suitably so, showing to us the way by which His great work was accomplished, sin blotted out, Satan subdued, God reconciled, man redeemed, even by the precious blood of Christ, the Lamb without blemish and without spot. But how we may ask did God show his respect to Abel's offering? We are not just told, but we may easily infer from the teaching of other Scriptures that it was by fire, fire probably from the flame between the cherubims. This we see in the offering of Moses and Aaron, Lev. ix. 23, 24; of Gideon, Judges vi. 21; and of Manoah,

xiii. 19, 20 ; of David, 1 Chron. xxi. 26 ; of Solomon, 2 Chron. vii. 1 ; and of Elijah, 1 Kings xviii. 24—38. Unto Cain and his offering God had not respect, without faith it is impossible to please God and Cain was without it, and now he is very wroth and his countenance fell, envy and hatred take possession of his evil heart, and God graciously condescends to plead with him, “Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?”—or have the excellency (marg.) in reference probably to the birthright—“and if thou doest not well, sin,” or, as it may be read, a sin-offering\* “lieth at the door,” the remedy is at hand, and still thou mayest have the dominion over him. God speaks graciously to him, He respects his birthright and shows him the true course to pursue, but he had no heart for God’s word, he was of his father the Devil (1 John iii. 12) and the works of his father he would do.

“Cain talked with Abel his brother,” or as the oldest versions have it, he “said to his brother, Let us go into the field,” and when they were in the field, apart from others who might hinder him, he rose up against Abel his brother and slew him. Here we see sin bearing its deadly fruit, and here we see the enmity between the two seeds fully developed, an enmity that has ever since existed just in proportion as the one is distinctly manifested and as the other is unrestrained ; of God’s mercy it is that there are many restraints where grace does not restrain, were it not so it would often go hard with His people.

\* It is the same word (זֶבַח) that is translated “sin-offering” in Lev. iv. 3, etc., and strengthens the evidence for the divine appointment of sacrifice here.



What must the feelings of Adam and Eve be now, and what their bitter remorse as they looked on the dead body of their son ! This is their first acquaintance with death, at least death in their own race, now they see the fruit of their sin, and how bitter is it, how every event proclaims that it is an evil thing and bitter to have forsaken God ! But sad as it is, it is still but a type I believe of a sadder scene, a worse murder. Does not Cain represent the Jew in his crime, slaying his brother, in his punishment, a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth, and in his preservation ?

The Lord says to Cain, "Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper?" What an answer, and what an exhibition of the evil of the heart ! We first see the envy, then the malice, then murder, then lying, then the utter and depraved heartlessness. Truly he was of his father the Devil, and like him he has now to pass under the curse of God, and that without any word of promise as in the case of his parents. He shed his brother's blood on the ground, and he is cursed from the ground, it is the witness of his sin and of his punishment ; the ground opened to receive from his hand his brother's blood, his life and strength, it now closes its life and strength as it were to the labour of his hand — "When thou tillest the ground it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength." He looked to stability and settlement on the earth as the first-born, and the dread of losing it seems the first occasion of his sin, he is doomed to be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth ; he slew his brother, he is in dread that every one that findeth him shall slay him. How terrible is his judgment even as his sin, and how

retributively on him the curse first falls ! In chap. iii. we find the ground cursed for man's sake, but the curse does not fall on man till he rejects the only way of access to God, till unbelief and murder of the seed of God closes the door of hope for ever. There seem to be three distinct judgments, or parts in the judgment, upon Cain, as probably also upon the transgressors in the last chapter ; he is cursed from the ground, the ground is made to refuse its strength to him, and further he is to be a fugitive and vagabond in the earth or ground : the ground which received the blood of Abel is made his avenger, it refuses its produce, and it refuses a settlement to him. Death, which was the curse on sin, he brings on righteous Abel, and he is visited with a worse death and a worse curse. In the thirteenth and fourteenth verses we have Cain's complaint, for he feels in his soul the bitterness of the judgment, though he did not feel for Abel—"Am I my brother's keeper?" He seems to come under that category of evils of the last day in 2 Tim. iii. 2, "Disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection ;" and so "the way of Cain" is one of the great forms of evil reprobated by the Apostle Jude, and to be judged at the coming of the Lord. He has enough of conscience left to feel what it must be to be hidden from the face of the Lord (the presence between the cherubims, I believe, from which he went forth as a fugitive and vagabond, for the same word\* is applied to His presence in the Tabernacle and Temple), and further he complains "every one that findeth me shall slay me," from which

\* כִּלְכֵּל יְהוָה. See 1 Sam. i. 22, "that he may appear *before the Lord*"—יְהוָה אֵלֵינוּ : also Ex. xxxiv. 23, etc.—ED.

we learn that there must have been some considerable population scattered about at this time. We do not read of it, as of many other things that we might look for, for it did not fall in the way of the divine penman to inscribe it, but here we learn the fact, and from the command in chap. i. 28 we might expect it to be so, especially as we find it in verse 4 that Adam begat sons and daughters; it has been computed that there *might have been* nearly a thousand persons on the earth at this time, and though this is not likely, whatever the number was it was an increasing population, and the fear of Cain would be prospective as well as present.

The Lord sets a mark on Cain, we know not what, something probably indicative of his offence, and warning others lest any should slay him, incensed by his crime, and so he went forth from the presence of the Lord, a fugitive and a vagabond, cursed from the ground, with the hatred and fear of his fellow man, and yet preserved with an awful security, abiding in his misery, a fearful record of crime and curse. He tilled and toiled, but he reaped disappointment and misery; the blood of Abel cried from the ground against him, and wherever he went and whatever he did, still the blood of his murdered brother cried out for vengeance and exacted a fearful retribution for his crime.

It seems doubtful whether Nod, to which Cain is represented as fleeing, is a proper name, for it is the same word (נֹד) that is translated "wanderings" in Ps. lvi. 8, and seems akin to the "vagabond" of the twelfth and fourteenth verses. He went to the *east* of Eden, while the progress of light is in the opposite

direction, and so it has been for the most part morally. There we find Cain and his family in their exile, shut out from God and seeking their resources in earth and the arts and enjoyments of earth; they follow their own devices to fill up that place in their hearts that of right belongs to God and that God only can fill and satisfy. It is man's way—what are the multitude of his inventions but resources to enable him to live without God in the world?

In the twenty-third verse we find in a descendant of Cain's the first recorded polygamist. How utterly subversive is it of the blessed order of God revealed in chap. ii. 24! There is something obscure in the word relating to Lamech, who like his father Cain was also a murderer, but it may be that in his case, the murder was not of the aggravated character of Cain's; and so if Cain's death was to be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech's seventyfold seven, for the law of the kinsman, the avenger of blood, was not yet introduced. It is remarkable the distinction that is noted between this Lamech and his namesake of the line of Seth (v. 29)—the one looks back upon his sin, the other looks forward in hope. In the two closing verses of the chapter we find another son given to Adam and Eve in the place of Abel, one in whom the living seed was to be perpetuated, but not that seed only for an apostacy set in here also, but they were probably as the nominal professors in the Church; in this line it was that men called on the name of the Lord, Cain's family may have been as the heathen.

## CHAPTER V.

THE fifth chapter gives us the genealogy of the antediluvian patriarchs from Adam to Noah, in that line in which was the seed of promise, of the other line we read nothing more. In the first two verses the *creation* of Adam is dwelt on in distinction from the formation of his posterity, and then the begetting of Seth, passing over any mention of Cain and Abel and his other sons and daughters (verse 4) of whom we read nothing as to their number or history. Of Adam we are told that he was created in the image and likeness of God, but that was lost, well nigh, if not altogether, obliterated by sin, and now in his fallen state he begets a son in his own likeness and image, his fallen frail and sinful image, and so it is with every child of Adam—"who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"—and hence the need of a vital change, of being born again if we would see the kingdom.

We notice the protracted years of these long-lived men, and doubtless it was of God's goodness and wisdom that at a time when He was pleased to hand down the knowledge of Himself by oral tradition rather than by written record there should be so few steps to the original source of the tradition, thus as

far as possible insuring security by such a provision. Thus, according to the Bible chronology, Adam was contemporary with Methuselah over two hundred years, Methuselah with Shem about an hundred, and Shem with Abram about two hundred; this was a short channel for tradition to flow in, yet Abram had to be called out of idolatry.

Another reason of those long lives may have been that in the infancy of things a greater experience would be needed to make acquaintance with life and its requirements and helps than a short life could accomplish, and then they may also have been in reference to the command in i. 28. Several of them lived over 900 years, but none reached 1000, the millennial age which was reserved for another period of time, but after all these hundreds of years, death follows, each gets his wages, "and he died" is the closing record of all. There is indeed one exception and how happy it is! "Enoch walked with God and he was not, for God took him." Here we find the holy witness for God in the midst of growing degeneracy, he did not seek to hide himself from God as one before, nor did he walk in the evil ways of those around him; no, he walked with God, the life of God was renewed in his soul and he was reconciled to God, else how could he walk with God? Can two walk together except they be agreed? He walked in the light, and his walk intimates progress till God took him, for how can one walk with God without progressing? Thus Enoch's walk exhibited the life, the light, and the love, and he was probably the one most generally characteristic of Adam as he was created in the likeness of God; the likeness was

renewed in Enoch, and we probably may learn in God's dealing with him thus renewed what had been Adam's lot had he never sinned. The record tells us of Enoch that "he begat sons and daughters," whence we learn that domestic and family duties do not interfere with the highest holiness, and if we ask what was the secret spring of this holy walk amid internal corruptions, domestic cares, and the evil of the world around him, the apostle instructs us in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that it was "*faith*," the great principle of the family of God, by which they draw all their blessings from Him; by this he walked with God, he pleased God, and so he was translated that he should not see death.

Before he was translated he bore his testimony to the promised seed, he was God's prophet in the earth in his day, and foretold the coming of the Lord with His saints in judgment on the ungodly. This prophecy of his, which we find in the Epistle of Jude, shows the degenerate state which soon issued in the flood, and may have had some primary reference to that event. The meaning of the name which he gives to his son, Methuselah, is not very clear, but some have thought that there is a reference in it to the coming judgment on the earth, and it is at least remarkable that it was in the year of his death that the flood came. Lamech in prospect of coming judgment derives comfort from some intimation concerning his son and so calls him Noah, "rest" or "comfort," saying "This same shall comfort us," etc. It was not so much to Cain's family removed from the other that he prophesied, as to the ungodly of Seth's family, showing us the third family which has ever existed in the earth, even as the Jew, the Gentile,

and the Church of God. First there was the infidel or heathen who know not God, though possibly among Cain's line there were some who called on God, which one would suppose from the names we find among them, a good deal like the names of Seth's line—they were but few;—next there was the family of professors who outwardly professed to be good people, much as the body of the baptized of this day, among whom was the third body or true seed born again of God, and against the second class it would seem that Enoch's prophecy was directed, the great apostacy of the latter days who go in the way of Cain.

In the translation of Enoch a new truth is presented to man, hitherto he had seen death but here is translation. The death of the righteous is seen in Abel, from which the Lord's people would probably have some dim apprehension of resurrection in connection with the promise, else would it seem strange and discouraging that the righteous should die and by a violent death, and reap no fruit of his faith. Enoch is called by Jude in connection with his prophecy the seventh from Adam (inclusive), it may be with some reference to the rapture of the saints in the seventh millenary or on the completion of their number. His is the shortest life of the antediluvian patriarchs and yet is he the holiest man—is it not God's estimate of life in this world after sin had brought down the curse?

One thought arises from the consideration of these long-lived men—we have here men with the same parts and functions as ourselves, constituted alike, and yet living to near 1000 years, an age that seems incredible to us of the threescore and ten years, and how is this? It is altogether contrary to our



experience and to the laws that govern life now, which even without disease wears out before 100 years, and so incredible is it to some not careful to treat the Scriptures with reverence that they proclaim it a myth. But there it is, a plain historical narrative, to be received in its plain import just as any other part of the Bible. May it not teach us one lesson, and that no insignificant one—the need of caution in drawing conclusions of which we may be very confident and which yet may be altogether erroneous? How easily would some come to the conclusion, from plausible data, that man *could not live* so many hundred years as we have seen that he has, and how doggedly would they assert their own convictions, on scientific grounds it may be, and yet we see the fact disparaging such conclusions, and proving the thing that many would proclaim impossible.

## CHAPTER VI.

IN the sixth chapter we find the growing degeneracy coming to a head and at length calling down judgment. As man increases, sin increases too; before the fall the increase of the creature would have been to increasing blessing for it was God's appointment, and every appointment of God was for good, but sin has pervaded and perverted everything. It is worthy of note that here even as at the beginning self-will or wilfulness originates the evil; inconsiderate of God, man follows his own inclination, it governs his conduct, and this issues in the hindering of God's Spirit and the grieving of God's heart (verses 3—6), and ultimate judgment. The sons of God are the seed of Seth, and the daughters of men those of Cain's line, though some interpret it otherwise, making the "sons of God" angels, but this does not seem natural, and the former view meets all the requirements of the passage.\* It is an early caution that we find as to the evil of such alliances, this unequal yoking between the Lord's people and those who are yet of the world, unconverted to God—"the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair,"—and now, even as then, we often find beauty in a sinful line, but let us take heed how we are captivated with it.

\* See Appendix.

The record proceeds to tell us that "they took them wives of all which *they chose*," the lust of the eye leads to the lust of the flesh, as afterwards in David's case and the case of many an one besides, this leads to abounding evil, and the evil brings down the judgment. How little did these fair faces avail to avert the coming wrath or to alleviate the sufferings of their guilty partners, though doubtless as the seed of a scoffing line they helped on the scoffers in their day!

How watchful should the Lord's people be in forming alliances to be governed by something above personal attraction, and how careful to guard against their affections being engaged, and so their judgment blinded, before they are well convinced, not only of the suitability of those on whom their affections would rest, but above all whether they are standing on the side of God or the world! Many have I seen left to discover their mistake when it was too late. It is a serious thing to form an alliance which may affect one's interests here and hereafter, and something more than a fair face or form is needful for a companion through life, an help meet for the various difficulties of the way.

The progeny of this evil alliance were mighty men of old, even as Nimrod (chap. x. 8, 9), great on earth but little with God, and wilfulness and wickedness proceed to such a length that it "repented the Lord that He had made man, and it grieved Him at His heart." He rises up in judgment, but in judgment He remembers mercy, He gives man 120 years for repentance, while the ark is preparing. This is God's testimony to them, the time of man's trial and of God's long-suffering, during which Methuselah Lamech and others were gathered to

their rest. Concerning the repentance and grief here spoken of, and the various affections of man in different parts of the word attributed to God, we must bear in mind that they are written in condescension to man and the limitation of his powers, for how else could we understand God, but by His being described as affected as we know man to be affected under somewhat similar circumstances? Thus the various feelings and affections and parts and passions of man attributed to Him are simply in condescension, to explain to us what we could not otherwise understand, since we could not comprehend God but as He is pleased thus to come down to us through what we do comprehend. How gracious it is amid all the evil which sin has occasioned that God so brings Himself down to us and near to us, He was "grieved at His heart," and in another place "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel"—what can so reveal God to us till He is pleased to manifest Himself in the flesh? We learn that He has a heart to feel towards His people, to be grieved or to be pleased, and so should the object of His people in everything be to please God. There was one who did always the things that pleased Him, and He has left us an example that we should follow His steps; it was the unvarying aspect of the Son towards the Father, and it should be ours. How different is the testimony of this chapter concerning the sons of God! "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," so entirely had the leaven leavened the whole lump, and so the judgment comes upon an utterly sinful world, but not till the

last of those named in chap. v. (excepting Noah and his sons) is removed. Methuselah died in the very year of the flood, and now Noah only is left, God's witness in the midst of abounding evil. Of Noah and of Enoch only I believe is it said that they walked with God; Enoch was the heavenly one and translated—"God took him"—Noah was "of the earthly family, but he was carried through the deep waters, and inhabited the new earth.

We saw the secret of Enoch's holy walk, and we find that it was the same principle that upheld Noah and made him to differ from those around him, it was not any inherent power of his own, no, he "found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (verse 8), and so he was "moved with fear" in the obedience of faith, and became heir of the righteousness that is of faith, and had this testimony, that he was a just man and upright and walked with God (verse 9), and that he was a preacher of righteousness for the 120 years of God's long-suffering. Enoch and Noah were alike prophets of judgment on the ungodly but of hope to the righteous, the one showed translation before judgment, the other a refuge in the midst of it, and both were types of events coming in the latter days, and how soon we know not.

When God decides on judgment He reveals his purpose to Noah and directs him to make an ark, giving him particular instructions so that nothing is left to his own devices. This great vessel, made not so much for progress through the waters as for the preservation of its freight, has been computed from the measurement to have contained about fifty thousand tons, and was amply sufficient for its purpose

notwithstanding all the infidel scoffs which have been levelled against it; besides the eight persons of Noah's family there was to be a pair of each of the different existing genera of birds and beasts, the latter probably little over two hundred, with food sufficient for their use. God's means are ever adequate for His own end or object, and His people know this and can rest satisfied with His word; scoffing is the result of infidelity, as infidelity is of pride and ignorance. It is observable that the window of the ark seems to be "above," Noah may not see the wide waste of waters, nor witness the despairing agonies of those who have brought down judgment on themselves. It may also be worthy of observation that the word כַּס, used in verse 14, "pitch it with pitch"—that which may not be washed away by the waters or removed by any violence to which the ark might be exposed—is the same word as that used frequently for making atonement or reconciliation for the forgiveness of sin, as covering it over, hiding it effectually, and from this word is the mercy-seat derived, or covering of the ark of testimony, in which was deposited the holy law of God, a law broken by man and which only had condemnation for him, but on this cover of the ark, or mercy-seat, was the blood sprinkled before God, and God saw the blood and not the sin which it covered. In the eighteenth verse we find God establishing his covenant with Noah, all is secure to him amid surrounding desolation, he has found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and this is the source of the blessing, even as the covenant is the security of it, and very blessed it is to witness the holy result in this man of God, "according to all that God commanded him so did he"—

what a contrast to all the wilfulness and disobedience around! But he was not discouraged or hindered in his work by it, no, he encouraged himself in God, and God helped him in his work, and so he went on building his great ship, probably afar from any water, any deep to float it. How strange it must have appeared to the world! While all wondered and some scoffed, some doubtless had their misgivings and convictions from the continued testimony and holy walk of that man of God, but the fear of man brought its deadly snare, and like the convictions of many they brought no profit, but only the heavier judgment; but amid the different opinions and feelings around him he went quietly on his way, assured in his own soul, for he knew Whom he believed, and this was his soul's rest.

We may learn from Noah's course not to be discouraged by the fewness of God's people around us. However few his people and however far gone in evil men may be, He abideth the same, and seeth the desire of our hearts towards Him, and knoweth the way and the time to deliver His tried people. It may not be unprofitable also to consider that many were employed by Noah building his ark, who never found a refuge in it when the flood came—solemn thought for the builders in God's house!

## CHAPTER VII.

THE ark is now finished, the time of God's long-suffering has been wasted upon an evil generation and has come to an end, and now before the flood comes seven days are allowed for Noah and his family to gather in the animals that are to be saved and to enter into their refuge, while God brings the flood upon the world of the ungodly and till His indignation be overpast.

We are not told of the effect of Noah's preaching; some may have believed and have been taken before the coming judgment as were the antediluvian patriarchs, and some in the last week, while the different pairs of the lower creation instructed by God were gathering in, or even after the flood had commenced in the eleventh hour, may have sought for mercy and found it, while presently involved in the judgment. Scripture is silent and we know not the result, but whatever it was that faithful man of God was blessed in his ministry—it was a sweet savour to God both in those who were saved and those who perished. We here for the first time see the distinction between clean and unclean animals, showing us that it did not originate with Moses. Of the clean beasts and of the fowls of the air Noah was to take by sevens, to meet



the necessity for food and sacrifice, as well as to preserve life, of the unclean by two, "and Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him." And now everything is accomplished, and in his six hundredth year the long-threatened judgment, the terrible reality of his oft-repeated and neglected warning, comes at last, the fountains of the deep are broken up and the waters gush out in overwhelming volumes, and the windows of heaven are opened to let out the torrents from above, the waters above the firmament and those below, separated as we find by the order of God (chap. i. 7), again come together to reduce the world once more to a watery waste, its void and formless state. What has not sin done, what is it not daily doing, and how would it not undo the provisions of God's goodness, but for the abounding of that grace that has met it on Calvary! The rain was upon the earth forty days, and the waters increased, and they prevailed, and increased greatly upon the earth, and the waters prevailed exceedingly, and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered, fifteen cubits did the waters prevail and the mountains were covered, and every living substance was destroyed both man and cattle and creeping things and fowls of the heaven, and they prevailed an hundred and fifty days. We observe in this account the gradual progress of the flood, wherefore we know not, it may have been extending the day of grace to some poor convinced souls, but we know not, we know that there was no refuge in the ark but for those of Noah's family, the Lord shut him in, others were shut out—it may remind us of the virgins in Matt. xxv. 10—"be ye also ready"—but who may say that they were ever-

lastingly lost, any more than all those of Noah's time, or indeed that all in the ark were everlastingly saved? The whole history is I believe typical, true as the history of God, but foreshadowing events to come. One word is very blessed, "The Lord shut him in," (verse 16), who else might shut that door by which an elephant could enter? There was no one to do so from without, and it was needful to close it now that God's purpose be not defeated, when many despairing sinners would wildly cling to it and struggle for an entrance. But now it is shut to, and they have only in the agony of despair to cry out, "open, open to us," but it is too late, the devouring waters are out and doing their work of destruction. One after another the hill-tops are submerged, those last unavailing refuges of the poor guilty and stricken sinners awakened but too late from their false security, and they sink in the deep waters, but over all the ark of God silently majestically rises up, and the higher and higher the waters rise, the higher still does this mighty vessel rise above them, carrying securely its covenant freight, and the rushing waters from above and below that sweep away the giants, the mighty men of renown, as things of naught, and that roll their waves over the loftiest mountains, have no power to touch even the feeblest insect that shelters in that refuge of God.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE eighth chapter is the reverse of the seventh, that tells of the coming of the flood, this of its departure, God's work is accomplished, His strange work, and now the waters having executed their commission are directed to subside. God remembered Noah we are told (an expression after the manner of man as chap. vi. 6, to show his care for him), and not Noah only, but every living thing and all the cattle that was with him in the ark, and so he made a wind to pass over the earth and the waters assuaged, gradually they arose and gradually they fall. The process is reversed, the fountains of the deep are stopped and the windows of heaven closed, and after five months the ark for the first time rested on the mountains of Ararat. After another period of over two months, the waters still subsiding continually, the hill-tops are seen, and after forty days further Noah sends out a raven which went to and fro but returned not, for it is an unclean bird which would feed on carrion. After seven days, as it would seem from verse 10, he sends forth a dove that found no rest amid the waters but in the ark alone, and after *other* seven days there is another mission of the dove, and she returns with an olive leaf *pluckt off*, not floating dead

upon the waters, which was the symbol of peace, earth restored and the waters abated. Yet seven days more and we have a third mission of the dove, and now she returns no more, whence Noah might conclude that the earth was restored and become habitable again. These several missions after seven days are remarkable, and would lead us to the conclusion that Noah noted the time during his long confinement in the ark and kept the Sabbath as the appointment of God (chap. ii.). How can we otherwise account for the repetition of the seven, and may we not easily conceive of that holy man resting with praise and thanksgiving after the labour of the week amid his motley household, and after prayer and supplications sending forth these winged messengers to learn by them how it fared with the world they had left under the judgment of God? Noah, it seems from calculating the different notes of time given in the chapter, awaits another month after the last mission of the dove, till the first day of the new year, before he removes the cover of the ark, and then he beheld the face of the ground that it was dry. What a glad sight to Noah so long immured in this vessel must it have been, yet does he not move from his abode till the command comes forth to leave; he leaves, even as he enters, in obedience to God after a year and ten days' sojourn in that strange dwelling, and with his strange company.\* It was a long voyage and would have been a painful and trying one, but that God ordered it all, He steered the vessel so that amid a drowning world they suffered no hurt, He ruled its unruly company, He met the difficulties insuperable to man, He ordered all, provided all, and

\* See Appendix.

governed all, so that they who scoff do but scoff at God.

Noah was guided by God in what he did, the animals were instigated by God, and so everything happened according to God's order and was effectual for God's purpose. There is a distinction in the order of God in their leaving and entering the ark, when they entered there was to be seemingly separation of the sexes, it was "Thou and thy sons, and thy wife and thy sons' wives" (vi. 18), they were separate, it was a time of mourning; but now the judgment is past, and the natural order is restored, and it is "Thou and thy wife, and thy sons and thy sons' wives (viii. 16) and then "every living thing that is with thee." And now we find Noah's first work as once more he sets foot on earth, his resource amid the widespread desolation, the consequence of sin, he draws nigh to God, Him with whom he walked of old, with whom he communed in the ark, his present help amid long continued scenes of sorrow and suffering brought upon him by the wilfulness of man. "Noah builded an altar unto the Lord"—the altar was God's table where the sacrifice was laid for Him, it was His place of meeting with man when He accepted the sacrifice, He often calls it "Mine altar" (see Ex. xxi. 14; Mal. i. 7, 10, 12), it was a type of Christ (Heb. xiii. 10), and here Noah brings his burnt offerings of every clean beast and every clean fowl, and here we see one reason of the multiplication of these in the ark. The burnt-offering (of which, as of the altar, the first mention is here made) was the first of all the offerings in point of importance; each offering had its own ap-

pointment and value, and the burnt-offering was for acceptance, it showed the way of access to God, and was moreover the expression of thanksgiving, indeed it was the most general of any of the offerings, and it carried with it at times the nature both of the meat and sin-offerings, atonement and thanksgiving, besides its own distinctive character (see 2 Ch. xxix. 27—31, and 2 Sam. xxiv. 22—25), it was one of those that was “a sweet savour to the Lord.” Noah now brings his burnt-offerings, not one only, but one of every clean bird and beast, and he offers for his acceptance in the new earth, and his thank-offerings for the wondrous mercy to him and to his house. Doubtless his offerings had a very full import, it was before the different offerings were assigned to different acts of worship, and Noah’s, as Adam’s and Abel’s and others of the holy patriarchs, was comprehensive of all he had to ask or say, for sin or acceptance or thanksgiving.

We now turn to the word and see how God was affected by these offerings of His faithful servant, and oh, how marvellously gracious is His response! “The Lord smelled a sweet savour”—that offering of faith went up pleasing and acceptable to God, and He said in His heart, “I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake.” In the sixth chapter He saw the sin and there was nothing to cover it, and His heart was grieved, and He said, “I will destroy man whom I have created, from the face of the earth;” there He saw the sin and judgment follows, now He sees that which covers the sin, and His heart is pleased, and so we see how the heart of God is affected according as He sees the sin or the covering of sin.

Dear reader, have you found a covering of your sin? If you inquire what it is, how perfectly is it declared to us in a passage antitypical of this word, in the Epistle to the Ephesians (v. 1, 2), "Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and *hath given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.*" Here is the real value of Noah's offering, it was the very type of His offering and sacrifice that is so pleasing to God, such a sweet-smelling savour to Him, and in the faith of that offering it is, not merely that our persons are accepted but more than that, that our offerings to God, our prayer and praise and service of love, go up as a sweet savour to Him in the sweet savour of Christ's offering. God sees us in Him, and oh, how dear are His people to Him, that are one with His Well-Beloved, and loved with the same love! (Jo. xvii. 23.)

The twenty-first verse seems to convey the idea of the incurability of human nature and the inutility of judgment as a correction, and now God can spare the world even under increased evil because of that offering on Calvary once for all.

The promise in the twenty-second verse of the permanency of the seasons, may involve in it that the revolution of the heavenly bodies had previously suffered some disturbance, probably during the period described in the second verse of the first chapter, and before the present order of things.

It is remarkable that traditions of the flood are more or less to be found in nearly all nations.

## CHAPTER IX.

THE ninth chapter gives us the order of God on the restored earth. It opens with blessing, even as the last did with God's gracious remembrance of Noah, then we have the command of chap. i. 28 renewed, and also the dominion over the inferior animal creation, as in chap. i. 26, but there is this difference from the original order of God, that then it was simply dominion, here it is "the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast," etc.; probably at first, before sin came in, it was not fear so much as love that ruled, the creature fawned on man, even as it will be hereafter in the new creation when fear again will yield to love (Isaiah xi. 6—9, and lxxv. 25), but here we see the subjection restored which is needful to man's preservation, and which would seem well nigh lost in the violence of the antediluvian apostacy (vi. 11). The brute creation is under the fear of man, and man should be in the fear of God, but in both we see the transgression of God's order, in the rational creature most frequently, in the other but occasionally.

Animal food is now for the first time allowed to man even as the green herb before; whether it be that the earth underwent some change by the deluge,



rendering the herb not a sufficiently nutritious food for man, or to keep the animal creation from multiplying beyond due bounds we know not, but such is God's order accompanied with one marked restriction, "But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." The blood was not to be eaten, nor the flesh with the blood in it, for the blood is the life; so Scripture tells us, and all the knowledge we possess is in proof of the truth of God's word. The blood is the life of man made in the image of God, and moreover it looked forward to that "precious blood," the life of the coming Man, which was one day to make atonement for sin, that life which was to be given as a ransom for the forfeited lives of sinners, and on the credit of which alone sinners from Adam down to His appearing could be saved. That blood was poured out, and not taken up again in resurrection; the flesh indeed, the body, was taken up, but animated by a new principle of life, not blood but spirit, and so on that flesh, that bloodless spiritual body, we feed by faith, it is our life and the strength of our life, and so are we *saved* by His life, even as we are reconciled by His death, His blood-shedding. But to return from a digression which can scarcely ever be out of place, we find in verses 3—6 death recognized as it was not before, the death of the brute creation for food, and the death of man avenged by the death of the man-slayer. It seems that man's life is protected with special care, whether it be that before the flood when there was no prohibitory law and evil so abounded (vi. 5, 11, 12), life was held by too uncertain a tenure and was often forfeited to the violence that prevailed, or that man becoming familiar

with the shedding of blood for his food might be led to think less of life and less of taking it away, or whatever else the reason may be—for oftentimes God does not give us His reasons, but only His will—now for the first time the penalty of death is denounced against the man-slayer. Before it was as we find in chap. iv. 15, vengeance on him who requites the murderer, but now it is “at the hand of every beast . . . and at the hand of man . . . will I require the life of man;” so that man or beast slaying a man must be slain. “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God made He man,” and so the slaying of a man was defacing God’s image in His creature. Here we seem to have for the first time magistracy introduced, the power of the sword, and this seems to be God’s unrepealed law to the present time in respect to death and life as regards the government of this world, or at least we do not know of anything repealing it. Among the Jews death was awarded to different offences, but that dispensation with all that was peculiar to it has passed away; now we have God’s mind, irrespective of peculiarity of dispensation, when He began to legislate for man, and that mind is death as the award of death and of death only. Philanthropy that is governed rather by its own feeling than by the word of God would indeed repeal it, but there the word stands out in the face of this sickly though well-meant feeling that would remove from the murderer his fear, and from man the security of his life with which God has invested it. In the Church properly speaking—that is, among the saints—though they are of course subject to the laws of the world while living in the world, yet

between themselves the rule of God would be the rule of grace. (See Matt. v. 39; Rom. xii. 17—19, and xiii. 8—10; Ephes. v. 1, 2.)

In the eighth to the seventeenth verses we have God's covenant with His creatures, and the token of it in the bow; when the gathering clouds hang threatening over the world, which before they had deluged, and the rain descends filling men's hearts with fear and misgiving, then appears "*the bow in the cloud*," the fitting symbol of peace. God looks upon it and remembers His everlasting covenant, and the waters no more shall become a flood to destroy all flesh, and man looks upon it (verse 14) and his heart is reassured, for it is the token of the covenant of his God securing the world from another deluge, which seems to be the extent of this covenant. In the times following the flood this would doubtless be a happy signal of peace to many, though now long experience of security has removed the apprehension of danger, and man views the token of the covenant without interest, or merely as an object of beauty spanning the heavens with its bright and varied-coloured arch.

An impression has arisen in the minds of some from this passage, that the cloud pouring out its rain had first appeared at the deluge, and that previously the earth had been watered by the dew, from the waters largely taken up by evaporation, as in chap. ii. 5, 6. If so, the bow would now have first appeared, and how impressive must the sight have been with all its associations and deep symbolic import; but if not, and that rain had been of more or less frequent occurrence on the earth, then of course, as an effect

from a well-known cause, the bow was familiar to man, but was now first appointed as the token of the covenant, somewhat as the Lord speaks of His covenant with day and night, at the close of the thirty-third chapter of Jeremiah.

It is observable the use that is made of this covenant and its token, in assurance, both to Israel and the Church, of their future and well-secured blessings, amid all the hidings of God's face, and the symbols of judgment. (See Isa. liv. and Rev. iv.)

In the eighteenth and nineteenth verses we have recorded the overspreading of the whole earth by the sons of Noah, who were the regenerators of its population in its void and desolated state.

Noah we find in verse 20 again settled on earth as a husbandman—a lawful calling, and as free from evil as any other, but evil comes into all, and here again we find failure the constant attendant upon man. "He planted a vineyard, and he drank of the wine and was drunken"—alas, for the man who walked with God! Appetite again, and failure and nakedness! Was it in ignorance of the nature of the wine, or was it that he would awhile forget his cares and sorrows in that oblivious draught? The former we may hope, but we know not, for a man of God, when separate from God, is but a man like other men. Noah was overtaken, however it was; when first we met with him, he was a pattern to follow, alas! here he is an example to warn us, and the dominion that he bore, now despised in his person, is cast down by his failure. One of his sons, his youngest, irreverently looked on the old man's failure, he seems to have jeered at that which should have been a sorrow of

heart to him, and would have got his brothers to join with him, but they would not look upon so sad a sight, they covered the failure, and it is remembered to them in blessing. That profane son is not cursed, he was in the ark, and had the covenant and the blessing (verses 1 and 8, 9), but he is cursed in one line of his posterity. Alas, how the failure appears everywhere! In Adam's family there was a Cain, in Noah's a Ham, and among the apostles a Judas.

Noah wakes up from his wine, we are not told how he was affected by his sin, but we learn that he keenly felt the insult of his youngest son, and this was the occasion of his delivering by divine inspiration that remarkable prophecy which to this day is receiving fulfilment, "Cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be." Service the lowest and most degraded was to be his lot even as we see it now, for the race of Canaan it is believed are chiefly to be found in Africa, and we know the degradation to which they have been reduced, and what a sad page in the history of man are the cruelties, the heartless and atrocious cruelties, to which they have been subjected.\* And yet it is foretold in God's Word, not that this in anyway justifies or countenances such cruelties, any more than the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah would justify Israel in the rejection and crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, but it shows very clearly that God's Word is none other than God's Word, which could so clearly foretell the fortunes of a particular race thousands of years past, before the race had an existence. The prophecy next rests on Shem and here the case is in contrast, "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and Canaan shall be his

\* See Appendix.

servant," it was a curse on Canaan, it is a blessing on Shem, and how great is the blessing! Jehovah was his God, the root and fulness of blessing (Ps. cxliv. 15; Heb. xi. 16), to his line specially was the knowledge of the true God revealed, among them His temple was reared and His name was worshipped and His will declared while all the world around lay in darkness, and in this line according to the flesh Messiah came, Who is God over all, blessed for ever. What a contrast in everything to Ham, and how important it is to observe that while man brings on himself the curse, God gives the blessing! (See chap. iii. and vi., and Rom. vi. 23.) The servitude of Canaan that follows this blessing commenced when Joshua overcame the seven nations of Canaan, and was completed in Solomon's time (1 Kings ix. 20, 21). Noah in his prophecy next takes up the case of his eldest son, "God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant." Again how wondrous is this, how characteristic of this line alone, as events have unfolded the prophet's word! God shall *enlarge* Japheth! Japheth means to enlarge, the proper name is kindred to the appellation, and how verified in this line, how have the European nations spread on every side, eastward and westward, to India and America, what enterprise and energy have they manifested, while the other branches of the Noachian family have for the most part been devoid of this spirit, and confined within their own limits, or limits narrowed by the conquests of the eldest brother! And then as to the dwelling in the tents of Shem, history tells us of the different invasions and conquests of Greeks and Romans, Tartars and Scythians, so that we see the

fairest portions of Shem's possessions fallen under the dominion of Japheth's descendants, the nations of Southern Asia under European rule, as for instance the vast empire of India under the British dominion; or if we view it under a spiritual interpretation, then how true is it that the privileges once possessed by the descendants of Shem, and by them alone, have passed over to the descendants of Japheth, according to that word of our Lord in Matt. xxi. 43 (compare Ro. x. 19). The Church is indeed composed of those gathered out of all the nations of the world, but it is plain that the bulk and body of the Church is among the descendants of Japheth. Who is there that has not heard the complaints of the little result of missionary labour among the nations of the East, while the precious seed sown has not been lost, but has fallen on the hearts of so many European residents there, and Japheth in God's sovereignty is receiving the blessing so lightly esteemed by the children of Shem?

We find in Japheth's case also the stigma resting on the descendants of Ham, "Canaan shall be his servant," and more amply verified it would seem even than in Shem's case. Why the curse falls on Canaan specially we know not, God had His own reasons and they were good and righteous but He has not told them to us; it may be that He foresaw how they would follow in their father's wake even as we find they did for they were a wicked nation. I do not say that He doomed them to this, but He doomed them to the punishment for it. Whatever the cause, the fact we know, it is patent to all that in *this life* the children suffer from the sin or imprudence of the parents; in *this life* I say, for in the life to come it is different, each stands

on his own responsibility, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father," "the soul that sinneth it shall die," this is the divine decree and none can escape it but as they find a refuge. That refuge many of the descendants of Ham have found in Jesus, even as that poor woman of Canaan that we read of, whose faith was so pleasing to the Lord. On the other hand how often do we find some of the truest and holiest men suffering in this life, not for their own sins, but from the evil of those who preceded them or with whom they are associated, as was the case with Daniel, Jeremiah, and others.

It seems likely that Moses was specially directed in narrating this remarkable prophecy of Noah at this time, Israel was now about to take possession of the land, the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to their seed after them, and which was ever the hope of the patriarchs. How encouraging to them would this prophecy be! They knew that the land was theirs by promise, and now they learn that it is inhabited by a race cursed of God and doomed to be the servants of Shem whose seed they were; what then had they to do but to go forth in the faith of the Word and to take possession, assured that God would be with them?

Thus we have been led to consider this wonderful prophecy delivered between four and five thousand years ago and yet receiving its fulfilment. How clearly it bears God's hand in it! How inexplicable is it on any other supposition! That the three sons of one man should be the fathers of such extensive families each reaching down to the end of time, and each distinguished by such distinct peculiarities, that





to the specially-named family centuries after God should reveal Himself as their God, while the others were in darkness, that another should be distinguished equally from the other two by that spirit of enterprise that would spread itself abroad not content within its own limits, and that the last again, in distinction from both the former, should be marked in one particular line of the family by a servile and degraded state—how is all this to be accounted for but by the simple way of God declaring what He foreknew?

For long ages God was the God of Shem, among his seed He had His tabernacle or abode, and among them He miraculously manifested Himself and among them only (Amos iii. 2). For long ages the energy of the descendants of Japheth has ranged through the globe, has overspread the dominions of Shem and dwelt in his tents, the two last universal empires have been Japhetic, and for long ages the brand of slavery has marked the devoted race of Canaan. So it was foretold in concise but emphatic terms, so it has come to pass, and one can only wonder in considering it at the incredulity that can reject the only and obvious solution, that it is God's Word, or at the credulity that can believe that it is anything beside.

Noah lived 350 years after the flood, and was the last of the very long-lived men, for there was a marked diminution of life in his successors: he lived 950 years and according to the Bible chronology was fifty-eight years contemporary with Abram.

## CHAPTER X.

“ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” and therefore it is all “profitable,” but different portions for different purposes, according to our different necessities ; some parts are profitable for instruction, and in how many things do we need instruction, in which the Bible is the only source from which we can get it! Other parts again are needful for conviction, and others for reformation and the training in a godly course (2 Tim. iii. 16).

The present chapter is one of those that instructs us, it is an ethnographic chapter, that is, it tells us of the races of man inhabiting the earth, it gives us the account of the origin and settlement of the nations of the world.

It follows suitably on the last, for without it we could not have known the value of Noah’s prophecy ; it is the explication too of that word of the apostle’s to the Athenians (Acts xvii. 24—26) “God . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation,” He who is their Creator is also the Disposer of their habitations, in Him we live and move and have our being, and all that we should seek after

Him who is not far from us, but to meet God's mind in this is just the last thing that man thinks of, so far gone is he from original righteousness.

In the distribution of the earth among these families Japheth, probably as the eldest, is first assigned his portion, fourteen of his descendants are named, and to these families were divided the isles of the Gentiles, as those places beyond sea, or to which the Israelites travelled by sea, were by them called (see Isa. xlix. 1, 6). These different allocations seem not to have taken place till after the confusion of tongues, for it is said (verse 5) "every one after his tongue," whereas we know there was but the one tongue till the Babel-builders were confounded, and this is further evident from verse 25, where we are told when the division took place, and there would scarcely have been a population sufficient to demand a separation previously. Europe and the north of Asia was that part of the world where God appointed the bounds of Japheth's habitation, and it is remarkable that his descendants as given in this chapter are the least of any of the three brothers, and yet according to the prophecy of Noah spread more than all, contrary to what one would expect, but in accordance with the word and with the fact.

We have next (verses 6—20) the descendants of Ham, thirty in number, and the places allotted to them, parts of the east of Asia, and Africa; in this genealogical tree there is one specially noted, Nimrod, who was "a mighty one *in the earth*," having some of that unenviable notoriety of those mentioned in vi. 4, etc., and was the founder of that kingdom that whether literally or in symbol, ever after holds

such a prominent place in the Scriptures. It is remarkable also in the history of this branch of Noah's family how the border of Canaan is distinctly marked out, and of Canaan only, for this was the land of promise to another seed.

We next come to the children of Shem, and of these six and twenty are enumerated (verse 21—31). Shem is designated as the father of all the children of Eber or Heber, even as Ham is called the father of Canaan, the one of the blessed line, the other of the cursed. It seems most likely that from this Heber the Hebrews were called, though wherefore, rather than from any other son of that line, we know not, but probably he was one who pleased God and so had this honour put upon him; this was the name by which the nation was usually known to others, or by which they spoke of themselves in connection with others, but their own name by which they called themselves was that of Israelites, from Israel the prince that prevailed with God.

In the names given in this chapter we discover the beginnings of many of the nations of antiquity, of many that now exist, and of some that will act a part in the latter times. Of course at this great distance of time the difficulty is increased of accurately tracing the history of each, but the researches of the learned have borne witness to the truth of the account in this early history of the origin of nations. Owing to intermarriages and intermixtures we may not draw the line too definitely, but generally speaking the habitations of Japheth were to the north and west, and of Shem to the south and east, as those of Ham to the south and west, or more generally still, Europe was princi-

pally the abode of the descendants of Japheth, Asia of Shem, and Africa of Ham. We observe that the light has travelled spiritually as naturally like the sun in the heavens from east to west, in gradual fulfilment of Noah's prophecy under its spiritual aspect, and further that Israel, the people of the Lord, were found in Shem's line, the Church of God for the most part in Japheth's, and Babylon and the Canaanite in Ham's.

It is further observable that the number of the nations enumerated here by which the earth was peopled is just seventy; now Moses tells us (Deut. xxxiii. 8) that "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*," but the number of the children of Israel that came into Egypt, where they so multiplied, was exactly seventy (see Gen. xlv. 27) and this agreement can scarcely be accidental.

The dispensational character of this chapter is of families, and so the priesthood was a family office. Early in the next chapter we find the rebellion against this order of God, they would make one universal family, but the fallen state of man interferes with this, and will interfere till the day of the Lord (see Acts iii. 19, 21; Eph. i. 10).

## CHAPTER XI.

IN the eleventh chapter we have men's thoughts and actings on the restored earth, and as usual with men, they are the reverse of God's thoughts.

The whole earth we are told was of one language, and as they journeyed from the East, the parts bordering on Ararat to the south it would seem, they come to the land of Shinar, and there they dwelt in a plain, the opposite of the hilly country they had left. Here they make a compact or confederacy in which Nimrod, that mighty one on the earth, would seem to be leader, for Babel was the beginning of his kingdom, and the dispersion did not take place till Peleg's time, when Nimrod would be in his prime. The unity of language which prevailed would favour their object, and so "they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and ... let us build us a city and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven"—one very high, to the skies, as we say, or to heaven, as the spies represented the cities in the land (Deut. i. 28)—"and let us make us a name lest we be scattered abroad," etc. Here we see man the same creature that he was before the flood, all its waters have not changed his nature or added anything to him, any more than its antitypical waters ever changed a creature of God—God only can do

this. God's mind was that they should scatter abroad and replenish the earth, as we see from the last two chapters, their mind was not to scatter abroad; God's mind was that they should be divided into distinct families, as we see in chap. x., their mind was to make one great family; God's mind again was that His creatures should live in dependence on Him, the sure and simple way of safety and blessing, their mind was a proud independence, a forgetfulness of God, or leaving Him out of their calculations. Their language was much as the language of the fool, "No God," in everything it is "*us*," that little pronoun, whether in the singular or the plural, so pleasing to the heart of man, in the singular the expression of selfishness, in the plural of confederacy; let *us* make brick, let *us* build, let *us* make *us* a name, it is independence, but more, it is ambition, it is vanity, somewhat as those who call their lands after their name (Psalm xlix.). In all this they do not consider God, but God considers them, "the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded," the language is as we have afore seen, after the manner of men, it shows us God's interest in the affairs of man however forgetful of Him they may be, and it should teach us not to act rashly or hastily without examination. Well, the Lord came down, and what did He see? What did He see when He came down to Eden? Failure. What in the fourth chapter? The murderer and his murdered brother. What in the sixth chapter? That every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually. But what here after the drowning of the world in judgment? The rebellion of these Babel-builders.

And what a little further on ? The sin of Sodom that brought down not the water, but the fire from heaven, a type of the latter day judgment of the world, when sin shall have come to the full. How it all speaks the helpless hopeless state of the creature in himself, the incurableness of his heart, and that help can only reach him from a source apart from himself, only of grace, God's grace, as all blessing must now be, for man has forfeited everything—but oh, how rich are the treasures which that grace opens to us, how sufficient, how secure, from the unfailing stores of God !

In the sixth and seventh verses we have the language of counsel in heaven, as in the fourth verse on earth ; the Lord saw what was in their heart to do, and how their unity of speech would aid them, and He says "Let us go down," an intimation, as it seems, of the Trinity (as in chap. i. 26) and of the Trinity in unity, "So the Lord (Jehovah) scattered them."

The *retributive* character of God's dealing with them, which we constantly meet in the Scriptures, is remarkable here, their wisdom, as is so often the case, but defeats its own object. They use their oneness of language to form this confederacy, the Lord confounds their language that they may not understand each other ; the means to their end is "let us build us a city," and of necessity "they left off to build the city" ; the end of their confederacy is "lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth," "the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth." Thus He effects His purpose in judgment when they failed to effect it by obedience, and thus language, which is God's work even as man is God's work, is spoiled by man's wilfulness.



The tongue in the Psalms is called man's glory (see Psalm xvi. 9; with Acts ii. 26, and also Psalm xxx. 12, cviii. 1), it distinguishes man above all other creatures, "therewith bless we God," and thereby is that intimate and wonderful communion of thought and feeling between man and man, but now the common language, the common medium of communication with the family of man, is lost, and the result is inconvenience never in this life to be more than partially remedied, and even that only as the fruit of much labour.

In the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles we see God's way of meeting the evil which would interfere with His purpose of grace, it is not again to renew this oneness of lip, for a failing thing is not renewed of God in these times (though the prophecy of Zephaniah (iii. 9) seems to point forward to such a restoration) no, but he gives the tongue to those whom He appoints to accomplish His purpose, whence we learn that the confusion is of men, the remedy of God's Spirit, and here we see the grace apart from any claim or deserving of men.

The number of tongues now introduced may have been according to the number of the families of the sons of Noah, seventy, but of course we know not; we know that there are now many more, but none of them of man's invention, for though man may reduce a language to rules, may by additions from different sources render it more copious, may refine or improve it, or on the other hand may so sink in the scale of brutes as merely to retain what is expressive of his wants, and this it may be from different sources so as to form a kind of *patois*, yet all languages are derived from these original sources however modified they

may have been in the course of time by many and varying circumstances.

The project of the Babel-builders has often been tried since, even down to our own times, in the design of a universal empire, but it will ever be like the first attempt, failure and confusion from every effort of man. The decree of God is, "overturn, overturn, overturn . . . until He come whose right it is," no city but that mentioned in Heb. xi. 10, and Rev. iii. 12, hath the top that reaches to heaven, none other hath the permanency or sure foundation, and no other can rally around it the saints out of every kindred tongue and nation.

In the after-part of the chapter we have the line of Shem continued down to the time of Abram, the line in which was the blessing specially, the line in which was the favoured nation Israel, and in which Messiah appeared. There does not seem anything remarkable to detain us in this genealogy. We observe the gradual diminution in the length of life in these patriarchs, Shem's life was shortened over 300 years from the duration of Noah's, again in Arphaxad's time there is a considerable reduction, and also in Peleg's, and after him it shortened gradually till after the time of the twelve patriarchs, when it attained to much what it was in David's time, and continues now, the threescore and ten years. In the case of Terah (verse 26), we have, contrary to the usual course of this genealogy, his three sons named, for they were all connected with the sacred history. Haran was the father of Lot, and Nahor the ancestor of Rebekah and Rachel. Abram, though named

first, seems the youngest of his sons ; he was 75 about the period of his father's death (verse 32, with chap. xii. 4), and this would make Terah 130 when Abram was born.

We find Terah removing with part of his family from Ur of the Chaldees and setting his face towards Canaan, they came however only as far as Haran, where Terah died, and there one branch of his family, his son Nahor, settled down, though we do not read that he came out of Ur with his father, but probably he followed him. Of that branch with which we are more immediately concerned, and of the occasion of their departure from Ur of the Chaldees, we read in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER XII.

IN the twelfth chapter a new page is opened in the history of God's dealing with men, and we come to the spring, the fountain-head of that river whose devious course we trace in after times to its termination in God's purposed and everlasting blessing. We have the call of Abram and the rise of that people "wonderful from their beginning hitherto," with whose history the remaining pages of the Old Testament are more or less occupied.

We learn from an after Scripture (Josh. xxiv. 2) that the descendants of Noah had fallen into idolatry even in Shem's line, they had departed from "the God of Shem," and it shows us incidentally the little value of tradition, for truth in this case had but a short traditionary journey and yet was it lost by the way. According to the Bible chronology we find (chap. xi. 10—26) that Shem and Terah were contemporaries near 300 years, and yet in Terah's time the patriarchs had fallen into idolatry; Shem was contemporary with Abram over 200 years, and yet Abram had to be called out of idolatry; and if we follow this thread a little farther, we find Adam contemporary with Methuselah near 250 years (chap. v. 4—21), Methuselah with Shem about 100 (chap. vi. 26—32),

and Shem as we have seen with Abram 200, so that there were but two connecting links of the traditionary chain from Adam to Abram, and notwithstanding how was the truth lost, and how many were the forms of error and of evil which overspread the earth, from murderous infidelity to blasphemous idolatry! Surely there was a needs be that God should interfere, and He does so, not in judgment as before but in grace. "The God of glory," we are told by Stephen, appeared to Abram, the true and glorious God in contrast to the false gods he had been serving, and here we see the fitness of the revelation to act on the mind and heart of Abram, in its being something sufficient to awaken him from his sleep among the idolaters around. God said to him, "Get thee out of thy country," all is evil and God calls His own out of it. It is His way to the children of Abram now, His word still is, "Get thee out," but ah, how slow are they to hear the God of glory! and then the world has such attractions when faith is weak. What is our Lord's estimate of the world under this present dispensation in which we are living? Read it in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, verses 4—14. What one redeeming feature does it possess? and what is God doing but calling His own out of it? and yet it is the world in which they are so busied, and which they are so unwilling to leave. God calls Abram from his country, his kindred, and from his father's house, this is trying exercise to Abram, yes, but it is the God of glory calls, he has to leave everything and he gets nothing but a promise, but then the promiser is God, the God of glory, and this is enough for him. It would have

been a poor thing, and Abram but a weak one, if he left all for man's promise, but in the reality of faith he can trust God, and act on His word when it is most repulsive to his sense and feeling. We observe here this new mode of God's acting, which often meets us after, God's calling; God's election is His own secret purpose, God's calling is the manifestation of His purpose. Idolatry was now fast spreading over the world, the heart of man manifesting what is in it in departing from the living God, and though doubtless God never left it without His faithful witnesses, such as Job and Elihu and Melchizedek, yet the ungodly flood was spreading wide and threatening to cover the earth, when God calls Abram to make him and his family the depositaries of His truth, and so to hedge them in as to keep them a separate people till Messiah should come.

The language of verse 1 is to be noticed, "The Lord *had*\* said," the call was not just then out of the land of Haran, or Charan (chap. xi. 31), but they came into the land of Charan in consequence of the previous call, as we learn from the seventh chapter of the Acts, consistently with the language used here—"The God of glory appeared unto our father Abram when he was in Mesopotamia, *before he dwelt in Charan*, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country," etc.—and Abram's taking his father and nephew seems rather the working of his natural feeling and inclination, than the result of God's call to them: many will come a certain way with the called, who never enter the land, many and diverse motives may influence

\* "Had said"—the word *הָיָה* is simply a past. The pluperfect sense was probably suggested to our translators by Stephen's speech.—Ed.

them, but it is only the call of God to one's soul that will ever bring one out of the world and into heaven. It is again to be noticed that his progress to Canaan is arrested till the death of his father, for it was not in God's purpose that Terah should get to Canaan, though it probably was in Abram's feeling—"I called him alone," says the Lord by the Prophet Isaiah, chap. li. 2. Lot indeed he does bring with him, and God allows it though He did not call him, but he is no help to Abram, only a trial—a help indeed to us, as showing us the faith of Abram in exercise, and thus God overrules many a thing for our blessing. It is a great thing and a hard thing, which Abram may not have then learned, to have our dearest natural feelings submitted to God's will. Nothing can be more true than for one bound to the kingdom to desire and labour to bring along with him those near and dear to him, but when they will not come and cannot be persuaded, then to learn submission and bow to a higher will, to fall back upon God's will in the failure of the creature, and to say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight," this is indeed the hard thing to learn and to do.

After Terah's death Abram went forth in the obedience of faith, as it is testified of him in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, and how noble a testimony it is, "He went forth not knowing whither he went," but he went in obedience to God and therefore in the guidance of God—"I will guide thee with mine eye." In the second and third verses we have the encouragement to Abram in the promises which God made to him, which are seven, the perfect number of the Scriptures, and inclusive of every thing his heart could

desire. How marked is the contrast in them to the Babel-builders of the last chapter, who said, "Let *us* build *us* a city" and "let *us* make *us* a name," it is all man's doing and therefore it is all failure and vanity, it is his effort to make himself great, he cannot rise above this poor self, but here the Lord says to Abram, "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." Such was the promise of the God of glory that loosened Abram's hold of all he held dear before, the promise which He was proving all his life, which his faithful people proved afterwards, and which we are proving now, for from Abram came that Seed, who is the true and very blessing of His people, and from Abram's seed have we the Scriptures of truth, opening to us all we know of God's mind and God's love. Oh, how unspeakable the blessing of being a true child of Abram, blessed of God, and made a blessing, and how sweet to think of the security of all this! It is all of promise, it is the "I will" of God, not the "let us" of man, and this is our inheritance by faith—"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith are blessed with faithful Abram." Well, encouraged by these precious promises Abram goes on his way, he departs as the Lord had spoken to him, with Sarah Lot and his servants and substance, and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and—blessed testimony!—"into the land of Canaan they came," but he had none inheritance in it, though he had God's promise, for the Canaanite was yet in the



land, and so it was not yet a fitting place for Abram. He had no rest in it, he moves from Sichem to Beth-el, and from Beth-el he journeys south, and is not all this typical, is it not for our instruction? What rest should the children of Abram have in this present evil world under its present possession? God graciously appears to Abram and says to him, "Unto thy seed will I give this land," and Abram in faith takes possession for his seed, "there builded he an altar unto the Lord," it was not only his thanksgiving, but it was his acknowledgment of God as the Lord of the land, and that he and his seed held under Him. What a contrast in all this to the Babel-builders of the last chapters! It is not a city or tower to perpetuate his own name that he builds, no, it is an altar to his God, he walks in faith and while he does so God is uppermost with him. From hence Abram moves from place to place as we have seen, he comes to Beth-el and here again he erects his altar and calls upon the name of the Lord; it seems that while he is in the land, wherever he abides there God has His altar, but when he departs from the land there is failure, God bid him come into the land, God did not bid him to leave it. While we are in the way of obedience we are safe, in the way of self-will there is evil and there is danger, and Abram has soon to experience this. There was a famine in the land and it tries the faith of Abram, true faith will be tried faith, and there is no faith so true, so untainted by the flesh, as always to stand the trial; the famine was grievous in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt—how often, alas! does a spiritual famine send the saints down there now. This is generally considered as his right course, and

his going to Egypt rather than returning to Charan or Mesopotamia probably was so, though Egypt it must be remembered was more convenient to him from the south of Canaan, yet I cannot however help thinking that the move was a false one, arising rather out of the weakness than the strength of his faith, and that the Lord might rebuke him, as He did his seed in after times, "What hast thou to do in the way of Egypt?" He could trust the Lord to leave his country and his kindred and to go he knew not whither, but he could not trust Him for the supply of food in the famine, though this was a time of the visible and immediate interference of God as Abram had proved. It is remarkable in the Scripture the failure of God's people in that very excellence for which they are most conspicuous, and so I think it was with Abram; our eyes must not rest too fixedly on any human example, one only will bear ever to be looked at, ever to be followed, the unfailing One, and in the deep trial of His faith, in the forty days' famine, how different was it with Him—"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Trust God, trust Him in the utter failure of all human means, rather than meet your necessity by a way contrary to His will this is the lesson of faith, but it is a lesson that we are slow to learn. We follow Abram to Egypt, but it is a different scene that meets us there, from that which we have witnessed in the land, we find no altar there unto the Lord, neither do we hear Abram calling on Him—ah, the world has a deadening influence whenever we enter it except in the way of duty! We read in verses 11—13, as he is leaving the land and nearing Egypt his sad

compact with Sarai, so savouring of worldly wisdom, so little savouring of faith, the equivoque, the prevarication, so unworthy of Abram and so unlike him, and all that it might be well with him for her sake! The atmosphere of Egypt is an unhealthy one for Abram. Sarai we read "was taken into Pharaoh's house and he entreated Abram well for her sake," but oh, how poor for one to whom God had so spoken as we read in the opening of this chapter! What is it better than the ways of unrighteousness? The world will always be the place not only of trial but of declension to a believer, when he wilfully enters into it or governs himself by its maxims or principles, and even though it may indeed treat him well after its manner, yet one true-hearted to the Lord should blush to receive such pay as the reward of unfaithfulness and disobedience. Pharaoh treats him well for her sake, God's way with another, is to treat *her* well for his sake.

In this trial into which Abram has brought himself God comes to his deliverance, He plagues Pharaoh and it seems somehow reveals the true state of things to him, and Pharaoh then reproves Abram and dismisses him and Sarai. God is a present help to him, and this story is repeated over and over again in the lives of the children of Abram; they fail and everything is lost, so far as it depends on them, and then God comes in to deliver them from the embarrassments into which their own sin or folly had led them, and so He carries on his own work through many a lapse and many a failure till He perfects it in the glory, and we have done with the sin and all its consequences for ever.

We notice in this chapter what often meets us in

the Scripture, the difference between God's biography and man's biography ; in God's Word the infirmity and transgression of His people appear, but also His unchanging faithfulness that He may have the glory, in man's word it is so often decking out the poor creature, and so drawing admiration to him, while God is in the back ground—how poor is this!—how sinful!

It is remarkable that from this call, or rather from his going down into Egypt dates the period of 430 years mentioned in Ex. xii. 40, 41 ; Gal. iii. 17, and (in round numbers) in Acts vii. 6. His seed went down in him and as Abram had no place in the land they are contemplated as in Egypt. May this his state shadow forth his heavenly inheritance? Heb. xi. 9, 10, 16.

It is also remarkable how large a portion of this brief history is allotted to the life of Abram from his call to his death, a period of 100 years, while so little is given to all the centuries from the creation to the flood, thus shadowing forth the history of the redeemed.

## CHAPTER XIII.

WE see Abram in this chapter restored to the land and restored to blessing, he comes back to the place of the altar, "even to Beth-el," and again he calls on the name of the Lord, and now he is as one who breathes a new atmosphere, he renews his strength like the eagle, and is invigorated to act as becomes the man of God. While in Egypt, as was observed, we do not read of the altar, or of his calling on God, but what we read manifests the sickly state of his soul, and it would seem as if he was settling down in Egypt, satisfied with his state, and in danger of forgetting the land and the promises of God in connection with it. This I would gather as well from his worldly prosperity, and knowing how pleasant this is to the heart, and that heart how deceitful, as also from their being no intimation of any wish on his part to leave Egypt and return to the land. But God interfered to deliver him, and though Pharaoh sent him away, and so his departure was rather forced than voluntary, yet anyhow it was a gracious deliverance.

We are always prone to be overcome by the ways of the world, while still it may be holding to a profession, but it is seldom when the world smiles upon a

saint that it will be well with his soul, it is assimilating in its tendencies, and many there are who too plainly manifest how far better it was with them when at the first—

Before His cross they found themselves,  
As strangers in the land,

than when sitting down as Abram in the attainment of the prosperity and indulgence of the world. We often do not understand God's dealings, while He is dealing with us, but anything that disturbs a mere worldly rest, and sends us back to "the place of the altar," is blessing though it may be accompanied with worldly trouble. God's love-tokens to His children are often the occasion of trouble to the flesh.

God does not call Abram out of Egypt, he had been called before from Ur of the Chaldees from among his idolatrous kin, but now God in his gracious care of Abram removes him from the place of danger to where He can meet him and commune with him and so restore him to blessing.

To resume the thread of our history, we find Abram again calling on the Lord and so renewing his strength, for this is the secret of strength, and it is not long before Abram has occasion for the exercise of it. Indeed while personally in the world we shall have occasion for the exercise of all the strength that we have of God. Abram is made to feel that the riches gathered in Egypt are not without their cross, and here strife and separation between friends are the fruit, the land is not enough for Abram and Lot with their riches, and contention arises between their servants, and that too before the idolaters of the land. It is grievous to give occasion to the enemies of the

Lord to blaspheme, and so Abram felt, he saw the danger, and he knew what the wise man has since told us, that "the beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water," and so he stays the evil torrent. How simple and affecting and self-denying is his address to Lot! "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." How single-eyed and beautiful, how befitting one who has been with the Lord! He does not plead his priority from years or relationship with his nephew, or his title to the land from the Lord; no, nothing of this kind, the honour of the Lord's name was in question by this strife before the heathen, and every other question is waived. Oh, that more of this spirit prevailed among those to whom the name of the Lord is dear! "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity"! How good for themselves, what testimony for our common Christianity to the world, and what glory to God! And just in the same proportion is strife and contention weakening to ourselves, dishonouring to God, and discreditable in the face of the world. It was a noble testimony when people said, "See how these Christians love one another," but if there is not the grace for it, if self in one or other shape be uppermost, and we know not how to forbear, then surely it is better to be instructed by Abram and separate ourselves rather than by contention and strife to weaken our strength

by the way, and give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.

The use which Lot makes of the noble and disinterested proposal of Abram does not much raise him in our estimation, he does not meet him in a like spirit, he seems quite disposed to take advantage of Abram's proposal, and so to provide well for himself. God and His honour seem uppermost with Abram, self with Lot, for a time at least, and so "he lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan that it was well-watered everywhere . . . even as the garden of the Lord," and doubtless he would hear from his herdmen a good report of the riches of the land, and so "Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east, and they separated themselves the one from the other." We know that Lot was a righteous man but we are not just told of his calling on the Lord as we are of Abram, and the silence of Scripture we must at times interpret, as well as the expression. Lot does not seem to take counsel of God in this matter, he lifted up his eyes, not to the place of the altar, but to look upon the land in its fertility and beauty, and unlike that righteous one to come, he judges by the sight of his eyes; the land to look upon was as the garden of the Lord, but here as of old the serpent had his place, and here he nurtured his brood, and here Lot speedily settled down, at leisure to repent, as many a righteous one has done since, being governed by sense rather than taking counsel of the Lord and awaiting His guidance.

It is remarkable in the retributive character of God's dealings how we are told by Peter when speaking of Lot in the second chapter of his second Epistle



that "in *seeing and hearing*" his righteous soul was vexed from day to day, the senses that governed his choice are made the instruments of his punishment, or the means through which it is administered, and so it ever will be, whatever we put or trust in the place of God will be made a curse or punishment, though for a time we enjoy ourselves in our own choice. In every difficulty or darkness let us wait upon the Lord, this is His remedy, and not the sparks of our own kindling.

Lot "pitched his tent *toward* Sodom," he does not enter it at once, but he is progressing to that place of his choice, probably influenced by a love of society; it has its attractions, and God has made us social creatures, but let us take heed as to the society we choose, knowing what an influence it exercises on us for good or for evil, and that we are impressible creatures as well as social. Of the men of Sodom we are told that "they were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly"—what a mercy to have our way so hedged up that we are not left to our own choice!

But we return to Abram after that Lot had left him, Lot did not rightly estimate the noble acting of his kinsman, his eye was on his own interest, and so he was blind to that which was for God's interest, he did not appreciate the conduct of Abram, but God did, and how consoling to think that if we do any little thing for the Lord, however hidden or slighted it be of man, the Lord sees it, and so when Lot has left the Lord said to Abram, "Lift up now thine 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. And I will make thy seed as the dust of

the earth," etc. (verses 14—17). Lot had lifted up his eyes, but it was to please himself, while Abram's eye was to the Lord, and *now* the Lord says to Abram, now is thy turn, lift up now thine eyes, and then comes the renewal of the covenant, with the additional promise of verse 16. The narrative shows us how pleasing to the Lord was the conduct of Abram—ah, nothing is lost upon Him, let it be the widow's mite or the cup of cold water! He is not indeed dependent upon us or our actings for anything, but He loves to see the fruit that tells of union with Himself and consequently trueness of heart, and that ever abounds not only to His glory, but to our own account, and dear Christian reader if you and I were more fruit-bearing branches, how much more would our God and Father be glorified in us, and how much happier should we be in Him.

We thus close the first page of the joint history of Abram and Lot, and thus far it teaches us that Lot judged by sight, and he judged wrong, and got trouble, Abram acted in faith, and he pleased God, and got blessing: Lot took care of himself and it fared ill with him, he escaped the judgment so as by fire, God took care of Abram, and he was well cared for: let us who profess to be the children of Abram, walk in the steps of the faith of our father Abram.

After this Abram removes, in obedience it would seem to the word of the Lord in verse 17, and he came and dwelt in Hebron, in the plain or groves of Mamre, "and built there an altar unto the Lord," and here we have the secret of his strong faith, even as his faith is of his obedience and blessing, it is that he has so much to do with the Lord. Here Abram abides many

years after his separation from Lot, till the judgment upon Sodom from which Lot so narrowly escaped.

Here we have the first notice of Hebron, one of the oldest cities in the world, and associated with many events in the after history of Israel; it seems to be so named here by anticipation, for the name by which it was known for a long time after this was Kirjath-Arba (Josh. xiv. 13—15).

## CHAPTER XIV.

IN this chapter we find Abram in different circumstances to any in which we have yet seen him, but still triumphing in faith. The chapter opens with a confederacy of four kings, against the king of the country which Lot had chosen for his abode and four other neighbouring kings, who we learn had been tributary to Chedorlaomer and had thrown off the yoke, whereupon he comes with his allies again to reduce them to subjection, and to punish their revolt. When reading of these kings and nations and cities of the very early ages, we must remember not to think of them just as we do of kings and nations and cities now, for the population of the globe was as yet very scanty, and these kings were but the heads of tribes of limited numbers; the five mentioned in the second verse occupied a district of about thirty miles, chiefly of mountainous country, and there may have been other kings within that space. Doubtless, Abram would be esteemed among them as a king, though he is not called so in the sacred record, God had other thoughts for Abram than making him a king now, but we see in his intercourse with the children of Heth (chap. xxiii.) that it was very much their mind of him, "Thou art a mighty prince among

us." We find the progress of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him is one of conquest, they subdue all before them, and among others the King of Sodom in whose country Lot dwelt; this is the first war we read of, and it reminds us of the word of the apostle (James iv. 1). In the twelfth verse of the last chapter we read that Lot pitched his tent *toward* Sodom, it was not a good beginning his going thither, and he does not seem to mend by the way; his substance was so great that it separated him from Abram and led him to Sodom, and herein he reminds us of the young man that turned away from the Lord Jesus, "very sorrowful for he was very rich." Lot has now to experience the bitterness of choosing for himself, of having taken his circumstances into his own hands, instead of submitting himself and his concerns to God.

In the battle of the kings those of Lot's country are worsted, and he and his goods are taken, "and there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the\* Hebrew," and now Abram again proves what it is to have to do with God. How bold it makes him toward man, how true to his friend, though the conduct of that friend was poor and selfish, and though Lot was now separated from him! But the faith of God will make us enduring of evil, and its affections absence may not blight, herein unlike too many earthly friendships. When Abram hears that his brother (or kinsman) is a captive, at once his resolution is taken, "he armed his trained servants born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen," he does not take with him those he had gotten in Egypt, but with his trusty little

\* See Appendix.

band he pursues the enemy unto Dan, the extremity of the land. He counsels not with flesh and blood, but in the energy of faith he speeds on his way, for he knew that there was no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few. What a blessed thing is this faith ! How it enables one to enter into the mind of the Lord, and to lay hold on the Lord's strength, and yet how opposed to mere excitement of mind, or mere animal courage ! Abram uses the means within his reach, and skilfully employs them, but his trust is not in them. No, he was "strong in faith, giving glory to God," this was the principle of his life, and as he was true to it, he rose over every difficulty.

Well, he overtakes this potent confederacy flushed with their success, and is entirely victorious over them. Here we have Abram in a new character, the man of peace is a warrior, for faith fits us for any exigency; he pursues them to near Damascus (and here as in the last chapter we have the first mention of one of the oldest cities in the world), and he brings back all the goods, and "his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people." Abram's is not an aggressive warfare, or if in a sense aggressive, it is the righteous aggression for the delivery of the captive, and now he returns in triumph at the head of his gallant little band of conquerors, and no wonder he is the object of interest to all around. Doubtless many a one came out to meet him, and to sound his praise for blessings received, many a child and many a parent, many a husband and many a wife, reunited through his means, or restored to their own abode in peace and quiet, and thus he was proving in a measure the promise of his faithful God, blessed and

made a blessing. Among those who came forth to meet him was the King of Sodom, and a greater than he, one surrounded with a certain air of mystery in the Scriptures, Melchizedek the King of Salem. Few scriptural questions have been more debated than who this Melchizedek was, many supposing him to be the Lord Himself thus manifested for a season, others an angel, others again the Holy Spirit personified, and others, among whom are the Jewish writers, Shem. That he was not the Lord is I think plain from the word referring to him in the seventh chapter of Hebrews "made like unto the Son of God," and the word in reference to the Lord in the same chapter, "after the similitude of Melchizedek;" "a comparison of similarity precludes identity," and Hebrews v. 1 would equally preclude the supposition of the Holy Spirit or an angel. There seems something like a purposed mysteriousness about him in the Scriptures, we read but little of him, but that little involving a great deal—"simple, calm, and great does the priestly king of the divine history come before us and depart." Here he first appears, next in Ps. cx., a word so frequently quoted or referred to in the New Testament, and lastly in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and these are the only Scriptures in which his name appears.

So far we learn from the narrative, that he was the king of a city or district called Salem, probably of a limited district of which this was the city, and which from the seventy-sixth Psalm, we have good ground to believe was Jerusalem, and this also fits in with his typical character. It is this typical character which invests him with such interest, his name implies a king of righteousness, and Salem, the place of his rule,

means peace, and in addition to this we are told that he was a priest, not of the false gods of the idolaters around, but of the Most High God, and as we learn from the Epistle to the Hebrews, he somehow shadowed forth an ever-living abiding priesthood, a priesthood of God, by Divine appointment, probably from his being so brought before us without any mention of his birth or death, his parentage or genealogy, a thing so requisite in the Aaronic priesthood. He shadows forth, probably more than any other that we read of, the official standing of Messiah in resurrection, the priest upon his throne, the throne of righteousness, and the counsel of peace, and it will help one in the understanding of the Scriptures relating to him, to observe that it is *officially* that he is the representative of Christ.\*

Melchizedek comes forth to greet Abram, and brings bread and wine to refresh him and his followers after their conquest of the kings, and in this there is nothing priestly I believe, for if there was the apostle could scarcely have failed to use it in his Epistle to the Hebrews, where he so diligently gathers up everything bearing upon the subject. It was as a king that he did so, and then as a priest he *blesses* Abram, which was one of the highest offices of the priesthood (see Lev. ix. 22, 23; Num. vi. 23; Deut. xxi. 5) and then he rolls the glory over upon God, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, and so the disposer of all things, of the battle and its spoil, of the world and its wealth. Abram acknowledges the official pre-eminence of Melchizedek by giving him tithes of all—the conqueror of kings bows before the priest of God.

\* See Appendix.



The history would seem to shadow forth the events of the latter day, the four nations in verse 1 bear much resemblance to those Gentile nations, mentioned by Daniel as possessing earthly dominion forfeited by Israel during the times of the Gentiles, then we see the victory of Israel not by might nor by power, but by the Most High God, and then the coming out of the king-priest from Zion, to bless and spread before them the fare of the kingdom. Bread and water is the wilderness fare (Gen. xxi. 14; Ex. xxiii. 25; Isa. xxxiii. 16), wine is represented as that of the kingdom (Isa. xxv. 6, and so Matt. xxvi. 29), but it may not be well to press such similitudes; of one thing we may be assured, Melchizedek is the type of Him who blesses us, and provides for us by the way, refreshing us after conflict, and who will finish His work in blessing, when He comes out in the glory at the latter day. Melchizedek passes away, but he leaves with Abram the savour of that blessed interview, and so should it ever be with a man of God.

Another and a very different king now appears, the King of Sodom making his bargain with Abram, and here again his faith is triumphant; we read that he overcame the confederate kings, but here we read of his overcoming a greater enemy, for "better . . . is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." "The King of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself;" now we know from his antecedents that these goods would have their attraction for Abram, but it may be that he remembered Egypt, and it may be, indeed it is most likely, that he knew this man of Sodom and was unwilling in any way to be indebted to him, he knew

too, how ready he would be to boast of his gifts to Abram, and so to take the glory from God (Abram's words in verse 23 seem plainly to imply as much); moreover he had been communing with the priest of the Most High God, and that interview was timely, it was in its place, and so we have his noble reply to the proposal of this King of Sodom, "I have lift up mine hand unto Jehovah, the Most High God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich."

How noble is this victory over that which so enslaves the world, and alas! not the world only, and how blessed this jealousy for God's glory, the being governed not by thoughts of self, but by thoughts of God!—but Abram has been learning of Melchizedek, and we see the result.

It is important in reading the Scriptures to observe the relative circumstances of men, that we may know how to account for the difference in the conduct of the same man at different times, which is as great as the difference between two men of opposite characters. In Egypt we read not of any calling upon God, and the silence is emphatic, Abram was turning his back unbidden upon the land into which he had been called, and observe the result, the poor, worldly-wise, prevaricating man, enriching himself in Egypt at the expense of truth and principle, and seemingly without an awakening sting of conscience. But here, who is it that we see thus triumphing on his way, in integrity, in truth, and unselfishness, rising above circumstances of danger and allurements, the master of wealth around

him and lying at his feet, and yet refusing to touch from a thread to a shoelatchet? Who is this, so altogether different in his acting from the man in Egypt? Why, the self-same Abram, but in different circumstances, Abram in faith calling upon God, and girded with might to remove the varied obstacles that oppose him in his course, and that prove such impediments to multitudes.

And is not this just what we see daily acting afresh in the children of Abram? How many do we see acting so poorly, so meanly, so selfishly, trafficking as is were with Pharaoh, and just because faith is not in exercise, they are not calling upon God, and therefore the riches of Egypt or the spoil of Babylon are uppermost with them. But follow one of these same poor weak vacillating ones, and see him with the great High Priest, and mark his faith reviving, and hear him calling upon God, and then how different a man is he! God is uppermost then, and the jealousy of his heart will be lest any one take the glory from Him. Oh, it is just as we are with the King of Salem that we gain the victory over the allurements of the King of Sodom. What an important subject is the belief and the unbelief of *believers*, and how our own soul's welfare and God's glory is concerned in it! May we have the grace to lay it to heart!

The exception of Abram in the twenty-fourth verse is a righteous one, he may dispose of what concerns himself, but he may not interfere with the rights of others.

The proposal of the King of Sodom is in accordance with Eastern custom, and would increase the title of Abram to the goods, but he will

not touch that which might call God's glory in question.

We read probably in this chapter of the first fulfilment of the denunciation against the seed of Canaan, in the servitude of the five kings to Chedorlaomer, a Shemite.

## CHAPTER XV.

IN the last chapter we found Abram triumphing in faith over his enemies within and without. What can not faith do that draws so on the resources of God, for we need ever to remember that the power of faith is not in itself, it has nothing of itself, but it leans on an arm that is omnipotent. We are not told that the King of Sodom and those around him appreciated the noble and disinterested conduct of Abram, but there was One who did, One upon whom nothing is lost that is done unto Him. Man forgets or is unobservant, but the widow's mite, or the cup of cold water, or the purpose of the heart though defeated of its object, is not lost upon that one all-seeing eye and loving heart, that it is the very preciousness of faith to have to do with, and so we find in the opening of this chapter how pleased was the Lord with the conduct of His faithful servant. "After these things the word of the Lord"—a new revelation of Himself it would seem, for in the last chapter it was "the Most High God," but here, "the word of the Lord," the personal distinct from the written word—"came unto Abram in a vision saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." How gracious is this revelation, and how specially suited to the circumstances

of Abram, and moreover how compensative in its character! Abram would have cause for fear, doubtless those kings he vanquished would not soon forget their defeat or loss, and would welcome any opportunity to rally against him, and then those around would be jealous of this stranger in the land, so prospering and spreading himself abroad, and they might be slow to acknowledge his title. Abram would be alive to all this, and therefore the word is, "fear not, Abram," he did not fear to go against these enemies of the Lord, and the Lord will not have him to fear from them. What a word it is for faith to rest on, and wherefore is it that we do fear, but because of our little faith? But what is the reason of this "fear not"? He has God's word for it, he has more, he has the special and appropriate revelation to dispel fear, amid so much to fear, "I am thy shield," this is the response of God to Abram, and who may break through that mighty buckler to injure Abram? Observe, it is not, I will provide thee a shield or defence, but "I, thy shield," God, His own ever blessed self, with all His attributes, His wisdom, love, and power, are arrayed on behalf of Abram, yes, and on behalf of all the children of Abram securing their eternal safety and blessing.

But let us further look at this revelation of the Lord. Abram would not take from a thread to a shoelatchet, lest this King of Sodom should say, "I have made Abram rich," and so take the glory from God, and now observe God's appreciation of Abram's conduct: "I am . . . thy exceeding great reward." God was not only his protection, but God was his portion, and what more did Abram need? What

security, what provision, what enjoyment, does this gracious revelation of God contain within it, for every one who has the faith to receive it, and will not this be the growing experience of God's growing children, that their exceeding blessedness is not what God gives, but that He, His own blessed Self, better than all His gifts, is their everlasting portion?

Abram is encouraged by this promise to plead with God for what was very near to his heart, and what was involved in God's promises to him (verses 2, 3\*) and again the Word of the Lord comes to him, assuring him of an heir in direct descent from himself, "And He brought him forth abroad, and said, 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." How strange and unlikely a promise to the childless old man, but it is the word of the Lord, and this is enough for Abram, enough for faith to rest on. How fitting too is the recompence here!—he who waited patiently for the seed gets the promise that his seed shall be as the stars in number. In the thirteenth chapter, when God was so pleased with the conduct of Abram in yielding the choice of the land to Lot, rather than that any dissensions among their servants should be witnessed by the idolaters around, the appropriate terms in the renewal of the covenant were (verses 15, 16), "all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of

\* It has been supposed that the case of Eliezer, the heir of Abram, was suggestive of the thought in Luke xvi. 22, etc. Lazarus is the same name as Eliezer, Græcised, and the nearness of the latter to Abram would seem to countenance the idea.

the earth," or of the land (for it is the same word as in the preceding verse), but here, when he has lifted up his hand to the most High God, the possessor of *heaven* and earth, it is no longer thy seed shall be as the dust, but in more fitting imagery, as the stars of heaven. It is well to note these minute details in the volume of God, there are no vain or make-weight words here as in other books, but everything has its meaning, and the discovery of the accuracy and fitness and beauty of each word, which exists I believe to a degree but little thought of, is the reward of diligence. A lively fancy may indeed find many things, where a more sober mind will be at fault, and while we watch against the flights of imagination, still more let us guard against the caution of a cold, reasoning mind; it is better to stray with imagination than err with unbelief, to err in the faith than from it. But God leaves us not to a choice of evils, if we follow on our way in subjection to Him, He will keep us, beset though we may be by the snares of a reasoning or an imaginative mind, each of value in its own way, and each exposed to abuse in its own way.

It is on this occasion that that record is given of Abram, which the Apostle Paul so uses for the furtherance of his object in his Epistle to the Romans, "he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness," showing us the one and only way of justification since man has become a fallen creature.

Two things I would note on this record, first, that it was not Abram's faith considered by itself



(if such a thing were possible, which indeed it is not, for faith cannot exist without an object, if we believe, we must believe something), not his belief but the thing which he believed, which brought him the blessing. It was no merit in his faith that procured him the blessing, for if it was, then it follows that his justification depended, in part at least, upon something in himself, something wherein he differed from others, and then of course it ceases to be wholly gratuitous, or of grace, and so it ceases to be secure. But in the chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, wherein the Apostle argues this point, he shows (chap. iv. 16) that it was "of faith, that it might be by grace," or in order (*iva*) to its being of grace, and this "to the end the promise might be sure." Alter this one jot, and everything is lost, the introduction of anything meritorious however slight, even in the faith itself, takes from the gratuity of grace if one may so speak, and so takes from the security of the promise. It can only be secure, while it is altogether dependent on God, and altogether independent of man; faith receives it, and that is just faith's part in *justification*.

Now Abram believed God just up to the measure that God was pleased to reveal to him Himself and His purpose, His purpose of blessing in his seed, which from the 3rd of Galatians we learn had reference to Christ, and so Abram's faith had reference to Christ, however dimly he may have seen Him. He believed God as his God, accepting and blessing him, and so he was blessed; his faith received the blessing that God promised, and so he was blessed, and this is just the value and working of

faith, it trusts God for what He promises, it receives what He gives, and whether the blessing be the subject of promise, or the record of what is past, as in the great truths of the first and second coming of Christ, faith takes it on the credit of God's word, and so enters into the blessing, faith substantiates the blessing, it realizes it to the believer, it knows its happy lot, and so goes on its way rejoicing.

The second observation which I would make on this record is the simple but effective refutation it affords of the perilous perversion of that word of the Apostle James, chap. ii. 21. James shows the reality of Abram's faith, it was not a mere profession, one *saying* "I have faith" (see verses 14, 16, 18), while his life denies it, no, but it was the living fruit, which showed where the root was, it was faith which had to do with God, and so was manifested before man, and the instance which the apostle selects in verse 21 as the most glorious example indeed of the obedience of faith, but which has often been perverted by those ignorant of the truth to show that he was justified by his works, did not take place for some forty years after the date of this record of his justification by faith. If man's justification be of his works, as some have asserted missing the drift of James's argument, then strange indeed is the character of the works which are adduced as possessing the merit to justify him, the slaying of a son and the betrayal of one's country! If we consider these acts as the expression of faith in obedience to God, all is plain and nothing can be more noble, for they were the sacrifice to God of all that was nearest and dearest, but if we look upon them as the good works, voluntarily undertaken, to

recommend the doers of them to God, then what can be more monstrous?

The vast importance of this subject will excuse my thus dwelling upon it. It is the first time that it formally comes before us in the Scriptures, and from its continued bearing upon the peace and well-being of a child of God, it is most needful to guard against mistakes.

To return to our narrative, in the seventh verse God again graciously encourages Abram by the promise of the land, and whether it was that from this encouragement, Abram would gratify a lawful desire to satisfy his mind, or whether, his faith not being quite sustained, he would indulge a very natural curiosity, may not be quite apparent. I incline to the latter view, and the more so that while God accedes to his request, it retributively meets with its own punishment in the horror of great darkness (verses 12, 13), and the knowledge of the long affliction of the seed he so much coveted. How much wiser and happier to leave coming events in God's hands! God promised him, ought he not to have rested in the promise as in verse 6, without this "whereby shall I know?" There are many ways of tempting God, but unbelief more or less is at the root of them all. It seems much like the failure of that righteous man in Luke i. 18—there was the distinct promise to Zacharias, but there was on his part also, the "whereby shall I know." Even in the best there is still some remainder of unbelief.

In the covenant which God makes to assure Abram of the land, according to his request, it is remarkable that he is ordered to provide all the animals, after-

wards appointed for sacrifice by the Levitical law, and herein he is obedient, everything is set in order, and now he waits and watches, till God come down and confirm the covenant.

Abram had spent the whole day it would seem in this work with God, for the first revelation from God to him was in the night or before sunrise (verse 5), then he had to provide and prepare the victims for the covenant, and then he had to watch and drive away the fowls that came down upon the carcasses, symbolic it may be of our great hinderer in communion with God (Matt. xiii. 4, 19), and then, when the sun was going down, and he was overcome with watching and weariness, a deep sleep fell on him, it may have been supernatural, and "an horror of great darkness," symbolic it would seem of the destiny of his seed. God now answers his "whereby shall I know," in the words "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." Here is the servitude and affliction in Egypt foretold (not indeed for four hundred years, which would be contrary to fact, but this difficulty is removed by reading the verse with a parenthesis as above), and after this God's judgment is declared on the nation that afflicted them, and their deliverance with great substance. But long before this took place, Abram should depart to the world of spirits, as we must interpret the going to his fathers, seeing that he was not buried with any of them. Two marks of God's favour there were in his death, it was to be "in peace," and "in a good old age," "as a shock of corn cometh in its season," which was in that dispensation a token of favour. In

the sixteenth verse we have the cause of the retardation of the possession of the land by his seed for so long a period, "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full," and so the land is not ready for His own favoured people. God will not dispossess the present inhabitants till they have filled up the measure of their sin, and may no longer be borne with, they have their time for repentance in God's long-suffering, even as the inhabitants of the antediluvian world. His ways are righteousness and truth towards all, and tender mercy and loving kindness towards His own people, towards all who will submit to Him, and so till the time came which God foreknew, Israel must be a servant in a strange land, or a wanderer in the wilderness. This intervening period of 400 years must either be taken, as expressed in round numbers here and in Acts vii. 6, to agree with the 430 years of Ex. xii. 40 and Gal. iii. 17, or if taken literally then it dates from about the birth, or rather the weaning, of Isaac, and the mocking of Ishmael. Isaac was the first fruits of the promised seed, Ishmael was the descendant of the Egyptian, and so his mockery at the weaning may be taken to shadow forth the persecution in Egypt (see Gal. iv. 29). It is remarkable that Scripture contemplates Israel in Egypt from Abram's first going down there, till the Exodus, just 430 years, though in point of fact Israel was there but half the time, or 215 years, and not one-fourth of that time under persecution (see Acts vii. 17, 20). From the promise to Abram in chapter xii., shortly after which he went down to Egypt, to the birth of Isaac, was 25 years, from the birth of Isaac to the birth of Jacob was 60 years, and from the birth of Jacob to his going down with the

patriarchs to Egypt was 130 years, making just 215 years, or half the time assigned to the sojourn of the children of Israel in Egypt (Ex. xii. 40, and Gal. iii. 17). The reason why Scripture contemplates them in Egypt from Abram's first going down there, may be that they had no place of their own in the interval, the land was not yet ready for them, and till in possession of the land they are as strangers in Egypt, and then there appears in the short sojourn of Abram in Egypt something typical of the sojourn of his seed afterwards. Doubtless however Abram failed, and fail he did, still he was a sufferer in Egypt, he would be so if it was only because of Sarai, then we see the plaguing of Pharaoh on his account, and afterwards his coming out with great substance, and this was just the history of his seed towards the close of their sojourn in Egypt. Moreover Scripture contemplates them while there as in suffering, for though God may give rest and favour anywhere, and so the period of Israel's actual suffering was under a hundred years at the close of their sojourn in Egypt, yet Scripture looks upon Egypt as the place of suffering to God's people, whose rest is in the land—"in the world ye shall have tribulation." But if any one be dissatisfied with this view of the difficulty, then it may be removed (as said before on p. 145) by reading the clause in the thirteenth verse concerning the servitude and affection in a parenthesis—for this there seems to be authority in the original, and thus all is made straight.

The seventeenth verse has generally been felt to be a difficulty. It represents God, I believe, as ratifying the promise which He graciously made to Abram in verse 7; Abram would know the certainty of this,

and so God confirms by covenant what He had said. The first and chief object of the Lord here is I believe to assure Abram of the land in answer to his question in verse 8. God's word did not seem quite to satisfy Abram on this occasion, and so he asks for a sign, and God gives him a sign in a vision of the suffering of his seed in a strange land, and then His judgment on their persecutors, and finally His bringing them out with great substance to take possession of the land, and then the Lord in symbol ratifies the covenant, by passing through the divided parts of the victims which Abram had made ready. This was the mode of ratifying a covenant, as we see in Jer. xxxiv. 18, 19. The Lord alone is I believe symbolized by the smoking furnace and burning lamp, for it is His covenant alone to assure Abram, Abram was not a party in the covenant, else he also should have passed through the pieces.

The symbols of the divine presence, are the smoking furnace (or rather "oven," as the word means, and is mostly translated), and the burning lamp, just as the fire and the cloud were the usual symbols of the presence of God, of His favour and protection to His people, and of judgment to His enemies. So it was in Sodom, Gen. xix. 24—28, so in the coming out of Egypt, Ex. xiii. 21, and xiv. 24, so at Sinai, Ex. xix. 16—18, and xxiv. 16, 17, so also in the rearing of the tabernacle, Ex. xl. 33—38, in the consecration of the temple, 1 Kings viii. 10, 11, and in the acceptance of the offerings of Moses and Gideon and Manoah, Lev. ix. ; Judges vi. and xiii., and so it will be in the latter day, Isa. ix. 5, xxxi. 9, lxvi. 16 ; Mal. iv. 1, etc., etc. And so the symbol would seem

in the present instance to represent God ratifying the promise of the land to His people, and judgment to their persecutors. The passage has usually been considered as typifying the affliction in Egypt and the light that was to follow, and this agrees well with the connection, but it loses sight of the notion of the covenant. This transaction had not I believe any relation to what is usually called the Abrahamic covenant, the promise of blessing in the seed, and the righteousness of faith, but seems to have reference only to the land, and is the covenant to which Nehemiah refers (ix. 8). The former which we find in chap. xii., and then repeated in chap. xiii., in the beginning of this chapter, and in chaps. xvii. and xxii., remained the subject of promise, and was ratified only on Calvary. In the eighteenth and following verses we have the substance of the covenant, the promise of the land which was verified by it and the boundaries defined, with the idolatrous nations possessing it. It was not possessed to this extent by Joshua, and scarcely even by Solomon, but it will yet be by that seed to whom the Lord says "I have given this land," for He "calleth those things that be not, as though they were." And so it will be in the latter day, when Israel shall yet arise and possess the land according to the boundaries promised of old to Abram.

Before leaving this chapter, it may be well to observe the fulness of the revelation of God which it contains—The Lord, Jehovah, the Lord God, the Word of the Lord, the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of Chaldees, the Lord covenanting the land to him, thy shield, thy exceeding great reward—what blessed food for faith to feed on!



## CHAPTER XVI.

THE life of a believer is a chequered scene,

Some moments on a throne of love,

but ah, how sudden his descent into the valley of humiliation! It is remarkable how universal is the testimony of all the Lord's people to this fact, and how the history of those who are at rest confirms it. It is owing to the hostility or contrariety of the natures which are united in him, and as the one or other of these is uppermost or in exercise, so will the state of the believer be—how important in this view of the subject is that word, Gal. vi. 8! This we see manifested in the case of Abram, the type and father of the faithful, the one so favoured of God, and yet proving so plainly that he carried about with him a body of sin and death.

We have seen him triumphing over every enemy, while his soul was with God: "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me," saith the Lord, pleading with Israel, "I should soon have subdued their enemies." This is power and this is victory, hearkening unto the Lord, it is one of the many phases of faith; this is often the attitude of Abram, and how happy and encouraging to contemplate him then, as we find him in the last chapter, but not as in this, hearkening unto

Sarai when he should not, and so comes failure and affliction. Abram had now been ten years in the land, his age was eighty-five, ten years since God had promised him a seed, once and again that promise had been repeated, and the delay in its fulfilment seemed not in anywise to shake the faith of Abram. But not so with Sarai, she was impatient we find at the delay, the language is that of a discontented woman and this is occasioned by the failure of her faith. She acknowledges God indeed in verse 2, but she could not wait His time for the accomplishment of His word, and so she has recourse to her own devices to effect His purpose, a fruitful source of sin and sorrow to God's people.

It may indeed be said for her that at her time of life—she was now seventy-five—there was little hope of her becoming a mother, and she may have thought that the promise to Abram (it was given to him and not to her) must be fulfilled in some other; still it was unbelief, it was considering her own body, rather than the promise and power of God. Abram we are told, hearkened to the voice of Sarai, here was his failure, and it resembles that of the first man—the common father of our race, and the father of the faithful alike sin by hearkening to their wives rather than to God. He should have instructed, counselled, or exhorted her, as the need might be, but no, he hearkened to her, he did not what he ought to do, and he did what he ought not to do. He did what was pleasing to the flesh, and here it may be we see how the evil of his journey to Egypt follows him and his acquisitions there. Hagar was an Egyptian, one of those maid-servants, we may suppose, bestowed upon Abram by

Pharaoh, her name which is Hebrew ("flight") was given by her new possessors either in reference to her departure from Egypt, or overruled by God, as is often the case, in reference to her future history; she was however the occasion of trouble to Abram and Sarai, as her seed was to their seed.

So Sarai took Hagar, "and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife"—so simply is it told as if to expose the evil. It was great failure in both of them, but God's promise does not therefore fail, if it did no promise would stand; however man fails, God is un-failing, His purpose in the seed nothing can frustrate, and so we do not lose the promise, but we tack trouble to it—a believer may not lose his life, for that is hid in Christ, but he often loses his peace, and his help by the way, by his unfaithfulness. Hagar conceived by Abram, and, as was natural to expect, she was elated, and looked down upon Sarai, "her mistress was despised in her eyes," and then follows Sarai's resentment, and Abram must bear the vent of her chafed and peevish spirit, she meets with the suitable punishment for tempting Abram, and he for submitting to the temptation. She is now reaping the fruit of her device, but she does not take the blame to herself, "My wrong be upon thee" is her language to Abram, and further she appeals to God, "The Lord judge between me and thee"—what bitter fruit to herself and others has come of that root of unbelief!

Abram yields to Sarai and submits poor Hagar to her harsh treatment; he seems indeed from different occurrences in his life, to be of a yielding disposition, this is often the failing with men of amiable character, and often from the same motive which here seems to in-

fluence Abram—for peace' sake—but when we yield what is right from such a motive, we can only expect that it will lead to evil and eventually to increased trouble.

Sarai dealt hardly with Hagar, she afflicted her, and she flees from her angry mistress towards her own country, and now by a fountain of water in the wilderness, the angel of the Lord found her. How simple and how sweet is the record! The Lord—for it was Himself—found the poor suffering outcast, and speaks to her good words and comforting, she was disobedient it is true, and failed in the respect that was due to her mistress, but she was in trouble, and moreover she was connected with Abram, and so the Lord finds her and counsels her in His pity. It is remarkable that he addresses her, as Abram also does in verse 6, as Sarai's maid, not as Abram's wife, so that as the wife of Abram she was not on a par with Sarai, she was an inferior wife, a kind of concubine, and this did not loose her from her bondage to Sarai. This angel says to her, "Hagar, Sarai's maid," He knew her name and all about her, but yet he asks her, "Whence camest thou and whither wilt thou go?" The question would be suggestive to her mind, she answers only the first part, whether she was slow to answer more, or that He took her up on this first part as sufficient, we know not, but very observable is His answer, "Return to thy mistress and submit thyself under her hands." How different is this from the counsel of the philanthropist! He judges from the affections of a fallen nature, and so would probably have helped her in her flight, but what is this but to take the case into our own hands, and so out of the Lord's? The Lord counsels

submission, He will not encourage her in the slighting of authority, but will teach her that her remedy is with Himself. She may have little thought that in the hours of suffering, which her own conduct to Sarai chiefly brought on her, there was One who saw it all, and who felt for her, and could help her, and who followed her into the wilderness, and found her by the fountain of water, but surely if there was simple trust in God in our trials and sufferings, either God would soften the heart of those who were evil disposed towards us, or give us the patience to bear the trial, and so turn it into a blessing. We are not told what the result was as to her reception, but we may easily suppose that it would be favourable. Abram would of course be kind to her, and now that Sarai's anger had spent itself, and that she felt the loss of her maid, and the disappointment in her hope about the seed, doubtless she would be glad of the return of Hagar, and Hagar from her interview with the Lord and her experience of the desert would learn not to carry herself so proudly towards her mistress, and probably too that it was better to be with the Lord's people notwithstanding all their infirmities, than in the rest or favour of the world without them. Thus they would go on together till another occasion made the flame to break forth afresh, and led to a final separation between handmaid and mistress. The Lord then encourages her with the promise of a numerous offspring, "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly;" we do not read of her having any son but the one, but what a progeny has come of him! Hagar here receives from the Lord the same promise that was made to Abram and not to Sarai, and then the strange son she was carrying is

announced, or rather the strange progeny of that son, "thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael," a name expressive of the Lord's having heard her, we do not read of any prayer going up from her, but her silent misery appealed to the Lord, He "hath heard *thy affliction*." This is the first instance of a name being given before the birth of the child, but everything concerning this remarkable child, or rather his progeny, is out of common order. "He will be a wild man," or rather, "a *wild-ass* man," as the word is translated wherever else it occurs in the Scriptures, and the description given of this animal in the thirty-ninth chapter of Job shows how like it is in its habits to the descendants of Ishmael. "He will be a wild man"—one much among them has said there is no word he would rather use to characterize this people than "wild," roving at large through the desert, scorning every attempt at dominion or restraint, attacking all whom they may overtake, and defending themselves when attacked with indomitable courage, preserving their independence amid the repeated efforts to subdue them made by surrounding nations who suffer from their depredations. The "wild man" with his hand against every man and every man's hand against him, and yet dwelling in the presence of his brethren, with a tenacity of national existence, with a perseverance and perpetuity that neither the warfare of enemies around, nor their own frequent intestine contests can destroy, their tented habitations, their food, their costume, everything bespeaking them a peculiar people—how strange, how unaccountable it is to find such a people now existing, near four thousand years after the description here given of them,

carrying about with them the marks and features foretold by the Lord to that poor outcast handmaid in the wilderness before the birth of her child, their first ancestor, the first of that peculiar race! How incredible on any other ground than this, that the book of Genesis was written by inspiration of God!

This gracious interview seems to have brought a blessing with it to poor Hagar, she acknowledges God, and acknowledges His goodness and compassion to her, "she called the name of the Lord that spake to her," that angel-Lord, "Thou God seest me." He saw her in her affliction, and He pitied and helped her, this was Hagar's faith, this should be our faith, happy quieting faith, in trials and afflictions, far, far beyond any device or effort of our own or others to help and comfort us. Hagar adds, "Have I also here looked *after* Him that seeth me?"—it may be as Moses looked after the Lord, her language is like His word to him in Ex. xxxiii. 23—and she names the well after the interview. Doubtless this was an era in the life of Hagar, and often she would remember in after life, the fountain in the wilderness, and the converse with that mysterious stranger, who knew so well all about her, and so well how to deal with her case. We find that Hagar was obedient to the Lord, she returned to her mistress, and got the first fruit of the promise in the birth of her child, which in obedience to the Lord she called Ishmael.

This passage of the history, if read in the light of after Scripture (Gal. iv.), may adumbrate what was future, and so it would be a mystery. Ishmael was before Isaac, that which was after the flesh before that which was of the spirit, the law came in before

the gospel ; if this be so, there may be a reason for the title the Lord here assumes, "the angel of the Lord,"—the Lord gave the law by the ministry of angels.

We find Abram was eighty-six when Hagar bear Ishmael to him, and he had to wait fourteen years longer for the promised seed ; probably his assent to Sarai's device to effect in the flesh, that for which he should have waited on God, did but retard the fulfilment of the promise—our devices do not help God.



## CHAPTER XVII.

THIRTEEN YEARS pass away, before we again hear of Abram—it is a long time—how was it with him? Did he go on his way in the integrity of his heart, at times feeling what a poor thing that heart was, and how little to be trusted, and at times knowing the presence and blessing of the Lord to sustain and comfort him on his way, or does the long silence intimate something of a spiritual slumber, some reserve on the Lord's part, as if the thing that Abram did displeased Him, and as if the Spirit had no record to make concerning him? I rather incline to the latter view, and think that the appearance and address of the Lord in the first verse of this chapter, was to awaken Abram, and restore him to communion with Himself.

It was when Abram was ninety-nine years old, that the Lord appeared and said to him, "I am the Almighty God, walk before Me and be thou perfect"—would not the words imply that this had not been his state previously? He had listened to Sarai, when it was evil to do so, and was governed by her impatient spirit, he had not set the Lord before him and walked with integrity as in His presence, but now God is about to favour him with increased manifestation of

His grace and goodness, and so He calls him into a state where He can meet and bless him.

It is an important word, this first verse, for those who desire to follow after holiness, it is akin to, but somewhat different from, the word of our Lord in the sixteenth Psalm. There the thought is setting the Lord before us, but here it is our being before the Lord, walking in the sense of His presence, and under His eye. Again it is different from the testimony to Enoch and Noah, they walked *with* God, Abram is to walk *before* Him. They are indeed all akin but the former seems necessary unto the latter, we cannot walk before Him, or so subdue our wills to His as to set Him before us, but as we get strength in walking with Him. Abram might say from self-knowledge and past experience, even as the holiest child of Abram might now say, Lord how can I walk before Thee, I who am so weak and failing? The reply is at hand, even with the command, "I am the Almighty God," El Shaddai, God's almightiness is engaged for the help of His people, and is anything too hard for Him? We fail, not for want of help in Him, but because we turn from Him or forget Him, and so it was with Abram, when he hearkened to Sarai.

It is not God's way, to ask of His people anything for which He does not help them, He is not as the earthly master (Ex. v. 6—8) and so this revelation, made now for the first time, comes in most appropriately. Abram could not well tell us of his own obedience to this word of the Lord, but we learn it indirectly from the statement of his house steward (in chap. xxiv. 40), which we shall have occasion afterwards to consider.

In the second verse we have again the promise of the covenant with Abram, which after the long lapse of any recorded communion with God might be needed to raise him up, and restore his soul. Abram we find "fell on his face," and thus "God talked with him;" wondrous grace! And yet in his previous and later interviews with God we read not of this position, he seems to have had more of liberty and holy confidence, may it not be a passing indication of his soul's strangeness with God for a long season? The Lord then repeats the covenant before promised in chapters xii., xiii., xv., but here with increased revelation, and with a confirmatory sign, which indeed He calls His covenant, and with the change of his name and Sarai's, and the promise of a son by Sarai. The increased revelation we have in the sixth and seventh verses, "I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee," and we know how this was fulfilled in the many descendants of Abram, in the different nations and kings that arose among his posterity, not only those of Judah and Israel, but the several descendants of Ishmael, the Saracenic kings, and the kings of Edom, etc. Then comes the promise "to be a God unto thee and thy seed after thee," the most blessed promise of the covenant, and which secured it all, a promise connecting it with that made to his ancestor Shem. The Lord changes his name from Abram to Abraham, the former signifying a high father, "father of elevation," the latter probably "father of a multitude," and so the high father becomes the father of a multitude, the father of a happy laughing seed that would make others laugh for joy. The change is effected by the addition of one Hebrew letter, (n)

taken as some suppose from the noun (רַבּוּ) expressing "multitude," but it is a very old view that it is from the great name, "Jehovah." This change of name became common in after times; we find our Lord giving that name to Peter which, as on the present occasion, was an indication of something in his character or history, and so the "new name" which belongs to all the new creatures in Christ.

In the ninth verse God imposes upon Abraham the observance of His covenant, and this we find in verses 10—14 was in reference to the rite of circumcision, the appointment of which immediately follows. It was a positive institution which could not have been originated but by revelation, and however early other nations may have had it, it was from Israel they got it. It was both a sign and seal, as the apostle teaches in Rom. iv., the token of the covenant, and by it Pharaoh's daughter would know that the babe in the ark of bulrushes was one of the Hebrew children. It was the door of entrance into the enclosure of Israel, and no one might partake in the great Jewish festivals without it (Ex. xii. 48). Abraham's natural posterity were the seed, the Israel according to the flesh, and into this Gentiles were incorporated by circumcision, and so spiritually the spiritual seed were of Abraham's descendants, and among them Gentile believers were engrafted, Acts x., and thus Eph. ii. 15, etc. It was of course peculiar to the male, in whom the woman is represented, as the man is the head of the woman, and probably with a reference to Christ (Col. ii. 11). It moreover had a figurative import, which we learn from Deut. x. 16, xxx. 6, and Rom. ii. 28. It would seem the occasion

of giving names to children from Luke i. 59, ii. 21. God attached such importance to this institution, that the wilful neglect of it was to be retributively visited with excision—it was contempt of the covenant.

In the fifteenth verse we have the name of Sarai changed to Sarah, not by the addition of a letter, but by the change of the last letter of the name. The meaning of the change is more obscure than that of Abraham's name, but it seems to be to the more general appellation of "princess," from the more particular of "my princes." Then the special blessing is given to Sarah, "I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her," and as God had promised to make Abraham a father of nations, so He says of Sarah, "She shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her." This was wonderful considering that Sarah was now an old woman, nearly ninety, but the Lord is the Almighty God, and this is the revelation of Himself in this chapter to meet every difficulty.

We see in the seventeenth verse how Abraham was affected by all this goodness of the Lord, he "fell upon his face and laughed," the expression it would seem of his reverence and his joy, godly fear and godly joy, blessed fruits of faith in faithful Abraham! Reading this verse in connection with John viii. 56 would lead one to think that Abraham in this promise had some foresight of the Christ; "he was glad," as our Lord tells us in the gospel, the expression of the way in which he was here affected.

Abraham encouraged by God's graciousness pleads for Ishmael, he was his son and he must feel for him, and probably heretofore he may have thought that it

was on him the promises rested, for it is not until this interview that God promises a son by Sarah, and Abram may have thought in the conflict of his soul that Ishmael, whom now he would know as the son of his sin and unbelief, might be taken to make way for the promised seed, and so his petition, "O that Ishmael might live before thee." Doubtless this parental feeling is pleasing to the Lord, and this confidence towards Himself, and so God tells him in reply more fully about this son He promised, and tells him the name he should be called, Isaac, whom Sarah was to bear, the one against the course of nature, the one with whom and whose seed the everlasting covenant was to be established. In all this he is the opposite of Ishmael, but for him too God has a blessing—what an encouragement for parents to plead for their children! Ishmael is then blessed with the promise of great increase and fruitfulness, his twelve princes are promised, and he too is to be a great nation, but again the Lord reverts to Isaac. There must be no mistake in this, Isaac is His object, the covenant is with him, and now the Lord tells him when he is to get this child of promise, "which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year." And now God having revealed His mind and accomplished His object with Abraham, "left off talking with him" and "went up."

In the concluding verses of the chapter we have the account of Abraham's obedience, the obedience of faith, and if it be the true view of his case which we have taken in the opening of the chapter, then truly here we find him restored. Always as he has to do with God, so he shines, it is the common history of all

the saints—why do we witness so much of self, and so much of lapsing among the Lord's people, but because they so fail of communion with Him? God went up from Abraham, and "*in the self-same day, as God had said unto him,*" so did Abraham. He ninety-nine years old! his son Ishmael thirteen, then those gotten in Egypt (who were not already circumcised, as they would have been had circumcision been practised there), all the men of his house without distinction, were circumcised as God had said unto him.

How beautiful this ready obedience! It was a strange rite, if one would reason on it, it was painful, it might be dangerous, but no matter, God had said it, and this was enough for the man of God. He kept the covenant (verse 9), the sign of it, and God made it a seal; we learn from the reasoning of the Apostle in the fourth of Romans, that it was a seal of the righteousness of the faith which Abraham had being uncircumcised, it was not that righteousness, nor had it anything to do with the procuring of that righteousness, which was altogether a faith-righteousness, but it was given by God as a token of His good pleasure to Abraham, a sign to seal visibly to him the covenant blessing which He had previously promised, but it is to be kept clearly distinct in our minds from the blessing itself, even as we here see it, and as the Apostle reasons. God's blessing is not dependent on an ordinance, though an ordinance may be a seal of the blessing, or a sign of him who has received it; the blessing is what God only can give, and as we know, what He does give, and *without* the ordinance; an ordinance is what a creature can administer, and as we know, what he does administer, and in multitudinous cases with-

out blessing, so much so indeed that the blessing *with* the ordinance is the exception and not the rule. God indeed may, and I believe often does, use an ordinance, as in the case of the Lord's Supper, as a channel of blessing to the soul, God can use anything, but in the present instance, as in the case of the baptised in the New Testament, we find that God's order is the blessing, the life or righteousness, first, the ordinance after, when it is a seal, not a sign, and when we subvert this and make the ordinance the primary thing, is it not to subvert God's order? Let us not slight, but honour the ordinance, for it is of God, but let us use it for what He has given it, and not put it out of its place, and this we seem to do when we put it between us and God, or when we rest in it apart from that for which it was given. What would it have been to Abraham without that righteousness which his faith laid hold on, though it was very sweet to him as the token of God's approval, and God's seal to his faith of the righteousness which he had before he was circumcised, but when one clings to it without the faith, or the righteousness that is of faith, what is it then but a form without life, a sign without meaning, a mere Nehushtan?

I dwell the longer on this because of the tendency of many and devout minds to follow in this track, to rest satisfied with a religious observance when there is nothing more, but what is this but a subtle device to give rest without life, or to extinguish life where it exists, to engender the Pharisaism that makes religion to consist in mere outward observance, instead of its being a thing of the heart, the healthy exercise of life within? Nothing can be clearer than the little



value the Apostle attaches to the outward rite of itself (see Rom. ii. 28, 29 ; 1 Cor. vii. 19 ; Gal. v. 6) and nothing should be more settled in one's mind, than the valuelessness of any rite as a thing to lean on, after experience has proved that it is but an empty form unaccompanied by that which alone gives it value. There is but little mention made of circumcision in the Scriptures after this, which would seem to intimate the Lord's mind to keep them from resting on the rite.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

IN that remarkable chapter, the eighth of Proverbs, where wisdom is personified, the attribute merging in the person, somewhat it may be as we find the "Word" in Heb. iv. 12, 13, and where the Person so presented to us is manifestly the Son of God, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity (as we see by comparing Luke xi. 49 with Matt. xxiii. 34, and also from 1 Cor. i. 30) we find this remarkable testimony at the thirtieth verse, "I was by Him as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in the habitable parts of His earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." It is especially to this last clause I refer, which teaches us, as I think, that in the various manifestations of God to men in the Old Testament times, it was the second Person who was so manifested, the One who declares or reveals God to us, and teaches us further—wondrous truth as it is—His delight with the sons of men. How difficult as we contemplate man, but how easy when we contemplate God, to believe the delight of goodness in diffusing itself, in imparting of its own blessedness! And so it is, as I take it, that at the opening of this chapter as of the last, the same blessed record greets us, "The Lord appeared unto "

Abraham, indeed the whole chapter shows us the Lord's pleasure in this intercourse with Abraham His friend, and, as I believe, not with him only, but with us "who walk also in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised." True indeed this is not a dispensation of personal manifestation, but a saint of God living in fellowship with the Father and the Son, will often be as assured of the visits of the Lord and consequently of His presence as though he saw Him with his eyes.

It would seem in Abraham's case that this visit occurs at but a short interval from the last; before the last there seems a long and dreary period, void of intercourse between God and Abraham, his acting displeased God, while he pleased himself, but here God seems pleased with the ready obedience of Abraham involving as it did the cross to himself, and so He speedily appears to him again. This is I believe what is daily going on in the lives of the saints, obedience is always pleasing to the Lord, true obedience is the expression of love, it is love in exercise, as love again is the fruit of faith—how can we love one we know not, and how can we know God but by faith? (Heb. xi. 6).

The appearance of the Lord here is different from, or more detailed than, any previous appearance, and the narrative is given with that sweet and primitive simplicity that is its own recommendation to an unsophisticated mind. Abraham sat at his tent door in the heat of the day probably under the shade of one of the oaks of Mamre, while other tents for his numerous household were standing apart, for with such a tribe as his, an encampment rather than a tent

would be required. "He lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him," they were strangers to him—for doubtless it is to this occasion the apostle refers in Heb. xiii. 2—and he was now an old man in his hundredth year, but "when he saw them, he ran to meet them," with the courtesy of a man of God, and with the ready attention of a true-hearted hospitality. Hospitality indeed was the necessity as well as the virtue of these times and regions, as it is still practised among the nomad tribes of the East, but what a savour would the prompt and kindly courtesy of the old man impart to the duty! His hospitality would be the more welcome from the grace that would dispel any feeling of restraint, and his courtesy the more true from the consideration for their case; it was not a hollow thing of form only, neither was his hospitality allied to that feasting of the world that looks for a return—it is an attractive picture of primitive times. The account which follows of the feast which Abraham and Sarah prepared for their guests, and the speed with which it was provided, will seem strange to European ears, but those who have had opportunities of observing the customs of those countries of the west of Asia, will readily recognize the truthfulness of the narrative, even by the customs of the present day. There is no part of the world probably where the manners and customs and fashions of the people have undergone so little change, as those countries of the East inhabited by the descendants of Abraham, and therefore it is, that Scripture allusions to the habits of the people, and their ways of acting, are often so accurately illustrated by modern travellers in the East.

After the guests have eaten they inquire of Abra-

ham for Sarah, who was in the tent behind after the manner of Eastern women. Their repast was under the tree, and this inquiry as for one known to them, and contrary to the customs of the East, would doubtless awaken in Abraham some suspicion as to his guests that they were more than they seemed to be, and this would speedily be confirmed by the declaration of one of them, "I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son." Abraham would now have no doubt who it was who spake to him, the same who made to him that strange promise before, "I will . . . give thee a son also of her"—"Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year;" this stranger, no stranger now, renews His promise to Abraham, and Sarah heard it in the tent door, and she "laughed *within herself*," not openly but in her heart, but she was in the presence of One who searcheth the hearts, and who witnessed that laugh and understood it. Abraham we read in the last chapter also laughed at the same announcement, but how different was his laugh from hers! Abraham laughed for very joy because he believed the good news that God told him, Sarah laughed because she believed not, her laugh was the result of incredulity, the mockery of her heart at what she thought too good to be true. She considered her own body and Abraham's now dead through age, Abraham "not being weak in faith considered *not* his own body now dead, nor the deadness of Sarah's womb, he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief but was strong in faith giving glory to God." Sarah looked to the creature and sinned, Abraham looked to the Lord. It is remarkable how we see in this page of the Divine history, even as

in the case of Zacharias and Mary in the first chapter of Luke, the same apparent effects proceeding from very different motives, and it teaches us the need of caution and wisdom in judging.

The Lord is displeased with Sarah's laugh, He was pleased with Abraham's; He sees the hidden springs of the heart, the motives that stir the man, and so the act is to Him according to the motive, and many a flaring act that attracts the admiration of man, is nothing to God in comparison even of the defeated purpose that has His glory in view: the Lord said unto David, "Whereas it was in thine heart to build a house unto My name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart, nevertheless thou shalt not build the house." The hypocrite may pass with the world, but oh, how hateful is hypocrisy to God, how certain to be detected and exposed! It was not so however with Sarah, she was no hypocrite, but overtaken in unbelief, betrayed by the flesh, like many beside her, she looked at the difficulty rather than the help, she did not consider what that stranger reminds her of afterwards, as well to rebuke her unbelief as to strengthen her faith, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" It is happy to find how she profited by this interview, for she is set before us in the eleventh of Hebrews as an example of faith in the conception of this promised child, for she "received strength to conceive seed . . . because she judged Him faithful who had promised." When the Lord questions Abraham, Sarah denies that she laughed, for it was "within herself," not audible, and so she may have covered over the act with this plausible protest, but it was only to add falsehood to unbelief, and yet she is not judged; there was no allowal

of evil, no purpose to deceive, no wilful sin, it was the betrayal in the haste of the moment at the exceeding improbability of what this stranger announced, whom she saw as a man, and whom probably she may not have known till He was thus revealed to her as the discoverer of the thoughts of her heart. There is somewhat a similar case in the close of the first chapter of John's gospel, when the Lord reveals Himself to the astonished Nathaniel, by disclosing to him what he thought none but himself knew. It has been observed, and is worthy of observation, that it is to this very passage the Apostle Peter refers in his first Epistle (chap. iii. 6) where he sets forth Sarah as an example to married women; she honours her husband just where she dishonours God, but the evil is not remembered, while the good is registered to her honour. How gracious of the Lord, and how encouraging to one desiring to do His will, yet feeling his own weakness and liability to sin!

After the reproof of Sarah the men rose up and looked toward Sodom, it was now their object, and Abraham courteously brings them on their way. And now a wonderful scene is presented unto us, we find in the seventeenth verse the Lord casting as it were in His own mind, or it may be counselling with the other two, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" How gracious is this dealing of the Lord with Abraham as of a man with his friend (see John xv. 15 and James ii. 23.) He had come down with the executioners of His judgment to take vengeance upon Sodom, type of a greater judgment, and He knew that Abraham would feel deep interest in the place, and He knew how the announcement would draw out the

graces of Abraham to his own profit, and to the profit of countless numbers of his spiritual seed. What decides the Lord to make His mind known to him we find in verses 18 and 19, it was His own declared purpose to make him a great and mighty nation, and in him to bless all the nations of the earth, and it as though He said, shall I do the greater and withhold the less? Is not the life more than meat? Nothing can be more absolute than this repeated promise, and yet it seems to rest upon the conduct of Abraham in training his children and household in the way of the Lord; the Lord links the means with the end, and both are seen in His purpose. "I know him," says the Lord, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." How remarkable is this confidence of the Lord in Abraham (in remembrance probably of his ready obedience in the matter of circumcision) and how the passage teaches us the importance of diligence in the religious instruction of our households! It seems to contrast with that word of the Lord to Samuel, in 1 Sam. iii. 13.

The Lord then tells to Abraham the great and grievous sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, it may have been lightly esteemed of man, but it rose up before the Lord and cried to Him, like the blood of Abel, for judgment, but He may not judge without evidence, and so He tells him His purpose of going down and seeing for Himself how it was with them, speaking as often after the manner of men. Then, if not previously, two of these three visitors depart and go towards Sodom (verse 22 and xix. 1) leaving Abraham alone *before the*



*Lord*, the position to which we find him called in the first verse of the last chapter, and now occurs this most remarkable instance of intercession, this wondrous pleading and wondrous answering, this holy boldness, this intimacy of faith, so pleasing to the Lord—how like the friend of God, how noble and disinterested, as we ever see him when he is with God! In the thirteenth chapter we see him yielding his right to his kinsman, rather than endanger the honour of God's name, in the fourteenth we see him rescuing his nephew from his enemies, at the risk of his life and all, and here when he can help him no other way, when vain is the help of man or any power of man on his behalf, we find him pleading for him with God as a man with his familiar friend—how truly is this man the friend of God, how he takes up His mind, and how truly it makes him the friend of man.

“Abraham drew near”—the very thing we want, to draw near to God—he “drew near and said, Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?” as if incredulous of such a procedure on the part of God, “that be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: . . . shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” He pleads to His face His own very righteousness to turn Him as it were from His purposed judgment! Then we have the Lord's marvellous assent to his proposal to spare the place, if but fifty righteous be found in it, and then the faith of the man of God gathering strength by this concession of the Lord to his request, advancing in his demand, and the Lord responding to it, Abraham lessening and lessening the number, and the Lord hearing and answering, till he comes down to what he believes must insure the safety of Sodom. At first it would

seem as if Abraham thought in the charity of his heart that fifty righteous must be found in Sodom, but whether it was from a misgiving in his mind as to the computation, or from the readiness of the Lord to answer his request, and so the desire to make sure of his object, he proceeds in his intercession till he brings down the number that is to save Sodom unto ten righteous. "I will not destroy it for ten's sake." What wondrous grace! what blessed faith! and how glorious to see them meet together! "I will not destroy it for ten's sake," ten grains of the salt of the earth, and Sodom is safe! But ten! surely Lot's household alone must muster this number, he was a "righteous man" as we know, and he had men-servants and maid-servants as we conclude from the thirteenth chapter, but we have no such testimony to Lot as we have to Abraham in the nineteenth verse of this chapter. God did not say of him, as of Abraham, "*I know him*, that he will command his children and household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord"—he was a righteous man, but he failed herein, he brought his family and household into a den of iniquity, and he reaped his reward. "The Lord went His way as soon as He had left communing with Abraham," while Abraham had a request to make, there was the Lord to listen to it, it was Abraham that first ceased in his blessed communion, the last word was from the Lord, and then He went on His way, and Abraham returned to his own place, believing it would seem that he had gained his object as to Sodom, else we may suppose that he would scarcely have ceased in his intercession, after having attained so far. But it may be that yet he had a misgiving in his mind, which

the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth verses of the next chapter would seem to countenance, and he would allow the justice of God's judgment, that it was a place ripened for judgment, if there were not ten righteous people to be found in it.

In the preceding narrative we have had occasion to contemplate the grace and goodness of God. How encouraging that we have such an One to come to, so disarmed of what would terrify, so clothed with what would encourage and assure our souls, and yet we see in Abraham the humiliation and godly reverence before this blessed presence, as well as the intimacy of faith, "Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord which am but dust and ashes," he knows what he is, and he knows to whom he speaks. It is a happy thing to see a child of God draw near to his Father with the confidence of a child, but how repulsive is the familiarity which some affect! We may indeed come with confidence for God is our Father, we should come with reverence for our Father is God.

The narrative further suggests to us, not only how valuable is intercessory prayer, when we remember that God is the same this day that He was of old when Abraham so pleaded with Him by the groves of Mamre, but further the value of even a few righteous: they were afterwards the preservation of Israel as we learn from the prophet's allusion to this passage, "Except the Lord of hosts had left us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom." Ah, the world little thinks in her giddy whirl after pleasure or profit how indebted she is to the saints of God, how she

Receives advantage from their noiseless hours  
Of which she little dreams.

It has been supposed by some that the three Heavenly visitors were meant to convey to the mind of Abraham some intimation of the existence of God in a Trinity of the sacred persons ; it does not seem likely, and certainly we should never learn that blessed truth from this passage, if there was not more direct teaching on the subject in the Scriptures.

A blessed truth, that seems more manifestly taught here, is the incarnation of the Son of God, the one of those three who communed with Abraham, appeared to Him as a man, spake to him and sat and ate with him and walked with him. Abraham might have borne to Him the testimony which John afterwards bare to the incarnation of the Word of life, "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled ;" and yet this very man is a discernor of the thoughts of the heart (verse 12, 13), He assumes the name and province of the Lord (10, 14), and allows of this intercession to be addressed to Him. Surely this man is more than man—

This wondrous man of whom we tell  
Is true Almighty God.

In this chapter we have I believe for the first time the Lord revealed as man, it was on His way to judgment, and we know that God's appointment for judgment, is "by that Man whom He hath ordained," and here we see that resurrection Man attended by His ministers of vengeance to the guilty, but appearing to Abraham as his friend—faith makes all the difference. We notice that Abraham calls Him Lord, Adonai, while the historian calls Him Jehovah.

## CHAPTER XIX.

IN the opening of this chapter we have the visit of the two angels to Sodom, who but a short time previously had left Abraham communing with the Lord (chap. xviii. 22). It must have been late in the day when they left Abraham, and it was a considerable distance from the groves of Mamre to Sodom, but it was a speedy journey to them, "He maketh His angels spirits" or winds, and swiftly they move in obedience to the will of their heavenly Master.

In the last chapter they are called "men," here they are called "angels," they had the appearance of men, so they were to the eyes of Abraham and the men of Sodom, but they were angels of God, His holy messengers, to execute His will, whatever that will may be, and so how different their visit to Mamre and to Sodom! how they would have comforted and strengthened Abraham, how they preserved Lot, saved as by fire, and executed the vengeance of God upon guilty Sodom and the cities of the plain sunk in the same iniquity and guilt! It may have been—who can say it was not?—that on their sorrowful mission to Sodom, they call on their way on Abraham to be refreshed by the faith of that man of God, and be not startled, dear reader, at the thought of these heavenly inhabitants who abide

in the presence of God being refreshed by the faith and holiness of saints on earth. There is joy among them when one poor sinner is converted, and how much more therefore when the saint is seen to walk with God to His glory, for unto this is their ministry in one way or other (Heb. i. 14). In giving directions to the saints at Corinth for what was seemly in their meetings, the Apostle counsels submission to the women "because of the angels," as present and witnessing their meetings, and rejoiced or grieved, it would seem, according to their subjection and order, or their self-will and disorder.

But it is not angels only, but the very heart of God is refreshed by the faith and holiness of His dear people, else why should it be so often given us as a motive in the apostolic teaching that we "please God," why, if He is not capable of being pleased or displeased with our actings? Probably nothing on earth ever came with pleasure to the Lord Jesus, such a desert drear had sin made it to Him, nothing but the faith that could respond to His mind. How pleased was He with the centurion's faith (Matt. viii.) and with the Syrophenician woman (Matt. xv., Mark vii.) to visit whom He seems to have gone outside the bounds of Israel! In their cases He had no reason to expect faith, for they were Gentiles, but where He might look for it He found it least, with the rulers and teachers of Israel, and how was His spirit grieved and angered with them!

To return from this digression, as the angels come to Sodom at even they find Lot sitting in the gate, the usual place of resort not only for public business, but also for intercourse. Lot meets them,

even as Abraham did, with courtesy and the accustomed rites of hospitality of these primitive times, he presses them to stay with him all night, for it was now getting late, but to this they seem unwilling to assent, and propose to abide in the street. This was not an unusual thing in hot countries where there was no accommodation for travellers, and where they were consequently compelled to do so when hospitality was not extended to them, and it is in reference to this that Job says (xxx. 32) "The stranger did not lodge in the street, but I opened my doors to the traveller." Moreover these strangers probably might desire to witness the state of the place, whether there might yet be an opening for mercy, or it may be their reluctance to accept Lot's offer was through that delicacy that is slow to intrude itself upon the kindness of another, but as he pressed them greatly, and so manifests how truly his kindness was meant, they accede to his request and enter into his house, and then he prepares his feast for them. But before they lay down to rest, that sad scene takes place, which manifests that the cry of Sodom's sin which went up into the ear of the Lord, was too true a herald of their shameless iniquity; it may have been lightly thought of by men, but it rose up before the Lord, crying to Him for judgment, and the judgment comes down, swift and fearful, on the wretched sinners. Lot goes out to speak to those who "compassed the house round both old and young"—alas, how universal the depravity! and considerate for the security and delicacy of his guests, that they be not outraged by the grossness of these sinners, he "shut the door after him." His address and proposal to them has but little effect in

turning them from their purpose, their hearts are set on their iniquity, and when they threaten worse to him, then the angels repay his kindness, "they pulled Lot into the house to them and shut to the door," and smote the men outside with blindness, "so that they wearied themselves to find the door." What a picture does it give us of their state! Miraculously stricken under the hand of God, they still persevere in the wicked purpose of their heart—are they not ripe for judgment? Nothing can stay them, their blindness does not abate their sin, a sin without a name in Scripture, but what it borrows from this cursed place.

How aptly their conduct on this occasion represents to us what often we see, the close connection of blindness and sin, of infidelity and iniquity! The only holy principle of action is faith, and though a believer indeed may act unholily, it is because his faith fails, while faith is in exercise he is with God, alike holy and happy.

Lot would now know who his visitors were, they saved him in Sodom, and shortly they were about to save him from it. Their visit seemed to bring the wickedness of Sodom to a head, for when grace does not subdue, it only hardens the heart. These angels were in the appearance of men, and men doubtless whom sin had not marred, but their holy beauty only inflamed the sinners of Sodom, and now they are satisfied of the justice of their mission, they have full proof of the guilt of Sodom, and their remaining care is for Lot and his family.

And now we find the value of Abraham's intercession, he may have thought, as was observed, judg-



ing probably by the many true ones in his own large household, that ten righteous at least would be found in Sodom, that where righteous Lot was, there must be a sprinkling, so to speak, of righteous ones about him, in the members of his own family, or his connections or neighbours, but if he thought so he was sorely deceived. Lot we know was a righteous man, but he seems to stand alone in Sodom, he was where he ought not to have been, and the Lord's face did not shine on him.

Sodom is doomed for there are not ten righteous in it, but shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? Far be it from Him to slay the righteous with the wicked, and so Lot is saved, and not Lot only, but the immediate members of his family, "the men said unto Lot, Hast thou any here besides? son-in-law, and thy sons and 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 the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it." Lot believed the word of the angels and is influenced by it, he "went out and spake unto his sons-in-law which married his daughters"—it seems uncertain whether this refers to married daughters, besides the two who escaped with him, and who were not married (verse 8,) or whether the sons-in-law may relate to those "who were betrothed to these two daughters," but the former supposition seems rather borne out by the next verse—his message to them was very urgent, "Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city," he spake to them of coming judgment, and urged them to flee from the wrath, "but he seemed as one

that mocked unto his sons-in-law." Oh, what myriads have there been since like the sons-in-law of Lot when urged to flee from the wrath to come! He believed the testimony, and therefore he earnestly besought his kindred to consult their own safety by flight, they believed it *not*, and therefore they disregarded his word—it is a description of the ordinary effect of faith and unbelief.

As the day dawned that was to witness the judgment of Sodom, the angels hastened Lot to remove with his wife and daughters that were then with him, implying seemingly that there were other daughters which were not there, but Lot seems slow to depart, "he lingered," alas, how many do! to flee from the city of destruction. Was it that he was infected by the air of Sodom, and unwilling to part with his property and his comforts and wander forth a homeless stranger in his declining years, or was it the thought of his relatives and neighbours and their speedy doom, that saddened his heart and deprived him of the energy to act with promptitude in his urgent circumstances? However it was, his angel friends "laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters," and brought them forth without the city, "the Lord being merciful to him," else he too had perished with the sinners of Sodom. He knew the right thing to do, but seemed powerless to do it; what believer is there that has not experienced the wide difference between *knowing* and *doing* the right thing? When they had brought him forth, "He said"—for the Lord had joined Himself to them, and thenceforth through the chapter seems to be the chief speaker and actor—"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." We must remember that God's judgment rested not only on Sodom and the cities of the plain, but on "all the plain" now covered by the Dead Sea, and hemmed in by the mountains on each side. It was this plain that had been so attractive in the eyes of Lot, and there his cattle and his property lay, but now he must not look on it, he must flee from it lest he be consumed. Doubtless the temptation would be strong to cast a lingering look behind, but the word of God is peremptory, and, as he soon learns, not to be trifled with, yet it is a tardy obedience that he yields, unlike to Abraham the faithful, and so from the Lord's grace and mercy to him, and his own inability to get to the mountains, he pleads for another city that was nearer, "Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one"—conveying the idea probably that its sins were proportionably less—"Oh, let me escape thither . . . and my soul shall live." Again how unlike to Abraham ! he pleads for his own convenience, Abraham for the safety of others. One would think that Lot had had enough of choosing for himself, but it is difficult to rise above the besetting infirmity of our nature, faith can do it, but nothing less ; the Lord graciously accepts him concerning this, and the place is saved by his intercession, but he soon finds that the Lord's choice for him was the best. Lot seems like one of those who must learn everything by deep-bought experience, because they will not learn of the Lord, they will not take Him at His word, and by the obedience of faith prove its truth and goodness, and herein he seems the contrast to Abraham, who "believed God." The infirmity of Lot however but

draws out the Lord's grace in dealing with him, "See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also," how He bears with His people! Probably among the perfect graces of His Divine character, none is more remarkable than His longsuffering; Lot's lingering and Sarah's laughter, what are they both but the fruit of unbelief, the unbelief of the believer, and yet how patient is He with these poor weak ones, they are precious in His sight, notwithstanding all the infirmity, and this is just what we see daily in the lives and blessings of the saints of God. "I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken," saith the Lord, He allows him to escape there for his safety, and spares the place for his sake, so prevailing is intercession, but adds, "Haste thee, escape thither, for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither." God's purpose of judgment is arrested till His saints are secure, "I cannot do anything," anything that would endanger the safety of His people. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the Lord cometh out of His place, to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity." (Isa. xxvi.) And so the windows of heaven did not open to pour down their deluge on the earth, till the family of Noah were shut in the ark, nor this judgment upon Sodom till Lot was safe in his Zoar, and so history tells us of the security of the saints at Pella before the wrath fell upon Jerusalem, and presently the commission will issue forth to "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." The saints may suffer

much from the persecution of their enemies, God permitting it, but not from the judgment of God when He is taking vengeance on these enemies.

And now Lot is secure in his "little" place, his Zoar (Zoar means "little," and was so called from this occasion, verse 20, previously it was called Bela, chap. xiv. 2) and the sun arose and shone brightly upon the cities of the plain and the blooming gardens around, but it was for the last time. Many it may be were stirring to go to their usual employments, many sunk in their sin and debauchery with no misgiving of their state, they cry peace and safety, and mock at the warning of the man of God, when swiftly, suddenly that strange storm of the wrath of God comes down on the devoted cities in "brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." The language of this verse seems to intimate the plurality of the Godhead, for we have the Lord who was speaking to Lot and the Lord in heaven. The judgment would seem much as in the case of the flood, when the waters from above met the waters from beneath, so here the fire from heaven would kindle the slime and bitumen that so abounded in the plain (chap. xiv. 10) from some great reservoir underneath, but now it is not as in the case of the flood, where the waters rose slowly, gradually, but swift destruction comes upon these sinners of Sodom, even as it will be when the Lord shall be revealed from heaven (2 Thess. i.). We may never be nearer to ruin than when least we expect it, it may be at our very door, and we unexpecting, unprepared, "the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night"—how it should teach us to live watchfully, dependently!

And now the cities, and the plain, and the in-

habitants, and the growth of the ground, all are submerged in ruin, that plain that was as the garden of the Lord in the eyes of Lot, is now a burning furnace, his man-servants and his maid-servants and his cattle and his property are but fuel for the fire, and he himself a pauper wanderer, and all this is what cometh of choosing for himself, of being governed by his own will and selfish inclination, instead of being subject to God.

In the twenty-sixth verse we have the brief account of his wife, the more important from the use which our Lord makes of it. She probably was one of the daughters of Sodom, for it was now over 20 years since Lot parted with Abraham, and we do not read of his having a wife then, and she would look back, it may be with a lingering after scenes left behind, or with a natural curiosity to know the fate of the place she had left, and of the relations and friends she had left in it, or it may be hearing the agonizing shrieks of the poor sinners of Sodom, and overcome by anxiety and fear. However it was, the judgment came swiftly upon her too, "she became a pillar of salt," she escaped being turned to ashes, as one says, but she is turned to salt. It may seem as if the punishment was disproportionate to the offence, but only to such as do not consider it; the offence was wilful disobedience, rebellion against God, the occasion matters little, whether it was eating of the fruit as in paradise, the gathering a few sticks in the wilderness, or the looking back upon Sodom as in this case, each was against an express command of God, and herein was the evil, every such transgression earns judgment, and it is only of God's mercy that it is averted. "Remember Lot's wife," says our Lord, remember

her disobedience, here hankering after the evil place she was brought out of—for manifestly there was something wrong in her heart—and remember her judgment, a permanent warning that it is not enough to be out of Sodom, judgment may overtake us still. Poor Lot! it is blow after blow to him, it was but a small company that left Sodom with him, it is less now, and yet what evil is left in it!—but it is all the fruit of his own doing.

We next turn for a little to Abraham, and what a contrast is there now between his state and Lot's! Early in the morning he arose and proceeded to the place where he stood before the Lord on His way to Sodom, that place would have a fragrance for Abraham, naturally we cherish the remembrance of places dear to us from happy associations! Doubtless Jacob often thought of Bethel and of Peniel, and we too have our Bethels and Peniels—would they were more frequent!—though it is not well to live on the *memory* of past blessings, memory is mostly weakening to a saint, experience of present blessing is what we should covet and enjoy, and yet we should not live even on this, let us live on the Lord Jesus alone.

Abraham looks towards Sodom and the plain, it may be with some misgivings of its fate, some anxiety to know the result of his intercession, he looks, “and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace,” and now Abraham would mourn, and think that his intercession failed, but it did not, for in His judgment “God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow” of the cities of the plain. His intercession availed not indeed for that evil place given over to the devil, but it availed

for Lot, again he rescues him from his imminent peril. Whether Abraham learned this we know not, though it is likely that afterwards he would see Lot, but we must often leave our intercession and prayers with God, and wait to learn the result till that day that will manifest all things.

And now we find Lot discovering his mistake in again choosing for himself, he fears to dwell in Zoar, the place of his own choice, he fears probably from its proximity to Sodom, where he would witness the desolation of the wrath of God, and the men of Zoar, it may be, were but little better than their brethren of Sodom, for it was one of the places marked for destruction, but spared by the intercession of Lot, and so he "dwelt in the mountain and his two daughters with him." He would not go there when the Lord told him to go, and now he goes when the Lord does not tell him, in both cases it is evil, much as the children of Israel with Amalek, they would not go against him when the Lord was with them, they would go when the Lord was not with them, so strange is the perverseness of the heart of man.

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with the sad result of Lot's indecision and vacillation of purpose. He is tempted to drunkenness,\* and then commits incest—failure and nakedness again!—the conduct of Lot's daughters is palliated by many but it seems inexcusable, when they said, "There is not a man in the earth to come in unto us," they knew of the men of Zoar, and they knew of Abraham's family, and they would see that the judgment of God was limited to the plain below, and they knew how contrary to their

\* The inhabitants of the cities of the plain are said to have kept their wine in the caves of the mountains.



father's mind was their evil act, else would they not have made him drunk, and they knew of God's judgment on the sin of Sodom. Lot's evil was great in suffering himself to be intoxicated, and in repeating the offence the next night, but there seems to be retribution in the evil. The proposal of Lot in verse eight was utterly indefensible, however sacred the laws of hospitality, and now the sin comes through those whom he would have given over to sin, his daughters seem infected with the ways of Sodom, and he escaped the pollution of that evil place to fall into greater. Had Lot been obedient in the first instance to the Lord's word (verse seventeen) he might have escaped all this evil, and his wife might have escaped too, for it was in going to Zoar that her disobedience was visited with judgment; he would also have been in the mountains on that side of the lake where Abraham was, and now he might have joined him without any cause for the apprehension that occasioned their separation, inasmuch as he was now stripped of everything. But it does not seem to have come into his mind to have returned to Abraham, he seems to have taken up his abode on the eastern side of the lake, in the parts afterwards called after one of his incestuous children.

It was an evil progeny and afterwards turned out bitter enemies to Israel. Their names in the original have reference to their descent, Moab, "from the father;" Ben-Ammi, "son of my people."

We here part company with Lot, there is nothing more said of him in the Old Testament. In the New Testament there are two allusions to him, by the Apostle Peter there is honourable mention made of him, in his second Epistle, where he is called "just," or righteous, "Lot vexed with the filthy conversation

of the wicked," but it was his own choice to dwell among these wicked. He was kept from the pollution of the crowd around him, but away from the haunts of man in a lonely cave he falls into a worse sin, unconsciously indeed, but how sad is this close of his history!

By the side of Abraham he does not show to advantage, and what a contrast is there between this chapter and the last, in which Lot's acting and Abraham's are severally presented to us! There we see the almost unmixed blessedness, here the abounding evil, but we are instructed by both, we need to know what is in us, as well as what God can make of us. Lot was a righteous man, and so doubtless a man of faith, but, so far as we can judge from the record given of him, weak in the faith, the type I think of a large class of Christians, irresolute, and easily overcome by what appealed to his interest or appetite. This I think we see in the way he was influenced in the choice of the plain, in his approach to Sodom (chap. xiii. 12) in his eventually dwelling in it (chap. xiv. 12), and his tarrying there after he well knew its evil, even till its destruction, and further in his marrying his daughters to the men of such a place, if not himself taking a wife from among them, his lingering there till the last moment, and then being as it were dragged out of it, his slow obedience as manifested in the case of Zoar, and the sad finale in suffering himself twice to be intoxicated, and then the sin that followed! Truly we have the treasure in earthen vessels. Infidels may scoff at this, infidelity and scoffing generally go together and generally result from sin and ignorance, but let not the child of God be moved by their scoffs, yet a little while and it will be with them as with the sinners of

Sodom, the swift destruction cometh and then their scoffs will be turned into the howlings of despair. The spirit of God is an impartial historian, and so we read of the failure of Lot, but it is remarkable that when Peter alludes to him the evil is unnoticed, it is blotted out, and the good only remembered—this is God's way with His saints. Scripture notices indeed the failures even as the graces of the saints, and as we are true before the Lord, we shall profit by the failures even as by the holy actions of the saints. The Lord would teach us by Lot or Lot's wife or even by Sodom as He would by Abraham; in Sodom we see what is in man, and while we are in the body we shall have infirmities and temptations to guard against and pray against, that evil gets not an ascendancy in us, even as we shall have graces to copy and to cultivate that God be glorified in us. We all know how much more prone we are to learn by example than by precept, how principles embodied in action will impress us, when in theory they pass unheeded.

The connection in which our Lord refers to this chapter (Luke xvii. 28—32) gives it a prophetic aspect, and it is so doubtless both in judgment and mercy. There is some foreshadowing of the future in the history, we have the judgment it may be of the wicked apostacy of the latter day, and Lot may show to us the Jew in the trouble and but just escaping—how small is the saved remnant! When the Son of Man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?—and Abraham on the mountains of Hebron may represent the Church apart from it all, in safety and communion with God before the judgment comes, and looking down on it from above—but I mean not to prophesy, only to notice the suggestions of the word.

## CHAPTER XX.

IN the twentieth chapter, we have again brought before us the failure of Abraham, but happily I believe for the last time. It is remarkable, as we had occasion to notice in the last chapter, the faithfulness and impartiality of Scripture, in laying before us the failure even as the graces of the men of God, their dark side all one as the bright, so different in this respect from the biographies of men, and it is further remarkable, how their failure is for the most part manifested in the very graces for which they are conspicuous—is it not, at least in a great measure, that the grace or virtue is of faith, and when faith fails, it fails? How strikingly is this seen in Abraham, his faith and his conduct in every instance presented to us rise or fall together. He is probably the most illustrious example that we find in the Scriptures of *faith*, it is his grand, his conspicuous excellence, the parent of all the good that is in him, at least that God sees in him, and yet as we attentively observe him, how we see him fail in this very grace, and then his life or conduct fails also, he falls to the level of a mere man, from the stature of a man of God, from failing to trust God, he has recourse to his own petty devices, and then he is brought down.

In the same way "*just* (or righteous) Lot" could

voluntarily live in such a den of filth and unrighteousness as Sodom, and connect himself with its inhabitants! Moses the meekest man sinned through an outburst of temper (Num. xx.) which kept him out of the land; the man after God's own heart it was, that was polluted with murder and adultery; the beloved disciple, who leant on the bosom of Jesus, would have called down fire from heaven on the Samaritan village, and Peter, so bold and forward, was he who in very cowardice denied his Master, denied that he knew Him, denied Him with cursing and swearing! Many are the instances to the same effect, which the careful reader of the Scriptures will discover, and the contemplation of such cases, while it stains the pride of all flesh, while they show us what is in man, should make the believer watchful when he thinks himself most strong; it is a word ever to be held in recollection by the Lord's people, "by faith we stand," and getting off this standing ground, we are but falling.

In the opening of this chapter we have Abraham's removal from Hebron or Mamre to the south country, when he abode for a time in Gerar, a principal place of the Philistines. We are not told of the occasion of this move after his long abode in Mamre, but as Lot had to do with his first coming there (chap. xiii. 18) so probably he also had to do with his removal from it. The immediate connection of this chapter with what precedes would countenance the idea, he saw the smoke of the country as the smoke of a furnace, and the fate of the cities of the plain would grieve the heart of Abraham, and make a change to some further locality desirable. He may have thought that Lot fell in the destruction of Sodom, or if he knew to the con-

trary, he would also know of the disgrace brought upon the family, by the shameless conduct of his daughters, and all this or any of it would be a sorrow to Abraham, and very *naturally* lead him to choose another place of abode; if such indeed was the case, then he acted more from feeling than from faith, and if so, this was but the first step in the failure which is here recorded, a failure the more inexcusable, as it is but acting over again his own poor conduct in Egypt in bygone years, and this too after such wondrous and gracious revelations of the Lord to him since then, and specially that recent manifestation that we read of in the eighteenth chapter. Truly in this he did not walk before the Lord, but we are never more exposed to danger, as has often been remarked, than after we have been most highly favoured. There is danger from a subtle self-complacency, and then that enemy that is "going to and fro in the earth," will be sure to assault us, when he sees that we are worth assaulting, when we are enriched of our God. How frequently this is the experience of the Lord's dear people some of the dearest of them can declare, as often as they have declared, and as probably was verified on this occasion in the experience of Abraham.

He goes to Gerar, and he sojourns in Gerar, the place of temptation, as Lot dwelt in Sodom, for Abraham had in himself just such another nature as Lot's, and Abimelech the king, the father-king, as the name implies\* sent and took Sarah. This to us seems strange, for Sarah was now an old woman in her

\* Abimelech was the name or title not of that king only but of all the kings of Gerar, they were all Abimelechs, as all the kings of Egypt were Pharaohs.

ninetieth year, and some learned men therefore propose to antedate this chapter, but it is a dangerous expedient to distrust the text, when it does not fall in with our notions. Life was longer then than now, and the effects of old age would not so speedily appear, and when God miraculously imparted to her the capacity to bear a child it is natural to suppose that He may also have imparted somewhat of the appearance of that time of life, that he may so have renewed her constitution that she would not look more than a person of half her age at the present time. However it was, she had attractions in the eyes of Abimelech, even as she had for Pharaoh over twenty years before, and Abraham must have known that this was likely, for he had resource to his old device, "she is my sister," and had not the Lord again interfered as in Egypt, we know not how it would have turned out with Abraham, and the promises which rested on him would have been in jeopardy. But He will see to His own promises, and His purposes shall not fail because of our failure. He knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, we get ourselves into troubles, God gets us out, and so He "came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife." How hateful before God is adultery, and how jealously He guards the seed which Sarah was now bearing before ever it saw the light of this world! He acts on his conscience by a dream; dreams generally are but a confused jumble of broken thoughts or images, supplied by memory or imagination when the judgment is asleep, but God may use a dream as a means of communicating His mind, or of impressing

one's heart, and probably before His will was recorded in His word, this was not unfrequently His way. Indeed it would be hazardous to say that He may not do so now, God can use anything, He may act by His Spirit on our spirit when and how He will, and when we see a permanent good effect produced by a dream, surely we may believe that it is of God, but the custom of looking to dreams for divine monitions, cannot too strongly be reprobated, as feeding a weak and superstitious state of mind, and leading to the neglect of God's word. One in such a state had need to be careful that he does not expose himself to the devices of Satan, for he too may act in this way, but when God speaks by a dream, we shall not need to be on the search for it, it will manifest itself.

Abimelech appears in this transaction to more advantage than Abraham, as the natural man often does above the spiritual, when the latter forgets or forsakes his principle. He "had not come near her," it is noted, to guard the integrity of the seed which she was bearing, "and he said, Lord, wilt Thou slay also a righteous nation?" doubtless with the fate of filthy Sodom before him, "Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother? in the integrity of my heart, and innocency of my hands, have I done this." God's reply to him in the dream is remarkable, "I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart." Ignorance may fitly be an excuse as here, but it may not when it is wilful, when there is an opportunity of being instructed; but observe the secret cause of this, "for I also withheld thee from sinning against Me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her." Here is the secret of our



preservation from so much of sin and sorrow, and the secret cause why the world, bad as it is, is not worse, even as the cities of the plain, given over to work all uncleanness with greediness. They who know their own hearts will recognize the truth of this, and when they have been preserved from the depths into which others have fallen, will be ready to sing with one of old, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory," that name that withheld us from sinning.

God now counsels or orders him to restore to Abraham his wife, adding as a motive it would seem to stimulate him, "for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live," but on the other hand, He warns him of the sure result of disobedience: "if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine," from whence we see as often in Scripture how the sins of the ruler were visited on the nation, inasmuch as the nation was viewed in him its head and representative—a doctrine little suited to the independence of these times. We have here the first mention of the prophet, one of the most eminent and favoured of the official persons of Israel. His calling was not merely nor indeed primarily to foretell—Abraham was no prophet in this sense—he was one commissioned of God to declare His will, and so he spake not his own words, but what he received from God, he spake by inspiration that which was revealed to him, past, present, or future, as it might be, according to God's mind. The priest was one by whom man came to God, the prophet on the contrary, one by whom God came to man, consequently all must bow to the prophet, as we see in Haggai, chap. i. 12.

Both offices might be united in the same person, as indeed we see in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and as we see in Him, parts or fragments of whose work all offices and ordinances of divine appointment did typify. The next place where we find the word is very explanatory to us of the office, it is in Ex. vii. 1, "The Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet." Moses is put in the place of God to communicate to Aaron, and Aaron was to speak his words, to interpret his mind to Pharaoh. The prophet as one in communion and favour with God, and knowing His mind, would be naturally the most fitted to make intercession with Him, and hence the Lord's word to Abimelech, "he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live," and hence we see this blessed work of intercession and prayer often connected with the prophetic office (see Num. xxi. 7, 8; 1 Sam. vii. 5, xii. 19—23; Jer. xxvii. 18, xlii. 1—4; Amos vii. 2). We see how this message from God told on Abimelech, and the readiness and heartiness of his obedience, which may rebuke many of us with so much more light than he had, though possibly the fate of Sodom may have influenced him. Next we have his reproof of Abraham (verses 9, 10) but reproof so reasonable and mildly ministered, that of the two he appears to far the most advantage on this occasion; "What hast thou done unto us?" he says, in thus passing thy wife for thy sister, "What have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin?" in taking thy wife, and so exposing myself and my people to judgment, "What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?" what evil amongst us that

would justify such conduct, were we in the habit of taking other men's wives? He might say indeed to him, "thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done," and surely Abraham's conscience must have pleaded guilty, he had exposed his wife to sin, and he had exposed the king and people who showed him hospitality to the judgment of God by his cowardly and prevaricating conduct, nor does his reply much raise him in our estimation, "because I thought, Surely the fear of God is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake."

Here we have rash judgment, leading to unbelieving fear for himself, and exposing others to temptation, nor does his exculpation in verse 12 much mend the matter, it is but a poor equivocal, which a straightforward man of God should condemn, and so would Abraham have done had he been living in faith, faith in exercise would have kept him from such humiliation.\* How different do we see him in the fourteenth chapter when pursuing the confederate kings, or standing before the King of Sodom! His contract with Sarah in verse 13 was one of his own prudence, and not of God's direction, it is a stipulated equivocation between them to avoid the inconvenience to which the truth might expose them. Abimelech, who we should suppose knew the true God much as Melchizedek, a light in darkness, deals graciously with Abraham, he restores to him Sarah, and gives him sheep and oxen, and menservants and womenservants, and the choice of his land to dwell where it pleased him. It was not as with Pharaoh (chap. xii.) for "her sake" that he entreated him well, but for the Lord's sake, as one would suppose

\* See Appendix.

from the intercourse between them, and the cattle may further have a reference to sacrifice, on which the prayer of Abraham would go up acceptably before the Lord (verses 7 and 17). It seems that Abraham availed himself of this offer of Abimelech's, and that this was the occasion of his first coming to Beersheba, where he chiefly resided for the remainder of his life. In the sixteenth verse we have Abimelech's delicate yet caustic reproof of Sarah, for calling Abraham *her brother*; she was a partner with Abraham in the evil, and he seems to intimate what Abraham ought to have been to her, and what he now enables him to be; by "a covering of the eyes," it is generally thought that a veil is meant, which was worn by married women in token of subjection to their husbands, to which probably there is a reference in 1 Cor. xi. 10, and which would indicate to others that Sarah was a married woman. In the close of the chapter we find Abraham in prayer, and God hearing him according to His own word in verse 7, and removing the affliction with which it would seem Abimelech's household was retributively visited (verses 17, 18), he took another man's wife, and his own wife and those of his household are hindered from bearing. It was in ignorance, but had he not restored her when he knew it, death to him and his household had been the result. I doubt not that this was not in reference merely to the moral question at issue, but in reference to the seed Sarah was bearing.

It is happy to see in Abraham's history, how he rises above the infirmity which for a while may have kept him down when faith was weak; he returns to the place of the altar, or he calls upon God, or walks

before Him, or is in prayer as we find him here, and then his strength is renewed, and he mounts up with wings as the eagle—what instruction is there in this to the believer! Probably the spiritual life of every believer on earth is a history of ups and downs, there is no uninterrupted communion here, nor will there be till He cometh that shall come, and for ever removeth the hindrances from the way, till we be like Him as well as with Him (Ps. xvii. 15). Uninterrupted communion was the experience of One and only One, that One could say "I have set the Lord *always* before me" (see Ps. xvi with Acts ii. 25); the saints on earth may say indeed I have set the Lord before me, but not *always*, it is but sometimes with the best of them, but just as we do, shall we realize communion with God, and rise above the infirmity or besetting sin that will otherwise keep us down in a low or worldly state: this we see in the father of the faithful, and believers now are his children realizing in measure his faith and experience.

## CHAPTER XXI.

“AND the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken.” How perfect the security of God’s word, what a rock to rest on, amid the shifting sands of man’s word, and the discouragement of appearances as in the present case! “Hath He said and shall He not do it, hath He spoken and shall He not make it good”? So Abraham and Sarah proved in the son of promise which she bare him in his old age “at the set time of which God had spoken to him,” when he was an hundred years old and she ninety. God’s word will come to pass *as* He hath said, and *when* He hath said, no one thing shall fail which the Lord hath spoken; three times are we reminded in these first two verses that the birth of Isaac is of the Lord, for it was needful that God’s hand should be clearly seen in this, that the child of promise was not after the order of nature, the child of the flesh, as Ishmael was, but of Divine interference. Abraham we find in the obedience of faith naming his son as he was told, and circumcising him the eighth day, as God commanded him in chap. xvii.; it would go to the tender heart of Abraham, subjecting the babe that would be so dear to him to this painful process, but it is God’s command, and when he is in the faith this outweighs all other considerations with Abraham.

Sarah now has her laugh, not the laugh of incredulity as before, she now possesses her cherished object; Abraham had his laugh previously, because he believed God, "faith is the substance of things hoped for," it anticipates the promised blessing, and Abraham believed the Lord and considered not his own body now dead, and so he had the joy of faith, while Sarah had to wait for her joy till the time of fulfilment.

"The child grew and was weaned," weaning was at a much later period of life with them than with us, Samuel was old enough when he was weaned to be left in the house of the Lord with Eli. Abraham makes a great feast on the occasion, but there is a canker in their festivity, "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking," and here again she has to taste of the bitter fruit of her own impatient policy. The result is that, to the great grief of Abraham, she will have this bondwoman and her son cast out, "for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." Sarah it may be acted in some measure from pride or temper, but the act itself was in accordance with God's purpose; Abraham grieved for his son Ishmael, but he was not her son, and so she does not feel for him, only for Isaac. Thus far we have the simple history before us, but we know the use which the Apostle makes of this history in his Epistle to the Galatians (chap. iv.), he allegorizes the facts to instruct them in spiritual truth. It is plain indeed from that remarkable passage that occasionally, and probably more frequently than we suspect, truth does underlie the letter of the word, which does not meet the eye; an attentive reader will

often feel as he goes along through the pages of his Bible, the writer has often felt it in this very book, that he is treading on ground where there is treasure beneath him, that, as in the present chapter, the narrative of some event has a sense distinct from, and independent of the literal meaning which the words convey. This is appropriately called the "mystic" or "spiritual" sense of Scripture, and is distinct from the figurative meaning: what is literal or figurative may equally cover over the hidden or mystic meaning. But then where is the power to uncover this meaning, to bring it to the light, where is the key to open to us the hidden treasure? Doubtless it is the gift of the Spirit, and there is danger in putting anything in His place. One endowed with a lively, or sometimes a morbid, imagination, is more open to the danger of seeing in the word, or bringing to the word, according to his own taste or fancy, something that may never have been in the mind of the Spirit; there is much of this that had better never have been, much that is more sober and instructive, that one would not reject, but still it is not the *word*, one cannot rest on it, and act on it as God's word, it is not authority to one's soul, or a foundation for doctrine, as the Apostle's interpretation of this chapter in Gal. iv. is; it may be interesting, it may be suggestive, if sober and in harmony with Scripture, it may be profitable, but still it is in relation to Scripture, as man's deductions or man's comments to God's word.\*

The event in the opening of this chapter is a great one, as the introduction of the promised seed into the world, and so it is often referred to in after Scriptures.

\* See Appendix.



Thus we see it in Isa. li. 1—3, again in Isa. liv., as we learn from the allegory in Gal. iv., and probably comparing Isa. xxviii. with Acts ii., and 1 Cor. xiv. 21, 22, we may see that the weaning, the rejoicing, and the mocking typified other things.\*

The enmity which we here see on the part of Ishmael is much what we should be led to expect from chap. iii. 15. It is the enmity between the two seeds, each has its laugh, but how different are they, the one the laugh of happiness, the laugh that is from God, the other the laugh of the flesh, the sneer and mockery that has nothing to do with happiness but with misery. It is what has continued ever since with various degrees of bitterness, according to the faithfulness of God's people or the power of restraining circumstances; it is this which has led to the persecutions and massacre of so many thousands and hundreds of thousands of God's people, that has made, and will still make, that woman "drunken with the blood of the saints." It is the aversion of nature to grace, unwilling to be stript of what it thinks its right, the enmity of the flesh to that which is of the Spirit. Our mother the Church, like Sarah, should preserve us from association with the evil, but alas, Sarah is old and feeble, the wilfulness of her children has crippled her power, the Isaacs and the Ishmaels feast together, and if there is not now the mocking and persecution, neither is there the spiritual blessing and sense of the Lord's presence.

This resolve of Sarah was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son, but God appears to comfort him in his distress, and guide him in his per-

\* See Appendix.

plexity, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad." Sarah gave utterance to a great truth, however defective her spirit may have been, and therefore God tells Abraham to "hearken unto her voice;" he once was wrong in hearkening unto her, and then too in the case of Hagar, and this might now have made him slow to accede to her hard request, if God had not appeared to enforce it. Abraham's feeling went one way, God's word another way, and Abraham while obedient to God as a son, felt for Ishmael as a father—how wise and good of God is it, thus to give the holiest parents such an instinctive yearning love for their ungodly offspring! To how many has it been the mediate cause of their conversion! Abraham would love to have his children about him, but there was a needs be for this separation between him that was born after the flesh, and him of the Spirit, and God shows Abraham that Isaac was the great subject of promise, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called": the seed was in him, and the hope was in him, in this child of promise, this child contrary to nature, miraculously born, and in all these points the type of the true Seed, the One that was to come, in whom is the laughing, smiling, happy seed, but the seed derided of others, and that must pass through death to his portion (Heb. xii. 2). But God says, "Also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, *because he is thy seed*": how gracious! There is blessing for Ishmael also because of his relation to Abraham, but not the blessing of the seed.

It is happy to witness the ready obedience of Abraham in this deep trial. How grievous would it be to him to part with his child whom he may never

more see, but he does not hesitate. God has told him, and he will not listen to the yearnings of his nature, so he "rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away." He commits the child to her care, and furnishes her with bread and water, the wilderness fare: the food, and the bottle made of the skin of an animal would be sufficient we may suppose for their support, till they might be replenished. In so brief an account, it is vain to object; we have only to suppose that Abraham did everything for their comfort which his affection would suggest, or which circumstances would allow of, that he directed them as to their course, and followed them with his prayer—he would not doubt as to their safety from the distinct promise of God to him respecting Ishmael. And now Hagar departs once more to face the wilderness; when first she went, it was of her own will, and contrary to God's will, now it is of God's will, and contrary to her own will, but sin and wilfulness occasion both her journeys, and sorrow follows, sorrow will be sure to follow sin, as happiness will accompany holiness. Hagar is now reduced to a state of extreme misery, she is in the wilderness, and the water in the bottle is spent, it is not the food that fails, but the water, this is the great want under a burning sun, and in a dry and thirsty land. And now Ishmael's strength fails, he must have been at this time from sixteen to eighteen years old, for from his birth to Isaac's was fourteen years, and from Isaac's birth to his weaning, could not have been less than from two to four years, but human life was then double its present duration, and infancy and every

other stage of life bore proportion to the whole, so that Ishmael was yet but tender and weakly. It is he that fails, not Hagar, and now poor Hagar lays the lad under some friendly shrub to shelter him from the burning sun, and she went and sat her down some distance off, "for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept," her cup of misery now was full, the water is spent and there is no friendly fountain to revive poor Hagar and her dying child. Of old when God found her, it was by a fountain of water in the wilderness, and God remembers her still, though she seems to have forgotten Him and His gracious dealings with her, and His promise concerning the child, or if she remembers Him, it may be as many an one does, without any confidence to call on Him from a sense of failure and unworthiness. When we have forgotten Him and have been going on our way without Him for a season, we think when awakened, it may be by affliction, as if He too had forgotten us, as if He did not care for us, but His ways are not as our ways. It is observable however that it is Ishmael God is represented as hearing, Ishmael, the poor mocker when all went well with him, but now that he is brought low, it may be that he remembers his father Abraham's instruction (chap. xviii. 19) and calls upon the Lord. We do not read indeed of any cry or prayer of his, but we do read that "God heard the voice of the lad," He has not forgotten to be gracious, and so "the Angel of God," that same uncreated Angel that spake to her of old, "called to Hagar out of heaven and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the

lad where he is." He heard his voice, and He saw her tears, and He knew the misery of their souls, and He comes to help them. "Fear not," the often words of comfort when everything around but ministered fear—oh, how blessed to have this God for our God for ever and ever, who considers our troubles, who knoweth our souls in adversities (Ps. xxxi. 7), how safely one may rest his soul with Him, amid all the anxieties that arise in time and in the thought of eternity!

The Lord directs her, "Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation." He would revive in her mind His former promise, and so encourage her poor fainting heart, but even Ishmael must pass through death in a sense to get to his promise. And then He "opened her eyes and she saw a well of water," the very thing she needed, it was near her, but she had not seen it previously, possibly being concealed with a selfish object by some of the stragglers of the wilderness; well, she fills the bottle with water, and brought it, and gave the lad to drink, and he revives, "and God was with the lad, and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer . . . and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt," so in everything he is distinct and separate from Isaac, he dwells apart, his mode of life is different, and he gets his wife from a different country. He does not follow his father's more peaceful way of life, he is not a shepherd but an archer of the wilderness, and doubtless this would have contributed to form those habits which marked his character, and which descended to his posterity, the wild man with his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him. How in-

structive is this little narrative to us, how it shows us our want and the ready supply, if we could but see it ! What do we want, dear reader, but that our eyes be opened to see these well-springs in the wilderness to satisfy our thirsty souls ? The disciples of old walked and talked, and sat and ate with the Lord Jesus, and yet they knew Him not, till their eyes were opened ; they had the word of God, but they understood not its precious truths till " He opened their understandings, that they might understand the Scriptures " (Luke xxiv.) We need both, the work *in* us that we may discern and value that which is *for* us, the objective and the subjective, as theologians speak.

In the remainder of the chapter we have the intercourse between Abraham and Abimelech. Abraham seems to have availed himself of the offer of Abimelech (chap. xx. 15), and to have principally dwelt about Beersheba for the remainder of his life ; of course we cannot know his reason for doing so, but we may reasonably suppose that any associations that would bring Sodom before him, would be very painful, and then the kindness that he received from Abimelech, and the seeming difference between his people and those of Sodom, would make his country desirable to reside in.

Here it would seem Isaac was born, and from hence he took him to offer him on Mount Moriah, and here he seems to have been at the time of Sarah's death, intervals embracing nearly twenty years each. Abraham's course seems to have been happy here, we do not read of any failure, and we do read of the happy testimony which he bare to the conscience of Abimelech and his chief captain, they spake to him, saying, " God is with thee in all that thou doest." This is the

true way for a saint to walk, to draw out a testimony for God from those with whom we have to do, like those afterwards, of whom they took knowledge that they had been with Jesus. This was the occasion of Abraham's swearing to show kindness to Abimelech, and his sons, and his sons' sons, according to the kindness which had been shown him, and doubtless Abraham well kept his oath. It bound him, but it did not, nor could it, bind his posterity after him, and if these Philistines 400 years after were cast out by Joshua, it in no wise interfered with the integrity of Abraham's oath. After this we find Abraham reproving, or rather remonstrating with Abimelech about a well of water, a valuable possession to those following the pastoral life, and under a burning sun, of which it seems Abimelech's servants had unjustly possessed themselves, without their master's knowledge. This is the occasion of the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech, a friendly treaty by which the well is secured to Abraham, and he seems by the present of cattle to show kindness to Abimelech, to acknowledge him it may be as the lord of the soil (for he had got no part in it of God), and they were to be a witness of the transaction in question. Thus they part on friendly terms, and then Abraham plants the grove in Beersheba for its cool and refreshing shade, and where he might call upon God in retirement and undisturbed—afterwards these groves were used for idolatrous purposes. Abraham now seems to have more of rest, but he would not ascribe it to man or man's covenant, but to the Lord, the everlasting God, who is here revealed to us in this character for the first time.

## CHAPTER XXII.

WE have now arrived at a portion of God's Word which exhibits beyond any other the trial of faith—at least in one who was only human—and the power and blessedness of the faith that could sustain one in such a trial. Abraham was honoured with a title above any other that we read of in the Old Testament, he was the friend of God—"Abraham my friend" (Isa. xli. 8; 2 Chron. xx. 7)—and yet he was a tried man; how comforting to the tried ones of God's family, to remember that their severest chastenings are not from any lessening of God's friendship, nay, as one afterwards teacheth us, the chastening is but the token of a Father's love to the son in whom He delighteth (Prov. iii.; Heb. xii.)

The Jews reckon ten great trials of Abraham,\* but many of them were of God's retributive dealing, the fruit of his own devices; some of his trials, and those the heaviest, were the proving of his faith, and we should distinguish between these different classes of trials. Probably all saints know something of both, for all have the evil flesh about them, and all have to do with God, and here we have the two great sources of the different classes of trials, the proving of faith,

\* See Appendix.



and the chastening for sin. We see Abraham in the last chapter sorely tried, but it was trial he brought upon himself, he must cast out his son, but it was his son after the flesh, the son of his own device, or of his yielding to Sarah's device, not the son of God's promise; yet a parent will feel for his own, and to a tender-hearted parent like Abraham "the thing was very grievous," but God assures and comforts him. And now years have rolled on, the "twelve princes" are rising up around Ishmael, the wild man, the archer of the wilderness, and Abraham is following his peaceful occupation, and as he paces his groves at Beersheba, holding communion with "the everlasting God," and gathering joy and strength in his own spirit, we may suppose that now in his old age his trials are over, but it is not so, the heaviest awaits him yet, the heaviest of all, but he stands in it, and so it is the most blessed. "It came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham," the word here translated "tempt" (נִסָּה) means to try or prove by the smell, so as to learn the savour of a thing, God tempted or proved Abraham to see what was in him, and He found that which was a sweet savour to Him, He found faith, the one thing without which it is impossible to please God, and the temptation was to Abraham when he passed through it full of blessing. God, we must carefully keep in mind, never tempts to sin (James i. 13), He could not from His nature, allurements to sin is the work of another one, he that is called the "tempter;" man is often said to tempt God (Num. xiv. 22), but never I believe in a good sense, as proving the goodness in Him—this faith does, it proves Him (Mal. iii. 10)—but in an evil sense, by some phase of

unbelief. Again we must remember that the temptation here was not merely for trial, it was not trial for trial's sake alone, but for the strengthening of his faith and the communication of blessing (we probably see the two uses of the same word in Deut. viii. 2 and 16) and moreover it may be that this temptation was designed for the instruction of Abraham, by a further and fuller manifestation of Himself and of His purpose. Indeed it has been supposed that the whole transaction was God's answer, by a symbolical representation, to the desire of Abraham to know more particularly the way in which all nations were to be blessed in him and in his seed, and while it is impossible to assert that it was so, still it is in keeping both with Abraham's character and antecedents, and God's way of dealing with him, and with the details of the narrative. In the fifteenth chapter we see something of the kind, God's blessed revelation of Himself to Abraham encourages him to inquire of the Lord concerning what was very near to him, and God's promise again further draws out Abraham, "whereby shall I know"? and the Lord meets this desire too, and by a symbolic representation assures him concerning the seed, their affliction and inheritance. All this instruction he got at his own desire, but it was accompanied with trial, and so it may be here; Abraham we may suppose would desire more knowledge of the coming blessing by the seed, and of the way or mode by which that blessing was to come—"whereby shall I know?" and God communicates this knowledge to him by a symbolic action involving much suffering to Himself. But whether God thus manifested Himself of His own will, as the opening of

the chapter would rather imply, or responding to the will of Abraham as we have been supposing, it seems likely that Abraham got deep instruction in the ways of God from the solemn event here brought before us.

God calls to Abraham, He calls him by his name, and Abraham responds to the call, "Behold, here I am," obedient to Thy call, ready to meet Thy will with me. Abraham little thought what a sore trial was now before him, but it is God that has called him to it, and it must be well. God does not leave him long in suspense as to His will, "Take now thy son, thine only son"—it is the same word as in Ps. xxii. 20, xxxv. 17, "my darling"—God calls him "his only son," as the only one of his wife Sarah, the only one of promise, and besides Ishmael is now banished, a lost one to Abraham—God proceeds with him, He will leave no doubt on the mind of Abraham as to whom He means, "thy son, thine only son, Isaac," thine Isaac, the son of thine old age, of thy beloved Sarah, the son of joy and laughter, him "whom thou lovest." God does not slur over any of the circumstances, to lighten the trial, but dwells with minuteness on each point that would open the cells of memory in Abraham's breast; indeed there seems a purposed climax in the description of Isaac, for God's design is to try or to prove Abraham, and He gives to the trial or temptation its full force, it must lose nothing of its strength in its assault upon Abraham's faith; if the faith be genuine, if it be in exercise, it will stand the shock, and so it was with Abraham, faith triumphed, God was glorified, and he was greatly blessed.

It was a sore trial that Abraham had to endure at the weaning of Isaac, the casting off of Ishmael, but what

is it to this at the maturity of Isaac, the sacrifice of his beloved son, round whom his hopes and happiness so twined!

After so designating Isaac that there can be no mistake, God opens the trial to Abraham, "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," thou, thine own self, with thine own hand, offer upon the altar thine own beloved Isaac, slay him, and consume him to ashes, as a burnt-offering to the Lord! Here we have the temptation in its length and breadth, the proving in very deed whether faith in Abraham, trust in his God, rose above every feeling and affection of his heart, every yearning of his nature, every suggestion of his mind and reason; head and heart would all have gone one way, and that way in opposition to God, but faith bowed down before Him, even in His severest demands, God must be above the nearest and dearest with Abraham, and to the word of his God, when He requires it, he will yield a blind unhesitating obedience, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He had afore pleaded to the Lord Himself, and now he acts on this faith, and it silences every murmur of his heart, and so, as in the case of Ishmael (xxi. 14) we find Abraham yielding a ready obedience, he is in earnest in his painful service. It may be that now he would have some faint glimmer on his mind as to the purpose of God, possibly he would associate this "only one," this seed of promise, with the promised seed of Eve, who was to bruise the serpent's head, it may be that he had learned from sacrifice that it was by death he was to do so, and it may be that he had some thought of resurrection also,

and that he looked for the resurrection of Isaac. The fifth verse would seem to intimate something of the kind,\* he would hardly have told his young men what he knew to be untrue, while in the act of obeying God, and the passage in Hebrews (xi. 17—19) where he is spoken of as “accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead” seems strongly to countenance, if not to affirm the view. He knew that the promises were suspended on Isaac, he knew that they could not fail for God was the promiser, but if Isaac was slain how could they be fulfilled but by his resurrection, and in the intimacy of that friendship with which he was favoured of God, it is likely that resurrection as the hope, or rather the hope being fulfilled in resurrection, was revealed to him. How else could he realize promises made but never fulfilled *to him*, as the repeated promises of the land *to him*, as well as to his seed? (See Acts vii. 5, and xiii. 32, 33.) And this seems to receive much confirmation from that word of our Lord (John viii. 56) “your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad,” now the day of Christ is an expression which does not meet its solution in the Lord’s first coming, but I believe always refers to His second coming, but the second coming we know is in resurrection, and so it would seem that Abraham had some perception that it was through the sacrifice of another, and the resurrection to life of the one so sacrificed, through death and resurrection, that the promised blessing, or the blessing in the promised seed, was to flow to all nations.

The trial however would be great to Abraham, but

\* The verb *נִשְׁחַיֵּם* is in the plural, “we will come.”—ED.

his faith was great to meet it, indeed he could not go through it without this mighty faith that so laid hold on God. If we think that the belief that he would again receive Isaac from the dead, would lessen the trial, doubtless it would, but it also magnifies the faith that could look through death to a present resurrection—this is just where the faith of Martha failed (John xi. 23, 24)—and we must remember that this was God's object with Abraham, not to try him for trial's sake, but to prove, to exercise, to strengthen his faith, that He might do him good (Deut. viii. 16), to manifest it to his own blessing, and the blessing of his seed after him. "Abraham rose up early in the morning" we are told, and the successive steps of his obedience are as minutely recorded, as is the temptation of God. He "rose up early," showing not only the alacrity of his obedience, but to escape, it may be, the enquiries and solicitations of Sarah, and saddled his ass with the rude pack of those early days, very unlike to what we call a saddle, "and took two of his young men with him," his servants, "and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering," not knowing whether there might be any where he was going, "and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him." We know how nature would shrink at each one of these acts, which so exhibit the self-possession and determination of the man of God, but God meets faith, and so its strength is the strength of God, and so Abraham is carried through the trial, without a wavering in his faith, that we have the slightest intimation of. Well he goes on his journey, his wondrous journey—what journey was ever like it, but that to the cross of Calvary, of which this probably was typical—

and "on the third day"—so long had he to meditate on the object of his journey in his own heart, with none to reveal it to, none to counsel with—"on the third day he lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off," being made known to him according to Jewish tradition, and a very probable one, by a luminous cloud resting on or over it. Here he stays his young men, they must not enter the sanctuary with him, they could not understand his strange worship, doubtless they would have hindered him in his sacrifice to God as one beside himself, and so he says, "Abide ye here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you"—"yonder" it may be where the cloud of glory was resting, the usual symbol of the Divine presence.

Abraham would doubtless remember his visit to these parts in times past, somewhere about here it was that he met with Melchizedek of old, and got such blessing from the interview, and the memory now would strengthen his faith in the Most High God, and so he "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 now we hear the conversation of this father and son by the way, "Isaac spake unto Abraham his father and said, My father"—how the word would go to the heart of Abraham! it was no hard unfeeling parent that Isaac spake to, but a tender-hearted, loving father—Abraham answers him, "Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" What a question it was! how it would again appeal to the heart of Abraham! but he

has his answer, and just the fitting one, the answer of one instructed in the school of God, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering," everything is resolved to God, Abraham was now walking before Him, and not in any crooked policy of his own, and it was the strength of his heart in this trying hour that in faith he was doing His will, however crucifying to himself, that he was acting in the integrity of his heart before God. It seems that Isaac is satisfied with the answer, for we do not read of any more questioning, and now they have finished their journey, and are come to the place of which God had told him, and in calmness and subjection of soul, he sets himself to his solemn work, he "built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood." How wonderful every step in the progress of this drama, the action of the father, the submission of the son! The father gives up his son, his only, his well-beloved son—what discipline of soul was here! what exercise of grace, that angels might look upon! with his own hands he makes all the preparations for the sacrifice of his son, and the son yields himself, in unhesitating obedience—how trained must he have been, so to yield himself without murmuring or questioning to those in authority over him! Surely Abraham justifies that word of the Lord concerning him (chap. xviii. 19), "I know Him, that he will command His children and His household after him," etc. Had Isaac resisted, being now, as is generally supposed, twenty-four years old, it would have been impossible for Abraham to have accomplished his purpose, but it is likely that now the special mission of Abraham was declared unto him,



and having entire confidence in his father's love, he knew that he would never have acted so, but in subjection to a distinct command of God, and it may be that the glory cloud was in his view, before which Abraham erected his altar, and that his father's hope of resurrection was imparted to him also. How far any or all of those motives combined to influence him, we may not determine, but it is likely that they would, and we see the result in his passive submission. And now everything is ready, "And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son," and from his uplifted hand the fatal stroke is about to fall upon the poor willing yet trembling victim, when suddenly that hand is arrested by a voice from heaven; "the Angel of the Lord"—the revelation of the Lord in this chapter, and the first time that He is so revealed to Abraham—"called unto him out of heaven and said Abraham, Abraham," repeating his name as if hurriedly to arrest the fatal blow, and he said, "here am I," he could say so with conscious integrity, he said so when God called him to the trial, and now that he passed through it, and lost nothing in it, he may face the Lord with holy confidence, he needed not as that poor naked one (chap. iii. 8) to hide himself when he heard the voice of the Lord. What a shaming effect has guilt on the soul, what an open confidence does conscious integrity impart! The Angel of the Lord called to him and 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." Abraham was tried, and he stood in the trial, and now comes the blessing, for "blessed is the man that endureth

temptation" (James i. 12). "Now I know," saith the Lord, "that thou fearest God." God knew it before, but He speaks, as constantly through the Bible, after the manner of man, now it is manifest and man may know it, and how gracious of God that it should be so manifest! What blessing to Abraham, and what blessing to his seed, this manifestation of the boldness, the decision, and the triumph of faith over everything that would hinder obedience to God! "Now I know that thou fearest God"—the fear of God, is in the Scriptures the expression of the true religion, more especially in the Old Testament, when the element of love was not yet brought to light in its fulness (Ps. cxxviii. 1), and this act was the proof of Abraham's religion, as his faith was the root of it. This is the passage of Abraham's life which the Apostle James uses (chap. ii. 21) to show the real and practical character of his faith, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?"—in point of fact Abraham had been justified long before, the faith that justified him we read of in the fifteenth chapter, but here his faith is justified as true faith, and not the mere profession, unaccompanied by works, as in the case of one saying "he hath faith," which the apostle is reprobating (verses 14, 16). Abraham was justified *before God* on the credit of that work which his offering typified, the only way by which a sinner was ever justified, by faith he came into the knowledge and standing of a justified man, his own soul had the peace and blessing of it, and by his obedience or works it was manifested to others.

Abraham now receives back his Isaac as in a figure from the dead (Heb. xi. 19). What must the joy

of Abraham's heart have been now, and what the joy of Isaac ! they can meet and embrace each other now, and they can return to Sarah, the trial has passed away, and with it the bitterness of death, and unembittered by any failure or wavering on their part. God has brought them through it, and doubtless to God they give the praise, and in after years they would remember that day on Mount Moriah, it would be an Ebenezer to them through the journey of life with its many trials.

And now "Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked," expecting it would seem the lamb of God's providing and if so, he was not disappointed, faith is never disappointed ; "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 so God did provide him a lamb for a burnt-offering. Of God's providing was every part of the transaction ; the ram, and the thicket, and the entangling of the ram in the thicket by his horns, all was of God, and nothing was of chance, and probably it was meant of the Lord to show forth the continuance of the intermediate economy of sacrifice till the time of the promised seed, the great antitype of Isaac appeared, that One for whom there was no friendly voice to avert the blow, the One forsaken of lover and friend, who bare the wrath to the uttermost, and the filling up of whose cup was, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me" (Ps. xxii. 1). "Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-Jireh," a good name, a happy memorial to encourage faith, "the Lord will see, or provide," in reference no doubt to his own word

to Isaac (verse 8) "God will *provide* Himself a lamb," and now that his faith is answered, and that he proves God's faithfulness, it is no longer "God will provide," but, the Lord Jehovah will provide, the higher and proper name, Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, will provide. God has proved Abraham and found him true, and now he proves God, and finds Him the same unfailing one, the very present help in trouble (Ps. xlv. 1). This name was Abraham's Ebenezer, showing how experience wrought hope in his soul (Rom. v. 4) and so it became a kind of proverbial saying, "in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen," expressive of faith in the Lord's help in extremity, though some would render it, more in accordance with the Greek translation, "in this mount the Lord will appear," in reference to the temple built here afterwards. "The land of Moriah" to which Abraham was directed of the Lord to proceed, is the general name, including probably not only the Mount Moriah properly, but Zion and Calvary, which are in immediate contiguity; there it was most likely that Melchizedek worshipped, there that David offered his sacrifice to stay the plague, there that Solomon reared the temple, and there was Jesus crucified, and there moreover, say the Jews' traditions, were the sacrifices of Noah and Abel and even of Adam offered up. It was the honoured spot where the Lord was pleased "to set His name there," and hence the traditions that gather round it.\*

\* It is remarkable that the Samaritans, jealous for the honour of their own place, make the word "Moreh," where Abraham first came (chap. xii. 6), and where rose Mount Gerizim, the competitor with Zion for the honour of the Lord's house.

And now "the Angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord," clearly revealing who this Angel was, even Jehovah, and showing in the renewal of the covenant for the fifth time, in the mode, and enlarged terms of it, how pleased was God with Abraham's obedience, "by Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord"—"God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath" (Heb. vi. 17)—"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 heavens, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore." Abraham gave up his only son at the Lord's bidding, and the Lord swears that his seed shall be as the sand of the sea-shore—how obvious the recompence here! Again he surrendered up the seed to whom was the promise of the land, and the oath secures to him the gate of his enemies, the possession and dominion over them, and further in yielding the seed he seems to yield the promised blessing (chap. xii. 3), but again the oath insures the compensative blessing, "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," and all "because thou hast obeyed my voice." What a blessed God to call our God! what a master to serve, upon whom nothing is lost, and who so repays every act of obedience! It was the obedience of faith, and hence its value in God's sight, and hence its blessing to Abraham.

Abraham's trial is now over, and he returns from the mount to his young men, and so he keeps his

word with them (verses 5 and 19), and then they return to Beersheba, when Sarah probably for the first time would hear of this wonderful event, and with what mingled feelings of dismay and gratitude would she hear that she was so near to lose her Isaac, and by his father's hand, but that she had him again in safety, and the second time as it were from God, first at his birth, and now in this his typical resurrection. Isaac in a sense represents to us the risen seed, and in keeping with this we find in the close of this chapter some account of the family from which a bride is taken for him—this seems the reason of their being introduced here.

While we should only understand Abraham's natural descendants by the word "seed" in verse 18, we learn from the Epistle to the Galatians that another sense is attributed to it, that it refers to Him in whom alone the blessing is.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

To Abraham probably belongs the highest title allotted to man in this world, "he was called the friend of God," and yet this honour does not bring with it exemption from suffering. There was indeed joy for Abraham, joy and confidence in that holy friendship, but in the world he was according to his own confession, "a stranger and a sojourner."

In the last chapter we find him a deeply tried man, here we see him a mourner, Sarah, his beloved Sarah, is taken, the partner we may suppose of near a hundred years, and of sixty-two of his pilgrim life, the partner of so many joys and sorrows; she was sixty-five when they came into Canaan, and now she dies at the age of a hundred and twenty-seven, she is the only woman thus honoured in the Scripture by the record of her age, death, and burial. She died at Hebron which seems to have been their stated abode after coming out of Egypt, probably a kind of centre of his pastoral migrations, till they moved further south on the destruction of Sodom, then his abode was mostly about Beersheba (chaps. xxi. 33, and xxii. 19), but doubtless his life was migratory from the character of his pursuits, attending to his flocks and herds, and dwelling in tents. Hebron as a settled abode might

best have suited Sarah in her declining years, when the unsettled ways of a pastoral life would have been wearisome to her, but whether from this or from other unknown cause we find her in Hebron at the time of her decease, while Abraham it would seem dwelt at Beersheba (chap. xxii. 19), and so he "*came* to mourn for Sarah." If they were thus occasionally separated by his nomad mode of life, we may easily suppose that they often met, and now he is called to mourn and to weep for her, he mourned for her because he loved her, and he wept for her because of the sorrow of his heart. "Jesus wept" in sympathy with sorrow not His own, and we may weep though we must not murmur; it is no credit to any one to be above sorrow, it indicates want of feeling, but it is worse to murmur, it is expressive of want of subjection to God. The infirmity of Sarah is not concealed from our view, it is not the way of Scripture to do so, it shows the evil in truthfulness, God covers it in grace; in Sarah it was mostly manifested, where it would most naturally be in a woman, in the case of Hagar, and as a partaker with Abraham in his guilty devices to shield himself in Egypt and Gerar, but here the evil was more with him, she fails in yielding to his devices, and retributively he fails in yielding to hers (chap. xvi.).

The Apostle Peter makes honourable mention of her in his first Epistle as we have seen, and she is also favourably noticed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to be called her daughters was an honour that was only purchased by well doing.

She was contrary to the course of nature the mother of Isaac, the promised seed, even as Mary was of his antitype Jesus, our Lord and Saviour,



and indeed as all the children of God are born (John iii. 3, 5).

There may be a mystery in the time of her death, it was between the resurrection of Isaac and his getting his bride.

In the means which Abraham uses to procure a burying-place for Sarah, a scene of primitive simplicity and courtesy is presented to us, He "stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth," he had been sitting on the ground, the ancient posture of mourning (Job ii. 13; Ezra ix. 3—5), even as kneeling is that of devotion. Hebron was in the possession of the sons of Heth or the Hittite, to whom accordingly he addresses himself, "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." How remarkable are these words of Abraham! To the children of Heth he was a mighty prince among them (verses 5, 6), but by his own confession he was a stranger and sojourner in that very land which God had repeatedly and distinctly promised to give to him and to his seed for ever, and he has not, nor ever had he, any other possession in the land than this burying-place, for which we find him here in treaty. He took possession of the land in death, intimating that his interest in it was in resurrection, and probably the strong desire of Jacob and Joseph to be buried in the land is expressive of the same hope. This confession of Abraham's (verse 4) is referred to in Heb. xi. 13, and is treated as teaching the same truth, and this is in harmony with Stephen's word, in Acts vii. 5. In resurrection will these promises to Abraham and his seed be fulfilled, which were not in

the time of Joshua, nor even of Solomon. They received indeed the firstfruits of the promise, but their failure hindered the fulfilment, they entered the land, but they never got the promised rest of the land, the enemies were never cast out, the fulness of it was never possessed. Joshua and Solomon were both in their work remarkable types of Christ, or their work was typical of that work yet to be performed by the Lord Jesus Christ. In resurrection He will bring His ancient people into the land, and give them rest in the land, and His sceptre, the sceptre of peace, shall be swayed over the land in the full length and breadth of it, when God shall give to Him the throne of His father David. Abraham, it may be said, looked for a heavenly inheritance (Heb. xi. 16), he did so, yet he will with Jeremiah and Daniel and other saints of Israel, "stand in" his "lot at the end of the days" (Dan. xii. 13).

The position of Abraham in the land very much teaches us what should be the position of the children of Abraham in this present evil world, in it indeed and yet not of it, strangers and sojourners, and their failing to realize this relation to the world, is the cause of their often low state in spirit. As we are at home in the world we shall be strangers with God, as we are at home with God we shall be strangers in the world, and what is it that causeth us to feel as sojourners down here, is it the trouble or trials of the way? No, troubles or trials will only lead us to wish for the removal of them; it is the faith that gives us to realize our life and portion with God, and to look upon circumstances here, whether of prosperity or adversity, as

but circumstances, and our life with God as the great reality, it is this that enables us to be willing pilgrims for the little while.

We further remark from Abraham's words, how death affects everything, what is his word of her that had been so beautiful and beloved? "That I may bury my dead out of my sight." Death is the wages of sin, it is well to be buried; there is no death in God's life, no burying out of sight, but a bringing to sight in light and immortality.

The children of Heth answer courteously and generously to Abraham, "and Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land," and entreats their good offices with Ephron the son of Zohar, to whom the cave of Machpelah belonged, that he would give it him for a possession of a burying-place, for as much money as it is worth.

Ephron appears to meet Abraham with the same kindness and courtesy, "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 again "Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land."

It is easy to adjust matters when such is the disposition, it is not who can make most of the other, or bargain best for himself, but it rather seems a friendly contest, as to who may outdo the other in kindness, each seeking not his own but the other's benefit. Abraham will not receive the land or any part of it as a gift, till God is the giver, even as He is the promiser, and Ephron on being urged by him values the land at four hundred shekels of silver, short of fifty pounds of our money, very sweetly adding "What is that be-

twixt me and thee?" How the words of this poor Hittite may instruct many a child of God! And so the silver is *weighed* out by Abraham, for money was not then in the convenient coin to which we are accustomed, "and the field of Ephron, . . . and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession," the only possession that he ever held in the land, and yet a not altogether unimportant one, as a memorial to the people where the bones of the patriarchs lay, which would keep the land in their minds as their future inheritance. This is the first account we have of any barter, and certainly to a European ear it is sufficiently attractive from its simplicity and seeming disinterestedness, but those accustomed to Eastern usages assert that the speech of Ephron was hollow and insincere, and only intended to lay Abraham under such a compliment as would insure payment with interest. It may be so, but it is happier to take the history as it reads, and it seems pushing orientalism a little too far in interpretation, to judge of this transaction between primitive people near 4000 years since, by the customs of those who, from increased intercourse with men, have learned more of the deceitful and cunning ways, that govern those specially who have been exposed to circumstances of poverty and oppression.

The field and the cave are now Abraham's, made sure to him for a possession of a burying-place, and there Sarah is buried, she first takes possession of the land, and there her dust is resting with Abraham's till the trumpet sounds, when she that was so beautiful as to attract the notice of kings even in her advanced years,

will rise with greater beauty than ever, and no deformity to mar it. Of the different localities of the Holy Land distinguished for remarkable events, none is more satisfactorily ascertained than the cave of Machpelah at Hebron, there it is to this day the object of interest to travellers, but as our hearts are with God, it is not to the place of the dust of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob that we shall go, but to where their spirits are. There is no comfort in the grave, the comfort is with God, where the spirits of the just are, and the hope is in resurrection when they shall be raised and together we shall be with the Lord.

The name of the Lord does not occur in this chapter, nor should we expect it in Abraham's intercourse with idolaters, or in a merely secular matter.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

THE twenty-fourth chapter opens with the declaration of God's faithfulness to Abraham, he "was old and well-stricken in age," but when old and grey-headed God forsook him not, "even to hoar hairs" He carried him. God had promised when first He called Abraham to bless him, and make him a blessing, and how did Lot and Abimelech and his own household, and many besides prove the latter part of this promise, and how does the simple language before us prove the former part! "The Lord had blessed Abraham in all things." How blessed to have Abraham's God for our God, and how happy to see the children of Abraham proving in their lives their relationship to him, getting and giving blessings in their several relations and circumstances!

In the last chapter we had the death of Sarah, in the chapter previous, the account of Isaac raised up in figure from the dead, in this chapter we read of his marriage. Abraham will provide him a bride, a help meet, but she must not be taken from the people of the land amongst whom he dwelt, he may get a sepulchre, a house for his dead from them, but not a partner for his Isaac. In order to effect his purpose, Abraham speaks to "his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had," a wise and holy ser-

vant he was, as we learn from this account of him: he is thought to have been that Eliezer who is mentioned in chap. xv. 2, but it is uncertain, for that chapter dates over fifty years back, however it matters little.

Abraham is about to exact from him an oath, and he says, "Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh," in reference it would seem to the customary form accompanying an oath, but what the import of the form was does not seem very evident (it is used but once more, chap. xlvii. 29), whether it was a general token of subjection, or bore some reference to circumcision as the seal of the covenant, or to the promised seed proceeding from him (as in Scripture language one's progeny is said to proceed, chap. xlv. 26; Ex. i. 5; Judges viii. 30—see margin)—whatever be the exact import of the custom, we cannot now ascertain it, from its extreme antiquity, and it is well that it is of very little moment, what is needful is plain. The terms of the oath we next get, "I will make thee swear by the Lord, 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," this is the oath and we cannot but notice, how it manifests the watchful care of the man of God for his child, there is no trace of anxiety about worldly circumstances, his one object is to have a fitting bride for Isaac. We see in the past history how Abraham was appreciated by the people of the land (chap. xxi. 22, etc., and chap. xxiii.), and we see his courtesy and integrity in his dealings with them, and doubtless if he had been so inclined, he might have married Isaac among them

well and prosperously, according to the estimation of the world, but he was taught of God, and moreover he was obedient to the teaching, and so he had a wisdom above the world's wisdom. He must have one of his own kin for Isaac, one descended from his father Terah who came out from the idolaters, and acknowledged the true God, but was not permitted to enter the land ; Isaac and his bride must be " of one," the mystical Isaac and His espoused " are all of one," one nation, one God and Father—how all this teaches us where there is the opened ear !

Abraham's care for Isaac herein is most instructive, what shipwreck of happiness has there been, and what blighting of many a fair bud of promise, from contracting marriages after the fashion of the sixth chapter of this book, rather than after the way of the father of the faithful ! The Shunammite could say, " I dwell among mine own people" (2 Kings iv. 13), and should not the children of Abraham say, we marry among our own people ?

It is observable, the name by which Abraham swears his servant on this occasion, " Jehovah, the God of the heavens, and the God of the earth," Abraham had known Him in this revelation, he had so learned of Him from Melchizedek (xiv. 19—22), if not previously, and God had covenanted with Abraham, that his seed should be as the dust of the *earth*, and as the stars of the *heavens*, and it is the solemn confession of Abraham's faith herein, of Jehovah as the true God, the Creator and Possessor of the heavens above and the earth beneath (chap. i. 1). When we speak of Satan's rule and power in the world, from such Scriptures as John xiv. 30 ; 2 Cor. iv. 4, we must



be careful so to interpret them, as not to cast God out of His own world. The world is His and He made it, it is sustained by Him, the sun that shines by day and the moon by night are His ordinances, as is the alternation of the seasons, and all the beauty of earth, sea, and sky is of Him, and to be enjoyed and relished as of Him: the great laws that govern our nature, and that rule society are His appointment, though Satan has come in, has got entrance and power in the world by reason of sin, and disturbs the order of God, and introduces disorder and confusion, and stirs up men to wilfulness and rebellion, influencing them to their own destruction. But admitting all this and more, still we must be careful not to deny God's rule of His own world, He is over Satan, Satan can only carry out his devices in subjection to God, he can only work within his tether, and God in His wisdom, according to the counsel of His own will, permits the evil, and overrules it all to the furtherance of His own purpose—this will all be manifested by and by to the praise of the glory of His grace and goodness.

To return to our narrative, Abraham delivers his commission to his servant, and he was happy in the servant to whom he entrusted this delicate and important service, on which so much depended. He was one of his household well trained to "keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment" (xviii. 19), and how we see herein the recompence to the man of God, he was careful of his household to instruct them, and so he was blessed in his household. Of his many trials we read not of any in this direction, and what a lesson this is! Those who are always complaining of servants would do well to see whether some of the

fault be not with themselves, do they act by their households as the father of the faithful did? Abraham's servant wisely inquires of his master, that he may be in full possession of his mind regarding Isaac, "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?" It was the suggestion of an obvious difficulty he was likely to encounter, she very naturally might be unwilling to leave her own people, and, crediting the report of this stranger, to accompany him into a strange land, and probably had it been another servant, less true to his master, less wise and earnest in his service, she would have declined, but we shall presently find how successful was he in his service, and how willing was she to leave all and follow at his word.

Whatever the result may be, Abraham's mind is decided as to one point, Isaac must not return to the land of his fathers, "Beware thou, that thou bring not my son thither again;" this is a settled matter, it would be worse than going down to Egypt, it would be apostacy, a going back to that out of which God had called him. This is apostacy, and it is well to remember it, it is not the chopping and changing that we commonly see, from one church or sect or party to another, or back again, as it may be, whether it be from tenderness or scrupulousness of conscience, or a love of change that is inherent in many, or the many ways by which weak minds are influenced by stronger, there may be plenty of this with more or less of profit, or with little or no profit, but more or less of loss, yet without anything of apostacy. Apostacy

is the return to the evil out of which God has called us. He called Abraham from a land of idolaters (Josh. xxiv. 2, 3), and neither he nor his seed must return there. God calls now as then, it may be out of some one of the Christ-denying sects of the day, or out of Popery and its abominations, or out of Judaism, or out of none of these systems, but, as it most commonly is, out of a lifeless formalism, or out of the giddy dissipation of the world, or out of a state of thoughtless indifference; from some such form of evil God calls His people, and to return back to the evil from which He has called us, this is apostacy, or to simplify and enlarge still more the definition, He calls His people to Himself, "My son, give me thy heart," and to depart *from Him*, for anything whatever it be, is apostacy—"Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing" or apostatising "from the living God." This was the temptation of the Hebrews, their calling was from Moses to Christ, their temptation to go back from Christ to Moses, and to guard them from this, and keep them steadfast in their profession was the object of the Epistle.

Abraham's care then was that his son should not be an apostate. In how many instances do we find the confidence of the Lord in him (chap. xviii. 19) verified! His faith is sufficient for the difficulty that is suggested, he knew that he was acting according to God's mind, and he could unhesitatingly trust God with the result, his experience wrought confidence of soul in him as to the result, "The Lord 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 swore 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." How noble is this, how he recounts and dwells on the different steps in the progress of the grace of the God of heaven, "the God of glory" (Acts vii. 2), how he encourages his own faith by this holy exercise, and how blessedly that faith comes out, "He shall send His angel before thee !" There is no expression of any doubt or uncertainty as to the issue, "He shall send," it is true faith resting on God, what he had proved God to be, it is the faith that we ought to have even as our father Abraham, but we are of such poor dwarfish growth, so half-hearted between God and the world, self is so uppermost, and the Spirit so hindered, that there is no room in us for this blessed God-honouring and soul-sanctifying faith. He concludes his answer to his servant by reiterating his charge concerning Isaac, "only bring not my son thither again."

And now the servant being assured swears to his master, and makes large preparation for his journey, the ten camels are as well for the gifts he bore, as in anticipation of the party that would accompany him on his return, it was an embassy befitting Abraham : thus the servant undertakes the journey and safely arrives at his destination, at the city of Nahor in Mesopotamia, the district lying between the two rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris. Here we are again called to notice the acting of this trustworthy servant, he made his camels to kneel by a well of water, in order to rest them, for

kneeling is their usual posture of rest, at the time of the evening, after the heat of the day, when women go out to draw water—it is woman's work irrespective of their rank or distinction, in many countries of the East to draw water—and here he takes his place where he may have an opportunity of observing the young women of the city. But first he prays to the Lord, and very sweet and simple his prayer is, "O Lord 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." He calls upon God in that character in which he most happily knew Him, Jehovah, the "God of my master Abraham," the covenant title by which he could most confidently come to God, the title by which Israel long after most loved to invoke Him; there is no selfish object in his petition, his master's interest is uppermost, and he asks a sign in order that he may know God's kindness to his master, in appointing a fitting wife for Isaac. Observe it is not asking a sign after that God had spoken, to confirm His words, that would be evil, but it is asking a sign for guidance, a token of kindness to Abraham, and of approbation of his own righteous course, and this was true and right; it would be more dubious in our time, when revelation is so full as to guide us in

our course, and to assure our hearts in God's ways, revelation I mean, under the teaching of God's Spirit. It is observable again how true and appropriate the sign is, as regards her he was to take as a wife for Isaac, how well it justifies Abraham's choice of him for this service, it is not the one adorned with beauty or worldly attractions that he thinks of, but the one whose gracious bearing and kindly conduct would mark her as a suitable wife for the beloved Isaac. God shows His approval of his prayer, by answering him precisely as he had asked even "before he had done speaking," it reminds us of that word of the prophet which is to have yet a future accomplishment, "Before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear" (Isa. lxxv. 24), so it was in the present case, "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," she was granddaughter of Abraham's brother and so suited as to years for his son who was given to him so late in life. She comes to the well "with her pitcher upon her shoulder" (verse 15) doubtless led of the angel of the Lord according to the faith of Abraham, and in the following verses we are presented in the intercourse between her and Abraham's servant, with one of those pictures of primitive simplicity and courtesy, that are so refreshing amid the ways of a world, where a refined selfishness has well nigh banished sincerity and truthfulness from our manners. In this interview the frankness and kindliness of the damsel so "very fair to look upon," her readiness to meet the request of this unknown stranger, and even to run beyond it, engage

our interest on her behalf; he hastens according to his prayer to the Lord, to test her with his predetermined arrangement, "Let me, I pray thee, drink," or rather, sup, "a little water of thy pitcher," and her answer in everything corresponds with his petition, rather exceeding it, showing how manifestly it was ruled of the Lord, while she only acts according to the impulse of a kind and benevolent nature, possibly somewhat influenced by the importance of the stranger with his ten camels. How wonderfully the Lord overrules the free actings of man, to the furtherance and fulfilment of His own purpose! "The man (verse 21) wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not," he seems astonished at the exact and immediate answer to his prayer so far, but he did not yet know her kindred (see verse 4) and of this he now proceeds to inform himself. He manifestly expected by his act, that she was of the family he came to seek after, he may have thought that God having so far answered his prayer it would be fulfilled in everything, and so he takes out his golden ornaments, he has them ready, but it does not appear from the text that he gives them before he questions her (see verse 47). They are the first fruits of greater treasure to win upon her heart when he discovers who she is, and his success we see in the proffered hospitality of her father's house. We have next recorded the thanksgiving and worship of this holy servant of the man of God, "and the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord, and he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's

brethren." This is all very grateful to one's spirit, the remembrance and acknowledgment of the Lord's guidance and goodness, the contrast to the lepers we read of in Luke xvii., and alas, the contrast to so much that we know of in our own hearts, and then all through, the way in which he speaks of Abraham, "*my master Abraham*," in contrast to the proud independence of these latter days, and yet this was no common servant, he was the steward of Abraham's house, and "ruled over all that he had," and "all the goods of his master were in his hand," and this we see in the disposal of the jewels and precious things of Abraham, and yet it is always in speaking of him, "*my master Abraham*," as there is grace in the heart, there will be humility in the conduct. Further we notice his testimony "I being in the way, the Lord led me," when can we look for the Lord's guidance with such confidence as when we are in the Lord's way?

Rebekah ran, well pleased no doubt with her interview, she has lost nothing, but has been a gainer by her courtesy and kindness, and her report to her family, and the sight of the earring and bracelets, bring out her brother Laban to see this stranger of no every day occurrence, who is still awaiting at the well the issue of his first interview, for this faithful one has learned not only to pray and praise, but further to wait, a great lesson for the servants of God. Laban's salutation must have sounded very gratefully in his ear, showing how in everything the Lord had prospered his way, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels," and then he enters the house, and attends to his camels, and all hospitality



is shown to him and his companions according to the custom of the East.

This is all well, but from what we afterwards learn of Laban's character, we cannot help suspecting that it was not quite disinterested, the jewels of gold had probably their weight with him, it is written that "a man's gift maketh room for him" (Prov. xviii. 16), it would seem to have been verified here. "There was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told my errand," how beautiful again is this self-denying conduct of this true servant, he will not rest or eat after his long and weary journey till he attends to his master's business! It is not his own ease or comfort that his heart is set upon, but his great commission, to get a bride for Isaac, everything is subservient to this, to this self is subservient, this is the great object of his testimony and for this the jewels are brought out, that tell of the treasures in the father's house—what a pattern is this servant to all the servants of God's house! On being invited to make his errand known, he proceeds, "I am Abraham's servant, and the Lord 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." How beautiful is this, tracing all up to the Lord's blessing, how different from the heartless infidelity that receives the good, without acknowledging the hand that gave it, and then how admirably suited is it to tell on the hearts of those to whom he was speaking! Abraham, Sarah, what memories would

these names awaken! Then the blessing, and the riches, the son of his old age—and therefore all the more suited to Rebekah who was of a generation later than Isaac—and then “unto him hath he given all that he hath”! Truly he was a wise as well as an holy servant, he looks to God’s blessing for the success of his mission (verses 12, 27), and yet he uses the means as skilfully as if everything depended on them—what a pattern servant he is! He then recounts the oath under which Abraham had placed him, that he should not take a wife for his son of the daughters of the Canaanites, but of his own kindred, thus approaching his object with that expression of preference and of affection for his own family, so sure to beget a favourable feeling in one’s breast, and he wisely avoids what would only be likely to give offence and what there was no object in introducing, Abraham’s charge to him not to take Isaac back again to the land of his kindred. Again with admirable tact he recounts his own difficulty, and the way in which it is met by Abraham, casting him on dependence on the Lord’s providing, which would lead them as we find afterwards was the case (verse 50), to recognize the Lord’s hand in the transaction and to bow unto Him. It is very interesting to note here, the impression on the mind of this worthy servant of a worthy master, it is the impression left from his intercourse with Abraham that he relates, rather than the very words of Abraham, or he mixes up (verse 40) [this abiding impression of Abraham’s character, with the expression of his sure confidence, “The Lord 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." Now Abraham had said nothing of himself or his walk, his testimony (verse 7) was entirely of what the Lord had done for him, and would do for him; we read indeed in the seventeenth chapter, how the Lord had said to him, "walk before me and be thou perfect," and it is a very sweet evidence by the way, which Abraham could not well give of himself, but which those who knew him best were best able to bear, how through God's grace he had responded to this command of God and manifested it in his life. The aspect which Abraham seems to have presented to this servant, was of one habitually walking before the Lord—it is very blessed for others to see in us, what we may not look upon in ourselves, much less speak of, without danger of injury. The world observes Christians, and Christians ought to present a testimony to the world, manifesting what their Christianity is.

This godly servant continues his narrative, and repeats to the family of Rebekah, what we have seen in the former part of this chapter, not only his intercourse with Abraham, but his prayer at the well, and his interview with Rebekah, which would seem so accidental to a casual reader, but which was all of the Lord's ordering in answer to the prayer of his servant, much as that other poor sinful one that we read of at the well, led there of God at the very time that He was there who alone could help her—wonderful are these leadings of God in His providence, as well as in His grace.

Again we see the skill evinced by the servant of Abraham at the close of his address, he is relating his

own thanksgiving (verse 27) for the Lord's goodness and guidance who led him "in the right way, to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son," and with what confidence does he speak of this as the Lord's ordering, and how would it naturally incline their minds even as we see in the issue! "Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good"—it is the Lord's will, and we have nothing to say one way or other. These brothers of Rebekah\* further give their entire consent, "Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, *as the Lord hath spoken*," and again this devout servant worships the Lord, and brings forth the jewels of silver and gold to adorn the bride, and precious things for her brother and mother for her sake—it is well to be related to the bride. "And now that they have told their errand they did eat and drink . . . and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said," true to his commission, "send me away unto my master." He is diligent in that master's service, he does not waste his time in loitering or self-indulgence, it may be that he saw that which would incline him to think it more prudent for him not to tarry there long, and then he knew Abraham's anxiety as to the success of his journey, and he would long to cheer the old man's heart with the account of the Lord's goodness in the way in which he had prospered him, and therefore, while the request of the brother and mother of

\* Laban and Bethuel seem both to be brothers (verse 59) of Rebekah, Bethuel her father does not appear in the chapter where we might expect to find him (see verses 28, 53, 55, 59, 60).

Rebekah is most reasonable, that she might abide with them a few days, we cannot but justify the faithful servant in his decision, and desire that all God's servants might learn a lesson from him, not to be lightly hindered in their master's service. Her friends seeing his determination, and influenced by the motive he brings to bear on them, "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way," refer his proposal to Rebekah, "Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." How remarkable is her decision! She is made willing of the Lord to forget her own people and her father's house, like Abraham of old to leave her father-land and family, and on the report of this stranger concerning Isaac, whom she had never seen, to go forth and face the wilderness in willingness to become his bride. So they send her away with her nurse Deborah and with a blessing (verse 60) which would seem to intimate their knowledge of God's promise to Abraham, and so Rebekah departs with the virgins her companions, under the care of this faithful servant to guide her through the wilderness till he bring her safely to Isaac.

And now the course of the narrative brings us to Isaac, who, whether expecting his bride, or according to his custom, "went out to meditate in the field at the eventide." We probably here see the value of Abraham and Sarah's training, his pastoral occupation would afford abundant scope for this habit of his soul, and while thus engaged in meditation or prayer, for it may be either, he lifted up his eyes and beheld the camels coming. The bride is approaching, and she too lifted up her eyes, and saw the bridegroom, but

she knew him not till she inquires of her faithful guide, he said to her, "It is my master," and then she alights and prepares herself to meet him, "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." How sweet and simple is this holy narrative, how attractive it makes Isaac before us, the meditative man, the tender mourning son, the loving husband! It was three years since Sarah's death,\* and yet how he cherishes her memory, till this stranger from across the desert comes to comfort his heart, to fill up the void which Sarah's death had made there. No doubt this only one would be very dear to Sarah, no doubt she lavished upon him all the fondness of a mother's love, and in his grief we see how it was responded to. Isaac's character, seemingly the very reverse of Ishmael's, was moulded we may suppose in great measure by this love of Sarah, and the consequent frequency of their intercourse. Neither is the mention of his love to Rebekah to be passed over, he loved her, this stranger whom he knew not, neither chose, but of his father's providing, yet "he loved her"! The narrative is as we have said sweet and simple, but I doubt not that under the letter there is a mystery, in Isaac we have the promised seed, in Rebekah the Church wooed and won by the faithful servant and coming into Israel's place (Matt. xxi. 43) and married to the risen One—all this and more there may be in this portion of the Word,

\* Sarah was ninety years old when Isaac was born (chap. xvii. 17, and xxi. 5) and she died at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven (chap. xxiii. 1). Isaac married when he was forty (chap. xxv. 20), which would be just three years after his mother's death.

but the great profit from it is the moral that runs through it, the devout acknowledgment of God, and the ever setting Him before us, and His special care and guidance of His people. This we see specially in Abraham's servant, the type of a true minister or servant of God, he swears to his master and is true to his interest, his whole course is that of single-eyed unselfish acting, he prays to the Lord and the Lord prospers his way, he waits on the Lord, acknowledges His guidance, and offers his praise, he testifies not of himself, but of his master's goodness, and delights to tell of that son, begotten not after the order of nature, and in figure raised from the dead, to whom his father "hath given all that he hath"—"all things that the Father hath are mine." Thus he testifies to gain the heart of the virgin unto him, and he gives her of the precious things of his master's wealth, first-fruit and earnest of richer gifts, to win this fair one for the beloved, and when his work is accomplished, he comes and tells all that he has done. Is not this a picture of a true minister, of one whom the Spirit hath sent forth? And oh, if we had many such ministers, how different would the Church be! I speak not of one or other national denomination of the Church, but this true-hearted unselfish ministry of the Spirit in any denomination. It is easy to be zealous for a party, and easy to substitute our conventionalism in the place of the Spirit's work, but everything that is not of His influence will fail, and whatever is can never perish.

It is remarkable what a lengthened space is taken up with the details of this chapter, while so few words are allotted to what we should consider so much

more important, but the sovereignty of the Spirit is manifested in these things.

Jehovah, the God of the heavens and the God of the earth, is the revelation of this chapter (verse 3).



## CHAPTER XXV.

IN the opening of this chapter we read of another wife of Abraham and her issue. Though mentioned here after the death of Sarah, it seems likely that it was a marriage of earlier years, there is nothing in the original answering to the "then" of the first verse, and in the genealogy of the first chapter of the first book of Chronicles, Keturah is called Abraham's concubine, and her children are named before the birth of Isaac (verses 32—34). It seems unlikely that he whose body is spoken of in Rom. iv. 19 as "dead," should forty years after have such a family, except indeed there was a miraculous prolongation of that physical vigour, in order to the fulfilment of the promises of the vast increase of his seed, even "as the dust of the earth" and "as the sand which is upon the sea-shore," but we should be slow to resort to miracle for a solution of difficulties, except as the word warrants it. Polygamy or a plurality of wives was common in these early days and did not seem to involve any impeachment on one's morality, nor does it seem expressly forbidden. In the beginning when everything "was very good" it was not so, but sin introduced disorder into God's creation and God's appointments, and till the Lord came, till He died and rose, and sent forth his own Spirit, there

was nothing to effect that true union which marriage typified and should manifest. The sons of Abraham scattered abroad would take with them, we may suppose, the knowledge of the true God, and for awhile preserve it; from one of them "Midian" sprung, that people among whom Moses dwelt in the desert, and whence he got his wife, the daughter of Jethro, the priest or prince of Midian. Abraham true to the testimony of his servant, gave all that he had to Isaac, except certain gifts which he gave to the sons of his concubines, and then he sends them away into the East country, apart from Canaan and apart from Isaac, for the holy seed must be separate, His people must dwell alone. Everything now concerning Abraham being finished, and his house set in order, he arrives at the close of his earthly pilgrimage. He had lived just a hundred years after his coming into the land of Canaan in the obedience of faith, and a hundred years after the death of his father Terah, he was just a hundred years old when Isaac was born, and it is likely, though there are no dates to assure us, that he lived about a hundred years\* with Sarah, whom he survived thirty-eight years. His ancestor Shem he survived twenty-five years, according to the Bible chronology, he was seventy-five when he came into the land, and he lived just seventy-five years after the birth of Isaac, and thirty-five after Isaac's marriage, and he had another trial of his faith in waiting twenty years before

\* Sarah was sixty-five when they came into the land, for she was ten years younger than Abraham (chap. xvii. 17), and he was seventy-five (chap. xii. 4). That they had then been married some time is I think plain from the record in xi. 30, and from their coming into the land to her death was sixty-two years, for she died at the age of one hundred and thirty-seven.

a child was born to Isaac in fulfilment of the promise. But the time approaches when he is to have done with trials, and he gives up the ghost, he dies in a good old age, in fulfilment of the Lord's Word to him (chap. xv. 15), "an old man and full," our translation adds "of years," but it seems better without the addition, he was "full" out of God's filling, full of blessing, it is the same word that is translated "satisfied" in the happy blessing of Naphtali (Deut. xxxiii. 23) and happily applied also to the death of David (1 Chron. xxix. 28). His being "gathered to his people" seems to refer rather to his spirit than to his body, in spirit he departed to the place where the separate spirits abide, and where we afterwards find him (Luke xvi. 22, etc.), in body he was *not* gathered to his fathers, but his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah with Sarah, afar off from his fathers to whose country he showed an aversion to return.

It is pleasant to see these separated brothers united in brotherly alliance to show the last respect to their departed father, they meet together over his grave and there lay his body, returned to the dust according to the primal curse, and thus it is that he takes possession of the land, but he will rise again to possess it with Sarah and Isaac and Jacob in the glory when it will be worth possessing, and when there will be nothing to disturb the rest of God's people.

Thus we part company with Abraham, the friend of God, the father of the faithful, in whom we see so manifested the different principles of which the spiritual seed of Abraham are so conscious in themselves; we see in him so plainly, what in the New Testament is called "the flesh" or fleshly mind, and

when this is uppermost, then Abraham is as another man, but we also see the faith, the power of his spiritual man, and where can we find an example of more noble and unselfish acting, than in Abraham when his faith is in exercise? It is just as he acts from himself or from God, that we see the difference; now it is by faith alone that we come to God, or act from God, and just as in faith we stay our souls on God, and draw from His resources, we shall stand with Abraham, be prospered in our souls, and get the blessing with him, have the victory over every enemy that opposes, and rest in assured hope of the promise of the time, when "He that shall come will come," and when all His ransomed people together shall raise their shout of praise to "Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." Well, Abraham departs, he is at rest from his wanderings and from the trials of the way, trials within and without, but God abideth the same, the same present Help, the same faithful and unfailing One, and the first word that we read after the death and obsequies of Abraham is "that God blessed his son Isaac" (verse 11), He had promised to be a God unto him and to his seed after him, and He is as good as His word. Isaac we are told "dwelt by the well Lahai-roi," where he dwelt when first he met Rebekah, it was that well where the angel of the Lord found Hagar when she fled from Sarah (chap. xvi.). This was coming into proximity with Ishmael, whatever was his motive for so doing, but it is blessed to dwell by the fountains in this wilderness, and in choosing an abode we should ever do so with reference to this, and seek to be where we may be refreshed by the living water.

Before proceeding with the history of Isaac, we have a few verses devoted to Ishmael and his descendants, we have the twelve princes according to the promise to Abraham (chap. xvii. 20), and then the death of Ishmael at the age of a hundred and thirty-seven years; "he gave up the ghost and died, and was gathered to his people," his body returned to the dust, and his spirit went to the place of separate spirits as Abraham's, but whether to be with the blessed or the unblest, God knoweth. In the eighteenth verse the locality of the tribes is given, and the verse concludes "he died in the presence of all his brethren," but it probably may bear to be rendered "he dwelt,"\* according to the oldest versions, and according to the assurance given in chap. xvi. 12; the margin gives the literal sense of the word, "fell," it seems a collective word referring not to Ishmael but to his descendants, whose lot "fell" to them in the presence of their brethren. The history then returns to Isaac, we have his age, forty years, when he married, and how he is tried in the barrenness of Rebekah, as Abraham was in the barrenness of Sarah, and this must have been a trial of patience, with such promises given, and apparently suspended on the child-bearing of their wives. "Isaac entreated the Lord for his wife . . . and the Lord was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived," how encouraging are these little passing notices of the Lord's care for His people, His interest in what concerns them, and His answer to their

\* The word *נָפַל* meaning "to fall" is translated by the LXX *κατέκρησε* in this passage. The same word is used in Judges vii. 12, where the LXX translate it by *βεβλημένοι*, and the authorized version "lay along."—ED.

requests ! Surely every child of God has more or less reason to record his thanksgiving with David, "Praise waiteth for Thee . . . O Thou that hearest prayer." We are not told that Sarah's barrenness was a subject of prayer with Abraham, the Lord came in promise to him, when hope was gone we may suppose from that source, and probably the case of his mother may have encouraged Isaac to ask the Lord concerning this thing.

It is remarkable the notice that is given of Rebekah's case, she bare twins, and before they were yet born, the rivalry of the two nations that respectively proceeded from them is symbolically predicted in her. "The children struggled together within her," and probably feeling the suffering and danger to her life, "she said, if it be so," if it be that I have conceived of the Lord's answer to prayer, and that the promise of the seed is about to be fulfilled in me, "why am I thus ?" exposed to this inward conflict and danger, but it leads her to the wise thing, "she went to inquire of the Lord." Whether there was some stated place to which worshippers resorted, and where the Lord manifested Himself, does not plainly appear; it may have been the altar where the sacrifice was offered, and consequently when the priest attended, there it would seem the offerings of Cain and Abel were offered, there probably the Cherubim were, and there God may have manifested Himself in fire, from whose presence Cain went out. It may be that in this instance Rebekah resorted to Abraham, the prophet and the priest, and from him inquired of the Lord; if it was simply an act of prayer on her part, the language of the text would scarcely have been used, "she went to inquire of the Lord." How-

ever it be, she is instructed of the Lord in the mystery, "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels, and the one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger," and thus she knew why it was so with her. A thought may suggest itself, would it have been wiser of Isaac to have awaited the Lord's time for the fulfilment of His own sure promise, than thus to have entreated Him? I do not judge, but one of the most persevering enemies of Israel was the result, indeed if we trace back the history of many of Israel's enemies, as the Canaanites, the Moabites, and Ammonites, and here it may be, the Edomites, we shall find something wilful in their origin. Isaac seems never to have had much of comfort from his sons, one of them was wild and reckless, the other for a long time a banished man and in servitude, and to the close of his life a tried man. God I believe often grants our prayer, but in doing so shows us how much better it had been to have left our matters in His hand; waiting on the Lord, biding His time, and specially when we have a sure word to rest on, is a position of great grace and blessing, but of much difficulty through the impatience of the flesh. We may not pass this record of Rebekah's suffering, without noting how often her language is descriptive of the state of the believer, he feels the struggles of the two nations within him, and he thinks, if it be so, why am I thus? if indeed there is that which is of God in me, then why this struggle of evil for the predominance? But his remedy is even as Rebekah's, to inquire of the Lord, and then he shall learn the cause of it and that the elder shall serve the younger

(1 Cor. xv. 46, 57). When Rebekah's time was come, the twins were born, Esau, the red and hairy one, is the first-born, and then Jacob, the supplanter, laying hold on his brother's heel, doubtless a symbolical act, from which he was named.

The boys grew, and Esau was "a cunning" (or skilful) "hunter, a man of the field," but "Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents," in the pursuit of his pastoral occupations, the word (עִם) translated "plain," is usually translated "perfect" (Job i. 1, etc.), and is indicative of the mildness and quietness of his character and disposition, the simplicity of his life, in contrast to the rude and boisterous course of Esau's life and pursuits. Isaac we are told "loved Esau," and the reason for this partiality does not tend to raise him in our esteem, "because he did eat of his venison," Jacob seems a character much more like unto Isaac, and probably this may be one reason why Isaac did not so much value him. We do not like to see ourselves reflected in others, for that which we can bear with and be partial to in our own selves, is seldom pleasant or even bearable in another, and for the same reason, it may be, that Isaac did not appreciate him, Rebekah did, she "loved Jacob" we are told, she saw in him it may be, the resemblance of the one she loved, and then his ways were so opposite to the rough and boisterous ways of his elder brother, and further she may have had respect to the answer the Lord gave her when she went to inquire of Him. These reasons may have weighed in her mind in giving Jacob the superiority, but the means she used to give effect to her desire respecting him were very culpable, and seem to have had an unhappy influence on the



character and after-life of Jacob. The next circumstance which their history brings before us, is characteristic of the lives of the two brothers. Jacob the quiet homely man sod or boiled pottage, the hunter returns exhausted by the violence of his exercise, and asks his brother of his pottage, "Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom," or red; there seems a double reason for his being so called (see verse 25) and this was the name which descended to his posterity, no honourable memorial of their ancestor. Jacob on this occasion first betrays the infirmity that runs so through his life, seeking to effect by his own craft or device that for which he should have trusted the Lord, he now sees his opportunity and he makes the most of it, "Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright." It was no brotherly part of Jacob thus to take advantage of the infirmity of Esau, and though he effected his object, he does not seem *personally* to have gained much by it, his after life seems one of continued trial, as if marking God's disapproval of his way of attaining to the birthright, as well as of the policy that ever seemed to govern his life. But Jacob no doubt would know of God's Word to Rebekah that the elder should serve the younger, and he may have thought that this was the time and occasion for the fulfilment of it, and if his conduct herein was reprehensible, how much worse was Esau's! Indeed the brothers seem the very opposite of each other, the one thoughtful and calculating, the other utterly reckless and inconsiderate, and consequently we find Esau making so light of that honour which in the providence of God had fallen to him.

The birthright seems from the intimations of Scripture, to have had considerable privileges conferred on it, the firstborn seems to have been held next in honour to his parent, and to have had dominion over his brethren (chap. iv. 7, xxvii. 29, 37), he had a double portion of his parent's goods, and succeeded to the authority possessed by the parent (Deut. xxi. 17; 2 Chron. xxi. 3), he was peculiarly devoted to God (Ex. xiii. 2, xxii. 29), and it was in exchange for the firstborn, that God took the tribe of Levi (Num. viii. 5—18) to be "wholly given unto Me," from whence it would appear that the priesthood "the excellency of dignity" was attached to the firstborn (chap. xlix. 3, and Ex. xxii. 29) and doubtless the firstborn shadowed forth the Messiah, the title is applied to Him in the New Testament (Rom. viii. 29; Col. i. 16—18; and Heb. i. 4—6).

From all this it is very easy to see why Esau is called a profane person in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The temporal blessings belonging to the birthright were not, as far as we know, clearly revealed, or at least possessed, in Esau's time, if they were he probably would have more valued the distinction, Jacob gained nothing by it in this way, as his after history shows; but the honour and sanctity of the birthright as constituting its possessor heir of the promises to Abraham, this was well known and this it was that Esau lightly esteemed, these promises were in part spiritual, revealing God in blessing, and the greater part which was not spiritual, was future. Now this was blessing not according to Esau's taste, the carnal and the present were uppermost with him, the glorious promises of blessing to Abraham were accord-

ing to his estimate not quite equal to a mess of pottage, and it is a further justification of Jacob, that he should value and covet what he saw was so despised and profaned. Alas, how numerous is the family of Esau, what multitudes hear of the promise, yet for the present, the sensual, reject the spiritual, the future blessing!

Esau said to Jacob, "Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?" he seems to refer to his faintness (verse 30), from toil and exhaustion, but others think that he rather alludes to the course of his life, that daily exposed him to death, and so Jacob exacts an oath from him resigning his birthright, and then gives him bread and his dear-bought pottage of herbs, "and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright," and in these words we have very much depicted the character of Esau, a sensual man, making everything of present indulgence, unreflecting, occupied in his own wild ways, and little thinking of the things of God. Jacob on the contrary was a thoughtful man, it may be more a man of thought than of faith, yet of faith also, and hence we shall see in his life the constant effort to bring about by his skill, by the result of his own thought, the fulfilment of the promise for which he should have trusted God, and this want of dependence makes his life one of continued trouble. The trouble above which Abraham's faith raised him, was ever ready to overwhelm Jacob, and yet he was preserved, for God's promise cannot fail, however we may fail, but how it shows us the value of simple unhesitating faith, and again how little faith is helped, but rather hindered, by our thoughts and reasonings!

## CHAPTER XXVI.

THIS chapter is occupied principally with Isaac, and here we see somewhat more of his character, but it is seldom profitable, or at least happy, instruction that we receive from learning man, if we would profit happily it must be from the study of God, and His revelation of Himself, from making deep acquaintance with Him, and of His wondrous grace it is that He manifests Himself in such fulness, to meet the growing desire of His people and increase blessing unto them.

We find in the opening verse that "there was a famine in the land," Isaac is tried as Abraham was, the land was yet to both of them a land of promise, both as to its great fertility and rest. In this trial Isaac like Abraham turns his face towards Egypt, and on his way thither, as it would seem, he goes to Abimelech to Gerar, we do not read that he waited on God, and though it may be supposed that he did so, yet the silence is significant, coupled as it is with the record of his movement—this would seem the first step of his failure. From the twentieth and twenty-first chapters we would suppose that Abimelech and he were on friendly terms, at Gerar Isaac it would seem was born, but this was long past, eighty years or more, and another king may have arisen who knew not Isaac,

though it may be that the Abimelech and Phichol (verse 26) of Abraham's time were yet living, of which the greater longevity of life then would allow. While he is at Gerar "the Lord appeared unto him and said, Go not down into Egypt," Abraham went down there unbid and God suffered it, to try him and show him what was in his heart, but Isaac must not go, Egypt would have been dangerous ground for him, he that "loved Esau because he did eat of his venison" must not be exposed to the flesh pots of Egypt. How it shows us the Lord's care and consideration for His people, how He orders for them according to their constitution and character, and the special temptations of their nature!

The Lord moreover said to him "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee"—blessed encouragement! surely he may be well satisfied to be a sojourner with such a promise and such a presence!—here then he is to be a *sojourner*, but a *dweller* in another land which the Lord would tell him of, for it would seem as if different lands are spoken of in verses 2 and 3. The Lord then renews to him the promise made to Abraham, to give the land to him and to his seed after him, to multiply his seed as the stars of heaven, and that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed—"I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father." How gracious is all this of the Lord, and specially so at this time when Isaac was tried! He comes to him to counsel him, to comfort and encourage him. In the fifth verse God assigns as the reason of this that Abraham obeyed his voice and kept his charge, etc., referring, as I think from the allusion to the oath in

verse 3, to his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, for the first promise of blessing was before Abraham's obedience (chap. xii.), and indeed the occasion of his obedience in leaving the land of the Chaldees, but the noble act of obedience noted in chap. xxii., so pleasing to God, drew from Him that solemn oath, more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise, and especially the heir then before Him, the immutability of his counsel.

This was all very gracious to Isaac, a sojourner in a strange land, and in a time of famine, but the grace is followed by failure, as we so often find in the lives of the saints, whether it be that blessing leads them into a sense of security, and this gradually into a state less dependent and watchful, or whatever else the reason may be, the fact remains the same, that failure often follows the manifestation of God's goodness to us; in fact we are altogether dependent upon grace, and when we forget this, or substitute any effort of our own for it, we are failing. Isaac fails just as Abraham did over eighty years before, and without the same excuse (xx. 11) for he must have known Abimelech's character better than his father did previously to his dissimulation; even if it was another king that was now reigning, Isaac had his father's example before him (which may however have helped him rather downwards than upwards), and he had not the same reason (xx. 12) to offer for his deceit that his father had. Abraham prevaricates, but Isaac tells a direct falsehood. "The men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say she is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to

look upon"—here is just the same fear of man as before, the same petty device to secure safety, and the same guilty exposure of his wife to temptation. His lie however is discovered by Abimelech, seeing him using familiarities with Rebekah contrary to the usages of the East between even a brother and sister; the "sporting" with Rebekah in verse 8 is the same word that we have in the seventeenth and eighteenth chapters for the "laughter" of Abraham and Sarah, and indeed the root of Isaac's name.

Abimelech learning the truth from Isaac reproves him, it is a sad thing when the Lord's people so fall from their high calling, as to expose themselves to the reproof of the world, if indeed this Abimelech was of the world. He appears on this occasion to more advantage than Isaac, and one would suppose from the identity of the name, and the same character of acting, that he was even the same that Abraham had to do with of old, and incidentally a little note has been observed rather tending to strengthen this conclusion; in Abraham's case Abimelech took Sarah, but now he would be an old man and there is nothing of the kind though Rebekah "was fair to look upon," but in his reproof he says, "*One of the people* might lightly have been with thy wife and thou shouldst have brought guiltiness upon us." He then charged all his people, saying, "He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death." Thus we have the history of Isaac's visit to Gerar, he abode there it seems for some time, and though there was this evil, we may suppose that the course of his life was on the whole true and upright. He "sowed in that land," remembering the famine, "and the Lord blessed him," He does not

withdraw blessing because of failure, if He did who would be blessed? He does indeed because of continued sin, but this was not Isaac's case, and so "The man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: for he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants," this was all the Lord's blessing, but it was blessing where there is ever some cross to remind us that we have not yet got to the place of pure, and perfect, and unalloyed blessing. Abraham had blessing coming up out of Egypt, but there was the cross in it from the strife of Lot's herdsmen and his, Isaac had blessing in Rebekah, but her very beauty was a snare and a fear to him, and here that we are told of his prosperity from the Lord's blessing, it is immediately added, that "the Philistines envied him." This evil feeling broke out in many annoyances, they stopped up the wells which the servants of Abraham had dug, a serious inconvenience in an open and sandy country, with little shelter, often exposed to a burning sun in a cloudless sky, and this to one following a pastoral life as Isaac did, indeed there was scarcely any way in which they could more manifest their enmity to him. At length "Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we," fearing it may be his increasing prosperity, and the effect it would have on his people not very well disposed towards Isaac. He accordingly departed from the immediate vicinity of the town "and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar and dwelt there," and in this Isaac acted as a man of peace, much in the spirit of our blessed Lord's words in Matt. x. 23. Here he "dugged again the wells of water which they had digged in the days of Abraham," and



which the Philistines stopped up, and here we get a glimpse of the diligent and improving character of Abraham, of the barbarism and enmity of these Philistines, and of the industry and filial affection of Isaac, who digged the same wells which his father had digged, and "called their names after the names by which his father had called them."

Isaac's servants go on digging their wells, and the herdsmen of Gerar go on striving with them, and seeking dishonestly to avail themselves of their labour. It is Esek and Sitnah with him, contention and hatred, a little picture of the world's ways, till he gets to Rehoboth, out of their neighbourhood, and there he thinks "the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

Rehoboth means room or space, but he somehow seems disappointed, he does not find what he expected, how seldom we do in this world! and so, "he went up from thence to Beersheba," his father's old quarters, whence he formerly set out on that never-to-be-forgotten journey to the land of Moriah.

Beersheba would be a place of many recollections to Isaac, and his move thither seems to have pleased the Lord, for it seems that He appeared to him the very night he arrived there. It may be that he came to Beersheba in obedience to the guidance of the Lord, or it may be that it was the desire to avoid any companionship with the Philistines; however it was, the Lord very graciously appears to him as He did in verse 2, and in a revelation that must have been very grateful and encouraging to the heart of Isaac, "I am the God of Abraham thy father," the very same gracious God now to Isaac, who so manifested His

goodness and mercy and faithfulness to Abraham, and then "Fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake." How cheering a word is this, and how calculated to comfort and sustain his heart on the way! He may have had much to fear from the Philistines, who caused him annoyance and turned him out of the land, but still the word is "Fear not," and wherefore? "I am with thee." God would have His people happy, and unto this end He so manifests Himself, He opens to them the spring of true happiness; "Rejoice in the Lord," says the Apostle, he directs them to the fountain that is ever full and flowing, even when trials and troubles may most abound. It is remarkable in the two appearings to Isaac in this chapter, that there is a promise and a very precious one, which was not made to Abraham, "I will be with thee" (verse 3) "I am with thee" (verse 24), and this promise is also given to Jacob. Is it that their weaker faith wanted more encouragement than Abraham "strong in faith"? However, Isaac took in the word of Lord, for "he builded an altar there," he did not that we read of in Gerar, "and he called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there his servants digged a well." He seems intent to settle there for a season, where Abraham of old in the infancy of Isaac planted the grove, and called on the Lord, the everlasting God (chap. xxi. 33). Here doubtless, in the shade of that grove, did the man who was called the friend of God often go forth to meditate, and here it may be the holy faith was nourished, which afterwards we see manifested in such power, and here it is most likely that he instructed Isaac "to

keep the way of the Lord," and that Isaac first learned to be a youth of meditation and prayer. After this Abimelech and one of his friends and his chief captain come to Isaac, on the same errand as formerly those of the same name came to Abraham (verse 26, etc., chap. xxi. 22, etc.), indeed in this chapter we have as it were a part of Abraham's life acted over again in Isaac, and this has led those who know not what it is to tremble at the word, to assert that the passages are identical, or that the one is but the repetition of the other, but any unprejudiced reader will find enough of variations in the narratives, to show that they are not the same, while the same events happen to father and son, as would be very likely under similar circumstances.

Isaac questions them as to their coming to him, feeling that their conduct had not been friendly, "Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? and they said, We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee." Now the Lord had been with Isaac before they sent him away from them, but probably this they did not recognize then, and thought that he was enriching himself at their expense, but now they see it is the Lord, and that it is their interest to be on good terms with one so favoured. Isaac's testimony when apart from them, tells more on their conscience than while he was among them; while he was with them they thought that he was actuated by principles like their own, but when he was separate from them, they saw that the Lord was with him. And so it is often with ourselves in this present world, we are different people when we mix up with the world and when we stand apart, when with

the people of the world they see too much of themselves and of their own ways in us, when we stand apart they see the Lord. They then propose a covenant with him, "That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done nothing unto thee but good, and have sent thee away in peace," it may be that Abimelech magnifies his own good here, it is a common way with us, but yet it seems that he was kindly to Isaac, and the sending him away may have been a peaceable act, suggested by the envy and ill-will that he saw in his people at his prosperity.

In Abimelech's visit and request we see the acknowledgment of Isaac's superiority, and the ground of it, "thou art now the blessed of the Lord," the blessed of Jehovah, a remarkable confession from Abimelech, and one which would be another note supporting the supposition of his being the same that had to do with Abraham of old, and had learned of him; incidentally too it appears from this how the Lord had fulfilled his word to Isaac (verses 3, 24), so that they took knowledge of him that he was the blessed of the Lord.

Isaac receives them in the same spirit in which they came, "He made them a feast and they did eat and drink," a usual feature in the ratification of a covenant between parties, as a symbol of kindly feeling, and then "they rose up betimes in the morning and swore one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace." While Abimelech and Isaac were thus amicably engaged, the servants of the latter were digging at the well, as we read in verse 25, and the day that Abimelech left

they came with the good news "we have found water," and whether it was that the old name of the well had been forgotten, the Philistines having stopped it up, and that Isaac named it from the transaction which had just taken place, or whether he remembers the old name and its associations of early childhood and parental affection, or under the joint influence, which seems the more likely, he calls upon the well its ancient name. The value set upon water in the East we have seen before, and it doubtless is typical; our Lord teaches us very sweetly on this in John iv. and there is much teaching on this subject in Scripture. The chapter closes with the account of Esau's wilful marriage with two of the daughters of the land, Hittites, of the cursed race (x. 15). It brought grief of mind to his parents, to Isaac now one hundred years old, and to Rebekah, but it was only what was to be expected from him—a profane one and a wilful one are nearly related.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

It is remarkable how plainly the Scriptures speak of the failings even of God's most favoured people, there is no effort as among men to make light of them, or palliate them by vain excuses. Now this failure has by some been used as an argument against God's word, as if that could not be of God which exhibited His people as encompassed with such sinful infirmity, and infirmity often breaking out under temptation into open sin, but the objection, like many objections of the learned, proceeds from ignorance. If indeed we were to read of God's approval of the sin of His people, there might then be some ground for the objection, but while we ever see His love of His people, we see as invariably His hatred of sin. The Bible is not the history of man as a perfect creature and God's love to him as such, but it is the history of man as a poor fallen sinful creature, blinded in his intelligence and perverted in his affections, and of God's wondrous grace in visiting, redeeming, and raising up for Himself a people out of such a mass of ruin and rubbish, and this favoured people have still that old nature, which knows evil only, and which can only be restrained in its actings, as they walk in communion with God; in subjection to Him all would

be holy and happy, in wilfulness or insubjection, all is sin and misery. Why is the world so filled with sin and misery? why is it the waste where the plants of righteousness are so few and sickly? Because of wilfulness; man will not yield to Him whom he was born to obey, he listens as our first parent to the voice of another, whispering to his heart what his natural heart likes to hear.

But while in faithfulness we have the record of the failure and sinfulness of the Lord's people, the beacons to warn us by the way, yet God blots them all out, they have no place in His remembrance against His people. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for *My own sake*, and will not remember thy sins." Wondrous love, and wondrous grace! "Happy is that people that is in such a case, yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord." In the chapter on which we now enter, and which suggested the foregoing observations, we have a sad exhibition of infirmity and sin in the Lord's dear people; every one that passes before us in the chapter is tainted with evil, and the poor outcast all tainted as he is, seems most to draw upon our pity, there is the outburst of natural feeling in him, in the others there is so much of deceit and selfishness, and sin is so exceeding sinful when seen in a saint, one expects it in the poor unconverted sinner, it is no strange thing, but for one who professes to have died to sin, yet to live in it—oh, how sad it is, how belying his profession, how dishonouring to the name that is called on him, what an occasion of blasphemy to the enemies of God! This was the virus of David's sin, and wherefore is it ever so with a saint? Just because he is untrue to his principles. The truth of God does not fail, but he

fails it, and as we have often had occasion to remark, a saint is no more than another man when he fails to live by *faith*, for then he fails to live on God, and what then is his strength but weakness, when the temptation cometh? In the chapter before us we see Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob manifesting this very painfully. They have faith each one of them, and yet not one of them acts in faith, and so the evil comes out, their unbelief does not make void the promise of God, no, that must stand notwithstanding our evil, and God can and constantly does overrule man's sin to the furtherance of His own purpose, but this does not make sin the less sinful. The Jew in murdering the Lord of Life, was but giving effect to God's determinate counsel, but he acted under the evil impulse of his own evil heart, and his descendants accrediting his way, are yet under judgment for the sin, and thus while we see the sinfulness of the sin, we see the wisdom and power of Him, who can make that a link in the chain of His purposes, which to our view would only derange them effectually. To return to our chapter, we here see Isaac old and infirm, "his eyes were dim, so that he could not see," and it seems that he was ailing (verses 4, 33, 41) for he called Esau his eldest son whom he loved, and said to him "Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death;" he lived however many years after this, he was now 137 years old as we learn by comparing dates, and we find at the close of the thirty-fifth chapter that he lived to 180 years, but he thought that his life was drawing to a close, and he resolved to be so far prepared for his departure, by leaving nothing undone that fell in the way of duty—the resolution was better than his



way of effecting it. Isaac was now about to impart his dying blessing, there was more in this than the general blessing which a good parent would invoke on his child, it seems a special blessing on the firstborn (Heb. xii. 17), and we see from the eleventh of the same epistle, verse 20, that it was of faith; the blessing was of faith and therefore sure, though there was much infirmity in Isaac's way of conferring it. This seems the first time that we read of it, the curse and blessing of Noah seem somewhat of the same nature, clearly of God and irreversible, we find it afterwards more distinctly in Jacob (chaps. xlviii. and xlix.) and in the last words of Moses (Deut. xxxiii.).

The partiality of Isaac for his son Esau that we read of in chap. xxv. 28 still continues, and therefore his object is to confer on him the blessing, it is difficult to think that Isaac could be ignorant of the response to Rebekah (chap. xxv. 23) or of Esau's having bartered his birthright to Jacob, and if he was not, the partiality seems very culpable; it may be that blind and enfeebled he was governed more by inclination, than by subjection to God's will—with how many alas it is so!—however it be, he calls Esau, and sends him to the plain to hunt for venison, saying “Make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die.” It is not a pleasant picture that we have here presented to us of poor old Isaac, him who went out to meditate in the eventide, but the infirmity that we read of in chap. xxv. 28 has probably grown with his years, a danger we are exposed to from infirmities that are indulged and not resisted. The connection between the feasting and the blessing is not very manifest,

whether it was to cheer and strengthen him, that he might be more in heart for his work, and his affections to Esau flow out the more generously, or that it was customary, and formed a part of the ceremony on such occasions, somewhat as in the last chapter (verse 28, 30), it does not appear, but Esau goes on his mission, and now Rebekah comes up, and if the portrait of Isaac is distressing, to the full as much or more so is that of his partner.

She heard Isaac speak to his favourite Esau, and now she speaks to her favourite Jacob; favouritism is evil in a family, but on this occasion she had more of right on her side than Isaac had on his, yet the deliberate deception of the blind old man, the taking advantage of his infirmity so to impose on him, is very repulsive to one's feeling of what is right. She tells Jacob of the purpose of his father, and at once, without allowing herself time to inquire of the Lord, as of old when she was in suffering, or to remonstrate with Isaac on the course he was about to adopt, she decides on her mode of proceeding to thwart the intention of Isaac, and secure the blessing for Jacob. She knew that it belonged to Jacob of right, both from the intimation of the Lord in chap. xxv. 23, and from Esau's forfeiture of the birthright in the same chapter (verses 33, 34), and she acted as if she thought that there was danger of the Lord's purpose failing without her interference to uphold it, and that in such an emergency any means were right that could secure it. Her faith was weak and her feeling was strong, she could not trust God to accomplish His own purpose without her crooked means, and she could not bear to think of her beloved Jacob losing the blessing—there are but

few whose faith can stand the trial, as Abraham's did on Mount Moriah.

To effect her object, Rebekah first requires the obedience of Jacob to her command, "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth: and thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death;" thus she taught her son to practise deception on his father, and yet this is not so bad as what follows. Jacob suggests that the difference between him and Esau, the one being a hairy man the other smooth, could not elude the touch of Isaac, and that so he might bring a curse and not a blessing on himself as a deceiver, it does not appear to be any conscientious feeling that influences Jacob, but a fear of consequences, and as to this his mother satisfies him, but in a way not very creditable either to her or him, she "said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice;" it seems a rash word and presumptuous, but probably she spoke in the intelligence of God's mind from that word to her when she went to inquire of Him. She believed His word, but could not trust Him to fulfil it—how much of faith and unbelief was mixed up in her! how are they mixed up in all the Lord's people! If she had not believed His word she would scarcely have exposed herself to the curse, if she had more faith in Himself she would not have adopted such means as she did to effect it. There was One who could use her words, the One who was "made a curse for us"

(Gal. iii. 13), to us He says "upon Me be thy curse" to the Father, "if he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on Mine account, I will repay," and so we enter into the blessing, the sure blessing, inasmuch as it is the fruit of another's doing, and none of our own. 1

Jacob seems satisfied by the assurance of his mother, and is obedient to her command, it is one of the few cases where disobedience had been a virtue, and if Jacob's conscience rather than his fears had been awakened, if faith had been in exercise he would have disobeyed her; in this instance obedience to God would have involved disobedience to his parent, and nothing less may justify it, it was a case where he might have said "whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." However he fetched the kids, and Rebekah does the rest, she put the goodly raiment of Esau upon Jacob (this raiment may have been some way connected with or something belonging to the birth-right), she puts the skins of the kids upon his hands and the smooth of his neck, the better to personate the hairy man, and to deceive the blind old parent, and when he was fully equipped for his mission, she gave into his hand the savoury meat which she had prepared. Jacob comes to his father and calls him, and he inquires "Who art thou, my son?" for evidently he doubted from his voice as to his being Esau, and also he did not expect him so speedily, and Jacob replies, "I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me." To try and save Jacob's character here, by saying that he

was justified in representing himself as Esau, inas-much as he came into his place, is to make him tell one lie less out of several, but indeed it seems little better than trifling with the text; his conduct was false and deceitful, and to justify it is only to palliate evil and trifle with truth.

The old man suffering from the infirmity which made him apprehend his end, for we see from Jacob's address that he was lying, "said to him, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? and he said, Because the Lord thy God brought it to me." One falsehood makes way for another, the progress of evil is down hill, but how terrible this bringing down the name of the Lord to sanction his lie, or cover it over, and yet how many do so, how much of evil is covered over with the profession of zeal for the name of the Lord! Isaac, manifestly suspecting some deception from his voice, will feel or handle\* him, "Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not," and so Jacob comes near, and Isaac "felt him and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau," an expression that apart from its literal meaning, seems aptly to designate the character that Jacob was now acting, that of a hypocrite, the voice or profession soft and gentle it may be, but the hands or acting rough and wilful. Isaac discerned him not, yet is he still suspecting, "Art thou my very son Esau?" Jacob again asserts what he knows to be false, and the old man is deceived even as he deserved to be,

\* The word used here by the LXX (*ψηλαφάω*) is that which John uses (1 Ep. 1) when proving beyond the power of deception the resurrection of the Word.

and he gives the blessing to Jacob, and Jacob gets it, but little with it during his life besides trial and trouble. Jacob brought to his father the food and he did eat, and wine and he drank, and Jacob comes near and kisses him, and the smell of Esau's raiment seems to assure Isaac and he pronounces the blessing of the firstborn, including earthly prosperity, "God give thee of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine," and then dominion over people and nations, next lordship over his brethren, and in the last place a curse on everyone who cursed him, and a blessing on those who blessed him—but the fulfilment was and will be to his posterity and not to him.

Jacob had scarcely secured the blessing and left his father, when Esau returns from hunting, and he also makes his savoury meat; how much we read of it in this chapter, and how unsavoury it is, in the events connected with it! Esau brings it to his father expecting the blessing, "Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me," and then comes the discovery of the cheat, and the trouble of the father and the son, "Isaac trembled very exceedingly," that he had been so deceived, and disappointed in his purpose of conferring the blessing on his favourite Esau, and yet we see his faith, his assured confidence in the blessing, "Who and where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and *have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.*" The blessing of Isaac was in faith (Heb. xi. 20), and he wished to confer this faith-blessing on Esau, this Rebekah knew, and knew that it was contrary to God's purpose, and

by her device defeated Isaac's intention, and so irrevocable was the blessing, that Esau could not change his father's mind, "he found no place of repentance" in Isaac however well disposed he was towards him (Heb. xii. 17). We have then Esau's trouble and supplication, and the indignation of father and son against Jacob, his subtlety and supplanting, and again the irrevocableness of the blessing (verse 37), and here the language is to be noted which is afterwards common in Scripture, when one is represented as doing what he declares by inspiration shall be done, "*I have made him thy lord . . . given to him . . . sustained him*"—there is a remarkable instance of it in Jer. i. 10. Esau on this occasion rather excites our pity by the expression of his misery and earnest supplication, but his father, though he may not reverse the blessing or withdraw it from Isaac, yet has a blessing for Esau also, which is like Jacob's in its beginning and also like it in this, that it refers to his posterity more than to himself, "Thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth"; this is just Jacob's blessing (verse 28), and many feeling that it was not applicable to Edom, the country of Esau's posterity, have given a different translation, "Thy dwelling shall be *apart from* the fatness of the earth," that is, the Holy Land, Jacob's portion. Next we have the hostile character of the tribe, "by thy sword shalt thou live," not by peaceable and pastoral habits, which would be the likely course on a rich soil, and then the dominion previously promised to Jacob, thou "shalt serve thy brother," but a time of liberation is held out, when he was to break the yoke of Israel from off his neck, and have dominion, doubtless from

Israel's sin and unfaithfulness, and of this we see some intimation in the second Book of Chronicles (chap. xxi. 8—10, xxviii. 17).

We soon find the bitter fruit of this sad transaction, "Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him," and thinking his father near unto death, he determines to slay Jacob when that event might take place; he feels for his father—"Isaac loved Esau"—and was unwilling to bring sorrow on him in his latter end, but he does not feel for his mother; "Rebekah loved Jacob" and probably he was aware that she had a hand in the transaction which deprived him of the blessing, and he visits none of the evil on his own guilty self—how strongly the evil of favouritism appears in the transaction! Esau may have thought that as Jacob was childless, the birthright and blessing would then revert to him on his brother's death; at Abraham's death Isaac and Ishmael were drawn together, forgetting former things in the common grief, but Esau has different thoughts, though as it turns out, they met long after and amicably it seems at the grave of Isaac. This wicked purpose of Esau was somehow revealed to Rebekah, whether of the Lord, or whether by some one to whom Esau may have divulged it, we know not, that is, whether directly, or providentially through some channel; the expression of the text as to his purpose is, "Esau said in his heart" (verse 41), however she heard it, and with an energy which seems to mark her character in contrast to Isaac's, and which is manifest from her first appearance at the well, to this the last recorded event of her life, she decides on the course to be adopted, she sends for



Jacob, and tells him how Esau was comforting himself with the thought of killing him—what a source of comfort! what a picture it gives us of poor Esau! Rebekah again commands the obedience of Jacob (verse 43, as in verse 8), and lays her plans before him, “Arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran, and tarry with him a few days until thy brother’s fury turn away, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence.” The “few days” turned out to be twenty years (chap. xxxi. 38), nor do we read of her sending for him. Esau seems hasty and impetuous, acting on impulse, and like such characters not prone to keep alive the remembrance of injuries, probably more open and generous of nature than Jacob, Rebekah knows this, and her policy is founded on it, to Jacob she further adds, “Why should I be deprived also of you both in one day”? that is, of Jacob if slain by Esau, and of Esau who would thus be exposed to death by the Noachian precept (chap. ix. 6).

To cover over her purpose she has another story for Isaac, it may be not to afflict him in his growing infirmities by showing him the true state of the case as regarded his favourite Esau, and so she complains of her trials from the Hittite wives of Esau, a complaint in which she knew that she would have the sympathy of Isaac (chap. xxvi. 34, 35), saying, “If Jacob take a wife” of the same stock, then “what good shall my life do me”? and so she effects her purpose, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Before leaving this chapter, to me one of the most melancholy in the Bible, just as showing what is in man, I would observe, first as to Isaac, the blind old

man, yet so indulgent of his appetite, and anxious about it, it is "the savoury meat" that seems to attract him, and how does the heir of promise fall in our estimation as we witness this indulged infirmity! His character seems quiet and inoffensive, rather described by negatives than by anything very positive, he is meditative, peaceful, one of those desirous to let and be let alone, with little of his brother Ishmael about him, without strength or resolution, and hence it may be that God would not let him go to Egypt, and that Abraham would not suffer him to return to Haran, and took care to keep him separate from Ishmael by whom he would be likely to be influenced. His great failing here seems his desire to keep the blessing from God's appointed line, to gratify his own natural affection, which seems to warp his judgment, and this looks likes thwarting God's purpose, but it may be that his mind was enfeebled by age and infirmity. There is but little said of him in the catalogue of the worthies in the eleventh of Hebrews—how much of Abraham!

Rebekah seems the opposite of Isaac, energetic and enterprising, fruitful in expedients, she may have found it difficult to influence Isaac, though in this instance she does not seem to have tried. She knew that Jacob was the heir of the blessing according to God's appointment, but she does not wait on God to fulfil His own purpose, but has recourse to her own device in order to effect it. Her object was true, to secure the blessing to the heir of promise, her means of effecting it most untrue, taking advantage of her husband's blindness, teaching her son to deceive, taking things out of God's hands into her own, her

fears running before her faith. It was drawing out into exercise the natural infirmity of Jacob, who all his life long manifested this propensity, the source of great hindrance and trouble to himself. The full consciousness that it was God's mind that he should have the blessing does not excuse her acting, but rather the contrary—shall we do evil that good may come? God can never need such means even at the utmost extremity. It was failure of faith, it was the poor resource of the creature, which she probably, as many an one now, would cover over by such words as "we must use means." Truly we must, but let them be God's means, such as He appoints or can sanction, such as are pleasing to Him, and not the poor expedients of a carnal wisdom that fears to trust Him without putting our own helping hand to His work.

Jacob's character appears in a still worse light than either Isaac's or Rebekah's, if at the first he had any misgiving of conscience, it seems soon to have been quieted and in this Rebekah helps him. He is guilty of falsehood, repeated falsehood, and calls down God's name to cover over his falsehood, the evil is progressive in his case, he goes on from bad to worse to effect his object, he not only is guilty of falsehood, but duplicity, deception, and hypocrisy. And then the other actor, whose bitterness of sorrow and just ground of complaint at first excited our pity, we find before we part with him to be a murderer in heart, another Cain, profane, wilful, murderous, anticipating in his heart his father's death, that he might take to himself the strange comfort of murdering his brother. Now all this display of the utter corruption of the heart had been spared

us, had there been the faith to trust God, but it is well to show us what is in man, well that the hidden evil may come to the surface, that we may know that it is not for anything in us, foreseen or otherwise, that God visits and redeems us, but of His own purpose of love. That purpose is not to be defeated because of man's evil, the very evil but developes the grace and goodness of the heart of God, that bears with it, and provides for it, and out of such miserable materials can purify for Himself a peculiar people. Further the narrative shows us the continual need of that precious blood that cleanseth from all sin, and of the Spirit's power to keep our hearts under control—how the everyday life of every saint teaches him the same! May we dear reader so learn of the Lord, as we read such Scriptures as this, which show us not merely the evil of this or that one, but the common evil of our common nature.

It is remarkable that after the departure of Jacob which we read of in the next chapter, we have nothing more of Isaac, but simply his death, nothing more of Rebekah, not even her death, though her nurse's death is noticed (chap. xxxv. 8), we do not know that she ever saw her favourite Jacob again. Of Jacob we have a long history, but it is a history of troubles above any of the patriarchs; God is to him ever the same gracious God giving him most precious promises, but he seems never to know what it is to trust God, without some poor device of his own to help out the promise, hence it is trouble and trial continuously, he gets the blessing in the way which we have seen, and the first-fruits of it is the deadly hatred of his brother, from which he is obliged to flee the

land of the birthright and the blessing, to flee as a poor fugitive to the land from whence Abraham was called, and whither he would not suffer Isaac to return even to choose him a wife. When after a long stay he returns, it seems that it is not till after Rebekah's death, since there is no mention of her as there is of Isaac, and his life after as we shall see is trial upon trial.

It is a melancholy chapter, and we have no right to gloss over the evil, but we should look at it when it comes before us, and learn from it as we may. Flattery and detraction are alike abhorrent to the word of God, man traffics with such wares; we are taught by the failings of God's people, even as we are by their graces, taught to watch against the one, to follow after the other. The difficult thing is to learn the lesson, to have no confidence in the flesh, and continually to have recourse to Another, with whom we may be assured of not being overcome by evil. Men are often staggered by witnessing the failings of God's people, they seem to think of them as if they should be perfect, forgetting that they are men of like passions with themselves, and have nothing of power but while they are living in communion with the Lord.

In Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob, we see grace as well as nature, and that very distinctly, in this chapter it is all nature, the grace slumbers, and therefore is it so sad a representation, but God is over it all, and overrules it all to His end. Those who manifest the evil suffer for the evil, but God's purpose must stand. He did not lead Isaac so to indulge his own inclinations, or Rebekah to deceive, or Jacob to lie, the evil

was their own, the wonderful power that makes the evil to fulfil His own purpose was God's ; man's interference does not help God, neither does it hinder Him, but our waiting on Him is what honours Him and brings blessings to ourselves.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

THIS chapter presents a happy contrast to the last, there we had altogether to do with man and man's devices, and the survey was not happy, it was "only evil continually," here we meet with God, and it is goodness and mercy, blessing upon blessing—oh how blessed to have to do with God, and to enter upon every service with that savour and power that cometh from His presence, which truth of itself cannot give, which is only of the Lord!

Rebekah's project succeeds with Isaac, he calls Jacob and charges him not to "take a wife of the daughters of Canaan," he had not any intention of doing so, that we read of, but it was the device of Rebekah to get him out of the way of harm, till Esau was pacified and his wrath had subsided. How much happier it had been to have seen Rebekah using the legitimate influence of a wife, and no doubt a beloved one, than thus having recourse to these by-ways for the effecting of her object. Influence is the power of a wife, that which God gives her to be a help meet to her husband's rule, while dominion, power properly speaking, belongs to the husband, either may be used for good or evil, and hence the responsibility.

Here we find Rebekah influencing Isaac, though not very truthfully, and Isaac acting under the in-

fluence, issuing his command to Jacob, "Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother." He then confirms the blessing to him, with the confidence that it was of God, and seemingly with entire reconciliation to his possessing it, "God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham." It is clear from this that Isaac quite recognizes Jacob as invested with the blessing of Abraham, and he invokes over him the same name which we first find on God's revealing Himself to Abraham in the renewal of the covenant in chap. xvii., "God Almighty bless thee," opening the source of power to make good the blessing, and from this edition of the covenant it seems to be, rather than any other, that the blessings are taken with which Isaac here blesses Jacob. So he sent away Jacob and Jacob obeys him, "he obeyed his father and mother," how refreshing is this simplicity of obedience in these patriarchal times! Jacob was now seventy-seven years old, and such an one as he was would naturally prefer his home and the society of his parents, to the long and dangerous journey he had to accomplish—near 500 miles—before he could sit down in a company of strangers whom he had never seen, but his parents willed it so, and he was submissive; it seems strange to us who are fallen on wilful days, when disobedience to parents seems no strange or grave offence in men's eyes.



How different is the acting of Isaac here from that of Abraham in his own case, "Beware that thou bring not my son thither again" (chap. xxiv. 6—8) where we see the intelligence of faith, and the jealousy for God's glory and his son's welfare that it begets, and how different altogether is the mission from that narrated in the twenty-fourth chapter!—but Isaac failed of the faith of Abraham, and as faith fails, everything fails with it, for we fail of God from whom is the power to will and to do.

In the sixth verse we return for a little to Esau, and then we have almost uninterruptedly the history of Jacob and his seed, the heir of promise struggling on through the difficulties of the way, difficulties which his failure in faith often not only increases, but begets.

Esau learning from this transaction how distasteful to his father were his Canaanitish wives (chap. xxvi. 34, 35)—it does not say to his mother, probably her favouritism led him to care little for her judgment—and seeing that Jacob obeyed his father and mother, and went to Padan-aram to take him a wife from thence, went to Ishmael (that is to the family or tribe of Ishmael, for he was now dead, chap. xxv. 17), "and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael." This is the way of the flesh to mend matters. What an alliance, between Ishmael and Esau—the outcast and the profane! Probably he thought by this means to ingratiate himself with his father, but it was not obedience as in the case of Jacob, it was the poor carnal mind trying by its own devices to remedy the evil that it could not undo, and so making things worse and not better.

And now we return to Jacob and take up the

thread of his eventful history, he "went out from Beersheba and went towards Haran," but how did he go? Was it with all those circumstances of wealth which we beheld when Abraham sent to get a wife for Isaac? No, he goes out a poor and lonely fugitive, with a long journey before him through a dangerous country, without a companion of his way or a beast to carry him, turning his back on the promised land, and his face to the land from whence God had called Abraham. To such extremity is the heir of promise reduced, I doubt not in judgment, but yet all overruled of God. To judge according to man's judgment, the promise to Abraham would now be in jeopardy, suspended on the life of this one childless man near eighty years old, his life sought by an angry and vindictive brother, and exposed to manifold dangers which rendered his life to human eye so precarious, yet was the promise never more secure, for it depended not on man but on God, nor was its ultimate issue to be affected either by the failure of the heir, or the wrath of his opponents. The reason of Jacob's going forth alone and in such privation was probably to evade the enmity of Esau, thus he would the less excite his cupidity, and the more easily escape him if pursued. It could scarcely have arisen from the deteriorated circumstances of Isaac, for even if the wealth of Abraham had diminished through his more easy and indolent habits, yet would he not have been brought so low as to necessitate the departure of Jacob in such circumstances—chap. xxvi. verses 12, 14, 28, would forbid such a conclusion, and yet it has been entertained by some.

The event may probably allegorise to us the same

truth which, as we learn from the Apostle, underlies the history of Isaac and Ishmael, it may have been the result of the persecution (Gal. iv. 29), but it is remarkable that while there the outcast one was Ishmael, he that was born after the flesh, here it is he that is of promise: there the one of promise, the infant Isaac, was blameless, here the promised seed was deeply culpable, and hence the judgment, while the promise stands fast. The history may also foreshadow to us an event in Israel's history, there is not one of the patriarchs whose life is more typical of Israel's history than Jacob, he after whom the nation was called. They too have had to go back to the land from which Abraham was called, and in bondage and servitude to wear their time away far from the land of promise, but God has still the blessing for them, the promise shall not fail because of their failure. He is their God, and they shall return and inherit the land, which God promised to Abraham and his seed for ever, an absolute promise cannot fail, a conditional one may and often does.

Jacob went on his way, "and he lighted upon a certain place and tarried there all night, because the sun was set." This place we find from the nineteenth verse to have been Beth-el, a town some miles beyond Jerusalem; it shows us how Jacob must have sped on his way to have accomplished this journey, near fifty miles, on the first day, a distance somewhat less than that which Abraham entered on the third day to effect (chap. xxii. 4, etc.), but there was no occasion for haste with Abraham, and there were occasions of delay with his company and preparations, the fear of Esau may have operated on Jacob, and he had little to retard him.

Some among the Jews will have this "certain place" to be Mount Moriah, where Isaac was offered and the temple was afterwards reared, and in answer to the difficulty of the nineteenth verse, they think that Luz was the ancient name of Jerusalem, and that the Beth-el elsewhere mentioned in Scripture was a different place from this; the thought fits well with the occasion, but the proof seems to tend rather the other way.

And now we have God's visitation of the poor wanderer, God is God and is true to Himself, whatever man may be, and He will not forsake His people in their extremity; possibly it was this faith that led Rebekah to part with Jacob the more readily, while she had not the faith to trust God for his preservation from the more imminent danger. Jacob is however now brought low, the poor wanderer is lying on the bare ground, with a stone of the place for his pillow, his sleep would be sweet after his long and hurried journey, thoughts of his home and then of Esau in pursuit of him would pass through his mind, but there was One nearer to him than Esau, the One that fed him all his life long, and redeemed him from all evil, and now was the time for God to come in. He slept, and so God can act unhindered by the great infirmity of his life, the constant interference of an anxious half-believing mind, ever intent on something of his own to help out God's promise.

Jacob was a man of faith, we cannot doubt it, we have many sweet instances of it, but there are degrees of faith between the "great" and the "little," the "strong" and the "weak," and his does not seem of the highest kind, he had not the faith of Abraham, to

take God unhesitatingly at His word, to cast himself on the promise and there to rest, he always seems to think it necessary to bring something himself to the promise, and he seems in this the type of a considerable number of believers, who are working for rest and never find it, never find at least settled peace or assurance, simply for want of the simple faith that takes it from God with an empty hand. Any faith will get blessing that comes to the Lord (see Matt. viii. 25, 26), but great faith gets great blessing; some believers are as it were children of Abraham, while some are rather children of Jacob, but it is blessed to be of the faith of either, and not of the families of Ishmael or Esau.

Jacob had a hard pillow as he slept, but oh, how sweet a dream on that pillow! It would be hard to the outward man, but his heart was comforted by this wondrous visitation of God's wondrous grace, it was the Lord dealing with him, not according to his deserts, but as the heir of the promise, and confirming to him, sealing as it were on him the promises, "He dreamed, and beheld a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."

What this ladder means has been a question with many, and many are the thoughts about it; to Jacob, it probably represented God as interested in the concerns of earth, His continual agency, and ordering of all things respecting His people, by His messengers traversing their way up and down in obedience to His will, it would lead his mind to see a communication opened between earth and heaven, and the care of God for the poor wanderer. To Christians with their

increased light, it has represented the Lord Jesus in His earthly and heavenly natures, bringing heaven and earth together, or uniting them again, after sin had separated them, by His work on earth, it represents Him as the One we must come to on earth by whom to get to heaven, the way of communication between us and God and between God and us, and as the One through whom all His providential dealings are carried on; practically it shows us the way to God, and the way of sanctification, for what is sanctification but getting nearer to God, daily ascending, getting higher up the ladder? But there are those who will not admit of this application of the ladder to Christ—however this may be, these thoughts are not the less true in themselves, and the application seems warranted by John i. 51.

Jacob saw further in his dream, “The Lord stood above it,” or some will have it, “above him,” whichever it be, it was encouraging to Jacob, the Lord was over all, ordering the movements of His ministering servants, the ten thousand times ten thousand of the heavenly host, the ministers of His will to the heirs of salvation. All that concerns them is ruled by Him, the various changes and circumstances of their lives are under His eye, and all His dealings with them are in Christ; as the Cherubims in the holiest arose out of the pure and solid gold of the mercy-seat, a type of Christ, so God’s dealings with His people by His ministering spirits are [all in and through the Lord Jesus Christ].

Jacob in this dream of dreams not only sees this wondrous vision, but he hears also, and what wondrous words he hears! The Lord who stood above

him said, "I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac," it is no stranger God that thus speaks to poor Jacob, it is the God of Abraham, and note the encouragement, "of Abraham, *thy father*," not, of Isaac thy father, which would be the natural way, but of Abraham, the friend of God, the one to whom the promises were given, the covenant head of His people; God remembers Isaac, but He puts the honour upon Abraham, and with him He more immediately links Jacob. After thus revealing Himself, He goes on to further revelation in exceeding great and precious promises, "the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Here we have God confirming the blessing of Isaac (verses 3, 4), and the covenant or promises which were first given to Abraham, and afterwards renewed to Isaac, now resting on Jacob, clearly acknowledging him as the line of the promised seed, in whom the covenant was confirmed (Gal. iii. 17) and would one day be fulfilled. Could anything be more unlikely than God's word to him that the land whereon he lay, a poor lonely wanderer, should one day be his possession, or that the seed of this unmarried man, near eighty years old, should be as the dust of the earth, and spread to every quarter of the globe, and that in him and in his seed should all families of the earth be blessed? It seems strange and improbable to us, but God said it. But it is not yet fulfilled, Jacob did not get the land, nor are all the families

of the earth yet blessed in him and in his seed—true, but God has said it, and this is enough for faith, we believe that it will be fulfilled to the letter, those who cannot so believe must explain it away, it is easy to explain away anything, but it is a dangerous process, when one begins, where will he end?

There are more words for Jacob, and as regards his present exigency the most precious, it is the God of Abraham further revealing Himself to him as his present help in his present need, a kind of earnest of the more remote promise, "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, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." How peculiarly appropriate to the circumstances of Jacob is this gracious revelation of God! He was now a lonely one, as he says in chap. xxxii. 10, "with my staff I passed over this Jordan," but the Lord tells him that he is not alone, for "behold, I am with thee." What blessed company for the poor pilgrim! Oh ye lonely ones "the heirs of promise," do but realize this word, and what will your blessing be then, and if the thought arise, "Ah, but I am unworthy," well, be it so, but what worthiness had the poor supplanter to boast? Remember that blessing is of God's grace, and not of man's worthiness, there is One that is worthy, He that is "the way," the "living way," that openeth heaven unto us, and unites us unto God. If we wait our worthiness for blessing we shall wait long; doubtless after we get the blessing, the holy walk of a saint is pleasing to God, and will increase blessing, but there is not one among the heirs of salvation



who will not while in the flesh have to confess to failure.

The Lord further says to him, "I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." Note again the appropriateness, Jacob was now a wanderer, about to pass through strange lands, and how many and great were the dangers to which he would be exposed, from roving tribes, and wild beasts, and want of food, but God knows them all, nothing is hidden from Him, and so the word in season according to his need, "I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest." What a keeper had Jacob! If the 121st Psalm had then been written, how he could have responded to it! But further still, "I will bring thee again into this land," the land of promise, the land of his father Abraham and Isaac, that flowed with milk and honey, and on which he was now turning his back, but he should return and possess it, for God has promised, and finally to seal all "for I will not leave thee till I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Here is the seal and security, God's most gracious promise never to leave him until He had accomplished all He had promised, and hence probably the reason of that title He gives Himself, "The God of Jacob," the God true to His own word and promise amid all the failure, the God blessing, and keeping, and restoring, and never leaving nor forsaking His people, and fulfilling to them every word that hath gone out of His lips. What a God to call *our* God, or as Israel will call him in the latter day, "God, even *our own* God," even as we may call Him now, by a higher title than Israel has yet known, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Jacob awakes deeply impressed with his wondrous dream, "and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not," he had thought of it as but common ground, but then he felt the Divine presence, "and he was afraid, and said, How dreadful" or awful "is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." He was awed in his spirit by the sense of God's presence, and the vision he had seen and the words he had heard led him to this conclusion, "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven," and surely that is the house of God to us where our spirit meets Him. What is a name how ever high-sounding, or what is man's pretension? The great thing is to meet God in spirit, and to have our spirit subdued in the sense of His presence.

"Jacob rose up early," he had not much to encumber him, and under the sense of the blessing he devoutly sets up his stony pillow for an Ebenezer, and anoints it with oil, a cruse of it he would have with him as needful in many ways for a long journey in the East, and he suitably calls the name of the place Beth-el, the house of God. This would harmonize with the notion of some among the Jews, of the place being Mount Moriah, but there is considerable difficulty in settling the locality of many of the early Scripture names of places. Jacob then vows a vow, saying "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: 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." This vow, the first I believe that we read of in Scripture, by which Jacob binds himself is based on God's promise, though it falls short of it—we all fall short of apprehending the largeness of God's heart. It was doubtless the expression of the gratitude of his heart under the sense of the wondrous blessing, but as it reads to us, it was not worthy of the occasion; it seems to say, if God will make good His word to me, then I will avouch the Lord to be my God forsaking all false gods; if so, how it fails of the full confidence that one would look for under the circumstances! It seems to savour of Jacob's character, Abraham would hardly have vowed so, but it may not be the language of doubt or condition but of confidence, though the former is more conversant with the whole tenor of the passage. "This stone shall be God's house," as the place was to him where he met with and worshipped God, seems to be fulfilled in chap. xxxv. The promise to give unto God the tenth of all He should give him is after the example of Abraham's tithe offered to Melchizedek.







