

The Book of Genesis

THE
BOOK OF GENESIS

EXPOUNDED IN
A SERIES OF DISCOURSES



BY
ROBERT S. CANDLISH, D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF THE NEW COLLEGE, AND MINISTER OF FREE ST. GEORGE'S
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XXXVIII.

THE BEGINNING OF JACOB'S PILGRIMAGE—THE VISION.

Genesis xxvii. 41-46; xxviii. 1-15.

“Whither shall I flee from thy presence?—When I awake I am still with thee.”—Psalm cxxxix. 7, 18.

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”—Hebrews i. 14.

The divine testimony concerning Esau's state of mind towards his brother Jacob—his bitter hatred and bloody purpose—is the most authentic commentary upon his previous conduct;—“Esau hated Jacob, because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob” (ver. 41)? Surely if Esau had really been seeking either true repentance, or any spiritual blessing which the godly sorrow of true repentance can command, he would have been humbled for his own sin before God, and anxious to have a share in the covenant-blessing on any terms that God might appoint. And towards his brother, he would have cherished such a sentiment as the oracle from the first should have awakened; and now much more after even his too partial father had acquiesced in it. Certainly, it is conclusive proof against the genuineness of that” repentance” for which Esau” sought a place, and found none,” that he harbored so deadly a hatred against Jacob, and formed so deliberate a plan of fratricide. But as in other instances, so here, persecution is overruled by God for good; it leads to a more decided separation of the church from the surrounding idolatrous world. The violent threatening of Esau is the means of preserving Jacob from such alliance with the ungodly as that into which Esau himself has unhappily fallen. First of all, it brings Jacob

into nearer and more confidential fellowship with God than he had ever before enjoyed; shutting him up in the bonds of a gracious and holy covenant. And then it puts him in the way of forming a connection somewhat better than the marriages which Esau had contracted with the daughters of Heth (xxvi. 34-35; xxvii. 46).

The movement towards Jacob's departure from the paternal roof, originates with his mother. A twofold motive animates her; she acts partly under the impulse of natural affection, and partly also under the guidance of religious belief or spiritual faith. She would save Jacob from falling a victim to his brother's anger; she would save him at the same time from falling into his brother's sin. The two motives are by no means incompatible. Rebekah dreads the double bereavement she must experience if Jacob should die by Esau's hand, and Esau also should die as a murderer, by the hand of the avenger of blood, or of the Lord himself making "inquisition for blood." "Why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?" (ver. 42-45). But besides, she perceives the necessity of the chosen family being kept holy and uncontaminated by heathen admixture: and she feels that the time has come for a wife being found for Jacob, to be the mother of the promised seed, not from among the daughters of the land, but from the kindred out of whom the Lord had so evidently selected herself as a spouse to Isaac. Hence her suggestion to her husband;—"I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?" (ver. 46). And hence Isaac's charge to his younger son;—"Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; arise, go to Padan-aram, and take thee a -wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother" (xxviii. 1, 2). With this charge,—after receiving anew his father's blessing,—Jacob is sent away (ver. 3-5).

Stung by the implied reproach cast on him by his parents, Esau vainly tries to repair his error, and only succeeds in adding sin to sin by the connection which he forms with the rejected race of Ishmael;—"Seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father; he went unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael to be his wife" (ver. 6-9). Under

better auspices, blessed by his aged parent, and led by God himself, Jacob goes forth on his lonely journey. Surely he goes forth in faith.

The outward circumstances, indeed, of his departure from home and his entrance on his solitary pilgrimage, are by no means such as to indicate or prove the high rank he holds in the estimate of heaven. Alone and unattended,—flying from the resentment of his brother,—he finds himself, as darkness closes in, without house or hut to shelter his weary head. No dwelling is near;—no hospitable hand is ready to open the willing door and spread the welcome couch. Under the broad roof of the heavenly vault, and on the bare earth, he is fain to lie down; the wide expanse his chamber, and the rough stone his pillow (ver. 10, 11). But that night is to be a crisis in his history. “God found him at Bethel” (Hos. xxii. 4). Now for the first time,—at least now for the first time decidedly,—he is to be apprehended, or laid hold of, by the Lord. He falls asleep on his hard, uncurtained couch; but it is to awake as a new man; with new life and energy, and new assurance of the divine favour and protection. Here, for the first time, so far as we can gather it from the history, by a formality, not of man, but of God, Jacob is served heir to the Abrahamic covenant, and the birthright-blessing of the Abrahamic family (ver. 12-15).

The manner, as well as the matter, of this communication from God to Jacob, is remarkable; indeed, the manner is even more so than the matter.

The key to it is to be found in a transaction long subsequent,—connected with the opening of our Lord's ministry on the earth. There can be little or no doubt that it is Jacob's dream which the Lord has in view when he makes the other-wise strange and inexplicable announcement to Nathanael;—“Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John i. 50, 51).

Let the circumstances of that memorable interview be considered. Nathanael is told by Philip that he and some others have “found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (ver. 45). Upon this he first

interposes the objection, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" and then, with the docility of a candid and earnest mind, he complies with Philip's invitation, "Come and see" (ver. 46). He is somewhat strangely welcomed; "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him. Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (ver. 47). A salutation like that must have surprised not a little one whose 'acquaintance Jesus was now for the first time making. He puts a simple question, and receives a reply that carries his conviction in a sort of ecstasy of gladness;—"Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the son of God; thou art the King of Israel" (ver. 48, 49).

What, we may well ask,—what is there in this brief colloquy,—to convince Nathanael so quickly, so effectually, so enthusiastically and joyously?

To say merely that Jesus gave a proof of his omniscience by referring to the fact of Nathanael having been recently under his fig-tree,—is by no means satisfactory. It is not to the accidental circumstance of an ordinary visit to a fig-tree that the Lord alludes; in that case, his allusion could scarcely have told so promptly and powerfully as it did upon Nathanael's mind. There was more in the hint, as Nathanael himself evidently caught it up. It was a swift electric and telegraphic interchange of intelligence between Jesus and this new inquirer. Not to the place where Nathanael happened at a particular time to be,—but to what was then and there passing in his mind,—does the Searcher of hearts appeal. And therefore the appeal comes home with point and efficacy to the conscience.

Let it be remembered that "under the fig-tree," was the oratory or place of prayer,—the "closet,"—for a pious Jew in the middle rank of life;—whence the sort of proverbial expression employed to denote a state of tranquility and religious freedom." They shall sit every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid" (Micah iv. 4). In that genial climate, and with the scanty accommodation furnished in their ordinary dwellings, the grateful shade of the vine or the fig-tree in the garden might be

resorted to, as was also the enclosed house-top, for the purposes of secret prayer and meditation; and we can scarcely doubt that it is to an exercise of that sort that our Lord alludes, when his allusion carries such swift conviction to Nathanael's soul:—"When thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." I saw what thou wast doing; I saw what was passing in thy mind. And it is upon the ground and warrant of what then and there I saw in thee, that upon thy very first coming to me I pronounce the sentence which not unnaturally surprises thee so much:—"Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"

But there must have been something special in Nathanael's exercise of soul under the fig-tree, to which the Lord so significantly points; and there is one hypothesis which seems to possess no inconsiderable amount of inherent probability.

Let it be supposed that it was the thirty-second psalm that had been engaging Nathanael's devout thoughts. He has been passing through some such experience as the psalmist in that psalm describes. There has been previously a season of decline in his spiritual life; there has been more or less of reserve in his intercourse with God. Especially in regard to sin,—either the general sin of his heart and life, or some specific sin in particular,—he has been restraining confession and prayer; excusing perhaps and justifying himself." Going about to establish a righteousness of his own," he has been dealing unfairly and deceitfully with the holy law of his God, as well as with his own guilt and corruption; trying to soothe his soul by means of palliatives,—to pacify his conscience with the usual opiates that lull worldly men asleep. But he has not succeeded; in very mercy, God has not suffered him to find rest. He has been harassed by misgivings and fears, until he has been constrained to try" a more excellent way;" the way of an unreserved unburdening of his whole heart to God. He has been driven to confession, and the simple, child-like, utterance of all his wants and all his griefs.

Such had been David's experience." When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the

drought of summer.” Then I changed my plan.” I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.”

It is in the fulness of that instant and glad relief which he found in unbosoming his whole soul to God, that David pours out the burst of grateful joy With which the psalm begins,—connecting the assured pardon of sin with the entire abandonment of all reserve,—“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” (ver. 1, 2).

Let us say that in the soul-exercise under the fig-tree of which our Lord shows himself to have been cognizant, Nathanael had just been brought to the precise point to which the psalmist came; that self-convicted and self-condemned he had come to the conclusion,—“I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord;”—seeing nothing for it but a frank and full casting of himself on the mercy of his God. Then, what an adaptation to his case,—what a word in season,—what a message of peace directed personally and pointedly to himself,—might his broken and contrite spirit recognize in the testimony of Jesus,—“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile”—applied as it was to a scene which none but the Searcher of hearts could know! And calling instantly to mind the connection in which the emphatic condition of guileless-ness stood, in that experimental psalm, with the full and free forgiveness of all iniquity,—how must he have exulted in the assurance thus indirectly, but only on that account the more effectually, conveyed to him of pardon, acceptance, and peace! “Be of good cheer, Nathanael, thy sins are forgiven thee!” With what unutterable emotions of relief, gratitude, and joy, must he have hailed this Omniscient One, so evidently having power on earth to forgive sins;—“Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel” (John 1 49).

Now, it is to Nathanael, thus convinced and thus quickened, that Jesus addresses the stimulating appeal:” Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these” (ver. 50). And it is as a sequel to this blessed

negotiation of forgiveness and peace that he introduces the promise so plainly borrowed from the record of Jacob's vision;—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (ver. 51).

Here, therefore, we have the interpretation of the vision.

The angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man represent the restored intercourse between heaven and earth which his mediation secures. The guileless believer not merely obtains the forgiveness of sin,—tasting "the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works" (Rom. iv. 6)." Being justified by faith, he has peace with God through Jesus Christ his Lord, by whom also he has access into that grace wherein he stands" (Rom. v. 1, 2). He has an insight into the unseen economy that now knits heaven and earth in one; and enjoys the benefit of that friendly commerce of reconciliation, love, and confidence, that upon the ladder of mediation is ever kept up, between the throne on high where the Son now sits and the simple heart of the poor smitten sinner here below, who has been converted and has become guileless as a little child.

But not only may we interpret Jacob's vision by the Lord's allusion to it in the promise given by him to Nathanael. We may not unreasonably carry back with us what we have gathered as to Nathanael's previous exercise of soul that it may throw light on Jacob's state of mind, during the night he passed on the bare ground and stony pillow at Bethel.

It is something more, as I cannot but think, than a plausible conjecture—that Jacob may have been undergoing an experience very similar to that of David and Nathanael, when he beheld what the Lord intimates that it would be the high privilege of Nathanael also to see. He leaves his home, as we may but too truly assume, not only with guilt on his conscience, but also with guile in his spirit. His sin has not yet found him out. He has been justifying himself and blaming others. Standing upon his divine title to the birthright-blessing in a self-righteous frame of mind, he has been insensible to

the evil of that sad train of cruelty and craft which has made his father's household so unhappy, and in which, from first to last, he has himself had so great a share. And so long as he has been buoyed up by his mother's sympathy and his own repeated successes in his schemes, he has felt little sorrow and little shame for all that has taken place. But it is altogether otherwise now. He is alone; and the hand of God is heavy upon him. His dream of self-confidence and self-complacency is at an end. His sin is now "ever before him." He can restrain his voice no longer from confession and prayer. He can no longer "keep silence." He can but say;—"I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord!" And may it not be that, through the gracious interposition of the blessed Spirit applying to his now opened wounds the healing balm of the gospel of peace, he has cause immediately to add:—"And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin?" May not this have been the manner of the Lord's dealing with him, and the course of his own experience, as preliminary and preparatory to the vision on which the promise to Nathanael is based;" Hereafter ye shall see heaven open;"—not opened occasionally, now and then, but open always;—so open always that, not at any particular Bethel, but anywhere and everywhere, "ye may see the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

XXXIX.

THE BEGINNING OF JACOB'S PILGRIMAGE—THE VOW.

Genesis xxviii. 16-22.

“Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God: let all that he round about him bring presents unto him that ought to be feared”.—Ps. lxxvi. 11.

It would seem that this was the first occasion on which Jacob was recognized, directly and personally from heaven, as the successor of Abraham and the representative of the chosen seed. His mother had received an oracular intimation at his birth; and his father had been led at last to bestow upon him the patriarchal blessing. But this midnight transaction is Jacob's formal inauguration, by God himself, into the high and holy position of the child of the promise. Henceforth Isaac is as one virtually dead; the entire rights and responsibilities bound up in the Abrahamic line of descent being transferred to Jacob.

There is a growing clearness in the divine utterances concerning Jacob which is worthy of a passing notice. The oracular announcement to Rebekah is vague enough; and even the two benedictions pronounced upon him by his father Isaac are by no means very explicit. The distinctive promise in the one is simply that of superiority over his brother (xxvii. 19); with the accompanying assurance that to bless or to curse him is to be a test of men's minds, such as the Lord's own advent afterwards was declared to be (Luke ii. 34, 35). In the other benediction, again, the point of the promise turns upon these few and general words:” God Almighty give thee the blessing of Abraham” (xxviii. 4). Now, however, the Lord himself renews with him the Abrahamic covenant

in all its breadth and fulness (ver. 13-15). Favoured in such circumstances with such a vision, and receiving so gracious a renewal of the covenant, Jacob might well awake with a vivid sense of the divine presence;—"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (ver. 16, 17). And he might well accompany his awakening not only with a solemn act of dedication, turning his stony pillow into a sacred memorial, and calling the place Bethel (ver. 18, 19), but also with a solemn acknowledgment of obligation. Accordingly" Jacob vowed a vow, saying. If God mil 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" (ver. 20-22).

I. This vow, or covenant, is a strong confirmation of the opinion already indicated, that the night of Jacob's sojourn at Bethel was the era of his new birth, or of his spiritual awakening to an apprehension of the unseen world, and of his own position with regard to it. We seem to have here the instinctive impulse of the new creature, under the regenerating or reviving influence of the Spirit. Snatched from impending ruin, which now for the first time he has in some measure adequately discerned,—tasting the fresh gladness of unlooked-for hope in the visit of the great deliverer who has so seasonably interposed to relieve him,—he can scarcely pause to collect his bewildered thoughts;—so eager is he, and so impatient, to bind himself by new obligations, or, at least, by a new and formal recognition of obligations that have been overlooked before. Nor is it mere impulse that prompts such a step at such a crisis; it is dictated also by sober reason. Conscious of weakness and fearful of temptation, the new convert, or the newly recovered backslider, feels a kind of security in the entire and absolute committal of himself which a vow or covenant implies. It is like burning his ships, now that he has landed on the shore where the onward march is to be ordered and the battle is henceforth to be fought. Being irrevocably pledged, as by military oath, he has nothing for it but to press manfully on, till his faithfulness unto death win for him the

crown of life. Thus discretion, as well as enthusiasm, may recommend a covenant or vow.

II. But the vow must be made in faith; and this faith must characterize equally the motive, the matter, and the object of the vow. Thus, as to the motive,—to be either lawful or expedient, the vow must be an expression, not of future, contingent, and conditional compliance, but of present trust, absolute and unreserved. Vows made in a spirit of superstition or self-righteousness,—as if man might stipulate or make terms with the Sovereign Lord of all, are impious and vain. Again, the matter of the vow,—the thing vowed,—that which I bind myself by covenant to render to my God,—must be of his own selection, not mine. To think that I may go beyond what God himself requires in my voluntary vow, is to assume the attitude, not of a debtor to grace and a dependent upon grace,—but of one in a position to lay God himself under obligation, and almost gain an advantage over him. Nor must it be any selfish end that I seek in my vow; not mere relief from some impending calamity or exemption from some unwelcome service; far less any compromise of the spiritual affection and hearty loyalty and love which I owe to my God.

The vow of Jacob will stand these tests; especially when considered in connection with the position in which he was when he made it. To some readers, it is true, it may seem as if the language used by him indicated doubt, and some disposition to make terms with God—rather than faith, and an acquiescence in the terms already made by God with him. The apparently conditional form of the vow, and the apparent postponement of what is vowed, may occasion to their minds some little difficulty. But in reality there is no ground for it.

As to the first point, the form of expression—“If God will be with me, and will” do so and so—does not necessarily imply contingency or suspense; on the contrary, it denotes the absolute certainty of the conviction upon the faith of which the vow proceeds. The particle “if” often bears the sense of “since,” or “forasmuch as;” instances in proof might be multiplied indefinitely (Rom. viii 17; Gal. iv. 7; Phil. ii. 1; Col. ii. 20; iii. 1, etc.) In the case

before us, we may confidently gather from the correspondence between the Lord's promise (ver. 15), and Jacob's recital of it (ver. 20), that the meaning of his vow is not, "If it shall turn out that God is with me," as if Jacob considered that blessing to be still uncertain; but "if it be so," or "since it is so," that "God will be with me." It is not the language of skepticism but of faith; faith echoing and appropriating the pledge which God had given. Yea! hath God said that he "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!" (ver. 20, 21). Can it be? Is this, in truth, his communication to me? Then, if so—that being the case—however beyond all expectation and all belief such goodness manifested to such an one as I am may be—I hesitate, I doubt no more. I take thee, O Lord, at thy word. And as thou givest thyself in covenant to thy servant, so in the bonds of the same covenant I venture to give myself to thee!

Then again, as to the other point, affecting the matter as well as the manner of the vow, it is unquestionably a prospective engagement under which Jacob binds himself. He is anticipating—not however doubtfully but in lively hope—the actual accomplishment of what God had been pleased to promise. And he is simply owning beforehand what will then be his duty, and pledging himself to its discharge. When the Lord shall have fulfilled all that he has said, as to his care of me in the way that I go, and as to my return to my father's house in peace, what will be the fitting return of gratitude for me then and in these circumstances to offer? What the peculiar obligation under which I must then feel myself to lie? Am I then to be wanting in a suitable acknowledgment? Nay, then more than ever "the Lord shall be my God." And in token rather of his faithfulness to me, than of my loyalty and love to him," 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" (ver. 22).

Such is the real import of this transaction between Jacob and his God—corresponding and fitly answering to the previous transaction between his God and him. The two are connected as cause and effect: they stand in the relation of antecedent and consequent to one

another. Jacob's act is the response of faith to the divine promise. Because thou, Lord, dealest graciously, and hast dealt graciously, and dost promise to deal graciously in all time to come, with thy most undeserving servant, therefore, with thy help, I also will deal truly and faithfully with thee. Thy covenant with me is sure: let my vow to thee also stand. Surely a better model of a spiritual and evangelical vow is nowhere to be found than that which the rude pillar was to attest and commemorate at Bethel.

III. The service which Jacob here performed had its accompanying external rites. A hastily-constructed altar was made of the stone on which he had laid his head; and, in default of other sacrifice,—for he who erelong was to pass again that way with flocks and herds enough and to spare, had not a kid or a lamb that he could call his own,—oil was poured upon the stone (ver. 18). A new name also was given to the spot, to make it ever memorable in after years—Bethel, or the house of God—a name destined to survive some notable revolutions (ver. 19). The Canaanites, when they built a city there—for in Jacob's time it was a mere field—ignorant or careless of the patriarch's intention, gave it the appellation of Luz. But the Israelites, on their taking possession of the land, carried out the patriarch's purpose, and called the place once more Bethel.

These external and formal accompaniments this vow had. And it may be noted that, being better remembered and understood than the covenant itself, they became afterwards a snare. The stone set up, with the oil poured on it, was probably one occasion, among others, of that aggravated kind of idolatrous worship which consisted in adoring, with abominable rites, anointed pillars like that of Jacob. And the superstitious regard paid in after years to the mere name and locality of Bethel, so moved the indignation of the holy prophet that he gave it—instead of Bethel, or house of God—the ignominious and contemptuous nickname of Beth-aven, or house of vanity (Hos. iv. 15; Amos v. 5). But apart from the formalities of Jacob's simple ritual,—so simple that one might have thought it scarcely possible ever to misunderstand or pervert it,—the essence of this transaction is not ceremonial, but altogether spiritual and moral; and its spirit is not legal, but on the contrary highly evangelical.

It is in fact the very type and model of the believer's consecration of himself,—with all that he now has, all that he ultimately hopes for, and all that he may receive by the way,—to the Lord. His person, as accepted in the beloved, is to be the Lord's. His final inheritance is to be to the praise of the glory of God. The very stone that upheld his weary head when the Lord first visited him in mercy upon earth, will be ever freshly anointed for praising God continually when he reaches his home in heaven. Every cross he has borne, as well as every deliverance he has experienced, will have its own song to be sung in it as in a consecrated temple. And the whole will be one everlasting hallelujah to the Lamb that was slain.

Meanwhile, between his present acceptance and the coming rest, he casts himself on the providence of his God; and whatever may be the amount of the Lord's liberality, he offers a pledge and proof of his accounting all that is given to him by the Lord to belong to the giver alone, by freely devoting to holy purposes such a portion of his time, his talents, and his substance, as may afford evidence of his holding the whole from God and for God—evidence which shall be at least equally conclusive with the literal tithing of all that he has.

XL.

JACOB'S SOJOURN IN SYRIA—ITS GENERAL ASPECT.

Genesis xxix.-xxxi.

“And Jacob fled into the country of Syria; and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep.”—Hosea xii, 12.

The exact meaning and object of Hosea's reference to Jacob's flight from Canaan, and his sojourn and service in Syria, are not very obvious. The style of that Prophet is abrupt; his transitions are often rapid, and his allusions brief and sudden. In this chapter, he is apparently contrasting the present sunken state of Israel with its former greatness, and the place which it once occupied in the divine regard. To give point and vividness to his representation of the past, he selects incidents in the early history of the nation, and especially in the life of the father of its twelve tribes. He reminds the people of the power which Jacob had to prevail over the angel, as well as of the Lord's gracious acknowledgment of him at Bethel (ver. 3, 4); and he exhorts them to make trial for themselves of the divine faithfulness;—“Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually” (ver. 6). Then, after a solemn reproof of their iniquity,—their deceit and oppression,—their pride and self-righteousness (ver. 7, 8); and a renewed intimation of the Lord's purpose of mercy (ver. 9-11); as if in confirmation of that intimation, he brings in again this other passage in Jacob's experience, his flight and servitude. And he contrasts with it the great national deliverance long afterwards wrought out by the hand of Moses;—“Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he

preserved” (ver. 12, 13). Thus over against Jacob's suffering of reproach and oppression, the prophet sets,—not Jacob's own escape from Syria,—but, as answering his purpose better, the deliverance of his descendants out of Egypt. In Jacob's degradation, Hosea sees the type, and as it were, the beginning of Israel's bondage. He fitly therefore passes at once, in the way of contrast, to the crowning interposition by which that bondage was ended. And he does so, that his countrymen may on the one hand be brought low, in the remembrance of Jacob's being brought low, and may, on the other hand, be moved to return to the Lord; believing that” he is the Lord their God from the land of Egypt” (ver. 9), and that there is no saviour besides him.

Such is the connection in which the prophet's allusion to Jacob's Syrian experience stands; and such its fitness, taken along with the accompanying allusion to the Exodus, at once to humble the people under a sense of their degradation, and to lead them anew to repentance.

Before going into a detailed examination of the incidents of Jacob's sojourn in Syria, it may be useful to suggest a few general considerations regarding it, which must be borne in mind all through the narrative.

I. In the view of the romantic adventures which Jacob met with, and the spirit and manner in which he met with them, in the country of his exile, it is important to bear in mind his singularly strange position as he left his paternal home.

Compare Jacob's lot with that of his father Isaac. There was no question in Abraham's house as to the title of Isaac to inherit the birthright; there was no misunderstanding on

that point between Isaac's parents. Abraham and Sarah were at one in owning him as the child and heir of the promise. And when it was needful to find a wife for Isaac, that the covenanted line might be prolonged, there was no proposal made to send him away. He was not destined to be an adventurer, taking his chance of success in life, as well as of a partner for better and for worse to share it. His

piety, which was both of early growth and of mature strength, had no family jars or jealousies to contend with; and the even tenor of his quiet domestic life was for the most part unbroken.

Very different is his son Jacob's entrance into the world, and the world's busy strife. He goes from home a fugitive, with a wide commission to push his fortune and seek a wife, in what had been once indeed the country of his fathers, but was now to him a strange land. And he goes with a home experience and home life but little calculated to keep alive the home feeling abroad.

In the home which he is leaving, there ought to have been no room for misunderstanding; the oracle of God which preceded and announced the birth of Isaac's two sons, should have made strife impossible. The recognition of Jacob, as the heir, in terms of that oracle, and on the ground of that submission to the sovereign decree of God which it demanded, would have obviated all risk of domestic rivalry and partisan-ship, and ensured peace and order in the household. But Isaac's favoritism for Esau, which blinded him to the divine purpose preferring Jacob,—and Rebekah's favoritism for Jacob, which was too much of the same carnal or merely natural sort,—led Jacob to use subtlety in the purchase of the birthright, and issued in the last melancholy plot. Isaac's unbelief, disregarding the divine oracle, and in spite of it treating Esau as the heir; and Rebekah's unbelief, aiming at the fulfilment of the oracle by means of her own policy, are alike fitted to have an evil effect on Jacob's moral nature

From first to last, it was a poor training that the chosen son and heir had in the house of his parents.

And now, suddenly, we find him far away from home. He carries with him, no doubt, his father's blessing, twice repeated; the first time pronounced unwittingly—his father intending it for Esau—the second time given expressly and unequivocally. But this late recognition of him as the heir, wrung so reluctantly from his father, and given, too, in immediate connection with his mother's trembling haste to get him out of the reach of his brother's vengeance, could not undo the mischief of an education under influences and

associations very different from those which, in holy and happy homes, minister to the growth of a manly character, and the due development of truth and love. Certainly, the school in which he has been brought up has had in it too much of the world's craft and jealousy, and too little of honourable, not to say heavenly, singleness of eye and generous warmth of heart. And his own natural disposition being originally, as we may suppose, inclined rather to a quiet than an active life,—inclined consequently to diplomacy rather than to daring and adventure,—he has had a home-training but too congenial to his constitutional temperament, and too well fitted to nurse and foster his tendency to aim at success in his enterprises,—by art rather than by arms,—by cunning stratagem, rather than by manly openness and boldness.

II. Thus born and bred he is thrown upon the world; experienced enough,—alas! more than enough,—in domestic intrigues and broils; but as regards the world's ways, rude and raw as any of those” home keeping youths” who, as the poet says, “have ever homely wits,” And the world on which he is thrown is more than a match for him.

Laban, its representative and type, is the impersonation of worldly shrewdness and unscrupulousness. In the family of such an uncle, Jacob is tempted, by the very craftiness and cold selfishness of the kinsman with whom he has to deal, to try a game of policy. From first to last, as we may say, it is diamond cut diamond—Greek meeting Greek; a trial of skill—a keen encounter of wits.

The record of it is not pleasant; it is a painful narrative of subtlety and sin. The elder of the two players has for a long time, as it would seem, the best of the game. The veteran man of the world out-maneuvers more than once his less experienced relative. In the end the tables are turned. Jacob rights himself, and he is, as I think the history indicates, divinely taught and authorized to do so. But it is not a satisfactory issue; it is too much like the extrication of an overreached man out of an ugly scrape,—the rescuing of him, not too creditably, out of the hands of a partner or customer, whose cool cunning has proved too much for him.

Can we doubt that it would have been better for Jacob if he had dealt with Laban throughout more frankly and more boldly? He might have entered his kinsman's house, not as one needing to be hired and to receive wages, but as the heir of the promise, on the faith of which his great ancestor Abraham had left these parts for a better portion in Canaan. He did not come to buy a wife by years of servitude. He knew well how his mother Rebekah, this Laban's sister, had been wooed and won for his father Isaac. The confidence and courage of good old Eliezer in courting a wife for Isaac might have inspired Jacob with the like confidence and courage in courting a wife for himself. He was entitled to take high ground, as the son and heir of Isaac and of Abraham. He might have made his demand to be at once acknowledged in that character. He had his commission and his credentials, with their blessing, from both his parents.

More than that, he had warrant and witness from above. A vision and a voice from heaven had owned him as proprietor of the promised land and father of the promised seed. Fresh from the scene at Bethel,—strong in the faith there begotten or revived,—he might have avowed his rank and destiny, on his first introduction to Laban's household. And not as a mendicant wanderer, at Laban's mercy, and fain to take service with him on any terms; but as the heaven-destined and heaven-declared inheritor of the covenant birthright and covenant blessing, he might have proclaimed the errand on which he came, and asked at once the spouse of his choice with as simple a trust in his God as that which Abraham's servant had manifested long years ago.

Surely if Jacob had behaved thus, in keeping and consistency with his position, as it was attested by the Lord at Bethel, and accepted by himself in the vow which he so solemnly made,—things might have turned out far otherwise than they did. Even worldly Laban might have been so awed or won, as to respect the man whom God honoured, and who honoured God. He might never have thought of proposing meanly to barter for hired service a hospitality which, on such a footing, Jacob would have refused to accept at the hands even of his mother's brother. The unworthy trick of substituting Leah for Rachel; the guilt of the double marriage, with

its consequent polygamy and domestic profligacy; the thrice repeated change of wages; the plan for redressing the wrong by securing the strongest of the flock; the furtive flight; the pursuit; the discreditable incidents of the meeting when Laban overtook Jacob; and the questionable truce or compromise which ended their connection; all, perhaps, might have been avoided; and a very different course of mutual confidence and esteem might have marked the history;—if Jacob, in his intercourse with his uncle and his uncle's house, had acted less as the timid and temporizing man of expedients,—the politic man of the world,—and more as the acknowledged friend of God,—the believing child of believing Abraham,—the heir of the covenant that is by faith.

The whole history of Jacob's sojourn in Laban's country, is an illustration of the mischief and misery resulting from an opposite line of conduct. He certainly but ill sustains the character of one favoured with such heavenly communications as had so recently been granted to him. His solemn vow is too little in his mind. He accommodates himself far too easily to the world in which he lives, learns too well its lessons, and becomes too familiar with its ways. A second gracious vision, and a long night of severe wrestling with the Lord (xxxii.), as well as also a fresh visit to Bethel (xxxv.), are needed to rid the patriarch of his Syrian tastes and tendencies, and revive his soul again for his pilgrimage and walk with God in Canaan.

III. The redeeming feature in the picture of Jacob's life at Padan-aram, otherwise far from pleasing, is his love for Rachel. It was of quick growth; but it was strong, and it lasted long. When he serves for her, the seven years seem to him but a few days for the love he has to her. When she dies in childbed, his affection touchingly appears. He will not give her child a name of grief, but one almost of joy; not Benoni, son of my sorrow, but Benjamin, son of my strength. He would have associated with his beloved, when she is gone, no word of evil omen, but rather a token for good. And how he cherished her memory is evident from what might seem a trifling circumstance in his parting interview with Joseph (xlviii).

The old man is sick and dying. He strengthens himself, however, to welcome his favorite child once more. He sits up on his bed to bless Joseph and Joseph's sons. As he proceeds in blessing them, the image of Joseph's mother, his much-loved Rachel, is before him. He interrupts his speech to tell how, "when he came from Padan, Rachel died by him in the land of Canaan in the way, and how he buried her at Bethlehem" (ver. 7).

What has that to do with the matter in hand? Rachel's death and burial have no bearing on the blessing which Jacob is conveying to Joseph, and Ephraim, and Manasseh.

But the old man's heart is full. Something in Joseph's look,—some trace or lineament of his mother's pale fair face as he last saw her, travailing and expiring,—brings back the sad scene to the patriarch's dim eye. Simply, as if almost unconsciously, he gives utterance to his recollection. And having paid this last tribute to one he loved so dearly, he calmly resumes the interrupted thread of his benediction.

There is something, to my mind, irresistibly affecting in this proof, so natural and incidental, so true and tender, of the hold which Rachel had of Jacob's heart. It constrains one to exclaim—Behold how he loved her.

Oh! that this love had been allowed to reign alone in Jacob's home, pure from the contamination of polygamy and concubinage! So one is apt to wish. And one is apt to think that if Jacob had been left to himself, to take his own way, it might possibly have been so. Jacob might have been happy with Rachel alone, as Isaac was with Rebekah. His household might have been a pattern of wedded faithfulness and affection, and his seed might have been all holy. It was not his own choice, but Laban's craft, that imposed upon him Leah. It was sad sisterly jealousy, the natural fruit of so melancholy a partnership, that introduced to him his concubines. But it is vain to speculate on what might have been Jacob's family history, if he had been more fairly treated,—by others, or had done more justice to himself. The history, as it actually unfolded itself, is before us; and it is written for our learning. It is a history of error and sin on every

side. All parties are culpable. And the emphatic moral of the whole is surely this; that any deviation at all, upon any plea, from the primeval law of marriage, ordaining the union of one man with one woman only, is fatal to domestic purity and domestic peace; that there can be neither holiness nor happiness in the house in which that law is set at nought; and that the word of the Lord, by the mouth of the Prophet Malachi, denouncing the man Who violates the marriage ordinance of God, stands irrevocable and sure;” Did not he make one?” one single pair, in Eden, one woman for one man.” Yet had he the residue of the Spirit”—the spirit of life. Had it so pleased him, he might have made more. But he made only-one.” And wherefore one?” and one only.” That he might seek a godly seed.”” Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth” (ii. 14, 15).

Some practical lessons may be suggested here.

1. The influence of home training, home habits, home associations,—how deep and lasting is it! If that influence is unfavorable to the cultivation of honourable principles and kindly affections,—if it fosters the development of evil passions and low arts of deceit,—how may it, in after life, eat as a canker into the very heart even of a sincere Christian profession! Conversion itself may not undo the evil. The child whom you send out from home may be a child of God when you send him; or he may become a child of God at some Bethel after he has left your roof. But if, through the sad infirmity of parents, perhaps of godly parents, or through the faults of rude brothers or unkind sisters, he has become familiar with strife, disorder, and cunning craftiness,—his character may have got a taint, his moral nature a bias, which may not indeed hinder his being converted and becoming a Christian, but which, even after conversion, may stunt the growth of his Christianity, and cause it to wear an aspect the reverse of amiable or honourable in the eyes of those before whom he should be” adorning the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things.” How important, in this view, is it that the home in which youth is bred, be a home of pure peace, and truth, and love; a home of frank manliness, where every eye” beams keen with honour;” a home of genial souls and warm hearts; a home of gratitude, of gladness, and of joy. Oh! let the boy and girl you send

out into a cold, cruel, deceitful world, have no coldness, cruelty, deceit, at home, on which to look back as having fashioned their characters beforehand too much in harmony with that world's ways. Send them forth with a substratum of such manly honesty, and womanly truth and tenderness, as will recoil instinctively from all that is mean,—all that is selfish or false. Let it be seen in them, wherever they go, what sons and daughters can be reared for God's service, and their country's, in a Christian's pure and peaceful home.

2. How needful is it for Christians to know and vindicate their true position in all their intercourse with the world and with worldly men; to live always fully up to their Bethel experiences, their Bethel privileges, their Bethel obligations, their Bethel visions, prayers, and vows. They gain nothing by giving in to any churlish Laban, accepting his terms, accommodating themselves to his ways. Enter into no house, brother, sit at no table, form no intimacy, contract no alliance, otherwise than as avowedly a Christian man, determined by God's grace to act out thoroughly your Christianity. Ah! you are apt enough to be drawn into worldly conformity, even when you have your Christian standing most clearly in your view. But how much is the danger increased when you mix with men, and do business or take pleasure with them; they not recognizing your Christianity; and alas! you making it but too plain that for the time you have almost ceased to recognize it yourself.

3. "Hail wedded love," sings our divine poet; and his strain is in highest accordance with the mind and heart of God." Rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe. Be thou ravished always with her love." Yes, it is a holy ordinance, a blessed institution, which makes man and wife no more twain but one flesh. Oh! then, what vile ingratitude is there,—what foul shame,—in all that tends to make that ordinance void,—the ordinance on which all the charities of life hang,—around which all its best blessings cluster. Who art thou, who under what ever pretense, or for whatever end, direct, most unthankful as thou art, to treat this ordinance with contempt, to set it aside, to turn it into an affair of traffic instead of a bond of love, or to countenance practices with which it is incompatible? Hast thou no fear of the vengeance of that God whose best earthly gift thou art abusing? Wilt thou not hear

his word?” Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers”—whatever men may think or say of them—“God will judge” (Heb. xiii. 4).

XLI.

JACOB'S SOJOURN IN SYRIA—ITS SPIRITUAL MEANING.

Genesis xxix.

“And Jacob fled into the country of Syria; and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep.”—Hosea xii. 12.

THE transition, or descent, is a great one, from Bethlehem to Padan-aram; from the position assigned to Jacob from heaven, to the position accorded to him on earth. Nor is it a brief degradation to which he has to submit,—like the brief scene of grace and glory which prepares him for it. One cold dreary night, when a stone was his only pillow, sufficed for the testimony from above. Years, not fewer than a score, were needed to exhaust the toil and trial of his humiliation. Leaving his father's house, in lowly guise, he is once, and once for all, declared by a vision and a voice from heaven, to be the son and heir. It is the act of a few moments. It is as a vivid flash of lightning across the starless gloom; and then all is dark once more. Thereafter, in the dark, nearly a quarter of a century is to pass before the son and heir again emerges out of obscurity. And all the while he is to be suffering wrong; and he is to be suffering wrong, that he may see his seed—the seed in which the foundation of the family and Church that is to be called after him is to be laid. In his humiliation, he purchases for himself a spouse, and a seed to bear his name.

It would be unwise to run the risk of pushing fanciful analogies and types so far as some of the older interpreters of the Old Testament Scriptures, patristic and medieval, were accustomed to

do. The story of Jacob's sojourn in Syria may easily be allegorized and spiritualized by a dreamy imagination, so as to become a rehearsal, as it were, or a sort of shadowy anticipation, of the Lord's incarnation and the Church's redemption. The double marriage is, in this view, supposed to be significant; the elder sister, who must be first espoused, representing the Jews, to whom the gospel must first be preached; the younger and favorite spouse standing for the Gentiles, who are preferred, and in favour of whom the Jews are comparatively disparaged and set aside. Even in its minute details, as regards the connection of Jacob with the concubines, as well as the births and names of the children—whether the children of the wives, or of their maids—the history has been turned into a figure of better things to come, and each separate particular has received its own small mite of spiritual application.

It is well to be on our guard against such refinements upon the plain and homely,—the intensely real and personal,—narratives of the Old Testament, as would emasculate them of all manly sense and spirit, and turn them into the senile driveling of a morbid, and sometimes prurient sentimentalism. At the same time there are certain broad analogies or resemblances not to be overlooked. Even in creation, as the volume of nature is more and more clearly read, it appears that God reveals himself upon a plan of typical forms. It would be strange if we had not everywhere traces of the same method in that providential history of redemption which it is the object of the Bible to record. If the forms of creation are cast in typical molds, why not also the events of providence?—especially those events of providence which form part of that onward march of the gracious plan of salvation to which both creation and providence are subordinate and subservient. In a general way, surely, and without undue merging of the real in the ideal, or losing the plain and useful practical history in recondite and far-fetched spiritual figure,—it is right to notice such coincidences between the experience of the Patriarchs and that of him who sprung out of their loins, as are fitted to throw light on the principles of the divine procedure in the great economy of redemption.

I. "Israel served" in Syria; he served as a shepherd; he "kept sheep." "He who by his strength is to have power with God,"—"he

who is to have power over the Angel and prevail,” served; he must needs serve. That is the law of his position, the condition of his deliverance and exaltation.

All throughout the history of the chosen people, it is made manifest that they,—the nation Israel, as well as the man Israel,—are under this condition and law. Servitude in exile is the indispensable preparation and preliminary if there is to be either grace or glory; it is the price to be paid for subsequent prosperity and peace at home. They served as fugitive exiles in Egypt, in order to their taking triumphant possession of the land at first. They kept sheep in Goshen, that they might reap the fruits of Canaan. They served also as captive exiles in Babylon, in order to their resuming the land in the presence of all their enemies. They hung their harps on the willows beside the rivers of Babel, that they might have their mouth filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing, at the recovered sight of their own glorious Zion.

Thus Israel, as a nation, was subject to the law or condition of dark banishment and dreary servitude being the way to light, liberty, and life. How fitting then that the founder of the nation,—the man Israel, from whom the nation derived its birth and took its name,—should exemplify in his history the same law, the same condition. Owned by God as the son, the heir,—he is not immediately glorified. He is not on the instant declared to be the son with power, or invested with the honours and prerogatives of the heir. He has first to flee and serve,—to banish himself to Syria, a strange land, and there to be a servant, keeping sheep.

Can we stop short of the conclusion that—whether exemplified in the people Israel or in the man Israel—the law or condition in question has a deeper root than either accidental coincidence or mere discretionary appointment? And where can such a root be found but in him of whom either Israel is the type?

“The man Christ Jesus” is the true Israel of God. He was hailed in that character in the waters of Jordan,—as Jacob was at the stone of Bethel. He was saluted as the Son, the Heir. The seal of the covenant was upon him and in him. Why should he not, then, as the

Son, the Heir, assume at once his rank and assert his power? Why should not the stones become bread to feed him? Why should not the angels wait on him to keep him from harm, as, casting himself from a pinnacle of the temple, he appears gloriously as King in Zion? Why should he not take possession, not of Canaan only, but of all the kingdoms of the world, as their rightful proprietor and lord? So Satan would tempt him to do. And he would help him to do so, upon the terms of a very moderate compromise. But no. Israel must recognize his position as for the time a sojourner in Syria. Nay more. Israel must serve,—keeping sheep. He must” take upon him the form of a servant.”” Being made in the likeness of man, and found in fashion as a man, he must humble himself and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” All this must come before God highly exalts him, and gives “him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. ii. 9-11).

Have we not here the root, the ground, and reason, of that rule of the divine procedure which we find exemplified in the history of the nation Israel, and of its founder the man Israel or Jacob? May we not now contemplate his low estate in

Syria, as well as the Egyptian bondage and Babylonian captivity of his posterity, in the light of a far more wonderful and awful humiliation,—in the light of the principle which that humiliation expresses and embodies? That principle is one which could only very inadequately be made apparent in the case of either of the two types,—Israel, the nation,—Israel, the individual; but it comes out emphatically in the case of the antitype. He must banish himself from his heavenly home, and become a servant in a strange land, because he makes common cause with us, places himself in our stead under the law which we have broken, redeems us by obeying and suffering on our behalf, and as the captain of our salvation brings many sons and daughters to glory. Thus he comes into Syria, and serves, keeping sheep; being “the good shepherd, who lays down his life for his sheep.” Thus our Jacob, through the tribulation of his condescending from heaven's glory to a low estate on earth, and the service of his obedience and propitiation in that estate,

comes forth as our Israel, having power with God," able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. vii. 25). So the principle applies to him as the Saviour. And so it must apply to us, if we are to be saved by him. For he saves us by making us one with himself. Israel now—the true Israel of God—is Christ; not Christ, however, isolated and alone, but Christ identifying himself with his people, and identifying them with himself. In Christ therefore, the rule or principle which governed his experience and determined his history, must govern and determine ours also. We in Christ must consent to serve in Syria, if we would be free in Canaan; to suffer in Egypt and in Babylon, if we would be exalted as sons and heirs in the promised land; to be humbled in him if we would be glorified with him. There must be the same mind in us that was also in him. We must be crucified with him, and be obedient with him, if we would hope to live and reign with him.

Thus far, guided by the Prophet Hosea, we can scarcely go wrong in taking a large and comprehensive spiritual view of Jacob's banishment to Syria and service there, as involving a principle in the divine administration which is exemplified in other dealings of God with Jacob's race; in Egypt, for example, and at Babylon; but of which we have the full development, as well as the real explanation in the humiliation, obedience, sufferings, and death of Christ—and of all who are Christ's—his for them, theirs in him.

II. Is it pressing unduly the analogy suggested, as I think, by the Prophet—or overstraining it—to go one step farther, and observe that, as in his low estate in Syria, Israel served for a wife, so in his humiliation the true Israel purchased for himself a spouse? Before he got home again to Canaan, Jacob saw in his household the foundation laid of that Church of the twelve tribes which was to be built upon the foundation of his twelve sons. Before he passed from earth to heaven, Christ had laid the foundation of a better church, in the twelve apostles whom he chose to build the spiritual habitation," the habitation of God through the Spirit," of which he himself is the head corner-stone. Jacob, in Syria, served well and worked well for a wife. The family he got at Padan-aram was purchased at no ordinary price; it cost him years of much servile toil, and of not a little suffering and shame. But the years passed swiftly, for the love

he had to the wife of his bosom. Christ also “loved the church, and gave himself for it.” It is the church which “he has purchased with his own blood.” It is the church which he “nourisheth and cherisheth as his own body.” It is the church which he “sanctifies and cleanses with the washing of water, by the word; that he may present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Ephes. v. 25-27).

For here, this marriage, divine and heavenly, shines forth in bright contrast with these Syrian nuptials, alas! too earthly and impure. Jacob, fleeing into the country of Syria, and serving there for a wife, finds himself in the midst of an evil age,” a wicked and adulterous generation.” He cannot even extricate himself out of its snares, or keep his own hands and his own heart clean. How then can he rescue and redeem the objects of his choice? The ties which bind them to him are close and endearing; his love to them may be ardent and strong. But ah! how impotent is he to save either himself or them from the bondage of corruption! But mark the true Israel! See how he can deal with the spouse, the church, for which in his humiliation he serves, at such a cost of patience and of blood! When he comes in contact with the objects of his choice, he finds them in the midst of a world that is lying in wickedness; themselves as deeply sunk in pollution and guilt as the very vilest of those among whom they dwell; the victims, like others, of its lying vanities; the heirs, like them, of” the wrath revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Such and so situated are the objects of our Israel's choice, in this Syria in which he, exiled for a time from heaven, has to serve for his bride. And into how close contact does he come with these miserable objects of his election, making all their misery his own, and all their guilt—the guilt of that estrangement from his Father and theirs which has rendered it needful for him to come into a far country, to seek and to save the lost! But being himself uncontaminated and free, he is able to be a ransom for them. Purchasing their release from condemnation—redeeming them to be his own peculiar people—he raises them out of the depths out of which, when for their sakes he had gone down into them, he has himself been raised. He makes them partakers of his own rising—his own resurrection. Nay more, he makes them

partakers of his own nature. His Holy Spirit beautifies, purifies, ennobles them.” The king’s daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold.”

Yes! in that day of the full and final consummation of our divine Israel’s espousals—when the wife for whom he served in his humiliation is to be revealed as one with him in his glory—when he shall appear and all his hidden ones with him; ah! in that day there will be no dark deceit, no fraud, no guile—no plot that needs the cloud of thickest night to cover it. Before all intelligences, in the eyes of an assembled universe; Lo, a great sight! New heavens and a new earth; the first heavens and the first earth passed away. And what do I see, as the rapt apostle saw it in his lonely isle of Patmos?” The holy city—the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, as a bride adorned for her husband.” And hark! a great voice out of heaven!” Behold the Tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away” (Rev. xxi. 1-4).

XLII.

JACOB'S SOJOURN IN SYRIA—RETROSPECT.

Genesis xxix.-xxx. 26.

The interval between Jacob's leaving Bethel for Padan-aram, and his proposal to return home again, is in many respects a dark and unsatisfactory subject of study. It is not necessary, as it is not pleasant, to dwell on its incidents in detail. Some leading features, however, must be noted.

It may be convenient to fix upon a sort of central point,—such as that between Jacob's first two seven-years' services, and his third and last;—his first two services, almost enforced, for his wives, and his last, more spontaneous, for his fortune. From this central point, a retrospective glance may be cast on the fourteen preceding years, before proceeding to the remaining seven. Such a retrospective glance, from some central point, it is often very useful to cast on the bygone part of life. How does it look now? An occasion arises for a kind of count and reckoning as to the past,—with ourselves, or with some one with whom we have had dealings,—a friend, a relative, with whom we have been living familiarly. It is time that we should part, or come to an understanding. Old scores are to be inquired into and disposed of. A new footing is to be adjusted.

So Jacob at this crisis feels. He must be off. It is high time for him to go home. He has tarried long enough in Padan-aram; longer far than he at first intended; as long certainly as was good for himself; as long as his grasping relative had any shadow of right to keep him. His heart yearns to embrace his parents once more. His duty calls him to make the land of promise his abode. It will not do to have the chosen family all bred, as well as born, in Syria. Let

them learn to breath the air of Canaan. Therefore, at the end of fourteen years,” Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.” In thus asking his dismissal or discharge, Jacob appeals to Laban's sense of equity. In all fairness he is quite entitled to what he asks. He has honorably fulfilled the terms of his engagement; as he can call Laban himself to witness;—“Thou knowest my service which I have done thee” (xxx. 25, 26).

It has been a service on which the two men may look back with very mingled feelings.

I. Jacob's first introduction to Laban's family must be fresh in the memory of both. It was not of such a sort as would have led either of them at the time to anticipate the nature of the connection that was to subsist between them, or the manner in which it was to be developed.

That first meeting with Rachel—how vividly is it before Jacob's eye! He is a weary pilgrim once more,—way-worn, foot-sore, and thirsty. He sees three flocks and their keepers gathered round a well. He hails them courteously as brethren. He gathers from them that he is at his journey's end. They are of Haran: they know Laban; they are expecting his daughter, and the sheep she has to tend. He at once calls to mind how old Eliezer found a wife for his father Isaac, perhaps at the very same well. The coincidence strikes him. Silently he breathes Eliezer's prayer, that it may please the Lord to show him her whom he has appointed for him. It is the prayer of faith. That he may be alone while waiting for the answer, he would be rid of the men whose presence may be embarrassing: for such, perhaps, is the reason of his suggestion that they should at once water the sheep and lead them off to pasture—a suggestion, however, which they decline to follow, on the plea that they must wait” until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth.” Suddenly Rachel appears with her father's sheep, following her lead. Jacob hastens anxiously and eagerly to serve her,—rolling the stone from the well's mouth and watering the sheep for her. His heart is full.—Hast thou heard me, Lord, as thou didst hear that good old man, whose way of executing his commission from home I so well

remember? Is this indeed the answer to my prayer?—Regardless of onlookers, he sees Rachel only. Saluting her with a holy kiss, he cannot refrain himself. He gives vent to his emotions in irrepressible tears—“Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept” (xxix. 1-11).

How strange, after fourteen such years as he had spent with Laban, to recall, as if it were yesterday, that first interview with Laban's daughter, and those first gushings of love! Could it ever have entered into his mind then to fancy it possible that so tender a scene was to be so followed up; that a moment of such simple faith and pure joy was to usher in so long a train of humiliation? And Laban too, has he no recollection of that day? Does he not again see his daughter running to him with the eager tidings that his sister's son has come? Does he not remember how the tidings then affected him?—how “he ran to meet Jacob, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house,” and made much of him, because—so he said, “Surely thou art my bone and my flesh.” There was no thought in Laban's heart that day of the frauds he was to practise on his kinsman, or the service he was to extort from him. For the time, he was as truly and deeply moved as Jacob was himself. Who that saw the family group round Laban's board that evening, and listened to their talk of home memories and home ties, could have anticipated such a domestic history as that which Jacob is looking back upon, when he says to Laban, “Thou knowest my service which I have done thee?” (xxix. 12-14).

II. The double marriage, and the manner of it,—what are father-in-law and son-in-law thinking of that whole matter now?” I have served for my wives,” says Jacob, as thou didst stipulate;—our bargain is fulfilled. It was a strange bargain; and now that, on the eve of a proposed parting, they recall all the circumstances of it,—not very creditable to either. How came they to fall into it? Surely Laban, when he so affectionately embraced Jacob, had no idea of treating him as he did. He is at first sincere in his kindness to his kinsman, his sister's son, when he invites him to abide with him as a guest for” the space of a month.” But as the month rolls on, he begins to be disappointed. He had expected, perhaps, that Jacob, being Abraham's grandson, and claiming to be his heir, would

produce some evidence of his birthright-title to the temporal wealth of that patriarch, as well as to the spiritual blessing. True; Jacob does not come with that rich and imposing retinue which formerly made Abraham's servant welcome in that worldly house. Still he may have some more private means of attesting his rank and riches. No. Jacob confesses he has none. He came away in haste and by stealth;—leaving his elder brother, as Laban would naturally think, in possession of the worldly privilege, at least, of which he accused Jacob of having defrauded him. Laban is no believer in divine oracles, or in deathbed patriarchal benedictions; he would have something more tangible. Jacob may turn out to be the son and heir; made the son and heir by some sort of spiritual covenant or arrangement of which Laban has no evidence, and can form no idea. Meanwhile, by his own acknowledgment, he has been a deceiver or supplanter, and is now little better than a runaway and a beggar. The least that can be expected, therefore, if he is to remain in his uncle's house, is that he should be willing to work as his uncle's servant. It does not, after all, seem very unreasonable that a man like Laban should assign to him that position. Nay, Laban may even consider himself to be deserving of some credit for generosity, when he proposes to recompense Jacob for his service. I will not take advantage of your relationship to me, as if it entitled me, while you are an inmate of my house, to set you to such offices as the other members of my family, and even my own daughters, gratuitously discharge.” Because thou art my brother (my kinsman), shouldest thou, therefore, serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be? (ver. 15). So far this Laban, as it might seem, is not much to blame. And when, still farther, upon learning that Jacob sought, as the only wages he then cared for, his younger daughter in marriage, Laban accepted, in lieu of the dowry which it was customary for a suitor to offer for his bride, a term of service proffered by the suitor himself,—he cannot well be considered seriously censurable. It was not wonderful that as a careful, if not tender, father, he should, for his daughter's own sake, acquiesce in Jacob's proposal to serve for her seven years;—that during that time of probation he might know more of one who, though allied to him by blood, had reached his house as a stranger, and a stranger not free from circumstances of suspicion. Even this part of the transaction, therefore, is not by any means unnatural or unjustifiable. Laban might reflect on it

afterwards without much regret or self-reproach. Would that he had nothing worse to reflect upon! (xxix. 14-20).

But, first, the false nuptials, the fraud practised on the marriage night;—how practised, we cannot tell—by what fell tyranny over the affections of the one daughter—by what threats forcing to her dishonour the other—by what vile arts practised on the outraged husband; the remorseless and unscrupulous plotter himself alone could reveal the secrets of that dark deed of shame;—then, secondly, the cool effrontery of his vamped-up excuse, when he is challenged for the base trick;—and, lastly, what is almost worse than all, the infamous offer of redress,—the proposal to repair the wrong by a new iniquity; making true love, unjustly and most scandalously baulked, minister to that incestuous bigamy in which alone it can now find its gratification; bartering both his children for the service of a man whose chief recommendation in his eyes manifestly was, that he was making him rich;—what complication of cruelty and crime, of low cunning, sordid avarice, gross impurity, and unfeeling oppression! And what has come of it? Laban has got a double seven years' lease of a most valuable servant, in whose diligent and faithful hands his affairs have prospered as they never prospered before. But has he no misgivings? Ah! might he not have some, now that Jacob talks of leaving him—as he thinks on the sort of home he has made for his son-in-law; the jealous rivalry of the sisters, unnaturally associated as wives; with all the unseemly strifes and unholy devices to which that rivalry gave inevitable occasion? And Jacob—what of him? How does he feel in looking back to the short week within which his double marriage was consummated? After one seven years' service, he found himself suddenly, and against his will, committed to another; with the wife he loved, indeed, in his bosom,—but under a sad drawback upon his anticipated domestic joy. He sought none other than Rachel. Left to himself, he would have been content with her alone, and what pure happiness might have been his, but for that outrageous stratagem of Laban of which he was the victim! The first term of his service for Rachel seemed to him but a few days for the love he had to her. And if, at its close, he had been allowed, as he intended, honorably to espouse the object of his chaste choice,—he might have walked in the steps of his father Isaac; and whether remaining in Syria, or returning to Canaan,

waited until it pleased God to crown the union with the promised issue. It is vain, however, to wish to recall or undo the past. The second seven years' term of service is over.¹ It has not gone so smoothly as the first; there have been family feuds and family faults.

The sisters, in their jealousy of one another, have led their husband into still grosser conformity to the loose manners of the age and country than he would himself have dreamt of. At the end of it he finds himself rich in children; he has a household large enough. But there is something significant in the close connection between Rachel's bringing forth, after years of bareness, her first-born son, Joseph, and Jacob's instantly proposing to return to Canaan. It is almost as if he recognized, not indeed as regards Laban, but as regards the Lord, a sort of *nunc dimittis*,—"now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." It is as if he felt that, had he been allowed to act according to his own choice and his own sense of duty alone, he would have gone home more gladly with this one solitary pledge of the love that knit his heart and Rachel's in one, than with the large family which he owes to mothers whom, of his own accord, he never would have sought (xxix. 21; xxx. 25).

Yes! the full enormity of Laban's treatment of him is now apparent. For a long time, while Rachel's womb is closed, Jacob may have been tempted to congratulate himself on his having been tricked into a previous marriage with her sister Leah. He evidently has satisfaction in Leah's fruitfulness; and while piously reproving Rachel's impatient demand, "Give me children or I die," he seems to acquiesce in her conclusion, that she is not likely to be a mother,—"Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb" (xxx. 1,2). So hopeless is he of issue by her, that he consents to take her handmaid as her substitute; that, according to the ideas then prevalent, he may lighten Rachel's reproach and abate Leah's triumph. Still, by herself or by her handmaid as her proxy, Leah has the best of it in this most sad and unseemly emulation. Rachel continues, as it would seem, hopelessly barren. Jacob is more and

¹ I adopt the opinion of those who place the marriage of Jacob and Rachel at the beginning of the second seven years' term of service. It seems all but impossible otherwise to harmonize the narrative.

more inclined to count it a happy circumstance that he has got other wives to be the mothers of his children. His indignant sense of the wrong

which he sustained, when that arrangement was at first so fraudulently forced on him, is abated; so also is his sense of his own sin in consenting to it afterwards. He begins to feel as if he could not have trusted the promised seed to Rachel alone; and as if he had done well to make sure of it by accepting Leah, for whom he had to thank the cunning of her father;—and the handmaids whom he owed to the evil passions of the sisters. They were not of his seeking, — these other spouses,—Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah; they have been in a manner imposed upon him; and Rachel's continued childlessness seems to explain the reason. At last, however, Rachel's womb is opened; quite as soon after her marriage as either Sarah's or Rebekah's;—nay, sooner. Jacob is rebuked. He sees that the flattering unction he has been laying to his conscience is vain. However he may be justified or excused for his polygamy, his defense or apology cannot rest on the ground on which Rachel's prolonged barrenness has been tempting him to place it. With her alone, as his only spouse, his faith would not have been tried so much as was the faith of his father Isaac;—the trial of it would have been as nothing in comparison with the trial of his grandfather Abraham's. It is altogether according to the manner of God thus to open Jacob's eyes, if in some such way as has been indicated, he has been tempted to deceive himself, and to think well, or at least not so ill, of those miserable matrimonial expedients on which he has been beginning, perhaps, to look with some measure of complacency.

Nor is it Jacob's eyes only that this event, the birth of Joseph, is fitted to open. The whole household, including Laban himself, might be the better for the lesson, if they could but lay it to heart. If, from the beginning of these transactions, faith had been allowed to regulate the counsels and proceedings of all the parties concerned,—if when Jacob sought a wife in faith, with a view to the promised seed, Laban, in the same faith, had given him the wife manifestly appointed for him by the Lord,—Rachel would have been to him what Rebekah was to Isaac, and Sarah to Abraham. Faith would have waited patiently in their case, as it did in the case of these other

holy pairs, for the promised issue. And as it now turns out, faith would in due time have received its reward.

Who are these poor worms of the dust, Laban, Leah, Rachel, Jacob himself, and all the rest of them, that they should go about plotting and planning, after so vile a fashion, for the building of the house or family in which the God of Abraham is to record his name, and out of which the Son and Lord of Abraham is to spring, for the saving of the nations? What mean these wretched bickerings and jarrings in that ill-assorted home? To what purpose is this indecent haste of these women? Why all this miserable game of rivalry, defiling honourable marriage,—this pitiable trade and traffic of mandrakes,—and all the other incidents which so offend us;—enacted beneath the roof of a professed man of God? Does the Lord stand in need of such devices and doings as these for the raising up of a seed for Abraham?— the Lord, who is able “out of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham?” Nay, let Isaac's birth in Abraham's house, and Jacob's in that of Isaac,—and now the opening of Rachel's womb in the birth of Joseph,—give the emphatic reply.

Yes! the Lord might have been trusted to work out his own ends in his own good way. He may be pleased, now that the thing is done, to turn to account the issue of these unholy devices, as “he makes the wrath of man to praise him.” He may use Jacob's sons, however Jacob has got them, for the founding of his church in Israel. So he manifests his sovereignty and power, his electing grace and overruling providence. But surely, for Jacob himself, and for all concerned in these strange and sad affairs, it Would have been better far, if faith had all along from the first been allowed to rule; if Jacob, in faith, had dealt more frankly and more boldly with Laban; if Laban and his house had, in faith, received Jacob; if all parties had, in simple faith, followed the Lord's guiding eye,—in simple faith, leaving the event to him.

“Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake -wrath: fret not thyself in anywise to do evil” (Ps. xxxvii. 1-8).

XLIII.

JACOB'S SOJOURN IN SYRIA—THE LAST BARGAIN.

Genesis xxx. 27-43.

“And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maid-servants, and men-servants, and camels, and asses.”—Genesis xxx. 43.

This is a summary of Jacob's manner of life during the third and last term of his service in the household of Laban. Some six or seven years have passed away since he consented to renew his engagement with his father-in-law -, and the close of it finds him prosperous, thriving, wealthy. He has been “providing for his own house,” as he intimated at the time his intention of doing (ver. 30), and God has blessed his provision. He has got more than he covenanted for in his vow at Bethel, which was simply bread to eat and raiment to put on. He has large store of what chiefly constituted the riches of these days;—“much cattle, and maid-servants, and men-servants, and camels, and asses.” The bargain which he made with Laban, when after two weeks of years spent in his service he consented to a third, has turned out to be profitable.

Into the terms of that bargain and its issue, we need not inquire very particularly; it is not made very clear by the narrative, not at least to us, at our distance of time and place. From our point of view, the reason and propriety of it are not very apparent; according to our modern and western notions, the whole affair appears strange, not to say fantastic. Possibly those who lived nearer the date of this history, being familiar with primitive patriarchal habits and the manners of nomadic tribes, may have been better able to enter into the meaning of the transaction. It may have had lessons to teach

them, which we can but imperfectly learn. For though all Scripture is written for our learning, it is not all equally so. Nor is it any disparagement of the perfection of the Bible, but rather the reverse, that being given for the use of successive generations, it should contain waymarks of these generations which the foot of time partially obliterates. In all essential matters, in all things pertaining to life and godliness,—to grace and glory,—the light shines more brightly as, from age to age, revelation rises from its dim and morning dawn to its meridian fulness,—so that its latest beams shed luster on its earliest discoveries. But in what relates to times, and seasons, and circumstances,—the incidents and outer garments, rather than the essence and inner spirit, of the truth which it has to disclose,—the Bible, being all throughout human as well as divine—and that is its perfection—may be expected to contain passages in its history, and paintings in its poetry, which distance makes comparatively obscure to us, though to the men of the day they may have been interesting and edifying. It would be well if this consideration were kept in view, as in common fairness it ought to be, by those who hunt for difficulties in these old sacred records, or who stumble at them. It would be well also if it were kept in view by those who study or expound these records for the purposes of moral instruction and the spiritual life. It might lead the former to be more modest and diffident in their criticism; and the latter to be more reserved sometimes in their moralizing and spiritualizing.

But to return. There is one thing about the bargain now in question that cannot fail to strike an attentive observer. It was singularly disinterested and unselfish on the part of Jacob. He himself makes it a test of his “righteousness” (xxx. 31-33).

It must be allowed, indeed, that that is not the notion which, on a cursory reading of the history, we are apt to take up. The whole thing looks like trick; Jacob defeating Laban on his own ground, and with his own weapon; plot against plot; stratagem against stratagem. But it is not really so. The appearance of craft is on the surface. If we look a little below the surface, what have we? At the best, or at the worst, Jacob offers to lay a bet, or make a wager, with Laban. And he gives his father-in-law most extraordinary advantage—such advantage as no speculator would give now. I do not say that Jacob's

affair with Laban was of that character; all I say is, that in that view of the matter, he gave Laban all the chance,—all the advantage,—of the trial as to the different kinds of sheep and goats. The whole transaction is so arranged that Laban cannot well lose, while the probability of Jacob gaining is extremely small.

But is it Jacob's craft that so arranges HI Or is it so arranged according to the will of God? What was the bargain? its occasion? its character?—

1. As to its occasion,—Jacob, having gained his end, and being all but complete as the ancestor of the twelve tribes, proposes to Laban that he should be suffered to go home to his father Isaac's house, and to the land of his inheritance. Surely it is a reasonable proposal, and one in which Laban should in all fairness have been willing to acquiesce. If he hesitates, it certainly does not appear to be from any reluctance to lose the society of his son-in-law, his daughters, and their children. There is not much evidence of friendly feeling or natural affection in Laban's dealings with them. Nor, indeed, to do him justice, does he make much profession of any thing of the sort. He frankly owns his motive for wishing to keep Jacob in his employment to be a selfish one;—"I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry; for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake" (ver. 27). He knows the value of a faithful servant, and plainly avows his love of gain. Jacob, on the other hand, when his conduct on this occasion is fairly judged, appears in a comparatively favourable light. Evidently he has not been covetous of wealth; at the close of a fourteen years' service, he is as poor as he was at the beginning: and in that condition of poverty, he is willing to quit the service (ver. 26). No doubt there had been opportunities -within his reach of bettering his circumstances,—such opportunities as many in his place would not have scrupled to take advantage of And, indeed, considering how he was situated, and how he had been used, I am apt to feel as if I could scarcely have blamed Jacob much, if I had seen him bent, not merely on enriching Laban, but on laying up something for himself. Without anything like what the world stigmatizes as dishonesty,—if he had been disposed to do what many another man in his position would have had no hesitation in doing, and would have been held

entitled to do,—Jacob must have had it frequently in his power to transact a little business on his own account. For can we doubt that the chief herdsman of a powerful and wealthy Sheik like Laban must have come in contact with parties ready to oblige him,—that he might have had capital advanced to him on which to commence trading for himself,—and that without prejudice, as it might have been represented, to his master's interests, he might have had his own private stock of cattle meanwhile accumulating and thriving on his hands? But Jacob acts otherwise. Faithful to his trust,—not as an eye-servant, but as one fearing God,—he conscientiously devotes himself to Laban's work. He uses no arts or methods of self-aggrandizement; nor does he make any complaint about the poor state in which his father-in-law, growing wealthy by his means, so ungenerously keeps him. Quietly he pursues the even tenor of his way; and when at last he proposes to leave his greedy kinsman, it is without one word of upbraiding about the past, and with no demand upon him now for more than his wives and his children for whom alone he has thus faithfully served during these long fourteen years. Surely that does not look like the conduct of one making haste to be rich, and not very particular as to the way. And surely it affords some ground for thinking that in making his new bargain with Laban, and in carrying it into effect, Jacob is not the party lightly to be suspected of underhand policy or fraud.

2. The bargain itself, so far as its tenor can be gathered from the somewhat obscure account which we have got of it, would seem to have been briefly this. All the purely white, or all that are of one uniform colour, among the cattle, the sheep, and the goats, are henceforth to belong to Laban; Jacob is to have as his hire the party-coloured among the goats, and the brown among the sheep. Under the bargain, a division is immediately made,—certainly most favourable to Laban, and scarcely equitable or fair to Jacob. All the cattle of the kind for which Jacob had stipulated are removed from under his care and consigned to Laban's sons. Jacob is left in charge exclusively of those that are of the sort Laban is to claim. And a space of three days' journey being interposed, every possible precaution is taken to prevent the two separate portions of the cattle from mixing and breeding together. For as yet the whole stock belongs exclusively to Laban. Jacob has not a single sheep,—not a

solitary goat. The bargain applies only to the offspring of the existing generation of these animals; and so far as appears, only to the offspring of those of them left with Jacob—to the exclusion of the others carried away by Laban and his sons.

Here, then, is Jacob left with a handful of sheep and goats, not one of which is of the colour that is to distinguish the cattle that are to belong to him. And from among the lambs and kids that may be born of them, he is to pay himself his hire as best he may.

Who has the best, humanly speaking, of this novel sort of engagement?

One can fancy the grasping household of Laban chuckling as they led away the only portion of the flock or herd that could have afforded Jacob any chance, as it might be thought, of making anything by his bargain, and exulting in the prospect of the whole property continuing to belong to them. For surely the cattle left with Jacob will produce offspring like themselves. Our simple kinsman will soon find that he has notably miscalculated, and is finely taken in.

How far this procedure on the part of Laban and his sons,—the removal from under Jacob's care of all that were of the sort that he was ultimately to have as his,—was part of the bargain as intended by Jacob, or was consistent with it, is not very clear. It is by no means improbable, when the character of Laban is kept in view, that it was an after-thought. It may be one of the instances to which Jacob refers when he says to Leah and Rachel,—“Your father hath deceived me and changed my wages ten times;” an exaggeration, doubtless, but not unnatural in the circumstances (xxx. 7). If so, then we can see a special reason for that interposition of God on his behalf of which he tells his wives (xxx. 8-12). It was upon the suggestion of God,—such virtually is Jacob's protest,—it was at his instance and in compliance with his directions,—that I adopted the expedient which he has so greatly blessed. In fact, how he should have thought of such a device without some impulse or instruction from above, it is extremely difficult to imagine. It is true that much learned and ingenious speculation has been expended on making it

out that he adroitly availed himself of a natural law of the animal economy; but the result of all such attempts has been anything but satisfactory. The success which the scheme met with cannot well be explained upon any principle of nature's ordinary operations; it seems both wiser and safer therefore to refer it at once to divine agency and superintendence; and to regard it as a case analogous to that of the blind man whose cure the Lord chose to effect by means equally unlikely to succeed (John ix). What Jacob did he did by faith. Why his faith was tried in this particular way,—why God chose to interfere on behalf of his servant in a manner so strange, and as it might seem, so out of all accordance with natural sense or reason,—we cannot of course tell, any more than we can tell why Jesus cured the blind man as he did; we can only acquiesce in God's sovereignty, working when and where and how he pleases; and recognize his purpose to test and prove, with a view to strengthen, the trust which a believer puts in him. We can well imagine, however, Laban and his sons, watching with supreme contempt, and the supercilious smile of calm and complacent incredulity, the fond and foolish experiment Jacob was trying. Jacob too, might sometimes be out of countenance, as he heard their sneers and felt the ridicule of his situation. But patience for a little. The scoffers are put to shame, and simple faith is owned and requited. For “the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maid-servants, and men-servants, and camels, and asses” (xxx. 43).

XLIV.

THE PARTING OF LABAN AND JACOB.

Genesis xxxi.

“When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.”—Proverbs xvi. 7.

The parting between Jacob and Laban is better than, in the view of all the previous intercourse between them, might have been anticipated. In so far as it is so, it is very manifestly the Lord's doing. Little or nothing of what is decorous and peaceful, not to say friendly, in the closing scene, is to be ascribed to the goodwill or the good sense of those engaged in it. Jacob's stealthy and felon-like flight was fitted to awaken Laban's wrath. Laban's pursuit, again, was the sort of last offence that makes the trodden worm turn round and show fight, as Jacob does in his angry chiding. But for the special interposition of God, disastrous consequences must have marked the meeting of the fugitive son-in-law and the incensed father of his wives. That interposition, however, made the meeting safe, and the farewell in which it issued decent, if not amicable. I. Jacob's resolution to return to Canaan is of the Lord. He says so himself expressly, when he tells his wives of what the Angel of God had said to him:—“I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedest the pillar, and where thou vowedest a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred” (xxx. 13).²

² There is a difficulty, though not a serious one, in clearing up the vision, or visions, which Jacob relates to his wives, when he is persuading them to quit their father's house, and accompany him to his own home (ver. 11-13). He appeals to God as having given him two distinct and separate revelations. They seem to be one, as he cites them to his wives; but if we look closely into them, it is manifest that they are really two. They are joined as one, because they are the beginning

He is bent on reconciling his wives to his purpose of leaving Syria. It was a purpose which he had announced to his father-in-law seven years before, on the birth of Joseph (xxx. 25). At that time, it was a purpose of his own,—natural, in the circumstances, but not of God. He had been persuaded to postpone the execution of it. He now resumes it; and he is anxious to satisfy his household that he has divine warrant for resuming it. In doing so, he briefly notices the whole history of God's dealings with him during the closing period of his service under Laban. God has been manifestly protecting and prospering him, for it was by express divine direction that he adopted the course which has so greatly enriched him. And now it is the command of the same God that he shall “arise, get him out of this land, and return unto the land of his kindred” (ver. 13). He who during these last years has defended me against the wiles of my crafty father-in-law,—“not suffering him to hurt me.”—and who, in spite of an unequal bargain, unfairly kept, has “taken away his cattle and given them to me,”—he, my father's God, now bids me seek my father's home.

The order, as Jacob cites it, is given with great solemnity. An appeal is made to the memorable scene at Bethel, and the transaction which was consummated and ratified there. Jacob is reminded of the Lord's grace and of his own obligation. The time has come for him to pay his vow (ver. 13).

and the end of the Lord's communication of his will to Jacob, With reference to the supplementary period of his sojourn after he had served fourteen years for his wives and children. Now that after another seven years' term of service he again, for the second time, proposes to leave Syria, it is reasonable that he should satisfy his household as to the divine warrant which he had both for remaining seven years before, when he had meant to go, and for going now, when there was much that might have induced him to stay. He intimates to his family that it is the same divine authority which sanctioned his renewed bargain With Laban for other seven years after the first two periods were ended, that now indicates the path of duty, as lying in the direction of Canaan and of home. Hence he recites as if it were all one vision, what really resolves itself into two; the one having reference to the manner in which he grew rich in cattle during the last seven years of his sojourn with Laban (ver. 12); the other having reference to his return to the land of his kindred (ver. 13).with Laban,

It is possible that he may have been inclined to forget it. During the fourteen years of his poverty, when "he served for a wife, and for a wife kept sheep," he was not in circumstances to redeem his pledge;—God, the God of Bethel, gave him food and raiment, but nothing more. It is but yesterday, as it were, that he has begun to acquire the means of carrying his devout and liberal purpose into effect; he is only now becoming wealthy. The sudden change may be apt to operate injuriously; reconciling him, perhaps, to his sojourn far off from Bethel. He may not now be so ready as he was when he was poor to say to Laban, Send me away that I may go unto my own place, and to my country; he may be willing to tarry a little longer. The impression of that night when first he tasted and saw how good the Lord is, may be growing somewhat faint; and when his own voluntary engagement is brought to his recollection, he may be tempted to persuade himself that the fulfilment of it had better be postponed for a season, till he is better able to show his gratitude to him whose blessing is making him rich.

If it be so with Jacob, as alas! it too often is even with men of God similarly situated,—if thus the world is getting hold of his heart, and causing him to be content in Syria, and unmindful of Canaan,—how graciously is his case met! The very murmuring of Laban's sons, and the change of Laban's countenance towards him, are in this view special mercies. They make him feel how precarious his position is, and how uncertain is his tenure of all that he has got. They reawaken his sense of the bitterness of his exile, and set him upon thinking of his home, and his father, and his father's God. And when, at that precise crisis, just as his soul is becoming weary under the feeling of the utter vanity of the very success he has attained, God once more comes specially to deal with him,—what can be more fitted to drive home the blow which has been already struck,—what more likely to give a gracious turn to the disappointment and resentment naturally rankling in his bosom,—what more certain to touch a tender chord, and revive in him the freshness of his first love—than so affecting a reference as the Lord is pleased to make to that old fellowship between himself and his broken-hearted servant;—"I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred" (ver. 13).

II. The manner of Jacob's departure is not, as it would seem, of the Lord. It savours too much of Jacob's own disposition towards guile.

In the first place, there was no reason for his having recourse to the stratagem of a secret movement, or clandestine flight. Laban had no claim upon him,—he was not Laban's bondsman. As an independent man, who had certainly got nothing from Laban as a favour,—nothing for which he had not paid full value,—Jacob might have stood up manfully for his right to go where he pleased, and to manage his household in his own way. If he retained any sense of his high position as the representative of believing Abraham,—the heir of the promise,—he ought to have taken a firmer and more worthy stand with his worldly father-in-law. And having express divine warrant for the step, he was inexcusable in not acting upon that warrant, openly and boldly. He might thus have left behind him such an impression of God being with him as could not fail to lead to good in many ways, beyond all that his calculations of expediency could forecast. But alas! he is radically and essentially a schemer; maneuvering is his forte and his fate. He must needs play the part of a cowardly fugitive,—escaping as a thief under the cloud of night. As it turns out, his plot is both unnecessary and unavailing. It is made evident that God would have interfered, at any rate, to help him; and it is made equally evident, that without God's interference, his plan for helping himself was vain. Nor is this all.

For, secondly, his plan proved itself to be full of mischief. Not only did it tend so to lessen him in the eyes of Laban as to make it impossible for him to exert any wholesome influence on that churlish man,—which he might have done, if he had gone forth boldly, at the Lord's call;—it wrought sore evil in himself and in his household. For himself, it made him too much what he had been before, when he won the blessing by a stratagem; and it works disastrously in his family. Would his beloved Rachel have cut so poor a figure in this world-wide and world-lasting history as she does when her father questions her about the secreted gods (ver. 34, 35),—would there have been idols in the chambers of his wives and children, hindering afterwards his payment of his Bethel vow (xxxv.

2-4),—if Jacob had not stolen away so slyly, but had insisted on his liberty to go forth in face of day, as a worshipper and servant of the most high God alone?

Certainly the manner of Jacob's departure from Syria, is not of God, but of man.

III. The peaceful end, however, of what threatened to become a violent and warlike collision, is of the Lord.

The clandestine flight of his son-in-law naturally provokes Laban. Considering indeed his past treatment of Jacob, and what we may with great probability conjecture to be his present intentions with regard to him,—now that his sons have awakened his covetous jealousy, and his countenance is not towards Jacob as it was before,—one would be disposed to say that he has no great reason to be surprised and no right to be displeased. Nor, whatever he may afterwards affect, can we give him much credit for being moved by fatherly affection. But he has lost a valuable servant. And with no misgivings of conscience as to the way in which he has dealt with him, feeling himself to be deceived and defrauded, he thinks that he does well to be angry. For none are more apt to be resentful of wrong than the sharper outwitted, or the biter bit.

What the meeting would have been, if the parties had been left to themselves, may in some faint measure be gathered from what, even under the restraint which the Lord's command to Laban imposed, it actually was. Certainly it was at one time passionate and stormy enough. It begins indeed with tolerable decency and smoothness. The wily and plausible man of the world assumes a bland countenance and uses fair words. It is his honour, as it seems, that is touched! His tender feelings as a parent are wounded! He is hurt because Jacob has suspected and distrusted him; and he resents his having had no opportunity of handsomely dismissing him, if he was determined to go, loaded with benefits,—and carrying with him the daughters he had got for wives, not as poor captives taken with the sword, but as women of rank suitably attended and attired. Above all, it is hard that a loving father should not be suffered to imprint a last kiss on the lips of children whom it is not likely that he is to see

on earth again. Truly the good Laban is a sorely injured man (ver. 26-28).

But the specious dissembler cannot be consistent with himself. As if to let out the cloven foot, he must needs make a boast of what he might have done; and that in such a manner as 'to indicate pretty clearly that but for a divine arrest laid on him, he would have actually done it;—"It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad" (ver. 29). Jacob shrewdly and rightly gathers his worthy father-in-law's real meaning (ver. 42). Laban has unconsciously dropped the mask. He had been bent on mischief. But, as he says, "the God of your father spake unto me." The God of your father! For Laban will not own and worship him as his God, although he is constrained to stand in awe and obey. It is not true faith but slavish dread that stays his hand. He is at heart a persecutor,—restrained neither by a conscientious reverence for God, nor by a kindly feeling towards man, but only by a sort of servile and superstitious apprehension of some evil coming upon himself from the wrath of that being whom his intended victim worships. So he betrays his real purpose; giving a hint, at the same time, of the ground he might have alleged that he had for picking a new quarrel if he chose; "though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?" (ver. 30).

Jacob's reply is, in the circumstances, as calm and dignified as it well could be. For his flight he has no occasion to apologize; at least not to Laban. He had too good reason to be apprehensive of wrong at his hands, not to be justified in taking the step he took, so far as his father-in-law might think he had any cause of complaint. He avows his fear, as a fear for which he had too good ground; "I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me" (ver. 31). He is not to be taken in by a hypocritical show of friendship.

As to the other charge about the theft of the gods, Jacob treats it with a sort of summary contempt. He may well regard it as an accusation got up by Laban to be the occasion of a fresh act of

treachery and wrong. The unscrupulous Syrian, while pretending to obey the divine voice,—that he should not, either by flattery or by threats, attempt to stay Jacob as a fugitive servant,—is trying to get round him another way. I have nothing to say, good or bad, as to the manner of your quitting my service. Your God, it seems, the God of your fathers, forbids me to reckon with you, as otherwise I might have a good right to reckon with you, for that. But the impunity thus secured to you for your flight cannot be meant to cover theft or sacrilege. Why hast thou stolen my gods? (ver. 30).

This looks at least very like a subterfuge or an afterthought on the part of Laban; and Jacob so regarded it,—putting upon it, naturally enough, a construction fully warranted by his knowledge of the man, and his experience of his consummate skill, as a master in the school of cunning. Hence his bold reply. First, he simply defends himself, and challenges his accuser to the proof—“with whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live” (ver. 31, 32). And then,—Rachel's device (ver. 32-35) keeping him as well as her father in the dark,—he vehemently speaks out his mind in the honest indignation of injured innocence; giving vent at last in one burst of invective to his pent-up feelings.

“Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban,” saying to him, “What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me?” The hunted victim stands at bay. He rehearses his wrongs; he taunts the wrong-doer; he will own no obligation to him or to his forbearance; the Lord alone has been his helper. “Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight” (ver. 36-42).

True to his character to the last, the wily Laban receives Jacob's torrent of invective with affected meekness. Assuming an air of moderation, making allowance for his son-in-law's vehemence, he professes himself willing to waive his rights. These wives of thine and their children are indeed all mine; I might claim them as mine. And the cattle are all mine. But what then? What can I do now? Far be it from me to proceed to extremity. Come, let us be friends. If we

must part, let us part in peace, and let us ratify a parting covenant of peace (ver. 43, 44).

The ratification of the covenant is effected by a succession of solemn ceremonies (ver. 45-55).

First, on Jacob's suggestion, he himself setting up the first stone for the central pillar, a monumental or memorial heap is raised. Both parties acknowledge the pile,—each in his own tongue giving it a name significant of its object,—“the heap of witness,”—the “beacon or watch-tower.” It marks a locality which,—under the name of Mizpah, and as some think also, Ramoth in Gilead,—became afterwards, in the days of the Judges and the Kings, a place of no mean importance,—a kind of frontier town, serving even then a similar purpose to that with a view to which it is here signaled (Joshua xiii. 26;? Kings xxii; 2 Kings viii. 28, 29, etc.). Next, “this heap of witness,” this “pillar of witness,” is constituted by Laban in a very solemn manner the seal or symbol of an appeal to the Most High: “The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another” (ver. 49). God is to be witness, if Jacob afflict or wrong the daughters of Laban (ver. 50). And he is to judge between them if either party pass this limit for hurt or harm to the other (ver. 51.) The oath is taken by each according to his faith. Laban's adjuration is, “The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge betwixt us; while Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac” (ver. 52). Some common ground they have. Each of them believed that the God he worshipped was the God of Abraham. But Laban knew him only as the God of Abraham's father; Jacob knew him as the God of Abraham's son. Laban recognized him as he was wont to be traditionally recognized in the family to which Abraham originally belonged. Jacob acknowledged him in the character which he had assumed, by a new revelation, as the God of Abraham's seed,—“the Fear,” therefore “of his father Isaac.” Thus they understood one another, as mutually binding themselves, by the most solemn vow that each could take. The transaction is completed by a sacrifice on Jacob's part, and a sort of sacrificial feast: “Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount” (ver. 54).

And now nothing remains but the bidding of a long and last farewell:—"Early in the morning Laban rose up and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place" (ver. 55). It is a quiet ending of a troubled history. The curtain falls on the Syrian act of the drama. And the last we see of it is the kiss of charity and the blessing of peace.

XLV.

THE TWO ARMIES—THE FEAR OF MAN—THE FAITH WHICH PREVAILS WITH GOD.

Genesis xxxii.

“The company of two armies.”—Song of Solomon vi. 13.

As Jacob had been dismissed from the land of promise by a vision of angels, so a troop of angels are in waiting to welcome his return. “The angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said. This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim;” that is, “two hosts, or camps” (ver. 2).

Why a name signifying “two hosts,” or “two camps,” or “a double army” (mahanaim), is used to denote what Jacob saw—for he meant evidently to call the place from the event,—is a doubtful matter of inquiry. That the angelic company divided themselves into two bands,—so as to cover the patriarch's train in front and rear, or on either flank,—is a view suggested by such expressions as that of the Psalmist, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Ps. xxxiv. 7), and that of the prophet, “I will encamp about mine house because of the enemy” (Zech. ix. 8). On the other hand, Jacob seems to regard the angels as one single body, when he says, “This is God's host;” and it is at least as probable a supposition as the other, that the duplication of this host, or its branching into two, indicated in the name he gives the spot, may arise from his associating with the heavenly attendants visible from above, his own array of pilgrims treading the earth below. “We are two camps,—two hosts!”—he may be regarded as gladly and gratefully exclaiming, for the encouragement of his followers and himself. We are not a mere feeble and defenseless

handful of women, children, and cattle, but two armies! This retinue of angels is God's host; and it is on our side. And they and we together form a double encampment, and a double line of battle. How great then is our security! How invincible are we! How strong may we be!

The only other instance in Scripture of the use of the term here employed is to be found in the Song of Solomon; and the two uses of it, there and here, may throw light on its meaning, and on the meaning of the passages in which it occurs. Referring to the spouse, an appeal is made; "Return, return, O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies"—or "Mahanaim" (Song vi. 13).

The image in that passage is undoubtedly a strange one; the spouse compares herself to an army. Or rather, perhaps, she is compared to an army by the bridegroom and his associates;—"Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners'?" (ver. 10). So they hail her as an army; and she is content to be viewed in that character. But it must be a double army that she consents to personate;—she cannot otherwise be terrible to any adversary, be he human, or Satanic, or divine; she cannot otherwise, as an army, display her banners in successful battle or triumphant victory. Her being saluted thus, as an army, is a plain enough indication to her that she has a warfare to wage,—a fight to sustain. It may be to meet the onset of an angry brother; it may even be to bear the brunt of an assault on the part of the Lord himself, to chasten or to prove her. But whether it is man's violence that she is to withstand, or the close onset of the Angel Jehovah wrestling with her vehemently, she can make head only as a double army. Alone, she is too feeble to stand in battle array; but when the angels of God meet her, she is two hosts. And it is only as two hosts that she can prevail. Therefore if the spouse is to be an army at all, she must be a double army,—having, as it were, a heavenly duplicate of herself associated with her. Only thus can she face a hostile Esau. Only thus can she stand the encounter of her loving Lord.

But the heavenly fellowship of angels, in so far as it is matter of sense and sight, is rare and brief; their visits are few and far between. The patriarch is still in the flesh; and “the life which he has to live in the flesh, he has to live by faith,”—and the prayer of faith. Once, in some fourteen, or twice fourteen, years, the believer may be “caught up into the third heavens,” to behold inconceivable glories and overhear unspeakable words (2 Cor. xii. 4). On some critical occasions the heavenly hosts may meet the weary wanderer. But he must be made to feel that earth is still the scene of his pilgrimage and probation, and that earthly work and warfare must be attended to. The business on hand is the earthly walk and the earthly struggle. The land of promise is to be reached. And Esau is in the way.

Into the feelings of Jacob with reference to his brother, it may be difficult for us to penetrate; for on the surface of the narrative, little appears that can throw light on them. That he was honestly anxious to adopt measures of conciliation, is plain from the embassy he sent, and from the words he put into the mouths of his ambassadors: “Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight” (ver. 3, 4, 5). The message in itself, and particularly as explained by the subsequent interview, amounted virtually to a concession to Esau of all the temporal benefits of the disputed birthright. Jacob was in haste to give up to him the title of superiority, and the higher rank belonging to the first-born,—and to intimate that he neither needed nor sought any part of the hereditary patrimony. He had enough of his own, through the kind providence of God, and had no wish to interfere with anything that Esau cared to claim;—for as to the spiritual privileges of the birthright, Esau had made it too plain that he felt but little concern.

On the other hand, we cannot but gather from the report brought back to Jacob, that Esau's approach was of a hostile character;—such at least was the impression conveyed to Jacob;—“The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him.

Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed” (ver. 6, 7). Notwithstanding what we cannot but admire in his reception of his brother when they actually met, there is no meaning in the inspired account, if it is not to be understood as implying that Esau did at first intend measures of hostility and revenge. No doubt,—as an evil conscience makes cowards of us all,—Jacob's sense of the offence he had formerly given to Esau may have rendered him suspicious and apprehensive; that may be true. But he must have had more to go upon when his fears prevailed so much. And unless we suppose Esau to have dissembled for the purpose of surprising his brother by unexpected kindness—and there is not a trace of any such refinement in the record, nor does it agree with the impetuous character of the man—he must be viewed as hastily rejecting Jacob's proposals of friendship, and continuing his adverse march towards him.

No wonder, then, that in the circumstances Jacob experienced a bitter feeling of disappointment, and was put into serious alarm. He was unaccustomed to battle. He was familiar only with pastoral and peaceful occupations. And now he was about to encounter one who had been a man of stern action, involved in the strife of war, or of the chase, from his earliest youth. Nor was he provided with an armed convoy or any sufficient means of resistance. One part of the army he had around him might consist of the invisible hosts of heaven; but the other was composed of “the mother with the children” (ver. 11). In these straits, what does Jacob do?

First, he takes measures for securing the safety of at least a portion of his company;—“He divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; and said, if Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape” (ver. 7, 8). His plan is in accordance, as we are told by some writers, with Eastern usages; it would be considered a wise and proper precaution in a similar emergency even now. But it does seem to savour somewhat of Jacob's natural disposition to calculate and scheme for himself, instead of simply doing his duty, and trusting implicitly in the Lord. The separation of his household, especially in the view of the reason assigned for it, does not commend itself to our ideas of what is

chivalrous and brave. We would rather that all should have run the same risk together. But we cannot well judge, at so great a distance of time, and at a still greater distance of manners, how far Jacob's policy might be justified.

His second expedient we can better estimate. He has recourse to prayer. And his prayer has several evident marks of its being really the prayer of genuine faith.

In the first place, he lays hold of the covenant;—"O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee" (ver. 9). He thus appeals to God as in covenant with his fathers and himself. He relies on the promise made to Abraham and to Isaac; and he appropriates it as his own. Secondly, he confesses his unworthiness, and his obligation to free and sovereign grace alone;—"I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands" (ver. 10). Thirdly, he looks to the Lord, and none else, for deliverance out of his brother's hand;—"Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children" (ver. 11). And in the fourth place, he takes his stand on the sure word of God;—putting the Lord in mind of his own express assurance with reference to the future fortune of his race;—"Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude" (ver. 12).

If anything amiss is to be noted in the prayer, it is the tendency which it indicates, on the one hand, to regard the opposition of Esau as the only obstacle in his way to Canaan, and on the other hand, to reckon,—somewhat too much in the spirit of self-righteousness,—on a sort of hereditary and personal title to the favour and help of God. It is Esau who has a controversy with him; and in that controversy the Lord must needs be on his side. He is soon to be taught, by a very sharp lesson, how inadequate a view this is of his true position in the sight of God.

For the present, however, he is thinking only of Esau as his adversary; and he carries out his plan of operation upon that assumption. He sends on successive droves, to be offered one after another, as propitiatory presents to his brother. That was his scheme;—"For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me" (ver. 20). So the lay was spent. "The present went over before him: and he himself lodged that night in the company" (ver. 21). Under cloud of darkness, he effected the passage of his family; and he was "left alone" (ver. 24).

But the Lord has a controversy with Jacob; he is to be made to feel that Esau is not his most formidable adversary.

The Lord is to deal with him as an adversary;—first turning his strength into weakness;—and then causing him to know by experience that "when he is weak then he is strong" (2 Cor. xii. 10). Hence the scene of the wrestling.

When Christ says that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force,"—he may be referring, in part at least, to this transaction. He is describing the ministry of his forerunner; and he is describing it as a crisis, not only in the history of the church, but in its bearing also on the duty and destiny of individuals.

"What went ye out into the wilderness to see?" What did your going out into the wilderness mean? Was it an idle jest? Did you go to be befooled by a reed shaken with the wind? Or was it a holiday excursion? Did you go to have your eyes dazzled by a man clothed in soft raiment? Was it as light an affair as the taking of a careless ramble in the common? Or was it as mere a matter of form as the paying of a stately visit at court, where gorgeous ceremony dwells?

No! You knew that you had more serious work on hand; you felt that the hour and the man were come; it was indeed a critical time. A new and fresh era had arrived. It was to be now or never. The old routine of a mere passive yielding to impulse, or devotion to etiquette, would suffice no longer. Listless, half-awake, childish

curiosity, pleased with every shaken reed, will not do. Vacant wondering after a sumptuous or solemn dress, such as piety may wear in kings' houses, will not do. Both must give place to something sterner and more real. Religion, as John's preaching forces it on our regard, is neither sport nor show, but close conflict and strife.

That is the lesson which Jacob is now taught. Left alone, and preparing to follow his family and goods across the brook, he is suddenly and forcibly stopped. An unexpected antagonist meets him, and a sort of death-struggle ensues. Who his assailant is, Jacob cannot at first even guess; but the force of the onset is felt. The two parties grapple in right earnest; and there is wrestling, as between man and man, till the breaking of the day.

Jacob makes a stout resistance; he is not to be intercepted on his way to Canaan; he is determined to possess the land; and be his adversary who he may, he shall not hinder him. The struggle waxes desperate, and Jacob yields not an inch. He who has thus attacked him as a foe gains no advantage.

But all at once, upon a single touch from the hand of this mysterious combatant, there is a shrinking of Jacob's sinews, a halting upon his thigh, a trembling of his knees,—a “piercing,” as it were, “even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow” (Heb. iv. 12). Helpless, lame, and ready to fall, he can but cling with desperate tenacity to the very Being who has so sorely smitten him.

Not to prolong the conflict, however, does he cling to this strong adversary, now discovered to be divine;—no, nor even to beg for his mere life, though now so evidently at the mercy of his seeming foe; but—oh wondrous importunity in such a case!—to deprecate his departure,—to insist on detaining him when he would be gone,—to crave his blessing!

Surely, O Jacob, “great is thy faith!” Might it not be enough for thee to escape death at the hands of this formidable “man of war,” as he with whom thou hast to do proves himself to be? (Exod. xv. 3). Thou mightest be too thankful to be left by him prostrate on the

ground, and to get rid, on any terms, of his contending with thee. But no. Jacob has discovered who this “man of war” is, and he will not let him go until he get his blessing.

The opposition which God offers to Jacob, and Jacob's resistance,—the sudden weakening of his strength, and his subsequent importunity,—are all spiritually significant.

God takes the attitude and aspect of an adversary, fighting against Jacob; and Jacob stoutly resists and maintains his ground. There is vehement wrestling all the night; and

there is this peculiarity in the wrestling, that it is the heavenly combatant who acts the part of the assailant; Jacob stands on the defensive. At first he might be inclined to regard the interruption as rather vexatious and impertinent than serious. It must be some idle fellow bent on mere annoyance or a frolic; it will cost but a moment to chastise his insolence and be rid of him. But he finds that this is more than a mere holiday wrestling-match, and that it is not to be so soon or so easily ended.

Who then can this mysterious adversary be, coming between me and the work I have to do? Can it be a secret emissary of Esau's—a hired bravo or assassin, or one of his followers bent on carrying that old threat into execution—“I will slay my brother Jacob?” No. That is not Esau's mode of warfare. Is it Esau's guardian angel interposing to prevent any injury being done to him? So the later Jews have fabled; but no such belief belonged to the age or the faith of Jacob. Is it, then, the “great adversary of God's people, who would fain prevent the entrance of the patriarch into, the promised land? Even if it be, Jacob will not give way.

No! Not even when he finds out that it is the very “Angel of the Covenant himself,”—the “Fear of his father Isaac,”—the God who had twice appeared to him in Bethel, who is now stopping the way, and, as a mighty man, seeking to overthrow him,—not even then will he give way.

When he makes that discovery, he may have many misgivings; and were his desire less intense, and his faith less strong, in reference to the country he seeks and the promises he has received, he might be inclined to call back his family and flock, and wend his way again to the luxurious pastures and the sumptuous dwelling of his kinsman Laban;—or to some new home among earth's many vacant places, where he might hope to win ease and honour. If he wanted an excuse, he had it now. It was not Esau only who threatened him; God himself was against him. After a decent show of reluctance and pretense of resistance, he might have submitted to necessity, as it might have appeared, and turned his back on Canaan.

But he would not. His longing for Canaan was too intense,—his warrant for claiming it too clear,—to admit of his giving it up. God had taught him to look for it; God had given him the promise of it. And now, not even when God himself seems to be against him, will he be beaten back. He may wrestle with me, but “though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” He shall not hinder me, while I have life, from passing this brook.

Again I say—O Jacob! great is thy faith! It is like the faith of one who, though not thy child after the flesh, was yet like-minded with thee, in the days when that divine Saviour who wrestled with thee dwelt on the earth, and went about doing good. The woman, who was “a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation” (Mark vii. 26), coming to Christ on behalf of her poor daughter, met with much the same treatment with thyself; and like thee, she was not to be overcome. Jesus wrestled with her,—dealt with her harshly,—spurned her, it might almost seem with his foot,—and called her dog. But she stood her ground. The divine Wrestler saw that he prevailed not against her; he was as it were forced to give in; the kingdom of heaven suffered violence, and this violent assailant took it by force;—“O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt” (Mat. xv. 28).

This wrestling of God their Saviour with those who seek his salvation, is not uncommon in the experience of his saints. Nor is it, as they can testify but too sadly, a mere show or feint on his part. It is not that he makes as if he fought;—as it is said when he was with

the disciples on the way to Emmaus that “he made as if he would have passed on.” It is not what we might call a make-believe fight, got up for the mere trial of their spirits. No. It is a real antagonism and opposition that they have to encounter. The Lord has a controversy with them, and does really set himself against them.

Is any sinner, for instance, moved to quit the land where he has been dwelling too long, and to take the staff of a pilgrim, and set out on the path to heaven? He has every encouragement in doing so —“exceeding great and precious promises, whereby he is made partaker of the divine nature.” Still he must lay his account with difficulties. He may be hotly pursued by those who fancy themselves injured by his going away,—persecuted by old companions,—harassed by old claims, and outstanding engagements and entanglements. Before him, also, he may anticipate coming evil; and reaping the fruit of former offences, he may have fears and misgivings as to enemies to whom his conscience tells him he has given an advantage. All this he may be prepared for.

But on some dreary night of watching and anxiety, I have to encounter a higher foe. God, the very God who has moved and encouraged me to take the decisive step, comes out as wrestling with me. He, too, is felt to be turning against me; and it seems as if it were all over with my chance of ever reaching heaven. I may as well give up the unavailing struggle and return to my worldly ease and unconcern again. So Satan and the world would have me resolve; so also does my own heart tempt me to resolve; and if my sense of eternal realities be faint, and my care for the salvation of my soul slight,—so unhappily I may resolve.

But far be such a thought from the man who is in earnest. God may buffet me, if it so please him; yes, he may slay me. But I cannot do without the salvation of my soul. Nay, now that God has put it into my heart to care for the salvation of my soul, not God himself, even when he meets me in his wrath, shall make me willingly give in.

XLVI.

JACOB'S TRIAL ANALOGOUS TO JOB'S.

Genesis xxxii. 24-32.

This mysterious duel or single combat,—this marvellous wrestling-match,—may be viewed as having two stages. In the first, Jacob is put by his divine adversary upon his defense. In the second, he appears as the assailant.

The scene opens with a violent and prolonged assault upon Jacob, on the part of an antagonist in human form, at first unknown. He turns out to be no other than the Angel of the Covenant, the Lord himself. And it is that discovery which gives its peculiar point and interest to the incident.

It is an instance, in its first stage, not of man wrestling with God, but of God wrestling with man; the Lord striving, in an attitude of opposition,—not feigned but real,—and striving vehemently, in a protracted encounter, with a poor child of the dust,—who yet, so far from yielding, even under the onset of so mighty an antagonist, stoutly resists and stands up to him manfully. This, Jacob felt, was the fight in which he was engaged.

And others also have felt the same thing. In particular, more than one or two of the Old Testament saints describe a certain crisis of their experience in such language;—borrowed, perhaps, from this very record of Jacob's memorable duel;—as plainly indicates that they regarded God as dealing with them precisely as he dealt with Jacob. No doubt, it may be a spiritual combat to which they refer, and not one that is merely physical and bodily. But surely, in Jacob's case, there must have been an apprehension of some spiritual

meaning being connected with the bodily wrestling; and in the case of the others, there is often some affection of the body associated with their spiritual frame.

The language of Hezekiah, for instance, as to the sickness from which he got a temporary respite, is remarkable in this view. He describes the dealings of the Lord with him under this very image of a violent onset;—"He will cut me off with pining sickness: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me. I reckoned till morning, that as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me." Thus he complains; while at the same time he cries, "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me" (Is. xxxviii. 12-14). So also Jeremiah speaks;—"Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones. He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places" (Lam. iii. 3-10).

But it is chiefly Job's experience that is here relevant. For perhaps the closest parallel, in a spiritual point of view, to the Angel's wrestling with Jacob and its gracious issue, is to be found in the sharp trial which Job had to undergo as he describes it graphically and most pathetically in one of his sorest experiences;—"Thou huntest me as a fierce lion: and again thou shewest thyself marvellous upon me. Thou re-newest thy witnesses against me, and increasest thine indignation upon me; changes and war are against me." "Are not my days few? cease then, and let me alone" (Job x. 16-20).

Consider, in this view, the case of Job.

There was a terrible onset made on him at the instigation of Satan. "Doth Job fear God for nought?" is Satan's challenge to Jehovah;—"Put forth thy hand, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face." In answer to this challenge, Satan is allowed to have his own way; he is to see the Lord putting forth his hand against Job. All that Job has is touched; messenger after messenger pours into the patriarch's ear the tidings of oxen, asses, sheep, servants, sons, daughters,—all, as by one fell stroke and sweep of doom, gone! In the twinkling of an eye, the rich

householder, the fond father, is a beggar, and childless! Whose doing is that? Satan's, in one view;—for it is done on his suggestion; and therefore it may be said,—as the Lord says,—that “Job is in Satan's power.” But strictly and truly, it must be held to be the Lord's own doing. It is the Lord himself who smites;—otherwise Satan's challenge is not met. He meant the trial to be that the Lord—not he, but the Lord—should put forth his hand and touch all Job's possessions. That must be the character and aspect of the procedure against Job. And in that light, accordingly, Job regarded it when he said;—“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (i. 21).

This is true also of the still closer onset on Job's person which the malignant spirit is permitted to suggest, and in which he is permitted to have some part (ii. 1-10).

The Lord says indeed to Satan:—“Behold he is in thine hand; only save his life.” The patriarch is in Satan's hand,—inasmuch as it is upon his motion, as it were, that this second part of the trial, like the first, is appointed. And in it, as in the former, Satan is active and busy. But, if it is to answer his purpose, it is as an infliction of God that he must use it;—the trial must be felt by the poor sufferer to come immediately from the Lord.

Doth Job fear God for nought? Will he fear God, when God is not for him but against him? So Satan, this second time, moves the Lord against Job. And Job, when he is smitten from head to foot, understands it to be the Lord's doing. What! he says, in answer to what he calls the foolish speech of his wife,—“Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?”

Thus all throughout it is the Lord who is dealing with Job, and Job apprehends it to be so.

Now observe Job's bearing under this fierce onset of the Lord against him;—instigated by Satan, and embittered by Satan's interference in the fray;—but still felt to be the Lord's. Observe it in connection with the advice given him by his wife on the one hand, and his three friends on the other.

I. The wife of his bosom entices Job to one sort of bearing under this onset; “Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God and die” (ii. 9). That is what Satan said Job would do; and that is what his own wife would have him to do. He whom thou hast been accustomed to reverence and love is against thee now. Of what avail is thine integrity? Plainly thou art no more a favorite with him; he could not treat thee worse if thou wert his worst enemy. Thou must perish after all, it seems, in spite of all thy fear of him, and all his seeming goodness to thee hitherto. Be it so. Let there be an end of this fond dotage of thinking thou canst gain anything by holding on by one who so uses thee. Accept thy fate; cursing, for thou canst not help cursing, as thou acceptest it, the Being who has led thee thus far, on the faith of assurances thou never couldst doubt,—and who now, as thou must feel, is so unrelentingly destroying thee.

That is one way of meeting the Lord's wrestling with me to which I may be tempted; but it was not the way of Job. He met God in the erect and upright port of a manly faith. He is resolved not to take amiss anything that God permits or does. He will hold on and stand firm, even when, as it might seem, the Lord is most against him. And he fortifies his courage by that argument which so well becomes the lips of a dependent creature,—undeserving of any good,—deserving of all evil—“Shall we receive good at the hands of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil”

“In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly” (i. 22).
“In all this did not Job sin with his lips” (ii. 10).

II. The same testimony is not recorded as to Job's bearing up against the onset of the Lord against him, under the advice given him by his friends. They would have him to meet the divine wrestler in a different frame of mind from that which his wife has been recommending. Their reasoning is all in the line, not of despair and defiance, but of abject prostration.

They start from the principle that great suffering is a proof of great sin (John ix. 2; Luke xiii. 1-5); their whole object being to make it palpable to Job, that because he is a great sufferer, he must

be a great sinner. They urge him to confess some great crime. They insist upon his acknowledging that the Lord's present mode of dealing with him,—his Wrestling with him so terribly,—is a proof that all his previous walk with God has been hypocrisy, and all his experience of God's favour a delusion and a dream. All their lengthened and elaborate dissertations on the providence of God, with which they wearied the afflicted patriarch,—“talking to the grief of him whom God was wounding,”—turned upon the one strain, in which they would have their suffering friend to acquiesce, that because he was a sufferer more than other men, therefore he was more than other men a sinner. It was not that he should say, irrespectively of this wrestling of the Lord with him, what might be equivalent to the saying, long after, of one nearly as sorely tried as he was, and proved by trial to be as true:—“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” No. It was not that. They would have him to interpret this wrestling of the Lord with him as in itself a sure evidence and mark of his having no standing at all before God as a righteous man,—a man justified and accepted in his sight.

This Job refuses to do. He combats the arguments of his friends, by calling in question their fundamental principle, according to which they would square the manifold and varied aspects of the providence of God to their own rigid notion of what we have learned to call poetic justice,—that every man must be held to be treated by God, even in this life, exactly as he deserves. As a general principle, the patriarch controverts it. And in reference to its application to himself, he stoutly and indignantly refuses to let go his consciousness of his uprightness. He would not listen to the impious suggestion of his wife that he should let go his integrity, and renounce the fear and service of one who seems to be so dead-set against him. Neither will he listen to the poor special-pleading of his friends, who would have him to own that he has no integrity to let go,—that all his fear and service of God has been false and hollow,—and that it is proved to be so by his present trouble.

The controversy is long; the contrast striking.

See these three men, Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar. They “come to mourn with Job and to comfort him.” They weep and rend their clothes and sprinkle dust upon their heads. They sit with him seven long days and nights in silence. Surely they sympathize with him. It may be so; but they must search him also. Sleek they are themselves, and smooth; having a comfortable opinion of their own righteousness and their right standing with God. In their personal experience, godliness is literally gain; virtue is its own reward; they are religious and prosperous citizens; prosperous, perhaps, because religious. And here is one who has been more prosperous than any of them, and Who has had the character and reputation of being more religious also. And how do they find him now 1

Ah! we must be faithful to him. We must tell him plainly that the Lord's present wrestling with him is sure evidence that all along, as regards his relation to God and his acceptance in God's sight, there has been something radically wrong. It must be so. To account for so formidable an assault of God upon him, we must assume that there is some dark criminality lying at the bottom of our friend's religion, and vitiating it all. For some hidden fault or falsehood, God is thus setting himself against him, and it must be our task to bring him to confession. “While we comfort him, we must deal truly with him. He must be made to see and feel what this wrestling of God with him means;—how it should smite him, as a deceiver of others and of himself, to the ground, and make him own that his whole walk with God hitherto has been a dream or a lie. That is the end which the friends have in view, in all their conversations. For that end, they enlarge on the common-places of the doctrine of providence. Their speeches have in them many sound and valuable thoughts and observations on the subject of man's subjection to a righteous government, and the certainty of good and evil being ultimately extricated from the complications in which they are now involved. There is truth, and important truth, of a general sort, in their reasonings. That indeed was what fitted them for being the apt ministers of Satan, in causing the Lord's sharp wrestling with him to bear so heavily as it did on Job. They were so sound in the faith as to God's government being a government under which the distinction between good and evil never can be lost sight of; they said so many admirable things in praise of virtue and uprightness, as being always

honoured and rewarded, and in condemnation of vice and hypocrisy, as sure to be detected and exposed;—that it must have been very hard indeed for the unhappy victim of their consolation to bear up against their reiterated assertion or insinuation, that the Lord, in wrestling with him, was rejecting him as false-hearted, and condemning him as still a guilty and guileful sinner.

But he does bear up; he stands upon the consciousness of his integrity. He will not allow the Lord's present dealing with him, however painful and however humbling, to overthrow his confidence. He will not, to please his friends, confess himself a hypocrite or self-deceiver; he cannot believe that that is what the Lord, who is wrestling with him, would have him to do. He knows both the faithfulness of his God and the honesty of his own heart too well, to put such a construction on the treatment which he is now receiving, however adverse and hostile a look it may have. He will not so stultify himself and make void his faith. Even when God is rushing upon him as an antagonist, he will maintain his ground, and make good his cause. He will not be beaten down; he will not give way or give in.

It is this high-spirited assertion of his uprightness,—running through all his speeches, mingling itself with all his woeful lamentations, his sad and bitter complaints and cries,—it is this that imparts so deep a pathos to the plaintive utterances of this sorely afflicted man. We see him sitting alone, desolate and bereaved, covered all over with a loathsome malady, writhing under intolerable pain of body, tortured in spirit, the wife of his bosom turned against him to tempt him, his familiar friends pouring dreary platitudes into his vexed and aching ears. Most touching are his melancholy wailings, expressive of present unutterable grief, as well as his tender reminiscences of better and brighter days. But more touching still is his stern determination to refuse for one moment to abandon the footing he has got for himself, as a true and upright servant of the living God. Plied to utter weariness with all Satanic temptations,—solicited on religious grounds to admit that God is casting him away as a false professor,—pressed by the endlessly reiterated common-places of his three “miserable comforters” to acknowledge himself to be one whom for some great sin God is

justly punishing and rejecting;—they would make him out to be a murderer, or secret criminal, whom, though he had escaped man's notice and judgment, God's vengeance would not suffer to live;—still the smitten patriarch stands up for himself and for his God. He knows that his righteousness is not a lie. He has not been false in serving God; he repudiates the imputation. Even when God is moved to be against him, he will not admit so foul a charge.

So far it is a noble as well as an affecting spectacle;—like what the heathen poets said was a sight worthy of the gods, a good man suffering adversity. So far also it is acceptable to God;—more acceptable at all events than if Job had assumed the other attitude which his friends urged him to assume,—and, false alike to God and to himself, had consented to count himself a castaway.

But yet the lesson of this wrestling is not fully learned—its object is not fully gained—until, rescuing him out of the toils of the three messengers of Satan who were so vehemently buffeting him, —first a true apostle of the Lord, Elihu,—and then the Lord himself in person,—open up to him the meaning of this whole procedure; causing him to see the glory of him who is smiting him, and in the light of that glory to see himself.

For Job needs to be humbled;—not as his false friends would have had him humbled,—in false and unbelieving abjectness of soul;—but as the Lord alone can humble. Elihu's testimony to this effect is true. Job, in the eagerness of his self-vindication against the cruel surmises of his persecutors, has been justifying himself rather than God. He has indeed done well in refusing to write such bitter things against himself as these men would have had him to write;—to put the interpretation they would have had him to put on the Lord's wrestling with him;—as if it meant that the Lord was condemning him utterly as a hypocrite. Still the Lord has something to say to him. His wrestling with him is designed and destined to leave behind it upon the soul of Job as deep and lasting a mark of God's majesty and the creature's weakness, as his wrestling with Jacob left on Jacob's body. The Lord will not indeed cast off, or cast down, his servant Job. But neither will he let him go, or cease from wrestling with him, until he brings hem, in the view of the glory of

the divine majesty, and under the apprehension of his own weakness and vileness, to cry out,—justifying himself no longer but justifying God,—“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (xlii. 5, 6).

Thus spiritually the Lord touches the hollow of Job's thigh, as literally he did in the case of Jacob; and Job, like Jacob, halts on his thigh,—his bones being out of joint. And to Job, as to Jacob, that penetrating touch,—overmastering, overpowering, prostrating him altogether,—is the beginning of his power with God. It is the crisis of the conflict; “when he is weak, then is he strong.” Subdued, smitten, helpless, lost,—at that very moment, his defense against God being beaten down, he assumes the offensive, taking the kingdom by storm. It is not now any longer God wrestling with Job; it is Job who wrestles with God;—“Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me;” for “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (ver. 4-6).

It is the very experience of David. When he is thoroughly worsted, he waxes valiant in this fight;—“I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.—Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. li. 3, 5). So he cries, in his distress. He is at his last extremity, unclean, undone! But that is God's opportunity; and David knows it to be so when he becomes importunate in prayer:—“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice” (Ps. li. 7, 8).

XLVII.

THE MEETING OF JACOB AND ESAU—BEOTHERLY RECONCILIATION.

Genesis xxxiii.

When Jacob got the name of Israel (xxxii. 28), it was explained to mean that not only with God, but with men also, he had power as a prince to prevail. His power, as a prince, to prevail with God appears in this, that the Angel,—the Lord who came upon him as an adversary to wrestle with him,—is constrained by his vehement and prolonged importunity to bless him. His power, as a prince, to prevail with men appears in this, that his brother,—advancing towards him in hostile array and with hostile intentions,—is moved, on the first sight of the man whom he meant to crush, to shed tears of fraternal love. This last instance of his power is indeed but another form of the first. When God is against him, dealing with him so as to weaken his strength and smite him to the dust, Jacob cannot face an angry Esau. But when, weakened and smitten, with broken bones and broken heart, Jacob is yet enabled to keep hold of the very Saviour who is wrestling with him;—to “weep and make supplication to him,” and refuse to let him go until he receive his blessing;—then, this very weakness being his strength, Israel may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man may do unto me.” Having overcome even God himself, he will not now shrink from the face of Esau.

That Jacob is now prepared to meet Esau in a very different frame of mind from what he felt but yesterday, may be gathered from a slight circumstance in the narrative. He does not arrange his household as he had proposed to do.

In his first consternation on receiving the tidings of his brother's advance he thought of adopting an expedient, savoring too much of that tendency to cowardice, and craft as the weapon of cowardice, which formed an evil element in Jacob's natural character, and had been aggravated by his early training (xxxii. 7, 8). There may be wisdom in it, but it is the wisdom of carnal and selfish prudence. The division of his company into two bands, with his reason for it, we cannot reconcile either with the simplicity of faith in God, or with the affection which would have moved a right-hearted husband, and father, and householder, to keep the objects of his love and care together, in the time of danger,—gathering them as, when the storm is brewing, a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings. But now there is a change. He marshals his family, not upon the miserable principle of risking one half for the chance of saving the other; but altogether; in the order of his customary mode of arrangement (xxxiii. 1, 2). And instead of keeping in the rear himself, as apparently he had meant to do, he takes his proper position at their head (ver. 3).

At all events, whether we are justified or not in supposing him to have thus changed his plan, and in putting this construction upon the change, Jacob approaches Esau, not “greatly afraid and distressed,” but with confidence and courage. He approaches him, indeed, with gestures significant of deepest courtesy, after the usual oriental fashion. But there is nothing abject or degrading in the salams or salutations which he offers. He is simply carrying out the purpose which, by his first embassy, he had intimated to his brother (xxxii. 4, 5); the purpose of acknowledging him, in all temporal respects, as the first-born; leaving him in possession of the civil rights and prerogatives of primogeniture; asking no surrender of the patrimonial inheritance; but simply desiring, as a younger brother, to be allowed to render to him the tribute of an acceptable compliment or service. His manner now is in entire accordance with his intention then. Holding fast whatever spiritual benefit the conveyance of the birthright to him and his seed may imply,—and about that there was no likelihood of any quarrel,—Jacob is careful to show in act, as he had said virtually in words, that as regards all else, he waives and foregoes his claim. Hence he humbles himself before Esau. And surely we may give him credit for doing so sincerely—not to serve a

purpose, but in good faith. Fresh from that wondrous midnight wrestling,—“bearing in his body the mark of the Lord” (Gal. vi. 17),—Jacob was in the very mood to be truly humble in any human presence; to cede anything, to cede all things, except the divine favour and the promise of the covenant; and not in fear, but in faith, to take anywhere contentedly the lowest place. Thus, not in fear but in faith,—all selfish pride and policy apart,—he “bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother” (ver. 3).

The conduct of Esau is irresistibly affecting; and the simple, artless manner in which it is narrated adds exceedingly to the charm. The man breaks down under the impulse of fraternal emotion; “Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (ver. 4). After a separation of more than twenty years, during which few, if any, messages could be interchanged, he sees his long-estranged and long-lost twin-brother again. He sees him drawing near, in an attitude of confidence and friendship, soliciting his favourable regard; not presuming on any right which past events,—the divine oracle and the paternal benediction,—maybe supposed to have given him; nor on the other hand shrinking and hanging back as if he were afraid or ashamed;—but coming, as brother to brother, younger brother to elder brother, seeking only reconciliation and peace. The generous soul of Esau is touched. All the wrong he thinks he has received,—all the wrath he has been nursing,—all is on the instant forgotten. An unarmed man, at the head of a number of unarmed men, and women, and children, and flocks, and herds, is casting himself on his pity and honour. The brother with whom his days of pleasant childhood were spent, is at his feet. Long years have passed since offence was given and taken between them. Far older recollections rush in upon the memory. The brothers are twin children once more;—“and they wept” (ver. 3).

One fears to mar the pathos of a scene like this by raising any questions as to Esau's state of mind; but something must be said in the way of explanation.

That his intentions were hostile up to the very time, or about the very time of the meeting, it is scarcely possible to doubt. He meditated revenge. He had heard of Jacob's proposed return to

Canaan, and of his being on the way. He had himself now got a position in "the land of Seir, the country of Edom," such as enabled him easily to intercept his brother's homeward journey. Estranged by his marriages and other causes, he had removed from the land of promise and become an independent chief. In that character he has been dwelling in Edom after his own manner, little mindful either of his brother Jacob or of his father Isaac. But now he learns that Jacob is returning from his long exile in Padan-aram, and is seeking again the paternal home. The information stirs up all his old jealousy and anger; the buried and forgotten injuries of the past rise again in his memory. He may have been thinking little of the rights and privileges of that standing in the paternal establishment about which he was so sensitive some quarter of a century ago. But is he to allow a younger brother, who, once and again, long ago, injured him so deeply, to step quietly into the possession of them? Not if he has the power to intercept him. And he has the power; he can come in between the banished one and the home and heritage which he seeks. He may himself be caring little about the inheritance in the meanwhile; but at any rate Jacob shall not again supplant or forestall him. With an armed force at his command, he will call his brother to account for the past, and effectually prevent his doing him any farther wrong.

Such, if we fairly interpret all the circumstances of his position, together with the unmistakable indications of the narrative,—such was Esau's state of mind when, rejecting Jacob's embassy of conciliation, he came to meet him with his army of four hundred men.

But the first sight of his brother, casting himself on his kindness, is too much for Esau; a man, at all events, of most true and tender nobility of natural character,—whatever else might be wrong about him. Doubtless he who has the hearts of all men in his hands has been preparing Esau's soul for this softening influence and impression. The same divine wrestler who thoroughly humbled Jacob, has been beginning to humble Esau too. Jacob's power to prevail with men, like his power to prevail with God, is to be proved to consist in his own weakness; and to make that clear, the relenting of his adversary is to be manifestly the Lord's doing; the result, not

of any measure of policy or persuasion on the part of Jacob, but of the Lord's immediate interposition to change the mind of Esau. Still the occasion and manner of the change, when it becomes manifest, are characteristic.

For it cannot be denied that of the two brothers, Esau seems in this interview to act the better part, and to present himself in the better light. Generosity is on his side, and magnanimity; and above all, nature.

Yes! Esau is natural;—so far as appears hitherto, merely natural;—a natural man;—yet also natural in the best sense of that term. All throughout this whole transaction his conduct is natural; it is all an affair of impulse. There is no planning beforehand, no forecasting and pre-arranging, as there was on the part of Jacob. The apparently studied obsequiousness of the one brother brings out in pleasing relief or contrast the spontaneous and impulsive warmth of the other. Esau prevents and outdoes Jacob in the reconciliation. It seems to be nature against art.; it might almost seem to be nature against grace;—nature acting naturally against grace apparently artificial and even artful.

The natural acting out of nature is always sure of sympathy;—hence the charm of such characters as Esau. It is impossible, and it would not be right, to be insensible to that charm. Our Lord himself was moved with love to the young man in whom he perceived many amiable and admirable qualities, although unhappily the love of riches caused him, when told what he lacked, to go away grieved. Let full justice then be done to the conduct and character of Esau, and let the touching and tender interest of this scene be thoroughly relished and enjoyed. Whatever memory of old grievances may have been rankling in his mind,—whatever temptation he may have felt to execute his old threat,—whatever purpose of violence he may have been meditating,—one glance at his brother's form and face, altered by years of trying toil, yet still the same,—is enough to chase them all away. The strong, stern man of war is a child again. He cannot, he will not, restrain himself. He suffers himself to be overcome. His tears flow fresh as he falls on his brother's neck and kisses him. And

in the mutual embrace of long-forgotten kindness, the breach of years is healed, and the renewed brotherly friendship is complete.

What the future course of this renewed brotherly friendship was, the inspired history does not say. The progress of the conversation would seem to indicate, on Esau's part, a strong desire to prolong the fellowship so auspiciously resumed.

After receiving the homage of Jacob's family and attendants, Esau is for declining the present, which Jacob had sent on before (ver. 8, 9), and is only induced to accept it by the apprehension that his refusal may be considered ungracious. For Jacob urges him on that score. The present is no longer needed to propitiate Esau's favour. That was the original design of it,—but for that design it is now superfluous. Jacob thankfully acknowledges this: “I have seen thy face as I saw the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me” (ver. 10);—so the original expression may best be understood. I have already, independently of any gift of mine, found grace and favour in your sight; your face I have now seen friendly to me, even as I saw the face of God friendly to me, when my importunity extorted the benediction. For Jacob connects the present scene with that of the wrestling. It was before the wrestling that he sent on the present, when he was greatly afraid and distressed;—probably, after the wrestling, he would not have sent it. He would have dispensed with so poor an attempt to bribe his brother into forbearance, and left all to God, whose face he had seen in peace; not doubting, but believing that he would bring him to see his brother's face also in peace. And so it has turned out. Your face, my brother, I have seen, as I saw the face of God. I ask you not now to take my gift if it were to pacify you towards me. But it may serve to seal the peace which God has established between us. On that footing Esau takes it (ver. 11). But he is not inclined to take it as a parting gift; he is not willing to let his brother away from him again; he assumes, as it would seem, that they are to continue together, and at least for a time travel together;—“Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee” (ver. 12).

What does this proposal mean? Has some faint notion of revisiting, along with Jacob, their aged father's dwelling, flashed

across Esau's mind? Is his heart drawn towards Canaan again? Is he almost inclined to renounce his high position in Edom, and resume the patriarchal and pilgrim life of his father Isaac, and his grandsire Abraham?

It may be so; who can tell? But if it was so, it was in all probability, a mere passing emotion,—the natural effect of the meeting which had so melted him; it could not be relied on as likely to be lasting. Jacob, therefore, acted wisely, and doubtless under divine direction, when he courteously declined Esau's invitation,—calling his brother's attention, as if in explanation of his doing so, to the difference of their modes of life, as indicated in the very difference of their modes of travel (ver. 13, 14). Still the proposal surely indicated good feeling;—as did also the modified form of it, the offer of an armed convoy to see Jacob safely through the disturbed territory that lay before him on his way home: “Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me” (ver. 15). That offer also, Jacob feels himself precluded from accepting: “What needeth it? let me find grace in the sight of my lord” (ver. 15). He is not to be indebted even to his brother for his safety. Thankful for the revival of friendly feeling between them, and desiring Esau also to be satisfied with that, he thinks it best that they should pursue their different paths in life apart.

And so the brothers part in peace.

Whether or not they often met again does not appear. Jacob seems to point to his visiting his brother Esau at some future time, when he speaks of “coming unto my lord, unto Seir” (ver. 14). He may have fulfilled his intention, and the friendly relations, now auspiciously re-established, may have been confirmed and made closer by occasional intercourse from year to year. Or it may have been otherwise. They may have continued to live apart, with little or no interchange of communication, either personally or by message. Perhaps it was best that it should be so. The tender meeting may have told upon Esau,—reflection deepening the impression of it on his mind. He may have been led, after Jacob was gone, to think over the circumstances of the scene,—to recognize the finger and the Spirit of the Lord, rather than any merit of his own, as the true cause

of the good feeling which prevailed,—and to ponder his brother's saying, “I saw the face of God.”

If any salutary effect was wrought by the interview, on either side, it may have been all the deeper and more lasting for the separation that followed. Had the brothers continued long in one another's company, or come much in contact afterwards, their differences of taste and temperament might have led to disagreements again,—old grudges might have been revived in new causes of offence,—their mutual influence on one another might not have been for good. We may be reconciled, therefore, to the thought of their living still apart, until we find them once more together, as they should be, at their father's funeral. In all likelihood, they must have met at Isaac's deathbed, and jointly closed his eyes. At all events, it is a not unpleasing close of a painful family story, to read how “Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days,—and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him” (xxxv. 29).

XLVIII.

PERSONAL DECLENSION—FAMILY SIN AND SHAME,

Genesis xxxiii. 17; xxxiv. 31.

“Their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant.”—Psalm lxxviii, 37.

On parting with Esau, Jacob resumed his march—“journeying to Succoth.” There he was within the border of the promised Land once more; so far he had obeyed the voice of the Angel who had spoken to him in a dream, enjoining his departure from Syria, and his homeward movement to Canaan (xxxii. 13). But the obedience was very stinted; it was according to the letter, rather than the spirit, of the divine commandment. It was such as to indicate on his part a certain halting or hesitancy, not consistent with “following the Lord fully.” And it may be too truly surmised that it gave occasion for the saddest and blackest page being written in the annals of his checkered domestic history.

I. The Angel who had spoken to him had announced himself in these words: “I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me.” That was the preface to the command; “Get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.” Fairly interpreted in the light of the preface, the command pointed to Bethel as his first resting-place in Canaan, and to the paying of his vow there as his first business. If Jacob's heart had then been quite right with God, he would have “made haste and not delayed to keep his commandment.” He would have felt as David felt when he “swore unto the Lord, Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I

find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.” But Bethel and its vow,—and alas! must we not add its God?—are for the time forgotten or postponed. A border residence is preferred.

There may have been plausible reasons for the delay. Perhaps he thought that, by-and-by, he and his house might be better prepared for meeting the Lord in his own appointed place and way,—that the taint or leaven of idolatry, of whose working Rachel's conduct about the images gave too convincing a proof, might be gradually purged out,—and that it would be time enough, after they had got settled in their new abode, and Syrian recollections and associations had been got rid of, to carry his family up to the spot of which he had himself been constrained to say, “How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, this is the gate of heaven.”

But such special pleading could ill disguise the indifference or estrangement of his own heart. What he had to do at last he might have done at first (xxxv. 2-5); he might have been as decided now as then, in purifying and preparing his household for Bethel's holy service and joy. But his mind does not as yet lie in that direction; he is otherwise occupied and attracted. He is tempted first to linger at Succoth, and then to pitch his tent, or set up his establishment, at Shalem (xxxiii. 17, 18).

For the world has taken, and is still keeping, too strong a hold of the patriarch's affections. He is rich in flocks and herds; and he is delighted with the ample accommodation which Succoth offers. It is the very place in which to set up stalls for his cattle; it deserves the name of “Booths.” Here then he will dwell in the commodious house he builds for himself,—surrounded on every side by the hard-earned trophies of his painful and protracted Syrian service. But even Succoth does not content him long. It is not enough that he finds there abundance of vacant room, in which he may lodge himself and his cattle, for as many days or years as he may choose to remain. He must be not a sojourner merely, as his fathers were, but a proprietor; he must needs purchase a permanent habitation for himself. Hence he removes a little way and comes to “Shalem, a city of Shechem,” or comes “in peace to the city of Shechem,”—for so

the words have been rendered. It may be that he gives the name of Shalem, signifying peace, to the "parcel of a field" which he "buys at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of silver" (ver. 19). At all events, the arrangements which he makes betoken a purpose to settle quietly here, as well as an expectation that here, his pilgrimage being over, he may take his rest in peace. This is to be his home. As such it is to be secured to him and his seed by the indefeasible hereditary right of property which purchase is understood to give. As such it is to be hallowed by the customary rites of worship; "he erected there an altar" (ver. 20).

This last act may seem to be an act of pious faith; and it is doubtless meant to be so. But may it not also be a means of self-deception, tending to reconcile him to his neglect of duty,—his unsteadfastness in God's covenant? Was it here that he should have erected an altar? Was there not still waiting for him at Bethel the hallowed stone of which he had vowed that it was to be "God's house?" And is not the name which he gives to the altar at Shechem a name of somewhat doubtful omen, as expressive of his state of mind? "He called it El-Elohe-Israel" (ver. 20),—God, the God of Israeli-referring, doubtless, to the recent scene of the wrestling, and the change of his name, by divine authority, from Jacob to Israel. Is he trusting in that new name,—perhaps presuming upon it, Is it as a prince, having power to prevail with God, that he claims him as his God? Might he not have done well to remember that other title which God assumed when he called him out of Syria, from Padan-aram, to come back to Canaan,—"I am the God of Bethel" "1 It is with the God of Bethel not the God of Israel, that he ought to be at present dealing. Instead of standing on his high prerogative as acknowledged to be Israel on the night of the wondrous wrestling,—he might rather have been recalling and resuming his low condition, when, as Jacob, he was a fugitive on the night of the lonely sleep and heavenly dream. Has Israel forgotten Jacob's vow? Has Israel's God ceased to be the God of Bethel? Has the man who once lay trembling on his stony pillow,—the man whose strength God weakened by the way,—waxed so confident in his princely rank, as to shake off the memory of the past,—with all its sense of dependence and all its debt of gratitude? This is his infirmity.

“When I am weak, then am I strong;” twice had he proved that great truth in his own experience. Now, when he is strong, he is weak. It were better for him still to be “the worm Jacob” than “the prince Israel,”—if this last distinction is to issue in his buying land, building houses, and rearing altars with proud names, at Sychem,—when he should be hastening, at the call of Bethel's God, to pay his vow at Bethel's pillar.

II. This decline of Jacob's own personal religion, of which we seem to have but too conclusive evidence, must be viewed as having an immediate and very close connection with the dismal family history that follows. Beginning himself to fall away, he cannot be ruling well his household. The traces of this want of rule thus occasioned are not far to seek;—they lie on the surface of the melancholy narrative (xxxiv.)

1. Dinah's fall is explained in one emphatic statement,—“She went out to see the daughters of the land” (ver. 1). For it is not a solitary incident that is thus indicated, but a customary course of conduct. Instead of being a “keeper at home,” as a “discreet and chaste” maiden would have done well to be, especially in the neighborhood of seducing worldly society, at once ungodly and impure,—this fair and frail child of a pious parent is suffered to be on terms of familiarity with the giddy throng frequenting the haunts of heathen pomp and pleasure. Surely Jacob is to be blamed. It is one of the untoward consequences of his halting on the border of Canaan and stopping short of Bethel, that his family are in such circumstances of exposure to temptation as might not otherwise have surrounded them. And it indicates relaxed discipline at home,—if not even perhaps a fond and foolish disposition to feel pride and take pleasure in his daughter's success among the gay and fashionable abroad,—that Dinah is found mingling, as it would seem, freely and without reproof, in the gay circle in which female beauty is apt to be a snare to its possessor, and female innocence is in danger of falling a prey to the arts and flatteries of the seducer (ver. 2).

2. Jacob's way of receiving the tidings of his daughter's dishonour is not creditable to him as the head of a family professing

godliness; at least it does not commend itself to our notions. For one thing, he seems afraid or unwilling to judge and act for himself. He is inclined to defer too entirely to his sons; he will say nothing and do nothing without consulting them. They were away upon their usual occupation "with his cattle in the field; and Jacob held his peace until they were come" (ver. 5). This may have been a proper and necessary measure of precaution; to strengthen himself, by means of their support, before treating with the man who had so grievously wounded him in so tender a point. Or it may have been according to the usage of the patriarchal polity, that such an offence should be regarded as a wrong done to the community, and in that view, should be considered only in a common council of the tribe. Still we cannot but regret that there should be so little of the grave authority and ripe wisdom of venerable age, and so much of the heady rashness of impetuous and unbridled youth, in the management, on Israel's part, of this miserable affair. And above all, we miss that reference to the divine will and law in the disposal of it, which surely we might have expected to find in the family deliberations of a man of God.

3. Hence partly, or rather chiefly, the sad contrast which here once more appears, between the goodness of mere nature, in its kindlier mood, and the evil of grace,—or gracious privilege and gracious profession,—perverted and abused. For, as between the two parties brought together in this transaction,—the Hivites and the Israelites,—the prince and people of the land, and the prince and people of the Lord,—who can hesitate to say on which side the preponderance of right and amiable feeling lies? If only such allowance as the manners of the world ask is made for the young man's sin at first, what is there in the narrative that does not redound to his credit? Instead of despising and hating his victim,—as is too often the case in such circumstances as his,—he continues to be attached to her more than ever. It is simply and touchingly told that "his soul clave to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel" (ver. 3). He is most anxious to repair the injury he has done to her; nothing will content him but honourable marriage. In spite of the fault in which he has been overtaken,—and which he is so willing, as far as possible, to undo,—all our sympathy now is with the generous and faithful

lover. His father too we cannot but admire. His frank consent to his son's proposal, when he says, "Get me this damsel to wife" (ver. 4), and his earnest appeal on his son's behalf to Jacob and his household, "The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you to give her him to wife" (ver. 8), bring this Hivite king before us in an aspect very pleasing. Nor can we put any other than an honest and generous construction on the larger overtures which he goes on to make, for a permanent friendly union between the two houses (ver. 9, 10). Let this matrimonial treaty,—this union of my son with your daughter,—be the auspicious inauguration of prosperous and peaceful times for both our tribes. It is in good faith, we cannot doubt, and with all his heart, that the chief holds out thus frankly the right hand of fellowship. And it is a conclusive proof of his own and his father's earnestness that Shechem gives, when he hastens to add,—speaking "unto her father and unto her brethren,"—"Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give. Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife" (ver. 11, 12).

We need have no scruple in allowing ourselves to be charmed with so artless and touching a picture of love and honour. It is good to mark the traces of high-minded and amiable feeling among those who are still children of nature merely. We cannot but be drawn towards such characters, although they may be nothing more than earthly and worldly after all; and we cannot but on that account be all the more grieved that dispositions so genial and upright as those manifested by these Hivite princes, were not met far otherwise than they were on the part of the family that should have proved itself to be the Church of the living God. Surely the advances so honorably made by these mere men of the world should have been differently received by men who were professedly the Lord's people. Either they should have been courteously declined, and the reasons for declining them faithfully and kindly stated, so as to impress the heathen with a sense of the sacredness of the chosen family, and the blessing that was ultimately to come to all nations through its being kept separate, in the meantime, and apart. Or else, if it had been considered lawful to entertain these advances favorably, the terms of alliance might have been deliberately adjusted, and its pledges ought

to have been scrupulously kept. If one or other of these courses had been adopted in good feeling and good faith, who shall say what impression might have been made on these noble-minded chiefs and on their nation.—and what an influence for good might have been exerted on the whole of the ungodly world, in the midst of which the chosen ones were sojourning? Alas! that so precious an occasion should have been lost,—so favourable an opportunity thrown away! The very opposite effect must have been produced by what was seen and experienced of Israel's ways.

4. That Jacob was privy, or was consenting, to the horrid plot by which her brothers avenged Dinah's fall, cannot for a moment be imagined. The idea is contradicted by all we know of Jacob's general character, as well as by the express terms of the narrative. But he erred greatly in leaving the matter too much in the hands of his sons,—committing the whole negotiation to them, and allowing them to have their own way. He might have known them better than to trust them so implicitly. He ought to have transacted the business himself; if he had, the foul crime could not have been committed. But he has let go the reins of government in his own house;—his sons have evidently got the upper hand. Hence they are in a position to concoct their vile stratagem without his knowledge, and to carry it into bloody execution without his being able to prevent them.

Their device is very base; doubly so because it is in the name of religion that it is practised. Religion! Much wronged, deeply insulted, religion! What frauds, what foul abominations, what unutterable cruelties, art thou not invoked to cover! And the true religion too! the religion of the one only living and true God! With what smooth hypocrisy do these villains propound their nice scruple of conscience! Most anxious are they to have their sister married to so generous a prince, and to be “one people” with such worthy neighbours (ver. 14-16). There is but one small obstacle, not, however, insurmountable. They cannot waive the objection, but their friends can easily remove it. A little bodily suffering, a few days' delay, that is all. And then the holy rite of circumcision makes us all one. That is our condition, say these religious men—comply with it or not as you please. If you see your way to comply, you are ours and we are yours, in a sacred covenant, for ever. If not, “we take our

daughter and are gone” (ver. 17). No farther harm is done; you and we part in peace. So the trap is laid. And the honest, unsuspecting parties on the other side simply walk into it. The princes warmly recommend the alliance to their people. The men are so “peaceable with us” (ver. 21)—“honourable men” surely and peaceable—not resenting violently an affront that might have provoked them greatly, but rather inclined to overlook it and be friends with us. And then commerce with them will be so profitable, and dwelling together with them so pleasant. The condition, moreover, is so simple—it indicates such a sense of religion in them, and may be so great a religious benefit to us! There ought to be no hesitation. And there is none. The men are all circumcised, and for the time therefore rendered helpless.

Suddenly, as at a St. Bartholomew signal, “on the third day,” holy mother church lets loose her dogs of war. The righteous avengers,—for is it not a righteous crusade?—with bloody swords in their hands, make the night hideous indeed. Ere morning dawns, the massacre is complete, and the spoil is gleaned (ver. 24-29).

5. And how does Jacob feel when the terrible fact bursts upon his knowledge? He is deeply moved, no doubt. The discovery of the atrocity is to him both a shock and a surprise—and he does not hesitate to express his mind to the two who had been the ringleaders in the exploit, Simeon and Levi (ver. 30). But even here, the traces of the lowered moral and spiritual tone of his own mind come out. The remonstrance, after ail, is but a feeble one; it indicates no high principle—no holy indignation—no righteous wrath; it turns mainly on considerations of selfish policy and prudence. It is a false step that has been taken—a step false in point of expediency. A blunder, rather than a crime, has been committed; and it may lead to unpleasant consequences. It may rouse the resentment of the neighbours and allies of the suffering tribe—and so endanger the fortunes, and even the lives, of himself and his family. Surely this is a kind of expostulation far below the occasion—not such as one who “feared God and regarded man” would have been apt to utter. And he seems but too ready to accept the lame apology of the culprits—“Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot” (ver. 31). For it was a lame apology, and false as well as lame. It was an apology

exaggerating the original offence, and suppressing all that was so honourable to his heart in the subsequent conduct of the offender. It was, in truth, a shameless justification of the foul deed, in all its foulness. And Jacob, by his silence, appears to make himself almost a party to the deed—a sort of accomplice after the fact.

Long afterwards, Jacob spoke very differently concerning this transaction. On his deathbed, looking at it in the near prospect of eternity, he stigmatized it with somewhat more severity;—“Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united! for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel!” (xlix. 5-7). By that time the patriarch had come to view the matter more in the light of God's holy law, and less in the light of human policy and passion. But alas! for the close of the present chapter of his history. It leaves him a dishonored and degraded parent,—reaping the bitter fruit of unsteadfastness in ruling his own household, and giving sad evidence of that unsteadfastness being the result, in large measure, of his own heart not being right with God.

XLIX.

PERSONAL AND FAMILY REVIVAL—MINGLED GRACE AND CHASTISEMENT—AN ERA IN THE PATRIARCHAL DISPENSATION.

Genesis xxxv.

“I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works.”—Revelation ii. 4, 5.

The scene here changes for the better. The patriarch experiences a revival; a new crisis of his spiritual life occurs. His heart is graciously made right with God once more, evidently in the prospect of his being called, upon the death of his father Isaac, to assume formally the position of the head of the chosen family in Canaan.

The first step in this quickening movement, is a sovereign and effectual interposition on the part of God (ver. 1).

So it must ever be. Left to himself, the sleeper will sleep the sleep of death. But the Lord in great mercy awakens him;—“God said unto Jacob, Arise.” It is a startling call, as addressed to the Church, or to any of the people of God, in any circumstances, in any mood of mind. “Arise ye and depart, for this is not your rest; because it is polluted; it shall destroy you with a sore destruction!”—such is the Lord's warning voice by the mouth of the prophet Micah. And through Isaiah he gives the word of comfort;—“Shake thyself from the dust, arise and sit down, O Jerusalem. Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” These calls may be held to indicate the full meaning of the call to Jacob. In his case also, it is a call to depart out of the

midst of what is polluting and destroying himself and all that are his. It is a call to awake to righteousness and not sin; to shake himself free from the dust of worldliness, security, and sloth; and to be on the look-out for new light coming, and a new rising upon him of the glory of the Lord.

For it is a call to Bethel, the house of God;—"Arise, go up to Bethel." He should have gone up thither long ago, and should have been dwelling there now. He has been remiss and dilatory,—he has been worse,—he has been ungrateful to his God, and faithless to his vow. And were he now, of his own accord, proposing to repair his error and make up for lost time, it could be no matter of surprise to him if the Lord should lay an arrest upon him, and tell him it is too late. But the Lord "waiteth to be gracious." Nay more. His grace outruns and anticipates Jacob's purpose. And as he takes the initiative in this movement, so he makes it a movement worthy of himself, and like himself. He interferes to rescue his servant from backsliding and its bitter fruits. And he interferes in a manner that accords with his own great name, as "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and slow to anger, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, though he will by no means clear the guilty." Bethel, though sadly neglected hitherto, is still accessible. The call is still free,—the warrant ample;—"Arise, go up to Bethel." Nor is it open only to a passing visit, an occasional pilgrimage and brief act of homage. It is to be thy habitation,—"Go up to Bethel and dwell there." It is a better dwelling-place than thou hast been choosing for thyself,—safer and more blessed,—for it is the dwelling place of thy God. And it is still at thy service,—as much at thy service as if, on first quitting Syria, thou hadst sought it with all thy heart;—"Dwell there, and make thee an altar unto God." Let it be thy rest, because it is the rest of God;—of that God who "appeared unto thee, when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother." (ver. 1.)

What can be conceived more condescending and kind,—more touching and tender,—than this summons to Jacob,—in all the circumstances? It is in fact virtually an act of amnesty and oblivion, as regards all that has passed since the night of his flight from home. It obliterates the intervening period, and blots out all its sins. It is almost like the Lord's question to Peter,—"Simon, son of Jonas,

lovest thou me? That question must have been felt by the fallen disciple to carry in it a sentence of full and free pardon,—for it proceeded upon the principle, with which his master had made him familiar,—“To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.” Lovest thou me? I am the Lord who called thee from being a fisher of fish, to be a fisher of men. I am the Lord who said, “Blessed art thou Simon Barjona.” I am the Lord who promised that “on this rock I would build my Church.” Thou hast denied me. But here am I, asking thee, “Lovest thou me? Could I ask thee such a question, except on the footing of all that has come in between us being to me as if it had never been? I ask thee to be all to me that thou wast before thy backsliding,—all that and more,—all that thou wast when thou saidst that I was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Substantially like this, is the Lord's call to Jacob. It annihilates the recent past, and goes back to the more remote. And it does so on the strength of a present act of grace,—forgiving all, forgetting all,—and proposing to have all again adjusted as at the first, when the first fresh gleam of the light of God's reconciled countenance broke the gloom of midnight,—and the worse gloom of a moody spirit,—as the exile lay forlorn on his stony pillow. It is indeed a call to him to be as he then was,—in spite of all that he has since been,—“to remember from whence he has fallen, and repent, and do the first works.”

Jacob's response to the call is prompt and decided. He takes immediate measures for complying with it,—and for complying with it in the spirit, and not merely in the letter. As the head of the family, and the prince and priest of the community, he issues suitable orders and enjoins special preparation, with a view avowedly to a very solemn act of worship. The preparation is twofold. It consists first of what is moral and spiritual,—the purging out of the old leaven of idolatry from among them;—and secondly of what may seem to be more of a ceremonial and ritual character, the special cleansing of their persons, and the changing or washing of their garments (ver. 2). So Jacob would present his household before the Lord at Bethel, with no taint of the world's idol-worship cleaving to them, and with “holiness to the Lord” stamped alike on their bodies and on their souls. And he enforces his injunction by a consideration that might well reconcile them to its observance. The

God with whom we are about to meet,—is the God “who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went” (ver. 3). It is in acknowledgment of that first and most seasonable interposition of his grace when I was in my sorest straits, even more than of all his kind providence towards me since, that I, —who have hitherto, alas! but ill requited his love,—now go to worship him at his own appointed place, taking you along with me. You cannot but feel that we must go, with no strange gods among us,—with clean hands and pure hearts.

The appeal of Jacob is effectual. The “strange gods that are among them are put away” (ver. 4). These were probably idols or teraphim, instruments of some sort of modified idolatry;—the true God not being altogether disowned, but false deities associated with him, or false methods of worship practised,—for that seems to have been the sort of religion prevalent in Syria, in Laban's house. But whatever they were, they are all, together with the ornaments of jewelry that were more or less identified with the use of them, unreservedly given up to Jacob, and buried by him in the earth, under an oak at Shechem;—not surely to be afterwards brought to light, and made the occasion of heathenism in the kingdom of the ten tribes,—as some have feigned;—but rather to be hidden and lost for ever (ver. 4).

Thus, the preliminary steps being all rightly taken, the journey towards Bethel begins.

It is accomplished in safety. That it should be so, is almost more than could have been anticipated as possible. It was, humanly speaking, far more likely that what Jacob feared would be realized (xxxiv. 30),—that, roused by the atrocity of the Sychem massacre, all the neighboring tribes of “the Canaanites and the Perizzites,” outnumbering many times over the little band amid which Jacob presided, would combine to follow after and destroy them. That it fell out otherwise, was wholly of the Lord. “The terror of God was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Cannon, that is, Beth-el, he and all the people that were with him.

And he built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el” (ver. 6, 7).

Yes! It is “El-bethel” now,—not as before (xxx. 20) “El-eloi-Israel.” It is God, the God of Bethel, not God, the God of Israel;—not God with whom he is a prince and prevails, but God who “appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother” (ver. 7). The stone which had been his pillow, and which he had set up as a pillar on that night long ago, is now, according to his vow, the house of God to him. It is as if all the intervening space of years were obliterated, save only for his grateful remembrance of the Lord's kindness and faithfulness in fulfilling all his promises so abundantly. The patriarch takes up the dropped thread of his former Bethel experience, in continuation as it were, and in supplement of the worship then begun.

Of the three incidents that follow (ver. 8-20),—the death of Deborah, the appearance of God to Jacob, and the death of Rachel, in giving birth to Benjamin,—the central one is of course the chief. It is God's gracious act owning his servant's revived and quickened faith, and it is the conclusion of the series of personal divine communications to the patriarchs.

Viewed in the former of these two lights, it is a significant circumstance that it is preceded and followed by a note of domestic woe. The return to Bethel first, and thereafter the departure from Bethel to join his father Isaac, are both saddened by the funeral pall. As he reaches the holy place, he has to bury his mother's faithful nurse; as he leaves it, he has to bury his own loved wife. The afflictions are not equal; the second immeasurably outweighs the first. But the first is heavy enough. The relation in which Deborah, as Rebekah's nurse, stood to her mistress, and her mistress' favorite son, was, according to the usages of the East in these primitive times, a very close and endearing one. She was no ordinary servant, and was not treated as such; she was a favorite and friend in Jacob's house, in which she seems to have been domesticated. Probably her death occasioned the first breach in the family circle, and was felt as a family bereavement. She was mourned with genuine tears; and for a memorial the oak beneath whose shade her remains were laid got

the significant name of "The oak of weeping" (ver. 8). Thus Jacob's first business at Bethel is to be chief mourner at a household grave. And his last, as he quits Bethel, is the same. It is the same, however, with aggravation unspeakably severe. Rachel is about to be a second time a mother. The doting husband's hopes are raised high. It may be that this child is to be born at his father's home,—in his mother's tent. He would fain see the wife he loves thus honoured, and one of his seed at least cradled in the hereditary patriarchal couch. Perhaps it is with a view to this that he hastens from Bethel to go to

Isaac his father. Alas! he is doomed to bitter disappointment. The journey is not well begun when travail comes suddenly on the woman with the child. Rachel is in hard and fatal labour. In vain the attendant tries to comfort her with the joyful tidings of "a son born into the world." In vain the broken-hearted father,—refusing to take in the terrible fact passing under his eye,—determined to be sanguine to the last and let no evil omen touch either mother or child,—whispers hope in the dull ear of death, and welcomes the last pledge of an undying love as no "son of sorrow," but "the son of the right hand." He is Benoni to her still,—the child of her grief,—however she may try to accept, with a languid smile of thankfulness, her husband's hope, in another sense than he meant it, as a hope that he is to be something very different to him. Her soul is departing,—let us say in peace. She has given him whom she loves a Benjamin; she is content that he should be to herself a Benoni. And so she dies, and is buried on the way from "Uz, or Bethel," to "Ephrath which is Bethlehem." Jacob rears a pillar to perpetuate her memory. Then all is over. The curtain falls on the bereaved husband's unutterable woe (ver. 16-20). Surely it is not without a meaning that the gracious visit paid by God to Jacob comes in between two such calamities as these.

In the visit itself there is not much that is specially remarkable. It is announced in the usual simple and solemn form: "God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padan-aram, and blessed him" (ver. 9). The change of Jacob's name to Israel is confirmed (ver. 10); and the promise of a numerous posterity, and of the inheritance of the land, is renewed (ver. 11, 12). Then the close of the interview is intimated: "God went up from him in the place

where he talked with him” (ver. 13); and it is followed up by a suitable act of worship on the part of Jacob, and a formal, public ratification of what before had been simply a private act or purpose of his own,—determining how the place was afterwards to be known among his seed (ver. 14, 15). In all this there would seem to be little or nothing beyond the recognition and renewed sanction of former covenant promises and pledges. The only very notable circumstance is, that this is the last of what we may call the personal interviews with which God honoured the patriarchs. Henceforward that mode of communication between heaven and earth ceases. The next we read of is that by dreams, and the interpretation of dreams. Of the “appearing” of God to the party visited; his “talking with him;” his “going up from him;” of that direct, face to face, mouth to mouth, kind of intercourse, which these descriptions must be understood to signify,—we do not discover any traces in any of the subsequent revelations of which Old Testament Scripture speaks. The nearest approach to it is to be found in the case of Moses, concerning whom, on the occasion of the murmuring of Miriam and Aaron against him, the Lord bears emphatic testimony “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream—my servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all my house, with him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold” (Numbers xii. 6, 7, 8). But what Moses enjoyed of this direct communication with the Most High would seem to have been, not so much in the way of the Lord visiting him on the earth, as in the way of the Lord calling him up, as it were, into heaven, on the mount to commune with him there. And at all events, the Lord's way of making known his mind to Moses is declared to be exceptional; and the ordinary manner of divine revelation is represented as being altogether different. Revelation by a personal visit,—as when Jehovah, assuming the appearance of a man, sat with Abraham in his tent, eating meat “with him—and talked with him as a man talks with his friend,—came to an end with this second interview between the Lord and Jacob at Bethel; which indeed was, more clearly than the first, of the same sort with those which his fathers had had with God. Here, therefore, is a critical change in the administration of the covenant on the part of God,—and here accordingly it may with not a little probability be contended that,

strictly speaking, the patriarchal dispensation, in so far as it is of the nature of a revelation, comes to a close. The patriarchal religion may now be said to be complete,—the last contribution to it being now made in the Lord's renewed ratification of the covenant with Jacob. Whatever intimation of his will God may be pleased to make for the guidance of his servants by visions and dreams;—and whatever prophetic insight into the future may be vouchsafed to gifted seers and dying saints;—all that is rather in the way of applying in detail to persons and circumstances, a revelation already given as for the time final, than in the way of adding to it, or repeating and confirming it. Henceforth the family of Jacob and their descendants are to live under the patriarchal dispensation, as a finished religious code,—very much as the Israelites lived under the Mosaic dispensation after the death of Moses, and as we live under the Christian dispensation, since the death of Christ and his inspired apostles and evangelists.

We seem, therefore, to be about to turn over a leaf at this stage of the history. The signal for doing so is the death of Isaac,—with which event the present chapter ends. It has all the appearance, especially towards its close, of what may be called a winding up; making even, as it were, the odd ends and remnants of the preceding narrative,—and clearing the stage for a new act of the drama, to be inaugurated when Jacob, on his father's death, becomes the patriarchal head of the chosen tribe. Hence, probably, there is introduced at this stage, the account of Reuben's crime (ver. 22), as well as the catalogue of Jacob's now completed family (ver. 22-26). The church visible, as its development is about to be traced from a new starting point, or fountain source, is now before

US, in its heads, complete,—Jacob or Israel, and the twelve sons whose names are here enumerated. It has been formed and nursed in exile; it is now to take its place in Canaan. All is told about it that is needful for our understanding its future course;—how it has, to begin with, some foul blots,—bloody treachery staining two, and vile lust a third, of the men who are to be its representatives;—how human sin and shame are thus blended at the outset with divine grace and love;—and how, therefore, it need be no matter of surprise, if a history of a very checkered character, even while Jacob

lives, prepares the way for the equally checkered prophecy which he is constrained to utter ere he dies.

Thus then, in the circumstances which are here brought together in this chapter,—experiencing a gracious revival,—chastened and afflicted in his dearest affections,—honoured with a last visit of God to renew and ratify his covenant,—with his family of twelve sons now complete,—but alas! completed at the cost of Rachel's loss;—and with Reuben's incest now superadded to the cruelty of Simeon and Levi:—thus does Jacob find himself once more in his father's house. There he is soon, along with Esau, to close his father's eyes, and consign his last remains to the silent tomb. And thereafter he is to take his father's place as the heir of promise, and to fulfill, as best he may, with such materials as he has, the functions which that high character involves.

L.

A NEW ERA—THE BEGINNING OF A NEW PATRIARCHATE.

Genesis xxxvii. 1-11.

“These are the generations of Esau.—Gen. xxxvi. 1. These are the generations of Jacob.”—xxxvii. 2.

“These are the generations of;”—such is the formula—the title or heading—that ushers in each new branch, whether lineal and descending, or collateral and diverging, of the great genealogical chart or tree, which the Book of Genesis unfolds. It is the sign which marks, at successive stages, the gradual contraction of the narrative into a few, and ultimately into one alone of the innumerable streams in which the flood of human life rolls on.

Thus, first, it heads the record of the original destination of our world and our race (ii. 4). The creation of the heavens and the earth,—of all the earth's living tribes, and especially of him who is to have dominion over it and them,—having been previously narrated in the first chapter;—history proper begins in the second. And it begins comprehensively enough; with the all-embracing phrase; “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth.” Again, secondly, after notices of the fall and its first fruits, applicable to all mankind; when the genealogical history of the fallen race is to be traced in the one line of Adam through Seth; the same formula is used,—“This is the book of the generations of Adam” (v. 1). So also, thirdly, when a new start is to be made, and amid universal defection, a fresh fountain-head of life is to be selected, it is announced in the same way,—“These are the generations of Noah” (vi. 9).

After the flood, the genealogical tree springs again from one parent stem, in a threefold ramification; "These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (x. 1). But Ham and Japheth being suffered to drop aside, the interest is fixed in the lineage of Shem; "These are the generations of Shem" (xi. 10).

Soon the choice is still farther narrowed,—and the name of Abraham's father, as representing his son, becomes the starting-point of the new branch in which the progress of the tree is to be traced; "These are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram" (xi. 27).

Of Abraham's two sons, Ishmael's line is first briefly sketched; "These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son" (xxv. 12). And then, in Isaac the history of the election of grace starts afresh,—"These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son" (xxv. 19).

Upon the death of Isaac, the same principle of elimination out of the sacred historic stream on the one hand, and selection for it on the other hand, comes to be applied. Each of his two sons, Esau and Jacob, has his place in the genealogical tree.

The genealogy in the line of Esau is very briefly and summarily traced; "These are the generations of Esau who is Edom" (xxxvi. 1); but like that of Abraham through Ishmael, it is traced with sufficient clearness to admit of its being at last historically identified. The two, indeed, as branch genealogies,—the one from Abraham through Ishmael, and the other from Isaac through Esau,—are recorded mainly with a prophetic view to such future historical identification. But, even apart from that consideration, the chapter which records the progress of Esau's house is an interesting study,—especially when viewed in the light of Isaac's dying benediction.

Look along the advancing course of Esau's posterity. See him in his families, multiplied and enriched; these families rapidly becoming dukedoms or principalities; these dukedoms, again, gathered up into a kingdom; and that kingdom reaching its culminating point, long before the kingdom for which Moses made provision in his law was even looming in the distance for Israel; for the history speaks of "kings reigning in the land of Edom, before

there reigned any king over the children of Israel” (ver. 31). Such is the general outline of the rise and progress of the Idumean power which this brief and bare list of Esau's generations may suggest; and it is enough for any practical use. The minute discussion of its details, in a genealogical or ethnological point of view, is unnecessary, and would be out of place.

Esau being thus withdrawn, Jacob remains (xxxvii. 2); and along the line of Jacob's seed, the entire subsequent stream of sacred history is to flow. No more branches are to be given off”,—and the branches already given off are to be noticed only in so far as they come across the current of Israel's wondrous course. The formula, as now used, “These are the generations of Jacob,”—stands henceforth alone; being the title or heading of the whole accumulating mass of inspired, narrative, prophecy, proverb, and song, in which Israel's varied fortunes are embodied; till the time comes when once more the old formula is to be used to usher in a new branch of the family tree;—“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Mat. i. 1).

Jacob is now the acknowledged head of the chosen family. Isaac is dead, and Esau has removed from Canaan into the territory which his race are to occupy and inherit. It is not improbable that he had begun to look in that direction shortly after he sold his birthright to Jacob, and before the transaction of the blessing. At all events, on Jacob's return from Syria, Esau is found, not where his father Isaac is dwelling, but in settlements of his own, more or less fixed, in the country with which his name is ever afterwards to be identified. Jacob resumes his place in his father's household, and upon Isaac's death takes the position of patriarchal head over the now considerable tribe into which Abraham's seed has expanded itself. It might seem, therefore, that the dark shadows of his life should now give place to sunshine.

Alas! no. The trial of his faith is not yet complete. The old man's heart is to be pierced with fresh and bitter pangs. “These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph”—(ver. 2).

Joseph? So this new section begins,—this new stream of the genealogical history,—having its new fountain in Jacob. Joseph! With the alarm of that name is the new patriarchate or headship of the chosen family, in the person of Jacob, rung in;—even as with the alarm of the same name, after a romance of history unparalleled before or since, it is to be rung out. Joseph! The first and last, the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, of Jacob's whole patriarchal reign!

For the interest of that patriarchal reign, (1.) as a story of human character and life, giving insight and calling forth sympathy, as no other story, either real or feigned, ever did;—(2.) as embracing a world-wide revolution, attested to be so by world-wide footprints, lasting till this day; (3.) as determining the condition of Israel's national development as a people sold into bondage and redeemed; (4) as all bearing on what really fulfilled the prophecy—“out of Egypt have I called my son;” the interest I say in all these views of it, of the patriarchal reign of Jacob, is all centered in Joseph. “These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph”—

But in the first instance, the history of Joseph is to be viewed in its bearing personally on his father Jacob. Let the state of the patriarch's household therefore be, as far as possible, realized.

1. Before Joseph's dreams, there is a root of bitterness in the family. Two reasons are assigned for the jealousy that sprung up. Joseph was dreaded by his brethren as a talc-bearer; and he was envied by them as a favorite. This double cause of offence did the stripling of seventeen give to his brothers, now grown to manhood.

He was a tale-bearer; “Joseph brought unto his father their evil report” (ver. 2). Rather he was a truth-teller. As one who was always “in simplicity a child,” he naturally told his father the incidents of each passing day. If his brethren,—old enough, some of them, to be his father,—were accustomed, while away from home, ostensibly on the business of tending their flocks, not only to familiarize themselves, but to attempt to familiarize their youthful brother, with scenes and doings which they cared not to submit to the scrutiny of

the parental eye; so much the worse for them; his mouth however cannot be shut.

But he was a favorite; "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children" (ver. 3). Did these sons of Jacob consider what cause might be pleaded for their aged father making a favorite of Joseph? He was "the son of his old age;" the first-born of his beloved Rachel,—now, alas! no more. Had they no allowance to make for so natural a fondness?

Very evidently, however, as the whole narrative shows, it is not as a tale-bearer, nor as a favorite, that Joseph is hated by his brethren. The real ground of their dislike is that he will not be one of them, and go along with them in ways which they know that their father condemns. Their quarrel with him is that his truth and simplicity, his piety and worth, commend him to their father's special confidence and regard. At all events, "when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him" (ver. 4).

Possibly Jacob may have manifested his warm esteem for his beloved son in an injudicious way. To listen to his reports of the evil he witnessed, instead of at once withdrawing him from its contagion, and from the temptation to become a mere spy and informer,—that may have been Jacob's weakness or mistake. And it was a poor conceit that led him to express his affection by a costly garment (ver. 3);—if indeed it was not something worse,—conferring on the youthful object of his fondness a foolish mark of rank and distinction, that could not fail to expose him to the ridicule or rage of his older brothers. Still, there lies at the bottom of the rankling sore in Jacob's household, as its chief cause, the evil conduct of his sons; which Joseph could not tolerate or conceal; and which Jacob himself perhaps did not, or could not, control.

2. The two dreams which Joseph had introduced a new element of disquiet into the family. What weight Joseph himself attached to them, when he first told them, does not appear;—but his very openness in telling them shows that he could mean no harm. He might have kept them to himself, and watched for opportunities of

realizing what they seemed to foreshadow. He might have made a confidant of some shrewd adviser or crafty tool, who, being entrusted with his secret, might be a safe accomplice in any ambitious scheme his dream-heated brain might devise. But Joseph has no reserve. His brethren, whom alone it can concern, are to know all about the first dream (ver. 5-7). And as the second dream, if it means anything, points to the heads as well as the members of the family, it is dutifully communicated to his father also (ver. 9, 10).

Such fraternal and filial frankness should have disarmed suspicion and hostility. Whatever there may be in these dreams, beyond midnight fancy's fairy and fantastic tricks,—whatever of supernatural significancy, and anticipation of the future,—Joseph surely is not to be blamed. He could not help having the dreams:—and he does all that could be asked or expected of him, when he hastens to put all the household in possession of them.

That Joseph did right in communicating his dreams,—seeing that they were meant not only for himself but for the whole household,—can scarcely be doubted. The communication of them, however, was not welcome; it gave dire offence to his brethren (ver. 8). His father also was at first displeased, or rather perhaps only surprised. For, one is inclined to ask, was it really in anger, or was it by way of dissembling, under colour of irritation, a secret satisfaction at the high prospect opening up before his favorite son, that the patriarch so mildly “rebuked” the lad's seemingly insolent aspirations—“What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I, and thy mother, and thy brethren, indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” (ver. 10). At all events, while “his brethren” simply “envied him,” “his father observed the saying” (ver. 11). Jacob kept it in his mind, treasured it in his memory,—pondered what might come of it, and whereto it might grow;—as Daniel did with reference to the vision of the four beasts, and as Mary did with reference to the visit of the shepherds at the birth of Jesus, and the saying of Jesus himself, when he was twelve years old, in the temple. Evidently, therefore, he attached importance to the intimation given in the dreams as to things to come. And the reflection is apt to arise,—If he and his other sons had received the intimation in faith, as coming

from the Lord, and so far acted upon it as to wait in humble patience for the issue—what sin and suffering might have been averted from the chosen family! But, alas! unbelief prevailed. Jacob may perhaps have been prepared to bow to the will of God; but the brethren of the good and godly youth, so evidently favoured of the Lord, envied him and hated him the more. For these great divine lessons were still to be taught by the eventful history of Joseph,—that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,—that they who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution,—that the righteous must through much tribulation enter into glory.

LI

THE MISSION TO DOTHAN—THE PLOT—THE SALE.

Genesis xxxvii. 12-36.

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”—John i. 11.

In the history of Joseph's strange career the particular providence of God is most signally illustrated. There is, indeed, evidence enough in the previous narrative of a wise and holy providence watching over the actions and affairs of men,—and carrying forward, by means of human agency and instrumentality, a vast and comprehensive plan for undoing the mischief of the fall, and bringing about the predicted result, that “the seed of the woman is to bruise the serpent's head.” But the march of that providence has hitherto been, as it were, along the highway of that great general divine purpose and promise,—individual and family interests being manifestly subordinate. Now, however, in the life of Joseph, what is personal carries it over what is public. The march of providence is, as it might seem, through a bye-way. The varied fortunes of one man, Joseph, as unfolded, not in the inheritance, nor in any movement connected with it, but in a region remote and in events remote,—not in Canaan but in Egypt;—the “vicissitudes of his checkered course;—his biography;—that is now the groove in which the church's history is to run. Hence it is a biography doubly important. It constrains us to observe the footprints of God's providence, as very specially exercised in the case of Joseph himself. And by analogy it points to an era when once again biography prevailed to usher in and mold a new church-development.

In the manner of Joseph's descent into Egypt,—how remarkably may the typical providence of God, if one may so call it, be traced and noted.

I. Take, first, the mission of Joseph, on his father's behalf, to his brethren (ver. 12-14). That Jacob should send Joseph on an errand of inquiry about his other sons, and that Joseph should be so ready to go, might seem natural enough, did we not remember the relations in which the members of this uneasy household stood to one another. But has Jacob forgotten the evil report which, in his honest and childlike simplicity, Joseph had brought of his brethren, and the offence which that had given? The robe of honour, also, with which his partiality had adorned his favorite son, and the jealousy and envy which that mark of distinction, however well deserved, had occasioned,—and the dreams, so artlessly told and so angrily listened to—is all that overlooked? Has the previous conduct of these men been such as to warrant Jacob in relying on their generosity and forbearance, when he commits to their tender mercies the object of his own love and of their hatred?

But perhaps he thinks to melt them by this proof of his interest in them, and of his beloved son's interest in them. They have been away from home—possibly for a considerable time. It would appear, too, that they have been in trying circumstances. The necessity of going farther than they intended, and the dryness of the pit into which they let down Joseph, point to drought, or scarcity of some kind, as having forced them to move on and seek food for their cattle. They had thus been, in a sense, exiles from the parental roof, and they had encountered difficulties. The father's heart yearns towards them. Their hard and stubborn nature may have been melted by what they have had to undergo. A visit of their young and amiable brother, charged with a message of tender fatherly affection, may be the very thing to put an end to all misunderstanding and animosity, and to effect a cordial and complete reconciliation. So Jacob proposes, and Joseph accepts, this mission of family peace. So “he came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

II. There is a special providence also in the fact or circumstance of Joseph's brethren having gone away beyond the place where he

first expected to find them (ver. 15-17). Possibly, if they had remained at Shechem, they would not have ventured on the crime which they committed. They could not have so easily concealed it from their father. He was a proprietor there; and in spite of the horrid cause of offence given in the case of Dinah, he must by this time have so far accommodated matters with prince and people, as to have his right of occupancy in the land which he had bought acknowledged and respected. Considering the means of communication which their father must have had open with Shechem, the brethren of Joseph, if it had been there that he had fallen into their hands, could scarcely have hoped to keep their cruel treatment of him secret. But it was so ordered that they had to move farther off. Had they Jacob's sanction for the movement? Apparently not. Whatever reason they might have for quitting Shechem, they should surely have either returned home, or sought instructions from home, before resolving on a journey beyond it. They were not found where their father had a right to expect that they would be found, when he sent their younger brother on his errand of affectionate inquiry about their welfare. And if he had been his father's unwilling messenger, or if he had been indifferent about his brethren to whom he was sent, he might have stopped short at Shechem; he might have been justified in going back from thence to his father, and simply reporting his having failed to find his brethren there. But no. He acts not merely according to the letter, but in the spirit, of the commission which he has received. He longs to carry to his brethren, however far away, the tidings and tokens of a father's loving care for them.

He will not desist from his undertaking, or give up his errand, to whatever destiny it may lead him. He must go to his brethren wherever they may be, and cheer them with a voice from home. He wanders up and down in search of them; and hearing, as it were, by chance, to what place they talked of removing when they quitted Shechem, the tenderly nurtured youth, fresh from his father's bosom, and with the fond pledge of his father's affection upon his shoulders, hesitates not a moment:—"Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan" (ver. 17).

III. It is noticeable that Dothan should be the place to which Jacob's sons had gone, and at which Joseph found them. It was in the line of the ordinary traffic between Syria and Egypt. Already there was a brisk trade carried on, chiefly by the Ishmaelites and other Arab tribes, such as Midianites, associated with them, for the exchange of oriental, perhaps Indian, commodities,—chiefly spices and such like luxuries,—with the costly and curious fabrics of Egyptian manufacture. Then, as now, the trade was conducted by merchants travelling in companies, with camels and caravans, fully furnished and equipped for defense as well as for the march. It was of the Lord's special ordering surely, that, unintentionally on their part, and against what either Jacob or Joseph could have anticipated, the men of Israel had betaken themselves to the very spot where the means of conveyance into Egypt were to come in their way. It is the spot where Joseph, by a providential coincidence as to time also, as well as place, can best be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles.

IV. The manner in which he came to be actually delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, is, in all its details, specially providential (ver. 18-20).

(1.) The conspiracy against him, before he joins them, is in this view to be noted. It is very emphatically put—“And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him” (ver. 18-20).

They would not wait to learn what he had to say; they would not give him a hearing. And yet they could not but know and feel that it was in no unfriendly, or unkindly, or un-brotherly spirit, that he was coming to them. A mere stripling, unarmed and unattended, he commits himself to them, without suspicion and without fear. The very simplicity of his having on him the much-grudged robe of honour, the badge of his father's love, might make his brothers sure that it is on an errand of love his father has sent him. Why is he here, so far from home? Can it be for any other than a purpose of love? But these dreams! This dreamer! He to be our Lord! He to be king of the Jews! Away with him! Crucify him! So there is a conspiracy. And it is of the Lord's special providence that there is a conspiracy. His typical purpose, if one may so call it, is thus accomplished.

For it might have been otherwise; the rage of Joseph's brethren might have broken out suddenly in an outburst of violence after he had come among them. Joseph's peaceful approach might have disarmed for the moment their hostility; and the movement against him might have been the result of a subsequent storm of passion.

But that was not to be the manner of Joseph's being delivered into the hands of the Gentiles; there must be deliberation, contrivance, treachery; a plot; a sale. It is neither by being cast from the brow of the hill on which Nazareth stands,—nor by being tumultuously stoned,—that he whom Joseph represents and typifies is to go down to the depths. He is to be conspired against; plotted against; betrayed; sold.

(2.) The stratagem of Reuben is also of the Lord (ver. 21-25);—not of course in the sense of its being suggested or inspired by the Lord, but in the sense of its being providentially ordered and overruled by the Lord. It serves the purpose of gaining time. He deprecates the shedding of blood, and suggests the casting into the pit; intending, though of course he concealed his intention, “to deliver Joseph to his father again.”

That it should have been Reuben who in this instance showed such consideration for his father is not a little remarkable. The last thing we read of him is his commission of his horrid sin; the sin which lost him his birthright prerogative, and brought upon him, long after, his dying father's sad prophetic denunciation (chap. xlix. 3, 4). It may have been the recollection of that very wrong;—and something perhaps in the way his father took it,—for the narrative of the crime, though very brief, has a certain strange significancy,—“And Israel heard it”—betokening the agony of silence, shame, and sorrow; it may have been this that occasioned the relenting of Reuben's heart now. He will not inflict a new stab in his father's tortured bosom. He will not do him a second wrong, more cruel, in some aspects of it, than the first. He will be no party to the child's murder. He will deliver him out of the hands of those who thirsted for his blood.

But how? Remonstrance, he well knows, will be vain. No appeal to their brotherly affection, their human pity, their filial duty, will avail. But their prudence may be called into exercise; their fear may be aroused. By all means let this dreamer of dreams die; surely it is meet that he should perish rather than dream himself into domination and us into bondage. Yes! Let him die. But not after the coarse and clumsy fashion you propose. You would slay him with your own hands, and so stain them with blood which may betray you. Nay, rather, let his death be such as may pass for accidental. Here is a pit, or well—dry, for it is summer, and there has been drought. What more likely than that the boy, wandering about in search of us, should have stumbled unawares upon it and fallen into it? When we are gone from the place, no marks of violence will remain to witness against us. Possibly none may ever discover the body but the birds that are to prey upon it. Or if any passer-by should hear a faint dying moan, and, looking down, should see a fair child breathing his last in solitary anguish,—he will but lament his inability to help him, and with a sigh of sorrow over his sad and untimely fate, go on his way musing on the vicissitudes of human life.

The suggestion of Reuben pleases the brothers and is promptly acted upon. Joseph, amid what tears and entreaties on his part, it is left to imagination to conceive,—enough to melt a heart of stone, any hearts but those that should have been the most open to embrace him,—Joseph lies deep down, along the cold and slimy bed, on which he is to experience the lingering torment of thirst and hunger, till nature sinks and death relieves him. The brothers at the pit's mouth sit down to their repast with what appetite they may.

“Woe to them that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointment; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph” (Amos vi. 6). Such is the indignant utterance of the prophet, referring, ages after, to this old historical scene, as the type of the worst kind of spiritual insensibility, and carnal, selfish, devilish hardness of heart.

(3.) The arrival of the caravan of travelling merchants is clearly of the Lord (ver. 25-28). They come in good time. The heartless and

unfeeling murderers,—for they were so in intent, and virtually, even in act,—are beginning to have some misgivings. Judah probably speaks the mind of all,—at least he carries their consent. He does not propose that they should undo what they have done; he is no preacher of repentance; to such preaching they will not listen. But a compromise may be expedient. They will not be the actual crucifiers of their brother; Joseph leaves their hands unharmed. All that they do is to rid themselves of one whose presence has become intolerable. Let those who receive him now be answerable for him. “Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, and our flesh. And his brethren were content.”

So the sin of man-selling is palliated. The men take credit for not slaying, but merely selling Joseph,—because, forsooth, “he is our brother and our flesh!” And so, in after years, Judas and the Jews may have tried to satisfy or silence conscience;—Judas, when he sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver;—and the Jews, when they first made themselves parties to the sale, and then gave Jesus over into the hands of Pilate!

LII.

SINFUL ANCESTRY OF “THE HOLY SEED”—GRIEF IN CANAAN—HOPE IN EGYPT.

Genesis xxxviii. (and xxxvii. 25-36, xxxix. 1).

“Let God be true, but every man a liar.”—Rom. iii. 4.

The narrative of sin and shame in the thirty-eighth chapter comes in as a somewhat strange parenthesis, or interruption, in the history of Jacob's patriarchate, or patriarchal reign, as it unfolds itself in the adventures of Joseph. There is, however, a break at the stage at which this sad story about Judah is introduced. The scene is about to be shifted from Canaan to Egypt. From this point Canaan, as it might seem, is, in the meanwhile, lost sight of. What is going on there is noticed only incidentally, as it were, and in subordination to the march of events and the fortunes of Joseph in Egypt. No doubt, as is soon made evident, the reverse of that is the real truth of the case. It is only in relation to Canaan, as the inheritance of Abraham's seed, that Egypt has any importance at all, in the view of inspiration. Still, in fact, for a season Egypt, and not Canaan, is to be the arena on which, as “in the heavenly places,” there is to be “made known to the principalities and powers, by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. iii. 10).

The account of this affair of Judah's finishes and disposes of the Canaan line of march. It is indeed a melancholy finale for the present—a most dishonourable close. Dating from the time of Abraham's first setting his foot in Canaan, to the time of Joseph's first appearance in Egypt, it is an eventful and interesting voyage along the stream of time that has been presented to our view. And now, when the vessel that carries the Church and her fortunes—may

I not say Christ and his fortunes,—passes or is transported from, the land of the Jordan to the land of the Nile, a dismal catastrophe occurs,—a sad enough wreck or waste is left.

The story told in the thirty-eighth chapter very probably had its beginning before the events recorded in the thirty-seventh; for we cannot interpret very strictly the phrase “at that time,” or about that time (ver. 1);—unless, indeed, we hold it to intimate, what we may regard as true, that the consummation of the story occurred contemporaneously, or nearly so, with the sale of Joseph.

Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, the three elder brothers of Judah, having justly incurred the forfeiture of their privileges,—Reuben by his invasion of his father's bed,—Simeon and Levi, by their cruel treachery in avenging Dinah's fall,—Judah stands now, naturally, first in the order of hereditary preference among the sons of Jacob. The pre-eminence, judging after the flesh, belongs to him. But, as if to make it conclusively and clearly evident that the flesh must give place to the spirit, and nature to grace, Judah also is found to have made shipwreck of his integrity. He too has fallen.

How he was led astray at first, being induced to quit the company of his brethren, by his fond and rash preference for one of the people of the land (ver. 1); how that unwise and unwarrantable friendship issued in his marriage with the daughter of a Canaanite (ver. 2-5); how the fruit of that marriage was foul and loathsome sin, bringing two sons in succession to an untimely end (ver. 6-10); how his breach of engagement as to his third son moved his widowed daughter-in-law to have recourse to so scandalous a stratagem as to be almost unparalleled, for redressing the wrong done to her (ver. 11-16); how Judah's unbridled lust, he being now a widower, and no longer young, laid him open to the woman's wiles (ver. 15-23); how he was compelled to own his sad fault, and if not to justify his partner in guilt, at least to condemn himself more than her (ver. 24-26); and how ultimately he seems to have so far repented as to avoid any repetition of his iniquity (ver. 26);—all these things are written for our learning; being fitted to suggest practical lessons of private and personal morality as important as they are obvious. But there are

two points of interest to be noted as regards the more public bearing of this narrative on the divine plan of providence and grace.

1. The practice afterwards sanctioned in the Mosaic economy, by what is called the law of the Levirate (Deut. xxv. 5), is recognized as already in use in the chosen family;—and the reason of it is not obscurely indicated. It would seem that it was not a practice that commended itself as suitable or welcome to the natural man,—to a mind imbued with merely natural notions, and without faith in the Messianic promise which Abraham and his house had to grasp. Judah's sons by his heathen wife were themselves, we may well suppose, more heathen than Israelite. Hence the younger brother did not care to take his elder brother's widow to wife, on the understood condition of his first-born being reckoned that elder brother's child,—so “raising up seed to his brother.” The unnatural crime by means of which the wicked and wretched young man sought, and sought successfully, to defraud his deceased brother and defeat his father's ordinance—or rather the ordinance of his father's God,—while it stands out conspicuously, in the record of its swift and terrible doom, as a warning against all abuse of appetite,—is, at the same time, a proof of the depth and strength of his repugnance to what was required of him as an act of fraternal duty. And hence it may serve to show that the chosen family of Israel must have been reconciled to the custom, and to the enactment of it in a statute, by some peculiar consideration.

Nor is it difficult to see what that was. Every true-hearted son of Abraham cherished the eager hope that he might be the ancestor of the promised Messiah—the seed of the woman that was to bruise the head of the serpent. To die childless, therefore, was not merely the disappointment of a natural desire and expectation,—it was a cause of regret in a far higher point of view. Hence the suitability of the younger brother being commanded to repair the defect, by taking his elder brother's widow to wife, and raising up seed to him by her. It was an appropriate office of brotherly love, inasmuch as it substantially secured to one prematurely taken away, his name and standing among the fathers of the families of Israel. Thus there was a special reason for the practice among the posterity of Abraham before the birth of Christ;—a reason, however, manifestly partial

and temporary;—not applicable to mankind universally, nor to any portion of mankind, now that Christ is born.

In the present instance, the reason comes out very clearly. The family in which the practice was to be observed, was that of Judah, of whom Christ was actually to be born; so that, over and above the sin, in the sight of God, of the pollution done to himself, the offence of Judah's second son, as against his deceased brother, was very highly aggravated. It went to rob him of the honour, which he might otherwise have had, of being held in law to be the progenitor of the promised Saviour,—even of him in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed. To make this still clearer—

2. As it turned out in point of fact, it was through this very woman, the widow of Judah's first-born, whom the younger son so infamously wronged, that the descent of the Messiah, according to the flesh, was to be traced. This woman of Canaan is to be the mother of the promised seed (Mat. i. 3).

Strange! That from such an incestuous connection, to which she knowingly tempted her father-in-law, and into which he unwittingly fell, there should spring—“such an high priest as became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners!” Is it not strange indeed?

Strange! Nay, not more strange than that he should have compassion on that other woman of Canaan, who in the days of his flesh wrestled with him, and refused to let him go, until he blessed her. That in his genealogy he should be mixed up with human sorrow and human sin, is a fitting type of his being, when he comes, a man of sorrows,—a friend of publicans, and sinners,—calling not the righteous but sinners to repentance. This blot upon his escutcheon,—this bar-sinister across his crest,—this blight in his family tree,—this taint of heathenism and of harlotry in his ancestral blood,—is ordained of set purpose. It is ordained, to abase the lordly pride and pomp of lineage the most renowned,—to put a mockery on earth's highest glory. It is ordained also, to mark the grace and condescension of the Most High,—who gives his holy and beloved Son,—that Son most freely consenting,—to be one of our unclean

and guilty race, and to come—all holy and righteous as he is in himself—into personal contact and conflict with its guilt and its uncleanness;—“his own self bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should Live unto righteousness” (1 Peter ii. 24).

And now, look, on the one hand, at the closing scene of one act of the drama in Canaan; and on the other, at the opening of the next in Egypt.

I. (xxxvii. 29-36), Joseph is gone. The feast at the pit's mouth is over. The bargain is struck and the money paid. The captive boy,—with what tears and struggles on his part! with what specious apologies on the part of his brothers!—is carried away. He may be thankful that it is no worse; that instead of being left miserably to perish amid slime and filth, he is only sold into bondage in Egypt. It is the finest country in the world,—with the widest scope for action,—where surely, if there be anything in those dreams of his, he may somehow find the means of distinguishing himself;—and without claiming any unseemly lordship over his father and his father's house, gratify his ambitious aspirations to the utmost. At all events, they are well rid of him now, for good. And the best of it is that they are rid of him without having his blood upon their hands.

But their task is not over. They must devise some cunning tale,—some plausible lie,—to account for Joseph's disappearance.

First, Reuben must in some way be satisfied. For he, as it would seem, had withdrawn from their company, after he had succeeded in persuading them to use the pit, rather than the knife; and in all probability without waiting to see them act on his advice. For, even though he means to rescue his young brother (ver. 21, 22), he shrinks from witnessing the cruel treatment he is to receive. He cannot stand by while these strong men so roughly seize and strip the lad, and cast him helpless into so loathsome a dungeon. On some plea or other, he excuses himself from joining in their plot and their repast, and retires into some secret place, intending to return when they are gone,—to save the lad's life and restore him to his father. He does return, after allowing them, as he supposes, time enough to

finish their feast. He comes upon them still where he had left them, —their business with the merchants having detained them. Perhaps they are in the very act of counting or concealing their gains. He expects to discover Joseph in the pit; and when he finds the pit empty, it is a cry of real and bitter anguish that bursts from his lips, as, “rending his clothes, he returns unto his brethren and says, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?” (ver. 30).

How is this cry to be met? How are these murderers in heart, man-sellers in act, to evade the keen questioning, and face the righteous wrath, of their elder brother?—now, especially, when his vehement grief confirms, what from his absence they may have begun to suspect before,—that he meant to assume the office of Joseph's protector and deliverer? Do they make him privy to the transaction of the sale? Do they tell him that Joseph lives, and is on his way to push his fortune in Egypt? That is not said, and does not appear from the narrative. On the contrary, long afterwards, when Reuben is bringing home to their consciences,—and they are taking home to their consciences,—this crime of theirs, as explaining and justifying the Lord's judgment upon them, he assumes apparently the death of Joseph (xlii. 22). Perhaps they tried to deceive him by the same trumped up falsehood by which they were soon to impose upon their father. And it is possible that Reuben may have been thus deceived, and that he may have again left their company, under that impression, sad and sorrowful, to weep alone, before they proceeded to put their vile trick into execution (ver. 31, 32). At the same time, it is not easy to acquit him of all blame; for he could scarcely be altogether satisfied by such a story. He was well aware of the murderous intentions of these men, and must have had some suspicion that in some way or other they had found means to carry them into effect. He may not have been a party to the device of the kid's blood staining the coat, any more than to the crime which that device was meant to cover. He may have believed that the blood was really Joseph's. But was it indeed shed by a wild beast, and not by those who avowedly sought the child's life? At all events, Reuben does not reveal at home all that he knows. He allows his brothers to tell their tale, and lets it pass for the truth, and all the truth, in silence. Is not his silence, however procured, sin?

Thus with the intent of blood upon their consciences,—the price of blood in their hands,—and a cruel lie in their lips, these patriarchs and heads of houses in Israel return home to their father.

Their story is at once believed: “It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces” (ver. 33). Such an accident is but too probable,—considering the wild country into which Joseph, in pursuit of his brethren, had wandered. The bereaved parent is utterly cast down: “Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days” (ver. 34).

In vain his family gather round him to suggest the ordinary topics of consolation,—some of them hypocritically perhaps at first,—but soon even the worst of them, after a sort, sincerely (ver. 35). For they are scarcely prepared, these hard and cold men, for the deep and lasting grief into which they have plunged their father; they had not anticipated that the blow would fall so heavily. It was, as they represented it, a providential dispensation; a sad enough affliction, no doubt, but one “common to man,”—the loss of a darling child, by a calamity that could not have been prevented or helped by any human foresight, skill, or strength. So, they imagined, the event must have looked in their father's eyes; and they might have expected therefore that he would manifest the meek patience and submission of faith, and say, “It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good.” And then it is but one of a large family that is gone. His house is still firmly established for generations to come. He has even one pledge left of his lost Rachel's love,—her Benoni,—his Benjamin. And the promised seed continues to be safe.

But the bereaved father “refuses to be comforted;” the hurt is not lightly healed. The wound inflicted on his tenderest affections is incurable on this side the tomb: “And he said. For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him” (ver. 35).

Ah! have his sons no misgivings now—no relentings? Would they have done what they did, if they had foreseen all this agony of a parent's soul? But the deed is beyond recall. They cannot bring

Joseph back; they dare not even hint that he may be yet alive; they will not retract their lie. Could they hope to be believed if they did? Joseph, at all events, is as much lost to his old father as if he were “without doubt rent in pieces.” It would be no kindness to undeceive Jacob, and so substitute for a painful sense of irretrievable loss, a still more painful suspense, never to be either satisfied or ended. Therefore they may think that they do well to keep silence. Even Judah holds his peace. They can but join their efforts to those of Reuben. His sympathy at least is real. But alas! is his offence forgotten? Can the wronged and outraged parent listen to the soothing words of one who has so recently wrought him such disgrace? And can he fail to detect, under the soothing words of the others,—however they may now be, on the whole, sincerely anxious to comfort him—occasional gleams of satisfaction in their countenances, at the thought of Joseph being got rid of?

So, in spite of sons and daughters rising up to comfort him, the bereaved father continues to weep for Joseph.

For Judah also he is now called to weep, if possible, still more bitter tears. The fruit of his miserable transgression is now coming to light. All in the chosen household is sin, sorrow, shame.

One only sign of good is there in it, and that is as yet secret. The ancestor of the Messiah is born; alas! under no promising auspices, judging after the flesh. The holy seed is still the substance of the smitten and ravaged tree (Isaiah vi 13).

Thus the curtain falls on the last scene of the drama for the present in Canaan.

II. It rises,—and another scene, or succession of scenes, opens to view. Lo! a company of merchants marching through the wilderness; and in the midst of them a young lad, with bleeding feet and streaming eyes, bound, footsore, weary, a servant, a slave (xxxvii. 3-6). And lo! again, a youth of promise, in a lordly mansion, on the road to preferment and the highest honour (xxxix. 1-6.)

But first, once more, Behold a prisoner, falsely charged with crime,—wearing out long days in a prison-house, and yet even there seen and known to be without fault.

And finally, Behold this wronged and afflicted one,—justified, exalted, raised to reign over all the land, to wield all royal sovereignty and power,—to be “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his own people Israel.”

LIII.

HUMILIATION AND TEMPTATION YET WITHOUT SIN.

Genesis xxxix.

“He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant; whose feet they hurt with fetters; he was laid in iron.”—
Psalm cv. 17, 18.

The lessons to be learned from the life and adventures of Joseph, considered simply as a matter of human history, or of a divine history of human experiences, lie on the very surface of the narrative; so much so that the business of drawing them out, and setting them in formal didactic array, is apt to become trite and tedious. For the most part, indeed, comment serves rather to weaken than to enforce the teaching of the Spirit in this matchless biography. It really tells its own tale, and suggests its own moral throughout, so clearly and so pathetically, that it might seem best to leave it to make its own impression, undiluted and unadulterated by the reflections, however sound, of ordinary exposition.

But Joseph can scarcely be considered simply in his individual character or capacity. He must be viewed as standing in a very peculiar relation to the church of God, as then represented by the chosen family of Abraham. In a very special sense, and in a very unusual manner, the church is bound up with him;—her history with his, and her prospects with his. In him and through him, she is to undergo a very special course of discipline, and to pass through a most momentous and significant change or crisis. Virtually, for a time, the church, as to her trials and hopes, is identified with him. Joseph in Egypt is working out the problem of her earthly progress.

Hence, it is almost impossible not to regard Joseph as sustaining, more than any of the other patriarchs, a sort of Messianic character, executing Messianic offices, and passing through Messianic experiences.

It is not merely that ingenuity may trace in what befell Joseph much that may be represented as analogous to what we find recorded in the gospels concerning Christ. Resemblances of a more or less typical character cannot fail to be observed between him and Christ, and between his varied life and Christ's, by the most literal and unimaginative commentator. I cannot but think, however, that we have to recognize a closer bond of union than that which such incidental coincidences might establish between Joseph and Jesus. Beforehand, we might anticipate, I apprehend, a parallelism between the two biographies, because the two subjects of them are themselves closely parallel, and intimately associated with one another. In this view, it might almost be said, with literal truth, that Joseph is the Jesus of the Old Testament church's history. In him, as in Jesus, the church is represented and developed.

The full truth and meaning of this virtual identification of the two may come out more clearly as the examination of the sacred narrative proceeds. I advert to the subject now, as explaining the method which I adopt in opening up the record which the chapter under review contains—I. of Joseph's first appearance in Egypt in a low estate; II. of his nobility of nature being even there, from the beginning, recognized; III. of his manifold and complex temptation; IV. of his suffering what was to him almost worse than death, through his refusal to yield when tempted; and V. of his being owned—even in the lowest depths—as one chosen and beloved of the Lord.

Thus the humiliation of Joseph in Egypt may be traced in several of its successive features and stages somewhat significantly.

I. Joseph first appears in Egypt in the low estate of a servant; "Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him of the hands of the Ishmaelites, which had brought him down thither" (ver. 1). His being found in that condition at all is

noticeable. It is not his original, natural condition; it is one into which he is brought in a specially remarkable manner,—by a train of events and circumstances altogether out of the ordinary course of things,—by his being subjected to treatment to which, in his own proper sphere, he never could have been exposed. He himself, afterwards, in looking back to it, ascribes his coming into the position of a servant in Egypt to a special divine act or appointment,—when he says to his brethren:—“Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; it was not you that sent me hither, but God” (xlv. 8). It is noticeable, too, that he puts this construction upon his being made a servant, in subordination to a divine purpose of mercy and salvation to be accomplished by that means;—“to preserve life; to save your lives with a great deliverance.” In point of fact, as we have seen, this change in his condition took place when he was on an errand of kindness to his brethren,—and an errand of kindness, moreover, voluntary and spontaneous on his part. His going on to Dothan, instead of stopping short at Shechem (xxvii. 12-17), was, so far as appears, his own act. Doubtless, he was obeying the spirit, if not the letter, of the commandment he had received from his father. But he might have returned home from Shechem, with the report that his brethren were not there, where he had been instructed to look for them. His going farther, alone, in search of them, through a wild and savage region, involved no little toil and risk, and was a proof at once of loyalty to his father, and kindly affection towards his brethren. He was not bound to go; it was altogether of his own accord that he went. God, as it would seem, had so arranged matters that in his visit to his brethren he should be manifestly a volunteer; and it is in the very act of visiting them as a volunteer, that he becomes a servant. His becoming a servant may thus be viewed as forming part of a divine plan of salvation. And it is not remotely connected, so far as he himself is concerned, with an act indicating both willing obedience to his father and spontaneous goodwill to his brethren.

II. In his humiliation as a servant, his nobility of nature early and conspicuously shone forth (ver. 2-6). The grace of God,—a certain divine gracefulness,—was upon him. A certain glory also,—a certain air of distinction,—bespeaking a higher origin and rank, distinguished the young Hebrew from the beginning. He grew in

favour with God and man. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man." In person and accomplishments, in mind and body, he excelled. In whatever he undertook he prospered. In the pursuits and exercises of the youth about him,—in the discipline and learning of the Egyptians,—in the tasks imposed upon him and the trusts committed to him,—he proved himself eminently successful. Evidently he was one on whom fortune smiled propitious. He won men's hearts too. He found grace in his master's sight, as he served him, and was subject to him, in all dutifulness and respectful obedience. So, in the years of ripening boyhood and opening manhood, his character unfolded itself Through the disguise of his low servile state, glimpses of what he really was appeared. It was no ordinary personage who had come from afar to take his place among Egypt's swarthy children,—but one fairer than any of them,—one, moreover, whose very presence brought a blessing with it, in house and field,—one to whom all things that his lord had, at home and abroad, might be safely left,—one high in the esteem of heaven,—“a goodly person” also, “and well-favored.”

III. Joseph is exposed to solitary temptation,—led, as it were, by the Spirit into the wilderness, into solitude, to be tempted,—and tempted truly of a devil (ver. 7-9).

The temptation is, in the first aspect of it, an appeal to appetite,—to carnal or bodily desire,—to the hunger of youthful lust. Strong in itself, it is strengthened by its being an insidious compliment to his high birth and concealed nobility. It is as one who, although in form a servant, is really something more,—as it were, a son of God,—that he is asked to take this course,—a course ordinarily unlawful, but in the case of one such as he is, and situated as he is situated, surely not unwarrantable,—not too great a liberty. Why should not this son of God, if needful, turn stones into bread? So the terms of the trial might virtually run. It was not every one, or any one, of the servants in the house that would have received such an invitation from such a quarter. The proposal is a flattering acknowledgment of his superiority; it is a challenge to him to take advantage of the position which his acknowledged superiority entitles him to assume; to avail himself—so the matter might be plausibly represented—of

the privilege which it brings within his reach. Thus subtle is the temptation as it deals with natural appetite, or the lust of the flesh.

But in another view, it is even more subtle still. Compliance might have set him on a pinnacle of luxury and pomp, from which, when he chose to condescend, or cast himself down, he would have been received by his old familiars almost as one coming from a higher sphere. The prospect doubtless was held out to him, of some exalted and brilliant position to be reached through the influence which, if he had consented, would have been at his command. Nor is it difficult to see,—if those acquainted with the ways of Eastern courts, from of old till now, tell us true,—how whatever we would think disgraceful to either party in the transaction might have been cautiously covered, or ingeniously got over, and a lavish grant of honourable place and title might have come through the tempter's wily ascendancy over the very man who, as a husband, would have been so cruelly wronged by her.

Nor is even this all. If the spirit of ambition as well as the love of pleasure and of show has place in Joseph's heart,—if the possession of “all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them” is a prize worth the having, in his esteem,—if such pre-eminence of power and influence over the civilized earth as he afterwards reached through a very different experience,—although he could not in his wildest dreams imagine it possible then,—yet if that, or more than that, in the line of universal empire, would gratify him,—what limit can be set to his tempter's ability to place him,—if only he will take counsel of her, and can keep it,—on the ladder of promotion to the right hand of what was then the throne of all thrones among mankind?

I am persuaded that I do not greatly err, in ascribing to the temptation of Joseph this complex, threefold character,—making it turn on these three principles or elements of the world's antagonism to God,—“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” In the view of the relative position of the parties, and the whole circumstances of the case, it may be regarded as all but certain that such prizes as I have indicated were held out to the Jewish captive as the rewards of compliance, and held out by one

who might well be believed to have the power of making even so great promises good.

On the other hand, it is equally obvious that the too probable consequences of declinature must have been present to Joseph's mind. He was too clear-sighted not to perceive that such blandishment, if withstood, might, or rather must, turn to resentment and revenge. Satan, the prince of this world, having tried the wiles of flattery in vain, will have recourse to threats and violence. The short and easy road of pleasure, pomp, and power, being in faith and godly fear conscientiously declined, it is but too obvious, as the only other side of the alternative, that Joseph must lay his account with meeting wrath to the uttermost. And if ever the promise of those early dreams of his, which he so simply told, and which his father counted so worthy of observation, is to be realized, it can only be through even deeper shame and sorrow than he has yet endured. It can only be through much tribulation that he is to enter into his glory. He is to be tried and perfected by suffering.

IV. The narrative of Joseph's disgrace (ver. 17-20) is not to be discredited because similar narratives occur in profane or uninspired literature, whether poetical or historical,—legendary or authentic. That only shows how true, alas! to nature,—to female nature, corrupted, abandoned, and debased,—is the conduct ascribed to the foiled and disappointed agent in this crafty plot of Satan against the righteous.

Charged with odious and heinous iniquity; laden with the accusation of a crime against the God whom he professed to serve, and an offence against the ruler in whose house he was; condemned, not justly,—for “this man has done nothing amiss,”—but on false testimony, Joseph has to bear the doom of the sin imputed to him, and to expiate its guilt, by enduring a sentence almost worse than death. For to his pure mind and tender heart,—to a soul so sensitively alive as his was to the honour of Jehovah and the sanctity of his law, and so prompt in its recoil from the very idea of disaffection or disloyalty to the master under whom he lived,—the disgrace of such an infamous imprisonment,—the reproach of such a

cross,—must have been little short of prolonged agony and torture of the cruelest kind.

Whether or not the abridgment of his liberty was accompanied with any of those aggravating circumstances of cruel barbarity which are but too common, in such instances, under tyrannical power, subordinate or supreme, would be comparatively a small matter for him. The history speaks of his being put in a part of the prison “where the king's prisoners were bound;”—and again, of his being in “the dungeon” (xl. 15; xli. 14). The Psalmist represents him as having “his feet hurt with fetters,” and as “being bound in iron.” And what sort of punishment confinement in the dungeon of a king's prison was, may be learned from the experience of Jeremiah (Jer. xxxviii. 6-13). In every view of it, Joseph's fate is, at this crisis, hard and sad enough. He is brought very low. Not only are his fair and warrantable hopes of an honourable extrication, by the well-won favour of his patron, from the state of servitude into which he had come, nipped and blighted: but there he lies, prostrate, helpless,—plunged in the mire of a loathsome cell, and the still more intolerable mire of a vile reproach which his whole soul abhors,—himself loaded with unmerited obloquy, and the name of that God whom he sought to honour in the heathen's sight, wickedly blasphemed on his account. He is indeed, as it might seem, forsaken of all, abandoned by earth and heaven alike, and left all alone in his anguish and agony. The arm of the ruler, which ought to have shielded him from injustice, is by a lying witness turned against him. Home memories rushing in upon his heart only madden him with the thought that by this time, where he had been so fondly cherished, so favorite, so well-beloved a son, his name is probably never heard. All evil mouths are open, and all evil tongues are busy, against him. Lovers and friends have gone from him. The iron is entering into his flesh and into his spirit. The earth is shaken beneath him. The heavens are darkened over him. “My God,” he may cry, “my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Ps. xxii. 1.)

V. But even in the utmost depths of his humiliation, his glory is seen (ver. 21-23). In the midst of all his sufferings as a reputed sinner, something of the essential glory and beauty of his nature, something of his exalted character and rank, appears. “Certainly this

was a righteous man;”—“Truly this was the son of God; (Luke xxiii. 47; Mat. xxvii. 54)—such, in substance, is the impression made on the keeper, in whose sight the Lord gives Joseph favour. For “the Lord was with him, and showed him mercy.” He was not to be left without some witness from on high of his being indeed, in spite of all outward appearances, the Lord's chosen servant. He has the witness in himself; the Spirit witnessing with his spirit that he is a child of God, and enabling him, in the strength of conscious innocence and integrity, and in the still greater strength of the divine approval and support consciously enjoyed,—“the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost being given to him,”—to resist almost “unto blood, striving against sin,” and to “endure the cross, despising the shame.” And out of himself, in his being recognized and acknowledged by one and another, given to him by the Lord to be the first-fruits of his pain,—won over to him in his affliction and by his affliction,—he has a testimony that, however he may be despised and rejected of men generally, he is owned by some as accepted of God. His trial, and his manner of bearing it, tell upon a few, at least, among the onlookers. From the very officer appointed to guard him,—as if it were from the Roman centurion beside the cross,—this admirable sufferer wins sympathy and approval. And soon it is to appear that his fellow-sufferers in the same condemnation are not all to prove insensible to his claims. Joseph in prison, like Jesus on the cross, is still beloved by God. And his very imprisonment, his very cross, is the occasion of his being seen and felt and owned to be so.

These, surely, are sufficiently significant indications of parallelism between the humiliation of Joseph and that of Jesus;—enough to warrant us in viewing the events in Egypt as eminently, and in a very special sense, typical of the incarnation at Bethlehem, and the crucifixion at Jerusalem.

But the narrative, considered simply as a narrative of life and character, must not be dismissed without some notice of the double lesson which it is fitted powerfully to enforce.

1. See, young man, where your strength must lie in resisting temptation;—"How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

Joseph's previous remonstrance seems intended to influence the weak or wicked woman who is soliciting him;—"Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand; there is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife" (ver. 8, 9). He suggests considerations which, even apart from the motives of pure religion, might have been expected to tell on an uninstructed heathen mind. The rights of his master, sacred in his eyes, ought to have been sacred in the eyes of his tempter also,—all the more because that master evidently reposed such honourable confidence in both.

But his defense for himself lies in God;—in a prompt, abrupt, instant, and, as it were, instinctive appeal to God, as in his law forbidding this sin, and all sin, peremptorily and without room for evasion, or exception, or compromise.

It is that which puts all casuistry and sophistical special pleading aside. Joseph does not deliberate, or parley, or debate. He takes the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. His reply virtually is, "It is written." I dare not take into my own hands the gratifying or pleasing of myself I dare not presume to tempt the Lord my God by venturing on unwarranted pleasure or promotion, and challenging him to keep me. I worship the Lord alone, and him only do I serve. "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

Ah! let me beseech you, brother, in this spirit, to "flee youthful lusts, which war against the soul." Flee, as this tempted Israelitish youth did. Stand not to argue, or even to contend. Flee for your life. And that you may flee, at once, resolutely, with fear and trembling, —with haste and horror,—put the matter plainly, as Joseph did —"How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

This swift word is your only safety in any temptation. Beware of going beyond it. Beware of beginning to question and to reason.

Beware of raising specious arguments of expediency, or of possible lawfulness or excusableness. Be decided. Be firm. And be sure that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” Enter into no doubtful disputations. “He that doubteth is condemned if he eat.” Stand fast in the only stronghold of integrity,—the abrupt, strong, honest outburst of holy Zealand indignation,—“How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

2. Learn to endure and hope, however dark the dungeon may be in which, through no fault of your own, perhaps for your faithfulness to God, and his law, and his truth, you may be plunged. Be sure that occasions and opportunities for glorifying God in your tribulation will open up before you. Be patient, be meek, be submissive. And wait, and watch;—“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

Praise the Lord then, “even in the fires;” in prison, a large room may be opened. From the cross, which you share with Jesus, a word, or voice, or influence in season, may go forth to win souls to Jesus, as well as to win friends to yourself. Be not then slow of heart to believe such gracious assurances as these;—“Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. viii. 15-18). And think for what end it may please the Lord that you should be brought low; what good may come to men, and what glory to God, through your being brought low. “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. “Wherefore God also hath highly

exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philip, ii. 4-11).

LIV.

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR—THE SAVED AND LOST.

Genesis xl.

“This child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”—Luke ii. 34, 35.

“Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand and another on the left.”—Matthew xxvii. 38.

The successive steps or stages of Joseph's humiliation may be briefly recapitulated. 1. He is sent by his father on an errand of kindness to his brethren—and with his whole heart he goes on that errand, determined to seek and find them, however far they may have wandered from home. 2. He comes to his own, and his own do not receive him. A plot is formed against him the moment he appears in sight. The dreamer must be got rid of. “This is the heir; come let us kill him.” 3. They will kill him, if needful, themselves. But they think it better to deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. It is a shrewd device—like that of the Jews long after—to make Pilate do their work—to get him who came to visit them in love disposed of, not by them, but by the men of another nation. 4. Joseph is valued and sold—cheaply valued, treacherously sold. 5. As a servant he is found in Egypt, dwelling among Pharaoh's servants—and yet so dwelling among them as to give evidence of his being a child of heaven, gracious, true, and fair; and to give promise, also, of some high destiny in store for him. 6. He is led into solitary temptation, assailed with solicitations appealing to three of the strongest principles in our human nature—appetite, ostentation, ambition;—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. He is virtually offered all that can gratify his utmost wishes for

pleasure, pomp, and power—if he will only worship a devil. 7. His tempter, foiled in flattery, tries persecution. A liar, like him who is “a liar from the beginning, and the father of it,” Joseph's assailant prevails against him by false testimony, and so succeeds in having him condemned. 8. Brought under condemnation, having guilt imputed to him, laden with obloquy, doomed to a servile punishment, Joseph is still so marked as God's own child, that amid all the darkness of his unmerited suffering, he is recognized, by the very officer appointed to carry out his sentence, as a righteous man.

Thus, with mingled evidences of grace and degradation—of a high character and a lowly state—Joseph comes to sound the depths of his appointed humiliation. And now we find him, even in the lowest of these depths—as it were, on the cross itself—still owned and honoured by God; appointed to be an arbiter of destiny, if I may so speak, to those between whom his cross stands; and that in such a manner as evidently to prepare the way for his own approaching exaltation.

It is the close of his humiliation, therefore, that is now to be considered.

Joseph in prison, at the extreme point of his humiliation, appears as the dispenser of life and death among his fellow-prisoners. He is the instrument or occasion of a decisive separation between the two whom he finds involved in the same condemnation with himself. He fixes authoritatively and conclusively their opposite destinations.

From the first, he is not altogether under a cloud; what he really is in himself, shines out from beneath his prison-garb, in spite of the drawbacks of his prison-state (ver. 1-4). Not only does he find favour,—the Lord being with him and showing him mercy,—in the sight of the keeper of the prison,—but even the captain of the guard, Potiphar himself, seems to have relented.

For it must be Potiphar who, receiving from the king the two officers with whom he is wroth, puts them where Joseph is confined, and charges Joseph with the care of them. As commanding the king's body-guard, he had charge of the state-prison,—which was

indeed part of his own house,—with a subordinate keeper under him;—a common arrangement in old eastern despotisms. That being his position, it was easy for him to consign Joseph to imprisonment without trial, or with such trial as he might choose to count sufficient. And it was equally easy for him to have other state prisoners associated with Joseph, and placed under his superintendence, if he so chose. That he should have so chosen in this instance, need not appear strange or surprising. Perhaps he doubted all along the truth of the accusation against Joseph, and suspected its unworthy motive, although he felt himself constrained to yield to influence and importunity that he dared not withstand, and sacrifice to the malice of disappointed desire, one in whom he had no fault to find. Or if at first credulous, and naturally inflamed with sudden wrath, he may have begun, on cooler reflection and better information, to change his mind. Or he may have received such reports of Joseph's demeanor in prison, from his subordinate officer, as to cause a revulsion of feeling,—and his old confidence may thus be beginning to return. At all events, it is by his order and with his consent that Joseph is placed,—as it was by Pilate's order that Jesus was placed,—between the two malefactors.

In that position he was “charged with them and served them” (ver. -i). It was a double function. He waited upon them and was their attendant,—responsible doubtless in that capacity for their safe custody,—but not authorized to act as their superior,—only entitled to officiate as their servant. For they were evidently persons of some rank and consideration in Pharaoh's court,—although the precise position of each is about as hard to be ascertained as his offence;—and as unimportant and irrelevant, for any practical purpose, if it could be ascertained. They were chiefs in their respective departments. They may have been guilty of fraud,—of what in meaner men would be called theft. Under some such accusation probably they were suffering, having Joseph between them, ready to serve and be of use to them. Thus “they continued a season in ward.”

The day, however, now dawns that is to decide their respective fates. In the morning, Joseph visits them, as usual; and finding them discomposd, he naturally asks the reason, “wherefore look ye so

sadly to-day V Carelessly perhaps, and as a mere matter of civility, they inform him,—“We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it.” And they are somewhat startled, we may be sure, by Joseph's reply:—“Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you” (ver. 6-8).

For it might well be deemed a strange reply from such a one as Joseph must have appeared to them to be. Who was he that he should dare to speak in so high a tone, and undertake so confidently what he avows to be a divine office? A servant,—one who ministered to them in humble guise,—a prisoner,—a convict,—one whom they may have been disposed to treat with supercilious indifference or spiteful indignity,—a poor degraded Israelite,—in their proud eyes contemptible. What wonder if both of these more reputable victims of the frowns of power should have laughed to scorn the lofty pretensions of one who was more a victim than themselves?

They may have done so, both of them, at first. But if so, one of them at least speedily relents. For we begin here to recognize a distinction between them. And the distinction is vital and fatal.

I. The chief butler, at once and unhesitatingly, told his dream (ver. 9-15). His doing so, and the result of his doing so, are in several views not a little remarkable.

1. He acted in faith. He believed Joseph's own assurance,—for it was virtually an assurance on Joseph's part,—of his having a commission from God to interpret the dream. And it was this faith that made him tell it. It was no child's play, or holiday-sport, between Joseph and these men—no mere trick of ingenious riddle-reading and guess-work. It was not an affair of magic, or legerdemain, or vulgar fortune-telling—a conjuror practicing his sleight-of-hand maneuvers and manipulations—an oneiromantist, or dream-prophet, with his jargon of symbols and occult senses, affecting to weave the idle thoughts of a tossing bed into a plausible web of fate. Joseph at least is in earnest. His trumpet gives no uncertain sound. He assumes the prophetic character, as decidedly as Daniel did when he stood before Nebuchadnezzar—or Christ when

he comforted the dying thief. He undertakes to speak for God—to speak as the oracle of God. It is avowedly on that footing that he invites his companions to tell him their dreams; he would not on any other footing encourage them to expect any satisfaction from him. And therefore, when the chief butler proceeded to act upon the invitation, it must have been from a decided persuasion, on his part, of the reality of Joseph's claim. But for some such conviction, we cannot imagine that he would have received Joseph's proposal otherwise than with ridicule and abuse. There was that, however, about Joseph which inspired confidence in his divine mission. "He spake as one having authority," and not as the soothsayers—"not as the scribes."

2. The faith thus exercised meets with an immediate recompense; as well it may, for it is of no ordinary sort. In opening his mind to Joseph, the chief butler virtually acknowledges him as a chosen servant of God, entitled to declare his will, and on his behalf to show things to come. He does so, in spite of outward appearances and outward circumstances.

He sees through the veil of suffering and shame a divine grace and glory shining forth in this seeming culprit. The truth being its own witness—the divine Spirit in Joseph's soul making his presence there even outwardly manifest—the man perceives that he is a prophet, one whom God has sent and sealed. And he makes known to him his dream accordingly.

3. The dream and its interpretation are both of God; being God's method of revelation—the method of revelation which he saw fit on this, as on other occasions, to adopt. It is idle to be speculating about the principles and laws of this sort of divine communication; estimating the probability of the dream beforehand, or laying down the supposed rules of its subsequent explanation. To dream about a vine, with its buds, and blossoms, and clusters, and ripe grapes, and to connect all the particulars of the dream with a scene in Pharaoh's palace—the dreamer himself doing his office as cup-bearer, pressing the grapes into the cup, and giving the cup into the monarch's hands—all that may seem natural enough, and well fitted to suggest sage remarks as to the working of the mind in sleep. Any shrewd

deceiver, we may be apt to think, might take the hint and gratify the credulous dupe consulting him, with a flattering prediction in the line of what was obviously running in his head. But nothing of that sort will suit the parties here, or fit into their relation to one another. There is no room for the supposition of this being anything like an ordinary case of dream-telling and dream-interpreting, after the fashion of what has sometimes been reduced almost to a system or a science—the art of turning to account man's inveterate superstitious proneness to pry into futurity. The whole must be accepted as altogether the Lord's doing.

4. It is so accepted by the chief butler himself. If it was in faith, believing Joseph to be what he professed to be, that he told him his dream at first, much more now, in faith, he must have received the interpretation of his dream as from heaven. Joseph had not said, Tell me the dream, and I will see if I can find a possible or likely meaning in it. He had appealed to God, and announced himself as able and authorized to put God's own infallible meaning on it. It was on that understanding that the man had placed his case in Joseph's hands. Clearly, therefore, Joseph's word must have been to him as God's. "Within three days" thou shalt be, as it were, "in paradise,"—taken from the prison to the king's palace and the king's presence—no longer languishing in the torture of condemnation, but safe from wrath and high in favour. Such salvation does Joseph announce to his fellow-sufferer.

5. Is it too much for Joseph to couple with the announcement of this salvation, so simple and touching a request as this:—"But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: for indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon" "? Can anything be more reasonable? Can anything be more pathetic?

It is not here, as it was in the instance of one greater than Joseph, when he spoke peace to the poor criminal hanging on a cross beside him. Then the petition to be remembered in the kingdom came from the malefactor to the Saviour; here it comes from the saviour to the

malefactor. The situation is simply reversed. It is his fellow-sufferer who says to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when thou comest unto thy kingdom;"—it is Joseph who for himself makes virtually this same request of his fellow-sufferer,—“Think on me when it shall be well with thee.” There is no risk whatever, in the case of the one petition, of its being forgotten or overlooked. Alas! there is but too much risk in the case of the other. When it is the deliverer, the saviour—for such, to all intents and purposes was Joseph's position here—who begs a favour of the party delivered, there is but too great a likelihood of his finding that he has begged it in vain. What ground for thankfulness is ours when we reflect, that the party needing deliverance, when he begs a favour of his deliverer, can never incur the hazard of any such sad disappointment!

Joseph might doubt whether the man who owed so much to him would indeed think of him when he was once himself out of the fellowship of suffering which had made them so much akin. We may be very sure that Jesus in his exaltation will remember us. It is not that we can make out a better case, or show more cause why we should be remembered. Joseph's plea is stronger far, upon the merits, than any plea of ours can possibly be. He can appeal to his blameless innocency, his spotless righteousness. He has done nothing to deserve the dungeon; he is well worthy of a better destiny. And the man to whom he appeals is surely bound to him by most affecting ties, of communion in disgrace and sorrow, and communion also in sympathy and kindness, given and received. What, in comparison, is our plea? We have well merited the worst that can befall us. And the Man to whom we appeal is he whom we have pierced! But he will not neglect our appeal to him, as we, like Joseph's friend the butler, might be found but too apt to neglect his appeal to us.

Did it depend on our remembering him—had it depended even on that penitent and pardoned thief remembering him—to fix and determine how soon Jesus should come to his kingdom,—who can tell but that he might have been left dying, or dead,—as Joseph was left languishing in the prison,—aye! to this very hour. Thanks be to God, it was the Father's remembrance of him, and not ours, that was

to bring our Joseph out of his dungeon to his royal court;—to bring Jesus from his cross to his crown.

It is ours to ask him to remember us in his kingdom. Nor shall he ever fail to do so.

He will not forget his having shared our imprisonment, our condemnation, our guilt and doom. All that he endured with us and for us, when he took his place beside us, and accepted as his own our criminality and our curse, must ever be fresh in his mind and heart. Joseph's fellow-sufferer might cease to think, in his prosperity, of the pains of their common distress; but our fellow-sufferer is ever mindful of the agony of the time when he made common cause with us, and bore instead of us our sin and sorrow. Therefore we may ask our fellow-sufferer to remember us with somewhat more of confidence than Joseph may have felt when he asked his fellow-sufferer to remember him. For have we not his own gracious words,—“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me” (Is. xlix. 15, 16).

II. The case of the chief baker stands out in sad contrast to that of his companion in tribulation (ver. 16-19). He had not been so ready to place his trust in Joseph, and to own him as entitled to speak for God. Rather, as we may too probably gather from the whole scope of the narrative, he had continued incredulous, perhaps contemptuous. When Joseph spoke so simply,—“Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me the dreams I pray you,”—he may have been inclined to rail at him, saying: If thou be such a favorite of heaven, save thyself Wouldst thou be where thou art, if God were so with thee as to warrant thine assumption of being his mouthpiece? So this unbeliever may have derided Joseph's claim at first. But now his comrade's good fortune, as he perhaps accounts it, tempts and encourages him to try his chance. He may have the luck to get as favourable a response from the oracle; and, at all events, it can do no harm to make the experiment. He, too, will now tell his dream, and abide the issue.

Alas! it is only ominous of evil. The servant of the Lord can speak of nothing but judgment. And if the doomed man should still affect to be skeptical, and set coming wrath at defiance, three short days are enough to dispel his miserable delusion, and prove Joseph a true prophet, alike of death and of deliverance. "It came to pass the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, that he made a feast unto all his servants: and he lifted up the head of the chief butler and of the chief baker among his servants. And he restored the chief butler to his butlership again; and he gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand; but he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them" (ver. 20-22).

1. Thus "one is taken and another left." For that, in the first place, is a lesson to be learned from this prison-scene. It is as it was in the days of Noah; and as it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man: "I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Luke xvii. 34-36). Even so it seems good in God's sight. Any two of us may be together in the same prison or in the same palace,—in the same trial or in the same triumph,—in the same sorrow or in the same joy,—sleeping together in the same bed,—grinding together at the same mill,—working or walking together in the same field; both apparently alike good,—both destined surely to be alike safe. But how long can we reckon on our companionship lasting? How soon and how suddenly may that saying come true; "One shall be taken, the other left?" How does it concern every one of us, in the view of that separating and sifting day, to be looking out for himself individually. Whoever I may be with in bed, at the mill, in the field, my being with him then will avail me nothing. Let me give earnest heed myself to the things which belong to my peace, before they be for ever hid from my eyes. And let me remember the Lord's own solemn and emphatic warning: "Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it" (Luke xvii. 33).

2. If Joseph was “set for the fall” of one and “the rising again” of another, and “for a sign that should be spoken against that the thoughts”—if not of many yet of some—“hearts should be revealed” (Luke ii. 34, 35),—behold a greater than Joseph is here. Jesus is still set forth before our eyes, crucified between two malefactors. His cross draws the line sharply between them. Both alike are sinners, breakers of the law. Both alike are guilty, justly condemned. Both alike are utterly helpless in their condemnation. But that central cross discriminates between them! It sets them, near as they are, at infinite distance apart!

On one side is the man of broken spirit, of contrite heart, accepting the punishment of his sin, consenting to lose his life that he may preserve it,—to have no life of his own, that he may owe all his life to Christ. On the other side is he who still seeks to save his life,—who even in the jaws of inevitable death will not give in,—who will not renounce his own poor conceit of innocence, goodness, and security, and agree to accept life in Christ, as the free gift of God.

On which of these sides art thou my brother? To which of these two crosses, on the right and on the left of Christ's cross, art thou billing to be nailed? Wilt thou be crucified with Christ,—trusting in him, praying to him, looking to him, believing his sure word, “To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise? “Or wilt thou be crucified without Christ,—near him, but yet without him,—setting him at naught, and thyself alone braving the terror of the Lord, of which his crucifixion is so sure and sad a presage and pledge?

3. If Joseph said to the man whose sentence of release he had pronounced, Think of me—and if he had some good ground for thinking that his friend ought to think of him, and would think of him—how much more may he who is greater than Joseph, and who procures for us—not by the interpretation of a dream merely but by what costs him something more than that—a sentence of release from doom and restoration to favour infinitely more valuable than the butler got—how much more may he, I say, prefer such a request to us—Remember me. Surely it is a sad thing if our hearts have not a better memory for Jesus than this man had for Joseph. And yet

what need of constant watchfulness and prayer that such ingratitude may not be ours! And what reason to bless God have we in the fact, that so many means and appliances are provided for helping us always to remember him—his blessed word ever in our hands; his gracious gospel preached to us; the holy sacrament of communion; his Spirit taking of what is his and showing it to us.

4. If it had been Joseph who had been asked to remember his fellow-sufferer, that asking would not have been in vain. Jesus at all events will not suffer any one of us to say to him in vain, “Lord, remember me, now that thou art come to thy kingdom!” “We have not an high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.”

When we appeal to him, by his remembrance of all his own sufferings to remember us in our sufferings, the appeal touches his heart. Remember, Lord, thy loving-kindnesses. Call to mind all thy dealings with the sick, the sorrowful, the poor, in the days of thy flesh. Call to mind all thine own trials and afflictions manifold. Remember us. Lord; and show in thy remembrance of us that thou art “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”

LV.

THE END OF HUMILIATION AND BEGINNING OF EXALTATION.

Genesis xli. 1-37.

"Then spake the chief butler unto Pharaoh, saying, I do remember my faults this day."—(ver. 9).

It was the day of Pharaoh's two dreams (ver. 1-8). The chief butler's remembrance of his faults that day was seasonable and providential. One would say also that his previous forgetfulness was seasonable and providential too. If his memory had been prompter and his gratitude warmer he might have spoken too soon. The story of the prison dreams, with their opposite interpretations, if he had told it immediately upon his escape from punishment and restoration to favour, would probably have been laughed to scorn by Pharaoh and his courtiers, or listened to with indifference, as an idle fancy that had beguiled the weary hours of captivity. It is otherwise received when, at the right time, it comes naturally out.

The king is greatly alarmed; and the alarm is evidently from the Lord. "His spirit is troubled;" and the trouble visits him in a tangible shape; it takes the form of a well-defined dream. And there is a reduplication of the dream, for the sake of emphasis. It was in this way that the king's mind could be most directly and most deeply impressed. For he is, we may suppose, like his servants, susceptible and excitable on the subject of night visions; apt to give shape and significance in the morning to the vagaries of fancy haunting him in his nocturnal slumbers. And he has not usually found any difficulty in getting the professed diviners or soothsayers who frequent his court to suggest a plausible interpretation, in accordance with his

own known or suspected leanings. For the most part, this game doubtless has been played between him and his wise men very safely—with reference to the trifles of the passing day—its comparatively insignificant incidents and affairs. The monarch might regulate his employment of his hours of business and recreation—he might settle how long he was to sit in council, what causes he was to try, or where he was to hunt, or how he was to beguile his vacant leisure—by what they shrewdly told him was the meaning of “his thoughts upon his bed.” But now, through his own favorite and familiar method of attempting to pry into God's secrets, the Spirit of God does actually reveal to him these secrets; and in a way fitted to move his own spirit to its utmost depths. He seizes upon what the king and all his court and kingdom would acknowledge to be a trustworthy means of divine communication. He takes into his own hands, and works for his own ends, the telegraph then and there supposed to be in use for conveying heaven's messages to earth. He turns it to account for the conveyance of a true telegraphic message. And he does so in such a manner as to authenticate unmistakably the message, and secure for it prompt belief.

I. The effect produced on Pharaoh's mind is such as to show that his dreams are from the Lord,—that the Spirit of God is dealing with his spirit through their instrumentality. He must have had abundance of various sorts of dreams before; many of them strange enough. He must often therefore have been bewildered and perplexed, until he got some cunning counselor to put skillful sense, or skillful nonsense, on the riddle. But he has never been so moved before as now. The dreams are so clear, distinct, and precise,—and the coincidence between them is so marked,—as to stamp upon them a peculiar character. They are unlike the usual tangled web that imagination weaves for the slumbering soul, or the wild chimerical plots that it sometimes, with a sort of strange consistency, works out to a sort of probable issue. The double visitation, the second coming after the first with a definite waking interval between, is quite out of the ordinary course. The king cannot get rid of the idea that something very special is intended; and in the circumstances, the idea is natural and reasonable. He is not in the position of those who have the written divine word, or even authentic divine tradition, to

be their guide to a knowledge of God's will; he has, as yet, neither inspired prophet nor inspired book to be his teacher. In the case of any who have either of these sure depositories of divine revelation to appeal to, the giving heed to dreamy portents and presages of good or evil is fond dotage. But it is otherwise with this Egyptian prince. He is to be all the better thought of for his lying open to such discoveries and lessons as it may please heaven in any way to send. In the present instance, at all events, it is impossible not to recognize a divine work in him, as well as a divine warning to him, in his dreams, and in the trouble of his spirit which they occasioned—The same Spirit inspires or suggests the dreams, and opens the heart to receive them in the manner in which he would have them to be received.

II. The impression on Pharaoh's mind is deepened by the utter helplessness of his ordinary advisers; the magicians and all the wise men are at fault. It is not merely that they find this to be a case which so baffles the usual arts of dream-reading that they must simply give it up as an insoluble problem, a riddle that they cannot guess the answer to. I suppose they may have sometimes failed before in this game, and acknowledged their failure;—or if they always contrived to get up some interpretation, according to some mystic science of divination, or skillful system of hieroglyphics, why did they break down now? Why not put a bold face on their ignorance, as they must have known very well how to do, and try to satisfy the king with some plausible cast of fortune-telling? They were not in such straits as Nebuchadnezzar's counselors were reduced to; they were not asked to divine both the dream and the interpretation of it together; they had the dreams given them. Were they so poor of invention, such bunglers in their trade, so bankrupt in ingenuity, as not to be able among them to get up some oracle in seeming accordance with the dreams, that might be specious enough to amuse their master for the passing time,—and safe enough for their credit, whatever the passing time might in the end bring forth? Ah! they felt that it was not to the passing time merely that the dreams related; more than that; they saw in them something altogether beyond their craft. They neither attempted to put a meaning on the dreams,—nor to persuade the dreamer that it was not worth his while to seek a meaning. They were very much in the

predicament of a future Pharaoh's magicians, when they found that they could not do miracles with their enchantments. They were constrained to own the finger of the Lord. Here is something which, with all our wisdom, we cannot aspire to touch. Here is wisdom beyond ours; wisdom really divine. That there is a divine significancy in these night visions they cannot deny, though what it is they cannot say. They are reduced to silence. And their silence increases Pharaoh's uneasiness;—he longs for light from above.

III. At this stage, Joseph's name is mentioned to the king (ver. 9-13). There comes into the royal presence one who has a fault to confess, a debt of gratitude to discharge, and good news to tell. Two years have passed since the memorable prison scene, when he and his companion had their opposite destinations announced to them by Joseph. For two years he has been basking in the sunshine of royal favour, all unmindful, alas! of him whom he once hailed as his deliverer, and who was still, in spite of his pathetic petition, left to languish unheeded in disgrace and sorrow. The perplexity at court awakens this forgetful man. His royal master's spirit is troubled, and they who usually minister to his peace are at fault. It is the very occasion for Joseph's interference. And why is not Joseph here? Why have I not introduced him to the king's notice long ago? For anything I can guess, if I had remembered him, Joseph might have had already a place near the king, entitling him to do the same office to him that he so happily did to me. At all events the time has fully come now. In the attitude of a penitent,—not taking credit to himself for what he has to say to the king about Joseph, but only lamenting bitterly that he has not said it long before,—he comes now to bear his late, but yet seasonable, testimony. It is the testimony of a believer,—of one believing in Joseph, and in Joseph's God,—so far at least as to own Joseph as a prophet. It was in the name of God,—it was as one acting on behalf of God, and by the authority and inspiration of God,—that Joseph announced to the chief butler the message that had relieved and refreshed his soul. It is as one who claims, and is competent, to speak for God, that the chief butler now introduces Joseph to the notice of Pharaoh. His frank confession, his simple statement, tells upon the king. Better than eloquence or rhetoric is such speech for Joseph;—the speech of a man repenting

of his fault in not “thinking of” his deliverer before, but ready now to testify of him,—to “testify for him before kings.”

IV. Upon a hasty summons, and after brief preparation, Joseph is brought into royal presence and stands before Pharaoh (ver. 14-16). And he stands before Pharaoh in the same character in which he conferred in the prison with his fellow-prisoners. He speaks as one having authority—as one having authority to speak peace. Meek he is, and lowly in heart. He gives himself no airs, as those were wont to do who affected, by dint of their superior wisdom, or in virtue of their superior sanctity, to scale heaven's heights and pry into heaven's mysteries. But yet there is no sycophancy or hesitancy about him;—no look or attitude as of one seeking to please his great hearer, or as of one drawing his bow at a venture. He is simply speaking as the Holy Ghost moves him. He is declaring the counsel of God,—delivering God's message,—announcing God's will. He is, one might almost say, by anticipation, acting upon the Lord's injunction;—“When they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say” (Luke xii. 11,12). V. It would seem to be in the character which he himself assumes, that Joseph is acknowledged by Pharaoh. The king apparently believes what Joseph says;—“It is not in me; God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.” This may be fairly inferred from his proceeding at once to tell his dreams (ver. 19-21), as well as from the ready acceptance which he gives to the interpretation of them (ver. 28-32). It is as a witness for God that Joseph speaks; and it is God who opens Pharaoh's heart to receive the things spoken by Joseph in that capacity. It is idle, and worse than idle, to be seeking other explanations of this great fact. There were no predisposing causes;—there was no concurrence of favourable circumstances. The dreams could not suggest their own solution. The stated and accredited functionaries, whose business it was to solve them, and whose training was all in that line, adepts as they were in the trade, were struck dumb. An Israelitish captive, who had been bought and sold for a slave,—a convict charged but lately with a foul crime,—a poor, weary prisoner, scarcely out of the dungeon pit,—scarcely rid of his felon dress,—hastily cleansed and attired that he may make a

decent appearance in the royal presence,—it is he who is hailed as the revealer of heaven's secrets and the arbiter of a kingdom's destiny. Upon the bare uncorroborated testimony of one who had been in jail along with him, on the warrant of a single instance of successful prognostication, which might have been held to be a shrewd guess or a lucky hit,—this youth of thirty years, setting aside all the grey-haired sages round the throne, wields “the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God,” and by means of it, sways the rod of empire. For Pharaoh is not disobedient, or unbelieving. There is that in Joseph's look and voice which carries in it the unmistakable impress both of divine truth and of divine authority; and there is that in the plain prophecy he utters which flashes conviction on the heart. The monarch at once gives in. And so, as it would seem, does the whole court. Not a mouth is opened, not a hand is raised, against the motion or proposal of Joseph (ver. 33-36). On the contrary, it is unanimously approved of;—“The thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of all his servants” (ver. 37).

It is no trifling motion, no ordinary proposal. It is not as if it were meant to regulate, by the omen of a dream, a day's diversion or a point of courtly etiquette. It is not even as if some question of a battle or a retreat, of peace or war, were made to turn on what a night vision might be construed to portend. Here the contemplated measures must stretch over a period of twice seven years; and not Egypt only, through all its borders, but the whole surrounding world must be embraced in their wide sweep. What Joseph ventures to suggest, as the corollary or practical application of the exposition of God's will that he has been giving, amounts almost to a universal revolution. And how unhesitatingly does he make the suggestion,—with what a tone and aspect of command; firm, though humble; not even waiting to be asked; but going on, after he has read out God's meaning in the dreams, to deliver in continuation and without pause his whole message,—whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. He is sent to speak for God;—“he speaks as one having authority,”

Does he foresee the issue as regards himself? Is he already, in his Own mind, anticipating the king's purpose of advancing him to the high office which he recommends to be instituted? Is it a secret

impulse of ambition throbbing in his bosom that prompts the recommendation,—as if he saw now within his grasp the elevation above his brethren that those early dreams of his had prefigured,—those dreams which had wrought him hitherto nothing but much woe?

I cannot think so. Such an idea was most unlikely to enter into his mind spontaneously; nor is it at all according to the analogy of the divine procedure in like cases that God should have put it into his mind. Enough of inspiration was communicated to him by the Spirit to serve the purpose of his office as a prophet, but no more. His own future was as dark as ever to himself, however clear he was commissioned to make Egypt's future to Egypt's king.

One can imagine Joseph's doubt as to the reception his bold and free speech is to have. It may irritate and provoke; or it may move only contempt. The man is a deceiver, or he is mad;—this whole story about famine eating up plenty is got up to serve a purpose. He is suborned by some parties who have an interest in the trades likely to be affected if his advice is followed; or he is simply a wild schemer. Let him not be suffered to mix with the king's counselors. Potiphar's house, or the prison adjoining it, is a fitter place for him. Joseph could not have been surprised if some such murmurs had met his ear, when, after his bold address, he stood silent and calm in that royal and courtly presence. Even if his reading of the dreams should be believed, and the course he indicated should in consequence be followed, were there not hundreds of “discreet and wise men” within call, on any one of whom this vast responsibility might be laid? Who among the many thousands in Egypt at that moment was less likely, in the eyes of men, to sit at the king's right hand, on the throne of absolute dominion, than the man,—“not yet fifty years old,”—who has just been undergoing a penal sentence of suffering and shame?

In the case of this, as of another exaltation, is not that saying true?—“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes” (Ps. cxviii. 22, 23). Have we not here a very pregnant and significant type of what Peter proclaimed to the “rulers of the people and elders of Israel,” when he said, “Be it known unto you all, and

to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

LVI.

EXALTATION—HEADSHIP OVER ALL—FOR THE CHURCH.

Genesis xli. 37-57.

“The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: to bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom.”—Ps. cv. 20-22.

“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour.”—Acts v. 31.

The elevation of Joseph in Egypt, if it is to be rightly apprehended in its spiritual aspect and bearings, must be viewed primarily in its relation to the chosen family. In a sense, he is “head over all things to the church, which is his body.” For Israel's sake Joseph is preserved from death, delivered from the lowest depths of suffering and shame, and invested with what was then the highest power on earth,—the rod of the strength of the Egyptian Pharaohs. The effects of his administration, as prime minister or grand vizier, on Egypt itself and the rest of the world, are comparatively subordinate, and one might say, with reference to the main object of this narrative, incidental. It may be interesting and important to trace these, so far as the scanty materials within our reach may enable us, with tolerable probability, to do so. But the chief purpose of this wonderful work of God had respect to the household of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,—the household of faith,—to whom were committed the oracles of God, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ was to come. In the light of that purpose, the whole scene is to be contemplated.

I. Pharaoh's sudden resolution, carrying as it seems to have done, the approval and concurrence of all his counselors and courtiers, is utterly inexplicable, on any other supposition than simply its being the Lord's doing (ver. 37, 38). Daniel's advancement by Darius, Mordecai's advancement by Ahasuerus, wonderful as they are, may be more easily accounted for than this preferment of Joseph. They had, both of them, got a certain position in the eyes of the heathen princes and people with whom they were connected, before they were so signally promoted. But this Joseph, who was he? A Hebrew slave, alleged to have betrayed a kind master's confidence and sought to injure him in the tenderest point;—a poor prisoner, friendless and forsaken,—who has just hastily exchanged his sordid jail costume for a somewhat more decent attire. Is he to be raised over the heads of all the wise and noble of the land, and set on a pinnacle of advancement to which none of them could ever have dreamt of aspiring?

The freaks and whims of oriental despotism are indeed endless, and many strange stories are told about them. But even Arabian imagination, in its wildest and most capricious flights, has given us scarcely anything so romantic as this abrupt transition in the case of Joseph, from the dungeon to the throne—from a criminal's doom to a royal favorite's renown and glory.

And yet it does not read like romance. The whole thing is told so simply,—the account is so naturally given,—the entire narrative is so plain, so homely, so unostentatious, that no mind or heart, open to the fair impression of what is genuine and artless, can fail to see in it and feel in it the stamp of truth. It is not gorgeous and fantastic fiction, but the most simple and unsophisticated telling of a true tale. It is no got-up fable, but a real, old-world, matter-of-fact story; having a life-like air about it not to be mistaken. The king speaks and acts with calm dignity and good sense, and with thorough self-possession. His appeal to his servants is rational and sober. And the entire affair is carried through with such a measure of serious thought as well as prompt decision, as to indicate that not any rash impulse, but a deep and settled conviction, is the source and regulating principle of Pharaoh's purpose and proceedings all throughout.

Surely there is evidence in all this of what is done being done in faith And it must have been, one would say, considering all the circumstances, faith having a divine origin as well as a divine warrant; faith in God's word, wrought by God's Spirit; like that faith through which, by grace, we are saved,—it must have been “the gift of God” (Eph. ii. 8).

II. The manner of Joseph's investiture with the insignia of office is worthy of notice.

(1.) He is thoroughly acquitted and justified,—declared to be free from all blame, and justly entitled to favour (ver. 39). No doubt Pharaoh's commendation of him turns chiefly on his discernment and intelligence,—on his discretion and wisdom; but it must be held to cover his whole character. It recognizes his standing as righteous and worthy. All stain of the criminality that had been imputed to him is gone. He has suffered enough on that account, and is now free. He in whom the Spirit of God so manifestly is,—he to whom God has showed such things,—may for a time be under a cloud; bearing a load of guilt not his own. But he cannot be long held in humiliation. The divine insight and foresight, which, even in his humiliation, he manifests, as regards the plans and purposes of God,—especially in their bearing upon others whose safety and welfare may be mixed up with his own destiny,—must soon issue in his being advanced, for their sakes and on their account, if not even by their instrumentality, to the position in which he can do them good. And the first step would seem to be his personal vindication,—his being acknowledged as one in whom no fault is found, and exalted as one of whom it may be said, in a sense, that in him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. ii. 3).

(2.) He is addressed in terms inviting him to highest pre-eminence (ver. 40.) “Sit thou on my right hand,” is virtually the word,—sit beside me and preside over all my realm. His place is still, of course, to be subordinate; he wields a delegated authority. But save his own seat on the throne, there is nothing which this great king reserves to himself, or exempts from the command that he is giving to the mediatorial prince whom he is setting up. All things in

Egypt are put under Joseph; as it is testified of one greater than Joseph that God “hath put all things under his feet.” And the single reservation is, in both instances virtually the same. When the Father says of his son Jesus, all things are put under him, “it is manifest that he is excepted which did put all things under him” (1 Cor. xv. 27). When Pharaoh exalts Joseph to be over all his house, and all his people, he puts in what is in substance the same caveat: “Only in the throne will I be greater than thou.”

(3.) He is proclaimed as one before whom all are to bow the knee,—having visible honour put upon him, and even a new name given to him, for this very end, that before him every knee may bow (ver. 41-45). The ring, the vestures of fine linen, the gold chain about his neck, appear conspicuously as badges of the favour he has, and the power he wields, when he “rides forth prosperously in his majesty.” The name which he receives, and which was doubtless proclaimed before him,—Revealer of secrets, or as some say. Saviour of the world,—announces his merit. It is fitting that before such a chariot, and at such a name, every knee should bow. It is the chariot of grace;—it is the name of salvation.

(4.) He is to be known as having his home in high places;—in the high places into which his deep humiliation, followed by his wondrous elevation, introduces him. He is to be seen familiarly established and happily domesticated there; receiving a noble spouse (ver. 45).

Pharaoh's arrangement of this marriage for his favorite Prime Minister is according to the common usage of Eastern courts. It is meant to confirm Joseph's allegiance, and be a pledge of his fidelity;—while at the same time it encourages his loyal zeal, and adds weight to his delegated authority. On that footing Joseph accepts the proposal. Nor can his acceptance of it be criticized or judged according to the ordinary rules applicable to the children of Abraham, which were undoubtedly meant to tell against all matrimonial alliances with the heathen. The position of Joseph is manifestly peculiar. If he is to have a home at all, he has no choice as to whom he may have to share it with him.

It is well, moreover, that Joseph should thus unequivocally assume the princely rank which his espousing, by the king's command, the daughter of one who was a priest, or a prince, or both, secured to him. He is in that way manifested as no intruder in the palaces and lordly halls of Egypt, but worthy and entitled to have his dwelling-place among them. He is manifested, moreover, as not merely a son of Israel, but a brother of Egypt;—fitly, therefore, set forth in his high estate as appointed to save both Jew and Gentile; being now personally allied to both.

Thus inaugurated in his high office, “Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt” (ver. 45). His humiliation is all over while he is yet comparatively young—certainly not more than “thirty years old” (ver. 46). It is cut short,—shall we say,—in mercy, before his heavy sufferings have exhausted his frame. And now he is to have length of days in his exaltation; honour and majesty are laid upon him; all power is given to him (ver. 46). It is given by delegation doubtless, but it is by absolute delegation. He rules supreme; not as one who reports cases and causes to the king, and is the mere executioner of the king's decree; but is one who has authority himself. So he goes out from the presence of Pharaoh; virtually Pharaoh has said, “I have set my king upon my hill,” when he says, “Thou shalt be over my house,—according to thy word shall all my people be ruled.” And a name is given him above every other name then known in all the world; the name of Revealer or Saviour. And before him “every knee is to bow.” He rides forth gloriously in chariot of state;—declared now, by no doubtful sign, to be no stranger, but the highest of Egypt's own princely sons; without whom “not a hand or foot is to be lifted in all the land.” So this Joseph now reigns, set far above ordinary “principalities and powers.”

III. Joseph is exalted for a special purpose,—and to the accomplishment of that purpose he makes all his power subservient (ver. 47-49). His rule is a rule of far-seeing providence; he rules, in a sense, as seeing the end from the beginning. Coming evil is anticipated and provided for. The rich and precious abundance of the early years of his reign is not suffered to be lost or wasted. It is stored for future use,—when in a season of want and destitution it may be available, if not for the full relief, at least for the partial

alleviation of the distress. The government is upon the shoulders of one who will lay up, as in a storehouse, the fruits of the large outpouring of heaven's blessing that is to characterize the beginning of the dispensation over which he has to preside and watch,—so that in the worst of times that may be at hand, some food may still be forthcoming. Granaries are filled for evil days.

IV. Before these evil days come, two names of good omen have become “household words” to all who watch the signs of the times, and the ways of him who, having been exalted to be a prince and a saviour, is himself a sign, and does nothing without a meaning (ver. 50-52). The glad father welcomes the children whom God gives him,—in whom he sees the pledges of toil and travail over and fruitfulness to come,—of labour and sorrow now to be forgotten and a prosperous issue of it all before him. He sees his seed and is satisfied. And what satisfies him may satisfy all who can sympathize with him. Whatever may be coming on the land and on the world; however the heavens may be as brass, and the earth as iron, and the river of Egypt may be dry, and there may be a great cry for bread, and much perishing for lack of it; still he is at the helm, he is at the head of all,—who, in the full knowledge of all that may be impending, can yet give forth cheerful tokens for the upholding of men's hearts; naming one son Manasseh, or “miserable toil forgotten;” and the other Ephraim, or “God makes fruitful.”

V. And now the evil days are near; “The seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands” (ver. 53, 54). It is a growing distress. At first, while dearth is in all the surrounding countries, Egypt is an exception; “there is bread in Egypt.” Soon, however, Egypt also suffers (ver. 55). “All the land of Egypt is famished;” and there is a universal cry for bread. The famine is over all the face of the earth. “It waxes sore even in the land of Egypt,” in spite of the opening of all the storehouses; it is sore in all lands (ver. 57). One only comfort there is,—one only hope for Egypt and all lands, Joseph is exalted; Joseph is in authority. The residue of whatever supply may be available is with him. He has in his hands the keys. He has received all power to amass around himself, and dispense at his pleasure, the whole staple and staff of life. Pharaoh sends all suitors and suppliants to him, “Go

unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do” (ver. 55). Joseph opens all the storehouses and sells to the Egyptians (ver. 56). “All countries come into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn” (ver. 57). A perishing world hangs on this great fact, that Joseph reigns.

Thus far, Joseph's rise from obscure and unjust oppression to the highest place which any one could hold by delegation in the world of that day, is a personal triumph to himself and a public benefit to Egypt and to the nations generally. The exact and full bearing of his promotion on Israel, as the church and people of God, is to be unfolded immediately. But at this stage, we see him simply as one receiving the due acknowledgment and reward of his thoroughly tried righteousness, and receiving it, not for his own gratification, but for the general good. Personally, he is now fully vindicated and righted, while the meaning of his previous shame and sorrow is made plain. He is himself, in a sense, “made perfect through suffering.” He has undergone a discipline of obedience and patience, such as admirably prepares his gracious spirit for the high office which he is to fill, and the momentous functions he is to discharge. It may not perhaps be easy to trace a very close connection, either of merit or of natural consequence, between the precise nature of his sufferings in his humiliation and the kind of recompense awarded to him in his elevation. It may not be safe to give the reins too freely to fancy, as it might be tempted to run wild in the domain of typical analogies. But surely there is a meaning in the circumstance of Joseph's lowly and afflicted experience having in it something of the nature of vicariousness,—inasmuch as no sin of his own brought it upon him,—and inasmuch also as he suffered for the fault of others, and suffered, to some extent, for the benefit of others. And at all events, in the high estate to which he is now promoted,—very much through that lowly and afflicted experience as the cause or the occasion,—this feature is conspicuously seen. It is not for himself that he receives honour and reigns supreme. He acts for others; he benefits the world. He uses his power for the relieving of want and woe,—for the dispensing of that bread by which man ordinarily lives. Worthily and fitly does he represent him who, being raised up on high, receives gifts for men;—in whom it pleases the Father that all fulness should dwell;—and out of whose fulness all may receive.

LVII.

CONVICTION OF SIN—YOUR SIN SHALL FIND YOU OUT.

Genesis xlii. 1-24.

“Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”—Acts v. 31.

Joseph in his elevation, like Jesus in his exaltation, is in the first instance a light to lighten the Gentiles. He has been rejected by the house of Israel. The gifts which, when he is raised on high, he has to dispense, come first therefore upon the Gentiles. But it soon appears that he is to be the glory also of God's people Israel. He is come to the kingdom for this end, that Israel may be saved.

The chosen family in Canaan, visited by the famine, are in sore straits, “looking,” as Jacob plaintively expresses it, looking helplessly “one upon another.” They hear of corn in Egypt, and of embassies going thither from all the surrounding countries to obtain, if possible, a share. For themselves, they may have tried to put off” the evil day, and to husband their resources; affecting a self-sufficient independence, while their neighbours have been fain to bend the knee to this new ruler in Egypt, who holds, as it would seem, the destinies of the world in his power. But it will not do. These proud sons of Jacob must give in at last, and, like others, bow as suppliants before this prince, in whose hands alone fulness dwells. They are in want,—themselves and their little ones like to perish. Their father's voice, too often unheeded in their prosperity, is now heard in their distress: “Behold I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we

may live, and not die” (ver. 1, 2). They prepare, accordingly, to set out for Egypt.

All of them? All the eleven? No! Twenty years have not sufficed to efface from the old man's memory the heavy loss he sustained when he had to weep for Joseph. Never, perhaps, has his mind been altogether reconciled to the story which the brothers told. Some suspicion of foul play on their part having had something to do with Joseph's strange disappearance continues to haunt him painfully. At all events he will not risk Benjamin in their company;—Joseph's young brother, the sole remaining pledge of poor Rachel's love, Jacob will keep at home;—so “Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt. But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said. Lest peradventure mischief befall him” (ver. 3, 4).

Along with many similar cavalcades or caravans, the men of Israel, with their attendants, reach Egypt, and have an audience of the governor: “Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth. And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them” (ver. 5-7).

Now here let us once for all fix it in our minds that Joseph had a part to play,—and he must needs play it out, and play it out correctly and consistently. He has to enact and sustain the character of an Egyptian nobleman or prince—the Egyptian king's prime minister or vizier. It is idle and frivolous to be raising minute questions, and discussing captious criticisms, about some petty details of his conduct and demeanor in that character;—as about his using the current off-hand formula of asseveration (ver. 16);—or about his giving himself, on a subsequent occasion (xliv. 15), in a half-serious, half-light sort of way, the air and manner of an Eastern sage or soothsayer,—familiar with magic arts. Once admit that Joseph has for a little while to keep up his disguise, to personate Pharaoh's viceroy, without letting his home-yearnings betray him—and all the rest follows as a matter of course. If the personification is to be probable and complete, he must of necessity speak and act “according to the card,” or trick. The only point of difficulty really

is the question that may be raised as to the propriety of his thus acting a part at all.

It will scarcely do to maintain the abstract and absolute unlawfulness of such a procedure,—to say that it is positively and in all circumstances wrong. Jesus himself on one occasion, in his interview with the Syrophenician woman, assumed the lordly port of a pharisee,—and doubtless looked the pharisee thoroughly well, when he used the pharisee's characteristic and contemptuous language about giving the children's meat to “dogs.” And again, when on the resurrection morn, he was walking with the disciples, and they stopped in the village, he “made as if he would have gone farther.” So when Joseph made himself strange to his brethren, at first,—and continued thereafter for a considerable time, and during several interviews, to make himself strange,—it is not necessarily involved in his doing so, that his temporary concealment, or stratagem, if you will,—was unjustifiable. It may have been so,—it may have been a mistake,—a fault,—a sin. If it was a measure adopted merely at his own hand, it was probably all that;—in which case, we must be content -with explaining how Joseph might have reasons of his own for acting as he did. For, without altogether vindicating him, we might hold him partly excused by his remembrance of former injury, and by the necessity, as he might suppose, of observing great precaution now, and testing his brethren rather sharply. And we might on that theory trace the manner in which the Lord overruled Joseph's scarcely warrantable policy for good to all the parties concerned.

I cannot, however, I confess, bring myself to believe that Joseph was left to himself in this matter; I feel persuaded that we must regard him as all along acting by inspiration. He surely has some intimation of the mind and will of God to guide him. He has been honoured already, more than once, as a prophet of the Lord. He has plainly spoken and acted by inspiration as a prophet, first, in his dealings with his fellow-prisoners, and thereafter in his delivery of his message to Pharaoh, and his assumption, at Pharaoh's call, of the high post to which, on the faith of his message being authentic, he is raised. Surely now, at this crisis of his exercise of authority—when the very exigency for which he has come to his all but kingly power

has arrived,—in the matter of his treatment of the family for whose preservation he is where he is,—Joseph is not left to his own unaided discretion. He is a prophet still as well as a prince. He has divine warrant for what he does.

Something of that sort, I think, may be intended to be intimated, when it is said (ver. 9), that he “remembered the dreams which he dreamed.” It was the Lord that brought them to his remembrance, and Joseph, I am persuaded, recognized the Lord in this. At once he perceives that this affair of his brethren coming to him is of the Lord. It is not a common occurrence; it is not mere casual coincidence. The Lord is here,—in this place and in this business; and therefore the Lord must regulate the whole, and fix the time and manner of discovery. If he had been left to himself, Joseph would not have hesitated a moment; his is not a cold or crafty temperament; he is no maneuverer; he would have had all over within the first few minutes. But the Lord restrains him. He is, I cannot doubt, consciously in the Lord's hand,—doing violence to his own nature to serve the Lord's purposes. And much of the interest and pathos of these scenes will be found to lie in the strong working of that nature under the control and guidance of the Lord.

1. Do we not see the inward struggle in the very first reception of his brothers by Joseph? (ver. 7), Not only did he “make himself strange” to them; in order that he might do so more effectually, “he spake roughly unto them;” asking vehemently the abrupt and almost rude question: “Whence came ye?” Surely that was not his way of receiving strangers generally when they came from other countries to buy corn; his ordinary manner could not be so uncourteous. In the king's place, he was himself “every inch a king;” filling the seat of power, and wielding its sceptre with graceful dignity and condescension. But when he saw his brethren he knew them; his heart yearned towards them, and the early home, and the fond father, of whom they put him in mind. It costs him an effort to keep silence. But something seals his lips; the time is not yet come. He must keep down therefore the rising tide of feeling. And so,—as is not uncommon in such a case,—he hides, under a gruff exterior, the deep inward movement of his heart.

2. As the interview proceeds, the struggle in Joseph's bosom grows more intense (ver. 8, 9). The simple reply of his brothers to his question, "Whence come ye?"—"From the land of Canaan to buy food" (ver. 7), is a touching appeal to him. From any little company of strangers visiting Egypt at that terrible crisis, such a plain answer must have had a certain pathetic power. Whence come ye? From our fatherland to buy food! As uttered by the sons of Israel, it causes a sad picture of family distress to rise before Joseph's view. He remembers the old dreams of his childhood that had caused so much heartburning, and produced, as it seemed, so much wickedness and misery. Fain would he explain to them even now, as he did explain to them afterwards, how these dreams were receiving a fulfilment equally for the good of all, and how they need not therefore any longer occasion jealousy or estrangement. Fain would he point to God's overruling providence as superseding all past misunderstandings, and opening the way for them all, as brethren, to dwell together in unity. But there must be reserve still for a little. Natural affection must be held, as it were, in abeyance, and its working must be violently repressed. Is it to overcome, as by a sort of reaction, this growing home-feeling which threatens to unman him, that Joseph, as Egypt's governor, puts on an air of still increasing severity"? He has a part to play; he must brave it out. And so he does, with vehemence enough, when he so abruptly accuses them:—"Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come" (ver. 9).

3. Their next explanation and remonstrance, so meek and humble, must have still farther moved Joseph's bowels of relenting pity; "Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. We are all one man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies" (ver. 10, 11). How are these brethren changed! Where now is all their proud contempt and bitter wrath: "Behold this dreamer cometh, away with him?" How crest-fallen are they! Even the charge of being spies elicits not a spark of the old fire of passion; nor have they the heart to meet it with any strong or emphatic indignation. Their disclaimer is sufficiently dejected,—for they are poor and needy. Is it a gratification to Joseph to see them brought so low? Nay, it cuts him to the heart. That these men, the men who used to envy him, and to lord it so cruelly over him, are now so abased at his

feet—prostrate before the brother they would have slain—it is a sight he can scarcely stand! And then, when in answer to his still more violent demeanor, assumed to cover his still growing weakness; “Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come” (ver. 12,—they enter with such simplicity into that sad family story of which he himself formed so great a part; “Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not” (ver. 13)—one can imagine the force which Joseph puts upon himself when, as if giving way to a transport of blind suspicious fury that will listen to neither reasoning nor remonstrance,—in the truest style of oriental and despotic passion,—he breaks out into the language of unmeasured reproach and threatening (ver. 14-16).

4. Such a storm of wordy rage was quite in character,—especially when followed, as it was, by a corresponding deed,—the actual consignment of these unoffending men to prison (ver. 17). Strange as the scene would seem to us, if we could fancy it enacted by a judge, or any one in authority among us, it would excite little surprise among the counselors and courtiers of Egypt. All the less, because Joseph was a stranger from another country: and they might therefore give him credit for knowing more than they could know about what sort of people were likely to come from the region to which he had himself belonged. He therefore might detect signs of false dealing not apparent to others in these ten weary travellers who professed to have come on so harmless an errand, and to tell so plaintive a story. He might be aware of circumstances connected with the foreign parts whence they had journeyed, fitted to cause just apprehension of some underhand design, however plausible their tale. And then, short as their sojourn had been in Egypt, for a day or two only, while they waited for an audience of the vizier, the brothers had probably kept themselves apart. They had not accommodated themselves to the Egyptian usages, either social or religious; having evidently strange ways and a strange worship of their own. To hear the new prime minister, who, as they recollected, was himself a native of the land of Canaan (ver. 7),—or the land of the Hebrews (xl. 15; xli. 12),—denouncing these, his seeming fellow-countrymen, as false spies, would probably be rather welcome than otherwise to the lords of Egypt. And the spectacle

was an edifying one of this Hebrew prime minister, showing so forcibly how the zeal of his master's house had eaten him up;—how concern for Pharaoh's safety and the security of his kingdom, had so completely got the better of all other considerations as actually to make him forget the proper limits of magisterial decorum, and lose his temper upon the very throne itself, in his eagerness to detect and denounce this Hebrew or Canaanite treachery, lurking under the mask of a pitiful cry for bread.

5. Joseph's policy is successful,—his acting is perfect. The terms he proposes to these suspected spies, are such as befit the furious mood which it suits him to affect. Let one of your number fetch that youngest brother you speak of so pathetically,—and thus verify, at least in part, your not very probable account of yourselves. For it needs verification. If the state of the household you belong to is such as you describe it, why should that old father of yours have risked so many of you on this embassy? Or if he was willing to risk so many, why not one more? And what is this about another being amissing—another of this suspicious round dozen of sons? Let us have proof, at all events, that you are telling the truth about the twelfth, if you cannot account for the eleventh. Let a messenger go and bring him. Send one of your number on that errand and let the other nine stay here in prison and await his return; the governor will be responsible for their safe custody; and the term of their confinement need not be long.

But grievously as these men were abased, they were not brought quite so low as to be willing at once to acquiesce in so cruel an arrangement as this; for so it must have appeared to them, whatever Joseph might mean by it. They felt, for themselves, how oppressive and unjust it was. They felt, for their father, what a blow it must be to him. They might well therefore hesitate, and rather suffer themselves to be all imprisoned together than agree to the seeming tyrant's intolerable terms. So they lie in ward three days.

6. On the third day Joseph sees them again (ver. 18), and resumes his intercourse with them. Is it another public audience that is meant here, or a private visit paid to them in prison? Are they brought again before the governor for another hearing, and for the

final decision of their cause? Or does the governor, in a less official capacity, condescend to have a conference with them in their confinement? This last is the more probable view, though the point is not very clear—nor indeed very material. Joseph cannot bear to have his brothers left long to languish in the suspense and gloom of the dreary captivity to which he has himself consigned them. He must have further dealing with them. And it is quite in accordance with Eastern manners, that he should seek to have such farther dealing with them, in a more easy and familiar way than the etiquette of state formality allowed. He has a modified proposal to submit to them; and, in submitting it, he has an avowal to make on his own part, which must have not a little surprised them. “This do and live; for I fear God” (ver. 18); I am of the same faith with you. Though governor in Egypt, I am no worshipper of Egypt's idols; I know and acknowledge the true God, as I see that you also do. And therefore I relax my otherwise inexorable conditions in your favour. I am almost inclined to believe that, after all, you may be true men; and I am disposed to treat you accordingly. I cannot indeed altogether dispense with proof; I must, in consistency, require of you the evidence I have already publicly committed myself to ask—the bringing of your youngest brother hither. But let it be done in the easiest manner (ver. 19, 20). The distress at your home need not be unrelieved; the father's anxiety need not be prolonged or aggravated. I must still insist on one of you remaining as a hostage;—but the rest may go and carry corn for the famine of your house.

Joseph is all but betrayed. He fears God as they do; and for the common fear they have, he and they, of the true God, he relents in his harsh treatment of them. He speaks to them with comparative kindness. Fain would he embrace them, and kneel with them, as in the olden time, when they all used to join together in the unbroken family circle, as their father led the worship of the one living and true God, in the midst of abounding idolatry. “I fear God” as ye do, and cannot suffer you to perish: “Ye shall not die.” He is on the point of breaking down and discovering himself. If he would keep up his assumed state and air of authority, he has need to retire apart, and be alone.

7. As he stands aside, his brethren are left in strange bewilderment and dismay. They have agreed generally to the governor's modified proposition; for that would seem to be implied in its being said, "and they did so" (ver. 20). But they have to fix among themselves who shall be the one to remain bound. The governor withdraws, and lets them deliberate and decide at their discretion. It is a cruel question of debate. Evil as they have shown themselves in too many respects to be, these men are still brothers; and in the extremity in which they now are, their brotherly affection is stirred to its utmost depths, A terrible decimation is demanded of them; one of the ten must run the risk of almost hopeless imprisonment, if not even of a worse fate, in the hands of this arbitrary Egyptian ruler. Which of them is to volunteer? Or shall they cast lots? Or commit the issue to the blind hazard of the dice? They gaze on one another. Blank consternation is upon every countenance. Who dare make a proposal? Who dare suggest a name? It is a time for conscience to work. The scourges which their vices have made for them begin, at that dark hour, to lash and sting them. Individually and separately, they have black sins enough to play the part of scorpions. Reuben has his foul outrage on his father's bed; Judah has his wretched incest; Simeon and Levi have their horrid revenge on Shechem;—each of the ten has his own several offence rising like a ghost, to shake his nerves in this stern trial. But there is one specter common to them all,—one deed of darkness to which they all are privy, and of which none else has knowledge: "They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us" (ver. 21).

As with one accord, they recall the scene at Dothan. Strange and startling coincidence! Their innocent young brother, the good and tender child, struggling in their hands, uttering his feeble, plaintive, wailing cry for mercy,—calling on the father who so loved him,—alas! how far off in his utmost need,—lifting his clasped hands and streaming eyes to them in vain;—the whole villany they yet, in spite of all that, had the heart to perpetrate, is fresh before them. Their common sorrow recalls their common sin. It (is a righteous judgment that has come upon them for their fratricidal guilt. This

man's pitilessness to us requites our pitilessness to our brother. The ruler now will not hear us, as we would not hear the boy then. God,—the God whom this extraordinary man says he fears as well as we,—God is just. He has raised him up, and given him power over us, to avenge the cause of Joseph.

Is it, can it be, that some strange dreamy resemblance between this dark-browed Egyptian vizier and the fair face of that little child, has been haunting these men, as he has been talking with them? Is it nature's mysterious spell working in them a sort of half-recognition of the brother whom they so remorselessly made away with? Is there a dim foreshadowing of what is to be realized fully by-and-by, when they are to see face to face their acknowledged victim, and literally, one would almost say, look on him whom they have pierced? It may be so. At any rate, their sin is terribly finding them out: nor have they a word to say to excuse or comfort one another.

Joseph would fain interfere, if he could, to pour soothing balm into their wounded spirits, as he afterwards delighted to do. But that may not yet be. He is compelled to listen in silence to their keen and bitter self-upbraidings. His time for speaking a word in season to their weary souls,—their time for receiving it aright,—is not yet come. The only one in that gloomy company who ventures to open his mouth, does but add, however unintentionally, vinegar and gall to the smarting wound: “Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child? and ye Would not hear; therefore, behold, also his blood is required” (ver. 22).

I cannot think that Reuben says this in the mere spirit of self-justification. It is not as exulting in his superiority over them,—for he is really sharing their punishment, as by his silence heretofore he has become an accomplice in their crime,—it is not as claiming for himself any peculiar immunity or exemption, but as circumstantially aggravating and enhancing the common guilt,—that Reuben urges home the deliberation with which the deed was done. It was no sudden impulse, he reminds himself and them. We talked the matter over. I remonstrated;—would that I had done so more decidedly! You went on against warning and entreaty to consummate the

wickedness. It was a black business for you, for all of us. Therefore is this distress come upon us. His blood is required at our hands.

8. Joseph can hold out no longer; he must cut short this distressing scene. He understands all that they say, as having withdrawn a little aside, he overhears it all. They are not aware of this;—for, as a matter of course, his conversation with them, in order to the keeping up of his character, is carried on through an interpreter (ver. 23). But not a syllable of that sad, conscience-stricken, communing of theirs escapes his ear; not a syllable of it fails to reach his heart. He is compelled to exercise patience, self-denial, and self-restraint. It is a sort of self-crucifixion for him to be obliged to stand by and Witness such anguish. A word from him would assuage it; but that word he may not utter. He must needs be obedient to the unseen influence under which his prophetic soul is acting. It is obedience that costs him, if not “strong crying,” yet “tears:” “He turned himself about from them and wept” (ver. 24). And then, to end the miserable suspense, and bring this most painful negotiation to a close;—since they “will not, or cannot, settle among themselves, which of them is to remain as a prisoner and hostage;—Joseph, “returning to them again, and communing with them,” summarily cuts the knot himself by another rough act of authority. Passing by Reuben, whom, in the circumstances, he could not find it in his heart to punish, he lays his hand on the next in order of age, Simeon. “Binding him before their eyes,” he bids the rest depart homeward, as best they may, in safety and in peace (ver. 24).

The liberal provision which Joseph caused his servants to make for these departing strangers,—the purchase-money of the corn being returned along with the corn, in every man's sack (ver. 25, 26); the surprise occasioned by the discovery of this circumstance in one instance on the journey (ver. 27); and the alarm felt, when on their arrival at home it was found to be the same with all (ver. 35);—these particulars,—as well as Jacob's bitter grief on hearing of the governor's detention of Simeon and demand for Benjamin (ver. 36);—may properly fall to be considered, so far as it is necessary to dwell on them, in connection with the second visit of the patriarchs to Egypt.

Meanwhile, this first visit is instructive. It furnishes a lesson, or more than one, as to the special providence of God, and the working of conscience in men. In particular, it exhibits Joseph in his exaltation, set for the trial of men's hearts,—to prove and humble as well as to relieve and save. For it is not by a sovereign and summary exercise of authority or power,—that he is to effect the purpose for which he is raised on high, and to deliver and bless his brethren. It is through a process of conviction that he is to bring to them salvation. He is as one who hides himself until he has broken the hard heart, and wrought in them something of that “godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation, not to be repented of” (2 Cor. vii. 10).

In this respect he fitly represents a greater than himself, one raised to a higher glory, for a wider purpose of grace. Jesus is “exalted, a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel, and the remission of sins;”—not the remission of sins only—but repentance and the remission of sins together. Joseph could have no difficulty about giving his brothers remission of sins; he has forgiven them long ago in his heart, and right gladly would he assure them of that at once. But, acting under divine guidance, he must so deal with them as to force upon them a deep and salutary exercise of soul, which in the end is to be blessed for their more complete peace,—their more thorough unity and prosperity,—in the day when the full joy of reconciliation is to be experienced.

I know not, brother, how it may be the purpose of our Joseph, who is Jesus, to deal with thine inquiring and anxious soul; he is sovereign in dispensing his gifts of pardon and peace, assurance and joy. It may be his gracious pleasure that thou shouldest have them now,—or for anything I can tell, not till by-and-by. In either case, thou art called to deep and salutary exercises of penitential sorrow. If instant relief for thy burdened conscience is granted, and he whom thou hast pierced utters at once the words, “Be of good cheer, it is I, thy sins be forgiven thee;”—with what a flood of tears shouldest thou be graciously mourning for these very forgiven sins! And if it should be otherwise with thee,—if it should seem as if this assured forgiveness were long of coming, and the prince, the Saviour, were long of showing himself,—surely thou canst not pretend that thou

hast any right to complain. Thou canst no more take it amiss than Joseph's brothers could, that thou shouldest have bitter days and nights to spend in thinking over all thy heinous guilt. Only make conscience of thinking over it with broken spirit and contrite heart;—not murmuring, not rebelling, not even feeling it to be hard, but accepting the punishment of thy sins;—and hold on, not despairing, but hoping against hope,—waiting on the Lord. For in the end it “will be no matter of regret to thee that thou hast been led to lay the foundation of thy faith very deep. The joy of morning will be all the sweeter for the weeping that has endured for a night. Let us therefore exhort one another to penitence and patience, in the spirit of the prophet's call: “Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us; in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning: and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth” (Hosea vi. 1-3).

LVIII.

THE TRIAL AND TRIUMPH OF FAITH.

Genesis xlii. 25; xliii. 14.

“Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God?”—Isaiah xl. 27.

“He giveth power to the faint: and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.”—Isaiah xl. 29,

The issue of the first visit of Israel's sons to Egypt is of a doubtful complexion. They get the corn they need; but they leave one of their number in prison. And the condition on which alone they can hope to have him released, is one which it cannot but be difficult, if not impossible, to persuade their father to fulfill. In three successive pictures, as it were, we trace the onward progress of the action, from this point where all seems dark.

I. The homeward journey of these stricken men might well be sad and dreary. The strange conduct of Joseph, in his personated character of Egyptian ruler, must have been very perplexing; it must have seemed to them the more so, the more they thought and talked of it,—and what else could they think or talk of by the way? They could scarcely look upon it as an ordinary instance of official severity and caprice, even according to the usages of tyranny in that olden time. There is something inexplicable about this naturalized Canaanite in Egypt; this man who came to Egypt as a slave, like what Joseph must have been after they had sold him; a slave “stolen away,” according to his own account, to the chief butler, “out of the land of the Hebrews;” who now, in so remarkable a manner, has got

promotion to the right hand of Pharaoh, and wields all his power. For they must have heard some rumours of his antecedents while they were so near him; and therefore they are the more perplexed by his treatment of them. The extraordinary curiosity and interest which he manifests about their family concerns, even in the midst of his seeming vehemence and passion, cannot but strike their minds. The fact of his pitiless treatment of them, so vividly recalling their pitiless treatment of Joseph, must still farther impress them. The man is harsh. But yet there is a certain tender pathos in his harshness to which they cannot be insensible. There is a kind of fascination about him, even when he calls them spies—something that keeps them submissive, and gives him an influence over them, even when he appears to be casting them off. He is of a relenting mood also; he does not insist on his first cruel proposition; he is content to retain a single hostage. He honorably pledges his faith, not only for the safe custody, but for the good treatment of this one brother, till the others come again; and he gives liberal and hospitable instructions as to their departure in peace and plenty: “Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way” (ver. 25).

These instructions, indeed, and the effects of them, are only partially known to the travellers at starting. The restoration of their money is managed secretly. But “the provision for the way” they could not but be aware of; and it must have appeared to them to be a special instance of God's providence over them, that after undergoing such humiliation and alarm, they should be thus handsomely dismissed and forwarded on their homeward journey.

Soon, however, a startling circumstance agitates their minds by the way. “As one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the inn, he espied his money: for, behold, it was in his sack's mouth. And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?” (ver. 26-28).

They are greatly at a loss. What can this mean? It can Scarcely be accident or chance. Is it then a device to entrap and ensnare

them? Are they already pursued by emissaries of the Egyptian lord, commissioned to arrest them, and bring them back on a pretended charge of fraud or theft? That can scarcely be,—for if he had intended to lay hold of them, why should he not rather have kept them, as he at first proposed, on the charge of their being spies? The thing is unaccountable. But be the explanation what it may, these men feel that it is the Lord who is dealing with them; in so singular a manner. It is still their sin that is finding them out. All this dark and strange turn of affairs is the Lord's visitation, moving them to repentance. And whatever gleams of light and hope break in upon them, through the variable mood of this mysterious governor,—so incongruously compounded of fury and of tenderness,—that too is of the Lord. It is the Lord who is causing them to “sing of mercy and of judgment,” in the exercise of that long-suffering of his which is to them salvation.

II. The scene on their return home is deeply affecting.

First, they simply narrate to their father Jacob all that had passed in Egypt (29-34). This time there is no concealment or disguise; no story invented to explain the loss of Simeon, and cover over the demand for Benjamin. The deceit once practised on their venerable parent has borne such bitter fruit, and their consciences, in the crisis of their own danger, have been so exercised about it, that they have no heart to try the same sort of policy again. Thus far, these men are now “Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile.” Then, the wonder and alarm of the discovery of every man's money in his sack's mouth, they share in all simplicity with Jacob (ver. 35).

Again, they may well ask, what can this mean? It surely is not the Egyptian ruler's ordinary way of dealing with all strangers coming to buy food in Egypt. And it clearly appears now that it is not a stratagem to procure their detention. What then? Is it intended, by this act of liberality, to lay them under an additional obligation or necessity to return, and carry with them Benjamin? Is it to put them more upon their honour, so that they cannot help revisiting Egypt to have this mysterious matter cleared up? They are afraid;—their father as well as they. The mystery only heightens the old man's distress, in the view of the whole untoward transaction.

For it is the representation of Jacob's deep dejection that chiefly fills the eye and the heart in this picture of family grief. How affecting is his first burst of complaint and expostulation! "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" (ver. 36). You have lost me two sons already. "Will you insist on my losing a third? Did you really give in to that cruel man's cruel terms, and not only consent to let him keep Simeon from me, but promise that he should have Benjamin, my Rachel's Benjamin, also? Would nothing content that ravenous Egyptian vulture but that he must make a prey of two more of my brood of loved sons, over and above that one of whose fatal loss you so simply, yet so touchingly, told him? And could you bring yourselves to acquiesce? Then am I forlorn indeed! Who, or what, is favourable or propitious to me? "All these things are against me."

It is a sad and bitter cry. Sinful, no doubt, it is, or tends to be, at least if the feeling is persisted in and indulged. But the utterance of sorrow, as nature prompts, is not to be restrained; it is not forbidden by the Lord, but rather encouraged. Jacob soon gives evidence enough of his mind and heart being schooled into an attitude of meek submission; and the schooling may have been none the worse for his giving vent freely at first to the irrepressible anguish of his soul. At all events, he carries our pity and sympathy in his distrust of his sons, and his disposition to lay the blame of this miserable state of things on them. We enter into his feelings when, looking back to their unbrotherly treatment of Joseph, even as he knew it—and he did not know the worst—and considering all their conduct since—he gives himself up to a sense of utter desolation. Will you leave me nothing? Will you take from me all? It is too much! "All these things are against me!" Even his settled obstinacy of purpose, as he sets himself against what his sons would have him to do, we are scarcely inclined very seriously to blame.

Reuben is undoubtedly in earnest in the pledge which he is willing to give of his confidence that no harm will in the end come to Benjamin; "Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee; deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again" (ver. 37).

Doubtless he would be as anxious to keep Benjamin safe as he was to keep Joseph safe. And he has evidently good hope concerning the issue of this affair—having shrewdly observed, we may suppose, something of that relenting softness in the Egyptian ruler's nature that cropped out in the midst of his rough and rugged manner—and being persuaded that compliance with his whim of having Benjamin sent as one of them, would conciliate his favour and remove his suspicions, whether real or feigned. Hence probably his readiness to offer such a guarantee as the placing of his own sons in his father's hand. His language, perhaps, is not to be understood quite literally; he could scarcely suppose that even if he failed to bring back Benjamin, his father would actually take him at his word, and put the two youths assigned as hostages to death. But it is a strong and anxious way of expressing, on the one hand, his solicitude to carry out what the ruler in Egypt had required, and on the other hand, his conviction that it was quite safe to do so—that the ruler would be found true to his part of the engagement—that Simeon would be restored, food in plenty secured, and Benjamin brought home again unharmed.

Jacob, however, is not persuaded or convinced by his eldest son's confident importunity. He knows nothing of Reuben's former care for the preservation of Joseph; it cannot therefore be expected that he should now be more willing to commit Benjamin to him than to the others. At any rate, the old man is firm in his determination not to run any risk of losing Joseph's only brother,—Rachel's only child. I could not stand it, he plaintively exclaims. Urge me no more. My mind is made up. “My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave” (ver. 38).

III. But Jacob undergoes a change of mind (xliiii. 1-14).

At first sight it might seem to be a change wrought under the pressure of mere physical necessity. As long as the supply of food brought from Egypt lasts, things remain on the footing of Jacob's expressed determination not to part with his youngest son. There is silence on the subject in the household; for it is needless to prolong

the painful and irritating discussion. There may even be hope that it may never be needful to revive it. Before their stock in hand is exhausted, plenty may have returned to the land of Canaan; and when Egypt's lordly potentate ceases to have the immense power which his command of Egypt's full granaries gives him over a starving world, he may become less tyrannical and more placable, and may be got to consent on easier terms to Simeon's release. But it is otherwise ordered by the Lord. The famine continues to become more severe rather than more mild. The corn brought out of Egypt is eaten up. The patriarch-father himself, as responsible for the household's subsistence, is the first to turn his thoughts to the land of plenty, and the storehouses on the banks of the Nile: "Go again, buy us a little food" (ver. 1, 2).

It is for the sons now to object, and to remind Jacob of the governor's solemn protest: "Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you" (ver. 3-5). They have reason on their side. They know, as their father cannot fully know, how the case actually stands. They cannot but insist upon it, as the condition of their complying with their father's command to return to Egypt, that they shall be allowed to carry Benjamin with them. How otherwise can they face the incensed and passionate viceroy, if they so flagrantly break faith with him, and so balk his fierce humor, as to ask an audience of him without that younger brother of theirs, whom he had set his heart on seeing, and whose presence with them he had so vehemently declared to be the only proof he would accept of their being not spies, but true men 1

Such considerations they urge upon their father, not, as it would seem, undutifully or unfeelingly. On the contrary, they are evidently affected by the old man's burst of sorrowful passion: "Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?" (ver. 6). There is a deep pathos in the simplicity of this question; and scarcely less in the earnestness of their reply;—"The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? and we told him according to the tenor of these words: could we certainly know that he would say. Bring your brother down?" (ver. 7.)

We could not help it, is their apology; that strange man pressed us so closely that there was no resisting him. And how could we anticipate that he would make so cruel a use of the information,—the sad family tale,—which, under the rack of an accusation of treachery, he remorselessly extracted from our lips!

The subdued tone of this defense, and explanation on the part of his sons, may have gone far to overcome their father's scruples. He must have seen now that they were in real earnest, and that they were acting under the pressure of stern necessity. At first, when immediately on their return home, they made the proposal, Jacob may have been slow to admit this. He may have been apt to suspect some sinister design,—or at least to hope that in the long run his sons would depart from so grievous a condition, and admit that a second embassy for food might be undertaken without regard to it. Now, however, when in such straits as the household are reduced to, these fathers of families persist in their averment that they dare not go to Egypt without Benjamin,—and when they give so simple, full, and touching a detail of the way in which it all came about,—the old man is not only satisfied as to the truthfulness of his sons, but made to see also that the Lord's hand is in the matter.

Judah's eager pleading, therefore, is now more a word in season than Reuben's somewhat premature offer of security had been, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever: For except we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time" (ver. 8-10).

The patriarch recovers his calm trust in God, his dignified composure. He resumes once again the firm and manly attitude which one who has known the Lord as his covenant-God ought always to maintain in adversity. There is no more any querulous complaining, any universal despondency,—“all these things are against me!” With a feeling of glad relief we see him erect and strong;—taking his proper place at the head of this whole affair;—

issuing in unfaltering terms his directions as to the conduct of the enterprise.

“Their father Israel”—Yes! he is Israel once more—“their father Israel said unto them, If it must be so now, do this; take of the best fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand: peradventure it was an oversight” (ver. 11, 12). He speaks as became him, with his own due authority. He cheerfully yields up his Benjamin; “Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man” (ver. 13). And he concludes his address with the words of pious benediction and prayer;—words of comfortable hope for them;—and for himself, blessed words of absolutely unreserved and unconditional resignation; “God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved” (ver. 14).

I scarcely know if any position in Jacob's eventful experience is more noble, in a spiritual point of view, than that which is here described. The closing declaration, “If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved,” is, in the view of all the circumstances, an instance of acquiescence in the will of God, all but unparalleled. Jacob is now in extreme old age, and he is about to be left alone, so far as the companionship of his sons is concerned. When, long ago, the ten brothers went from home to feed their flocks, Joseph was the comfort of his father's heart,—Benjamin being but a child. In his love to the ten, Jacob sends Joseph to Shechem,—and Joseph goes on to Dothan,—and there disappears. Jacob has still Benjamin, as well as the ten, to comfort him in his being bereaved of Joseph. When the ten are first constrained to go to Egypt for food, Jacob has still Benjamin left to comfort him. But now, he is to be literally left alone; Benjamin goes with the rest. And however it may be necessary to put a good face on the mission, and send the brothers off with a hopeful blessing, it is for the father a terrible venture. Already Simeon is the tenant of an Egyptian prison. This new embassy, in which all the rest join, may end in their all sharing Simeon's fate,—if not even in a worse catastrophe than that. Jacob consents to the surrender. Leave him Benjamin, and you leave him

something to look to, and lean on, after the flesh. When he gives up Benjamin, what remains? It is all, henceforth, with Jacob, an exercise of mere and simple faith,—“enduring as seeing him who is invisible.”

Let any one imagine the state of Jacob after he has thus sent all his sons away. It is the very triumph of that faith which is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Weeks or months must elapse before any tidings can reach him of the good or ill success of this expedition. The vessel that carries such a venture in its bosom may not be heard of till his grey hairs, through weary watching, have become greyer still. His fond eye, dimmed with the bitter tears of age, sees them—scarcely sees them—leaving him perhaps for ever on this earth. He may look on them, he may look on Benjamin, no more on this side of the grave. He has no express promise that he shall. What probable presumption is there that he shall? It is indeed a dark and doubtful prospect. But, by God's grace, the very extremity of the emergency rouses the old believer to a new venture of faith. He has trusted God before; he will trust him still. “I will trust and not be afraid,” is his language; “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.”

And this is the man whom but yesterday we saw thoroughly unmanned, and indulging almost in a childish, burst of passionate upbraiding against his God, as well as against his sons—“All these things are against me?” He is like one sunk in the mingled imbecility and obstinacy of helpless dotage. Where is his manly reason? Where his religious resignation—his shrewd sense—his strong faith? What a change now!

Jacob is himself; he is Israel! The pilgrim of half a century is on his feet again, with staff in hand, and eye fixed once more on “the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” This is not his rest; his tent in Canaan is not his home; its dear fellowships are not his portion. All things are not against him, though “all these things,”—“the things that are seen,”—may seem to be so. They, however, are but “temporal.” “The things which are not seen are eternal;” and they are not against him. “The earthly house of his tabernacle” may be “dissolved,” before his sons come back,

before Benjamin can be with him again. But he has “a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Thus, a second time, “when he is weak, then is he strong;”—strong in faith, seeing an unseen Lord, leaning on an unseen powerful arm, looking up into an unseen loving face, looking out for an unseen glorious home. Strong in such faith, he can attend to what is urgent in the occasion on hand, going into even its minute business details. He can order his household gravely but cheerfully, in a crisis that makes the hearts of the other inmates fail. He can bid what may be a final farewell to these stalwart and goodly young men, who, in spite of all their faults, are his sons still. He can take what may be his last look of the Benoni,—the Benjamin,—his dying Rachel left him. And calmly committing himself and his way to the God who blessed him at Bethel, and led him to Syria, and brought him back to Canaan,—the God who has guided and guarded him all his life hitherto,—the God of whom he can say, “I know in whom I have believed,”—he will walk on for the rest of his earthly sojourn,—not wearily, not grudgingly,—but rejoicingly, hopefully,—not weeping always, as if all things were against him,—but praising God who makes all things work together for his good. He will walk, and work, and suffer, and wait, as “a stranger and pilgrim on the earth, declaring plainly that he seeks a better country, even a heavenly.”

LIX.

THE DISCOVERY—MAN'S EXTREMITY GOD'S OPPORTUNITY.

Genesis xliii. 15—xlv. 3.

“They shall look upon me whom they have pierced.—Zech. xii. 10.

“They were afraid; but he said unto them, It is I; be not afraid.”—
John vi. 19, 20.

“Joseph made haste” (xliii. 30); that maybe said to be the explanation of Joseph's whole conduct on the occasion of his brethren's second visit to Egypt. He was, if we may judge from the outset of the narrative, nervous, agitated, restless: his manner abrupt, his movements quick, his whole demeanor like that of a man, as we say, in a flutter, or in a flurry,—in a state of excitement which he can scarcely control. He is all on edge, for the crisis is come. He has to save appearances, and play his part as a rough-speaking Egyptian vizier, for a little longer. But it is with far more difficulty than before that he does so now. There is a hurried fitfulness about his way of dealing with the case that almost betrays him too soon. He has enough to do to change his position, as it were, every moment, that he may keep his countenance, and not break down. All throughout, I think, this indication of an inward struggle is to be traced; and it gives intense interest, if I mistake not, to the successive parts of the scene.

I. There is an audience at the public levee: “The men stood before Joseph” (xliii. 15). The first sight of his returning brethren is almost more than he can stand; he makes haste to cut short the interview. The appearance of Benjamin is evidently too much for him (ver. 16); it is his presence that overpowers him, and makes him

fain to turn from his brethren without venturing to open his lips to them. He speaks hastily to the ruler of his house,—barely summoning courage to give these Hebrew strangers in charge to him, that he may carry them from the place of public audience to his own private residence in the palace, and prepare for their sitting at meat with him at noon. Allowing no time for explanations, he is glad thus hastily to dismiss them, even rudely as it might seem, from his presence, lest on the very seat of authority, his self-possession should give way.

For the dismissal is very summary,—and is felt by the brethren to be so: “The men were afraid” (ver. 17). Xo wonder, one would say, that the men were afraid. They apprehended evil from their being brought into Joseph's house. The governor must have some private and personal cause of offence, about which he wishes to reckon with them more closely, than he could do in an open levee. They at once conjecture what it is; it must be about “the money that was returned in their sacks :” it must be “that he may seek occasion against us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses” (ver. 18). They shrink from entering the house, until they have entreated their conductor to hear their explanation, ending with the protestation: —“We cannot tell who put our money in our sacks” (ver. 19-22). The ruler of Joseph's house takes pains kindly to reassure them; “He said, Peace be to you, fear not; your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks; I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them” (ver. 23). His manner of reassuring them is very remarkable; he uses the language, not of respect only, but even of sympathy. If he does not himself fear the true God, he reverences those who do. He is Joseph's confidential servant,—near his person,—high in his esteem. His master has not disguised or dissembled his religion; the man has seen and noted his avoiding all participation in Egyptian idolatry, and his devout consistent worship of one Supreme Being He has gathered that these strangers are of the same sort of faith with his master; and that this probably is the explanation of their having been so liberally treated formerly, as well as of their being about to be so hospitably entertained now. They come from the same part of the world to which the ruler traces his origin, and own the same God as he does. So the man accounts to himself for what has taken place,—and so he

comforts them. It is your God, your hereditary God, who has done this; therefore have peace and fear not. See, here is your brother Simeon, whom you left a prisoner and hostage, safe and well. There is no treachery or harsh treatment intended; Simeon's restoration to you is surely a sufficient pledge of the governor's good faith. Thus they are set at ease. So "the man brought the men into Joseph's house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet, and he gave their asses provender. And they made ready the present against Joseph came at noon: for they heard that they should eat bread there" (ver. 24, 25).

II. The scene at the banquet in the governor's house, it is almost an offence to touch, in the way either of criticism or of comment. Joseph's demeanor is still hurried and agitated;—he is more than ever put to it to keep up his incognito and suppress his vehement emotion, by the assumption of an abrupt and hasty manner.

The reception, as it were, in the withdrawing-room, opens in the usual style of oriental courtesy. The strangers, introduced as guests, offer their presents in the customary form, and make the prescribed obeisance (ver. 26). The great man acting the part of a princely host or entertainer, is gracious and condescending in his polite enquiries (ver. 27). And, as it would seem, he receives with that air of civil and courtly satisfaction which it becomes him to show, their grateful and deferential reply, and their repeated prostration of themselves (ver. 28). So far the conversation proceeds decorously and with dignity. It may be noticed, however, that the governor has his eyes cast down, and keeps them fixed on the ground. He does not look his invited guests in the face. Is it contempt? or indifference? or mere absence of mind? Or is it that he fears he may break down and betray himself?—But now he looks up. His eager gaze is fastened again, as in the former brief interview, on Benjamin,—“his mother's son,” as the narrative with touching simplicity remarks. He cannot stand it. Scarcely has he contrived to ask, with seeming unconcern, the obvious question that might be expected of him in the circumstances, when his self command gives way;—and fairly unmanned, with a broken benediction hastily muttered over the lad's head, he rushes out to vent his full heart alone! It is a touch of nature,—such as throughout all time, and all the world over, makes

men kin. "He lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said. Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son. And Joseph made haste: for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there" (ver. 29, 30).

How, after all, he got through the trying ordeal of the feast, we may, according to our several temperaments, conjecture. He "makes haste." That is his only safety. Without pause or interruption he hurries on the ceremonial. All, indeed, is ordered in due form, and according to strict etiquette. There is no breach of decorum, no cause of offence to any. The governor has so completely recovered his composure that, "refraining himself," he can attend even to the minute points and punctilios of the entertainment. He takes his place, and gives his orders, as if nothing had occurred to disconcert him (ver. 31). All traces of recent tears are wiped away. He leaves his chamber outwardly serene and calm,—and gives directions for the meal to be served. He takes care that the proper distinction is kept up between himself and his guests, as well as between the Egyptian courtiers and these Hebrew strangers; separate tables being prepared, in deference to a prejudice of which it would be irrelevant here to inquire the cause (ver. 32). Nay, he carries his careful discrimination still farther. With an exactness that strikes them with strange surprise, he arranges the eleven according to seniority,—so well does he remember them, individually as well as collectively (ver. 33). And paying very special attention and a very marked compliment to them all, he gratifies his feelings by singling out, in a way that might not awaken suspicion, the youngest and most interesting of their number, and loading him, probably according to the custom of the court, with peculiar tokens of his kindness: "He took and sent messes unto them from before him: but Benjamin's mess was five times so much as any of theirs. And they drank, and were merry with him" (ver. 34). Thus, as we may suppose, he hurries over the banquet; allowing himself no time to think or feel,—promoting the general hilarity,—and carrying off his own intensity of suppressed emotion under an air of busy and, as it might seem, even officious hospitality.

III. The ingenious device which Joseph adopted for securing Benjamin alone,—on the evening of the day on which he entertained his brethren, and in the view of their departure homeward early next morning,—is in keeping with his assumed character of an Egyptian vizier. It is such a trick as one might imagine to be keenly relished by some of those capricious potentates of whose whims we read in oriental fable. Why Joseph should have chosen to resort to an expedient of that sort, unless it were simply that he meant to play out his part well and consistently to the last, it is really idle to ask. Perhaps it was a hasty thought. He is not quite prepared to discover himself; and yet he can scarcely bear to let them all,—or in particular, to let Benjamin away. It will not do to repeat the old stratagem of affecting still to believe them spies, demanding still more specific proof of their being true men, and keeping one of them in security till they bring the proof demanded. He must try a new stroke of policy. And this device of the pretended divining cup may answer as well as any. It will not awaken suspicion or surprise among his ordinary Egyptian attendants: it is the kind of clever child's-play with which they are familiar.

The steward of Joseph's house hears with all gravity the order given, and prepares to obey it (ver. 1, 2). “With equal gravity, when the men have departed next morning, he hears and obeys the order to pursue them and recover the cup (ver. 3-5). He shrewdly guesses his master's design,—and sets himself coolly to carry it out.

The men are suddenly arrested in their journey (ver. 6). They hear with consternation this new charge of theft, and with solemn emphasis disclaim it (ver. 7). They appeal to the proof of honesty they have given in bringing back the money they had found in the mouth of their sacks, on the occasion of their former visit (ver. 8). And they challenge investigation, with all the confidence of conscious innocence. If there be a thief among us, you may punish, not only him, but all of us,—for we vouch for one another; “With whomsoever of thy servants the cup be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen” (ver. 9). With the utmost mildness and moderation, as it would appear to them, their captor accepts, but with a just modification, their challenge. It is enough that the guilty one of your number should himself suffer, not death,

but bondage,—while all the rest of you go free (ver. 10). So the search proceeds,—the imperturbable steward calmly superintending it, as if he knew nothing of what was coming. Deliberately taking the eldest first, and, one after another, exhausting all who are scatheless, he comes at last to the seeming culprit; “The cup was found in Benjamin's sack” (ver. 11, li).

Briefly, but how pathetically, is the effect of this exposure told! The brothers are startled and stunned. What can all this mean? What new and over-whelming evidence is this of their old sin finding them out? Is it a reality that has befallen them, or a horrid dream that haunts them? It cannot be that Benjamin, their best and fairest, has committed such a crime,—that he has requited the singular favour the strange governor showed him by such ingratitude,—that he has stained his young hands with sudden baseness. There is some dark mystery about the matter; God is dealing with them terribly in his wrath. And now, what is to be done? Is Benjamin to be surrendered, and are they to go? That, very likely, is what Joseph really wants. His heart, when he is alone after the banquet, yearns for Benjamin;—somehow, anyhow, let the others be off as they may, he must have “his mother's son.” And the scheme he hits upon may serve his purpose to detach Benjamin from the rest, and restore him to his embrace. He may even now be preparing a glad surprise for the affrighted youth who, when he is brought back alone, is to find in him, instead of an unjust and angry tyrant, a loving brother, and powerful patron and friend. If so, he is to be so far disappointed. The brothers will not consent to part company with the accused; whatever danger there may be, or whatever disgrace, they will share it with him. They are changed from what they were when they could so cruelly, and without a cause, sell their father's favorite child. Not even when there seems to be a cause, will they give up their father's last comfort now; “They rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city” (ver. 1.3).

IV. Thus the whole company return together: “And Judah and his brethren,”—Judah taking the lead now, for he had taken the lead in persuading Jacob to part with Benjamin, and had come under the most solemn obligations for his safety,—“Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house (for he was yet there); and they fell before

him to the ground” (ver. 14). This return of all his brethren together may have taken Joseph by surprise. It was still early morning. Joseph had not left his home to transact business in his public court; they found him in comparative privacy, in his palace. Their coming back in a body was fitted, perhaps, at first to disconcert, and yet afterwards it served to facilitate his plan. It was more than he had expected or desired. And it seemed to stand in the way of his special design to obtain possession of Benjamin. But at the same time, he could scarcely resent it; for it indicated a more gracious frame of mind than he may have been giving them credit for. And along with their subdued and humble deportment, all throughout, it may have had something to do with the impulse to discover himself, which, as the conversation went on, soon proved too strong for him.

At first, indeed, he keeps up his assumed sternness and gruffness of manner. He speaks as one justly offended by the secret meanness and villany, thus by supernatural or magical means discovered: “What deed is this that ye have done? Wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine” (ver. 15). He makes an attempt, also, to accomplish the object upon which his heart is set,—to separate Benjamin from the rest, and keep him with him while the others may go. This appears as the colloquy proceeds. The reply made to his first angry accusation is not very coherent: “Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants. Behold, we are my lord's servants; both we, and he also with whom the cup is found” (ver. 16). Judah speaks as one in great trepidation; he is utterly at a loss how to explain what has occurred. But, at all events, he is clear enough in his intimation that they all mean to make common cause with Benjamin. How the cup got into Benjamin's sack, they cannot tell; for they cannot believe it to be Benjamin's own doing. Be it accident, however, or contrivance, or legerdemain, they take it as a blow struck by the divine hand at all of them together. It is God touching them at the tenderest point,—wounding them all in common through their youngest—Benjamin—whom their father had, with so many misgivings and forebodings, committed to them, and whom it concerned their common honour to carry back to the old man in safety. It is a common calamity, a common judgment. Judah frankly tells this stern lord of Egypt that

they so regard it. They accept it at the hand of God as the common punishment of their untold common sin. They had offended together; and they will now also suffer together.

Not so is Joseph's rejoinder, in the character of ruler and judge. He takes high ground in justice and equity. It is Benjamin, "his mother's son," that he longs to have. It is Benjamin that he would fain contrive to keep, under all this affectation of fair and impartial dealing. It is Benjamin, and Benjamin alone that he wants: "God forbid that I should do so; but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father" (ver. 17).

V. The speech of Judah, however, alters the whole aspect of the case. The simple, natural, resistless eloquence of that most pathetic appeal, breaks down all Joseph's reserve. It may well do so. It is such an outbreak of genuine feeling as a heart like Joseph's cannot withstand. If the idea had really entered into his mind,—and much of the narrative would seem to indicate that it had,—of getting Benjamin alone to be his companion in his splendid exile, and letting the separation otherwise between himself and his father's house in the meantime continue;—if doubts as to how his other brethren might be disposed to regard him, had made him hesitate about the best way of treating them; if such considerations, connected with their former envious and cruel malice,—which might rankle still in their bosoms though all sense of it was long gone from his,—had moved him to make a difference between Benjamin and them;—Judah's appeal was fitted to work a thorough change. For it is indeed a noble pleading. The speaker rises to the occasion;—for the occasion makes the speaker. It is the very soul of truest oratory. And it is directed, perhaps unconsciously on the orator's part, to the very point of breaking down Joseph's partial purpose on behalf of Benjamin.

Joseph may mean it for a kindness. Very soon, if Benjamin is anyhow kept and the rest are suffered to go, he will relieve his young brother's anxiety, and make him a sharer in all his own prosperity. It will be his fond delight to advance Benjamin to Pharaoh's favour and Egypt's highest honour. But if any such

romantic notion has been floating in Joseph's brain, the speech of Judah is the very thing to recall him to sober thought. It sets before him, in vivid picture, the actual realities of the case, as the brother, in his overwhelming agony of spirit, simply tells an unvarnished tale of truth.

First, he adjures the governor, in most melting strains, to give him a favourable hearing: "O my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears; and let not thine anger burn against thy servant; for thou art even as Pharaoh" (ver. 18). It is a courtly opening; but it is quite artless and sincere; as much so as the opening of Paul's noble appeal to King Agrippa. The speaker is in earnest; in the earnestness almost of despair. Next, he reminds the governor of the way in which he had wrung from them the information about their domestic circumstances, of which he is now making so cruel a use (ver. 19-23). He paints now, in a few graphic strokes, the scene between them and their father, when the old man's consent to risk Benjamin was obtained, at the cost almost of a broken heart (ver. 24-29). Unwittingly he sends a shaft into Joseph's bosom, as he represents his father bewailing his beloved Rachel and her two sons,—one already lost, and the other about to be torn away. The old man, says Judah, assured us, ah! how pathetically,—and his trembling, weeping agitation confirmed the assurance,—that the loss of Benjamin, after the loss of Joseph, was more than he could survive. How then, he asks, can I face my father if I go home without Benjamin? "Now therefore, when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us (seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life); it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave" (ver. 30, 31). I made myself, he continues, answerable to my father for the lad's safe return; let me, therefore, instead of him, be the victim of thy displeasure (ver. 32, 33). Take me, and let the lad go. I dare not, I cannot, face the fatal despair which his absence must cause;—"For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father" (ver. 34).

The whole pleading most thrillingly touches the right chord in Joseph's soul. Instead of Egypt's splendour, to be shared with

Benjamin when he has entrapped him, as it were, by guile,—there rises before his eyes the image of a forlorn and desolate old man, whose fond caresses are yet fresh in his remembrance. Judah's affecting words, accompanied, one cannot doubt, with tears, in which they all share, awaken home feelings that cannot be suppressed. The aspect of severity can be maintained no longer. It is time for Joseph to relent. “Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried. Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph: does my father yet live?” (ver. 1-3).

Over the scene of the discovery a veil of reserve is cast; Joseph is alone with his brethren. No strangers witness his emotion; but the loud burst of his weeping is overheard without. His brethren cannot speak for trouble and terror; but he invites them to draw near, and addresses to them words of peace; “Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life” (ver. 3-5). It is as in the day when that prophecy shall be fulfilled, “I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him” (Zech. xii. 10). Blessed are they who so mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Two observations on this scene may be allowed.

I. The precise moment of Joseph's making himself known to his brethren,—whether we regard it as chosen by himself, or as chosen for him by God through the working of his natural feelings,—is highly significant. Certainly, it looks as if it was a sudden thought,—an abrupt change of mind;—as if up to this time Joseph had really been intending to keep Benjamin, ostensibly for a slave, and to send the rest sorrowing and despairing away,—but now, moved by Judah's pathetic pleading, found himself unable to persist in his purpose any longer. If so, it is a circumstance surely very suggestive. Jesus, I suppose, put on an air of stern and frowning severity, when he made as if he would spurn away from him, like a

dog, the woman of Canaan,—and he kept up that aspect till the instant of his being constrained by the woman's importunity to say, "O woman, great is thy faith." What a sudden change, and how seasonable! Instantly that face beams with its wonted halo of love,—that eye is dim with its wonted tear of pity,—that mouth utters its wonted words,—such as never man spake but this man! There, it was great faith that seemingly wrote the change,—here, it is great need. Nay rather, there and here alike, it is great need;—great need, prompting great earnestness and urgency—great boldness and perseverance. It was great need that furnished the woman with that keen and witty logic of hers;—"Truth, Lord, but the dogs eat of the crumbs of the children's table." It was great need that gave Judah that matchless, persuasive eloquence, which otherwise his tongue never would have known. It is great need that touches Joseph's heart. It is thy great need that touches thy Joseph's heart, O poor sinner, O fainting soul? Thy sin is terribly finding thee out; and all is very dark! The very Lord of grace and glory, on whom thy fate hangs, keeps an ominous silence;—or is about to deal out to thee a rigid measure of inexorable justice. Still cleave to him, O thou guilty one, with guilt of deepest dye on thy conscience,—cleave to him, O thou of little faith, sinking in a stormy sea. Cry to him; plead with him; wrestle with him! Refuse to let him go until he bless thee.

Lo! he smiles,—he weeps. That dark brow unbends. Those withdrawn arms are stretched out. Thou art in his embrace. He cannot refrain himself He makes himself known to thee,—to thee, the chief of sinners—to whom he rejoices affectionately to say,—I am Jesus, thy Saviour, thy friend, thy brother.

II. The manner of this disclosure is as significant as the time of it. All is unmingled tenderness and love. Not a word of upbraiding,—not a look of reproach,—not a sigh of regret or complaint. All is peace. If their old sin,—then freshly, oh! how freshly and poignantly remembered by them,—is mentioned by him at all, it is only that he may assure them of its being thoroughly forgiven. He would even seem almost to excuse it, or to excuse them,—showing how their conduct wrought out the gracious saving purpose of God. At all events, he will have them to think of that gracious saving purpose now, as giving them a pledge of there being mercy enough with God

for the very worst of them, and for the very worst deed that any of them has done.

So the apostles preached Christ to his betrayers and murderers, —telling them that the blood which they so cruelly shed, and which they so madly imprecated upon their own heads, was flowing as a fountain to cleanse them from all sin,—the sin even of crucifying the Lord of glory. So Christ discovers himself to you, O ye men of broken spirits and contrite hearts, when the Holy Spirit is showing you how you have been piercing him. “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest;” “Saul! Saul! why persecutest thou me?”—that is the utmost of his reproof Or rather, it is his affectionate, most touching, altogether irresistible expostulation.

Could the brothers withstand that appeal,—I am Joseph your brother whom ye sold into Egypt? Could Saul withstand that appeal, —I am Jesus whom thou persecutest? Canst thou withstand the appeal, when he whom thou hast been piercing, wounding, grieving afresh, till this very hour, speaks to thee as he never spoke to thee before—or speaks to thee as he has often spoken to thee before,—but with new power, as now at last thou feelest in thy inmost soul, —“I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

LX.

A TRUE BROTHER—A GENEROUS KING—A GLAD FATHER.

Genesis XLV.

“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”—John xiii. 34.

“Kings shall be thy nursing fathers.”—Isaiah xlix. 23.

“A wise son maketh a glad father.”—Proverbs x. 1.

Joseph, Pharaoh, Jacob, stand out conspicuous in this chapter,—Joseph's brotherly and filial love (ver. 4-15),—Pharaoh's grateful and generous hospitality (ver. 16-20),—Jacob's piety (ver. 21-28).

I. The address of Joseph to his brethren, is singular for its rare mixture of authority and tenderness. There is in it the calm and conscious air of the prince and prophet, tempered with all a son's reverence, and all a brother's fond familiarity. It is worthy of Joseph,—of his simple character, and of his exalted rank (ver. 4-15).

The first outburst of irrepressible feeling being over, Joseph sets himself to encourage his troubled and terrified brethren,—too troubled and too terrified to be able to answer his plain question, “Doth my father yet live” (ver. 3). He kindly bids them draw near—“Come near to me, I pray you.” And as they come near, he repeats his intimation, “I am Joseph,”—adding to it these two particulars,—“your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.” In doing so, he means to speak comfort and peace to them. It is not by way of reproach that he reminds them of the past; but rather to press home upon them the

assurance that he is still their brother. Neither his present elevation, nor the deep shame and suffering which preceded it, has separated him from them. In spite of all that might seem to have put a wide gulph between him and them, he is not estranged from them. All throughout, in the hands of the Ishmaelites, in Potiphar's house, in the cruel disgrace and pain of his unjust imprisonment, he has never ceased to feel himself to be their brother, notwithstanding their unbrotherly treatment of him. Seated on the throne of sovereign power, he is not too elevated to call them brethren still: "I am Joseph your brother." And if now he recalls the sad scene of their last parting in Canaan,—“whom ye sold into Egypt”—it is not that he may upbraid them with what they then did, but that he may show how it has been all ordered and overruled for good (ver. 5-8). It brought about what God designed; “God did send me hither.” And it is for you that I am here;—“to preserve you a posterity and save your lives by a great deliverance.” And not for you only, but for the Gentile world also, for “he hath made me a father to Pharaoh,” to benefit “all the land of Egypt.” This is not your doing, but God's.

Thus reassured, Joseph's brethren are prepared to await his orders. It cannot surprise them to find that his first concern is about his father. Once and again has Joseph, even when keeping himself unknown, inquired about the old man's life and health, with an earnestness and particularity that might seem to them unaccountable on the part of a mere stranger, and one so high in rank at a foreign court. Now the mystery is solved. That Joseph should be thus thoughtful about the fond parent whose favorite child he had been, is only natural. But surely, in the circumstances, it must have cut these men to the heart to think of the long estrangement of which they had been the cause! Could they listen unmoved to their brother's eager and impetuous urgency? “Haste ye” (ver. 9);—and again: “ye shall haste” (ver. 13). It is all hot haste to relieve the aged Patriarch's anxiety, and cheer his long darkened soul with tidings of great joy,—to tell him of his long lost son's greatness and glory,—and above all, to bring him to that son's embrace, and place him in peace and plenty under his fostering care; “Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him. Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not.” “I will nourish thee.” “And behold your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin,

that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither” (ver. 9-13).

Surely this is a message which it may well cost these men tears of penitential sorrow to receive, as it must cost them tears of shame to deliver it. Such love as Jacob's for his son, and Joseph's for his father, it has not hitherto entered into their minds to conceive. And it is such love that they have been so deeply and cruelly wounding. It is a new measure they now get, by which to estimate their crime. It is somewhat of the nature of that insight which, through the Spirit's teaching, the smitten soul gets into the mutual love of the Father and the Son; an insight that gives hitherto unimagined significancy to the dread transaction between them which guilt made necessary, and into the exceeding sinfulness of sin as causing of that state of things between the Father and the Son, of which the cry upon the cross is the expression—“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!”—making it needful for the son to become “an outcast from his God,” and needful for the Father to say, “Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd!”—and all in love, O my soul, to thee!

And then, what a message for these men to deliver! To look their injured father in the face and tell him of the long lie by which they have made his old age miserable; to recant the mean and cruel falsehood; to confess all their dark deed of villany; thus to disclose and undo the past—what a humiliation! They had need to be furnished with a gospel of the best sort,—glad tidings of great joy,—to overcome their abashed embarrassment in speaking to Joseph's father concerning Joseph.

Joseph himself seems to feel this. And, accordingly, he is at great pains to encourage them. Again and again he resumes the task. He would have them to turn their eyes away from themselves to him,—from their own sin and shame, to his glorious saving power. You see me, he cries; “your eyes see.” It is no delusion; I am not a spirit, or a ghost; I am your own brother, raised up by God to this height of princely dignity on very purpose to be your saviour. “Your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin.” He believes me; why should not you? True, you may feel that you have -wronged

me, and sinned against me, as Benjamin never did; you have that to answer for with which his conscience is not burdened. But what of that? I make no distinction now between him and you. I do not place you at a disadvantage. "Your eyes see," as well as "the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you" (ver. 12);—not to him only,—but to you as well,—and speaketh to you peace. It is I who speak to you,—not now through an interpreter, as if I could address you only in a strange tongue;—but plainly,—face to face,—mouth to mouth. And I speak to you, not to upbraid you with the past, but to send you on what, in spite of all the past, should be a pleasant errand now. Return home, to your own house, and tell what great things God has "wrought. Be not disconcerted or dismayed. Let your faltering tongue, overcoming all your natural misgivings, give forth its errand: "Ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither" (ver. 13). This grateful office rendered to him will obliterate the dark memory of every old offence. If the new insight you have got into my father's love for me, and mine for him, aggravates your distress when you think of the breach you have caused,—let it console you to be partakers of the joy that there is in our meeting, father and son, now that all that pain is over.

But not even yet is Joseph satisfied that he has done enough. Still fresh tokens of his heart's love are lavished on Benjamin and on them all,—kisses and tears: "He fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them" (ver. 14, 15). Nor will he leave off kissing them all and weeping with them, pouring out his soul in a flood of sympathy, until he has fairly vanquished all their fear, and brought them to converse freely, boldly, familiarly: "after that, his brethren talked with him" (ver. 15).

Ah! truly, Joseph is the model of what a brother ought to be, "a brother born for adversity!" He is the sort of brother you need in your deep grief, ye sin-sick, sin-laden, sorrow-laden children—the fitting type of the brother you have in the well-beloved Son of the Father! He is never weary of speaking peace to you,—assuring you that he remembers not any wrong of yours against him; that the blood which your sin shed cleanseth that sin away; that he whom

you crucified is at God's right hand, mighty to save! How is he ever striving, by his word and Spirit, to reveal himself to you, and to get you to see him! How does he raise you from the dust and set you on a rock that you may sound his praise! How does he plead with you and expostulate with you, that you may lay aside all your doubts and hesitancy, and believe him when he talks with you, and bids you go on your way to the Father rejoicing! How does he kiss you and weep with you,—loading you with tenderest caresses,—refusing to be content until you, his brethren take heart, and summon courage,—to “talk with him.” “To talk with him!” Yes! For that is what he wants—what alone can prove that all at last is right between him and you—that there is no more dislike, or jealousy, or suspicion, or servile dread—that you do indeed now know him, and trust him, and love him, as a brother. He would not merely talk affectionately with you—he would have you to talk confidingly and confidentially with him. That is what alone could satisfy Joseph. It is what alone will satisfy your Joseph, your Jesus. Receive then his kindly advances. Believe his gracious words. Let him show himself to you, and embrace you and sympathize with you. “And after that,” as “his brethren,” “talk with him.” Frankly, unreservedly, in the confidence of brotherly familiarity, talk with him; of his Father and your Father, of the house with many mansions, of the coming joy of the re-united family's home-meeting there; or of his past experience in his humiliation; or of your own present experience in your sin and sorrow; or of his kingdom; or of your own grief; or of duty; or of trial; or of death; or of his church; or of your own household and friends. Only talk with him, ye brethren of his, of all, of anything, that may interest him and you. He refuses to let you go until you “talk with him.”

II. On this occasion, the conduct of Pharaoh is princely, and truly noble. It is in keeping with all that we read of this illustrious monarch—surely no ordinary specimen of the race of oriental kings, as we are apt to conceive of them. The grace and generosity of his cordial congratulation is at once a pleasing proof of the high place which Joseph's wise fidelity has won for him in his royal master's esteem, and a refreshing instance of the king's own goodness of heart—his kindly nature—his grateful appreciation of true and honest service; “And the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house,

saying, Joseph's brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants" (ver. IG).

The discovery of his vizier's lineage and family connections might have been distasteful to a sovereign of narrow mind. The melting scene of kissing and tears might have awakened, in the stern bosom of a tyrant, no other emotion than contempt for such womanish weakness. The liberty which Joseph took in disposing, as it would seem, upon his own authority, of Egypt's territory, and alienating what he chose of it to a strange tribe, might have been resented as the insolence of upstart greatness. But it is not so. Pharaoh is above all such petty jealousies;—he delights in the story which he hears;—its romance excites him and its pathos touches him. He has thorough sympathy with his favorite, who has served him so well, in this new and strange turn of fortune, as well as in all the varied experience that has gone before and prepared the way for it. And he carries the whole court along with him in his sympathy. Joseph's proposed arrangements for his father's and his family's accommodation are approved of warmly, and promptly seconded (ver. 17-20). The king in fact cannot do enough to testify his regard for Joseph. Not only is there to be a goodly portion of Egypt's best awaiting the acceptance of Jacob and his house, when they come from Canaan; it is the monarch's pride and pleasure to undertake the whole charge of the removal. And all expedition must be used. Whatever conveyances are needed for the little ones and the wives, Egypt is to supply them, that no time may be lost in preparing to start from Canaan. Nor is the packing of the household goods to be suffered to cause delay. There is no need to care for the stuff. Let it be abandoned and left behind, rather than that there should be any tarrying. Why be burdened with such impediments? Let the old man, and all who live with him, come quickly. Let them come themselves, and make a bonfire of their furniture and property, or a legacy to their neighbours. Why should they be troubled about these things, when "the good of all the land of Egypt is theirs, and they may eat the fat of it?" So impatient is this right-hearted, large-hearted prince to carry out the hospitable thoughts on which he is intent.

It must have been with deeply gratified feelings that Joseph came forth from his interview with so kind a master, and proceeded to give his final instructions to his departing brethren. Such confidence as is reposed in him, such sympathy as is shown with him, such royal bountifulness, may well repay years of suffering and toil. Frankly he acknowledges and accepts Pharaoh's liberality, and faithfully he executes his commands. His brethren are now thoroughly furnished and equipped with all necessaries for their journey and return (ver. 21-23). Thereafter, with one parting word of admonition, Joseph dismisses them in peace; "So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way" (ver. 24).

Is there a quaint dash of humor in this significant hint: "See that ye fall not out by the way?"—a touch of sly, sarcastic, good-natured irony? Nay, it is no time,—and Joseph has no heart,—for that. There is a graver, deeper, better, meaning in what he says. These brethren of his have been getting a new lesson in the school of love,—in the divine faculty of holy charity. They have just come to the knowledge of a kind and degree of love, of which they had no conception before. For in truth love like Joseph's to his father and his brethren is a new thing to them. The very idea of it is new. Hence they are so slow to take it in, to understand it,—to believe that it can be real. But they have been got to see it and to feel it. They have now some insight into Joseph's open heart. He has given them such discoveries of what is in it that they can stand out incredulous no longer. Love so tender and so true; so prodigal of self; so mindful of all but self; so self-sacrificing and self-forgetting; so meek, so merciful, so mild, so melting; love that can so forgive, and pity, and embrace, and weep; love that will take no denial and suffer no repulse, but will have the loved ones, almost in their own despite, in its embrace; Joseph's love; the love of Joseph's heart; has found entrance into their long frozen hearts, and opened the warm fountains of tears and gladness there. Forgiven much, they love much. Joseph they love as they never thought to have loved a living being before; and they love one another as they never loved one another before. But it is a new affection. They are novices and raw recruits in this discipline of charity. The old nature in them may still be apt to get the better of the new creation. They may well therefore

be grateful for that deep, love-thrilling, voice of admonition, “See that ye fall not out by the way.”

“A new commandment,” says the Lord, “I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John xiii. 34). Like Joseph's brethren, if you have been moved to believe in Jesus, you have been taking a new lesson in the way of loving. You have become acquainted with a style and manner of love far transcending even Joseph's. The love of Jesus! Who can know it? But something of it you know. Experimentally you know it. For have you not bathed his feet with your tears, and wiped them with the hairs of your head? Have you not heard his voice, “Neither do I condemn thee?” Have you not looked to him lifted up on the cross, laying down his life for you?

Yes. It is a new commandment,—to love as he loves. And its observance among yourselves, and towards all men, is with you the growth of a new nature. Take therefore always in good part every warning against the risk of this new-born grace of love or charity giving way, under the irksome annoyances of the road you have to travel, and the infirmities of the brethren with whom you have to travel it. See that ye “walk in love, as Christ also loved you, and gave himself for you an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour” (Eph. V. 2). “See that ye fall not out by the way.”

III. The arrival of the brethren at their father's house in Canaan, closes this touching scene—“They went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, and told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt” (ver. 25, 26).

The patriarch's reception of their news is simply told;—“Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not” (ver. 26). He believed them not. Is it for very joy—as it is said of the assembled disciples, when they saw the risen Lord, and his pierced hands and feet, that they yet believed not for joy? Or is it that he cannot trust their truthfulness? And yet the fact that they are all there,—Simeon and Benjamin and all of them,—may attest what they tell. However they may have deceived him before, can he fail to see evidence in their whole

manner now that they are giving him a true report? Nay, it is enough to say that under this new excess of emotion the old man's heart fainted. For a time he could not take the tidings in; they quite overwhelmed and overmastered him. And no marvel. He has to undo the past of years. He has to turn back the whole tide and current of his feelings, from the dismal day when he accepted as a fact Joseph's death, and began to make up his mind to a stern and sad submission. For the rest of acquiescence in a fixed and certain doom, is now to be suddenly exchanged for the restless agitation of reviving hope. At once everything is unsettled again and in suspense. The very idea of its being possible that Joseph may be yet alive, is more than the old man's shattered nerves can stand; "His heart fainted."

But he rallies, and can listen to their detailed account of the whole wondrous providence they have to report; "And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them" (ver. 27). Gradually his mind is strengthened to take it all in. Piecemeal, as it were, or bit by bit, the reality of the strange transactions of which he hears becomes more and more palpable. The actual sight of the conveyances provided for carrying him and his house bodily to Egypt, helps him to realize as true what looks so like a tale or a dream (ver. 27).

It is no imagination, no vision, no deception; the visible, tangible, sensible, evidences of the fact are there before his eyes. The spirit of the aged and tried believer revives. He can still believe,—and find that "all things are possible to him that believeth." He is still Israel,—nay, now again he is more than ever Israel,—strong to prevail with God. "Israel said. It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die" (ver. 28). It is as Israel that he says this. It is as Israel that he rises to the emergency,—and shakes off the fainting helplessness of unbelief. "His spirit" revives to the obedience of faith, "It is enough;"—and to the joy of faith, "Joseph my son is yet alive;"—and to the walk of faith, "I will go and see him before I die."

Thus the patriarch again approves himself to be worthy of the name of Israel. For I cannot but think that there is a meaning in the

use of this name, at this crisis. There is a remarkable change here from Jacob to Israel. "Jacob's heart fainted" at first; but "Israel said. It is enough." As Jacob, the patriarch has been weak,—apt to say, as he refuses to be comforted, "I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning,"—or "all these things are against me,"—or "me ye have bereaved," or "ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow into the grave." Occasionally he has been roused to an exercise of his wonted strength of faith,—as when, after much hesitation, "Israel their father" consented to risk Benjamin with his brothers into Egypt. He has doubtless been disciplining himself into submission to the sovereign hand of God, learning to be still and know that he is God,—to be dumb, not opening his mouth, for God hath done it. But he has been despondent still,—fearful of evil,—slow to take in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of peace,—ready to imagine, even when he hears good news, that it may be too good news to be true. Now however he is Israel once more. He will doubt no longer. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Has he not, even in the Lord's wrestling with him, overcome? Is not this the answer to many a prayer for light on the dark dealings of the Lord with him? Is it not an answer infinitely beyond what he could ask or think? "At evening time" there is to be "light" indeed! (Zech. xiv. 7). "They told him all the words of Joseph; and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived; and Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die" (ver. 27, 28).

LXI.

FAITH QUITTING CANAAN FOR EGYPT—CANAAN LEFT FOR JUDGEMENT.

Genesis xlvi. 1-27.

“Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.”—Ps. cv. 23.

“Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.”—Luke xix. 44.

Egypt is now to be for a long period, measured by centuries, the home or refuge of God's chosen Israel, in order that, in the fulness of time, a signal historical event may become a significant Messianic prophecy. To Moses, the Lord said: “Thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my first-born; and I say unto thee. Let my son go that he may serve me” (Exod. iv. 22, 23). By the mouth of Hosea, the Lord says: “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hosea xi. 1). And the inspired Evangelist interprets and applies the symbolic prediction. Mary's husband “arose, took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Matt. ii. 14, 15). To lay a foundation for this divine oracle, involving as it does a great general principle of the divine administration,—that salvation comes through suffering, liberty through service, life through death,—the descent of the holy family into Egypt is ordained.

Jacob yields to the solicitation of Joseph, and the invitation of Pharaoh. He makes up his mind to leave Canaan; and that, not for a

short personal visit merely to his son in Egypt, but for a protracted sojourn of his whole household there. They are to be established and domesticated for long generations on the banks of the Nile. In all this Jacob exercises faith. It is by faith that he goes down, with all his children, into Egypt. It is by faith that he takes the step which is to prove so critical, not for himself only, but for the people and nation of which he is the head; by faith having for its object, not merely a human message or testimony, however cheering and consoling, but a divine warrant.

This is made palpable by the transaction between him and his covenant-God which marks his departure from the land of promise, and his committal of himself and his house to a strange country (ver. 1-4). The scene of the transaction is fitly chosen; it is Beersheba,—on the confines of the sacred territory. There Abraham made a covenant by oath with his neighbour Abimelech, the Philistine King of Gerar;—planting a grove, and calling upon the name of Jehovah the everlasting God (xxi. 22, 23). He was dwelling at Beersheba when the great trial of his faith took place, in the matter of the command to sacrifice Isaac (xxii.) At Beersheba, in the clays of Isaac, the transaction with the king of Gerar, whence its name was derived, was in a remarkable manner repeated (xxvi.) It was for the most part Isaac's home, where he was residing when he blessed Jacob and Esau (xxviii.) It was afterwards a border city, marking one of the limits of the land of Israel (Judges XX. 1). Jacob probably lived near it, and had occasion to pass through it on his way to Egypt.

He pauses there. The place reminds him of his father Isaac, and of his father's habitual fear and worship of God. If he has been moved to undertake the journey on Joseph's invitation and at the entreaty of his other sons, relying on Pharaoh's royal honour,—and as yet with too little consultation and prayer for ascertaining the will and seeking the countenance of the Lord,—he feels his need of this at Beer-sheba. He cannot pass a spot hallowed by so many pious memories, and so full of the associations of his father's house; he cannot quit the last corner of the holy land of promise on which his foot is to stand; he cannot bid a final farewell to Canaan, the country promised to his race;—at his age, it must be a final farewell;—

without a solemn renewal of his covenant with the Lord,—without waiting for a renewal of the covenant on the part of the Lord himself. Therefore “he offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I” (ver. 1, 2).

The burden of the divine communication is, “Fear not to go down into Egypt” (ver. 3). For there was cause of fear in Jacob's circumstances;—there might well be fear in Jacob's heart. It was a hazardous movement on which he was venturing. To flit and change his place of residence at all, at so great an age, is of itself a trial. Leave me to repose, the much vexed and weary patriarch might have said; let Joseph come to visit me, and bring such tokens of his filial love as he may choose. But why must I unsettle all my ways of life, lift my feet from the very side of the quiet ancestral grave in which I long to rest, and undertake toil and travel from which my tottering frame shrinks, to become in my last days a stranger among; strangers of a strange-e and foreign tongue? Then, is it safe to reckon on security in that strange land? Joseph's affection may be sure, but his life is precarious. His heart towards me may be trusted, but is the king's heart towards him to be equally relied on? A sudden caprice in the monarch's breast, or a sudden revolution in his realms, or an. invading foe, or a change of dynasty, or any one of many possible, nay probable, contingencies, may change Joseph's seat near the throne to his old bed in prison, as abruptly as the prison was exchanged for the throne. And where then is Israel? It can be no cause of wonder to find Jacob at Beersheba beginning to be afraid.

The first eagerness of his desire to go to Joseph, the first excitement of the good news from a far country on the strength of which he has been persuaded to go,—may well be giving place to certain anxieties and ominous alarms, as he now more calmly considers the risks and dangers of his undertaking.

Especially he might be apt to fear, as he called to mind the dark prophecy with which he must have been familiar, which held suspended over his house the doom of a long and bitter subjection to a foreign foe. He could not but have fresh in his memory and before his eye, at Beersheba, the scene of that memorable night when the

Lord appeared to Abraham and justified him as a believer (xv). Jacob is probably on the very spot where Abraham then lay. In spirit, as he recalls the past, and is in Abraham's place;—in the midst, as his fancy puts it, of the materials of Abraham's sacrifice;—that ominous voice of woe,—“thy seed shall be a stranger,”—“shall serve,”—“shall be afflicted four hundred years,”—is sounding in his ears. Is the time come? Is he, under the impulse of natural affection sorely tried, and now at last longing to be gratified, bringing on the fulfilment of that terrible oracle? Ah! he may well tremble, and shrink,—and hesitate on the brink,—and almost resolve to turn back.

But the Lord says, “Fear not.” (1.) Fear not, for “I am God, the God of thy father.” I am God the Almighty, having all power; and I am thy father's God, pledged in covenant to make all things work together for good to his seed and thine. (2.) Fear not, for “I will there make of thee a great nation;” not here, but there; in Egypt. Thy going down into Egypt does not frustrate, it fulfills my purpose. It may be a trial, and the beginning of trials; but it is an indispensable preliminary to the triumph. (3.) Fear not, for “I will go down with thee unto Egypt.” “I will not leave thee nor forsake thee.” Whatever ill may there await thee or thy seed, “I will not leave you comfortless; I will come unto you.” (4.) Fear not, for if I send thee and go with thee, “I will also surely bring thee up again,” In thy posterity, in the great nation I am to make of thee, I will bring thee up again. And even thyself personally I will bring up. Thy bones shall not rest in Egypt; they shall be laid here, in Canaan. And in the resurrection thou shalt inherit the land. (5.) Fear not, finally, though the years of thy pilgrimage are to close in death, far off from the holy land. For, as I said to Abraham on that awful night, “Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace,”—so say I to thee,—Thou shalt fall asleep in peace, in the arms of thy beloved,—“Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes” (ver. 3, 4). “Fear not,” therefore, “thou worm Jacob” (Is. xli. 14).

Reassured by so gracious and seasonable a vision—now strong in faith as the Israel of God—the patriarch pursues his journey (ver. 5-7). Nothing occurs by the way deserving notice—no incident or

adventure of any interest. "All his seed brought he with him into Egypt."

Thus the descent into Egypt is accomplished. It is a critical era in the history of the chosen race. And it is therefore only natural that occasion should at this stage be taken for a sort of census, that may bring out its exact state, as regards the gross number of which it is composed, and the several tribes into which it is to be distributed.

The list or catalogue given of Israel's family (ver. 8-27) has occasioned considerable difficulty. In the first place, the number seventy (ver. 27), while it agrees with that given in other parts of the Hebrew Pentateuch (Exod. 1-5; Deut. 10-22), differs from that given by Stephen, in his defense before the Sanhedrim (Acts vii. 14). He makes it seventy-five, according to the Greek Translation of the Old Testament then in common use. The names also are somewhat perplexing. A minute examination of them, and a comparison of this list with two other enumerations of the original heads of the Jewish community, apparently somewhat parallel or cognate to this one (Num. xxvi.;? Chron. ii.-viii.), suggest questions of identity not easily solved. And the mention of two females, and only two, Dinah (ver. 15) and Serah (ver. 17), is embarrassing. Great labour and research have been expended by learned men on the clearing up of these perplexing points of detail—and much ingenuity has been exercised—not altogether with a satisfactory result. This should not be either a surprise or a stumbling-block to any candid mind; and that, as I think, for two sufficient reasons.³

³ For more particular satisfaction, the following additional remarks may be useful. (1.) Nowhere is there a greater likelihood of errors having crept into the sacred text, through careless or ignorant copying of manuscripts, than in lists of proper names and such like—and nowhere is it less easy to discover or correct the errors by sound criticism. (2.) The principles upon which these genealogical trees or tables were constructed among the Israelites, can be only very imperfectly known or conjectured. For generations before the writing of the books of Moses, they must have been traditionally preserved by being handed down in the chosen family—perhaps embodied in current song or poetry—some of them even committed, in a rude fragmentary way, to public or domestic registers, or records of some sort. They were probably not meant to be exhaustive, or to comprehend all the individuals concerned. A selection was apparently made of heads, or chiefs, or leading persons—and so made, for the most part, as, for the sake of easy memory, to give a round number rather than a fractional or broken one. (3.) Here,

1. It is very obvious that in a book like the Bible, composed and compiled at sundry times and in diverse manners, and containing varied and minute chronologies and genealogies, there must be many things that would be better understood, and could be more easily explained long ago, at the time, than they can be now; just as we believe, from its prophetic character, that there may be some of these very things that will come to be more clear, in themselves and in their use, as the end of all draws near. Meanwhile we need not be greatly troubled if we have to confess that not a few knotty questions of the sort indicated defy satisfactory solution.

2. We must allow to men writing under the inspiration of the Spirit the same liberty of using current popular phraseology, and stating matters of notoriety in the customary way, that we would concede to any honest author in the like circumstances. Such an author does not scruple to give the round numbers, and broad, brief summaries, artificially framed as helps to memory, or as making a neat scheme or system in the story or the genealogy,—when these are the familiar modes of reckoning among his readers, and when, as they stand, they sufficiently answer the purpose he has in view. If he were not to do so, if he were not to be thus far accommodating to prevalent usage, if he were to affect a minute, martinet, and punctilious accuracy, even down to trifling details of that sort;—altering when there was no real occasion for it, and as if for mere alteration's sake, commonly received versions of familiar records and traditions;—not only would he be justly chargeable with a

for instance, in particular, it is not conceivable that there were only two women in Israel deserving of mention upon the occasion of the settlement in Egypt. We read (ver. 5-7) of Jacob's daughters, and the wives and daughters of his sons; and again of Jacob's sons' wives (ver. 27), as being over and above the seventy. The presumption is that as for the most part heads of future houses in Israel are here singled out, so there may have been others at the time equally conspicuous of whom no mention is made. (4.) Probably the number seventy or seventy-five—for evidently it was not held to be material which of the two was preferred—was technical and artificial, if we may so speak—not intended to be an exact historical enumeration, but a kind of convenient, shorthand summary—representing clearly enough to the successive generations of Israelites the state of the household at the time of the settlement in Egypt—and capable of easy application to the more complete and regular arrangement of the tribes, whether on their coming out of Egypt, or in the wilderness, or in Canaan.

certain prudish pedantry, but he would fatally damage his chance of acceptance and usefulness among the people. The liberty which any honest writer would exercise in such particulars, ought not to be denied to one writing by inspiration. The Spirit, superintending what is written, and making himself responsible for every word of it, is not bound to make the author whom he inspires more of a pedant in point of accuracy than you or I would choose to be, in alluding to old histories, quoting old books, and using old registers and recollections.

The essential element in the narrative here is, that a mere handful of men and women was all Israel,—as it went down into Egypt. Very slowly hitherto had the chosen race increased. Abraham, after he was told that his seed was to out-number the stars and the sand, had to wait for years before his one chosen child of promise came. Sixty years after, Jacob was born; and another interval of at least eighty years elapsed before he became a father. For nearly two centuries the promise to Abraham hung by a single, often a doubtful, thread. Even now, after another half century,—when the period of his seed's bondage in a strange land, of which Abraham had been warned, is about to begin to run,—it is a single family that migrates from Canaan to Egypt,—as much so as when Abraham, in the character of a patriarchal chief, led and ruled his household at the first. There is scarcely yet the incipient form or outward aspect of a tribe. The idea of a great nation is still in the clouds.

Did any such idea occur to Pharaoh, when he sanctioned and enforced so warmly his prime minister Joseph's invitation? Was it a permanent settlement of Joseph's kinsmen in his dominions that he had in view? Did he contemplate their growing into a distinct people, preserving their nationality, and becoming formidable for their numbers? Or did he mean that their sojourn in his realm should be short,—limited to the duration of the famine which occasioned it? Or, if he wished them to stay longer, did he anticipate their getting merged and lost in the general mass of Egypt's teeming population? “Who can tell? In all likelihood Pharaoh had no fixed purpose or expectation about the matter at all. Joseph was a favorite, and he was glad to show kindness to Joseph's father and brethren. Joseph,

while conforming to Egyptian usages in things civil, has retained his own peculiar religious notions and practices; his father and his brethren may very likely do the same. The king does not care much about the matter; he does not look far before him. He little dreams of what fruit the tiny seed now planted in his land is to bear; he knows not he is unconsciously fulfilling the divine decree.

Has Jacob, or have his sons, or any one of them,—Joseph for instance,—any clearer insight? Or are they all led like the blind by a way that they know not? Joseph probably has as yet no suspicion that he is bringing the family down to Egypt for such a destiny as awaits them; he simply desires to have them with him to share the sunshine of royal favour. His heart is in Canaan, which he believes to be the heritage of his house. In his care at the first about their dwelling apart,—not less than in his care at last about his own bones,—we see evidence of his faith in the promise made to Abraham. But in bringing his father's family into Egypt he little reckons on the long interval that is to elapse before Canaan is again reached. And his brethren, in this whole affair, seem to have walked all along by sense rather than by faith.

But Jacob was a believer in regard to it. He had in view the fulfilment in Egypt of that prophecy of mingled weal and woe which Abraham received;—about his seed growing into a great nation; and about their doing so under oppression calling ultimately for the signal vengeance of the Most High against their oppressors. It needed a strong faith to sustain aged Israel in taking a step thus pregnant with so much evil. He does not take it in ignorance; his eyes are open to all its issues. But he is cheered by the assurance of a glorious, joyous, return home at last,—and by the hope, meanwhile, of having Joseph to close his eyes in peace.

And now Canaan has no longer within its borders the leaven of God's chosen seed, but is left to its old inhabitants, until their iniquities shall be full. Not a foot of the soil beyond a sepulcher, the sepulcher which Abraham bought from the sons of Heth;—for the well which he got by treaty with Abimelech at Beersheba, and the parcel of ground which Jacob bought, were both of them uncertain possessions at this time, and need not be taken into account;—save a

sepulcher, then, not an inch of the territory belonged to the departing family. All connection with the land is broken off. Once only, at the burial of Jacob, is there any revisiting of its borders. And thereafter it is all as if never foot of a God-fearing man, or a God-fearing family, had trod its soil.

What traces, what memories, what influences have the Israel of God bequeathed, now that the time of their sojourn is for the present over? Alas! how much is there to humble and sadden them, if they will but pause and think, as they cast their last look on the plains and on the people they are leaving behind them! Crimes and sins of heinous dye,—instances of unbelief in God and conformity to an ungodly world,—unbrotherly dissensions,—unneighbourly revenges,—scandals, stumbling-blocks, which their evil lusts and passions have put in the way of those whom a consistent walk, and holy example, and pure and warm charity, might have won;—such recollections may well overwhelm them with bitter shame and sorrow, as they bid a final adieu to the scenes of their long sojourn in the land of their pilgrimage. Some recollections of piety and love will doubtless linger, when they are gone, among the people who have been the witnesses of their walk. But ah! how dimly has their light been shining! How uncertain a sound has their trumpet been giving! It would have been good for them, during the years of their witness-bearing for God among ungodly men, had they been anticipating the day when that witness-bearing must cease, and had they asked themselves beforehand how then, at its close, they would be able to stand the retrospect!

Surely, for every church, for every believer, there is a lesson here. I must soon quit the place that now knows me, and quit it for ever. What savour, of death unto death, or of life unto life, will my occupancy of it leave when it is over, when I am gone,—and the place that now knows me knows me no more?

LXII.

ISRAEL'S WELCOME IN EGYPT—TO BE KEPT THERE TILL THE TIME COMES.

Genesis xlvi. 28—xlvii. 10.

“The Lord shall be known in Egypt.”—Isaiah xix. 20.

Taking together the end of one chapter and the beginning of another, we have an incident complete in itself, and of great significancy, as regards the purpose of God in the development of his church's history. The chosen seed, like “a corn of wheat,” is to “fall into the ground and die,” in order that after many days it may “bring forth much fruit” (John xii. 24). The long underground concealment of the Egyptian sojourn and captivity, preparatory to the great resurrection of the nation at the time of the Exodus, is now about to begin. And the manner of its commencement is to be clearly marked. It is to be no obscure and stealthy midnight movement, but an honourable transaction, signalized in high places,—as was the burial of Jesus, when Joseph of Arimathaea got Pilate's consent to pay all respect, along with Nicodemus, to the body of the crucified. Thus Jacob is received, on his arrival in Egypt, with all honour, first, by his son Joseph (xlvi. 28-34), and next by the king (xlvii. 1-10).

Joseph's reception of his father and brethren is both affectionate and politic. There is in it the warm, gushing affection of a loving son and brother; but there is in it also the sagacious policy of a prince and ruler, who has to manage the affair on hand, as one of government and diplomacy, with a sound and wise discretion. Jacob makes his entry, as it would seem, with some measure of state. Either by way of precaution, or to show that he comes as an independent patriarchal chief, he abstains from going at once direct

to his son. He is to make it manifest from the first, before the eyes of all the Egyptians, that while he comes on Joseph's invitation, he does not come to occupy a subordinate position;—as if he and his household were to be mere hangers on, as it were, in Joseph's palace, to swell the number of his attendants, and be simply pensioners at his table. That is not Joseph's own desire or design. He wishes his father to take his proper place, as the acknowledged and honoured head of a distinct patriarchal community. Accordingly a suitable residence has been prepared and set apart for him in Goshen,—and thither Jacob turns aside (ver. 28).

From thence, in due form, he sends Judah as an ambassador to announce his arrival to Joseph (ver. 28). There is evidently something of the nature of courtly ceremony here,—as there is also in Joseph's stately manner of approach to Jacob; he “made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father to Goshen, and presented himself unto him” (ver. 29). It may have been to keep up appearances before the Egyptians that this was thus arranged; if so, it was probably a wise policy.

All policy, however, is forgotten when son and father meet: “He fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while” (ver. 29). It is all nature now; and it is nature, as is nature's wont, with much matter in little bulk;—a whole scene compressed into a few words,—and these the simplest.

To enlarge here would be presumptuous.

No weeping like that of Joseph, lasting “a good while,”—if we take in all the circumstances; the early fondness, the long, long separation, the wondrous re-union;—no such weeping anytime or anywhere else, except when “Jesus wept!”

And only once again is the resistless pathos of Jacob's plaintive word of acquiescence paralleled;—“Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive!”—once and once only,—in the “Nunc Dimittis;” “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

But Joseph is a ruler, as well as a son and brother; in the capacity of ruler he must make due provision for the emergency that has occurred. Nor is that so easy as might at first appear. If it were only the hospitable entertainment of his kindred that he had to look to, it would be no difficult task to provide for that. He stands so well with the king, and has such absolute command over all the resources of the kingdom, that he can at once secure for his kinsmen all honourable accommodation in the house and court of Pharaoh. But that is not enough for him; it is not what he wants. He is willing that his father's family should cast in their lot with him in Egypt. But the dizzy height of his own preferment does not blind his eyes to the necessity of placing them, if it be possible, on a footing which they may maintain, independently of his own precarious favour with the king, or the king's successors. Nor is he insensible, we may well suppose, to the satisfaction of being himself discovered to be one of a family for whom he can claim an independent standing. He would have those whom he is introducing to a share in his exaltation established, as a peculiar people, in the possession of a territory of their own. Hence his care beforehand as to the manner of their introduction to Pharaoh. He proposes to take advantage of their business being that of shepherds, to secure for them the separate habitation in the fertile region of Goshen which it is his aim that they shall have. He will even make his own use—for their good—of the ill repute in which their occupation is held: “for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians” (ver. 33, 34).

What special reason there was for this antipathy is not said. It may have been the recollection of some recent invasion of a shepherd tribe from the desert. Or it may have been the result of Egypt's high civilization, causing settled trades or manufactures to be of chief repute, and casting discredit on the old modes of life which roving hordes, with no property but their flocks and herds, were accustomed to pursue. Be that as it may, it is a shrewd device of policy on the part of Joseph,—if it be not rather the inspiration of divine wisdom,—to make the very lowliness of the calling of his brethren the means at once of their security and of their isolation. It is not by claiming for them a high public rank, and pushing them forward as entitled to honourable consideration for their relationship

to him, that he wins for them the place which he deems it best and safest for them to occupy. No. It is rather in the position of the outcast of the world,—the despised and rejected of Egypt's busy merchants and proud fastidious fashionables,—that he sees fit to place them. He would rather have them to be an abomination than a delight to the Egyptians. Egypt's frown is better for them than Egypt's flattery and fellowship. It is the same now. The world's hatred is safer for the friends of Jesus than the world's smiles. “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake” (Luke vi. 22).

Joseph's introduction or presentation of his kindred to Pharaoh is evidently an affair of some little delicacy. He manages it with his usual tact; or rather With that mixture of sagacious policy and strong feeling which seems to have been natural to his character. We have seen how he has prepared his brethren, “his father's house,” beforehand, and primed them, as it were, for the royal audience awaiting them. He has come to an understanding with them as to what he is to say about them in introducing them to the king, and what they, when introduced, are to say to the king about themselves.

And now he goes about the business, as arranged, with a certain elaborate observance of form that agrees well with ancient oriental manners. There is also, however, on the part of Joseph an evident design to maintain the independent standing and dignity of his father's house, and to give to their settlement in Egypt the prestige of a sort of royal recognition of their independence.

I. Joseph enters the royal presence alone, and makes his report to Pharaoh (ver. 1). He tells the king of the arrival of his father and brethren, and also that he has taken it upon himself to settle them at Goshen. It is a fertile district, fitted for pasture rather than for agriculture. It is on the frontiers of Egypt, towards the Arabian wilds, where roving nomadic tribes of shepherds are accustomed to pitch their tents and feed their flocks. It has been conjectured that it was a district from which some invading Arab host had only very recently been expelled, and which, though reclaimed and recovered by the Egyptian monarch, as a part of his dominions, was not yet

occupied, and was not likely to be speedily or fully occupied, by Egypt's native population. For the highly civilized Egyptians, who had made great progress in arts as well as arms, preferred for the most part a more central position and more settled employments. They were growers of wheat and all sorts of grain. They were skilled in linen and other manufactures. They carried on a considerable trade. Hence they naturally shrunk from the neighborhood of the constantly migrating hordes, who lived by pasturage and by plunder,—whose wealth was in flocks and herds, as their home was in camps, and their joy in war. A locality like Goshen, on the very borders of the land, and scarcely regained out of the grasp of these alert and almost ubiquitous enemies, ever on the watch for fresh mischief, might be apt to lie waste for want of Egyptian settlers; and in its ambiguous state of half conquest and half occupancy, might be a source of weakness rather than of strength to the Egyptian commonwealth. In such a condition of affairs, it might be a good stroke of policy to have it inhabited by a young and enterprising family of shepherds, disposed to detach themselves from the princes of Palestine and the wild chiefs of Arabia, and to cast in their lot, for whatever reason of necessity or choice, with the fame and the fortunes of Egypt. So we may suppose Joseph to have reasoned, when, on his own responsibility, he took the step which he now reports to Pharaoh. Evidently he felt that it was a step which needed some explanation. And he has prepared the explanation, which he first states himself, and then expects his brethren, according to the instructions he has given them, to confirm. He dwells, as he has taught them to dwell, on the fact of their being shepherds. That being their trade, where could he put them, with their flocks and herds, more properly than in the region which lay waiting, as it were, for such a race to possess it? It is the very thing needed to strengthen Egypt's outworks, and keep wild rovers at bay. "Behold they are in the land of Goshen."

Two remarks here suggest themselves,—the first applicable to Joseph's part in this arrangement; the second applicable to the overruling hand of God which may be seen in it.

First, as to Joseph,—is it not noticeable that he does not push the fortunes of his family at court? Who else in his place would have

failed to do so? The ball is at his foot; the kingdom's resources are at his disposal. His relatives could not be refused preferment if he asked it for them. Offices in his own household, and in the king's, await their acceptance, if Joseph will but give the word. Provincial appointments, all over the country and its dependencies, may be theirs. Unbounded wealth and honour may come to all of them, if Joseph chooses to use his opportunity on their behalf. And why does he not? Why banish them to distant obscurity in Goshen? Is it that he distrusts them, and thinks that they might not do him credit if he promoted them? Nay, he has had them at his table. He is not ashamed to own them as brethren, and set them before the king. Judah's rare eloquence and Benjamin's simple beauty would have made themselves felt any day in Egypt's highest circles. What then is it that weighs with Joseph in his preferring the humble sphere of Goshen for his family, rather than the riches of Egypt? What can it be but faith—the same faith which moves him, for himself and his sons, to make common cause with them?

For it seems all but certain, from the narrative,—and it is exceedingly remarkable,—that from the moment of his bringing down his father and brethren from Canaan, Joseph took the place, as far as possible, and acted the part, not of the vizier and prime minister of Pharaoh, but of a child of Israel. We read, indeed, of his completing the operation which the famine had suggested, and effecting a great change in the tenure of property all over Egypt. He remained at his post till his work was done. But beyond all question, his heart was in Goshen; he was an Israelite indeed. It was not to Pharaoh but to Jacob that he looked for an inheritance to his two boys. He sits loose to Pharaoh's palace; all his hope is in Goshen's tents. Surely this is faith. He thus declares himself to be “a stranger and sojourner on the earth,” and to be “looking for a city.” The promised Saviour,—the seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head, and so becoming the source of blessing to all the nations of the earth,—the divine favour and the heavenly rest,—these are all precious to him; and they are all bound up with Israel. Therefore he will be himself one of Israel's sons. And for Israel he will choose a place where “the people may dwell alone.” He will not hazard the risk of their participation in Egypt's glory. It is better and safer for

them, as God's chosen people, to be humble shepherds feeding their flocks in Goshen.

Secondly, in the whole of this matter, the over-ruling providence of the Lord is conspicuous. He brings Israel into Egypt at the right time, and with the right place prepared for their habitation. Goshen is made vacant for their reception, and Pharaoh finds it to be for his and for Egypt's good to have Israel located there. It is not man's planning—it is the Lord's doing. He causes a wild roving shepherd tribe to overrun, so as to depopulate and lay waste, an outlying portion of Egypt's realm. Again he causes them to retire before Egypt's mustering hosts. Then Joseph is sold; the famine comes; Joseph is promoted; his brethren come down for food; and discovery takes place. Thus Israel is brought into Egypt; and in Egypt Goshen is ready for Israel. Time, place, and circumstances, all are fitting into one another. And it is altogether the doing of the Lord.

II. Having himself prepared the way, by reporting to Pharaoh what he has done, Joseph now solicits and obtains for a select number of his brethren an audience of the king (ver. 2). This also is an affair of state, like the formal reception of an embassy. Joseph would not have his people to appear before Pharaoh as a miscellaneous crowd of suppliants, or a company of needy adventurers. They approach the throne by a deputation; the “five men” act as representatives of an orderly community, prepared to negotiate a treaty with, Egypt and Egypt's monarch. They have to ask a favour, no doubt: but they do not ask it after the manner of abject mendicants. Their whole bearing is erect and dignified. In answer to the king's inquiry, “What is your occupation?” there is a frank avowal of their hereditary character and calling: “Thy servants are shepherds, both we and also our fathers” (ver. 3); and they have no hesitation in following-up their avowal With a proposal that might almost, in their circumstances, seem presumptuous. They certainly state their case with great coolness, and prefer their petition, respectfully enough it is true, but with not a little confidence; “Now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen” (ver. 4).

Thus these brethren of Joseph claim at Pharaoh's hands the humble portion of the good things of Egypt that they need. And Joseph has power and influence enough to secure that their claim shall be allowed. For it is to Joseph that they are indebted. It is he who obtains for them the boon; it is with him that Pharaoh deals; "Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: the land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell" (ver. 5, 6). The land of Egypt is before thee; the best of it may be chosen. If Goshen is preferred, by all means let it be Goshen. That may not be in some respects the best. The overflowing Nile may cause some other parts of Egypt to teem with more luxuriant harvests. But it may be the best for them. At all events it is heartily at their service.

The gift is princely, and the manner of giving is princely; there is in it an air of courtesy and liberality worthy of a king; of one who was then the highest of earth's kings. He gives simply and freely. And, by a refinement of kind graciousness, as if to lessen the burden of the obligation, he adds the suggestion that their services may be turned to account. The benefit is not all on one side; there is an honourable way of requiting Pharaoh's goodness; "If thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle" (ver. 6).

III. The personal interview between the king and Jacob is one more of the scenes in this most affecting history on which few would choose or venture to expatiate (ver. 7-10). The simple pathos of the narrative is only marred by anything like lengthened comment or exposition.

The meeting begins and ends with benediction. When "Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh," "Jacob blessed Pharaoh." When "he went out from before Pharaoh," "Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (ver. 7, 10).

"Without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better" (Heb. vii. 7); that is the construction divinely placed on

Melchizedek's blessing Abraham. May not the same construction be placed on Jacob's blessing Pharaoh?

Pharaoh's intermediate question indeed, coming in between the two benedictions, may seem to savour of an assumption of superiority (ver. 8). He plays the king,—does he not? —: according to the customary kingly fashion of condescension, when he asks “How old art thou?” And yet it was a natural enough question, and it might be put in all simplicity. Jacob's countenance and gait betokened extreme old age. Sin and sorrow, anxiety and care, had left their deep traces on a face furrowed by many a tear; his frame tottered under the load of griefs as well as years. But he had the calm look of faith,—his dim eye caught a beam of heavenly light,—and there was authority in his voice,—when “he blessed Pharaoh!” His reply to Pharaoh's kind inquiry is very touching; it must have deepened the impression made by his grey hairs and venerable mien. It is a reply which, familiar as it is from long-past reading and recollection, one cannot recall to memory, even now, without a thrilling sense of reality; as the scene represents itself almost visibly before the mind's eye.

There is Pharaoh,—at first, as I suppose, seated in state on the throne,—prepared, first by Joseph's explanation, then by the audience granted to the five brethren, for the formal reception of Jacob, the head and chief of the family. what sort of approach to him, on the patriarch's side, the monarch may have anticipated, who can tell? He did not probably look for prostration, or anything like abject and servile obeisance. But was he prepared,—was even Joseph prepared,—for the majesty,—it must have been something majestic,—of Jacob's act? Lifting up his hands, at the full height of his stature, without one preliminary word of salutation or gesture of compliment to the king, the old man pours out his soul in prayer;—asking God's best blessing on the royal head;—and in God's name, pronouncing the customary blessing of Abraham's house and seed!

We have no more trace in history of this Pharaoh; he passes from the stage with Jacob's blessing on him. May we not say that he passes from it with the blessing upon him of Jacob's God? He has had a strange experience, for the king of a heathen land. He has had

not a little personal knowledge of the true God, Jehovah, the God of Israel. Visions by night have awakened him to seriousness. A godly youth, discovered in prison by his godliness, has brought God, as the revealer of secrets, and the ruler of events, very near to him. The chosen seed, the Israel of God, have come to be entrusted to his keeping. And now the last we see of him is when he talks with Jacob, and receives his blessing.

If he intended to receive the patriarch, as chief of the new tribe he is inviting to a settlement in his dominions, formally and in state, as from the throne,—the patriarch's first appearance, as he entered the royal presence, must have changed his purpose. The tables, as it were, are turned. Jacob,—with heart full of grateful feeling as all the king's kindness rushes fresh upon him,—and conscious of his power, as Israel, to prevail as a prince with God in invoking a worthy recompense,—“Jacob blesses Pharaoh.” Shall we say that the king feels himself to be blessed,—the less by the better,—a monarch of earth by a servant of the monarch of heaven? He quits the throne accordingly and accepts the patriarch's benediction. It is the benediction of an old man. How old, he asks? The answer moves him all the more: “And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.” It is the benediction of a much tried and much exercised old man. He invites and welcomes its repetition; for he has heard from Joseph something of Israel's God, and Israel's hope. Let us leave him, humbling himself to receive twice over the blessing of the aged saint. Let us gratefully own God's grace in his dealings, first and last, with this right royal king of Egypt.

And from all these particulars connected with the settlement of the chosen family in the land in which they were to “dree a weary weird,” to work out a sad period of bondage, let us learn such lessons as these:—1. How the Lord makes place and time suitable for any crisis which he has appointed to happen, in the history of his people collectively, and of every one of them apart. If Egypt must be your destiny, he will find for you a Goshen,—and have it ready for

you at the very hour you need it. 2. How Jesus may be trusted by you to claim for you at the hands of the world, and its princes, and its people, whatever may be for your good. He will see to it that you have whatever Goshen you require at the hands of any Pharaoh,—and you may humbly accept it without undue humiliation or shame. 3. How he who has the hearts of all men in his hands can dispose whatever Pharaoh you come in contact with to be at peace with you and do you good. And 4. How he can make your contact with any and every Pharaoh conducive to his good as well as yours,—if in faith you realize your power, the power of your prayer, with God,—and if on every occasion of your being introduced to such a one, “when he asks you any simple question about yourself, you make it the occasion of your calling down from heaven a blessing upon him.

LXIII.

JOSEPH'S EGYPTIAN POLICY—ISRAEL'S QUIET REST.

Genesis xlvii. 11-28.

“To teach his senators wisdom.”—Psalm cv. 22.

“My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation.”—Isaiah xxxii. 18.

Two topics occur in this passage for consideration, the policy of Joseph as ruler in Egypt,—and the position of Israel as settled in Egypt. Of these, the former is to be regarded as quite subordinate to the latter.

I. The Egyptian policy of Joseph is very briefly noticed; and in the most incidental way; some fourteen verses comprise the whole. Evidently it is not a full account of the transaction that is given; and evidently also, it is an account of it simply in an Israelitish point of view. It is not narrated as a part of the universal history of the world,—nor even as a part of the history of Egypt. The change, or revolution, is only so far described as to explain the position of the Israelites in Egypt, and account for their future treatment there. It is, accordingly, imbedded, as it were, in the continuous narrative of their Egyptian experience; so that it comes in, as it were, incidentally. We might quite well omit it all (ver. 13-26), and read the story of Israel without that intervening break.

Joseph, after obtaining the sanction of Pharaoh, proceeded to carry out his plan and settle the chosen family, as a peculiar people, in a territory which they could call their own. And having so placed them, he nourished them; not as if they were mere mendicants

receiving alms,—but in an orderly manner, and with a full recognition of their separate standing, as a tribe or patriarchal community, welcomed as such, in a friendly manner, by Egypt and its prince (ver. 11, 12). With this account of the beginning of their settlement, the account of their progress fitly joins in (ver. 27). The intermediate narrative is quite parenthetical. The account of Joseph's conduct, as ruler in Egypt, is an altogether irrelevant, not to say impertinent, interruption, unless we hold that it is brought in with a view to its bearing on the fortunes of Israel.

But looking at it in itself, what are the facts of the case? For there would seem to have been from of old, and to be still, not a little misapprehension in many quarters in regard to this matter. The facts are few and simple. At the beginning of the years of famine, Joseph sold the grain, stored up during the seven years of plenty, for money (ver. 14). It is not insinuated that he acted the part of an extortioner, but only that he did, in point of fact, obtain possession of the money, and hand it over to Pharaoh. The grain market followed the natural course of trade. Joseph had corn,—the people had money; but Joseph's corn outlasted the people's money. Then when “money failed,” Joseph took cattle (ver. 15-17). How long the money lasted is not said; but the cattle lasted, as payment for corn, only for a year. The next year, probably the last, or last but one, of the famine, the people had nothing to give for corn but their lands and their persons (ver. 18, 19). Joseph took their land (ver. 20); and as to their persons, he enforced a general removal from the country into towns (ver. 21). The priests alone were exempted (ver. 22); it would seem that their land had been already surrendered to the crown, and that they had become pensioners dependent on the king. The ordinary population ceased to be landowners, and came under a system which implied their being, as a general rule, settled in cities, rather than living a rural life. They were still, however, to have an interest in the soil. The cultivation of it, after it became the king's, was offered to them on easy terms (ver. 23-26). Leases might be had, for anything we know, for any number of years; or there might be no need of leases. The annual rent to be paid by the people for liberty to till the ground was fixed. It was to be always and everywhere a fifth part of the produce. Four parts of it were absolutely their own.

These are the plain facts here recorded,—without comment or explanation. They surely afford far too scanty materials for determining whether Joseph, at this crisis, acted a wise and patriotic part for Egypt, or made himself the tool of a tyrant, for the establishment of an arbitrary throne. We would need to know more of the constitution and laws of Egypt, both before and after Joseph's administration, than either old history records, or new researches among the tombs and pyramids have as yet discovered,—before we could be in a position to pronounce a dogmatic opinion on the subject. Certainly, it is only a most perverse ingenuity that can extract out of the few bare and simple statements in this brief passage, evidence to convict Joseph of a cunning Machiavellian plot to lay Egypt and its inhabitants prostrate at Pharaoh's feet. On the contrary, for anything that here appears, his manner of turning to account the years of increasing famine, may have been as much for the people's benefit as for that of the prince. He was the king's loyal servant; but he was also the saviour, in a temporal sense, of the king's subjects. He certainly took measures for abolishing all feudal tenures of property that were independent of the king. But that may have been no harm. He struck at the root, perhaps, of the heritable jurisdiction of petty princes and landlords, accustomed, as we may conjecture, to wield the power even of capital punishment over their vassals. He ordained that all occupiers and cultivators of estates should hold them directly of the crown. But he fixed a uniform and easy condition. And if his measures tended to foster a busy town population, rather than one overcrowded and enslaved in the country,—considering Egypt's place and opportunities as a manufacturing and trading country,—that can scarcely be held to have been a wicked act of power. Certainly, there is no trace of Egypt's having become less prosperous or less influential in consequence of Joseph's rule. The opposite rather is the fair inference.

But it is chiefly important to observe the bearing of Joseph's Egyptian policy upon the condition and prospects of Israel. It put an end to a state of things that might admit of rival clans and their chiefs acting on their own account, so as to thwart the supreme government. It concentrated authority in one royal head. And so it

made it easier for the Pharaoh who was Joseph's friend to secure the peaceful settlement of the family in Goshen; while it also made it easier, long afterwards, for the Pharaoh who "knew not Joseph," to enslave and oppress the nation into which the family was then fast growing. That is probably the reason, and the only reason, why the matter is noticed at all in this history, however briefly and parenthetically. It is simply to explain how the introduction into the country of a new race or a new nationality,—which at an earlier date, and under a different order of things, might have occasioned heart-burnings and dissensions, and even kindled the flames of civil war,—could be quietly accomplished by the mere will and word of the king who now, thanks to Joseph's sagacity, was reigning as a king indeed; wielding a sovereign sceptre—and not merely holding an uneasy and uncertain balance among a set of turbulent lords of the soil, ready to make him their sport or their victim, to fawn on him and set him at defiance by turns. And it is also to show how, in the very conjuncture of circumstances which brought Israel into Egypt, and prepared Egypt for Israel, he who sees the end from the beginning was so ordering and overruling events, as to bring out of an arrangement which seemed all to wear a smiling and favourable aspect towards his people, that very discipline of long and dreary bondage which was to fulfill his own previously announced purpose, and pave the way for their terrible and glorious deliverance at the last.

II. And now the people of Israel are at rest,—in a settled habitation,—dwelling in peace and safety,—with none to make them afraid (ver. 27, 28). They have their own houses and possessions undisturbed,—their own institutions and usages,—their own family order,—their own patriarchal rule,—their own religious services—worshipping God every man under his own vine and his own fig-tree.

It is a goodly and pleasant scene to look upon. All the past is forgotten; its trials and temptations, its sins and sorrows,—its dark passages of deceit and envy, of malice, lust, and blood,—its cruel separations,—its anxious suspense,—its trembling hope,—its whole tragic interest of pity and terror. All is over. The intricate plot is for the present unraveled,—the strange wild romance is ended. And

now there is a pause; all is quiet. There, in Goshen, tranquility reigns—unruffled calm,—complete repose. The old man's vexed soul is to taste, before he quits this earthly scene, a serene peace hitherto but little known. Before the few and evil days of his pilgrimage close, he is to “see his children's children, and peace upon Israel” (Ps. cxxviii). No details are given, no particulars specified; for quiet times furnish few materials for history. So these uneventful years swiftly pass, until “the time draws nigh that Israel must die.”

LXIV.

THE DYING SAINT'S CARE FOR THE BODY AS WELL AS THE SOUL.

Genesis xlvii. 29-31.

“The hope and resurrection of the dead—The hope of Israel.”—Acts xxiii. 6, and xxviii. 20.

“Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years” (ver. 28). They were, we may venture to believe, years of tranquility and quiet domestic joy. Though in a strange land, he might say, with the contented Shunammite, “I dwell among my own people” (2 Kings iv. 13). He had his sons around him, now at last living together as brethren in unity; having learned of Joseph to love as they had been loved.

It was a short time, not only in itself, but even as compared with the patriarch's entire life. For “so,”—taking these seventeen years into account,—“the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years” (ver. 18). It was not much more than a tenth of his allotted earthly span, that Jacob was permitted thus to spend in Goshen's retired haven of calm, after more than a century of exposure to the fitful storms and breezes of an uneasy voyage. We might almost wish that he had got a longer interval of preparatory repose before he was called to pass from earth's tumult to heaven's final rest. But that is not the mind of God. The allowance of even these seventeen years, between his tossing on the sea and his safe arrival in port, is a signal instance of the Lord's kind consideration. But this is not his rest; here he has no continuing city; the hour of his departure comes at last. “The time drew near that Israel must die” (ver. 29).

It is a time that is drawing near to every happy home, to every loving household; the fondest home-circle must be thus invaded, the most loving home-fellowship must be thus broken up. A few short years of holy and peaceful sojourning together may be granted to you. But the years are numbered,—and the time draws near when one of you must die.

How solemn is the parting-knell! It has a voice to every house, every home, every band of brothers, every circle of companions. What are you about together? How are you living together? Are you encouraging one another in sin; forgetting God, and following pleasure? Are you striving with another, envying one another, injuring one another? The time draws near when one of you must die! Are you, on the contrary, walking together in the good way of the Lord,—seeking the Lord together,—working together for the Lord,—communing much together, oh! how lovingly, in the Lord! Still the time draws near when one of you must die!

Have you in the midst of you a venerable patriarch, a brother, or a father, much beloved in the Lord,—a parent, a counselor, a friend, a pastor, who is to you as a sort of head,—whose words of wisdom should be your guide,—whose ever ready arm is your stay,—whose ever ready smile or tear of sympathy is your consolation? Ah! if at any time you are tempted, on the one hand, to make too much of him,—to reckon on him as your help for years to come,—to lean on him, it may be, instead of looking to God,—to idolize him,—or count him a necessity of your well-being;—or if at any time you are tempted, on the other hand, to make too little of him, to put away his counsels and warnings till a more convenient season;—may it not be good in either case to be realizing the solemn fact,—that the time draws near when your Israel must die.

For Israel himself, the drawing near of the time when he must die, implies work to be done,—directions to be given,—preparations to be made. He must “set his house in order, since he is to die and not live” (Is. xxxviii. 1). He must settle his family affairs, and arrange about his funeral.

This last is his first concern; he gives commandment about the disposal of his body. The future of his soul occasions to him no anxiety; on that head he has nothing to fear, or to ask. He is ready to depart in peace,—his eyes having seen the salvation of God. This is no case of a deathbed repentance—no hasty and desperate attempt, after years of willful neglect of God's grace, to pacify the alarm of conscience at the last hour. Jacob has long walked with God. His infirmities and faults may have been many,—his circumstances have been very trying. But his long experience of the divine forbearance and kindness, and the recent outburst of light at his “evening time,” must have drawn closer the cords of love that bound him to the God of his fathers, as his own God. He can calmly, therefore, resign his spirit into the Lord's keeping. It is about his body and its burial that he is solicitous: and his solicitude is very great. It leads to his having very close dealing with Joseph on the subject, and to his exacting from Joseph a very solemn pledge. Using the same significant form that Abraham did, when he adjured his old servant and made him take an oath in the matter of a spouse to be found for Isaac,—he causes Joseph to swear with the same deep emphasis in the matter of a grave to be provided for himself: “Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me: bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: but I will lie with my fathers; and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying-place. And he said, I will do as thou hast said. And he said. Swear unto me. And he swore unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head” (ver. 29-31).

The old man is now content. His soul is to be with God, his body is to rest in Canaan.

What does all this mean? Why this extreme concern as to where his body is to lie? Is it mere natural feeling,—the fond imagination of a sort of pleasure in being laid near kindred dust,—sharing the narrow bed and the long home of loved ones lost and mourned? It may be so in part. Something of that ineradicable instinct of human nature would seem to be indicated, when the dying patriarch afterwards repeats the same request: “Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife;

and there I buried Leah” (xlix. 29-31). There is a touch of tenderness in this last remembrance,—“there I buried Leah,”—that cannot but affect the heart.

Partly, then, it may have been natural feeling that moved Jacob;—and partly also wise policy and true patriotism. That the remains of the last of their patriarchal chiefs should be carried up by his people, and with much state deposited in the family vault, was an arrangement well fitted to prevent their settling down in Egypt as their final home. It tended to keep alive their sense of their high calling as the destined heirs of Canaan.

But there must have been something more than mere natural feeling and wise patriotism in this extreme urgency of Jacob. These and the like motives might incline him to give a hint, to indicate a wish, to leave behind him an order. But the deep solemnity of the oath evidently betokens something far more serious;—more spiritual;—more intimately connected with his own personal religious experience, and his hope for eternity.

“I believe in the resurrection of the body,”—that is the only true and full interpretation of this remarkable procedure of the departing patriarch. “I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” That was Job's creed; and it was Jacob's. Job, trusting in a living Redeemer, looked hopefully through the loathsomeness of the tomb to a bright resurrection morning. So also did Jacob. He too knew that he had a Redeemer who liveth,—that he had for his Redeemer the Living One. He therefore looked through death to life,—through his dying in the body to his living again in the body. He believed assuredly that the promises made to him living in the body must be fulfilled to him living again in the body,—since they were the promises of him “who is the God, not of the dead, but of the living.” Therefore his body must rise again, that in his risen body he may receive the promised inheritance. That promised inheritance is identified with the land within whose borders he desires his body to be laid. His being buried there is his taking infetment in it with the very body in

which, when it is raised in glory, he is to receive the promised “recompense of reward.”

In this assurance Jacob was willing to close his pilgrimage, as not only a stranger and sojourner in Canaan, but an exile in Egypt. He was willing to have the promise postponed to the future life, and to await, for its fulfilment, the resurrection of the body. And in token of this assurance, and of this willingness, he issues instructions, under the solemn sanction of a deep oath, respecting his body's burial in the land of promise.

Is not his faith mine? And his hope? When the time draws near that I must die,—believing, I may commit my soul to God. And my body too. I need not, it is true, be so anxious as Jacob was about the place or manner of my body's interment. I have not the same occasion. I am not called to teach the same prophetic lesson. I may sit very loose to the question where my lifeless frame is to lie,—in ocean's deep bed,—or on earth's wildest waste. But it is not because I hold the body cheap. No. It is because I know that he to whom it is still united will see to its safe keeping, wherever it may rest,—and will restore it to me soon, invested with his own glory,—and will bestow upon me, when it is restored to me, the promised everlasting inheritance in “the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

LXV.

THE BLESSING ON JOSEPH'S CHILDREN—JACOB'S DYING FAITH.

Genesis xlviii.

“By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”—Hebrews xi. 21.

This scene, or transaction, is partly natural and partly supernatural j or rather it is both throughout. It is faith prevailing against sense, and triumphing over it. But the triumph appears in its being an affair of sense, or of nature, which grace turns into an affair of faith. Grace reigns in it by faith; and it does so all the more conspicuously because there is in it so much of nature.

Besides the usual symptoms of age and approaching death, Jacob has a special warning in an attack of illness. He is sick; and the sickness is the occasion of a second parting interview, as it were, between him and Joseph (ver. 1). Possibly the former interview may have been supposed on both sides to be the last. Warned by marks and signs of growing weakness, that the time draws near that he must die, Israel has sent for Joseph, and has concluded with him a solemn covenant as to the disposal of his body after his decease. Evidently that was a matter to be arranged, at least in the first instance, with Joseph; he alone had the power to carry out the plan on which Jacob's heart was set. The interposition of Joseph's influence and .”authority was needed,—and Jacob takes a pledge from him that it shall not be wanting.

So that solemn conference closes,—and the old man's heart is at rest. Joseph withdraws,—perhaps scarcely expecting to see his father again.

But Jacob lives on. He has not fulfilled all his task; he has not done all his death-bed work. For himself, he has made full provision; his soul is to be -with God, and his body is to rest in Canaan. But he must be mindful of others—of his family, viewed as God's church—and in the first instance, of Joseph, their saviour and his. And this must be specially, and in a marked way the doing of the Lord. Accordingly the Lord sends sickness upon Jacob; and the rumour of the sickness brings Joseph. It is not as it was on that former occasion; Jacob does not “call his son Joseph.” There is a providential cause. Jacob falls sick, and Joseph of his own accord comes to see him.

He comes on the impulse of natural affection. He will visit his old and failing father once more; and he will take with him his two sons, that their grandfather may give them a parting blessing. It is all natural, and simply natural Faith, no doubt, moved Jacob, on that first occasion of his becoming sensible of his approaching dissolution, to call his son Joseph, and give him directions as to his funeral. But here, at the outset, there is no sending in faith, or coming in faith; but only what might seem a becoming expression of the love which Joseph felt for his dying parent, and the esteem in which he held him, and would have his sons to hold him.

Very soon, however, faith begins to manifest itself, and to give a turn to the interview far transcending the range of sense or of nature: “Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed” (ver. 2). For the use of the name “Israel” is here, as I think it is always, or almost always, significant. It is not merely an occasional substitute for the name “Jacob,” with a view to variety. It seems to mark the transition, in the patriarch's experience or frame of mind, from natural weakness to strong faith. “Jacob” is a worm—“thou worm Jacob” (Is. xli. 14). “Israel” is a prince, having power with God and prevailing—able to sustain the wrestling of the Angel—and to overcome (Hosea xii. 3, 4).

Thus it is “Israel” (xlvi. 27) who takes up his abode in Egypt, in Goshen; for it is no little strength of faith that reconciles him to what his doing so implies. It is “Jacob” (ver. 28) who lives in the land of Egypt seventeen years;—“Jacob” makes out the few and evil days of the years of his life till they are an hundred forty and seven—a bent and feeble old man. But when they draw near their close (ver. 29), it is “Israel” who is to die. And upon Joseph's swearing to carry him out of Egypt and bury him in Canaan—it is no “Jacob”—no—it is “Israel” who, in the firm and full faith of the resurrection and the inheritance, “bows himself on the bed's head” (ver. 31).

So it is here. It is “Jacob” sick and prostrate—who is told, “Behold thy son Joseph cometh unto thee.” But it is “Israel” who instantly thereupon “strengthens himself and sits upon his bed.” Yes! It is “Israel”—though at first it is as “Jacob” that he speaks in welcoming his son: “And Jacob said unto Joseph” (ver. 3).

His speech is all of faith and by faith. The visit of Joseph and his two sons cannot but be soothing and gratifying to his natural affection; but that is not what breathes in the old man's words. He is divinely moved within to accept the incident as a divine hint from above. It is not as giving vent to his own feelings that he speaks—but as having a commission to execute, which God has put into his mind, and for which God makes him see and feel that the opportunity has now providentially come.

I. At once and abruptly he begins a recital of the Lord's dealings with him from the beginning. And it is fitly said that it is “Jacob” who does so. The whole of his first speech (ver. 3-7) is specially appropriate to “Jacob.” It begins with a devout acknowledgment of his obligation to grace; he recalls the appearance of God Almighty to him at Bethel (ver. 3, 4). Twice did God appear to him there—first, on his flight into Padan-aram, and again after his return to Canaan. The two appearances were intimately connected, and might almost be regarded as one; the second being the complement or accomplishment of the first. Both were times of quickening and revival. The first may have wrought his conversion. Flying from the wrath of his injured brother, and laden with the guilt of sin against God, he received a gracious visit and was moved to make a solemn

vow. That scene must have been fresh in his memory at this time. But it is probably the last of the two appearances that he has chiefly in view. Then he was reawakened to a full apprehension of his high calling as the heir of the promise. And it is that character that he here takes; in that character, he transacts with Joseph. Thou comest to see thy poor sick father Jacob; and thou bringest thy sons with thee, to gladden his dim eyes and sinking heart. Thou meanest to speak comfortably to him. All well. Thy filial love is owned and rewarded. Thy father, as the Jacob to whom God Almighty appeared at Luz, and gave the promise of Canaan for an everlasting possession for him and his seed after him, has somewhat to say to thee. It is good news (ver. 5, 6). Thou art a prince in Egypt. Thou art married to one of Egypt's daughters; and naturalized as one of Egypt's sons. It might seem as if thy house were to be established among Egypt's noblest families. But no. Thy portion is still with the seed of Abraham. And it is a double portion; I adopt as mine thy two first-born sons. Each of them is to have a standing as my son in the sacred household. It may be God's will that thou shouldst found a family in Egypt if so, it must be in thine other children. These two whom thou hast brought to me I claim and adopt as mine.⁴

It warms the old man's heart to be made, in his Last days, the channel of conveying to his son Joseph so emphatic a token of the divine favour as his being represented, in two lines, in the chosen household. It brings back tender memories and reawakens buried love (ver. 7). Hence his reference to Rachel; an irrelevant reference, but all the more touching on that account. It is Rachel's child who

⁴ Did Jacob intend thus to transfer to Joseph the right of primogeniture? It may be so. For we read elsewhere concerning Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, that for his sin "his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's" (1 Chron. v. 1, 2). This is confessedly an obscure intimation. It may mean that—Reuben, Simeon, and Levi being set aside for special offences—Judah came to stand in the position of pre-eminence. Or it may mean that, while Reuben, in some sense, retained his first place in the reckoning of the genealogy—the birthright was virtually shared between Joseph, who received a double portion in his sons, and Judah, to whom the sovereignty was assigned. At all events, the statement is remarkable: "The birthright was Joseph's." And it seems to point to this transaction—Jacob's conferring a double portion on Joseph, in the persons of his two sons—as the first formal intimation of the divine purpose to that effect.

stands beside his bed; to Rachel's child it is his last joy on earth to communicate the divine decree. It is Rachel's child whom he is permitted thus to crown with double honour.

II. But it is the religious faith, rather than the natural affection, indicated in this transaction, that is chiefly to be noticed. At first, apparently, Jacob's dim eyes had not recognized his two grandchildren separately. But now they are brought forward with formal courtesy, and some sort of ceremony, to receive Jacob's embrace and blessing. The old man kisses and embraces them; and then simply expresses his gratification and gratitude: "I had not thought to see thy face; and lo, God hath showed me also thy seed" (ver. 8-11). Then comes the solemn patriarchal, or rather prophetic act. "With his hands upon their heads the aged seer announces the will of the Lord. "Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the first-born" (ver. 12-14).

This strange act receives a twofold explanation.

1. Generally, as applicable to both of Joseph's sons alike, the divine purpose is declared. "He blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (ver. 15, 16). It is "Israel" who thus speaks; and what he says is primarily a benediction upon Joseph. It is he who is thus signally owned and honoured in his sons. And the benediction runs in the name of God in a somewhat peculiar way; as "the Angel which redeemed him from all evil." It is a remarkable form of expression. It can scarcely be restricted to time, or to deliverance from temporal evil. It may include that; but it surely goes beyond it. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, is here spoken of as redeeming from all evil, comprehensively,—from all the evil of the fall. He is the destined seed of the woman, bruising the head of the serpent, and setting his victims free. So Israel hails, in the God before whom Abraham and

Isaac had walked,—in the God who had fed him all his life long unto this day,—the great Mediator, the Angel of Jehovah who is himself Jehovah, the redresser of all the ills to which flesh is heir. It is the Messianic blessing, in its widest range, that Israel invokes upon the lads. He would have them to be made partakers of the hope which they all,—Abraham, Isaac, and himself,—had, when they walked as strangers on the earth, and died in faith, resting on the promised Saviour.

2. “Israel” distinguishes the lads in thus blessing them. Joseph has noticed the misplacing of his sons (ver. 13, 14); but he has not ventured to interfere until his father's lips are closed. Now, however, he will have the mistake rectified :

“Not so, my father: for this is the first-born; put thy right hand upon his head” (ver. 17, 18). But it is no mistake; his father knows what he is about; and what he has done he has done deliberately (ver. 19). “Israel” is acting in this matter for God; announcing, not a wish of his own, or a determination of his own will, but an oracle of God. And one proof of its being so is the sovereignty which it asserts and vindicates as belonging to God. It is a sovereignty which it is his prerogative to exercise, without giving account to any. And it is his pleasure to exercise it,—especially in the sacred family, and in connection with the covenant-promise of redemption by the Angel, of which that family is the depository,—in a way that reverses human notions, and makes it plain that all is of God. “For the purpose of God, according to election, must stand, not of works, but of him that calleth.” “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.” So it had ever been in God's dealings with the patriarchs in time past; so it was to be still. So it was, and is, in the time of the complete fulfilment of the promise,—when the Angel of the Covenant actually accomplishes the redemption from all evil of which Jacob speaks. The law, or rule, under whose operation the economy of grace ordinarily proceeds, is always the same,—humbling to human wisdom, glorifying to the divine sovereignty. The last are often first, and the first last. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of

blood, nor of the mil of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John i. 11-13). But the blessing, though with a distinction thus made, in the exercise of sovereignty, between the lads,—as if to show that it is the blessing of the same God who gave the oracle, “The elder shall serve the younger,”—is still comprehensive enough to embrace both. And as embracing both, it is so rich and full, that nothing beyond it can be imagined as desirable for any one: “He blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh” (ver. 20).

That surely must be a blessing, inclusive of “the promise which godliness has, both of the life that now is, and of the life that is to come” (1 Tim. iv. 8). No other blessing could dying “Israel” hold to be a model blessing for his seed,—for all time to come.

III. And now the patriarch closes the affecting interview with one more declaration of his faith: “Behold I die, but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers” (ver. 21). As to himself, he dies in sure and certain hope of the resurrection and of an inheritance beyond the grave. For Joseph, and for all his family whom he leaves behind, he gives his dying confirmation to the assurance that the earthly inheritance is certain to the family of Abraham at last. And in testimony of his faith to that effect, he leaves a final and very peculiar bequest to Joseph: “Moreover, I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow” (ver. 22).

It is a bequest of special significancy. It is like the transaction into which Jeremiah entered, on the eve of the captivity at Babylon, when under divine guidance he negotiated with his uncle for the redemption and purchase of the field in Anathoth (Jer. xxxii). That act of the prophet was designed emphatically to attest his full and firm faith in the promise of God, that the people would be delivered out of their Babylonian bondage, and would resume possession of the land of their fathers. So confident is Jeremiah of the fulfilment of that promise, that when all the country is in the enemy's hand, and Jerusalem itself is about to fall, he completes the purchase of the alienated property of his house,—and causes the title-deeds to be

duly delivered for safe custody to a competent witness,—with the same calm assurance with which such a matter might have been adjusted in the palmiest days of Solomon's reign. That must have been a striking and affecting spectacle to the poor Jews about to be carried off to weep beside the river of Babylon.

So now, at Jacob's deathbed,—and long after, when the memory of that deathbed, traditionally preserved in song or story, shed a ray of dim light on the darkness of the Egyptian oppression,—this act of the patriarch, disposing of property in Canaan in favour of his beloved son, as unhesitatingly as if he were the actual owner of the whole country, must have served to keep alive the steadfast belief in which Jacob died, that “God would bring them again unto the land of their fathers.”

In this view of the bequest, the precise locality of the “portion” bequeathed,—and the precise manner in which Jacob acquired it,—need not occasion much inquiry. It may have been the identical spot which he purchased at Sychem, and which he may have been forced afterwards to vindicate by arms, against some unjust attempt to dispute his title. But be that as it may, the portion was now, and for ages would continue to be, out of the reach of himself and his seed. He foresees the long sojourn in Egypt already begun; he knows that the chosen seed are not to see Canaan for centuries. And knowing that, he leaves the portion as a legacy to Joseph;—the faith in which he leaves it being a better legacy by far.

Thus, “by faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff” (Heb. xi. 21). The blessing which he pronounced on his grandsons was an act of worship as well as an exercise of faith; it was a believing acknowledgment of the Redeeming Angel, in whose name it ran. There may have gone along with it worship more express and formal. But the material point is that the worship, whether virtual or explicit, was pilgrim-worship. Jacob “worshipped upon the top of his staff.” It may have been for support to his feeble frame that he did so; his worshipping upon the top of his staff may be thus sufficiently accounted for. In leaning on it, however, he must have been reminded, by the very sense of his frailty that made him lean

on it, that he was a pilgrim on the earth, and that his pilgrimage was very near its close. It is as one going on a journey that he worships, when he blesses the sons of Joseph. Staff in hand, he worships and blesses,—as, long afterwards, his descendants were commanded to do when they kept the Passover (Exod. xii. 11). He is going hence. His worship and his blessing have respect to a hereafter,—to the resurrection state in which he himself, and Joseph's sons, and all his true seed, are to receive the everlasting inheritance.

And what shall we say of Joseph's faith in all this strange procedure? What is he doing here? He is giving up his two sons to Jacob. He is consenting virtually to their being disinherited, as regards their position and prospects in Egypt. He is casting in their lot with the family now on the very brink of servitude. What a sacrifice for himself and them!

It does not appear that Joseph left, through any other son, a name to be ranked among the nobles of the Egyptian court; there is no trace of his having founded a family. No explanation can be given of that fact, especially in the view of his bringing his sons to be blessed by Jacob,—except that he did all by faith. It was with him as with Moses. “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Heb. xi. 24-26). Joseph made the same choice; and he made it in the exercise of the same faith.

LXVI.

JACOB'S DYING PROPHECY—JUDAH'S EXALTED LOT— SHILOH COMING.

Genesis xlix. 1-12,

“My beloved is “white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.”—The Song of Solomon v. 10.

“He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love.”—The Song of Solomon ii. 4.

There is a solemn assembly in the patriarch's dying chamber,—around his dying bed: “Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together” (ver. 1). “Gather yourselves together,” is his summons,—all of you,—not one cut off. This is Jacob's privilege, above what his grandfather and his father had. They had to submit to a pruning process,—painfully losing natural branches,—that the promise might be seen to be of grace, and of the election of grace. Abraham had to give up Ishmael, born after the flesh,—and to consent to his seed being called in Isaac, the son by promise. Isaac had to let Esau go, and confirm the covenant in Jacob. But in Jacob the family is one; the heads of the chosen race are complete. Expansion, not contraction, is henceforth to be the rule. The stream is to be widened, and not narrowed any more. All his sons are “gathered” round Jacob. They are to learn what is to befall them in after time (ver. 1); they are to listen to a far-reaching prophecy. It is no “Lochiel's warning” of “coming events casting their shadows before,”—no dreamy oracle of gifted, second-sight diviner,—that they are to hear. Nor is it the utterance of such almost preternatural sagacity of insight and foresight as has sometimes been supposed to be the dying privilege of peculiarly saintly men. The patriarch

speaks under the inspiration of the Omniscient Spirit. He has really before him what is to befall his sons, in their offspring, "in the last days."

These last days are the Messianic times. Jacob's eye of faith and hope is fixed upon the advent of the promised Saviour when he sees and sketches the nearer or remoter fortunes of his descendants. On that back-ground the different destinies of the tribes of Israel stand out in bold relief to his inspired view.

"Hear," he cries, with voice divinely strengthened and divinely moved, to pour out in a rapt divine song what he saw in rapt divine vision,—“gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father” (ver. 2). Hear, ye sons of “Jacob.” Ye are Jacob's sons,—sons of “the worm Jacob,”—in yourselves worms, as he is,—weak, unworthy, vile. But your father is not “Jacob” merely; he is “Israel” also; and it is “unto Israel your father” that you are to “hearken.” You are called as “sons of Jacob.” You are called to hearken to “your father Israel.” So this wonderful divine prophecy, or prophetic poem, is introduced.

The minute exposition of it I do not mean to undertake; a very cursory survey is all that I can attempt.

Two things may be noticed at the outset. First, It is partly retrospective as well as prospective. It proceeds upon a review of the past, as well as upon fore-knowledge of the future. Jacob reads off the fortunes of his sons, in their respective races, under the light of what they had shown themselves to be. This does not detract from the prophetic character of the poem; for its predictions are not such mere conjectures as observation might suggest. But an important principle in the divine administration is thus brought out. It is that of transmitted character;—and, within certain limits, transmitted destiny too. What his sons were, and what they did, must tell powerfully, for weal or for woe, on what the tribes that spring from them are to enjoy or suffer. Secondly, The chief interest of the prophecy centers in two of its utterances,—that about Judah, and that about Joseph, It may thus be divided into two parts, in the first of which Judah is conspicuous and pre-eminent,—in the second

Joseph. And he, it is to be kept in mind, is represented chiefly by his younger son Ephraim.

Judah, then, on the one hand, and Joseph, or Ephraim, on the other,—are the leading and prominent figures in this prophetic picture. And all the subsequent history shows that the tribes bearing these names played the principal part in the working out of the destiny of the chosen nation;—Judah in the south, Ephraim in the north;—Judah faithful to David's line, Ephraim the head of the revolted provinces. So also, all through the prophecies, Judah and Ephraim are the well-known names of the two kingdoms.⁵ Judah and Ephraim,—which is Joseph,—are representative or leading tribes along the whole line of the eventful history of the Jewish people. And therefore they fitly occupy the prominent places in the two parts of Jacob's dying oracle respectively. Judah stands pre-eminent among the first four sons of Jacob (ver. 3-12); Joseph, again, ranks as chief among the remaining eight (ver. 13-27).

Keeping these preliminary remarks in view, I now briefly sketch the patriarch's successive oracles concerning the tribes of Israel.

I. Reuben comes first (ver. 3, 4). He should have been strong; he proved himself to be “unstable as water.” The contrast is emphatic and affecting, as it brings out what the old man would have had his eldest son to be, and what he turned out to be. My might,—the prime of my strength,—all that I had of excellency, in respect of dignity or power,—all might have been his. But he lost it all by his instability; he wanted self-control. Impatient and impetuous, he was like an unruly stream, soon spending its force, and then becoming-languid. He had manifested this temperament in the commission of a horrible crime. It was great wickedness; but it was great weakness too. His father fastens on the weakness of it j the entire want of self-command which it too plainly showed. And he foresees that, if this is to be the character of his tribe, it must mar all prospect of high fame or fortune.

⁵ Is. vii. 17; xi. 13; Ezek. xxxvii. 15-17; Hosea Passim.

Did it not really do so when, upon the first success of Moses, after the long wandering in the wilderness, Reuben grasped at the earliest chance of repose and self-indulgence,—and sought a settlement on the east of the Jordan, in the first country conquered, before Canaan proper was reached?

But besides his natural vice of instability, transmitted as a hereditary taint to his tribe, we must recognize here also, as affecting them as well as him, the judgment of God upon his sin. The guilt he had contracted lost him his birthright, as the inspired historian testifies (1 Chron. v. 1, 2). He was still indeed to retain his place, in the reckoning of the genealogy, as the first-born: but the rights and privileges of primogeniture were to pass from him.

II. Simeon and Levi, as next in order, have a joint oracle given forth concerning them (ver. 5-7). Their father speaks very plainly. He denounces unsparingly their sin, in the matter of their sister Dinah. Their vile treachery and bloody cruelty had troubled him at the time; and now, on his deathbed, he looks back upon it with unabated, or rather with enhanced, horror. He solemnly anathematizes their fierce anger and cruel 'wrath; in fact, their share in their father's last blessing is very like a curse. He does not indeed altogether cast them out. They are still to be reckoned among his sons,—and the tribes springing from them are to be numbered among the people. But it is to be in a way marking them out as the objects of retributive judgment. They are to be “in Jacob,”—“in Israel;” but they are to be “divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel.” It is a hard sentence. All the rest are to have quiet settlements in the land; they alone are to be, as it would seem, without fixed habitations. That is their doom; the doom apparently of both alike. But, as it turns out, there is a difference. And it is a difference illustrating both the goodness and the severity of God. In Simeon's case there is severity; the sentence takes effect without mitigation. His tribe was from the first very small, feeble, and insignificant. However respectable in point of numbers at the Exodus (Num. i. 23), it seems to have lost position and influence during the years of sojourn in the wilderness; for when the tribes had their several portions assigned to them after the victories of Joshua, the children of Simeon had their inheritance within that of the children of Judah

(Josh. xix. 9; Judges i. 3, 17). It was otherwise with Levi. The sentence was indeed executed even more literally upon his posterity than upon that of Simeon. But it was turned from a curse into a blessing. It was over-ruled for their highest good. They had no separate inheritance of their Own among their brethren. But they had the Lord himself for their inheritance (Deut. x. 9). "Divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel" they were. But it was in the character of the chosen priests and ministers of the Lord.

III. Reuben, Simeon, and Levi being disposed of and set aside, Judah comes upon the field of the patriarch's vision. He has listened with trembling awe to the stern denunciation of the crimes of his elder brothers. He too has sins upon his conscience that may well shake his nerves. His sons have been born in uncleanness,—and he has had a hand in selling Joseph into Egypt, though it might be said that it was to save his life. But no such ban lies upon him as lay upon the three that went before. We may gather from his noble speech before Joseph, that his filial and fraternal love was pure and strong. He is one who can understand his father; and feel for him and with him more than the rest could do. And at all events, the purpose of God according to the election of grace must stand. It is in Judah that the seed of Abraham is to be called. In him the dying Israel "sees the day of Christ afar off and is glad." His song is now a song of triumphant jubilation and joy.

Judah is to verify in his history the significant name which he got in his birth (ver. 8). When his mother Leah bare him, she said, "Now will I praise the Lord," therefore she called his name Judah. His name is Praise. Others as well as his mother are to call his name Praise; his brethren are to praise him (ver. 8); he is to be pre-eminent among them by their own consent. For the victories he is to win over his enemies and theirs, his father's children are to yield him allegiance and loyal service (ver. 8). He is to be lion-like in his power and prowess (ver. 9). As the king of the forest, he is to master his prey;—as the young lion, springing upon it;—as the old lion, couching and terrible when roused. He is to be invincible in war. And above all, he is to be a legitimate prince, a lawful ruler, and he is to continue to be so until another rise, one springing from him,—

in whom at last his high and blessed destiny is to be fulfilled—“until Shiloh come” (ver. 10).

Who is this Shiloh? And what does his name import? The aged seer beholds him, and hails him. Far on in the stream of time,—along the royal line of the son whose name is Praise, he catches sight of another son, whose name is Peace!

Judah, thou art Praise! Thou art to be a conqueror. Thou art to have a lion's strength. Thou art to reign and decree justice. I see before me all thy glorious lot. But in thee, through thee, behind thee, I see another,—one greater than thou art. Lo! he comes. He who is Peace,—“our peace,”—comes. And as I see him coming, what a scene bursts upon my ravished sight, my straining eyes!

L What a “gathering together in one of all things in him!” (Eph. i. 10). “Unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (ver. 10). Nations are flowing to him,—multitudes of all tongues and kindreds. Well they may. For he is giving peace,—he is speaking peace;—peace from heaven;—peace on earth. Shiloh comes; all wars cease; all the nations are one in him.

2. And with what plenty of all richest and choicest blessings do I see him loaded!—“Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes” (ver. 11). He comes—a prince,—“thy king,” O Israel,—“meek, riding on an ass, and on a colt the foal of an ass.” He comes to travel no more, but to tarry. It is in the midst of a most fruitful vineyard; he binds his humble steed to one of its noblest trees. “This is my rest,—here will I stay.” The wine is flowing copiously; the red blood of the grapes is so abundant that he washes his garments in it. The nations gathering round him partake of all this fulness. They drink the wine with him in the kingdom.

3. And then how fair is this glorious peacemaker, this bountiful and blessed prince, as I see him coming!—“His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk” (ver. 12). Shiloh comes;—“fairer than the sons of men” (Ps. xlv. 2). “My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. His mouth is most

sweet; yea, he is altogether lovely” (Song v. 10, 16). What brightness in his eye!—what milk-white beauty in his teeth! My soul is ravished with his loveliness and his love. O let Shiloh come. Come, thou who art all my salvation and all my desire; yea, come quickly.

I need not stay to show how the history of the tribe of Judah corresponded, in all its leading outlines, to the prophetic sketch of it given so long before by Jacob. Very early Judah began to have a certain acknowledged pre-eminence among the tribes of Israel. The first place in the march, in the battle, in the encampment, would seem to have been assigned from the very beginning to Judah. In the land of promise Judah soon began to acquire a position and influence which none of the rest of the tribes could challenge. In David and his victories; in Solomon and his glory; in the unbroken line of their descendants; in the preserving of the royal family through the captivity of Babylon and all subsequent changes,—in humble circumstances, indeed, but still distinguishable as inheriting a right to reign which none but they could claim;—in all this we clearly trace the fulfilment of the oracle;—the exaltation of Judah fully consummated,—and perpetuated also till the appointed era arrived.

But I must offer a word of explanation as to the view which I have ventured to give of the closing portion of the oracle concerning him. I assume, as all but universally admitted, that the Messiah is the party indicated by the name Shiloh. Usually, however, the reference to him is restricted to the few words in the tenth verse “until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” The eleventh and twelfth verses are applied to Judah; and are understood as describing the luxuriant fertility of the portion that the tribe of Judah had in Canaan,—its overflowing fulness of fruit and fruitfulness.

Now this application of these verses is open to some remarks. First, it is by no means clear that Judah's portion deserved to be so glowingly depicted; the language is too rich for that. Then, secondly, there is great awkwardness in the introduction of this abrupt reference to the Messiah as merely, and so briefly, parenthetical.

But, thirdly, there is no incongruity at all, if we take what is said by Jacob, after his mention of Shiloh, as being all said of that illustrious personage. Israel sees Judah first, and then Shiloh; he no more sees Judah at all, but only Shiloh; he has done with Judah; Shiloh is all in all. And finally, the description that follows is in entire harmony with the Messianic prophecies of later days. Nay more, I cannot but discern in this old Messianic oracle the germs of some of the Messianic characteristics which later prophecies have acknowledged and developed. Thus, in the "foal and ass's colt," may we not have the rudimentary idea of what was afterwards expanded by Zechariah into the prophecy which was literally fulfilled in our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Zech. ix. 9). It was no mere arbitrary sign that was thus given beforehand by the prophet. It was the index of a meek and lowly mind, such as becomes Shiloh—the Prince of Peace. Though he is the lion of the tribe of Judah, he does not multiply horses, as the kings that affected oriental pomp used to do, against the express commandment of the law. He rides, like the old Judges, on an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass; in humble guise; willing to be as the poorest of the people. Then again, is not the image of wine, the blood of the grape, a very common emblem of the spiritual refreshment which the Messiah has to bestow? The idea of its abundance, even to the washing of his garments in it, is in thorough keeping with subsequent prophetic symbols. And once more, may we not see in the picture of beauty briefly drawn at the close of all—"His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk" (ver. 12).—what might be the suggestive source of not a little of the language used in the Song, to bring out the rapturous admiration in which the Bridegroom King is held by his loving spouse?

Taken thus, the sublime utterance of Israel is consistent with itself, and worthy of its occasion and its object. He does full justice to Judah. He invests him with all the natural attributes of strength, and all the conventional insignia of rank and power. He salutes him as raised to the highest pinnacle of earthly glory. But exactly then, and at that point, Judah disappears from his range of vision; and he does not come upon it again. It is all filled with the surpassing glory of one far greater than Judah; coming with peace, as well as praise, for his name;—coming to "gather into one all things in himself;"—

coming triumphant, but meek and lowly in his triumph;—coming to shed abroad from himself all abundance of wine;—coming to be “glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe.”

How much, or how little, the patriarch knew of a previous coming of that illustrious one,—to obey, and suffer, and die,—we cannot tell. He knew at least that “without shedding of blood there is no remission,” and that “through much tribulation lies the entrance into the kingdom of heaven.” We who live now, under the partial realization of Jacob's great vision, know all that better than he could do. We know “Christ and him crucified.” We know Jesus, who was once crucified, as now exalted at the right hand of God. But do we fix our eye as steadfastly as Jacob did on what is our hope now;—the fuller realization of this vision at the glorious appearing of the Lord from heaven? Do the words—“till Shiloh come”—cause our hearts to thrill as they did the heart of dying Jacob? Do we enter into the mind of him who, ages afterwards, as he closed the volume of the Revelation, exclaimed, “Even so come, Lord Jesus”?

LXVII.

WAITING FOR THE SALVATION OF THE LORD—SEEING THE SALVATION OF THE LORD.

Genesis xlix. 18.

I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.

This is a remarkable ejaculation in the circumstances. What can it mean? Is it a part of the oracle about Dan, at the close of which it comes in? Is it Dan who is to be understood as using these words? Does Jacob put them into the mouth of that tribe as expressive of their future character? Or is it the old man speaking for himself—breaking out, in the midst of what he feels to be his somewhat weary work, into a pathetic appeal to God for rest?

Whatever may be its import, I cannot but take it to be the utterance of his own emotion; the irrepressible sighing of his own heart. Perhaps it indicates some little disappointment. The picture of the prospective fortunes of his house which the Spirit is setting before him is not all bright. On the contrary, it has in it too many features of resemblance to what he has already met with in his actual family history. The future is to be too like the past; what his sons have been their several posterities are to be. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, have passed in review before his divinely opened eyes, with little to give him comfortable hope. In Judah, indeed, he has seen a glorious sight—Shiloh coming and gathering to him all nations—the king, meek, and riding upon an ass—setting up a kingdom of peace and plenty—resting and giving rest amid overflowing abundance of wine of the choicest grapes—himself all fair—“the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.” But the very glimpse he has thus got of Messiah's royal beauty causes a kind of reaction. It is

brief and evanescent, like a flash of light across the dark and lowering sky. He has instantly to change his hand and check his pride. The strain has risen for a moment to heaven's holy harmony of joy and glory -, it comes down again at once to earth's broken music. The burden may not be quite so heavy as before. Elements of material prosperity are in the busy scenes which its glowing language depicts. There is Zebulun along the sea-coast, almost rivaling great Zidon in its commerce (ver. 13). Issachar also is seen stretching his lazy length in his rich inland valleys, unambitious of distinction in policy or war—content with the alternate animal rest and servile toil of a rude life of rural safety and abundance (ver. 14, 15). And Dan rises conspicuous—giving rulers and judges to all Israel—having the wisdom of the serpent, at least, if not the harmlessness of the dove, to help him forward (ver. 16, 17). So far, there is a somewhat better outlook for them than for the first three. But it is not quite such as to satisfy the patriarch. His spirit, wrought up to its highest pitch by what he has seen of Shiloh in Judah, feels, as it were, a shock, a jar. Is this all he is to get of insight into the grace and glory of him whose day he sees afar off? with such gladness of heart? Must he have his mind again filled with images of mere terrestrial significancy? This is not quite what he thinks he might have anticipated; it is not exactly what he would have desired. "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

What it was that Jacob waited for may be made matter of doubtful disputation. Any signal deliverance wrought by God may be called, in Scripture language, "his salvation." The miracle of the Red Sea is so called (Exod. xiv. 13); and so also is the victory granted to the good king Jehoshaphat, upon his prayer and fasting, without his army striking a blow (2 Chron. xx. 17). In these and similar instances the meaning is fixed by the connection in which the expression stands. But it occurs very often, indeed for the most part, with nothing to restrict or qualify it—especially in the Psalms, and in some chapters of Isaiah. "My salvation," says the Lord to the church. And the church, or the believer, answers, "Thy salvation, O Lord."

When thus used absolutely, without any particular event being specified, it may denote simply the Lord's saving power and grace

generally; and thus understood, it includes much that is fitted to awaken interest and call forth desire. That God saves,—and how God saves,—are the two parts of it;—both of them, if we look at them in the right light, not a little wonderful. In the first place, that God saves at all,—that he can save, being such as he is, and men being such as they are, is not quite so much a matter of course as we are apt to fancy. For, let us remember, it is such salvation as can be called his, emphatically his,—that is now in question;—such salvation as may be fitly and worthily ascribed to him. And therefore, secondly, the manner of it is all-important,—how he saves. An insight into that is indispensable.

“Thy salvation, O Lord,”—thy manner of saving! How it is possible for thee to save at all,—upon what principles, after what fashion, thou art minded to save,—what may make it possible for thee to save, if I may so say, safely,—without derogating from thine infinite perfections,—without prejudice to thyself, O Lord, and to the glorious majesty of thy throne and law,—that to me is a marvel! It is a mystery,—the knowledge of it is too wonderful for me. “It is high, I cannot attain unto it.”

Thou hast indeed been a saviour to me, O Lord! Thou hast been so on many an occasion, in many a danger, in many a trying hour. Thou hast been continually “delivering my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling” (Ps. cxvi. 8).

Surely thy dealings with me personally prove that thou savest,—that it is thy delight, thy very nature, to save. And they teach something also as to the manner of thy salvation;—how much there is in it of long-suffering patience, generous forbearance, tender pity;—how much there is in it also of utterly undeserved and gratuitous loving-kindness;—how much of wisdom and kind consideration;—how much of what is fitted to touch the conscience and win the heart.

Still there is darkness. That thy salvation should be of such a sort in my case,—that thou shouldst have so saved, so often, such an one as I am,—is to my mind only an aggravation of the darkness.

Nor is the darkness dispelled when I look away from my own personal history to other instances of thy power to save. These have been very terrible in many of their accompaniments,—so terrible, that in spite of all that I have tasted of thy saving goodness, I may well doubt if I am really saved after all,—I who have so abused thy goodness that even it may all the more condemn me. I cannot but ask if the deluge of wrath must not at last be my portion, rather than the ark of safety,—the fire of Sodom's judgment, rather than the little city Zoar.

Nay, even the sacrificial rite which I have been accustomed to observe,—the plunging of the knife into the innocent victim slain in my stead,—can only very partially chase the gloom away. The awful truth it proclaims, that “without shedding of blood there is no remission,” does but suggest the anxious question,—Can this blood suffice?

Ah! it might well be with deep and poignant grief that the dying Israel, feeling himself to be still,—to be at that dread moment more than ever,—the poor, weak, sinful worm, Jacob,—uttered this plaintive voice, in the midst of his prophesying,—“I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.”

He had thought he was now at last to obtain full satisfaction. He would gladly have laid an arrest on the bright and beauteous form that flitted past him, as he saw for a moment the coming Shiloh. Fain would he have sought leave to gaze on him a little longer;—if by any means he might see in him any sign of a better ransom than “the blood of bulls or of goats” could ever furnish. But the vision vanishes swiftly and sadly from his view. The great problem of reconciling the final welfare of the guilty with interests of even higher moment in the righteous government of the Most High,—the question of questions,—“How can man be just with God V—How can God himself be “a just God and a Saviour?”—is scarcely at all more clearly solved than it was before. It is still as one who has not yet attained that he has to say; “I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.”

May not something of the same spirit be traced in other Old Testament references,—especially in the Psalms and in Isaiah,—to the salvation of the Lord; and in the attitude of the church, or of the believer, towards that salvation?

Thus in the thirty-fifth Psalm, we have such supplications as these: “Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive against me;— Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.” “My soul shall be joyful in the Lord, it shall rejoice in his salvation” (ver. 1, 3, 9). Here there is waiting for the salvation of the Lord,—waiting in confident expectation. It is waiting under a cloud. It is waiting under the cloud occasioned by the triumph of the ungodly, in their persecution of the righteous;—“For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul” (ver. 7). The problem, the question, is still virtually the same. How is the riddle of God's providence to be read?

I cannot be at rest while I see violence and wrong prevailing,— and the meek ready to perish. But I know that the Lord reigneth in righteousness. There must be a time, not only of righteous deliverance for his poor and oppressed ones, but of righteous reckoning with their oppressors. I confidently anticipate such a time. Therefore I say that “my soul shall be joyful in the Lord;”—“it shall rejoice in thy salvation,”—for which “I have waited, O Lord.” It is no malignant joy in human misery; it is the joy of seeing God's character vindicated, and his rule upheld, by his own righteous method of deliverance being at last realized and fulfilled.

Then, again, the fiftieth Psalm closes emphatically thus: —“Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation of God” (ver. 23), That is God's own promise. He will show to the upright the divine salvation,—the only sort of salvation that is worthy of himself. Let us remember the argument of that fiftieth Psalm. After a tender expostulation with those who are really his own among the people, for not trusting, loving, and praying to him enough,—and a terrible denunciation of those who are merely hypocrites and self-deceivers, —who take God's covenant in their mouth and yet conform to the world and its wicked ways,—the Lord finds the source, at once of

the weak unsteadfastness of the godly, and of the reckless presumption of the worldly, in the "silence" which in his providence he is now "keeping," and the too common and natural misinterpretation and abuse of that silence on the part of both sorts or classes of men. It is the silence of forbearance, and of the delay of judgment, which encourages the profane and is apt to perplex the pious. But both will soon have light enough on the only way of salvation that is consistent with righteousness. "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence,—thou thoughtest I was altogether such an one as thyself,—but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." There is to be a speaking out, on the part of him who is now "keeping silence." And it is in connection with that prospect that it is said;—"To him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God." I will show him the salvation that alone can be of God;—the salvation that is righteous as well as gracious. Therefore such a one may confidently and humbly reply,—"I wait,"—I have waited, and will still wait,—"for thy salvation, O Lord."

But it is in the 119th Psalm pre-eminently that this great thought of the Lord's salvation is made matter of devout meditation and prayer. "Quicken me in thy righteousness. Let thy mercies come also unto me, O Lord; even thy salvation, according to thy word" (ver. 40, 41). "Let my heart be sound in thy precepts, that I be not ashamed; my soul fainteth for thy salvation; but I hope in thy word" (ver. 80, 81). "Mine eyes fail for thy salvation, and for the word of thy righteousness" (ver. 123). "Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments" (ver. 166). "I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord, and thy law is my delight" (ver. 174).

Surely all this is indeed "waiting for the salvation of the Lord!" And it is the waiting of one who is thoroughly on the side and in the interests of God; of his "righteousness," his "precepts," his "word;" "the word of his righteousness," his "commandments," his "law."

In every instance in which he speaks of the salvation of the Lord, the Psalmist speaks of it in connection with a prior and paramount recognition of the Lord's own character and claims. (1.) "Let thy salvation come to me;" (2.) "my soul fainteth for thy salvation;" (3.)

“mine eyes fail for thy salvation;” (4.) “I have hoped for thy salvation;” (5.) “I have longed for thy salvation;” these are strong, earnest, and emphatic breathings of devout desire. But as to the first, the salvation must come “according to thy word;” as to the second, “my heart must be sound in thy precepts;” as to the third, thy salvation must be identical with “the word of thy righteousness;” while the fourth and fifth stand connected with the devout profession:—“I have done thy commandments,”—“Thy law is my delight.”

No salvation could content me that is not in harmony with these high and holy principles;—these deep convictions of my soul. No salvation could approve itself as thine that did not meet this inexorable condition.

But the Psalmist feels that in none of the salvations with which he is familiar, whether personal, or domestic, or national, is it met adequately and sufficiently. Much there is in all of them to manifest both the goodness and the severity of God; for there are always tokens of his displeasure against sin, in the midst of all his loving-kindness to the sinner. But in none of them can either retributive justice or saving mercy be seen to be complete, and to have its perfect work. Both the righteousness and the grace halt, and fail of their full accomplishment. The onlooker is still staggered by the seeming impunity of evil; only a partial and doubtful victory being secured on the side of good. If he is of one mind with the Psalmist,—if he is of one mind with the Psalmist's Lord,—he waits for what, as being more thoroughly according to his law, may more worthily be called “his salvation.”

In a remarkable series of prophecies in Isaiah (xlvi.-lvi.), the Lord speaks of “his salvation.” And he speaks of it as no longer to be waited for, at least not much longer, but as now at hand and within reach. “I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory” (Is. xlvi. 13). “My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust” (Is. li. 5). “Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye my judgment, and do justice; for my

salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed" (Is. lvi. 1).

This salvation of the Lord is brought near in the train of righteousness—his own righteousness. What righteousness that is, the description of the Messiah which stands in the very heart of this glorious evangelical prophecy, indicates beyond all possibility of doubt.

For, in the fifty-third chapter, not only is the fact of the Lord's salvation being near confirmed, but the manner of it also is declared;—and in so far as that can be done beforehand, it is declared clearly and fully. The righteousness of God:—a righteousness that is in every view his,—provided by him, wrought out by him, accepted by him, applied by him; a righteousness infinitely worthy of him, and therefore worthy of being [called his;—commensurate with his own perfect righteousness of nature;—corresponding perfectly to the righteousness of his government and law;—a righteousness having in it both precious blood to expiate deadly guilt and sinless obedience to win eternal life;—such a righteousness, in the holy person and atoning work of him whom the prophet describes as “wounded for our transgressions,”—goes before, and opens up the way for, the Lord's salvation;—a salvation as worthy of him, and of being called his, as is the righteousness which is its pioneer;—such a salvation as the Psalmist had before his eyes;—such a salvation as Jacob would fain have seen, when he said; “I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.”

Need I trace this thought running through the Old Testament, any farther? Let me simply bring it down to Gospel times.

The aged Simeon here sufficiently shows the way. He was one who could say with Jacob; “I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.” But he had not to say it exactly as Jacob had to say it. The patriarch must be content to depart with the language, so far, of ungratified curiosity, or rather, of unsatisfied desire, on his lips—“I have waited.” Not so this “just and devout” man. He “waited for the consolation of Israel,”—the salvation of the Lord. But he was not to have to say, even at the last, “I have waited,” that was not to be his

dying ejaculation. For “it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.” And accordingly in the temple he took up the child Jesus in his arms and blessed God and said; “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” He saw the Lord's anointed Saviour, and the Lord's way of saving Jew and Gentile by him. He saw the tribulation through which, in righteousness, the salvation was to be accomplished. He saw the sharp sword that was to pierce alike the Saviour and the saved. He saw the light and glory for which the sharp sword was to open up the way (Luke ii. 25-35).

Simeon's attitude, rather than Jacob's, may be said to be ours. And yet may not the two be combined? May we not enter all the more into Jacob's “waiting,” the more we enter into Simeon's “seeing?” We should be able to say, with a fulness of meaning which even Simeon could not grasp, that our eyes have seen the salvation of the Lord. Not the infant Jesus in the temple has been disclosed to us,—but besides, the man Christ Jesus,—in his life, and death, and resurrection; teaching, doing good, obeying and suffering. Christ crucified, Christ glorified, it is ours to see; to see in the light of inspired apostolic revelation; to see with eye opened and purged by the same Spirit who inspired that revelation. Truly, we see the salvation of the Lord as Simeon could scarcely be said to see it!

What then? Is there to be no more waiting for it? Nay, if we see it as Simeon could scarcely see it, we will say with more intensity than Jacob could say: “I have waited,—I wait,—for thy salvation, O Lord.” For this surely is a case in which it must hold true “that increase of appetite grows by what it feeds on.” The more we see of the salvation, the more we wait for something more of it still to be seen. In fact, there can be no real waiting without some seeing. Jacob must have been able, in some measure, to enter into Simeon's grateful acknowledgment,—“Mine eyes have seen thy salvation;” else he never would have felt his own longing,—“I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.” And Simeon, when he found what had been revealed to him fulfilled, and could say, “Mine eyes have seen thy

salvation,” did not cease to wait,—nay rather he waited all the more,—“for thy salvation, O Lord.”

For the salvation of the Lord;—what it is; of what sort, and in what way effected; how the Lord saves, and all that is implied in his saving;—is as immense and inexhaustible as is his own infinite fulness,—the “fulness of the Godhead” that “dwells bodily in Christ.” Therefore, for deeper insight into it and for larger enjoyment of it, there must always be waiting,—waiting evermore. Even in eternity there is waiting for it. The dying saint,—the dying sinner scarcely daring to own the name of saint, weary and way-worn, conscious of little in himself but ignorance, infirmity, and unbelief, yet still holding on,—may be apt almost to complain—“I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord;” and alas! I seem to have been waiting all but in vain! What of its light and joy is mine? What of its sensible comfort? What of its full assurance? What of its beatific vision? its rapture? its triumph? What of the outburst—“I know, I see, I mount, I fly T’ Depressed and doubting, or at the best, “faint yet pursuing,”—he asks, Is this then, after all, the salvation that I have been waiting for, O Lord? Is this indeed thy salvation? Nay it is not. It is not, at least, the whole of it. Be thankful for the earnest of it, which is “waiting for it.” Thou hast been waiting for it; and thou mayest have to wait for it still. Waiting for it is thy security now; waiting for it will be thine eternal joy in heaven.

Let no one therefore ever say, dying or living, in any other spirit than that in which Jacob said it—“I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.” For, with whatever sense of the vanity of earthly things, and the unsatisfactory nature of even the best earthly prospects, for himself and his, he said it,—of one thing we may be sure, he did not say it in the spirit of unbelief. On the contrary, if I am right in my impression of what he meant, he was moved to say it by the very sight his faith had just got of Shiloh coming. He had hoped to have seen more of him; for in him he saw the salvation for which he had waited. But let him have seen ever so much more of him, he must still have gone away from earth unsatisfied. And let him have seen ever so little, he is in a position, as he goes away, to say with Simeon, “Mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

How is this salvation to be waited for? What is implied in waiting for it? Let one or two texts give the answer.

1. "Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him" (Ps. lxxxv. 9). Do we "fear him?" Do we deprecate the Lord's wrath, as that Psalm does?—"Cause thine anger against us to cease;" "Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?" "Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? Are we as much in earnest as the Psalmist is about God's favour toward us, and our revival toward him? "Thou hast been favourable;" "Thou hast forgiven;" "Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee? Do we thus wait for his salvation?—"Show us thy mercy, O Lord, and grant us thy salvation." Do we moreover wait in the attitude of obedient faith,—"I will hear what God the Lord will speak;" and of believing hope,—"for he will speak peace to his people, and to his saints;" and of thorough separation from evil and an evil world,—"let them not turn again to folly"? Then, surely, his salvation is nigh to us, as "to them that fear him." All the more it is so, if we make what follows your own special and personal prayer; "That glory may dwell in our land, mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace kissing each other."

2. For, as another Psalm puts it (xcvi. 2), if like Simeon, we see—and like Jacob, we wait for—the Lord's salvation; let us "sing unto the Lord, and bless his name, and show forth his salvation from day to day."

Yes! let us show forth his salvation; let us tell all men that he saves, and how he saves; let us make known the way of saving grace. The more we do so the more shall we have of insight and experience—of hope and expectation—with regard to it. Both Simeon and Jacob tried that method; let us try it also. The more we try it, the more shall we have cause to say with Simeon, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation;"—and with Jacob, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

3. The actual result or issue, present or prospective, of this "showing of the Lord's salvation," is a great help to us in our own experience, as "seeing it," and yet "waiting for it." The Psalmist

celebrates, in anticipation, a glorious time, “O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right hand and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. The Lord hath made known his salvation; his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Ps. xcvi. 1-3). So also does the prophet. “The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Is. Hi. 10). Who can doubt that when these days come, there will be a “seeing of the Lord's salvation,” with Simeon; and a “waiting for it,” with Jacob, greatly beyond what there is of either now? And yet, might there not be even now more than there is of insight and sympathy—of experience and hope—as regards this salvation of the Lord? Let there be realized, on a small scale, under our immediate cognizance, what we believe is to be realized universally, under the eyes of all intelligences at last—a fresh original exhibition of the power of saving truth over the consciences and affections of men. Let us throw ourselves, heart and soul, into the midst of any saving work of the Lord—personally at home or by sympathy abroad. Let us lay ourselves alongside of any one soul into whose mouth the Lord has put the new song, and enter into the marvellous things which the Lord hath done for that soul. Our seeing the Lord's salvation for ourselves—our waiting for it—will thus become, more and more, seeing and waiting indeed.

4. Let the saying in Lamentations (iii. 26) be kept in mind: “It is good for a man both to hope, and quietly to wait for the salvation of God.” Let no man object to a waiting posture,—even though it should continue to be a waiting posture to the end;—even though he should feel as if it is all waiting, and only waiting, that he has to acknowledge as his experience;—“I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.” For this waiting posture is very becoming and very blessed. It is good to wait;—not to wait in indolence, or idleness, or indifference;—not to wait with the sluggard's folded hands, or the fatalist's dark, stern, moody apathy of soul; but to wait intelligently; with desire and hope;—to wait, because we know something of the blessedness of what we wait for:—to wait in patience, because what we have already tasted of what we wait for is so rich a boon, and so

thoroughly undeserved, that we may well be content to wait, ever so long, for ever so little more of it.

As regards the Lord's first coming, and its immediate fruit, there should be on our part, as on Simeon's, the actual, present seeing of the salvation of the Lord. The righteousness in the train of which it comes is not to be waited for. That is near; Christ is near, "Jehovah our righteousness." "Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart. Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. X. 5-11).

Not waiting therefore,—but looking, seeing, embracing,—is our duty and privilege, when Christ is set forth as come, already come, —crucified, already crucified,—risen, already risen;—"delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification."

But he cometh again. "Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation" (Heb. ix. 28). And looking for him now is waiting for him, with "loins girt and lamps burning." It is watching also, as not knowing at what hour the Master may come; but yet "knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed" (Rom. xiii. 11).

LXVIII.

CLOSE OF JACOB'S DYING PROPHECY—THE BLESSING ON JOSEPH.

Genesis xlix. 19-32.

“Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall the people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days.”—Daniel x. 14.

“Let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren”.—Duet, xxxiii. 16.

Of the twelve tribes, as represented by his twelve sons, in this last oracular vaticination of “Jacob who is Israel,” three are connected, as it would seem, with Judah—namely, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi,—the other seven belong more properly to Joseph.

These last are called in order. Zebulun, Issachar, and Dan come first. At Dan, the patriarch pauses for a moment. Under the somewhat disappointing impression of a descent from the glorious vision of the Messiah, vouchsafed to him in connection with Judah, he utters the ejaculation, “I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord;” and then he resumes his task. The remaining members of his household pass in review before him,—Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin. With the exception of Joseph, they are all very summarily disposed of.

The utterances regarding them indeed are so brief and enigmatical as to defy, at this distance of time, anything like a really discriminating application of them, or a trustworthy historical

verification of them. They doubtless suggested marks and badges, of which a college of heralds might have made good use in emblazoning the escutcheons and banners of the tribes. Gad is represented as a multitudinous host, with signs in its ranks both of defeat and of victory,—but ending in victory; “Gad, a troop shall overcome him; but he shall overcome at the last” (ver. 19). Asher is a giver, or receiver, of rich and princely banquets; “Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties” (ver. 20). Naphtali is an animal of speed and beauty running at large, and uttering pleasant voices; “Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words” (ver. 21). And Benjamin is an animal sly and predatory, prowling secretly in the dark for victims; “Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil” (ver. 27).

These are all significant enough delineations; they may have served as watchwords among the tribes when their fortunes came to be developed. And it is not difficult to trace points of correspondence between the curt hints thus addressed to his sons, and the actual circumstances of their families to such an extent as sufficiently to vindicate the inspiration of the dying patriarch. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that these hints are very curt, and that much modesty and forbearance ought to be exhibited by any who would interpret them particularly;—still more by any who would take exception to them as incapable of explanation. They may well be left in some obscurity,—at least for the present,—for we cannot say what light the future may yet shed on these early archives.

Even the oracle about Joseph is to be cautiously handled. It is fuller than the rest. The old man's heart is in it. It is like the swan's fabled strain in dying. He pours it out with a richness and copiousness of expression, altogether unlike the summary conciseness with which he dispatches the others (ver. 22-26).

First, growth and fertility,—exuberant growth, luxuriant fertility,—are ascribed to this “rod out of the stem “of Israel,—this “branch growing out of his roots.” The parent tree gives off in him a shoot that becomes itself prolific of goodly offshoots of its own; “Joseph

is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall” (ver. 22).

Again, secondly, he appears as an archer. He is beset for a time by other archers, vexing and wounding him in their envy. But his weapon is unhurt, and his strength is unimpaired. One mightier than himself shields him from harm, and nerves him for endurance and triumph; “The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee” (ver. 23-25).

Then, thirdly, the varied abundance of the good things provided for him is indicated; He “shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb” (ver. 25).

And finally, in the fourth place, as if he would exhaust his whole soul in one last loving embrace of his favorite son,—the son so worthy of his favour,—the dying patriarch intimates that, signal as were the blessings he had himself got heaped upon his head by his pious and believing forefathers, he would have them surpassed and excelled by the blessings he invokes on Joseph,—as much as the great, old, far-off hills, that are ever the same, surpass and excel in grandeur the little fields of ever-changing tint, on which the passing seasons, year by year, leave their evanescent hues;—“The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph” (ver. 26).

Such is to be Joseph's happy portion;—a portion in respect of which he is to be as much distinguished from the other sons of Israel in prosperity, as he was in trial;—for all these blessings are “on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren” (ver. 26).

There is, it must be owned, a good deal of vagueness in all this benediction,—at least to our apprehension now. Considered as a prophecy, it is general rather than specific,—indefinite rather than precise;—furnishing few, if any, points of minute identification between its foreshadowings and the subsequent history. Nor is much additional light thrown upon it by what looks almost like an explanation or amplification of it, in the dying speech of Moses (Deut. xxxiii. 13-17).

It is unquestionable that in after time Joseph, as represented principally by the tribe of Ephraim,—for the division of Manasseh into two parts necessarily weakened the influence of his tribe,—held a most conspicuous place in Israel's territory, and played a most conspicuous part in Israel's history. All that Jacob said of him was fulfilled in large measure, before the sad revolt of the tribes among which he took the lead from the throne of the house of David, and the temple-worship of the Lord in Jerusalem. A cloud has since come over the destinies of Joseph's house;—whether or not ever again to be raised, it may be left to time to show.

One clause in the benediction is peculiar,—the parenthetical clause; “From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel” (ver. 24). These are divine Messianic titles,—appropriated in subsequent Scripture to the Jehovah of the chosen people's worship,—the Angel-Jehovah of their believing hope. Is this the origin of that use of them? Is Joseph honoured as one acting instead of God towards his brethren,—and as, in that respect, the type and herald of him who comes to save? Is it meant to be intimated that this is the crown and consummation of the warfare and work, the office and ministry, for which “his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob,”—that in virtue of it, he is “the shepherd, the stone of Israel;”—having been raised up to prefigure him who is the true Shepherd, feeding his flock and giving his life for the sheep,—and who is also the stone, the rock, on which the church is built,—the sure foundation laid in Zion?

Thus the dying patriarch reads off the histories of his descendants. Thus he divides the several families that are afterwards

to constitute the commonwealth of Israel; “All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them” (ver. 28).

Having discharged this last office, his mind returns to his own situation and his own prospects. He reiterates his earnest and anxious entreaty as to the disposal of his body;—“And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers” (ver. 29). He is particular,—after the garrulous manner of old age shall I say?—nay rather, for it is the true explanation, in the intensity of his believing hope; he is minutely particular in pointing out the identical spot where he wishes his remains to be laid;—“In the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying-place” (ver. 29-30). He indicates the reason of his anxiety, and the longing desire which he has to serve himself heir, in his burial, to his father and grandfather. They, with their wives, reposed in that tomb in which he has already laid his Leah. He would fain lie there himself;—“There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah” (ver. 31). And, as if to obviate all objections, and vindicate, with his dying breath, his unquestionable right to the place of sepulture in which he so solemnly adjures his sons to lay him, he adverts to the original acquisition of the property by Abraham, for the burial of Sarah;—thus justifying his grandsire's far-seeing prophetic wisdom in refusing to take it as a gift, and insisting on having it by purchase;—“The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth” (ver. 32).

So ends this closing interview of Jacob with his sons. They have for themselves his last solemn warnings and blessings,—and his last orders as to his own remains.

LXIX.

THE DEATH OF JACOB—HIS CHARACTER AND HISTORY.

Genesis xlix. 33; l. 1.

“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.”—Psalm xxxvii. 37.

“Fear not, thou worm Jacob.”—Isaiah xli. 14.

“Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel.”—Isaiah xlvi. 1.

The strangely checkered course of Jacob's earthly history is run. His end is peace; and according to God's promise (xlvi. 4), Joseph closes his eyes;—“When Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people. And Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him” (xlix. 33; l. 1).

The manner of his death is simply told. First, he composes himself to rest, and as it were, to sleep; he calmly assumes the attitude of repose. He has done with life;—its business is all ended. When “the time drew near that Israel must die” (xlvi. 29), he at once proceeded, with wonderful self-possession, to set his house in order,—to give directions, “by faith,” concerning his burial,—to bless, “by faith,” the two sons of Joseph,—to pronounce, “by faith,” the inspired oracles that told what was to befall his children in the latter days,—and to charge them once more solemnly with the obligation to lay his body in the grave of his fathers Abraham and Isaac,—in the land which his seed were to receive for an inheritance.

And now, his deathbed work being over, he lies down exhausted, quietly to await the summons to his long home. It comes. He resigns his spirit to him who gave it; he commends his soul to God. And he has gone home,—gone to be one of the kindred multitude that have gone before.

It might be unsafe to make much of these expressions in themselves—“he yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people,”—or to put on them a very strict literal interpretation. They are expressions used generally to denote death, in almost any circumstances. One cannot help imagining, however, that as used originally in early times, and with reference to their verbal derivation and significancy, they may have meant more than they were understood afterwards to mean, when they became the hackneyed familiarities of common speech. They certainly seem to indicate two ideas of death, not unlikely to occur to primitive thought;—the one, that of a sort of acquiescence or contented surrender;—the other, that of being involved in a sweeping and comprehensive cast of the fatal net, which draws into a common receptacle or reservoir the successive swarms of the human race. The one is a kind of voluntary parting with life; the other is being swallowed up in the mysterious, unseen realm which collects in its capacious bosom, one after another, the busy generations that, one after another, people this changing world. Be that, however, as it may, there can be no doubt that these words denote a calm and peaceful close of the patriarch's troubled career.

It had indeed been a troubled career. From first to last it was a sore, sad struggle of the flesh against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. Let us recall some of its stages.

I. There was misunderstanding from the beginning—misunderstanding and unbelief. The oracle which accompanied his birth should have ensured order and peace; it turned out, on the contrary, to be the occasion of confusion and strife. It was no secret in the household. The two brothers, while yet boys, or lads, evidently knew all about it, and made it a ground of quarrel and bone of contention. The parents were divided in regard to it. The mother and her favorite younger son were in favour of what it

foretold; the father and his firstborn, on the other hand, would rather stand out for the natural right of primogeniture, and set the oracle at defiance, or let it fulfill itself as it best could. Hence the unseemly and un-brotherly scene of the birthright sold for a mess of pottage j—Jacob seizing his opportunity—Esau despising his privilege. Hence the still more melancholy scene of the wretched struggle for the blessing;—the father trying to go against the Lord's decree—the mother seeking to accomplish it by fraud. It was the oracle that set them all at variance, through their unbelief. They all sinned and were sinned against;—with what proportions of wrong sustained and guilt contracted, it is vain to inquire.

But certainly, of all the household, Jacob was in the worst and most difficult position. Had the oracle been believed and obeyed, he might have taken the place assigned to him, with such wise and loving counsel, on the part of father and mother alike, as would have prevented all family heartburnings, and united parents and children together in looking to the promised Seed and Saviour, with a view to whom it was that the younger son was chosen. His being thus chosen, with this view, would not then have stirred in him either pride, or envy, or deceit. But he found himself an occasion of strife. He sought to end it by a sort of compromise with his brother—for the transaction of the mess of pottage seems, on his part, to have been of the nature of a compromise—the symbol of his surrendering the temporal inheritance for the spiritualities of the birthright. But the miserable jealousy of favoritism grows. And between the one parent bent on what must frustrate the oracle, and the other devising carnal means for its accomplishment, Jacob, not yet himself strong in faith, falls a ready victim to the policy which, instead of trusting God with the bringing to pass of his own purposes in his own time and way, will insist on taking what is altogether God's matter into its own I control, and planning and acting at its own hand on God's behalf.

II. A brighter scene opens at Bethel. It is a critical time. He is now wholly in the Lord's hands; not in the hands of a misjudging father, on the one side, or of a weak, fond, erring mother, on the other. Forsaken, virtually, by father and mother, “the Lord takes him up” (Ps. xxvii. 10).

On that night, as his head leans on his pillow of stone, he is alone with God. He is very near heaven—heaven is very near him. It is open to him. God from heaven, God in heaven, deals with him. A covenant is ratified—a personal covenant. The two parties mutually give themselves to one another. Jacob is now a new man; old things are passed away—all things are become new. So he begins his lonely pilgrimage in Syria.

For it is to be to him spiritually a lonely pilgrimage, in which, with much in his outward lot to harass and distract him, he may have enough of difficulty in walking with him whose covenant he has embraced. He falls into very worldly society, and becomes familiar with worldly ways. The kindness he meets with among his mother's kindred is sadly marred by covetousness and cruel craft. He is hurt and wounded in his tenderest and purest affections. His domestic comfort is blighted in the very bud. He is entangled by human guile in a breach of the holy and honourable law of marriage ordained by God—and one breach leads on to more. A happy household, a godly seed, can scarcely be looked for. What prosperity he meets with is embittered by the unscrupulous artifices against which he has continually to guard. At home, in his family—abroad, in his business—it is an uneasy life he has to lead. Certainly there is not much in it that is congenial to the spirit of the solemn and significant transaction at Bethel. He is in danger of adopting heathen customs, and has begun to adopt them, like his descendants long afterwards who “were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.” It is well for him that his rest in Padan-aram is rudely broken.

III. But it is not change of scene only that will arrest a tendency to backsliding, or heal backsliding begun, and restore the soul. Jacob is recalled from the land of his exile, and is to sojourn again in the land where God personally met him, and dealt graciously with him. But he is not to re-enter it without a fresh awakening. A new personal meeting, a new gracious dealing, on the part of the Lord, awaits him ere he re-crosses, now become two bands, the Jordan which he passed over before with his staff. He fears the opposition of Esau. He has to encounter the opposition of Jehovah. The Lord, to whom he has cried for help against his brother's dreaded vengeance,

himself stands against him as his adversary,—as one who has a controversy with him. A night of wrestling ensues. Jacob's faith is quickened greatly. In the strength of the Lord, he sustains till day-break the wrestling of the Lord with him. He will not be driven back, or give up, or give in. "Behind a frowning providence he sees a smiling face." In the man wrestling with him, he recognizes his covenant God and Saviour. Therefore, "when he is weak then is he strong." Even when the Lord is contending with him, he will "endure, as seeing him who is invisible,"—seeing in the seeming enemy, the unseen friend. Even when the Lord breaks his very bones,—or touches them so that they are out of joint,—he will hold on in faith. And when his great antagonist seems to cease his wrestling, and makes as if he would leave him to complain, "all my bones are out of joint,"—he will not let him go until he blesses him, and gives him cause to say that "the very bones which he has broken now rejoice." The mysterious wrestler will not indeed have his name revealed,—that name which the Incarnation at last disclosed (Mat. i. 21). But Jacob gets his blessing.

So, as a prince, by his strength he has power with God. Seeing God face to face, and having his life preserved, he becomes Israel. The worm Jacob becomes a prince, having power over the Angel and prevailing. And so, having that way of faith which pleases the Lord, he finds God making his enemies to be at peace with him (Prov. xvi. 7), and causing him to dwell safely in the land.

IV. Still, Jacob's revival is not complete. The Lord needs yet again to visit him, for he is tempted to take his ease.

Forgetful apparently of his old vow at Bethel,—pledging him to return thither after his wandering, and there consecrate anew himself and his possessions to the Lord,—he lingers on the confines, where he first finds rest. He worships God, indeed, and erects an altar; but it is without thoroughly purging his house and household of all idolatry, and all heathen wickedness. He is apt to settle on his lees. The reins of domestic discipline also are relaxed. Intercourse with the surrounding world is too freely allowed; and there is a tolerated conformity to its ways;—the swift and sad result being first a daughter's dishonour, and then the cruel and cowardly revenge

inflicted by her brothers. Another divine interposition is needed,—another decided step. God must remind Jacob, of what surely he should not have needed to be reminded of,—his old Bethel experiences and Bethel pledges. Roused seasonably from apathy and spiritual sloth, he at last “makes haste and delays not to keep God's commandment.” He makes thorough work of the purifying of his house,—“enduring in it no evil thing.” All cherished remnants of idolatrous and heathen worship are cast out. He carries his household, thus purged, to Bethel. He fulfills his vow. And though sad breaches in his family mark the occasion,—the death of Rebekah's nurse, before the renewal of the covenant at Bethel, and the death of Rachel afterwards, in giving birth to her youngest son,—it is not in his case as it was in the case of the rebuilders of Jericho (1 Kings xvi. 34). These are not judgments but chastisements. Jacob shows his sense of their being so, when, parting with his beloved, he takes her Benoni to be his Benjamin.

V. It is when thus awakened, chastened, and comforted, that Jacob receives, upon his father Isaac's death, the patriarchate, or patriarchal headship. His brother Esau having been led, as it would seem, of his own accord, though of course under special providential guidance, to migrate, with his whole establishment, already growing into tribes or dukedoms, into the wide regions ever since occupied by his posterity,—Jacob quietly succeeds his father, and takes his place as the representative and chief of the chosen race. Together the two brothers, friends at last, bury their father Isaac. And it is graciously so ordered that when Jacob comes, in terms of the oracle to serve himself heir, he does so, on the one hand, with no objection or opposition on the part of his brother Esau, but on the contrary, as it would seem, with his acquiescence, if not even with his consent; and he does so, on the other hand, in connection with such fresh and recent dealings of the Lord with him, both by his word and by his providence, as are evidently blessed by the Spirit for his personal quickening and revival. It is with mingled feelings that after all his trials he now takes the place of Abraham and of Isaac.

VI. In that capacity he has still sharp discipline to endure. Not to speak of the sins of Reuben and Judah, he has to pass through the whole trial connected with Joseph.

Here too, as in former instances, the root of much, if not all, of the evil is to be found in unbelief;—in an unbelieving disregard of the mind and purpose of God, sufficiently revealed, and in sufficient time. If the manifestly inspired dreams with which the young lad was twice visited had been duly observed and turned to account,—if pains had been taken to make them the ground of patient expectation on the part of all the family, instead of their being allowed to become the occasion of jealousy and suspicion,—how much domestic sin and sorrow might have been avoided! But his father rebuked him, and his brethren envied him. And though his father's rebuke might be slight and passing, since he was, and was deservedly, a favorite child, his brethren's envy remained and rankled. Instead of faith leaving it to God to bring to pass his own end by his own means, there is the sin of unbelief which we have so often had occasion to point out. Man's fond folly and fierce passion must come in. God is not acknowledged; his salvation is not waited for. Hence misery at home;—and abroad, cruel “plotting against the righteous.” The dreamer is still, in spite of his dreams, the favoured, if not petted child,—and his brothers must somehow get rid of him. Thus long years of grief are brought upon Jacob. His patriarchal reign is, alas! no reign of righteousness, and peace, and joy. He has to mourn for Joseph as lost,—lost by a horrid fate,—torn, as he is made to think, by savage beasts. And with all their anxiety to comfort him, his remaining sons, conscious of hypocrisy and the cruelest lie men ever told,—can only very partially succeed. Wild also, and lawless, they too often are in their own lives. Benjamin, his Rachel's Benjamin,—the last pledge of her dying love,—is almost the only earthly consolation of his fast declining years. But now comes the famine,—and even Benjamin must go. Yet once more Jacob is to be thoroughly bereaved. A strange, inscrutable, stern necessity, shuts him up, and hedges in his way. There is no outlet,—no escape; any where; any how. He must part with all; yes! all; to please an Egyptian tyrant,—to satisfy his jealousy and gratify his caprice;—or else he and his must starve. The nest is bare! The last and dearest fledgling is rudely torn away, to glut the insatiate maw of the all-devouring monster that the Nile seems to have brought forth. What remains for Jacob but to sit alone and weep;—going down in disconsolate sorrow to the grave?

VII. At last there begins to dawn upon him some glimpse of light—some insight into the meaning of what has been so dark in the divine providence towards him.

But even here, what the light, as it dawns, reveals, is not all bright and clear. In the tidings that Joseph is alive in Egypt, and has prepared in Egypt a home for his father and all his house,—in the importunate message which Joseph sends, in his own name, and the king's,—in the wagons, and carriages, and provisions, all ready at his door for the journey,—Jacob's slowly opening mind begins to recognize a hint, or solemn intimation, that the time has come for the fulfilment of the Lord's prediction to Abraham; “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance” (xv. 13, 14).

It is not simply a visit he is about to pay. It is not even merely a temporary sojourn of a few years he is to make, till the calamity of the famine is overpast. Jacob's eyes are opened to the truth. The summons from Egypt is the signal of a far more serious and ominous crisis. It rings in his ears as a very solemn curfew-knell,—ushering in a long, long night of weariness and woe. This is worse than the flight to Padan-aram. That was personal to himself, and on the face of it only temporary. This is the uprooting out of the chosen land of the entire family tree;—and long ages are to pass before “the vine brought out of Egypt” is to be planted in it again. It is not merely that he is now too old himself to cherish the hope of a return. That is not the case. Like Moses, whose “eye” in his old age “was not dim, nor his natural strength abated,” Jacob is so hale and hearty that there is nothing to hinder his paying Joseph even a long visit in Egypt, and yet cherishing good and warrantable expectation of coming back to die in Canaan. Nor need the fact of his taking all his well-nigh starving household with him to a temporary asylum in a country where there is plenty, occasion much concern. But Jacob sees more clearly the real meaning of the movement; he does not shut his eyes to its ultimate as well as its immediate bearings. It is— he knows that it is—the beginning of the predicted captivity of his

race. And knowing this, he acquiesces in faith,—his faith being strengthened by one more visit paid to him by the Lord. It might seem hard that it should fall to him, in his old age, and after all his trials,—when he would fain lie down and die where his fathers Abraham and Isaac had died before him,—to lead, as it were, this forlorn hope,—to be the conductor of his people, not out of bondage, but into the worst extremity of bondage. Jacob, however, makes no remonstrance, and utters no complaint. Gratefully accepting the Lord's promise for himself and his seed, he goes down into Egypt to end his days there.

And now this Jacob is dead. “After life's fitful fever he sleeps well,”—commending his soul to God, and his body to be buried in Canaan's hallowed soil, in hope of the resurrection-day. His character and experience remain on record for our learning.

His character may not be great perhaps as men count greatness; not exalted; not noble; not fit for high achievements; but weak, rather, if you will, and inclined to the arts of weakness; not always amiable, any more than admirable; apt to suffer by contrast with some of the finer natural qualities which such a man as his brother Esau occasionally exhibits. Yet surely, on the whole, it is a character worthy of study, and not without attractions. At any rate, it is all before us; the worst and the best. We see what materials grace and faith had to work with. And we see what, in the actual result, grace and faith made of these materials. We see grace making a weak man strong; for surely to the last he was strong in faith. It made “the worm Jacob” “the prince Israel.” Let us “follow his faith;” considering the end of his conversation—“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever” (Heb. xiii. 8).

His varied, checkered, troubled experience,—is it not full of instruction and comfort to the spiritually exercised soul? It is almost,—next to David's,—the most so of any left on record in the Old Testament. There is scarcely a mood of mind into which sin or sorrow can cast a believer that may not find a type, or parallel, or example, in Jacob. Weakness in himself, as well as weakness caused by his suffering wrong at the hands of others,—and these others familiar friends as well as foes,—foes of his own household,—Jacob

certainly exhibits. Much of his history is written for our warning; in much of it he is a beacon rather than a pattern. But much also is written for our encouragement and guidance. In running the race set before us, “faint yet pursuing,” amid many cares and fears, many faults and infirmities, we may learn not a little from Jacob, while we seek to walk as strangers and pilgrims on the earth,—“waiting for thy salvation, O Lord.”

LXX.

THE BURIAL OF JACOB—THE LAST SCENE IN CANAAN.

Genesis i. 1-13.

“So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers; and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulcher that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor, the father of Sychem.”—Acts vii. 15, 16.

The burial of Jacob was an affair of state. It was a public ceremony conducted with national pomp. This must surely have been Pharaoh's doing. Jacob himself never could have dreamed of it; and it does not seem to have entered into the mind of Joseph to solicit or expect it. He assumes indeed at once, as a matter of right, or a matter of course, the position of head of the family;—and it is evidently conceded to him, without dispute or hesitation, by his brethren. He takes the charge and oversight of the whole business, and adopts measures for carrying his father's last wishes into effect, and having his body carried to Canaan. But he does so, evidently, not in the character of a prince of Egypt, the vizier or prime minister of the king, but in the character of Israel's son,—now, on Israel's decease, the acknowledged patriarchal chief of the tribe or clan.

And this, probably, is the simple explanation of a circumstance for which many frivolous and conjectural reasons have been imagined,—his communicating with Pharaoh on this occasion, not himself personally, but by a message sent through third parties (ver. 4). He has, for the time, withdrawn from the court; and is in deep seclusion, either in his own apartments, or more probably, in the bosom of his father's house. He had already made it manifest enough, that in the height of his Egyptian glory and prosperity, he was so far from being ashamed of his connection with a wandering

horde of shepherds from Canaan, that he counted that connection to be even more desirable, more to be coveted and prized, than the monarch's favour and all its fruit. He had not, indeed, exactly the same alternative before him which long afterwards tried and proved the faith of Moses. He had not literally to choose between "the reproach of Christ and the treasures of Egypt,"—between "suffering affliction with the people of God, and enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season." But he gave unequivocal evidence of the same faith that Moses exercised, when he sought so earnestly his dying father's blessing for himself and his sons. He thus deliberately preferred, for himself and for them, to share the fortunes of Abraham's seed, through the long years of predicted bondage that he knew were soon to come, as preliminary to the possession of the promised land,—rather than to stand aloof, as he might have done, and be content with patronizing the settlers in Goshen, without compromising or risking his rank and position in the palace and in the kingdom of Egypt.

Plainly, during Jacob's lifetime, Joseph counted it better to be Jacob's son than to be the nearest to Pharaoh's throne. And now that Jacob is dead, his feeling and his faith are unchanged.

He has closed his father's eyes,—and given vent to a burst of uncontrollable grief;—"Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him" (ver. 1). He looks back from that aged deathbed, through the vista of more than half-a-century of troubled life, and recalls the days when, as a child, he got that "coat of many colours,"—the last gift of fond fatherly love, before it was so rudely rent and so cruelly crushed. He proceeds to execute the task that now remains. Though shut up in the retirement of mourning, whether at Goshen or in his own palace,—keeping his chamber in privacy,—he has his attendants at his call. He issues orders for the embalming of his father's body, in the usual way, and by the usual functionaries, so as to make it fit for the long journey in prospect;—"Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel" (ver. 2). Forty days thus pass away;—so much time being required to complete the process of embalming, in due form;—"Forty days were fulfilled for Jacob; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed" (ver. 3).

Joseph, meanwhile, continues mourning in private. And the Egyptians of his household,—whether through hired officials or under the impulse of their own natural sympathy does not appear,—mourn more openly in public;—“The Egyptians mourned for Jacob threescore and ten days” (ver. 3).

These seventy days of mourning being past, and all now being ready, Joseph prepares to start on his melancholy journey towards Canaan.

Being Pharaoh's servant, he has to obtain Pharaoh's leave; “When the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh” (ver. 4). He does not go to ask it himself. This is not certainly,—it could not be,—from any distrust of the king. Perhaps the etiquette of court excluded from the royal presence one whose appearance in the attire of first mourning might cast a gloom over the royal household. Perhaps he felt that he could scarcely venture to face his master and friend, who had shown such kindness to himself and his lost father, without the risk of being too much overcome. Or perhaps he deemed it more becoming, when he was acting, not as Pharaoh's favorite minister, but as the head and representative of another race, to approach the king thus humbly, through the officers of the household;—the customary channel for conveying addresses and petitions to the throne.

Be this as it may, what Joseph asks his Egyptian friends to say on his behalf to his beloved and loving sovereign, is very simple and touching; “My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die; in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again” (ver. 5). They are simply to tell how Jacob laid Joseph under a vow,—and that in a manner more than ordinarily solemn and affecting. My father was old before he left Canaan,—older in sorrow than in years; he reckoned his grave to be already dug there. It had been opened for his grandfather and his father,—and for their wives,—and for his own. In his eyes it stood ever open for himself. He spoke of it to me with his latest breath as “the grave which I digged for me in the land of Canaan.” I took an

oath to bury him there. I ask permission to go up and fulfill my oath. And I promise instantly to return.

Such brief leave of absence, for such a sacred duty, Joseph asks his friends to solicit on his behalf.

There is no hint of his desiring a pompous funeral; he has no thought of anything of the sort. His one wish is simply to do his father's bidding. It is Pharaoh himself, evidently, who makes a national affair of what might otherwise have been nothing more than a family arrangement.

The king grants his favorite minister's request after a kingly fashion;—"Pharaoh said. Go up and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear" (ver. 6). The father of the man who has laid him and his kingdom under such obligations,—carrying them so well through the crisis of such a famine, and making it the occasion of consolidating the empire and confirming its supremacy among the nations,—is not to be buried as a common man. Joseph is by all means to accomplish his promise, and carry the loved remains to Canaan.

But he is to do so in a manner worthy of the great prince whose favour he has won, to whom he is a second self. It is to be, not merely a Hebrew, but an Egyptian ceremonial: "Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company" (ver. 7, 8, 9).

Goshen is deserted of all but "the little ones, and flocks and herds." Even the old men and the women, as it would seem,—with the exception probably of a remnant to look after the little ones, and flocks, and herds,—are eager to swell the train. All Joseph's house, and his brethren's houses, and the whole house of his father, are on the march. And along with them, there are the chief men of Pharaoh's household and the flower of Egypt's chivalry; the elders or

princes of the king's court, as well as those of the whole land; with chariots and horsemen in abundance.

It was a goodly cavalcade,—a “very great company.” It was Pharaoh's way of signaling the man whom he delighted to honour. And it was a tribute of regard, that would probably more exalt Joseph in the eyes of all Egypt,—and that would certainly, as we may well believe, come more home to Joseph's own heart—than his first investiture with the fine linen and the gold chain when he was proclaimed ruler over all the land. It must have been to Joseph almost as if his royal master had, with his own hands, carried his father's head to the grave. The Egyptians saw how Pharaoh loved Joseph; and they fully sympathized with both.

The procession thus formed moved towards Canaan. They did not, as it would seem, proceed by the most direct and shortest route. They went circuitously; following, it is believed, very much the Hue of march which the Israelites took, when they left Egypt four hundred years after,—to wander forty years in the wilderness, and to be at last brought into the promised land.

So “they came to the thrashing-floor of Atad” (ver. 10). That spot where the funeral cavalcade halted, was, as is commonly supposed, on the east side of the Jordan;—“beyond Jordan” (ver. 10), looking from Egypt. This of itself would indicate a round-about journey;—rendered necessary, perhaps, or expedient, by the risk of collision with the roving and unfriendly tribes of the desert. At any rate, at Atad they call a halt, and the company is there for a time to be divided. The Egyptians are to remain stationary there, while Jacob's sons go on to complete the sad work which they have on hand in Canaan.

But before they separate, there is an entire week spent by the whole host together in a great and very sore lamentation. The mourning, according to old eastern usage, is loud and clamorous. And it is universal. Not the Hebrews alone give way to their emotions; their Egyptian companions also join in the vociferous wailing. In fact, it would seem as if they played the first part, and took the lead. It was their parting burst of grief as they suffered the

Hebrews to go on alone from the thrashing-floor of Atad to the burial-place in Canaan. The onlookers remarked that it was an Egyptian mourning. And they commemorated it as such;—"When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said. This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abel-mizraim,"—the mourning of the Egyptians,—“which is beyond Jordan” (ver. 11).

The Egyptian convoy having thus halted on the confines or borders of Canaan;—either because their having come thus far was deemed a sufficient token of respect, or perhaps because their farther advance might have been misconstrued as a hostile demonstration;—the family of Jacob proceed, by themselves, across the Jordan into the land of Canaan proper, and accomplish their purpose peaceably, without difficulty or disturbance: “His sons did unto him according as he commanded them: for his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a burying-place of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre” (ver. 12, 13), Then, leaving the buried body of the patriarch in the cave of the field of Machpelah, they slowly and sadly retrace their steps;—"Joseph returned into Egypt, he and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father" (ver. 14.)

It is their last look at the inheritance promised to their fathers. They themselves are to return to it no more; and ages of oppression are to roll on before their children see it. Joseph in particular must have had feelings peculiar to himself on the occasion. He had not been in Canaan since he was a lad. What boyish memories must the sight of its once familiar haunts awaken! And now he may not linger to refresh old recollections and explore new charms. He has to do with nothing in it save his father's opened grave. It is a glimpse even more transient and unsatisfying than Moses got from Pisgah, that Joseph gets at Machpelah. He is to walk by faith and not by sight. In faith he turns away from the home of his ancestors,—the destined home of his posterity,—of which, in circumstances so solemn, he has caught, as it were, a passing view. And with his brothers, and their train, he sets his face again towards Egypt.

It is almost like a second selling to the Midianites,—a second going down to captivity. It is as if he were a second time exchanging Canaan's bright promise for Egypt's dark and bitter slavery!

But, strong in faith, he is prepared for present duty. He must keep his word to Pharaoh. Egypt is the place where God would have him to be. So he sets out, with the family of which he is now the head, to take what may befall him or them in that foreign land of banishment and bondage.

How far, or in what way, this incident of Jacob's funeral may have affected the relations between the Egyptians and the Canaanites, it is altogether vain and idle to speculate. Conjectures may be formed as to the effect, in after-times, of what the Canaanites witnessed at the thrashing-floor of Atad, and of the way in which they thought it worth while to preserve the memory of it. It is just possible that they may have conceived the idea of the Egyptians having some purpose of helping the Israelites, at a future convenient season, to obtain possession of the territory in which they took such formal in-festment by the burial within its borders of their great father Jacob. The rumour of the prophecy about Abraham's seed may, at an earlier period, have aroused their suspicion and alarm,—and it may have been some relief to them to see Jacob and his whole house migrating into Egypt. But now, after the lapse of a few years, these strange worshippers of a God unknown to them are back again among them,—and upon an errand that quietly assumes a right of property in their territory, and not obscurely points to that right being held to cover something more than a privilege of burial,—some wider inheritance than a grave. And they come with the backing of all Egypt's pomp and power. No doubt Egypt may pretend that it is a simple compliment to him who has been Egypt's saviour and benefactor,—thus to honour his father's funeral with such a public national demonstration. But such grievous mourning among the Egyptians as Abel-mizraim has witnessed is scarcely quite natural in the circumstances,—and, before now, a reconnoitring expedition, with ultimately hostile intent, has been covered by an ingenious stratagem of this sort. There may be some covered wile under this very loud wailing.

So the Canaanites may have reasoned. And their reasoning in this way may have led, by-and-by, to a reaction among the Egyptians. As the memory of Joseph and his services became faint, and a different dynasty of Pharaohs occupied the throne, and the Israelites multiplied and became formidable for their numbers, it might become the policy of Egypt to allay the apprehensions of the neighboring nationalities by reversing the course adopted at Jacob's burial, and resorting to measures of repression and severity. If the Canaanites still retained the jealousy of which the scene at Abel-mizraim may have sowed the seeds, and indicated fear lest the same partiality for Joseph, which led to such a display of Egyptian sympathy towards him at his father's death, might prompt a still more formidable display of sympathy towards his race in their assertion of their claim to Canaan,—what more likely to prevent misunderstanding and preserve peace, than Egypt's beginning to treat Israel precisely as we learn that it did, when “a new king arose over Egypt who knew not Joseph,” and “the people of the children of Israel increased abundantly, and waxed exceeding mighty?” (Exod. i. 7, 8). We may find here one, at least, of many causes that may have contributed to that result.

Be this, however, as it may,—and it is no more than a conjecture, however plausible or probable,—the state-funeral of Jacob, with all Egyptian as well as Hebrew honours, marks the culminating point of Israel's favour and prosperity in the land that was to witness their long bondage. After that signal mark of distinction, the chosen family begin, as it would seem, to fall out of public view;—to become isolated and detached;—gradually ceasing to attract notice;—left very much to themselves, to tend their flocks and occupy the territory assigned to them,—and to increase and multiply till they grow into a people numerous and strong and compact enough for invading and possessing Canaan. This in fact is to be their safety. They are to be let alone. Not until a much later period is the vast Hebrew population in and around Goshen to force itself, as a matter of surprise, on the attention of the Egyptian rulers, and to awaken jealousy and alarm. Meanwhile they are, in a sense, hidden by the Lord in a secure place, until the time comes for his displaying the power of his outstretched arm in signal judgment on their oppressors, and a glorious deliverance wrought out for them.

XXI.

JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN—THE FULL ASSURANCE OF RECONCILIATION.

Genesis i. 14-21.

“And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shelved by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”—Acts iii. 17-19.

The funeral obsequies in Canaan being over, the entire cavalcade return to Egypt: “Joseph returned into Egypt, he and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father” (ver. 14); and it might seem that things would now fall, as a matter of course, into the usual quiet routine. Surely by this time there should be a complete understanding among all the parties in the agitating scenes that have been enacted, as to the footing on which they are to be towards one another. Joseph has finished his good work of settling his father's household in “quiet habitations;” and they have nothing to do but peaceably pursue their ordinary occupations, grateful to Joseph and Pharaoh,—above all, grateful to God. But this assured state of things is not to be immediately realized. There is to be still farther explanation,—a still more express and formal adjustment, as it were, of all outstanding claims and liabilities. The covenant of peace is to be again renewed, and ratified even more solemnly and affectionately than before.

Once more, therefore, let us look at Joseph and his brethren, as they are seen confronted with one another, after their father's death has left them to themselves.

The brothers are agitated by a fear not unnatural. Conscience again makes cowards of them. In spite of all the kindness they have experienced at Joseph's hand, they have the idea that he may have been dissembling his purpose of retaliation, and under the mask of smiles, really all the while only "nursing his wrath to keep it warm." Like Esau in his rage against his brother, they think perhaps that Joseph may have been restrained by the awe in which he held their father, and so may have postponed his revenge till after his decease: "When Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him" (ver. 15).

To avert this danger, they have recourse to two expedients. They first send a message to Joseph, professing to embody a commandment of Jacob: "Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil; and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father" (ver. 16, 17). And then they follow up the message with a personal appeal: they "went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants" (ver. 18).

It has been supposed that the commandment which they put into the mouth of their father after his death may have been a fabrication of their own to serve their purpose; but one scarcely likes to imagine that it was so. It is at least as probable that they may have mentioned to Jacob, while he was yet alive, the apprehension which they entertained. And to soothe and satisfy them,—though he could not deem it necessary so far as Joseph was concerned,—he may have authorized them to make some such use of his name as they did make. In fact, it may have been his way of intimating his own full and thorough forgiveness of their sin. And at all events it could do no harm to endorse, as it were, with his paternal sanction, what he knew to be his beloved son's brotherly feeling towards these conscience-stricken men.

The message, with its mention of his father's mind and will, touches Joseph's heart to the quick. His brethren also, who seem to have followed close at the heels of their messenger, spoke doubtless to the same effect. "And Joseph wept when they spake unto him" (ver. 17).

Was it for their fancying such an interposition of their father's authority to be necessary in order to pacify him that Joseph wept? Or was it because he could not but be moved by such an instance of his father's common love to all his children"? It may have been a mixture of both emotions. Why this distrust of me, as if in so solemn a manner, and by an authority so sacred, I must be commanded to forgive?—I who, as your own hearts might have told you, had forgiven you long before? But be it so. My father's command makes my forgiveness of you all the sweeter to me, as well as all the surer to you. Gladly, in his name, as well as from myself, do I forgive you now anew. It is his act now as well as mine. Let my warm gushing tears attest at once my deep reverence for him, and my tender love to you. Is not that the meaning of these gracious drops? Is it any wonder, in the circumstances, that "Joseph wept when they spake unto him'?"

The submissive language of these men, following upon their citation of their father's command, is striking and significant at this late stage of the history. It carries us back to those early dreams which gave so much offence. The very parties who took umbrage then, now bear witness, in their own demeanor, to the literal fulfilment of the augury which the dreams contained. In spite of all the unbelief and opposition of men, the counsel of the Lord stands sure. The lesson, as to the special and particular providence of God, which this whole divine drama of Joseph's life is fitted and designed to teach, is now at last complete; the end explains and vindicates the beginning. The complicated plot unravels and exhausts itself; and there is simplicity at the close. It is seen that "the Lord reigneth."

So Joseph himself reads the divine lesson, and explains the divine plot, if one may so call it,—using dramatic language in reference to so dramatic a series of incidents. That he does so is

implied in his reply to the somewhat abject prostration of his brethren:—"Fear not; for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (ver. 19, 20). He might have been gratified by their homage. It might have pleased him to see them thus compelled to own the superiority on his part which his dreams foretold,—and the very idea of which they so murderously resented,—if he had regarded the matter in a selfish light, or from a selfish point of view. But it is not himself that he considers at all; he forgets self. It is the Lord's hand that he sees in the whole wondrous history. It is the Lord's sovereignty, wisdom, and grace, that he recognizes, and would have his brethren to recognize throughout it all. Think not of me; look not to me. Who am I, that you should bow so humbly to me? Am I in the place of God, that I should take it upon me to judge you? What, after all, have you done to me? You meant evil; but God has over-ruled it for good. It is not with me that you have to deal; nor am I to deal with you. Let us, all of us, cease from taking so narrow a view, and one so merely human. Do not make me your judge; do not prostrate yourselves before me, as if I had any right or inclination to punish or revenge. I do not count you to have injured me. You were but the instruments in God's hands of accomplishing his purpose, which for you and me alike has turned out to be so gracious. Let us together own his providence in all that has fallen out. Surely to you his long-suffering is and must be salvation,—his goodness may well indeed move you to repentance. And for me, seeing that all you did to me has turned out so well,—so well for you, as well as for me, and so well for him that is gone,—let me acknowledge in it all, not your hand, but the Lord's. If I am to be now, as your homage implies, your chief and head,—by your own consent and choice, as well as by the Lord's design and doing,—let my patriarchal reign and headship over you be one of mutual confidence and love on both sides. Let all the past, your sin and my suffering, be swallowed up in our common owning of God's wondrous working in his ways toward the children of men. He does all things well. He has made me, through your treatment of me, the means of saving much people alive; it is the Lord's doing, let it be marvellous in our eyes. So Joseph reassures his brethren; "Now therefore fear ye not: I will

nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them” (ver. 21).

It is a noble instance of forgiveness,—a signal exhibition of the spirit of faith and love,—the very “meekness and gentleness of Christ.” But does it not point to something higher? Is not a greater than Joseph here? Have we not here Christ himself, of whom Joseph in all this is so fitting a type?

See then now Jesus,—the true Joseph,—our Joseph. He too suffered at the hands of his brethren. They all conspired against him;—you, brother, and I, among the rest. We nailed him to the accursed tree. We caused his blood to flow, and the cry of agony to be wrung from his lips,—“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Is “the Spirit of grace and of supplications poured out upon us” now? Are we “looking on him whom we have pierced, and mourning as one mourneth for an only son? Do we feel as if such wrong as we have done to him, in distrusting, persecuting, crucifying him, never could be overlooked?—as if he must needs, in spite of all his patience and all his pity, resent at last our unworthy treatment of him? He addresses us almost in the very words of Joseph,—“Fear not; for am I in the place of God?” Have I come to judge and condemn? Nay! It is mine to save. And does he not add, as did his apostles, when preaching to his actual betrayers and murderers,—Lay not too much to heart what you have done to me; however you meant it, has it not turned out for good? So God intended it,—to bring to pass, through your means, the saving of much people, the saving of you this day. Me ye have not really injured. Lo! The cross on which you lifted me up has become a throne—a throne on which I am exalted, to be a Prince and a Saviour. It is my Father's doing; my Father's will. You could “do nothing against me, except it were given to you from above” (John xix. 11). “The prince of this world,” though he “cometh to me, hath nothing in me” (John xiv. 30). It is neither your purpose, nor his, that is fulfilled in me. But “I love the Father, and as he has given me commandment, so I do” (John xiv. 31).

Yes! You may remind me, as his brethren reminded Joseph, of my Father's commandment. I had his commandment to die for you. I have his commandment to save you,—to pardon and to bless. “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me: and him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John vi. 37-40).

It might have seemed something very like an insult or an impertinence, on the part of Joseph's brethren, to bring to bear upon him, as if he needed it, the pressure of parental authority;—“Thy father did command:”—not our father, they say, gratifying us,—but thy father constraining thee. And yet, after all, can we wonder? The more they knew of Joseph, since they had come to live on friendly terms with him,—the more they saw of his beautiful character,—the more they experienced of his bountiful generosity,—the more must their former grudge against him, and the horrid deed of treachery and cruelty which it prompted, have appeared in their eyes utterly inexcusable and unpardonable. Every day's new insight into Joseph's heart, as they looked on him whom they had pierced, must have pierced their hearts with new and fresh poignancy of grief and fear. Is it surprising that their consciences misgave them? Is it surprising that they should have felt Joseph's kindness to them to be too much to last,—the assurance of his perfect and unchanging forgiveness to be too good news to be true? Need we wonder that they should have tried to enlist their father on their side,—and get him to enforce, by a dying charge to Joseph, that loving and beloved son's own purpose of mercy, if it should begin to falter? So Joseph may have felt. He is not, therefore, offended. He willingly accepts his father's commandment, as even a better reason for forgiving his brethren than his own spontaneous inclination.

Is not this the very mind of Jesus? Is not this the security which he gives to us? Is he not ever anxious to assure us that what he does for us and to us, is all done in obedience to his Father's

commandment? Nor does he wait till we quote that commandment of his Father to him; he testifies of it to us. He is beforehand with us. He himself interposes this great guarantee,—this sure warrant of faith. It is not my doing, he seems to say of that salvation which he works out for us. My laying down my life for you,—my forgiving your sins on the earth,—my receiving you when you come to me,—my raising you up at the last day;—all that is not really my doing. No. Not my doing: “I came not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.” It is his will; it is his commandment; for you and me alike. It is he who commands you to look to me, and believe in me. It is he who commands me not to cast you out in any wise, but to receive you, and give you everlasting life, and raise you up at the last day. Yes! it is my Father's commandment; and “as he giveth me commandment so I do.” For I love the Father; I and the Father are one. Therefore you are safe in casting yourselves into my arms; safe as the sheep of my pasture. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one” (John x. 27-30).

LXXII.

FAITH AND HOPE IN DEATH—LOOKING FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN.

Genesis i. 22-26,

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.”—Hebrews xi. 22,

This is entirely a Hebrew ending of the life of Joseph. Not a trace of his Egyptian connection is in it; nothing of what pertains to his position as Pharaoh's favorite minister, and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

How is it so? Has he forfeited or lost the king's regard? Has he experienced the vicissitudes of royal caprice and courtly life? Is he in disgrace? or in compulsory retirement?—the victim of conspiracy or of jealousy—awakened, perhaps, by his open leanings towards Canaan and the prospects of his family there? Nothing of the sort appears. The brief notice, in the Book of Exodus, of the change of Egyptian policy which led to Israel's oppression, surely implies the reverse; that Joseph's influence continued unabated, not only while he lived, but even long afterwards; “There arose up a new king-over Egypt, which knew not Joseph” (Exod. i. 8). It is not probable that the king's friendly disposition towards Joseph, which had been shown so conspicuously at the funeral of his father Jacob, suffered any diminution during the fifty years of his own surviving; lifetime. All the more remarkable is the fact that the record of these years, and of their close, has so much of a Hebrew, and so little, or rather absolutely nothing, of an Egyptian character and complexion.

The observation, indeed, as has been already seen, may be extended more widely. From the moment of the Hebrew family coming on the stage, the Egyptian element in the drama becomes subordinate, and occupies the background. It appears, indeed—and now and then appears prominently enough—as for instance in the princely arrangements made first for Jacob's removal to Egypt, and then for his burial in Canaan. Still it is in a Hebrew point of view, that these instances of the Egyptian monarch's munificent kindness are recorded. And it remains true that, so far as Joseph in particular is concerned, his Egyptian rank, state, and power, are made little account of in the narrative, after his relations to his own family are resumed.

Now why is it so? It is not enough to allege the merely natural partiality of a Hebrew historian, smitten with the spirit of national prejudice or pride—counting Egypt comparatively nothing, and the interests of the house of Israel all in all. For that very spirit would rather naturally have led such a historian to give a studied, and even exaggerated, elaboration of all that might tend to keep up the idea of Joseph's Egyptian glory—as shedding its halo on the people, few in number and of doubtful respectability as to profession or occupation, who claimed the benefit of his name. The more he could tell of Joseph's greatness in Egypt, and his great influence with Egypt's king, after the settlement of the Israelites in Goshen, the more would he think that he advanced the renown of his race. The singular abstinence, in the inspired record, from all such glorying—and its simple merging of Joseph, the Egyptian Vizier, in Joseph, as first the son of Jacob and then his heir—must be felt by every competent judge to be a strong internal proof or presumption of its inspiration. This is certainly not the manner of men.

It is not thus that even an honest Hebrew annalist, left to himself, would have delineated the close of Joseph's career.

Between his father's death and his own, upwards of half-a-century intervened; and the whole period is passed over in all but entire silence. Not a hint is given of the way in which these years were spent. All that we learn is that the two elements or conditions of prosperity, usually held of much account among men—and

especially among the Israelites—and reckoned to be the reward or acknowledgment of righteousness, were found realized in the case of Joseph. Length of days was his—and the privilege of seeing his race perpetuated: “Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees” (ver. 22, 23). He lived long; and his great-grandchildren were fondled on his knee and trained under his eye. “He saw his children's children; and,” so far as appears, “peace upon Israel” (Ps. cxxviii. 6). The gathering clouds did not obscure his setting sun. His end was peace.

He died, believing. For “by faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones” (Heb. xi. 22). So the apostle testifies concerning his dying charge, in which he “took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence” (ver. 25).

But it may be asked, why did he not follow his father's example, in the order he gave as to his remains? He exercised and manifested the same faith that Jacob did when he “gave commandment concerning his bones;” but he did not give the same commandment; he did not ask to be at once buried in Canaan. He was content that his bones should be in Egypt for ages yet to come. He made no arrangement for such a funeral for himself as he had given his father. Why so? Why should he not have left the same request to his children, that his father left to him? It was not surely because he had not the power; his influence had not so far declined as that supposition would imply. The reigning Pharaoh would not have made any objection to that being done for Joseph which had been allowed in the case of Jacob. There may, indeed, have been some change of circumstances. The relations between the Egyptians and the Canaanites may have been somewhat altered; and it is easy to imagine grounds of policy or expediency on which it might not be right or wise for Joseph to contemplate a repetition, in his own case, of the significant scene which had marked the burial of Jacob. But it seems more probable that the difference between his dying request

and that of his father, in regard to this matter, has a deeper meaning, in a spiritual point of view.

1. It is very obvious that Joseph's commandment concerning his bones had far more distinct and pointed reference to the future than Jacob's had. In fact, Jacob's dying requests (xlvi. 28-31; xlix. 29-32) have no explicit reference to the future at all. He dwells only on the past. We know indeed that his faith did embrace the future. He went down to Egypt (xlvi. 3, 4), upon the guarantee of a promise that he was to become a great nation there, and was to be brought up again to Canaan, And in both of the passages in which he intimates his wish as to his burial,—in the benediction of Joseph's sons and in the prophetic pictures of the twelve tribes,—he gives abundant evidence of his believing grasp of things to come. Still it is remarkable that in what he says about the disposal of his remains, there is no particular allusion to the future. He dwells upon the past, with all its hereditary associations and its incidents of domestic tenderness.

This was natural and right. He had but recently left Canaan,—and he was an old man when he left it. What he longs and cares for is, that his dust should mingle with kindred dust, in the grave in which his nearest and dearest relatives have been laid.

In Joseph's commandment concerning his bones, on the other hand, the past is not mentioned; it is the future alone that he contemplates. And this also is natural and right.

Jacob belongs to the generations that have lived and died in Canaan; he is associated with Abraham and Isaac. Joseph again is the fountain-head of the generations that are to spring up in Egypt; he is identified with the house of Israel as it is to be perpetuated in Egypt, down to the exodus in the time of Moses.

The two different commandments given by Jacob and by Joseph respectively, are thus seen to be appropriate. That of Joseph, however, would seem to indicate the stronger and higher faith. And accordingly it is Joseph's commandment, and not Jacob's, that the apostle, in writing to the Hebrews, signalizes. He does full justice, it is true, to Jacob's blessing of both the sons of Joseph (Heb. xi. 21).

But in the matter of “the commandment he gave concerning his bones” (Heb. xi. 22), Joseph stands out as a more conspicuous example of faith than Jacob. Mere natural affection, and the touching memory of the olden time, may, to a large extent, explain what Jacob said on the subject. Joseph, on the other hand, has his eye exclusively fixed on what is “hoped for” and “unseen.”

The orders issued, the directions given, correspond with these two different states of mind.

Take my body back to Canaan,—away at once from Egypt; let it rest beside the bodies of my fathers and my wife. Let my lot be with them,—in the land which you, my posterity, are to inherit,—but still rather as one of them, than as one of you. Such is the meaning of Jacob's injunction.

Joseph, on the other hand, prefers rather to cast in his lot, so far as the disposal of his corporeal frame is concerned, with the present and coming races of Israel in Egypt.

Keep me among you,—my unburied bones,—my embalmed body. I desire not to be separated from you. Even after death, I would, as far as possible, be one of you. I have no doubt of your return to Canaan; and my dying wish is to return, so far as my bones can represent me, along with you. I do not choose that any part of me should reach Canaan before you; for I do not choose that even my decease should separate me from you. My father belonged to our ancestry, and sought to be with them in his grave; I belong to you and your seed. I am content to “bide my time;” to wait for the consummation of my desire concerning my body,—which is, after all, identical with my father's—until what I believe, as he believed it, is realized and fulfilled;—for “God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence” (ver. 25).

2. The possession of Joseph's bones,—the custody of them under so solemn a charge,—must have been a signal benefit to the Israelites in Egypt;—more so than the possession of Jacob's bones would have been. The two arrangements, fitted into one another,—the last being the complement of the first;—and taken together, they

completed the lesson which the Israelites, in their peculiar circumstances, needed to learn.

To have laid up the body of Jacob,—swathed and embalmed,—in the form of a mummy, according to Egyptian usage,—to be kept for some thirty or forty generations,—as an heirloom in their tribes,—would have been palpably unnatural and unsuitable. Such a mode of dealing with the Hebrew patriarch's remains,—he being a mere stranger in Egypt,—but yesterday come down into the land,—while all his ties were elsewhere,—would have been incongruous. His burial in Canaan is, in every view, more becoming and more in harmony with his history.

It is otherwise with Joseph,—himself almost a naturalized Egyptian,—and as an Israelite, associated far more with Israel in Egypt, than with Israel in Canaan.

And then, the difference of the times and circumstances is to be noted.

When Jacob died, Israel was in the first full flush of favour and prosperity in Egypt; the world in Egypt was smiling on them. They were feeding their flocks in the best pastures, and basking in the sunshine of royal patronage. They needed to be reminded that Egypt, though the land of plenty, was not their rest,—that Canaan was their home.

When Joseph died, a change was near at hand. Already, there may have been ominous signs of approaching trouble. The prophetic warning which Abraham got was about to be accomplished. They needed to be reconciled to Egypt as the house of bondage, by the assurance of a joyous return to Canaan at last.

Both of these needs are suitably met by the dying commandments of Jacob and of Joseph respectively, “concerning their bones.”

Jacob virtually says:—You are now in the enjoyment of all worldly ease and plenty. The famine is past,—and with the famine,

other sore miseries besides. You have abundance of the good things of this life,—and the evil consequences of former sins and errors are put right. Egypt, which is your world, is now a sort of paradise to you. But forget not Canaan. You are merely strangers and sojourners here; your real citizenship is elsewhere. The world in Egypt is all smiles; but let not its smiles ensnare or enslave you. Set not your hearts upon it. Love it not, nor the things of it. As you carry your dead father up to Canaan, let what you are doing teach you to keep Canaan ever in view. Egypt has its pleasures,—alas! too often sinful; but the promises are all bound up with Canaan. There, where you lay me, beside Abraham and Isaac, let your hope always be centered. Let the habit of your life be fashioned, not after Egypt's license, but after Canaan's holy covenant.

Joseph again, in an altered state of things, may be held to say:—Egypt, which is the world to you, is about to become a house of bondage,—a furnace of affliction. Its smiles are to give place to frowns,—its joys to bitter grief. There is to be little more of bright sunshine in this world for you, but only ever-deepening gloom. But courage! Be of good cheer. Be not dismayed. The darkness will not last for ever. This weary Egypt, this region of cloud and storm,—of oppression, trouble, and woe,—is not to be your dwelling-place always. Canaan is ere long to open to you its blessed gates. I am sure of it; so sure of it am I, that I specially ask you not to do for me what I did for Jacob.

I am as intensely bent as he was on having Canaan as my final rest; I intend that my bones shall lie there with his. But I would not prevent or anticipate you. I leave my bones with you, to be carried up to Canaan, only when you go up to Canaan yourselves. Keep them. And as often as you look at the coffin in which they are put, let your faith and hope become as bright as mine now is. Be assured, as I am assured, that the tribulations of Egypt are to end in the peace and joy of Canaan.

How far Joseph's purpose may have been accomplished,—how far the preservation of his body, in a state of constant preparation for being carried up out of Egypt to Canaan, may have contributed to keep up, among the Israelites, during the years of their affliction, the

memory of the Abrahamic covenant and the expectation of the promised deliverance,—it is impossible to say. The history here is almost a complete blank, an utter void. Beyond the briefest possible notices, we have no account of the rise and progress of the Egyptian persecution of the Israelites. And we have no account whatever of the religious state of the Israelites during the persecution. But we know that when the time of the Exodus came, the commandment of Joseph concerning his bones was freshly remembered and faithfully obeyed (Exod. xiii. 19; Josh. xxiv. 32). And we can scarcely doubt that the sacred deposit had the effect of keeping alive, at least among the more thoughtful and spiritually enlightened of the people, that trust in the God of their fathers, and in his promises, which enabled, as we may well believe, others besides the parents of Moses, to brave the wrath of the king, and hold fast the hope of a Saviour. Certainly, Joseph's dying act had a strong tendency to effect such a result. As a manifestation of his own faith, it was fitted to confirm the faith of the people in his assurance, "God will surely visit you."

"So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt" (ver. 26). And so ends the history or biography, which far above all others, save only one, rivets the mind and ravishes the heart.

The two stand out alone,—the life of Joseph and the life of Jesus,—parallel at least in many important aspects, if not intended to stand in a closer relation to one another.

The parallelism is of itself suggestive. To one living before the coming of Christ, if he was at all spiritually minded, it was fitted to suggest thoughts connected with the Saviour yet to come. Taken in connection with the rite of sacrifice, and other evidently anticipative usages and ordinances, it could scarcely fail to afford some insight into the necessary conditions which the Saviour must fulfill, as well as also into the manner of his fulfilment of them. To us now, under the guidance of the same Spirit who inspired the two great biographies, their parallelism may furnish the means of a not unprofitable comparison between the two deliverers and their respective deliverances.

I. The character of Joseph fits him pre-eminently for being a type of Christ. The two qualities most conspicuous in Joseph, apart from his personal innocence and blamelessness, are on the one hand, his meekness and gentleness, and on the other hand, his commanding and authoritative wisdom and benevolence. His personal purity, his spotless and stainless integrity,—the result conspicuously in him of renewing grace, tried and tested by temptation,—made him a fitting pattern of him who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” And then, when we add to that, first, his unresisting and uncomplaining endurance of wrong,—and secondly, his capacity of rule and government,—we have the very features or attributes of personal worth or excellency,—in kind though not of course in degree,—that constitute the beauty and the strength of “the man Christ Jesus;”—the suffering and reigning Jesus.

II. The personal history of Joseph is eminently typical, both in the deep humiliation to which he was subjected, and in the glory which followed. He suffers, not for any sins of his own, but through the sins of those to whom he would do good. He bears, in a sense, the blame and the doom which others had deserved. Strict and proper substitution, indeed, there is not, and could not be, in his case. Of that peculiar characteristic of the sufferings of Christ the only exact type is to be found in the animal sacrifices of the old economy,—the slain lamb,—the blood of bulls and of goats; and even that is imperfect, as representing him, who “through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God.” But short of that, in the load of sorrow and shame which Joseph in his innocency and tried holiness had to bear, weighing him down to the very gates of death,—in the cup which he had to drink, and which he took, not as at the hands of men only, but immediately from the hand of God,—the cup filled to overflowing with the pressed fruit of other men's sins,—we have what assimilates in no ordinary degree Joseph—betrayed, sold, condemned, and as good as dead in his hopeless dungeon,—to Jesus, amid the circumstances of his life-long grief, and his last agony. And then the bright side of the picture, in Joseph's case as in that of Jesus, is his elevation to the right hand of the great king; his investiture with full authority and command over all the king's

resources in all his realms; his receiving power over all that he may give life to many; his being exalted a Prince and a Saviour.

III. The actual salvation wrought is of a typical sort. It is so in itself; for it is the giving of life;—"to save much people alive." It is deliverance from death,—certain and inevitable death. It is "the filling of the hungry with good things, while the rich are sent empty away." And then, as to the manner of it,—the extent to which it reaches, and the way in which its blessings are diffused,—is not Joseph, like Jesus, "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of God's people Israel?" He is "a light to lighten the Gentiles." For at first "he came unto his own, and his own received him not." His brethren, the sons of Israel, to whom he carried a message of peace from home, cast him out. It was in Gentile Egypt that the first light of his saving power and glory shone. But "God's people Israel" were soon embraced in the shining of it.

Is it not so in the dispensation of the gospel salvation? Will it not be seen to be so, more and more, as the end draws near? Now are the times of the Gentiles. Now is Jesus the light of the Gentiles. But the Lord hath not cast off Israel. "Blindness" indeed "in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." But in the end, "all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Rom. xi 25-27).

IV. The death of Joseph,—or rather "the commandment which he gave concerning his bones,"—may also be regarded as in some sense typical. It has something like a counterpart in the confidence with which the Messiah speaks of his own resurrection in that Messianic Psalm: "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. xvi. 9-11).

In a higher sense, and with a deeper meaning than Joseph could reach,—Jesus, when he spoke of his death, pointed to the inheritance which his risen saints are to share with him, their risen Saviour.

But, laying its typical meaning aside, let us once more think of Joseph's dying charge, as distinguished from that of Jacob,—or rather let us take them both together. They had their separate voices to utter,—their separate lessons to teach.

Dying Jacob would carry his children's minds and hearts away from Egypt's pomps and pleasures, its vanities and prosperities, to the quiet rest of Canaan, where his bones are laid.

Dying Joseph would reconcile his brethren to the toil and woe of Egypt's long bondage, by the animating consideration that they still have him, in a sense, among them,—his body committed to their charge,—in the full assurance of its being carried by them to Canaan, when they go thither in triumph at last.

May it not be said of us, if we believe in Jesus, that in the death of every saint who falls asleep before our eyes, we have the two views, the two lessons, combined?

A father in Israel, or a brother beloved, dies. We say of him that he departs. He departs to be with Christ, which is far better. He is gone to Canaan. He passes into heaven. And as he passes away from us, "he being dead, yet speaketh."

What is he saying to us? Cleave not to Egypt. Be not drawn by the world's smiles to love the world. I leave you, perhaps, prosperous and happy; but I ask you to go with me, in spirit, as I enter the promised land. Let there be, as it were, a funeral service there, in which you join. Nay, rather, come with me and see how blessed is my entrance into Canaan's rest. And ever after feel that Canaan is your rest too. Egypt is not your home. Be its Goshen pastures ever so pleasant, and ever so plentiful, love them not. Be often, in spirit, returning with me to Canaan.

Again, what else is he saying to us? Weary not in Egypt. Be not impatient. Earth may be to you a house of bondage, all sad and dreary. But my bones are with you in it. My body, still united to Christ, rests in its grave among you. I am sure of its being brought to Canaan ere long. It is but a little while. All earth's groans are past. The dead are raised,—the living changed. All are with the Lord. “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. iv. 13-18).

APPENDIX.

I

OBSERVATIONS ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS AS A WHOLE.

I PUT into the form of a postscript what some may think might perhaps be more properly placed as a preface or introduction; and I do so because it gives some general, and sufficiently desultory views that have been suggested to me in a review of the entire book, rather than an explanation of the method of my exposition of it. These views, in short, partake more of the nature and character of afterthought than of the nature and character of forethought.

I. Moses, as it seems to me, has fared very much as Homer has fared, at the hands of minute critics. In particular, the Book of Genesis has undergone the same sort of treatment as the Iliad. Both have been disintegrated, and torn into shreds and fragments; parceled out among a motley and miscellaneous crowd of unknown documents and imaginary authors; and resolved into a mere medley of traditionary hymns or songs, strung together,—if not at random, by some fortuitous concurrence of atoms;—by some marvel or miracle giving undesigned concinnity and completeness to the whole.

For that is the phenomenon which is to be accounted for in both cases alike. And in both cases alike it is the answer to the objection urged against the historical tradition of a single authorship.

The force of the answer lies in its being an appeal from word-catching and hair-splitting analysis, to the broad, general impression which a large-minded and large-hearted earnest reader cannot fail to receive. No one who throws his own soul into the Iliad, if he is at all capable of doing so, can have the slightest doubt as to its being a

single soul with whom he has communion. He desiderates and demands a Homer; not a lot of song-writers but a solitary seer; a "vates sacer;" a genius creating unity because it is itself one. I believe it to be the same with Genesis. I think it has the stamp and impress of an undivided authorship. There is a completeness about it,—an epic roundness, with beginning, middle, and end,—and With a marvellous adaptation and subordination of seeming episodes to the onward march of the plot,—that I confess I would rather question the unity of the Aeneid, on the score of such interludes as that of Nisus and Euryales,—or the unity of Hamlet, on the score of the grave-digging scene,—than I would deny to this Book of Genesis the unity of a sole and single authorship—not to speak of a sole and single divine inspiration.

II. Having this conviction, I am not much troubled with questions raised as to the pre-existing materials of which the author may have made use, or the subsequent emendations, interpolations, and alterations, which the book may have undergone from age to age, until its final revision was adjusted, perhaps in the time of Ezra, when the canon of the Old Testament Scriptures is supposed by many to have been finally fixed.

I have no faith, I confess, in the imaginary library of such a visionary as Ewald. I do not suppose that scholars will allow him, with impunity, to "call" books, like "spirits, from the vasty deep,"—as if he could recover the burnt Sybilline leaves, and read them off to us as clearly as Tarquin, if he had chosen, might have heard them read.

At the same time, in maintaining the unity of Genesis and of its authorship, it is important to explain that this is quite consistent with there being many traces in the book, both of earlier documents or traditions, and of later editings and revisions. In fact, from the very nature of the case, it must be so. When the book was written, there must have been a literature of some sort—lyrical, legendary, monumental—of which the writer could not fail to take advantage. And it is absurd to suppose that the learned men who had to deal with the book,—imperfectly preserved from age to age till the canon was complete, would deny themselves the liberty,—especially if

they were under divine inspiration,—of making such corrections and explanations as, in the circumstances, the lapse of time required.

III. But I must add that, while fully admitting these obvious considerations,—and indeed relying on them as accounting for, if they do not explain, not a few textual difficulties,—I cannot see my way to concur in the theory that distinct documents, such as may be separately and systematically characterized, are to be found recognizable in this book.

I am unable, for instance, to see the necessity for assuming the two annalists, the “Jehovist” and the “Elohist,”—into whose double thread our critical friends are so fond of resolving the Mosaic cord. I very much doubt the possibility of a clear and consistent “redding of the marches” between the two, if it is to be carried out all through; and I think there is “a more excellent way” of meeting the difficulty.

I have adverted to this in my exposition of the first two chapters of Genesis, and elsewhere in these volumes; borrowing light from the Lord's statement to Moses, “And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them” (Exodus vi. 3).

That statement, I apprehend, can scarcely be taken literally to mean that the name—“Jehovah”—by which the Supreme Being announced himself to Moses and the Israelites in Egypt had never been in use before among the patriarchs.

It rather points, as I think, to the difference of signification between the two names;—the one, Eloim, denoting sovereignty and power, the other, Jehovah, suggesting the idea of faithfulness or unchangeableness (Mai. iii. 6);—and to the suitability of the two names to the two eras in question respectively. In former patriarchal times, God appears chiefly in the character of one choosing or electing those who are to be the objects of his favour, giving them “exceeding great and precious promises,” and ratifying and confirming with them a most gracious covenant. With such a transaction on his part, the assertion of absolute sovereignty and almighty power is in harmony and in keeping. Now, on the other

hand, when he is about to come forward and interpose for the purpose of fulfilling these old assurances, and with that view, wishes to secure the confidence of the new generation in whose experience and with whose co-operation the work is to be done,—the appeal to the immutability of his nature, as proving or implying “the immutability of his counsel” (Heb. vi. 17), is relevant and appropriate. Formerly he spoke as the omnipotent ruler over all, whose hand none can stay, to whom none can say what doest thou! Now he speaks as the I AM, “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.”

Considering the importance attached in these days and among that people to the import and bearing of names, I prefer some such explanation of this passage in Exodus to one which would make it the assertion of a mere historical fact as to the dates of the two names being in use;—and a fact too, which, if it is to be understood strictly according to the letter, must be regarded as of doubtful probability. And I am persuaded that in the passages in Genesis in which either name occurs, a reason can for the most part be found for its being employed rather than the other, founded on the nature of the subject treated of, or the view which the writer desires to give of the events or incidents he may be recording, without its being necessary to postulate distinct fragments with distinct authorships.

I believe, as I have attempted to show, that we have a parallel and illustrative instance in the manner of using the two names, Jacob and Israel; the one denoting natural weakness, tending to guile, the other divine strength apprehended by prevailing faith. On many occasions, as it would seem, the selection of the one name rather than the other is determined by the attitude in which the patriarch is presented, or the act in which he is engaged. I would not indeed press this principle of interpretation too far, either in the case of the two patriarchal designations, or in the case of the two divine titles; and I repeat that I am not troubled by the hypothesis of advantage having been taken by Moses of materials previously current in the form of traditionary narratives or songs. Surely, however, it is being wise above what is written, to pretend so confidently as some do, to disentangle the Elohist and the Jehovist elements in the narrative. It turns the mind away from higher and more spiritual considerations

which the appropriateness of the name used to the theme on hand might suggest; and it breaks the continuity of a history which, I venture again to say, presents in its onward movement, from first to last, a specimen of epic oneness unparalleled in literature; its very digressions and apparent interruptions admitting of satisfactory and probable explanation.⁶

IV. There are some other points relative to the mode of interpreting such a book as Genesis, upon which questions might be raised and explanations given; and there are several principles of exposition, to which reference is incidentally made in these pages, and which might admit of fuller illustration and vindication. One, for example, is the extent to which we may avail ourselves of the undoubted fact of an oral revelation having preceded the written word, as affecting the manner in which that word would probably be composed, and the kind of evidence it might be expected to afford of the leading truths of religion. Another is the amount of acquaintance with the doctrines of the Gospel which may be presumed in the early world, as rather alluded to and taken for granted, than communicated for the first time, in God's successive discoveries of himself to the fathers. Then a third question might turn upon the value of incidental quotations from the Old Testament in the New, as warranting the application of hints thus given considerable beyond the particular passages quoted, as well as upon the legitimate use of resemblances, parallelisms, and analogies, occurring in the comparison of incidents and predictions, under different and far distant dispensations. While a fourth, and very interesting problem, might be to fix the limit between a sound and safe discretion and a fanciful license, in filling up the brief sketches and outlines of the inspired record, and drawing inferences from them;—presuming upon a certain spiritual tact, or taste, or apprehension, a feeling of probability, a sense of concinnity, or congruity, which, even apart from such precise and palpable evidence as can be critically or logically stated, will often give to a rightly constituted and rightly exercised understanding, a prompt and full assurance of the mind of the Spirit.

⁶ See for instance my remarks on chapter xxxviii.

But I do not feel myself called upon, even if I were competent, to discuss such matters critically and abstractly: I think it enough to indicate, that in preparing these papers, I have had them in my view. How far I have succeeded in practically applying the rules and methods indicated within due bounds, it is not for me to judge. In one particular, perhaps, I may be censured for going too far, although not, as I am of opinion, justly. I refer to the amount of knowledge on the fundamental articles of revealed religion, and especially on the remedial plan of the Gospel, which I have assumed to have existed among men before the written word came into being. That written word, as it seems to me, takes for granted such knowledge to a considerable extent, and proceeds upon the faith of it—supplementing it and correcting it often by allusions and hints, rather than formally teaching or communicating it, as if for the first time. I refer to such heads of doctrine as the being and attributes of God; the unity of the divine nature, with perhaps some intimation of the plurality of persons in that unity; the guilt or condemnation of sin; the manner of its remission through a propitiatory sacrifice; the calling and conversion of sinners; the promised Saviour; the resurrection and final judgment; the eternal state. I do not of course mean that the knowledge on these subjects which the written word might assume, and to which it might appeal, was at all so full and accurate as what revelation gives; and in revelation itself I trace a growing clearness of development. I admit also that, depending on oral tradition alone for its transmission from age to age, the knowledge must have deteriorated in its character, and become corrupt and imperfect, when the written word began its teaching, as compared with what it was at first, as given by God originally. All that I contend for is, that we may fairly regard the written word as in such particulars reviving and ratifying the primeval creed, not yet wholly lost, and may interpret therefore upon the principle of its assuming and appealing to a measure of intelligence in those to whom it was given, that would enable them, under the guidance of the Spirit, to understand its suggestions and intimations better, and draw the right inferential conclusions better, than we sometimes give them credit for.

II

⁷“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.—For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?”—1 Corinthians vii. 14, 16.

In these two verses the apostle gives the rationale or explanation of the practical rules he is laying down relative to the case of a married person becoming a believer, while the partner in the marriage-state remains unconverted. In substance the apostle decides that the marriage-tie is not dissolved by the conversion of either party to the faith of the gospel.

An apparent exception is made in the intermediate verse,—or rather a caution is added,—to the effect that what he says of a believing husband or wife who might think it a duty to separate from an unbeliever, does not apply when it is the unbelieving party that refuses to remain connected with the believing. That is altogether a different matter. If the unconverted husband will not live with the converted wife, but insists on leaving her, on account of her conversion, let him go; and so, also, let the unbelieving wife go, if she will not continue to be the wife of her believing husband. In every such instance, where the movement is on the part of the unbelieving or unconverted spouse, the believing or converted one incurs no responsibility, and is in fact utterly helpless. He is not, therefore, to distress or vex himself. The marriage-tie is not, in such circumstances, to become a bondage; nor is the peace of the church to be broken by questions and litigations of such a nature. For, let it be noted, the exceptional case could only arise in countries in which the law or custom tolerated, if it did not sanction, this pretense for dissolving marriage; and in which, therefore, a heathen husband forsaking his wife, on the express ground of her being a convert to Christianity, or a heathen wife forsaking her husband on that ground, would be protected or patronized. The exception, accordingly, does not weaken the ordinary and general rule that the

⁷ Supplementary to paper on circumcision, xxi. Volume first, page 279.

conversion of either party does not break the marriage-tie. And above all, it does not touch the obligation laid upon the converted party to continue true and faithful to that tie, if the other party is willing. The direction on that point is plain and unequivocal, without reserve or qualification; “If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him” (ver. 12, 13).

This direction is in the first place introduced by Paul (10, 11), as a corollary or inference from the broad general statute respecting marriage and divorce, laid down by the Lord personally;—“It hath been said, whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Matt. v. 31, 32). What the apostle goes on secondly to ordain (12, 13), as to a believer continuing to live with an unbeliever, is his commentary upon the text, as it stands in the legal code of the great Lawgiver himself. There is really nothing here to raise any question as to differences and degrees of authority or inspiration in the

Bible; nothing even postponing the word written by an apostle to the word spoken by Christ himself, in the flesh; as if it were of less weight and value, or were less truly and literally the oracle of God. All that Paul intends is to distinguish the text in the law of marriage, from the commentary; the text as settled by the Lord himself personally, from the commentary or application dictated by the Holy Ghost to the apostles.

The general law of marriage and divorce, says Paul to the Corinthians, is expressly determined and declared, once for all, by the divine founder of our religion; and that law, in the precise letter of it, sufficiently disposes of one of the points raised among you; namely, how far it is right generally to hold the marriage-tie broken on considerations of religion. This was enough to expose and put down the error of those who affected to think that the gospel of Christ made them too pure and spiritual to continue still in the

married state;—an error springing out of the spurious and fictitious refining upon the gospel style and standard of holiness to which the eastern philosophy gave rise.

But another point might be mooted, which the mere text of the law, as laid down by the Lord personally, might not be supposed to meet; namely, the special point, as to the case of one of the parties becoming Christian and the other remaining heathen. This point might occasion difficulty; particularly among the Jewish members of the church; when they thought of the stern denunciation of such mixed marriages by their lawgiver; and the stern and unrelenting measures taken to dissolve them by the reformers of their polity, Ezra and Nehemiah (Exod. xxxiv. 16; Deut. vii. 3; Ezra ix. and X.; Nell. xiii. 23). Paul, therefore, proceeds to deal with that point;—not doubtfully, as if uncertain of his inspiration and authority;—but plainly and peremptorily. He takes up the text of the law, as laid down by the Lord, and unhesitatingly adds his comment or explanation. He gives his interpretation of it, or his finding under it, to the effect of ordering the believing husband or wife to remain even with an unbelieving partner. Such, as he determines it, is the fair import and legitimate force of the law spoken by the Lord himself;—so far virtually superseding or reversing the Mosaic rule, enforced by Ezra and Nehemiah—a rule evidently rendered necessary by the peculiar position of the Jewish nation; and not therefore always or universally applicable and binding.

Now, in the two verses before us (14 and 16), the apostle brings out the theory or principle upon which this practical rule of conduct is to be vindicated or explained. He assigns for it a twofold reason; a reason somewhat formal, and if we may so speak, relative or relational, connected with the standing which a Christian household has before God; and another reason more real, practical, and moral, bearing upon the opportunities of doing good which the household economy presents. For we may conceive of a really conscientious member of the Corinthian church,—particularly if he were a Jewish convert,—bringing forward a double objection against the apostle's rule. You desire me to continue joined in the marriage yoke with one who is still an unbeliever; not even in name and by profession a follower of Jesus. But I have two serious difficulties and scruples of

conscience about doing so. In the first place, may not my standing in relation to God be thereby affected? And in the second place, may not my personal character run the risk of being contaminated, tainted, and corrupted? My position or standing as a believer in the sight of God is one of holiness;—in the sense of his having separated me, and set me apart for himself, so that I am in a new and peculiar covenant-relation to him;—called and consecrated to be his. May not that position be compromised if I remain a member of a heathen or unchristian family, which, as such, is in the relation of an unclean or common thing to God? Again, by God's grace I have obtained the gift of saving faith—and I seek to live by faith, and walk by faith, with God, in the world? Is there no danger of my being drawn away and enticed, if, in so near a fellowship as that of marriage, I still associate with an unconverted person? May I not be tempted to apostatize or become a backslider? May I not thus fall away from my steadfastness 1

No, says the apostle. Your two difficulties are, indeed, such as might naturally occur to you: your scruples are not idle and vain. But they may be met.

Thus, as to the first, mark the grace and condescension of God. Such is the favour you find, as a believer, in his sight, and such his benignant complacency in you, that he consents to see your family in you, and not you in your family; to give your family the benefit of your relation of nearness and friendship to himself, instead of your having the loss and damage of their relation of estrangement; to view the household as partaking in your consecration to be the Lord's, rather than you as partaking in their unblest standing before him; to account them, in this sense, holy for your sake, and not you common or unclean for theirs. On this head, therefore, you need have no anxiety.

And again, as to the other point, your reasonable and commendable fear lest your faith should be undermined and corrupted by such association with an unbeliever; consider that, by the grace of God, in answer to your prayers, the result may be the very reverse. Your tender and holy walk;—rendered all the more tender and holy by the very apprehension you feel lest the

spirituality of your views, and the heavenliness of your aims, should suffer from the sphere in which you are forced to move;—your faithful testimony—your consistent conduct—your affectionate assiduities—your discreet utterance of a word in season—your patience, gentleness, and love;—may be the means, in the hand of the Spirit, of converting to God the very party whose influence you dread as likely to draw your own soul away from him; “For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?” (ver. 16). Or, as the apostle Peter has it—“Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear—(1 Peter iii. 1, 2).

Thus the apostle disposes of the two scruples which a believer might feel, as to complying with the rule he has announced; and establishes that rule, by laying down two principles, deeply seated in the domestic constitution, as it is ordained by God to be the central element alike of society and of the church. It is to the first of these principles that I propose now to call attention.

The principle upon which God proceeds in dealing with a household as represented by a believing head, whether it be the husband or the wife, has its origin, of course, in his own sovereign appointment. It is of his mere good pleasure that he adopts a method of this kind in counting up the families of men;—reckoning as his own, and as in an important sense holy unto himself, every family that has even one of its heads in a position to commend it in believing prayer to him. “We do not, therefore, require to bring arguments of natural reason in support of an arrangement which confessedly rests exclusively on the divine will, and could only be discovered and ascertained by a divine revelation of that will. At the same time, it may be satisfactory to observe—1. That there is no valid presumption against it on any grounds of natural reason and the common sense of mankind; 2. That it is according to the analogy of the divine procedure in the whole government of this world; and 3. That it is of great practical value to us, and altogether worthy of God.

1. The holiness here ascribed to the family of a believing parent has been often called *federal* or *covenant* holiness; and the expression provokes contempt in certain quarters. "The phrase 'federally holy' is unintelligible, and conveys no idea." Such is the brief oracular utterance of a popular American writer (Barnes), whose notes on the different books of the Bible, however valuable for the literary, historical, geographical, and antiquarian information they contain, are far from being safe guides either doctrinally or spiritually; and whose shallow criticisms would but ill supplant the sound and masculine theology of the older commentators. "The phrase," he says flippantly, "the phrase 'federally holy' is unintelligible, and conveys no idea." The remark is the result of ignorance. If, indeed, holiness here means personal purity and likeness to God,—piety, godliness, moral goodness;—if it expresses a quality or attribute of personal character;—then, undoubtedly, to speak of any one being "federally holy"—holy in respect of a covenant standing or relation,—while not personally a sanctified believer,—would be not merely unintelligible, but wicked,—not merely absurd, but profane. But it is notorious, every scholar knows, that that is not the meaning of the words "sanctify" and "holy" in this passage. The objectors themselves do not and cannot put that meaning on these words; and they know that it is not the meaning which sound divines and competent critics attach to them. In fact, the original term here rendered "holy,"—with the verb from it, to "sanctify," or "make holy,"—rarely, if ever, does, either in the Old Testament⁸ or in the New, denote personal character. It does not necessarily imply any inward goodness or good quality at all. It is commonly used simply as a term of outward relationship; denoting the use, destination, office, or official character of a person or thing;—having reference to the light in which God may be pleased to regard any one,—the treatment which God may bestow upon him,—the footing on which God may place him;—and not to what he really and personally is.

⁸ I mean, of course, the corresponding word in Hebrew to the Greek word here. For there are two words in Hebrew, and two corresponding words in Greek, both translated holy in one English version; but never confounded in the original languages. The one refers to personal character, inferring piety and love; the other denotes consecration or setting apart for a sacred use, and is applied to things as well as persons. It is the latter that, with its cognate verb, is employed here.

Thus viewed, the idea is surely simple enough. Take two familiar illustrations:—

(1.) I have occasion to deal with some one among you in a matter that brings us into the closest terms of mutual friendship and partnership with one another. Strictly speaking, it is entirely and exclusively a personal matter between you and me as individuals. But when the negotiation is completed, the compact sealed, and the league between us personally fairly established, somewhat of the effect or influence of the transaction reaches beyond you, as an individual, to those connected with you. Your family and your friends, though they may be far from being on the same terms with me individually as you yourself are,—nay, though they may continue strangers or even enemies,—are yet, somehow, different, as to my esteem of them, from what they were before;—and partly, at least, share in the interest with which I consider you.

(2.) When Joseph presented his aged father and his brethren to Pharaoh, the king did not treat them as common persons,—far less did he regard them as unclean, although Hebrew shepherds were apt to be an abomination to Egyptians. In themselves Jacob and his sons were nothing to Pharaoh. They had no claim upon his notice; and there was no reason why they should find any especial favour in his sight. But, as belonging to Joseph, whom he so warmly esteemed, and so eagerly delighted to honour,—they became at once the objects of the king's liveliest sympathy;—and were admitted by him to a standing to which they could never otherwise have attained.

Is there anything unreasonable in such a mode of procedure? Or can any cause be shown why God may not formally and systematically adopt it, in his dealings with the families of those whom he counts his own?

2. On the contrary, the analogy of providence and grace creates a probability on the other side. I do not now refer to the two great economies, or covenants,—that of works, and that of redemption or salvation,—in the one of which God deals with the whole family of mankind as represented by the first Adam, while in the other, he

constitutes the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, the representative and surety of all the elect. The principle of both of these dispensations alike, under which paradise is forfeited and is regained,—man is lost and is found,—affords a presumption in favour of the arrangement now in question. But apart from that, it clearly appears to be a principle of the divine plan of government generally,—that individuals grouped together in organized bodies or communities should have a sort of reflex or imputed character in the sight of God,—borrowed from the character or profession of their natural or their constituted federal heads. Thus God had a special favour for all who were related to Abraham, even after the lapse of ages, and in a remote line of descent; not regarding them as standing in the same position with the general mass of men, but reckoning himself to have peculiar claims upon them,—and them also to have peculiar claims on him,—in respect of the place Abraham held in his esteem (2 Chron. xx. 7; Ps. cv. 6, 9, 42; Is. li. 2). No doubt the seed of Abraham, spiritually understood, is Christ, and believers viewed as one with Christ (Gal. iii. 16). But the literal offspring of Abraham were, and are, clearly accounted by God to be peculiarly his own, for Abraham's sake. And the very circumstance of Christ and his Church being represented so emphatically as Abraham's seed, proves the principle for which we are contending. It shows a desire in the divine mind to place even the bestowal of his saving grace and saving gifts upon the footing of the family relationship and the kindness which he bears to the family-head.

The same remarks will apply to the light in which God viewed those who could claim kindred with Jacob, as well as those of the house and lineage of David (Jer. xxxiii. 26). And subordinate instances might be quoted, such as that perhaps of the Rechabites (Jer. xxxv.); where the whole spirit of the incident is lost, if we do not consider it as an example of a family covenant, connected with a family blessing. Jonadab the son of Rechab acted plainly as the head of a house. As such he was owned by God, and all his house in him. And the special praise of his posterity is that they recognized and realized that fact.

Let it be observed here, in the first place, that we speak merely of the general principle of the divine procedure, and not of its

particular application. The general principle is that when God chooses any one, and admits him into a relation of friendship with himself, he delights to extend to others connected with the chosen one, and does extend to them, merely because they are so connected, a certain participation in the benefit. Whether it may be temporal or spiritual blessings that are more immediately involved, is not at present material, and does not effect the analogy. It is enough to have shown, that when God admits the head of a household, or race, into a relation of holiness, or devotedness, or consecration to himself,—it is his method, his way, his rule, to extend that relation beyond the individual, so as to comprehend those belonging to him, and in some distinct sense, naturally, or by appointment, represented by him. Again, secondly, let it be noted that the principle is not made void by the fact that in spite of all this, j those who are thus graciously treated and accounted virtually holy, never actually become in their own persons holy. It is the worse for them: their guilt is aggravated, and the severity of their doom enhanced. But their unbelief does not make void the faithfulness of God, or prove that he did not admit them into a relation of covenant-nearness to himself, for their father's sake;—a relation carrying with it precious advantages and opportunities,—signal means and pledges of grace;—and involving, in proportion, all the heavier responsibilities.

If it be asked what we can bring forward out of the New Testament as favoring this view of the analogy of God's dealing with men?—I simply point, to the numerous instances in the early church of the conversion and baptism of whole households, along with their respective heads (such as John iv. 53; Acts xvi. 34, xviii. 8;? Cor. i. 16),—together with the allusions in the messages at the end of the epistles to household churches (Rom. xvi.) I raise no question here directly as to the administration of ordinances. But I own it does appear to me impossible to explain these intimations of entire families becoming Christian all at once, and households becoming in a sense Christian churches,—without having recourse to the principle,—that the heads, one or both, often acted in name of the family; and that, in so doing, they were accepted and approved; and the family, in them, was accounted no more common or unclean, but holy. And let it be remembered that these are not exceptional cases.

They are the ordinary and current sort of specimens, left on record, of the way in which Christianity at first grew and established itself.

On the whole, I can see nothing contrary to the analogy of God's ways on earth, in the arrangement according to which, for the sake of a believing parent or head, he regards the whole household as brought into a peculiar relation of federal holiness to himself;—taken out of the common class, or category, of ungodly families in the world;—and invested, at least in some sense and to some effects, with a sacred character in his eyes.

3. I say to some effects. For it is not a mere nominal or ideal character of holiness that is ascribed to the family of a believing head; but one that is at least in some sense, and to some effects, real. No doubt it is a sort of virtual or representative holiness that the household are described, in this text, as possessing, and not a personal holiness: for it is assumed that the husband or wife referred to is still an unbeliever; and probably the children too. But the distinction here recognized between holy and unclean is not on that account either unmeaning or unimportant.

To come to the point at once; the essential question in the whole discussion is substantially this,—Does the covenant of grace, as administered on earth, embrace any but actual believers? Have any others an interest in it? Are any others within its pale?

I speak of the covenant as administered upon earth. For of course, as regards the counsels of heaven, it comprehends, not merely all who at any given moment are actually believers, but all the elect who ever have believed, or ever are to believe, to the end of time; and it excludes all else. But as regards its administration on earth, by the word and Spirit of God, and by ordinances and fellowship,—it is certainly, in one view, less comprehensive, for it takes in only a portion of those who are to be saved. May it not, in another view, be more comprehensive, taking in others besides the actually saved? It is true, none such can be comprehended in it, so as to have a saving interest in its benefits. In that sense, none but the elect can be embraced in it. But does it follow that there can be no sense in which others may be within it? May not God impose

covenant-obligations on others besides believers?—obligations super-adding to all the other grounds on which unbelief is a sin, the peculiar and heavy aggravation of its being a breach of covenant? May he not, indeed, make this very arrangement, when realized in the case of the elect themselves, one of the means of conversion, and one of the motives of faith? May He not give covenant privileges, promises, and pledges, to others besides believers,—such as, upon covenant-principles, afford facilities and encouragements to believe? May He not accept a covenant-profession of penitence and faith,—so far at least as to take it, if we may so speak, in good part,—make it the occasion of suspending his judgments, in the exercise of his forbearance,—and even perhaps turn it into the commencement of a gracious and saving work in the soul? In all these respects,—in respect of covenant-obligations imposed,—covenant privileges, promises, and pledges bestowed,—and covenant-professions owned,—God may surely admit others besides believers to an interest in his covenant as administered on earth, and recognize them as standing in a covenant relation to himself.

Is it asked what we mean by the word covenant, as used in this connection? In reply, let us bear in mind that the covenant of grace is not a voluntary compact or agreement between God and us, implying or requiring the consent of parties. It may be so between God and his eternal Son, or in the councils of the Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. But in its relation to us, it is simply the solemn act of God, binding himself to us, and binding us to himself. Doubtless, in order to our having a saving interest in it, consent, concurrence, acquiescence, or in one word, obedience, is indispensable. But it does not follow that this is necessary in order to our having any interest at all, of any sort, in it. God himself, at his own hand, as it were, and by his own mere act or arrangement, may give us an interest in it, and regard us and deal with us as having an interest in it;—a real interest too, as we may ere long find,—to our profit or to our cost;—to our profit, if, owning our covenant relation, and feeling it, we lament our guilt, and cry for mercy, with a full and vivid apprehension of the extent of our responsibilities, and the faithfulness of God's pledges; to our cost, if—imagining ourselves to be at liberty to consult our own discretion, apart from divinely imposed and divinely sealed and sanctioned vows—we trifle with

the overtures of the blessed Gospel;—dealing with them as if we were free to dispose of them as we think fit;—until we come to “count the blood of the covenant wherewith we were sanctified an unholy being, and do despite to the Spirit of all grace.”

I have done little, or rather nothing more than attempt a statement of the point at issue. To argue it out is more than it would be fitting in this place to undertake. There are two questions, however, which, before passing on to the application of the subject, I may briefly suggest.

I. Has the covenant of grace ever been administered on earth without such a margin as we plead for? Has the church of God ever existed in the world otherwise than as the kernel of a nut? Has God ever constituted a society of real believers, really and savingly in covenant with himself, otherwise than as they might be contained within a wider body;—which also he condescends to acknowledge, as in a certain covenant relation to himself? Assuredly, before the coming of Christ, nothing of the sort appeared among men. It is on all hands confessed that during all the period intervening between the fall and the Christian era the true people of God, the really saved, were hidden and almost lost, in the far larger and miscellaneous community, in which alone, however, and as a part of it, they had any place and standing. In other words, they actually were what the general mass to which they belonged should have been;—were accounted, and were bound to be. In point of real attainment, they were what the society and all its members were in point of obligation, privilege, and profession. This was the state of matters when the church in covenant with God was to be found in the Jewish nation; co-extensive with that nation in one view;—but alas! far more restricted in another.

Is there any proof, or even presumption, that all this is changed under the New Testament form of the dispensation? The covenant is the same; its obligations, pledges, and professions are in substance the same. True, the Jewish nation as such is no longer the shell or husk containing the kernel. But as of old, in Mesopotamia, the work began with the call of Abraham,—went on to the recognition of his household in him,—and issued in the setting apart of the nation

springing out of his loins;—so, in gospel times, individuals again were called;—but not merely as individuals. Their families were consecrated in them, and along with them. And not families only, but communities, churches, and nations also, are recognized as capable of sustaining a high and holy relation to God;—exactly as the church and nation of Israel did of old. In fact, no one can read the Acts and the Apostolic Epistles without perceiving that from the very first societies were formed, capable of being collectively addressed as in a covenant relation of holiness to the Lord;—while yet only a portion were personally believers, or personally holy. We conclude, therefore, that the church has never existed upon earth otherwise than as a center or nucleus of real holiness, found within the circumference of a body virtually or federally holy.

II. Our second question is, Can the covenant of grace be administered otherwise on the earth?—at least so long as the earth shall continue to be a scene of trial and probation? God, if we may so speak, by a wide cast of the net, brings men,—not as individuals merely, but in families and communities,—into a certain covenant relation to himself; in respect of which they are brought under the responsibilities, and partake of the influences, of the kingdom of Heaven. For the ordinary means of grace, let it be remembered, and the common operations of the Spirit, are covenant-blessings, enjoyed upon the footing of a covenant-obligation to improve them. Thus God engages and binds men, in families and communities, as well as individually, to the acceptance of his offered mercy, through the obedience of the faith; and calls them, in the way of gospel ordinances, to seek and to secure the great salvation. He puts them to the proof; he places them under training, discipline, and trial; that they may be tested as to what manner of spirit they are of; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. To some extent this is done by the mere preaching of the gospel, for the first time, among any people, and the call to individual sinners to repent. But as Christianity takes root, and new generations rise up under the light of the gospel, it would seem to be essential to the great experiment which God is carrying on,—that he should deal with families and communities of men as such;—reckoning them, by a gracious and liberal construction of what is professed on their behalf, to be within the range of his holy covenant;—viewing them as represented in

their believing head;—and on that ground, treating them as already his,—as separate and holy unto himself,—and so treating them, as such, that they may become really what die wishes them to be;—or if not, may be the more absolutely without excuse. It is as if a king should say of a family, or city, whose heads and representatives are loyal, I accept your family,—your people,—in you. So far, I take their loyalty for granted,—that in you, on your account, and for your sake, I will treat them as if they already were, or would immediately become, themselves loyal. Virtually they shall be loyal, in my esteem of them; as such they shall be admitted to much of my confidence, and many—nay, if they will, all,—of the benefits of my reign. And as such, moreover, they shall be ultimately accountable to me. I give them thus a fair opening and start. I place them in the most advantageous position for being faithful and happy subjects. I put them upon honour. I pledge myself to them, and I pledge them to myself. And if, after all, they turn out rebellious,—theirs is not the guilt of ordinary rebellion, but guilt aggravated, on their part, by the breach of my covenant with them.

The principle I have been endeavouring to explain is one ;of deep significancy and wide application;—affecting, as it does, not only the whole character and constitution of the Church, as visible here below;—but the warrant and nature of all domestic, social, and national religion. If that principle, or something equivalent to it, be not admitted, there may be individual believers associating, more or less formally, with one another; but there can scarcely be such an idea as that of a Christian community, a Christian family, or a Christian nation. I cannot, however, dwell upon these larger views. I close with two brief practical remarks.

1. Am I the believing head of a family, or one of its heads? Let me see in what position, through the gracious condescension of God, my faith places the household. It takes it out of the class of common households, and brings it into an interesting and affecting relation to the Lord. He is pleased to look upon it as in me, and for my sake, invested with a certain character of holiness in his sight. Surely this consideration should not only reconcile me to the continued obligation of all my family ties and duties; it should do more. It should give me great freedom, encouragement, and enlargement, in

pleading with God on behalf of all my household, and pleading with them on God's behalf. And it should fill me with a very profound apprehension of the enhanced responsibility lying upon them all;—the more especially since, according to God's sovereign ordinance, that enhanced responsibility is entailed on them through me.

How very solemn and awful, in this view of it, is the relation of the holy believing head of a family to all the members of it! Do I believe that, not merely myself, but my household with me, are in a covenant relation to God;—in so far, at least, as covenant obligations, privileges, and professions are concerned? Have I avowed and acted on that belief, by applying for baptism, the initial seal of the covenant, for my children? How holy, then, should they be in my esteem! how sacred! With what reverence should I treat them!—with what scrupulous and trembling care to keep them from all pollution; with what watchful anxiety to have them washed and sanctified and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God! Strange that such a doctrine as this should be represented in any quarter as having a tendency to relax parental diligence, and minister to carnal security and sloth!

2. Are you the members of a family that is blessed in having a believing head? Are you the children of Christian parents? As such, have you been acknowledged by the Church on earth, and sealed by God himself, in the sacrament of baptism? Consider, how solemnly you are pledged and engaged to be the Lord's! But you may say that you are not bound by a transaction to which you did not give your consent. It is unreasonable, as well as unscriptural, to say so.

You are bound in many ways, and to many duties, without your own consent. As children, you are bound to your parents;—as citizens, to your country;—without your previous concurrence asked or obtained. God binds you, and he has a right to bind you. And so, in like manner, he binds you as members of a Christian family. Solemnly, and in covenant, he binds you to himself. Does this offend you? Consider, on the other hand, that he also, and in like manner, graciously binds himself to you. If you are under covenant obligations, you have also covenant promises and privileges and pledges.

Ah, my young friends! your birth in a Christian land; your baptism in a Christian church; your pure and happy home in the bosom of a Christian family,—with a godly father to teach you, and a godly mother to watch over you,—and both together to pray for you and to pray with you;—these things are, none of them, either accidental or insignificant. They bespeak a gracious purpose—they have all a gracious meaning. True, they will not of themselves avail to save you.

But they do much to put you in the way of salvation. And who can tell how terribly they will aggravate your inexcusable guilt and your inevitable condemnation,—if, under all the sacred influences, and all the sacred pledges, involved in your connection with a Christian land, a Christian church, a Christian family, you continue still unsanctified and unsaved!

THE END.

