

DODS MARCUS

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE:
THE BOOK OF GENESIS

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I.

THE CREATION

Genesis i. and ii

If any one is in search of accurate information regarding the age of this earth, or its relation to the sun, moon, and stars, or regarding the order in which plants and animals have appeared upon it, he is referred to recent text-books in astronomy, geology, and palæontology. No one for a moment dreams of referring a serious student of these subjects to the Bible as a source of information. It is not the object of the writers of Scripture to impart physical instruction or to enlarge the bounds of scientific knowledge. But if any one wishes to know what connection the world has with God, if he seeks to trace back all that now is to the very fountain-head of life, if he desires to discover some unifying principle, some illuminating purpose in the history

of this earth, then we confidently refer him to these and the subsequent chapters of Scripture as his safest, and indeed his only, guide to the information he seeks. Every writing must be judged by the object the writer has in view. If the object of the writer of these chapters was to convey physical information, then certainly it is imperfectly fulfilled. But if his object was to give an intelligible account of God's relation to the world and to man, then it must be owned that he has been successful in the highest degree.

It is therefore unreasonable to allow our reverence for this writing to be lessened because it does not anticipate the discoveries of physical science; or to repudiate its authority in its own department of truth because it does not give us information which it formed no part of the writer's object to give. As well might we deny to Shakespeare a masterly knowledge of human life, because his dramas are blotted by historical anachronisms. That the compiler of this book of Genesis did not aim at scientific accuracy in speaking of physical details is obvious, not merely from the general scope and purpose of the Biblical writers, but especially from this, that in these first two chapters of his book he lays side by side two accounts of man's creation which no ingenuity can reconcile. These two accounts, glaringly incompatible in details, but absolutely harmonious in their leading ideas, at once warn the reader that the writer's aim is rather to convey certain ideas regarding man's spiritual history and his connection with God, than to describe the process

of creation. He does describe the process of creation, but he describes it only for the sake of the ideas regarding man's relation to God and God's relation to the world which he can thereby convey. Indeed what we mean by scientific knowledge was not in all the thoughts of the people for whom this book was written. The subject of creation, of the beginning of man upon earth, was not approached from that side at all; and if we are to understand what is here written we must burst the trammels of our own modes of thought and read these chapters not as a chronological, astronomical, geological, biological statement, but as a moral or spiritual conception.

It will, however, be said, and with much appearance of justice, that although the first object of the writer was not to convey scientific information, yet he might have been expected to be accurate in the information he did advance regarding the physical universe. This is an enormous assumption to make on *à priori* grounds, but it is an assumption worth seriously considering because it brings into view a real and important difficulty which every reader of Genesis must face. It brings into view the twofold character of this account of creation. On the one hand it is irreconcilable with the teachings of science. On the other hand it is in striking contrast to the other cosmogonies which have been handed down from pre-scientific ages. These are the two patent features of this record of creation and both require to be accounted for. Either feature alone would be easily accounted for; but the two co-existing in the same document are more

baffling. We have to account at once for a want of perfect coincidence with the teachings of science, and for a singular freedom from those errors which disfigure all other primitive accounts of the creation of the world. The one feature of the document is as patent as the other and presses equally for explanation.

Now many persons cut the knot by simply denying that both these features exist. There is no disagreement with science, they say. I speak for many careful enquirers when I say that this cannot serve as a solution of the difficulty. I think it is to be freely admitted that, from whatever cause and however justifiably, the account of creation here given is not in strict and detailed accordance with the teaching of science. All attempts to force its statements into such accord are futile and mischievous. They are futile because they do not convince independent enquirers, but only those who are unduly anxious to be convinced. And they are mischievous because they unduly prolong the strife between Scripture and science, putting the question on a false issue. And above all, they are to be condemned because they do violence to Scripture, foster a style of interpretation by which the text is forced to say whatever the interpreter desires, and prevent us from recognising the real nature of these sacred writings. The Bible needs no defence such as false constructions of its language bring to its aid. They are its worst friends who distort its words that they may yield a meaning more in accordance with scientific truth. If, for example, the word 'day' in these chapters, does

not mean a period of twenty-four hours, the interpretation of Scripture is hopeless. Indeed if we are to bring these chapters into any comparison at all with science, we find at once various discrepancies. Of a creation of sun, moon, and stars, subsequent to the creation of this earth, science can have but one thing to say. Of the existence of fruit trees prior to the existence of the sun, science knows nothing. But for a candid and unsophisticated reader without a special theory to maintain, details are needless.

Accepting this chapter then as it stands, and believing that only by looking at the Bible as it actually is can we hope to understand God's method of revealing Himself, we at once perceive that ignorance of some departments of truth does not disqualify a man for knowing and imparting truth about God. In order to be a medium of revelation a man does not need to be in advance of his age in secular learning. Intimate communion with God, a spirit trained to discern spiritual things, a perfect understanding of and zeal for God's purpose, these are qualities quite independent of a knowledge of the discoveries of science. The enlightenment which enables men to apprehend God and spiritual truth, has no necessary connection with scientific attainments. David's confidence in God and his declarations of His faithfulness are none the less valuable, because he was ignorant of a very great deal which every school-boy now knows. Had inspired men introduced into their writings information which anticipated the discoveries of science, their state of mind would be inconceivable, and revelation would be a source of

confusion. God's methods are harmonious with one another, and as He has given men natural faculties to acquire scientific knowledge and historical information, He did not stultify this gift by imparting such knowledge in a miraculous and unintelligible manner. There is no evidence that inspired men were in advance of their age in the knowledge of physical facts and laws. And plainly, had they been supernaturally instructed in physical knowledge they would so far have been unintelligible to those to whom they spoke. Had the writer of this book mingled with his teaching regarding God, an explicit and exact account of how this world came into existence – had he spoken of millions of years instead of speaking of days – in all probability he would have been discredited, and what he had to say about God would have been rejected along with his premature science. But speaking from the point of view of his contemporaries, and accepting the current ideas regarding the formation of the world, he attached to these the views regarding God's connection with the world which are most necessary to be believed. What he had learned of God's unity and creative power and connection with man, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he imparts to his contemporaries through the vehicle of an account of creation they could all understand. It is not in his knowledge of physical facts that he is elevated above his contemporaries, but in his knowledge of God's connection with all physical facts. No doubt, on the other hand, his knowledge of God reacts upon the entire contents of his mind and saves him from presenting such accounts of creation as

have been common among polytheists. He presents an account purified by his conception of what was worthy of the supreme God he worshipped. His idea of God has given dignity and simplicity to all he says about creation, and there is an elevation and majesty about the whole conception, which we recognise as the reflex of his conception of God.

Here then instead of anything to discompose us or to excite unbelief, we recognise one great law or principle on which God proceeds in making Himself known to men. This has been called the Law of Accommodation. It is the law which requires that the condition and capacity of those to whom the revelation is made must be considered. If you wish to instruct a child, you must speak in language the child can understand. If you wish to elevate a savage, you must do it by degrees, accommodating yourself to his condition, and winking at much ignorance while you instil elementary knowledge. You must found all you teach on what is already understood by your pupil, and through that you must convey further knowledge and train his faculties to higher capacity. So was it with God's revelation. The Jews were children who had to be trained with what Paul somewhat contemptuously calls "weak and beggarly elements," the A B C of morals and religion. Not even in morals could the absolute truth be enforced. Accommodation had to be practised even here. Polygamy was allowed as a concession to their immature stage of development: and practices in war and in domestic law were permitted or enjoined which were inconsistent with absolute morality. Indeed

the whole Jewish system was an adaptation to an immature state. The dwelling of God in the Temple as a man in his house, the propitiating of God with sacrifice as of an Eastern king with gifts; this was a teaching by picture, a teaching which had as much resemblance to the truth and as much mixture of truth as they were able then to receive. No doubt this teaching did actually mislead them in some of their ideas; but it kept them on the whole in a right attitude towards God, and prepared them for growing up to a fuller discernment of the truth.

Much more was this law observed in regard to such matters as are dealt with in these chapters. It was impossible that in their ignorance of the rudiments of scientific knowledge, the early Hebrews should understand an absolutely accurate account of how the world came into being; and if they could have understood it, it would have been useless, dissevered as it must have been from the steps of knowledge by which men have since arrived at it. Children ask us questions in answer to which we do not tell them the exact full truth, because we know they cannot possibly understand it. All that we can do is to give them some provisional answer which conveys to them some information they can understand, and which keeps them in a right state of mind, although this information often seems absurd enough when compared with the actual facts and truth of the matter. And if some solemn pedant accused us of supplying the child with false information, we would simply tell him he knew nothing about children. Accurate information on these matters will infallibly

come to the child when he grows up; what is wanted meanwhile is to give him information which will help to form his conduct without gravely misleading him as to facts. Similarly, if any one tells me he cannot accept these chapters as inspired by God, because they do not convey scientifically accurate information regarding this earth, I can only say that he has yet to learn the first principles of revelation, and that he misunderstands the conditions on which all instruction must be given.

My belief then is, that in these chapters we have the ideas regarding the origin of the world and of man which were naturally attainable in the country where they were first composed, but with those important modifications which a monotheistic belief necessarily suggested. So far as merely physical knowledge went, there is probably little here that was new to the contemporaries of the writer; but this already familiar knowledge was used by him as the vehicle for conveying his faith in the unity, love and wisdom of God the creator. He laid a firm foundation for the history of God's relation to man. This was his object, and this he accomplished. The Bible is the book to which we turn for information regarding the history of God's revelation of Himself, and of His will towards men; and in these chapters we have the suitable introduction to this history. No changes in our knowledge of physical truth can at all affect the teaching of these chapters. What they teach regarding the relation of man to God is independent of the physical details in which this teaching is embodied, and can as easily be attached to the most modern

statement of the physical origin of the world and of man.

What then are the truths taught us in these chapters? The first is that there has been a creation, that things now existing have not just grown of themselves, but have been called into being by a presiding intelligence and an originating will. No attempt to account for the existence of the world in any other way has been successful. A great deal has in this generation been added to our knowledge of the efficiency of material causes to produce what we see around us; but when we ask what gives harmony to these material causes, and what guides them to the production of certain ends, and what originally produced them, the answer must still be, not matter but intelligence and purpose. The best informed and most penetrating minds of our time affirm this. John Stuart Mill says: "It must be allowed that in the present state of our knowledge the adaptations in nature afford a large balance of probability in favour of creation by intelligence." Professor Tyndall adds his testimony and says: "I have noticed during years of self-observation that it is not in hours of clearness and vigour that [the doctrine of material atheism] commends itself to my mind – that in the hours of stronger and healthier thought it ever dissolves and disappears, as offering no solution of the mystery in which we dwell and of which we form a part."

There is indeed a prevalent suspicion, that in presence of the discoveries made by evolutionists the argument from design is no longer tenable. Evolution shows us that the correspondence of the structure of animals, with their modes of life, has been generated

by the nature of the case; and it is concluded that a blind mechanical necessity and not an intelligent design rules all. But the discovery of the process by which the presently existing living forms have been evolved, and the perception that this process is governed by laws which have always been operating, do not make intelligence and design at all less necessary, but rather more so. As Professor Huxley himself says: "The teleological and mechanical views of nature are not necessarily exclusive. The teleologist can always defy the evolutionist to disprove that the primordial molecular arrangement was not intended to evolve the phenomena of the universe." Evolution, in short, by disclosing to us the marvellous power and accuracy of natural law, compels us more emphatically than ever to refer all law to a supreme, originating intelligence.

This then is the first lesson of the Bible; that at the root and origin of all this vast material universe, before whose laws we are crushed as the moth, there abides a living conscious Spirit, who wills and knows and fashions all things. The belief of this changes for us the whole face of nature, and instead of a chill, impersonal world of forces to which no appeal can be made, and in which matter is supreme, gives us the home of a Father. If you are yourself but a particle of a huge and unconscious universe – a particle which, like a flake of foam, or a drop of rain, or a gnat, or a beetle, lasts its brief space and then yields up its substance to be moulded into some new creature; if there is no power that understands you and sympathizes with you and makes

provision for your instincts, your aspirations, your capabilities; if man is himself the highest intelligence, and if all things are the purposeless result of physical forces; if, in short, there is no God, no consciousness at the beginning as at the end of all things, then nothing can be more melancholy than our position. Our higher desires which seem to separate us so immeasurably from the brutes, we have, only that they may be cut down by the keen edge of time, and wither in barren disappointment; our reason we have, only to enable us to see and measure the brevity of our span, and so live our little day, not joyously as the unforeseeing beasts, but shadowed by the hastening gloom of anticipated, inevitable and everlasting night; our faculty for worshipping and for striving to serve and to resemble the perfect living One, that faculty which seems to be the thing of greatest promise and of finest quality in us, and to which is certainly due the largest part of what is admirable and profitable in human history, is the most mocking and foolishest of all our parts. But, God be thanked, He has revealed himself to us; has given us in the harmonious and progressive movement of all around us, sufficient indication that, even in the material world, intelligence and purpose reign; an indication which becomes immensely clearer as we pass into the world of man; and which, in presence of the person and life of Christ attains the brightness of a conviction which illuminates all besides.

The other great truth which this writer teaches is, that man was the chief work of God, for whose sake all else was brought into

being. The work of creation was not finished till he appeared: all else was preparatory to this final product. That man is the crown and lord of this earth is obvious. Man instinctively assumes that all else has been made for him, and freely acts upon this assumption. But when our eyes are lifted from this little ball on which we are set and to which we are confined, and when we scan such other parts of the universe as are within our ken, a keen sense of littleness oppresses us; our earth is after all so minute and apparently inconsiderable a point when compared with the vast suns and planets that stretch system on system into illimitable space. When we read even the rudiments of what astronomers have discovered regarding the inconceivable vastness of the universe, the huge dimensions of the heavenly bodies, and the grand scale on which everything is framed, we find rising to our lips, and with tenfold reason, the words of David: "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers; the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him?" Is it conceivable that on this scarcely discernible speck in the vastness of the universe, should be played out the chiefest act in the history of God? Is it credible that He whose care it is to uphold this illimitable universe, should be free to think of the wants and woes of the insignificant creatures who quickly spend their little lives in this inconsiderable earth?

But reason seems all on the side of Genesis. God must not be considered as sitting apart in a remote position of general

superintendence, but as present with all that is. And to Him who maintains these systems in their respective relations and orbits, it can be no burden to relieve the needs of individuals. To think of ourselves as too insignificant to be attended to is to derogate from God's true majesty and to misunderstand His relation to the world. But it is also to misapprehend the real value of spirit as compared with matter. Man is dear to God because he is like Him. Vast and glorious as it is, the sun cannot think God's thoughts; can fulfil but cannot intelligently sympathize with God's purpose. Man, alone among God's works, can enter into and approve of God's purpose in the world and can intelligently fulfil it. Without man the whole material universe would have been dark and unintelligible, mechanical and apparently without any sufficient purpose. Matter, however fearfully and wonderfully wrought, is but the platform and material in which spirit, intelligence and will, may fulfil themselves and find development. Man is incommensurable with the rest of the universe. He is of a different kind and by his moral nature is more akin to God than to His works.

Here the beginning and the end of God's revelation join hands and throw light on one another. The nature of man was that in which God was at last to give His crowning revelation, and for that no preparation could seem extravagant. Fascinating and full of marvel as is the history of the past which science discloses to us; full as these slow-moving millions of years are in evidences of the exhaustless wealth of nature, and mysterious

as the delay appears, all that expenditure of resources is eclipsed and all the delay justified when the whole work is crowned by the Incarnation, for in it we see that all that slow process was the preparation of a nature in which God could manifest Himself as a Person to persons. This is seen to be an end worthy of all that is contained in the physical history of the world: this gives completeness to the whole and makes it a unity. No higher, other end need be sought, none could be conceived. It is this which seems worthy of those tremendous and subtle forces which have been set at work in the physical world, this which justifies the long lapse of ages filled with wonders unobserved, and teeming with ever new life; this above all which justifies these latter ages in which all physical marvels have been outdone by the tragical history of man upon earth. Remove the Incarnation and all remains dark, purposeless, unintelligible: grant the Incarnation, believe that in Jesus Christ the Supreme manifested Himself personally, and light is shed upon all that has been and is.

Light is shed on the individual life. Are you living as if you were the product of blind mechanical laws, and as if there were no object worthy of your life and of all the force you can throw into your life? Consider the Incarnation of the Creator, and ask yourself if sufficient object is not given to you in His call that you be conformed to His image and become the intelligent executor of His purposes? Is life not worth having even on these terms? The man that can still sit down and bemoan himself as if there were no meaning in existence, or lounge languidly through life

as if there were no zest or urgency in living, or try to satisfy himself with fleshly comforts, has surely need to turn to the opening page of Revelation and learn that God saw sufficient object in the life of man, enough to compensate for millions of ages of preparation. If it is possible that you should share in the character and destiny of Christ, can a healthy ambition crave anything more or higher? If the future is to be as momentous in results as the past has certainly been filled with preparation, have you no caring to share in these results? Believe that there is a purpose in things; that in Christ, the revelation of God, you can see what that purpose is, and that by wholly uniting yourself to Him and allowing yourself to be penetrated by His Spirit you can participate with Him in the working out of that purpose.

II.

THE FALL

Genesis iii

Profound as the teaching of this narrative is, its meaning does not lie on the surface. Literal interpretation will reach a measure of its significance, but plainly there is more here than appears in the letter. When we read that the serpent was more subtile than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made, and that he tempted the woman, we at once perceive that it is not with the outer husk of the story we are to concern ourselves, but with the kernel. The narrative throughout speaks of nothing but the brute serpent; not a word is said of the devil, not the slightest hint is given that the machinations of a fallen angel are signified. The serpent is compared to the other beasts of the field, showing that it is the brute serpent that is spoken of. The curse is pronounced on the beast, not on a fallen spirit summoned for the purpose before the Supreme; and not in terms which could apply to a fallen spirit, but in terms that are applicable only to the serpent that crawls. Yet every reader feels that this is not the whole mystery of the fall of man: moral evil cannot be accounted for by referring it to a brute source. No one, I suppose, believes that

the whole tribe of serpents crawl as a punishment of an offence committed by one of their number, or that the whole iniquity and sorrow of the world are due to an actual serpent. Plainly this is merely a pictorial representation intended to convey some general impressions and ideas. Vitaly important truths underlie the narrative and are bodied forth by it; but the way to reach these truths is not to adhere too rigidly to the literal meaning, but to catch the general impression which it seems fitted to make.

No doubt this opens the door to a great variety of interpretation. No two men will attach to it precisely the same meaning. One says, the serpent is a symbol for Satan, but Adam and Eve are historical persons. Another says, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a figure, but the driving out from the garden is real. Another maintains that the whole is a picture, putting in a visible, intelligible shape certain vitaly important truths regarding the history of our race. So that every man is left very much to his own judgment, to read the narrative candidly and in such light from other sources as he has, and let it make its own impression upon him. This would be a sad result if the object of the Bible were to bring us all to a rigid uniformity of belief in all matters; but the object of the Bible is not that, but the far higher object of furnishing all varieties of men with sufficient light to lead them to God. And this being so, variety of interpretation in details is not to be lamented. The very purpose of such representations as are here given is to suit all stages of mental and spiritual advancement. Let the child read it and he

will learn what will live in his mind and influence him all his life. Let the devout man who has ranged through all science and history and philosophy come back to this narrative, and he feels that he has here the essential truth regarding the beginnings of man's tragical career upon earth.

We should, in my opinion, be labouring under a misapprehension if we supposed that none even of the earliest readers of this account saw the deeper meaning of it. When men who felt the misery of sin and lifted up their hearts to God for deliverance, read the words addressed to the serpent, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" – is it reasonable to suppose that such men would take these words in their literal sense, and satisfy themselves with the assurance that serpents, though dangerous, would be kept under, and would find in the words no assurance of that very thing they themselves were all their lifetime striving after, deliverance from the evil thing which lay at the root of all sin? No doubt some would accept the story in its literal meaning, – shallow and careless men whose own spiritual experience never urged them to see any spiritual significance in the words would do so; but even those who saw least in the story, and put a very shallow interpretation on its details, could scarcely fail to see its main teaching.

The reader of this perennially fresh story is first of all struck with the account given of man's primitive condition. Coming to this narrative with our minds coloured by the fancies of poets

and philosophers, we are almost startled by the check which the plain and sober statements of this account give to an unpruned fancy. We have to read the words again and again to make sure we have not omitted something which gives support to those glowing descriptions of man's primitive condition. Certainly he is described as innocent and at peace with God, and in this respect no terms can exaggerate his happiness. But in other respects the language of the Bible is surprisingly moderate. Man is represented as living on fruit, and as going unclothed, and, so far as appears, without any artificial shelter either from the heat of the sun or the cold of night. None of the arts were as yet known. All working of metals had yet to be discovered, so that his tools must have been of the rudest possible description; and the arts, such as music, which adorn life and make leisure enjoyable, were also still in the future.

But the most significant elements in man's primitive condition are represented by the two trees of the garden; by trees, because with plants alone he had to do. In the centre of the garden stood the tree of life, the fruit of which bestowed immortality. Man was therefore naturally mortal, though apparently with a capacity for immortality. How this capacity would have actually carried man on to immortality had he not sinned, it is vain to conjecture. The mystical nature of the tree of life is fully recognised in the New Testament, by our Lord, when He says: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God;" and by John, when he describes

the new Jerusalem: "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." Both these representations are intended to convey, in a striking and pictorial form, the promise of life everlasting.

And as of the tree of life which stands in the Paradise of the future it is said "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life;" so in Eden man's immortality was suspended on the condition of obedience. And the trial of man's obedience is imaged in the other tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. From the child-like innocence in which man originally was, he was to pass forward into the condition of moral manhood, which consists not in mere innocence, but in innocence maintained in presence of temptation. The savage is innocent of many of the crimes of civilized men because he has no opportunity to commit them; the child is innocent of some of the vices of manhood because he has no temptation to them. But this innocence is the result of circumstance, not of character; and if savage or child is to become a mature moral being he must be tried by altered circumstances, by temptation and opportunity. To carry man forward to this higher stage trial is necessary, and this trial is indicated by the tree of knowledge. The fruit of this tree is prohibited, to indicate that it is only in presence of what is forbidden man can be morally tested, and that it is only by self-

command and obedience to law, and not by the mere following of instincts, that man can attain to moral maturity. The prohibition is that which makes him recognise a distinction between good and evil. He is put in a position in which good is not the only thing he can do; an alternative is present to his mind, and the choice of good in preference to evil is made possible to him. In presence of this tree child-like innocence was no longer possible. The self-determination of manhood was constantly required. Conscience, hitherto latent, was now evoked and took its place as man's supreme faculty.

It is in vain to think of exhausting this narrative. We can, at the most, only remark upon some of the most salient points.

(1) Temptation comes like a serpent; like the most subtle beast of the field; like that one creature which is said to exert a fascinating influence on its victims, fastening them with its glittering eye, stealing upon them by its noiseless, low and unseen approach, perplexing them by its wide circling folds, seeming to come upon them from all sides at once, and armed not like the other beasts with one weapon of offence – horn, or hoof, or teeth – but capable of crushing its victim with every part of its sinuous length. It lies apparently dead for months together, but when roused it can, as the naturalist tells us, “outclimb the monkey, outswim the fish, outleap the zebra, outwrestle the athlete, and crush the tiger.” How naturally in describing temptation do we borrow language from the aspect and movements of this creature. It does not need to hunt down its victims by long continued

pursuit, its victims come and put themselves within its reach. Unseen, temptation lies by our path, and before we have time to think we are fascinated and bewildered, its coils rapidly gather round us and its stroke flashes poison through our blood. Against sin, when once it has wreathed itself around us, we seem helpless to contend; the very powers with which we could resist are benumbed or pinned useless to our side – our foe seems all round us, and to extricate one part is but to become entangled in another. As the serpent finds its way everywhere, over every fence or barrier, into every corner and recess, so it is impossible to keep temptation out of the life; it appears where least we expect it and when we think ourselves secure.

(2) Temptation succeeds at first by exciting our curiosity. It is a wise saying that “our great security against sin lies in being shocked at it. Eve gazed and reflected when she should have fled.” The serpent created an interest, excited her curiosity about this forbidden fruit. And as this excited curiosity lies near the beginning of sin in the race, so does it in the individual. I suppose if you trace back the mystery of iniquity in your own life and seek to track it to its source, you will find it to have originated in this craving to taste evil. No man originally meant to become the sinner he has become. He only intended, like Eve, to taste. It was a voyage of discovery he meant to make; he did not think to get nipped and frozen up and never more return from the outer cold and darkness. He wished before finally giving himself to virtue, to see the real value of the other alternative.

This dangerous craving has many elements in it. There is in it the instinctive drawing towards what is mysterious. One veiled figure in an assembly will attract more scrutiny than the most admired beauty. An appearance in the heavens that no one can account for will nightly draw more eyes than the most wonderful sunset. To lift veils, to penetrate disguises, to unravel complicated plots, to solve mysteries, this is always inviting to the human mind. The tale which used to thrill us in childhood, of the one locked room, the one forbidden key, bears in it a truth for men as well as for children. What is hidden must, we conclude, have some interest for us – else why hide it from us? What is forbidden must have some important bearing upon us. Else why forbid it? Things which are indifferent to us are left in our way, obvious, and without concealment. But as action has been taken regarding the things that are forbidden, action in view of our relation to them, it is natural to us to desire to know what these things are and how they affect us.

There is added to this in young persons, a sense of incompleteness. They wish to be grown up. Few boys wish to be always boys. They long for the signs of manhood, and seek to possess that knowledge of life and its ways which they very much identify with manhood. But too commonly they mistake the path to manhood. They feel as if they had a wider range of liberty and were more thoroughly men when they transgress the limits assigned by conscience. They feel as if there were a new and brighter world outside that which is fenced round by strict

morality, and they tremble with excitement on its borders. It is a fatal delusion. Only by choosing the good in presence of the evil are true manhood and real maturity gained. True manliness consists mainly in self control, in a patient waiting upon nature and God's law and when youth impatiently breaks through the protecting fence of God's law, and seeks growth by knowing evil, it misses that very advancement it seeks, and cheats itself out of the manhood it apes.

(3) Through this craving for an enlarged experience unbelief in God's goodness finds entrance. In the presence of forbidden pleasure we are tempted to feel as if God were grudging us enjoyment. The very arguments of the serpent occur to our mind. No harm will come of our indulging; the prohibition is needless, unreasonable and unkind; it is not based on any genuine desire for our welfare. This fence that shuts us out from knowing good and evil is erected by a timorous asceticism, by a ridiculous misconception of what truly enlarges human nature; it shuts us into a poor narrow life. And thus suspicions of God's perfect wisdom and goodness find entrance; we begin to think we know better than He what is good for us, and can contrive a richer, happier life than He has provided for us. Our loyalty to Him is loosened, and already we have lost hold of His strength and are launched on the current that leads to sin, misery, and shame. When we find ourselves saying Yes, where God has said No; when we see desirable things where God has said there is death; when we allow distrust of Him to rankle in our mind, when we

chafe against the restrictions under which we live and seek liberty by breaking down the fence instead of by delighting in God, we are on the highway to all evil.

(4) If we know our own history we cannot be surprised to read that one taste of evil ruined our first parents. It is so always. The one taste alters our attitude towards God and conscience and life. It is a veritable Circe's cup. The actual experience of sin is like the one taste of alcohol to a reclaimed drunkard, like the first taste of blood to a young tiger, it calls out the latent devil and creates a new nature within us. At one brush it wipes out all the peace, and joy, and self-respect, and boldness of innocence, and numbers us among the transgressors, among the shame-faced, and self-despising, and hopeless. It leaves us possessed with unhappy thoughts which lead us away from what is bright, and honourable, and good, and like the letting out of water it seems to have tapped a spring of evil within us. It is but one step, but it is like the step over a precipice or down the shaft of a mine; it cannot be taken back, it commits to an altogether different state of things.

(5) The first result of sin is shame. The form in which the knowledge of good and evil comes to us is the knowing we are naked, the consciousness that we are stripped of all that made us walk unabashed before God and men. The promise of the serpent while broken in the sense is fulfilled to the ear; the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened and they knew that they were naked. Self-reflection begins, and the first movement of conscience produces

shame. Had they resisted temptation, conscience would have been born but not in self-condemnation. Like children they had hitherto been conscious only of what was external to themselves, but now their consciousness of a power to choose good and evil is awakened and its first exercise is accompanied with shame. They feel that in themselves they are faulty, that they are not in themselves complete; that though created by God, they are not fit for His eye. The lower animals wear no clothes because they have no knowledge of good and evil; children feel no need of covering because as yet self-consciousness is latent, and their conduct is determined for them; those who are re-made in the image of God and glorified as Christ is, cannot be thought of as clothed, for in them there is no sense of sin. But Adam's clothing himself and hiding himself were the helpless attempts of a guilty conscience to evade the judgment of truth.

(6) But when Adam found he was no longer fit for God's eye, God provided a covering which might enable him again to live in His presence without dismay. Man had exhausted his own ingenuity and resources, and exhausted them without finding relief to his shame. If his shame was to be effectually removed, God must do it. And the clothing in coats of skins indicates the restoration of man, not indeed to pristine innocence, but to peace with God. Adam felt that God did not wish to banish him lastingly from His presence, nor to see him always a trembling and confused penitent. The self-respect and progressiveness, the reverence for law and order and God, which came in with clothes,

and which we associate with the civilised races, were accepted as tokens that God was desirous to co-operate with man, to forward and further him in all good.

It is also to be remarked that the clothing which God provided was in itself different from what man had thought of. Adam took leaves from an inanimate, unfeeling tree; God deprived an animal of life, that the shame of His creature might be relieved. This was the last thing Adam would have thought of doing. To us life is cheap and death familiar, but Adam recognised death as the punishment of sin. Death was to early man a sign of God's anger. And he had to learn that sin could be covered not by a bunch of leaves snatched from a bush as he passed by and that would grow again next year, but only by pain and blood. Sin cannot be atoned for by any mechanical action nor without expenditure of feeling. Suffering must ever follow wrong-doing. From the first sin to the last, the track of the sinner is marked with blood. Once we have sinned we cannot regain permanent peace of conscience save through pain, and this not only pain of our own. The first hint of this was given as soon as conscience was aroused in man. It was made apparent that sin was a real and deep evil, and that by no easy and cheap process could the sinner be restored. The same lesson has been written on millions of consciences since. Men have found that their sin reaches beyond their own life and person, that it inflicts injury and involves disturbance and distress, that it changes utterly our relation to life and to God, and that we cannot rise above its consequences save by the

intervention of God Himself, by an intervention which tells us of the sorrow He suffers on our account.

For the chief point is that it is God who relieves man's shame. Until we are certified that God desires our peace of mind we cannot be at peace. The cross of Christ is the permanent witness to this desire on God's part. No one can read what Christ has done for us without feeling sure that for himself there is a way back to God from all sin – that it is God's desire that his sin should be covered, his iniquity forgiven. Too often that which seems of prime importance to God seems of very slight importance to us. To have our life founded solidly in harmony with the Supreme, seems often to excite no desire within us. It is about sin we find man first dealing with God, and until you have satisfied God and yourself regarding this prime and fundamental matter of your own transgression and wrong-doing you look in vain for any deep and lasting growth and satisfaction. Have you no reason to be ashamed before God? Have you loved Him in any proportion to His worthiness to be loved? Have you cordially and habitually fallen in with His will? Have you zealously done His work in the world? Have you fallen short of no good He intended you should do and gave you opportunity to do? Is there no reason for shame on your part before God? Has His desire to cover sin no application to you? Can you not understand His meaning when He comes to you with offers of pardon and acts of oblivion? Surely the candid mind, the clear-judging conscience can be at no loss to explain God's solicitous concern for the sinner; and

must humbly own that even that unfathomable Divine emotion which is exhibited in the cross of Christ, is no exaggerated and theatrical demonstration, but the actual carrying through of what was really needed for the restoration of the sinner. Do not live as if the cross of Christ had never been, or as if you had never sinned and had no connection with it. Strive to learn what it means; strive to deal fairly with it and fairly with your own transgressions and with your present actual relation to God and His will.

III.

CAIN AND ABEL

Genesis iv

It is not the purpose of this narrator to write the history of the world. It is not his purpose to write even the history of mankind. His object is to write the history of redemption. Starting from the broad fact of man's alienation from God, he means to trace that element in human history which results in the perfect re-union of God and man. The key-note has been struck in the promise already given that the seed of the woman should prevail over the seed of the serpent, that the effects of man's voluntary dissociation from God should be removed. It is the fulfilment of this promise which is traced by this writer. He steadily pursues that one line of history which runs directly towards this fulfilment; turning aside now and again to pursue, to a greater or less distance, diverging lines, but always returning to the grand highway on which the promise travels. His method is first to dispose of collateral matter and then to proceed with his main theme. As here, he first disposes of the line of Cain and then returns to Seth through whom the line of promise is maintained.

The first thing we have to do with outside the garden is death – the curse of sin speedily manifests itself in its most terrible form. But the sinner executes it himself. The first death is a murder. As if to show that all death is a wrong inflicted on us and proceeds not from God but from sin, it is inflicted by sin and by the hand of man. Man becomes his own executioner, and takes part with Satan, the murderer from the beginning. But certainly the first feeling produced by these events must have been one of bitter disappointment, as if the promise were to be lost in the curse.

The story of Cain and Abel was to all appearance told in order to point out that from the very first men have been divided into two great classes, viewed in connection with God's promise and presence in the world. Always there have been those who believed in God's love and waited for it, and those who believed more in their own force and energy. Always there have been the humble and self-diffident who hoped in God, and the proud and self-reliant who felt themselves equal to all the occasions of life. And this story of Cain and Abel and the succeeding generations does not conceal the fact, that for the purposes of this world there has been visible an element of weakness in the godly line, and that it is to the self-reliant and God-defying energy of the descendants of Cain that we owe much of the external civilisation of the world. While the descendants of Seth pass away and leave only this record, that they "walked with God," there are found among Cain's descendants, builders of cities, inventors of tools and weapons, music and poetry and the beginnings of culture.

These two opposed lines are in the first instance represented by Cain and Abel. With each child that comes into the world some fresh hope is brought; and the name of Cain points to the expectation of his parents that in him a fresh start would be made. Alas! as the boy grew they saw how vain such expectation was and how truly their nature had passed into his, and how no imparted experience of theirs, taught him from without, could countervail the strong propensities to evil which impelled him from within. They experienced that bitterest punishment which parents undergo, when they see their own defects and infirmities and evil passions repeated in their children and leading them astray as they once led themselves; when in those who are to perpetuate their name and remembrance on earth they see evidence that their faults also will be perpetuated; when in those whom they chiefly love they have a mirror ceaselessly held up to them forcing them to remember the follies and sins of their own youth. Certainly in the proud, self-willed, sullen Cain no redemption was to be found.

Both sons own the necessity of labour. Man is no longer in the primitive condition, in which he had only to stretch out his hand when hungry, and satisfy his appetite. There are still some regions of the earth in which the trees shower fruit, nutritious and easily preserved, on men who shun labour. Were this the case throughout the world, the whole of life would be changed. Had we been created self-sufficing or in such conditions as involved no necessity of toil, nothing would be as it now is. It is the

need of labour that implies occasional starvation and frequent poverty, and gives occasion to charity. It is the need of labour which involves commerce and thereby sows the seed of greed, worldliness, ambition, drudgery. The ultimate physical wants of men, food and clothes, are the motive of the greater part of all human activity. Trace to their causes the various industries of men, the wars, the great social movements, all that constitutes history, and you find that the bulk of all that is done upon earth is done because men must have food and wish to have it as good and with as little labour as possible. The broad facts of human life are in many respects humiliating.

The disposition of men is consequently shown in the occupations they choose and the idea of life they carry into them. Some, like Abel, choose peaceful callings that draw out feeling and sympathy; others prefer pursuits which are stirring and active. Cain chose the tillage of the ground, partly no doubt from the necessity of the case, but probably also with the feeling that he could subdue nature to his own purposes notwithstanding the curse that lay upon it. Do we not all sometimes feel a desire to take the world as it is, curse and all, and make the most of it; to face its disease with human skill, its disturbing and destructive elements with human forethought and courage, its sterility and stubbornness with human energy and patience? What is stimulating men still to all discovery and invention, to forewarn seamen of coming storms, to break a precarious passage for commerce through eternal ice or through malarious

swamps, to make life at all points easier and more secure? Is it not the energy which opposition excites? We know that it will be hard work; we expect to have thorns and thistles everywhere, but let us see whether this may not after all be a thoroughly happy world, whether we cannot cultivate the curse altogether out of it. This is indeed the very work God has given man to do – to subdue the earth and make the desert blossom as the rose. God is with us in this work, and he who believes in God's purpose and strives to reclaim nature and compel it to some better products than it naturally yields, is doing God's work in the world. The misery is that so many do it in the spirit of Cain, in a spirit of self-confident or sullen alienation from God, willing to endure all hardship but unable to lay themselves at God's feet with every capacity for work and every field He has given them to till for Him and in a spirit of humble love to co-operate with Him. To this spirit of godless energy, of merely selfish or worldly ambition and enterprise, the world owes not only much of its poverty and many of its greatest disasters, but also the greater part of its present advantages in external civilisation. But from this spirit can never arise the meekness, the patience, the tenderness, the charity which sweeten the life of society and are more to be desired than gold; from this spirit and all its achievements the natural outcome is the proud, vindictive, self-glorifying war-song of a Lamech.

The incompatibility of the two lines and the persecuting spirit of the godless are set forth by the after history of Cain and Abel.

The one line is represented in Cain, who with all his energy and indomitable courage, is depicted as of a dark, morose, suspicious, jealous, violent temper; a man born under the shadow of the fall. Abel is described in contrast as guileless and sunny, free from harshness and resentment. What was in Cain was shown by what came out of him, murder. The reason of the rejection of his offering was his own evil condition of heart. "If thou doest well, shalt not thou also be accepted;" implying that he was not accepted because he was not doing well. His offering was a mere form; he complied with the fashion of the family; but in spirit he was alienated from God, cherishing thoughts which the rejection of his offering brings to a head. He may have seen that the younger son won more of the parents' affection, that his company was more welcome. Jealousy had been produced, that deep jealousy of the humble and godly which proud men of the world cannot help betraying and which has so very often in the world's history produced persecution.

This cannot be considered too weak a motive to carry so enormous a crime. Even in a highly civilised age we find an English statesman saying: "Pique is one of the strongest motives in the human mind. Fear is strong but transient. Interest is more lasting, perhaps, and steady, but weaker; I will ever back pique against them both. It is the spur the devil rides the noblest tempers with, and will do more work with them in a week, than with other poor jades in a twelve-month." And the age of Cain and Abel was an age in which impulse and action lay close

together, and in which jealousy is notoriously strong. To this motive John ascribes the act: "Wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

We have now learned better how to disguise our feelings; and we are compelled to control them better; but now and again we meet with a deep-seated hatred of goodness which might give rise to almost any crime. Few of us can say that for our own part we have extinguished within us the spirit that disparages and depreciates and fixes the charge of hypocrisy or refers good actions to interested motives, searches out failings and watches for haltings and is glad when a blot is found. Few are filled with unalloyed grief when the man who has borne an extraordinary reputation turns out to be just like the rest of us. Many of us have a true delight in goodness and humble ourselves before it when we see it, and yet we know also what it is to be exasperated by the presence of superiority. I have seen a schoolboy interrupt his brother's prayers, and gird at him for his piety, and strive to draw him into sin, and do the devil's work with zest and diligence. And where goodness is manifestly in the minority how constantly does it excite hatred that pours itself out in sneers and ridicule and ignorant calumny.

But this narrative significantly refers this early quarrel to religion. There is no bitterness to compare with that which worldly men who profess religion, feel towards those who cultivate a spiritual religion. They can never really grasp the distinction between external worship and real godliness. They

make their offerings, they attend to the rites of the religion to which they belong and are beside themselves with indignation if any person or event suggests to them that they might have saved themselves all their trouble, because these do not at all constitute religion. They uphold the Church, they admire and praise her beautiful services, they use strong but meaningless language about infidelity, and yet when brought in contact with spirituality and assured that regeneration and penitent humility are required above all else in the kingdom of God, they betray an utter inability to comprehend the very rudiments of the Christian religion. Abel has always to go to the wall because he is always the weaker party, always in the minority. Spiritual religion, from the very nature of the case, must always be in the minority; and must be prepared to suffer loss, calumny, and violence, at the hands of the worldly religious, who have contrived for themselves a worship that calls for no humiliation before God and no complete surrender of heart and will to Him. Cain is the type of the ignorant religious, of the unregenerate man who thinks he merits God's favour as much as any one else; and Cain's conduct is the type of the treatment which the Christ-like and intelligent godly are always likely to receive at such hands.

We never know where we may be led by jealousy and malice. One of the striking features of this incident is the rapidity with which small sins generate great ones. When Cain went in the joy of harvest and offered his first fruits no thought could be further from his mind than murder. It may have come as suddenly on

himself as on the unsuspecting Abel, but the germ was in him. Great sins are not so sudden as they seem. Familiarity with evil thought ripens us for evil action; and a moment of passion, an hour's loss of self-control, a tempting occasion, may hurry us into irremediable evil. And even though this does not happen, envious, uncharitable, and malicious thoughts make our offerings as distasteful as Cain's. He that loveth not his brother knoweth not God. First be reconciled to thy brother, says our Lord, and then come and offer thy gift.

Other truths are incidentally taught in this narrative.

(1) The acceptance of the offering depends on the acceptance of the offerer. God had respect to Abel and his offering – the man first and then the offering. God looks through the offering to the state of soul from which it proceeds; or even, as the words would indicate, sees the soul first and judges and treats the offering according to the inward disposition. God does not judge of what you are by what you say to Him or do for Him, but He judges what you say to Him and do for Him by what you are. “By *faith*” says a New Testament writer, “Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain.” He had the faith which enabled him to believe that God is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. His attitude towards God was sound; his life was a diligent seeking to please God; and from all such persons God gladly receives acknowledgment. When the offering is the true expression of the soul's gratitude, love, devotedness, then it is acceptable. When it is a merely external offering, that

rather veils than expresses the real feeling; when it is not vivified and rendered significant by any spiritual act on the part of the worshipper, it is plainly of no effect.

What is true of all sacrifices is true of the sacrifice of Christ. It remains invalid and of none effect to those who do not through it yield themselves to God. Sacrifices were intended to be the embodiment and expression of a state of feeling towards God, of a submission or offering of men's selves to God; of a return to that right relation which ought ever to subsist between creature and Creator. Christ's sacrifice is valid for us when it is that outward thing which best expresses our feeling towards God and through which we offer or yield ourselves to God. His sacrifice is the open door through which God freely admits all who aim at a consecration and obedience like to His. It is valid for us when through it we sacrifice ourselves. Whatever His sacrifice expresses we desire to take and use as the only satisfactory expression of our own aims and desires. Did Christ perfectly submit to and fulfil the will of God? So would we. Did He acknowledge the infinite evil of sin and patiently bear its penalties, still loving the Holy and Righteous God? So would we endure all chastening, and still resist unto blood striving against sin.

(2) Again, we here find a very sharp and clear statement of the welcome truth, that continuance in sin is never a necessity, that God points the way out of sin, and that from the first He has been on man's side and has done all that could be done to

keep men from sinning. Observe how He expostulates with Cain. Take note of the plain, explicit fairness of the words in which He expostulates with him – instance, as it is, of how absolutely in the right God always is, and how abundantly He can justify all His dealings with us. God says as it were to Cain; Come now: and let us reason together. All God wants of any man is to be reasonable; to look at the facts of the case. “If thou doest well, shalt thou not (as well as Abel) be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door,” that is, if thou doest not well, the sin is not Abel’s nor any one’s but thine own, and therefore anger at another is not the proper remedy, but anger at yourself, and repentance.

No language could more forcibly exhibit the unreasonableness of not meeting God with penitent and humble acknowledgment. God has fully met our case, and has satisfied all its demands, has set Himself to serve us and laid Himself out to save us pain and misery, and has so entirely succeeded in making salvation and blessedness possible to us, that if we continue in sin we must trample not only upon God’s love and our own reason, but on the very means of salvation. State your case at the worst, bring forward every reason why your countenance should be fallen as Cain’s and why your face should lower with the gloom of eternal despair – say that you have as clear evidence as Cain had that your offerings are displeasing to God, and that while others are accepted you receive no token from Him, – in answer to all your arguments, these words addressed to Cain rise up. If not accepted already you have the means of being so. If you do well to be

hardened in sin it is not because it is necessary, nor because God desires it. If you are to continue in sin you must put aside His hand. It can only be *sin* which causes you either to despair of salvation or keeps you any way separate from God – there is no other thing worse than sin, and for sin there is an offering provided. You have not fallen into some lower grade of beings than that which is designated sinners, and it is sinners that God in His mercy hems in with this inevitable dilemma He presented to Cain.

If, therefore, you continue at war with God it is not because you must not do otherwise: if you go forward to any new thought, plan, or action unpardoned; if acceptance of God's forgiveness and entrance into a state of reconciliation with Him be not your first action, then you must thrust aside His counsel, backed though it is with every utterance of your own reason. Some of us may be this day or this week in as critical a position as Cain, having as truly as he the making or marring of our future in our hands, seeing clearly the right course, and all that is good, humble, penitent and wise in us urging us to follow that course, but our pride and self-will holding us back. How often do men thus barter a future of blessing for some mean gratification of temper or lust or pride; how often by a reckless, almost listless and indifferent continuance in sin do they let themselves be carried on to a future as woful as Cain's; how often when God expostulates with them do they make no answer and take no action, as if there were nothing to be gained by listening to God

– as if it were a matter of no importance what future I go to – as if in the whole eternity that lies in reserve there were nothing worth making a choice about – nothing about which it is worth my while to rouse the whole energy of which I am capable, and to make, by God’s grace, the determination which shall alter my whole future – to choose for myself and assert myself.

(3) The writer to the Hebrews makes a very striking use of this event. He borrows from it language in which to magnify the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice, and affirms that the blood of Christ speaketh better things, or, as it must rather be rendered, crieth louder than the blood of Abel. Abel’s blood, we see, cried for vengeance, for evil things for Cain, called God to make inquisition for blood, and so pled as to secure the banishment of the murderer. The Arabs have a belief that over the grave of a murdered man his spirit hovers in the form of a bird that cries “Give me drink, give me drink,” and only ceases when the blood of the murderer is shed. Cain’s conscience told him the same thing; there was no criminal law threatening death to the murderer, but he felt that men would kill him if they could. He heard the blood of Abel crying from the earth. The blood of Christ also cries to God, but cries not for vengeance but for pardon. And as surely as the one cry was heard and answered in very substantial results; so surely does the other cry call down from heaven its proper and beneficent effects. It is as if the earth would not receive and cover the blood of Christ, but ever exposes it before God and cries to Him to be faithful and just to forgive

us our sins. This blood cries louder than the other. If God could not overlook the blood of one of His servants, but adjudged to it its proper consequences, neither is it possible that He should overlook the blood of His Son and not give to it its proper result.

If then you feel in your conscience that you are as guilty as Cain, and if sins clamour around you which are as dangerous as his, and which cry out for judgment upon you, accept the assurance that the blood of Christ has a yet louder cry for mercy. If you had been Abel's murderer, would you have been justly afraid of God's anger? Be as sure of God's mercy now. If you had stood over his lifeless body and seen the earth refusing to cover his blood, if you felt the stain of it crimson on your conscience and if by night you started from your sleep striving vainly to wash it from your hands, if by every token you felt yourself exposed to a just punishment, your fear would be just and reasonable were nothing else revealed to you. But there is another blood equally indelible, equally clamorous. In it you have in reality what is elsewhere pretended in fable, that the blood of the murdered man will not wash out, but through every cleansing oozes up again a dark stain on the oaken floor. This blood can really not be washed out, it cannot be covered up and hid from God's eye, its voice cannot be stifled, and its cry is all for mercy.

With how different a meaning then comes now to us this question of God's: "Where is thy brother?" Our Brother also is slain. Him Whom God sent among us to reverse the curse, to lighten the burden of this life, to be the loving member of the

family on Whom each leans for help and looks to for counsel and comfort – Him Who was by His goodness to be as the dayspring from on high in our darkness, we found *too* good for our endurance and dealt with as Cain dealt with his more righteous brother. But He Whom we slew God has raised again to give repentance and remission of sins, and assures us that His blood cleanseth from all sin. To every one therefore He repeats this question, “Where is thy brother?” He repeats it to every one who is living with a conscience stained with sin; to every one that knows remorse and walks with the hanging head of shame; to every one whose whole life is saddened by the consciousness that all is not settled between God and himself; to every one who is sinning recklessly as if Christ’s blood had never been shed for sin; and to every one who, though seeking to be at peace with God, is troubled and downcast – to all God says, “Where is thy brother?” tenderly reminding us of the absolute satisfaction for sin that has been made, and of the hope towards God we have through the blood of His Son.

IV.

CAIN'S LINE, AND ENOCH

Genesis iv. 12–24

“My punishment is greater than I can bear,” so felt Cain as soon as his passion had spent itself and the consequences of his wickedness became apparent – and so feels every one who finds he has now to live in the presence of the irrevocable deed he has done. It seems too heavy a penalty to endure for the one hour of passion; and yet as little as Cain could rouse the dead Abel so little can we revive the past we have destroyed. Thoughtlessness has set in motion agencies we are powerless to control; the whole world is changed to us. One can fancy Cain turning to see if his victim gave no sign of life, striving to reanimate the dead body, calling the familiar name, but only to see with growing dismay that the one blow had finished all with which that name was associated, and that he had made himself a new world. So are we drawn back and back in thought to that which has for ever changed life to us, striving to see if there is no possibility of altering the past, but only to find we might quite as well try to raise the dead. No voice responds to our cries of grief and dismay and too late repentance. All life now seems but a reaping

of the consequences of the past. We have put ourselves in every respect at a disadvantage. The earth seems cursed so that we are hampered in our employments and cannot make as much of them as we would had we been innocent. We have got out of right relations to our fellow-men and cannot feel the same to them as we ought to feel; and the face of God is hid from us, so that now and again as time after time our hopes are blighted, our life darkened and disturbed by the obvious results of our own past deeds, we are tempted to cry out with Cain: "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

Yet Cain's punishment was less than he expected. He was not put to death as he would have been at any later period of the world's history, but was banished. And even this punishment was lightened by his having a token from God, that he would not be put to death by any zealous avenger of Abel. He would experience the hardships of a man entering unexplored territory, but to an enterprising spirit this would not be without its charms. As the fresh beauties of the world's youth were disclosed to him and by their bright and peaceful friendliness allayed the bitterness of his spirit, and as the mysteries and dangers of the new regions excited him and called his thoughts from the past, some of the old delight in life may have been recovered by him. Probably in many a lonely hour the recollection of his crime would return and with it all the horrors of a remorse which would drive rest and peace from his soul, and render him the most wretched of men. But busied as he was with his new enterprises, there is little doubt that

he would find it, as it is still found, not impossible to banish such dreary thoughts and live in the measure of contentment which many enjoy who are as far from God as Cain.

It is not difficult to detect the spirit he carried with him, and the tone he gave to his line of the race. The facts recorded are few but significant. He begat a son, he built a city; and he gave to both the name Enoch, that is “initiation,” or “beginning,” as if he were saying in his heart, “What so great harm after all in cutting short one line in Abel? I can begin another and find a new starting point for the race. I am driven forth cursed as a vagabond, but a vagabond I will not be; I will make for myself a settled abode, and I will fence it round with knife-blade thorns so that no man will be able to assault me.”

In this settling of Cain, however, we see not any symptom of his ceasing to be a vagabond, but the surest evidence that now he was content to be a fugitive from God and had cut himself off from hope. His heart had found rest and had found it apart from God. *Here*, in this city he would make a fresh beginning for himself and for men. Here he abandoned all clinging memories of former things, of his old home and of the God there worshipped. He had wisdom enough not to call his city by his own name, and so invite men to consider his former career or trace back anything to his old life. He cut it all off from him; his crime, his God also, all that was in it was to be no more to him and his comrades. He would make a clean start, and that men might be led to expect a great future he called his city, Enoch,

a Beginning.

But it is one thing to forgive ourselves, another thing to have God's forgiveness. It is one thing to reconcile ourselves to the curse that runs through our life, another thing to be reconciled to God and so defeat the curse. It is sometimes, though by no means always, possible to escape some of the consequences of sin: we can change our front so as to lessen the breadth of life that is exposed to them, or we can accustom and harden ourselves to a very second-rate kind of life. We can teach ourselves to live without much love in our homes or in our connections with those outside; we can learn to be satisfied if we can pay our way and make the time pass and be outwardly like other people; we can build a little city, and be content to be on no very friendly terms with any but the select few inside the trench, and actually be quite satisfied if we can *defend ourselves against* the rest of men; we can forget the one commandment, that we should love one another. We can all find much in the world to comfort, to lull, to soothe sorrowful but wholesome remembrances; much to aid us in an easy treatment of the curse; much to shed superficial brightness on a life darkened and debased by sin, much to hush up the sad echoes that mutter from the dark mountains of vanity we have left behind us, much that assures us we have nothing to do but forget our old sins and busily occupy ourselves with new duties. But no David will say, nor will any man of true spiritual discernment say, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is *forgotten*;" but only, "Blessed is the man whose transgression is

forgiven.” By all means make a fresh start, a new beginning, but let it be in your own broken heart, in a spirit humble and contrite, frankly acknowledging your guilt and finding rest and settlement for your soul in reconciliation with God.

It is in the family of Lamech the characteristics of Cain’s line are most distinctly seen, and the significance of their tendencies becomes apparent. As Cain had set himself to cultivate the curse out of the world, so have his children derived from him the self-reliant hardiness and hardihood which are resolute to make of this world as bright and happy a home as may be. They make it their task to subdue the world and compel it to yield them a life in which they can delight. They are so far successful that in a few generations they have formed a home in which all the essentials of civilized life are found – the arts are cultivated and female society is appreciated.

Of his three sons, Jabal – or “Increase” – was “the father of such as dwell in tents and of such as have cattle.” He had originality enough to step beyond all traditional habits and to invent a new mode of life. Hitherto men had been tied to one spot by their fixed habitations, or found shelter when overtaken by storm in caves or trees. To Jabal the idea first occurs, I can carry my house about with me and regulate its movements and not it mine. I need not return every night this long weary way from the pastures, but may go wherever grass is green and streams run cool. He and his comrades would thus become aware of the vast resources of other lands, and would unconsciously lay the

foundations both of commerce and of wars of conquest. For both in ancient and more modern times the most formidable armies have been those vast moving shepherd races bred outside the borders of civilization and flooding as with an irresistible tide the territories of more settled and less hardy tribes.

Jubal again was, as his name denotes, the reputed father of all such as handle the harp and the organ, stringed and wind instruments. The stops of the reed or flute and the divisions of the string being once discovered, all else necessarily followed. The twanging of a bow-string in a musical ear was enough to give the suggestion to an observant mind; the varying notes of the birds; the winds expressing at one time unbridled fury and at another a breathing benediction, could not fail to move and stir the susceptible spirit. The spontaneous though untuned singing of children, that follows no mere melody made by another to express *his* joy, but is the instinctive expression of their own joy, could not but give however meagrely the first rudiments of music. But here was the man who first made a piece of wood help him; who out of the commonest material of the physical world found for himself a means of expressing the most impalpable moods of his spirit. Once the idea was caught that matter inanimate as well as animate was man's servant and could do his finest work for him, Jabal and his brother Jubal would make rapid work between them. If the rude matter of the world could *sing* for them, what might it not do for them? They would see that there was a precision in machine-work which man's hand could not

rival – a regularity which no nervous throb could throw out and no feeling interrupt, and yet at the same time when they found how these rude instruments responded to every finest shade of feeling, and how all external nature seemed able to express what was in man, must it not have been the birth of poetry as well as of music? Jubal in short originates what we now compendiously describe as the Fine Arts.

The third brother again may be taken as the originator of the Useful Arts – though not exclusively – for being the instructor of every artificer in brass and iron, having something of his brother's genius for invention and more than his brother's handiness and practical faculty for embodying his ideas in material forms, he must have promoted all arts which require tools for their culture.

Thus among these three brothers we find distributed the various kinds of genius and faculty which ever since have enriched the world. Here in germ was really all that the world can do. The great lines in which individual and social activity have since run were then laid down.

This notable family circle was completed by Naamah, the sister of Tubal-Cain. The strength of female influence began to be felt contemporaneously with the cultivation of the arts. Very early in the world's history it was perceived that although debarred from the rougher activities of life, women have an empire of their own. Men have the making of civilisation, but women have the making of men. It is they who form the character

of the individual and give its tone to the society in which they live. It is natural to men to consider the feelings and tastes of women and to adapt their manners and conversation to them; and it is for women to exercise worthily the sway they thus possess. Practically and to a large extent women settle what subjects shall be spoken of, and in what tone, trifling or serious; and each ought therefore to recognise her own burden of responsibility, and see to it that the deference paid to her shall not lower him who pays it, and that the respect shown to her shall help him who shows it to respect what is pure and true, charitable, just, and worthy. Let women show that it is worldly trifling or slanderous malignity or empty tittle-tattle that delights them, then they act the part of Eve and tempt to sin; let them show that they prize most highly the mirth that is innocent and the conversation that is elevating and helpful, and while they win admiration for themselves they win it also for what is healthy and purifying. No woman can renounce her influence; helpful or hurtful she certainly is and must be in proportion as she is pleasing and attractive.

Thus early did it appear how much of what is admirable and serviceable clung to human nature apart from any recognition of God. The worldly life was then what it is now, a life not wholly and obviously polluted by excess, nor destroyed by violence, but displaying features which appeal to our sensibilities and provoke applause; a life of manifold beauty, of great power and resource, of abundant promise. There is abundant material in the world for beautifying and elevating human life, and this material may be

used and is used by men who acknowledge neither its origin in God nor the ends He would serve by it. The interests of men may be advanced and the best work of the world done by three distinct classes of men – by those who work as God’s children in thorough sympathy with His purposes; by those who do not know God but who are humble in heart and would sympathise with God’s purposes, did they become acquainted with them; and by those who are proud and self-willed, positively alienated from God, and who do the world’s work for their own ends. And so far as the external work goes the last-named class of men may be most efficient. In mental endowment, social and political wisdom, scientific aptitude, and all that tends to substantial utility, it is quite possible they may excel the godly, for “not many noble, not many wise are called.” But we have nothing to measure permanent success by, save conformity with God’s will; and we have nothing by which we can estimate how character will endure and how deeply it is rooted save conformity with the nature of God. If a man believes in God, in one Supreme Who rules and orders all things for just, holy and wise ends; if he is in sympathy with the nature and will of God and finds his truest satisfaction in forwarding the purposes of God, then you have a guarantee for this man’s continuance in good and for his ultimate success.

The precarious nature of all godless civilisation and the real tendency of self-sufficing pride are shown in Lamech.

It is in Lamech the tendency culminates and in him the issue of all this brilliant but godless life is seen. Therefore though he

is the father, the historian speaks of him *after* his children. In his one recorded utterance his character leaps to view definite and complete – a character of boundless force, self-reliance and godlessness. It is a little uncertain whether he means that he has actually slain a man, or whether he is putting a hypothetical case – the character of his speech is the same whichever view is taken.

“I have slain,” he says, or suppose I slay, “a man for wounding me,

A young man for hurting me:

But if Cain shall be avenged seven-fold – then Lamech seventy and seven-fold.”

That is, I take vengeance for myself with those good weapons my son has forged for me. He has furnished me with a means of defence many times more effectual than God’s avenging of Cain. This is the climax of the self-sufficiency to which the line of Cain has been tending. Cain besought God’s protection; he needed God for at least one purpose, this one thread bound him yet to God. Lamech has no need of God for any purpose; what his sons can make and his own right hand do is enough for him. This is what comes of finding enough in the world without God – a boastful, self-sufficient man, dangerous to society, the incarnation of the pride of life. In the long run separation from God becomes isolation from man and cruel self-sufficiency.

The line of Seth is followed from father to son, for the sake of showing that the promise of a seed which should be victorious over evil was being fulfilled. Apparently it is also meant that

during this uneventful period long ages elapsed. Nothing can be told of these old world people but that they lived and died, leaving behind them heirs to transmit the promise.

Only once is the monotony broken; but this in so striking a manner as to rescue us from the idea that the historian is mechanically copying a barren list of names. For in the seventh generation, contemporaneous with the culmination of Cain's line in the family of Lamech, we come upon the simple but anything but mechanical statement: "Enoch walked with God and he was not; for God took him." The phrase is full of meaning. Enoch walked with God because he was His friend and liked His company, because he was going in the same direction as God, and had no desire for anything but what lay in God's path. We walk with God when He is in all our thoughts; not because we consciously think of Him at all times, but because He is naturally suggested to us by all we think of; as when any person or plan or idea has become important to us, no matter what we think of, our thought is always found recurring to this favourite object, so with the godly man everything has a connection with God and must be ruled by that connection. When some change in his circumstances is thought of, he has first of all to determine how the proposed change will affect his connection with God – will his conscience be equally clear, will he be able to live on the same friendly terms with God and so forth. When he falls into sin he cannot rest till he has resumed his place at God's side and walks again with Him. This is the

general nature of walking with God; it is a persistent endeavour to hold all our life open to God's inspection and in conformity to His will; a readiness to give up what we find does cause any misunderstanding between us and God; a feeling of loneliness if we have not some satisfaction in our efforts at holding fellowship with God, a cold and desolate feeling when we are conscious of doing something that displeases Him. This walking with God necessarily tells on the whole life and character. As you instinctively avoid subjects which you know will jar upon the feelings of your friend, as you naturally endeavour to suit yourself to your company, so when the consciousness of God's presence begins to have some weight with you, you are found instinctively endeavouring to please Him, repressing the thoughts you know He disapproves, and endeavouring to educate such dispositions as reflect His own nature.

It is easy then to understand how we may practically walk with God – it is to open to Him all our purposes and hopes, to seek His judgment on our scheme of life and idea of happiness – it is to be on thoroughly friendly terms with God. Why then do any not walk with God? Because they seek what is wrong. You would walk with Him if the same idea of good possessed you as possesses Him; if you were as ready as He to make no deflexion from the straight path. Is not the very crown of life depicted in the testimony given to Enoch, that “he pleased God”? Cannot you take your way through life with a resolute and joyous spirit if you are conscious that you please Him Who judges not

by appearances, not by your manners, but by your real state, by your actual character and the eternal promise it bears? Things were not made easy to Enoch. In evil days, with much to mislead him, with everything to oppose him, he had by faith and diligent seeking, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, to cleave to the path on which God walked, often left in darkness, often thrown off the track, often listening but unable to hear the footfall of God or to hear his own name called upon, receiving no sign but still diligently seeking the God he knew would lead him only to good. Be it yours to give such diligence. Do not accept it as a thing fixed that you are to be one of the graceless and ungodly, always feeble, always vacillating, always without a character, always in doubt about your state, and whether life might not be some other and better thing to you.

“Enoch was not, for God took him.” Suddenly his place on earth was empty and men drew their own conclusions. He had been known as the Friend of God, where could he be but in God’s dwelling-place? No sickness had slowly worn him to the grave, no mark of decay had been visible in his unabated vigour. His departure was a favour conferred and as such men recognised it. “God has taken him,” they said, and their thoughts followed upward, and essayed to conceive the finished bliss of the man whom God has taken away where blessing may be more fully conferred. His age corresponded to our thirty-three, the age when the world has usually got fair hold of a man, when a man has found his place in life and means to live and see good days.

The awkward, unfamiliar ways of youth that keep him outside of much of life are past, and the satiety of age is not yet reached; a man has begun to learn there is something he can do, and has not yet learned how little. It is an age at which it is most painful to relinquish life, but it was at this age God took him away, and men knew it was in kindness. Others had begun to gather round him, and depend upon him, hopes were resting in him, great things were expected of him, life was strong in him. But let life dress itself in its most attractive guise, let it shine on a man with its most fascinating smile, let him be happy at home and the pleasing centre of a pleasing circle of friends, let him be in that bright summer of life when a man begins to fear he is too prosperous and happy, and yet there is for man a better thing than all this, a thing so immeasurably and independently superior to it that all this may be taken away and yet the man be far more blessed. If God would confer His highest favours, He must take a man out of all this and bring him closer to Himself.

V.

THE FLOOD

Genesis v.–ix

The first great event which indelibly impressed itself on the memory of the primeval world was the Flood. There is every reason to believe that this catastrophe was co-extensive with the human population of the world. In every branch of the human family traditions of the event are found. These traditions need not be recited, though some of them bear a remarkable likeness to the Biblical story, while others are very beautiful in their construction, and significant in individual points. Local floods happening at various times in different countries could not have given birth to the minute coincidences found in these traditions, such as the sending out of the birds, and the number of persons saved. But we have as yet no material for calculating how far human population had spread from the original centre. It might apparently be argued that it could not have spread to the sea-coast, or that at any rate no ships had as yet been built large enough to weather a severe storm; for a thoroughly nautical population could have had little difficulty in surviving such a catastrophe as is here described. But all that can be affirmed

is that there is no evidence that the waters extended beyond the inhabited part of the earth; and from certain details of the narrative, this part of the earth may be identified as the great plain of the Euphrates and Tigris.

Some of the expressions used in the narrative might indeed lead us to suppose that the writer understood the catastrophe to have extended over the whole globe; but expressions of similar largeness elsewhere occur in passages where their meaning must be restricted. Probably the most convincing evidence of the limited extent of the Flood is furnished by the animals of Australia. The animals that abound in that island are different from those found in other parts of the world, but are similar to the species which are found fossilized in the island itself, and which therefore must have inhabited these same regions long anterior to the Flood. If then the Flood extended to Australia and destroyed all animal life there, what are we compelled to suppose as the order of events? We must suppose that the creatures, visited by some presentiment of what was to happen many months after, selected specimens of their number, and that these specimens by some unknown and quite inconceivable means crossed thousands of miles of sea, found their way through all kinds of perils from unaccustomed climate, food, and beasts of prey; singled out Noah by some inscrutable instinct, and surrendered themselves to his keeping. And after the year in the ark expired, they turned their faces homewards, leaving behind them no progeny, again preserving themselves intact, and transporting themselves

by some unknown means to their island home. This, if the Deluge was universal, must have been going on with thousands of animals from all parts of the globe; and not only were these animals a stupendous miracle in themselves, but wherever they went they were the occasion of miracle in others, all the beasts of prey refraining from their natural food. The fact is, the thing will not bear stating.

But it is not the physical but the moral aspects of the Flood with which we have here to do. And, first, this narrator explains its cause. He ascribes it to the abnormal wickedness of the antediluvians. To describe the demoralised condition of society before the Flood, the strongest language is used. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great," monstrous in acts of violence, and in habitual courses and established usages. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually," – there was no mixture of good, no relentings, no repentances, no visitings of compunction, no hesitations and debates. It was a world of men fierce and energetic, violent and lawless, in perpetual war and turmoil; in which if a man sought to live a righteous life, he had to conceive it of his own mind and to follow it out unaided and without the countenance of any.

This abnormal wickedness again is accounted for by the abnormal marriages from which the leaders of these ages sprang. Everything seemed abnormal, huge, inhuman. As there are laid bare to the eye of the geologist in those archaic times vast forms bearing a likeness to forms we are now familiar with, but of

gigantic proportions and wallowing in dim, mist-covered regions; so to the eye of the historian there loom through the obscurity colossal forms perpetrating deeds of more than human savagery, and strength, and daring; heroes that seem formed in a different mould from common men.

However we interpret the narrative, its significance for us is plain. There is nothing prudish in the Bible. It speaks with a manly frankness of the beauty of women and its ensnaring power. The Mosaic law was stringent against intermarriage with idolatresses, and still in the New Testament something more than an echo of the old denunciation of such marriages is heard. Those who were most concerned about preserving a pure morality and a high tone in society were keenly alive to the dangers that threatened from this quarter. It is a permanent danger to character because it is to a permanent element in human nature that the temptation appeals. To many in every generation, perhaps to the majority, this is the most dangerous form in which worldliness presents itself; and to resist this the most painful test of principle. With natures keenly sensitive to beauty and superficial attractiveness, some are called upon to make their choice between a conscientious cleaving to God and an attachment to that which in the form is perfect but at heart is defective, depraved, godless. Where there is great outward attraction a man fights against the growing sense of inward uncongeniality, and persuades himself he is too scrupulous and uncharitable, or that he is a bad reader of character. There may

be an undercurrent of warning; he may be sensible that his whole nature is not satisfied and it may seem to him ominous that what is best within him does not flourish in his new attachment, but rather what is inferior, if not what is worst. But all such omens and warnings are disregarded and stifled by some such silly thought as that consideration and calculation are out of place in such matters. And what is the result? The result is the same as it ever was. Instead of the ungodly rising to the level of the godly, he sinks to hers. The worldly style, the amusements, the fashions once distasteful to him, but allowed for her sake, become familiar, and at last wholly displace the old and godly ways, the arrangements that left room for acknowledging God in the family; and there is one household less as a point of resistance to the incursion of an ungodly tone in society, one deserter more added to the already too crowded ranks of the ungodly, and the life-time if not the eternity of one soul embittered. Not without a consideration of the temptations that do actually lead men astray did the law enjoin: "Thou shalt not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, nor take of their daughters unto thy sons."

It seems like a truism to say that a greater amount of unhappiness has been produced by mismanagement, folly, and wickedness in the relation subsisting between men and women than by any other cause. God has given us the capacity of love to regulate this relation and be our safe guide in all matters connected with it. But frequently, from one cause or another, the government and direction of this relation are taken out of the

hands of love and put into the thoroughly incompetent hands of convenience, or fancy, or selfish lust. A marriage contracted from any such motive is sure to bring unhappiness of a long-continued, wearing and often heart-breaking kind. Such a marriage is often the form in which retribution comes for youthful selfishness and youthful licentiousness. You cannot cheat nature. Just in so far as you allow yourself to be ruled in youth by a selfish love of pleasure, in so far do you incapacitate yourself for love. You sacrifice what is genuine and satisfying, because provided by nature, to what is spurious, unsatisfying, and shameful. You cannot afterwards, unless by a long and bitter discipline, restore the capacity of warm and pure love in your heart. Every indulgence in which true love is absent is another blow given to the faculty of love within you – you make yourself in that capacity decrepit, paralyzed, dead. You have lost, you have killed the faculty that should be your guide in all these matters, and so you are at last precipitated without this guidance into a marriage formed from some other motive, formed therefore against nature, and in which you are the everlasting victim of nature's relentless justice. Remember that you cannot have both things, a youth of loveless pleasure and a loving marriage – you must make your choice. For as surely as genuine love kills all evil desire; so surely does evil desire kill the very capacity of love, and blind utterly its wretched victim to the qualities that ought to excite love.

The language used of God in relation to this universal corruption strikes every one as remarkable. "It repented the Lord

that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.” This is what is usually termed anthropomorphism, *i. e.* the presenting of God in terms applicable only to man; it is an instance of the same mode of speaking as is used when we speak of God’s hand or eye or heart. These expressions are not absolutely true, but they are useful and convey to us a meaning which could scarcely otherwise be expressed. Some persons think that the use of these expressions proves that in early times God was thought of as wearing a body and as being very like ourselves in His inward nature. And even in our day we have been ridiculed for speaking of God as a magnified man. Now in the first place the use of such expressions does not prove that even the earliest worshippers of God believed Him to have eyes and hands and a body. *We* freely use the same expressions though we have no such belief. We use them because our language is formed for human uses and on a human level, and we have no capacity to frame a better. And in the second place, though not absolutely true they do help us towards the truth. We are told that it degrades God to think of Him as hearing prayer and accepting praise; nay, that to think of Him as a Person at all, is to degrade Him. We ought to think of Him as the Absolutely Unknowable. But which degrades God most, and which exalts Him most? If we find that it is impossible to worship an absolutely unknowable, if we find that practically such an idea is a mere nonentity to us, and that we cannot in point of fact pay any homage or show any consideration to such an empty abstraction, is not this really

to lower God? And if we find that when we think of Him as a Person, and ascribe to Him all human virtue in an infinite degree, we can rejoice in Him and worship Him with true adoration, is not this to exalt Him? While we call Him our Father we know that this title is inadequate, while we speak of God as planning and decreeing we know that we are merely making shift to express what is inexpressible by us – we know that our thoughts of Him are never adequate and that to think of Him at all is to lower Him, is to think of Him inadequately; but when the practical alternative is such as it is, we find we do well to think of Him with the highest personal attributes we can conceive. For to refuse to ascribe such attributes to Him because this is degrading Him, is to empty our minds of any idea of Him which can stimulate either to worship or to duty. If by ridding our minds of all anthropomorphic ideas and refusing to think of God as feeling, thinking, acting as men do, we could thereby get to a really higher conception of Him, a conception which would practically make us worship Him more devotedly and serve Him more faithfully, then by all means let us do so. But if the result of refusing to think of Him as in many ways like ourselves, is that we cease to think of Him at all or only as a dead impersonal force, then this certainly is not to reach a higher but a lower conception of Him. And until we see our way to some truly higher conception than that which we have of a Personal God, we had better be content with it.

In short, we do well to be humble, and considering that we know very little about existence of any kind, and least of all

about God's, and that our God has been presented to us in human form, we do well to accept Christ as our God, to worship, love, and serve Him, finding Him sufficient for all our wants of this life, and leaving it to other times to get the solution of anything that is not made plain to us in Him. This is one boon that the science and philosophy of our day have unintentionally conferred upon us. They have laboured to make us feel how remote and inaccessible God is, how little we can know Him, how truly He is past finding out; they have laboured to make us feel how intangible and invisible and incomprehensible God is, but the result of this is that we turn with all the stronger longing to Him who is the Image of the Invisible God, and on whom a voice has fallen from the excellent glory, "This is My beloved Son, hear Him."

The Flood itself we need not attempt to describe. It has been remarked that though the narrative is vivid and forcible, it is entirely wanting in that sort of description which in a modern historian or poet would have occupied the largest space. "We see nothing of the death-struggle; we hear not the cry of despair; we are not called upon to witness the frantic agony of husband and wife, and parent and child, as they fled in terror before the rising waters. Nor is a word said of the sadness of the one righteous man, who, safe himself, looked upon the destruction which he could not avert." The Chaldean tradition which is the most closely allied to the Biblical account is not so reticent. Tears are shed in heaven over the catastrophe, and even consternation

affected its inhabitants, while within the ark itself the Chaldean Noah says, “When the storm came to an end and the terrible water-spout ceased, I opened the window and the light smote upon my face. I looked at the sea attentively observing, and the whole of humanity had returned to mud, like seaweed the corpses floated. I was seized with sadness; I sat down and wept and my tears fell upon my face.”

There can be little question that this is a true description of Noah’s feeling. And the sense of desolation and constraint would rather increase in Noah’s mind than diminish. Month after month elapsed; he was coming daily nearer the end of his food, and yet the waters were unabated. He did not know how long he was to be kept in this dark, disagreeable place. He was left to do his daily work without any supernatural signs to help him against his natural anxieties. The floating of the ark and all that went on in it had no mark of God’s hand upon it. He was indeed *safe* while others had been destroyed. But of what good was this safety to be? Was he ever to get out of this prison-house? To what straits was he to be first reduced? So it is often with ourselves. We are left to fulfil God’s will without any sensible tokens to set over against natural difficulties, painful and pinching circumstances, ill health, low spirits, failure of favourite projects and old hopes – so that at last we come to think that perhaps safety is all we are to have in Christ, a mere exemption from suffering of one kind purchased by the endurance of much suffering of another kind; that we are to be thankful for pardon on any terms; and escaping

with our *life*, must be content though it be bare. Why, how often does a Christian wonder whether, after all, he has chosen a life that he can endure, whether the monotony and the restraints of the Christian life are not inconsistent with true enjoyment?

This strife between the felt restriction of the Christian life and the natural craving for abundant life, for entrance into all that the world can show us, and experience of all forms of enjoyment – this strife goes on unceasingly in the heart of many of us as it goes on from age to age in the world. Which is the true view of life, which is the view to guide *us* in choosing and refusing the enjoyments and pursuits that are presented to us? Are we to believe that the ideal man for this life is he who has tasted all culture and delight, who believes in nature, recognising no fall and seeking for no redemption, and makes enjoyment his end; or he who sees that all enjoyment is deceptive till man is set right morally, and who spends himself on this, knowing that blood and misery must come before peace and rest, and crowned as our King and Leader, not with a garland of roses, but with the crown of Him Who is greatest of all, because servant of all – to Whom the most sunken is not repulsive, and Who will not abandon the most hopeless? This comes to be very much the question, whether this life is final or preparatory? – whether, therefore, our work in it should be to check lower propensities and develop and train all that is best in character, so as to be fit for highest life and enjoyment in a world to come – or should take ourselves as we find ourselves, and delight in this present world?

whether this is a placid eternal state, in which things are very much as they should be, and in which therefore we can live freely and enjoy freely; or whether it is a disordered, initial condition in which our main task should be to do a little towards putting things on a better rail and getting at least the germ and small beginnings of future good planted in one another? So that in the midst of all felt restriction, there is the highest hope, that one day we shall go forth from the narrow precincts of our ark, and step out into the free bright sunshine, in a world where there is nothing to offend, and that the time of our deprivation will seem to have been well spent indeed, if it has left within us a capacity permanently to enjoy love, holiness, justice, and all that is delighted in by God Himself.

The use made of this event in the New Testament is remarkable. It is compared by Peter to baptism, and both are viewed as illustrations of salvation by destruction. The eight souls, he says, who were in the ark, “were saved by water.” The water which destroyed the rest saved them. When there seemed little hope of the godly line being able to withstand the influence of the ungodly, the Flood came and left Noah’s family in a new world, with freedom to order all things according to their own ideas. In this Peter sees some analogy to baptism. In baptism, the penitent who believes in the efficacy of Christ’s blood to purge away sin, lets his defilement be washed away and rises new and clean to the life Christ gives. In Christ the sinner finds shelter for himself and destruction for his sins. It is God’s wrath against

sin that saves us by destroying our sins; just as it was the Flood which devastated the world, that at the same time, and thereby, saved Noah and his family.

In this event, too, we see the completeness of God's work. Often we feel reluctant to surrender our sinful habits to so final a destruction as is implied in being one with Christ. The expense at which holiness is to be bought seems almost too great. So much that has given us pleasure must be parted with; so many old ties sundered, a condition of holiness presents an aspect of dreariness and hopelessness; like the world after the flood, not a moving thing on the surface of the earth, everything levelled, prostrate, and washed even with the ground; here the corpse of a man, there the carcase of a beast; here mighty forest timber swept prone like the rushes on the banks of a flooded stream, and there a city without inhabitants, everything dank, dismal and repellent. But this is only one aspect of the work; the beginning, necessary if the work is to be thorough. If any part of the sinful life remain it will spring up to mar what God means to introduce us to. Only that is to be preserved which we can take with us into our ark. Only that is to pass on into our life which we can retain while we are in true connection with Christ, and which we think can help us to live as His friends, and to serve Him zealously.

This event then gives us some measure by which we can know how much God will do to maintain holiness upon earth. In this catastrophe every one who strives after godliness may find encouragement, seeing in it the Divine earnestness of God for

good and against evil. There is only one other event in history that so conspicuously shows that holiness among men is the object for which God will sacrifice everything else. There is no need now of any further demonstration of God's purpose in this world and His zeal for carrying it out. And may it not be expected of us His children, that we stand in presence of the cross until our cold and frivolous hearts catch something of the earnestness, the "resisting unto blood striving against sin," which is exhibited there? The Flood has not been forgotten by almost any people under heaven, but its moral result is *nil*. But he whose memory is haunted by a dying Redeemer, by the thought of One Whose love found its most appropriate and practical result in dying for him, *is* prevented from much sin, and finds in that love the spring of eternal hope, that which his soul in the deep privacy of his most sacred thoughts can feed upon with joy, that which he builds himself round and broods over as his inalienable possession.

VI.

NOAH'S FALL

Genesis ix. 20–27

Noah in the ark was in a position of present safety but of much anxiety. No sign of any special protection on God's part was given. The waters seem to stand at their highest level still; and probably the risk of the ark's grounding on some impracticable peak, or precipitous hill-side, would seem as great a danger as the water itself. Five months had elapsed, and though the rain had ceased the sky was heavy and threatening, and every day now was worth many measures of corn in the coming harvest. A reflection of the anxiety within the ark is seen in the expression, "And God remembered Noah." It was needful to say so, for there was as yet no outward sign of this.

To such anxieties all are subject who have availed themselves of the salvation God provides. At the first there is an easy faith in God's aid; there are many signs of His presence; the subjects in whom salvation operates have no disposition or temptation to doubt that God is with them and is working for them. But this initial stage is succeeded by a very different state of things. We seem to be left to ourselves to cope with the world and all its

difficulties and temptations in our own strength. Much as we crave some sign that God remembers us, no sign is given. We no longer receive the same urgent impulses to holiness of life; we have no longer the same freshness in devotion as if speaking to a God at hand. There is nothing which of itself and without reasoning about it says to us, Here is God's hand upon me.

In fact, the great part of our life has to be spent under these conditions, and we need to hold some well-ascertained principle regarding God's dealings, if our faith is to survive. And here in God's treatment of Noah we see that God may as certainly be working for us when not working directly upon us, as when His presence is palpable. His absence from us is as needful as His presence. The clouds are as requisite for our salvation as the sunny sky. When therefore we find that salvation from sin is a much slower and more anxious matter than we once expected it to be, we are not to suppose that God is not hearing our prayers. When Noah day by day cried to God for relief, and yet night after night found himself "cribb'd, cabin'd, and confined," with no sign from God but such as faith could apprehend, depend upon it he had very different feelings from those with which he first stepped into the ark. And when we are left to one monotonous rut of duty and to an unchanging and dry form of devotion, when we are called to learn to live by faith not by sight, to learn that God's purposes with us are spiritual, and that slow and difficult growth in self-command and holiness is the best proof that He hears our prayers, we must strive to believe that this also is a needful part

of our salvation; and we must especially be on our guard against supposing that as God has ceased to disclose Himself to us, and so to make faith easy, we may cease to disclose ourselves to Him.

For this is the natural and very frequent result of such an experience. Discouraged by the obscurity of God's ways and the difficulty of believing when the mind is not sustained by success or by new thoughts or manifest tokens of God's presence, we naturally cease to look for any clear signs of God's concernment about our state, and rest from all anxious craving to know God's will about us. To this temptation the majority of Christian people yield, and allow themselves to become indifferent to spiritual truth and increasingly interested in the non-mysterious facts of the present world, attending to present duties in a mechanical way, seeing that their families have enough to eat and that all in their little ark are provided for. But to this temptation Noah did not yield. Though to all appearance abandoned by God, he did what he could to ascertain what was beyond his immediate sight and present experience. He sent out his raven and his dove. Not satisfied with his first enquiry by the raven, which could flit from one piece of floating garbage to another, he sent out the dove, and continued to do so at intervals of seven days.

Noah sent out the raven first, probably because it had been the most companionable bird and seemed the wisest, preferable to "the silly dove;" but it never came back with God's message. And so has one often found that an enquiry into God's will, the examination, for example, of some portion of Scripture,

undertaken with a prospect of success and with good human helps, has failed, and has failed in this peculiar ravenlike way; the enquiry has settled down on some worthless point, on some rotting carcase, on some subject of passing interest or worldly learning, and brings back no message of God to us. On the other hand, the continued use, Sabbath after Sabbath, of God's appointed means, and the patient waiting for some message of God to come to us through what seems a most unlikely messenger, will often be rewarded. It may be but a single leaf plucked off that we get, but enough to convince us that God has been mindful of our need, and is preparing for us a habitable world.

Many a man is like the raven, feeding himself on the destruction of others, satisfied with knowing how God has dealt with others. He thinks he has done his part when he has found out who has been sinning and what has been the result. But the dove will not settle on any such resting-place, and is dissatisfied until for herself she can pluck off some token that God's anger is turned away and that now there is peace on earth. And if only you wait God's time and renew your endeavours to find such tokens, some assurance will be given you, some green and growing thing, some living part, however small, of the new creation which will certify you of your hope.

On the first day of the first month, New Year's day, Noah removed the covering of the ark, which seems to have stranded on the Armenian tableland, and looked out upon the new world.

He cannot but have felt his responsibility, as a kind of second Adam. And many questionings must have arisen in his mind regarding the relation of the new to the old. Was there to be any connection with the old world at all, or was all to begin afresh? Were the promises, the traditions, the events, the genealogies of the old world of any significance now? The Flood distinctly marked the going out of one order of things and the establishment of another. Man's career and development, or what we call history, had not before the Flood attained its goal. If this development was not to be broken short off, and if God's purpose in creation was to be fulfilled, then the world must still go on. Some worlds may perhaps die young, as individuals die young. Others endure through hair-breadth escapes and constant dangers, find their way like our planet through showers of fire, and pass without collision the orbits of huge bodies, carrying with them always, as our world does, the materials of their destruction within themselves. But catastrophes do not cut short, but evolve God's purposes. The Flood came that God's purpose might be fulfilled. The course of nature was interrupted, the arrangements of social and domestic life were overturned, all the works of men were swept away that this purpose might be fulfilled. It was expedient that one generation should die for all generations; and this generation having been taken out of the way, fresh provision is made for the co-operation of man with God. On man's part there is an emphatic acknowledgment of God by sacrifice; on God's part there is a renewed grant to man of the world and its

fulness, a renewed assurance of His favour.

This covenant with Noah was on the plane of nature. It is man's natural life in the world which is the subject of it. The sacredness of life is its great lesson. Men might well wonder whether God did not hold life cheap. In the old world violence had prevailed. But while Lamech's sword may have slain its thousands, God had in the Flood slain tens of thousands. The covenant, therefore, directs that human life must be revered. The primal blessing is renewed. Men are to multiply and replenish the earth; and the slaughter of a man was to be reckoned a capital crime; and the maintenance of life was guaranteed by a special clause, securing the regularity of the seasons. If, then, you ask, Was this just a beginning again where Adam began? Did God just wipe out man as a boy wipes his slate clean, when he finds his calculation is turning out wrong? Had all these generations learned nothing; had the world not grown at all since its birth? – the answer is, it had grown, and in two most important respects, – it had come to the knowledge of the uniformity of nature, and the necessity of human law. This great departure from the uniformity of nature brought into strong relief its normal uniformity, and gave men their first lesson in the recognition of a God who governs by fixed laws. And they learned also from the Flood that wickedness must not be allowed to grow unchecked and attain dimensions which nothing short of a flood can cope with.

Fit symbol of this covenant was the rainbow. Seeming to

unite heaven and earth, it pictured to those primitive people the friendliness existing between God and man. Many nations have looked upon it as not merely one of the most beautiful and striking objects in nature, but as the messenger of heaven to men. And arching over the whole horizon, it exhibits the all-embracing universality of the promise. They accepted it as a sign that God has no pleasure in destruction, that He does not give way to moods, that He does not always chide, that if weeping may endure for a night joy is sure to follow. If any one is under a cloud, leading a joyless, hopeless, heartless life, if any one has much apparent reason to suppose that God has given him up to catastrophe, and lets things run as they may, there is some satisfaction in reading this natural emblem and recognising that without the cloud, nay, without the cloud breaking into heavy sweeping rains, there cannot be the bow, and that no cloud of God's sending is permanent, but will one day give place to unclouded joy. Let the prayer of David be yours, "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me. Let, I pray Thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort according to Thy word unto Thy servant."

It may be felt that the matters about which God spoke to Noah were barely religious, certainly not spiritual. But to take God as our God in any one particular is to take Him as our God for all. If we can eat our daily bread as given to us by our Father in heaven, then we are heirs of the righteousness which is by faith. It is because we wait for some wonderful and out-of-the-

way proofs that God is keeping faith with us that we so much lack a real and living faith. If you think of God only in connection with some spiritual difficulty, or if you are waiting for some critical spiritual experience about which you may deal with God, – if you are not transacting with Him about your daily work, about your temporal wants and difficulties, about your friendships and your tastes, about that which makes up the bulk of your thought, feeling, and action, then you have yet to learn what living with God means. You have yet to learn that God the Infinite Creator of all is present in all your life. We are not in advance of Noah, but behind him, if we cannot speak to God about common things.

Besides, the relation of man to God was sufficiently determined by this covenant. When any man in that age began to ask himself the question which all men in all ages ask, How shall I win the favour of God? it must, or it might, at once have struck him, Why, God has already favoured me and has bound Himself to me by express and solemn pledges. And radically this is all that any one needs to know. It is not a change in God's attitude towards you that is required. What is required is that you believe what is actually the case, that the Holy God loves you already and is already seeking to bless you by making you like Himself. Believe that, and let the faith of it sink more and more deeply into your spirit, and you will find that you are saved from your sin.

What remains to be told of Noah is full of moral significance. Rare indeed is a *wholly* good man; and happy indeed is he who throughout his youth, his manhood, and his age lets principle

govern all his actions. The righteous and rescued Noah lying drunk on his tent-floor is a sorrowful spectacle. God had given him the earth, and this was the use he made of the gift; melancholy presage of the fashion of his posterity. He had God to help him to bear his responsibilities, to refresh and gladden him, but he preferred the fruit of his vineyard. Can the most sacred or impressive memories secure a man against sin? Noah had the memory of a race drowned for sin and of a year in solitude with God. Can the dignity and weight of responsibility steady a man? This man knew that to him God had declared His purpose and that he only could carry it forward to fulfilment. In that heavy helpless figure, fallen insensible in his tent, is as significant a warning as in the Flood.

Noah's sin brings before us two facts about sin. First, that the smaller temptations are often the most effectual. The man who is invulnerable on the field of battle amidst declared and strong enemies falls an easy prey to the assassin in his own home. When all the world was against him, Noah was able to face single-handed both scorn and violence, but in the midst of his vineyard, among his own people who understood him and needed no preaching or proof of his virtue, he relaxed.

He was no longer in circumstances so difficult as to force him to watch and pray, as to drive him to God's side. The temptations Noah had before known were mainly from without; he now learnt that those from within are more serious. Many of us find it comparatively easy to carry clean hands before the public, or

to demean ourselves with tolerable seemliness in circumstances where the temptation may be very strong but is also very patent; but how careless are we often in our domestic life, and how little strain do we put upon ourselves in the company of those whom we can trust. What petulance and irritability, what angry and slanderous words, what sensuality and indolence could our own homes witness to! Noah is not the only man who has walked uprightly and kept his garment unspotted from the world so long as the eye of man was on him, but who has lain uncovered on his own tent-floor.

Secondly, we see here how a man may fall into new forms of sin, and are reminded especially of one of the most distressing facts to be observed in the world, viz., that men in their prime and even in their old age are sometimes overtaken in sins of sensuality from which hitherto they have kept themselves pure. We are very ready to think we know the full extent of wickedness to which we may go; that by certain sins *we* shall never be much tempted. And in some of our predictions we may be correct; our temperament or our circumstances may absolutely preclude some sins from mastering us. Yet who has made but a slight alteration in his circumstances, added a little to his business, made some new family arrangements, or changed his residence, without being astonished to find how many new sources of evil seem to have been opened within him? While therefore you rejoice over sins defeated, beware of thinking your work is nearly done. Especially let those of us who have for years been fighting mainly against

one sin beware of thinking that if only *that* were defeated we should be free from sin. As a man who has long suffered from one bodily disease congratulates himself that at least he knows what he may expect in the way of pain, and will not suffer as some other man he has heard of does suffer; whereas though one disease may kill others, yet some diseases only prepare the body for the assault of worse ailments than themselves, and the constitution at last breaks up under a combination of ills that make the sufferer a pity to his friends and a perplexity to his physicians. And so is it in the spirit; you cannot say that because you are so consumed by one infirmity, others can find no room in you. In short, there is nothing that can secure us against the unspeakable calamity of falling into new sins, except the direction given by our Lord, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." There *is need* of watching, else this precept had never been uttered; too many things absolutely needful for us to do have to be enjoined upon us to leave any room for the injunction of precepts that are unnecessary, and he who is not watching has no security that he shall not sin so as to be a scandal to his friends and a shame to himself.

Noah's sin brought to light the character of his three sons – the coarse irreverence of Ham, the dignified delicacy and honour of Shem and Japheth. The bearing of men towards the sins of others is always a touchstone of character. The full exposure of sin where good is expected to come of the exposure and when it is done with sorrow and with shame is one thing, and the

exposure of sin to create a laugh and merely to amuse is another. They are the true descendants of Ham, whether their faces be black or white, and whether they go with no clothes or with clothes that are the product of much thought and anxiety, who find pleasure in the mere contemplation of deeds of shame, in real life, on the boards of the theatre, in daily journals, or in works of fiction. Extremes meet, and the savage grossness of Ham is found in many who count themselves the last and finest product of culture. It is found also in the harder and narrower set of modern investigators, who glory in exposing the scientific weakness of our forefathers, and make a jest of the mistakes of men to whom they owe much of their freedom, and whose shoe latchet they are not worthy to tie, so far as the deeper moral qualities go.

But neither is religious society free from this same sin. The faults and mistakes and sins of others are talked over, possibly with some show of regret, but with, as we know, very little real shame and sadness, for these feelings prompt us, not to talk them over in companies where no good can be done in the way of remedy, but to cover them as these sorrowing sons of Noah, with averted eye and humbled head. Charity is the prime grace enjoined upon us and charity *covers* a multitude of sins. And whatever excuses for exposing others we may make, however we may say it is only a love of truth and fair play that makes us drag to light the infirmities of a man whom others are praising, we may be very sure that if all *evil* motives were absent this kind

of evil speaking would cease among us. But there is a malignity in sin that leaves its bitter root in us all, and causes us to be glad when those whom we have been regarding as our superiors are reduced to our poor level. And there is a cowardliness in sin which cannot bear to be alone, and eagerly hails every symptom of others being in the same condemnation.

Before exposing another, think first whether your own conduct could bear a similar treatment, whether you have never done the thing you desire to conceal, said the thing you would blush to hear repeated, or thought the thought you could not bear another to read. And if you be a Christian, does it not become you to remember what you yourself have learnt of the slipperiness of this world's ways, of your liability to fall, of your sudden exposure to sin from some physical disorder, or some slight mistake which greatly extenuates your sin, but which you could not plead before another? And do you know nothing of the difficulty of conquering one sin that is rooted in your constitution, and the strife that goes on in a man's own soul and in secret though he show little immediate fruit of it in his life before men? Surely it becomes us to give a man credit for much good resolution and much sore self-denial and endeavour, even when he fails and sins still, because such we know to be our own case, and if we disbelieve in others until they can walk with perfect rectitude, if we condemn them for one or two flaws and blemishes, we shall be tempted to show the same want of charity towards ourselves, and fall at length into that miserable

and hopeless condition that believes in no regenerating spirit nor in any holiness attainable by us.

VII.

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

Genesis xi. 27–xii. 5

With Abraham there opens a new chapter in the history of the race; a chapter of the profoundest significance. The consequences of Abraham's movements and beliefs have been limitless and enduring. All succeeding time has been influenced by him. And yet there is in his life a remarkable simplicity, and an entire absence of such events as impress contemporaries. Among all the forgotten millions of his own time he stands alone a recognisable and memorable figure. But around his figure there gathers no throng of armed followers; with his name, no vast territorial dominion, no new legislation, not even any work of literature or art is associated. The significance of his life was not military, nor legislative, nor literary, but religious. To him must be carried back the belief in one God. We find him born and brought up among idolaters; and although it is certain there were others besides himself who here and there upon earth had dimly arrived at the same belief as he, yet it is certainly from him the Monotheistic belief has been diffused. Since his day the world has never been without its explicit advocacy. It is his belief in the

true God, in a God who manifested His existence and His nature by responding to this belief, it is this belief and the place he gave it as the regulating principle of all his movements and thoughts, that have given him his everlasting influence.

With Abraham there is also introduced the first step in a new method adopted by God in the training of men. The dispersion of men and the divergence of their languages are now seen to have been the necessary preliminary to this new step in the education of the world – the fencing round of one people till they should learn to know God and understand and exemplify His government. It is true, God reveals Himself to all men and governs all; but by selecting one race with special adaptations, and by giving to it a special training, God might more securely and more rapidly reveal Himself to all. Each nation has certain characteristics, a national character which grows by seclusion from the influences which are forming other races. There is a certain mental and moral individuality stamped upon every separate people. Nothing is more certainly retained; nothing more certainly handed down from generation to generation. It would therefore be a good practical means of conserving and deepening the knowledge of God, if it were made the national interest of a people to preserve it, and if it were closely identified with the national characteristics. This was the method adopted by God. He meant to combine allegiance to Himself with national advantages, and spiritual with national character, and separation in belief with a distinctly outlined and defensible territory.

This method, in common with all Divine methods, was in strict keeping with the natural evolution of history. The migration of Abraham occurred in the epoch of migrations. But although for centuries before Abraham new nations had been forming, none of them had belief in God as its formative principle. Wave upon wave of warriors, shepherds, colonists have left the prolific plains of Mesopotamia. Swarm after swarm has left that busy hive, pushing one another further and further west and east, but all have been urged by natural impulses, by hunger, commerce, love of adventure and conquest. By natural likings and dislikings, by policy, and by dint of force the multitudinous tribes of men were finding their places in the world, the weaker being driven to the hills, and being schooled there by hard living till their descendants came down and conquered their conquerors. All this went on without regard to any very high motives. As it was with the Goths who invaded Italy for her wealth, as it is now with those who people America and Africa because there is land or room enough, so it was then. But at last God selects one man and says, "*I will make of thee a great nation.*" The origin of this nation is not facile love of change nor lust of territory, but belief in God. Without this belief this people had not been. No other account can be given of its origin. Abraham is himself already the member of a tribe, well-off and likely to be well-off; he has no large family to provide for, but he is separated from his kindred and country, and led out to be himself a new beginning, and this because, as he himself throughout his life said, he heard God's

call and responded to it.

The city which claims the distinction of being Abraham's birthplace, or at least of giving its name to the district where he was born, is now represented by a few mounds of ruins rising out of the flat marshy ground on the western bank of the Euphrates, not far above the point where it joins its waters to those of the Tigris and glides on to the Persian gulf. In the time of Abraham, Ur was the capital city which gave its name to one of the most populous and fertile regions of the earth. The whole land of Accad which ran up from the sea-coast to Upper Mesopotamia (or Shinar) seems to have been known as Ur-ma, the land of Ur. This land was of no great extent, being little if at all larger than Scotland, but it was the richest of Asia. The high civilisation which this land enjoyed even in the time of Abraham has been disclosed in the abundant and multifarious Babylonian remains which have recently been brought to light.

What induced Terah to abandon so prosperous a land can only be conjectured. It is possible that the idolatrous customs of the inhabitants may have had something to do with his movements. For while the ancient Babylonian records reveal a civilisation surprisingly advanced, and a social order in some respects admirable, they also make disclosures regarding the worship of the gods which must shock even those who are familiar with the immoralities frequently fostered by heathen religions. The city of Ur was not only the capital, it was the holy city of the Chaldeans. In its northern quarter rose high above

the surrounding buildings the successive stages of the temple of the moon-god, culminating in a platform on which the priests could both accurately observe the motions of the stars and hold their night-watches in honour of their god. In the courts of this temple might be heard breaking the silence of midnight, one of those magnificent hymns, still preserved, in which idolatry is seen in its most attractive dress, and in which the Lord of Ur is invoked in terms not unworthy of the living God. But in these same temple-courts Abraham may have seen the firstborn led to the altar, the fruit of the body sacrificed to atone for the sin of the soul; and here too he must have seen other sights even more shocking and repulsive. Here he was no doubt taught that strangely mixed religion which clung for generations to some members of his family. Certainly he was taught in common with the whole community to rest on the seventh day; as he was trained to look to the stars with reverence and to the moon as something more than the light which was set to rule the night.

Possibly then Terah may have been induced to move northwards by a desire to shake himself free from customs he disapproved. The Hebrews themselves seem always to have considered that his migration had a religious motive. "This people," says one of their old writings, "is descended from the Chaldeans, and they sojourned heretofore in Mesopotamia because they would not follow the gods of their fathers which were in the land of Chaldea. For they left the way of their ancestors and worshipped the God of heaven, the God whom

they knew; so they cast them out from the face of their gods, and they fled into Mesopotamia and sojourned there many days. Then their God commanded them to depart from the place where they sojourned and to go into the land of Canaan.” But if this is a true account of the origin of the movement northwards, it must have been Abraham rather than his father who was the moving spirit of it; for it is certainly Abraham and not Terah who stands as the significant figure inaugurating the new era.

If doubt rests on the moving cause of the migration from Ur, none rests on that which prompted Abraham to leave Charran and journey towards Canaan. He did so in obedience to what he believed to be a Divine command, and in faith on what he understood to be a Divine promise. How he became aware that a Divine command thus lay upon him we do not know. Nothing could persuade him that he was not commanded. Day by day he heard in his soul what he recognised as a Divine voice, saying: “Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will show thee!” This was God’s first revelation of Himself to Abraham. Up to this time Abraham to all appearance had no knowledge of any God but the deities worshipped by his fathers in Chaldea. Now, he finds within himself impulses which he cannot resist and which he is conscious he ought not to resist. He believes it to be his duty to adopt a course which may look foolish and which he can justify only by saying that his conscience bids him. He recognises, apparently for the first time, that through his conscience there

speaks to him a God Who is supreme. In dependence on this God he gathered his possessions together and departed.

So far, one may be tempted to say, no very unusual faith was required. Many a poor girl has followed a weakly brother or a dissipated father to Australia or the wild west of America; many a lad has gone to the deadly west coast of Africa with no such prospects as Abraham. For Abraham had the double prospect which makes migration desirable. Assure the colonist that he will find land and have strong sons to till and hold and leave it to, and you give him all the motive he requires. These were the promises made to Abraham – a land and a seed. Neither was there at this period much difficulty in believing that both promises would be fulfilled. The land he no doubt expected to find in some unoccupied territory. And as regards the children, he had not yet faced the condition that only through Sarah was this part of the promise to be fulfilled.

But the peculiarity in Abraham's abandonment of present certainties for the sake of a future and unseen good is, that it was prompted not by family affection or greed or an adventurous disposition, but by faith in a God Whom no one but himself recognised. It was the first step in a life-long adherence to an Invisible, Spiritual Supreme. It was that first step which committed him to life-long dependence upon and intercourse with One Who had authority to regulate his movements and power to bless him. From this time forth all that he sought in life was the fulfilment of God's promise. He staked his future

upon God's existence and faithfulness. Had Abraham abandoned Charran at the command of a widely ruling monarch who promised him ample compensation, no record would have been made of so ordinary a transaction. But this was an entirely new thing and well worth recording, that a man should leave country and kindred and seek an unknown land under the impression that thus he was obeying the command of the unseen God. While others worshipped sun, moon, and stars, and recognised the Divine in their brilliance and power, in their exaltation above earth and control of earth and its life, Abraham saw that there was something greater than the order of nature and more worthy of worship, even the still small voice that spoke within his own conscience of right and wrong in human conduct, and that told him how his own life must be ordered. While all around him were bowing down to the heavenly host and sacrificing to them the highest things in human nature, he heard a voice falling from these shining ministers of God's will, which said to him, "See thou do it not, for we are thy fellow-servants; worship thou God!" This was the triumph of the spiritual over the material; the acknowledgment that in God there is something greater than can be found in nature; that man finds his true affinity not in the things that are seen but in the unseen Spirit that is over all. It is this that gives to the figure of Abraham its simple grandeur and its permanent significance.

Under the simple statement "The Lord said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country," there are probably hidden years

of questioning and meditation. God's revelation of Himself to Abram in all probability did not take the determinate form of articulate command without having passed through many preliminary stages of surmise and doubt and mental conflict. But once assured that God is calling him, Abraham responds quickly and resolutely. The revelation has come to a mind in which it will not be lost. As one of the few theologians who have paid attention to the method of revelation has said: "A Divine revelation does not dispense with a certain character and certain qualities of mind in the person who is the instrument of it. A man who throws off the chains of authority and association must be a man of extraordinary independence and strength of mind, although he does so in obedience to a Divine revelation; because no miracle, no sign or wonder which accompanies a revelation can by its simple stroke force human nature from the innate hold of custom and the adhesion to and fear of established opinion; can enable it to confront the frowns of men, and take up truth opposed to general prejudice, except there is in the man himself, who is the recipient of the revelation, a certain strength of mind and independence which concurs with the Divine intention."

That Abraham's faith triumphed over exceptional difficulties and enabled him to do what no other motive would have been strong enough to accomplish, there is therefore no call to assert. During his after-life his faith was severely tried, but the mere abandonment of his country in the hope of gaining a better was the ordinary motive of his day. It was the *ground* of this

hope, the belief in God, which made Abraham's conduct original and fruitful. That sufficient inducement was presented to him is only to say that God is reasonable. There is always sufficient inducement to obey God; because life is reasonable. No man was ever commanded or required to do anything which it was not for his advantage to do. Sin is a mistake. But so weak are we, so liable to be moved by the things present to us and by the desire for immediate gratification, that it never ceases to be wonderful and admirable when a sense of duty enables a man to forego present advantage and to believe that present loss is the needful preliminary of eternal gain.

Abraham's faith is chosen by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews as an apt illustration of his definition of Faith, that it is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." One property of faith is that it gives to things future and which are as yet only hoped for all the reality of actual present existence. Future things may be said to have no existence for those who do not believe in them. They are not taken into account. Men do not shape their conduct with any reference to them. But when a man believes in certain events that are to be, this faith of his lends to these future things the reality, the "substance" which things actually existing in the present have. They have the same weight with him, the same influence upon his conduct.

Without some power to realize the future and to take account of what is to be as well as of what already is, we could not carry

on the common affairs of life. And success in life very greatly depends on foresight, or the power to see clearly what is to be and give it due weight. The man who has no foresight makes his plans, but being unable to apprehend the future his plans are disconcerted. Indeed it is one of the most valuable gifts a man can have, to be able to say with tolerable accuracy what is to happen and what is not; to be able to sift rumours, common talk, popular impressions, probabilities, chances, and to be able to feel sure what the future will really be; to be able to weigh the character and commercial prospects of the men he deals with, so as to see what must be the issue of their operations and whom he may trust. Many of our most serious mistakes in life arise from our inability to imagine the consequences of our actions and to forefeel how these consequences will affect us.

Now faith largely supplies the want of this imaginative foresight. It lends substance to things future. It believes the account given of the future by a trustworthy authority. In many ordinary matters all men are dependent on the testimony of others for their knowledge of the result of certain operations. The astronomer, the physiologist, the navigator, each has his department within which his predictions are accepted as authoritative. But for what is beyond the ken of science no faith in our fellow-men avails. Feeling that if there is a life beyond the grave, it must have important bearings on the present, we have yet no data by which to calculate what will then be, or only data so difficult to use that our calculations are but guesswork. But

faith accepts the testimony of God as unhesitatingly as that of man and gives reality to the future He describes and promises. It believes that the life God calls us to is a better life, and it enters upon it. It believes that there is a world to come in which all things are new and all things eternal; and, so believing, it cannot but feel less anxious to cling to this world's goods. That which embitters all loss and deepens sorrow is the feeling that this world is all; but faith makes eternity as real as time and gives substantial existence to that new and limitless future in which we shall have time to forget the sorrows and live past the losses of this present world.

The radical elements of greatness are identical from age to age, and the primal duties which no good man can evade do not vary as the world grows older. What we admire in Abraham we feel to be incumbent on ourselves. Indeed the uniform call of Christ to all His followers is even in form almost identical with that which stirred Abraham, and made him the father of the faithful. "Follow Me," says our Lord, "and every one that forsaketh houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." And there is something perennially edifying in the spectacle of a man who believes that God has a place and a use for him in the world, and who puts himself at God's disposal; who enters upon life refusing to be bound by the circumstances of his upbringing, by the expectations of his friends, by prevailing customs, by prospect of gain and advancement among men; and resolved to listen to the

highest voice of all, to discover what God has for him to do upon earth and where he is likely to find most of God; who virtually and with deepest sincerity says, Let God choose my destination: I have good land here, but if God wishes me elsewhere, elsewhere I go: who, in one word, believes in the call of God to himself, who admits it into the springs of his conduct, and recognises that for him also the highest life his conscience can suggest is the only life he can live, no matter how cumbrous and troublesome and expensive be the changes involved in entering it. Let the spectacle take hold of your imagination – the spectacle of a man believing that there is something more akin to himself and higher than the material life and the great laws that govern it, and going calmly and hopefully forward into the unknown, because he knows that God is with him, that in God is our true life, that man liveth not by bread only, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God.

Even thus then may we bring our faith to a true and reliable test. All men who have a confident expectation of future good make sacrifices or run risks to obtain it. Mercantile life proceeds on the understanding that such ventures are reasonable and will always be made. Men might if they liked spend their money on present pleasure, but they rarely do so. They prefer to put it into concerns or transactions from which they expect to reap large returns. They have faith and as a necessary consequence they make ventures. So did these Hebrews – they ran a great risk, they gave up the sole means of livelihood they had any experience

of and entered what they knew to be a bare desert, because they believed in the land that lay beyond and in God's promise. What then has your faith done? What have you ventured that you would not have ventured but for God's promise? Suppose Christ's promise failed, in what would you be the losers? Of course you would lose what you call your hope of heaven – but what would you find you had lost in this world? When a merchant's ships are wrecked or when his investment turns out bad, he loses not only the gain he hoped for, but the means he risked. Suppose then Christ were declared bankrupt, unable to fulfil your expectations, would you really find that you had ventured so much upon His promise that you are deeply involved in His bankruptcy, and are much worse off in this world and now than you would otherwise have been? Or may I not use the words of one of the most cautious and charitable of men, and say, "I really fear, when we come to examine, it will be found that there is nothing we resolve, nothing we do, nothing we do not do, nothing we avoid, nothing we choose, nothing we give up, nothing we pursue, which we should not resolve, and do, and not do, and avoid, and choose, and give up, and pursue, if Christ had not died and heaven were not promised us." If this be the case – if you would be neither much better nor much worse though Christianity were a fable – if you have in nothing become poorer in this world that your reward in heaven may be greater, if you have made no investments and run no risks, then really the natural inference is that your faith in the future inheritance is small. Barnabas sold his Cyprus property

because he believed heaven was his, and his bit of land suddenly became a small consideration; useful only in so far as he could with the mammon of unrighteousness make himself a mansion in heaven. Paul gave up his prospects of advancement in the nation, of which he would of course as certainly have become the leader and first man as he took that position in the Church, and plainly tells us that having made so large a venture on Christ's word, he would if this word failed be a great loser, of all men most miserable because he had risked his all *in this life* on it. People sometimes take offence at Paul's plain way of speaking of the sacrifices he had made, and of Peter's plain way of saying "we have left all and followed Thee, what shall we have therefore?" but when people have made sacrifices they know it and can specify them, and a faith that makes no sacrifices is no good either in this world's affairs or in religion. Self-consciousness may not be a very good thing: but self-deception is a worse.

Here as elsewhere a clear hope sprang from faith. Recognising God, Abraham knew that there was for men a great future. He looked forward to a time when all men should believe as he did, and in him all families of the earth be blessed. No doubt in these early days when all men were on the move and striving to make a name and a place for themselves, an onward look might be common. But the far-reaching extent, the certainty, and the definiteness of Abraham's view of the future were unexampled. There far back in the hazy dawn he stood while the morning mists hid the horizon from every other eye, and

he alone discerns what is to be. One clear voice and one only rings out in unfaltering tones and from amidst the babel of voices that utter either amazing follies or misdirected yearnings, gives the one true forecast and direction – the one living word which has separated itself from and survived all the prognostications of Chaldean sooth-sayers and priests of Ur, because it has never ceased to give life to men. It has created for itself a channel and you can trace it through the centuries by the living green of its banks and the life it gives as it goes. For this hope of Abraham has been fulfilled; the creed and its accompanying blessing which that day lived in the heart of one man only has brought blessing to all the families of the earth.

VIII.

ABRAM IN EGYPT

Genesis xii. 6–20

Abram still journeying southward and not as yet knowing where his shifting camp was finally to be pitched, came at last to what may be called the heart of Palestine, the rich district of Shechem. Here stood the oak of Moreh, a well-known landmark and favourite meeting-place. In after years every meadow in this plain was owned and occupied, every vineyard on the slopes of Ebal fenced off, every square yard specified in some title-deed. But as yet the country seems not to have been densely populated. There was room for a caravan like Abram's to move freely through the country, liberty for a far-stretching encampment such as his to occupy the lovely vale that lies between Ebal and Gerizim. As he rested here and enjoyed the abundant pasture, or as he viewed the land from one of the neighbouring hills, the Lord appeared to him and made him aware that this was the land designed for him. Here accordingly under the spreading oak round whose boughs had often clung the smoke of idolatrous sacrifice, Abram erects an altar to the living God in devout acceptance of the gift, taking possession as it were of the land

jointly for God and for himself. Little harm will come of worldly possessions so taken and so held.

As Abram traversed the land, wondering what were the limits of his inheritance, it may have seemed far too large for his household. Soon he experiences a difficulty of quite the opposite kind; he is unable to find in it sustenance for his followers. Any notion that God's friendship would raise him above the touch of such troubles as were incident to the times, places, and circumstances in which his life was to be spent, is quickly dispelled. The children of God are not exempt from any of the common calamities; they are only expected and aided to be calmer and wiser in their endurance and use of them. That we suffer the same hardships as all other men is no proof that we are not eternally associated with God, and ought never to persuade us our faith has been in vain.

Abram, as he looked at the bare, brown, cracked pastures and at the dry watercourses filled only with stones, thought of the ever-fresh plains of Mesopotamia, the lovely gardens of Damascus, the rich pasturage of the northern borders of Canaan; but he knew enough of his own heart to make him very careful lest these remembrances should make him turn back. No doubt he had come to the promised land expecting it to be the real Utopia, the Paradise which had haunted his thoughts as he lay among the hills of Ur watching his flocks under the brilliant midnight sky. No doubt he expected that here all would be easy and bright, peaceful and luxurious. His first experience

is of famine. He has to look on his herd melting away, his favourite cattle losing their appearance, his servants murmuring and obliged to scatter. In his dreams he must have night after night seen the old country, the green breadth of the land that Euphrates watered, the heavy headed corn bending before the warm airs of his native land; but morning by morning he wakes to the same anxieties, to the sad reality of parched and burnt-up pastures, shepherds hanging about with gloomy looks, his own heart distressed and failing. He was also a stranger here who could not look for the help an old resident might have counted on. It was probably years since God had made any sign to him. Was the promised land worth having after all? Might he not be better off among his old friends in Charran? Should he not brave their ridicule and return? He will not so much as make it possible to return. He will not even for temporary relief go north towards his old country, but will go to Egypt, where he cannot stay, and from which he must return to Canaan.

Here, then, is a man who plainly believes that God's promise cannot fail; that God will magnify His promise, and that it above all else is worth waiting for. He believes that the man who seeks without flinching and through all disappointment and bareness to do God's will, shall one day have an abundantly satisfying reward, and that meanwhile association with God in carrying forward His abiding purposes with men is more for a man to live upon than the cattle upon a thousand hills. And thus famine rendered to Abram no small service if it quickened

within him the consciousness that the call of God was not to ease and prosperity, to land-owning and cattle-breeding, but to be God's agent on earth for the fulfilment of remote but magnificent purposes. His life might seem to be down among the commonplace vicissitudes, pasture might fail, and his well-stocked camp melt away, but out of his mind there could not fade the future God had revealed to him. If it had been his ambition to give his name to a tribe and be known as a wide-ruling chief, that ambition is now eclipsed by his desire to be a step towards the fulfilment of that real end for which the whole world is. The belief that God has called him to do His work has lifted him above concern about personal matters; life has taken a new meaning in his eyes by its connection with the Eternal.

The extraordinary country to which Abram betook himself, and which was destined to exercise so profound an influence on his descendants, had even at this early date attained a high degree of civilisation. The origin of this civilisation is shrouded in obscurity, as the source of the great river to which the country owes its prosperity for many centuries kept the secret of its birth. As yet scholars are unable to tell us with certainty what Pharaoh was on the throne when Abram went down into Egypt. The monuments have preserved the effigies of two distinct types of rulers; the one simple, kindly, sensible, stately, handsome, fearless, as of men long accustomed to the throne. These are the faces of the native Egyptian rulers. The other type of face is heavy and massive, proud and strong but full of care, with neither

the handsome features nor the look of kindness and culture which belong to the other. These are the faces of the famous Shepherd kings who held Egypt in subjection, probably at the very time when Abram was in the land.

For our purposes it matters little whether Abram's visit occurred while the country was under native or under foreign rule, for long before the Shepherd kings entered Egypt it enjoyed a complete and stable civilisation. Whatever dynasty Abram found on the throne, he certainly found among the people a more refined social life than he had seen in his native city, a much purer religion, and a much more highly developed moral code. He must have kept himself entirely aloof from Egyptian society if he failed to discover that they believed in a judgment after death, and that this judgment proceeded upon a severe moral code. Before admission into the Egyptian heaven the deceased must swear that "he has not stolen nor slain any one intentionally; that he has not allowed his devotions to be seen; that he has not been guilty of hypocrisy or lying; that he has not calumniated any one nor fallen into drunkenness or adultery; that he has not turned away his ear from the words of truth; that he has been no idle talker; that he has not slighted the king or his father." To a man in Abram's state of mind the Egyptian creed and customs must have conveyed many valuable suggestions.

But virtuous as in many respects the Egyptians were, Abram's fears as he approached their country were by no means groundless. The event proved that whatever Sarah's age and

appearance at this time were, his fears were something more than the fruit of a husband's partiality. Possibly he may have heard the ugly story which has recently been deciphered from an old papyrus, and which tells how one of the Pharaohs, acting on the advice of his princes, sent armed men to fetch a beautiful woman and make away with her husband. But knowing the risk he ran, why did he go? He contemplated the possibility of Sarah's being taken from him; but, if this should happen, what became of the promised seed? We cannot suppose that, driven by famine from the promised land, he had lost all hope regarding the fulfilment of the other part of the promise. Probably his idea was that some of the great men might take a fancy to Sarah, and that he would so temporise with them and ask for her such large gifts as would hold them off for a while until he could provide for his people and get clear out of the land. It had not occurred to him that she might be taken to the palace. Whatever his idea of the probable course of events was, his proposal to guide them by disguising his true relationship to Sarah was unjustifiable. And his feelings during these weeks in Egypt must have been far from enviable as he learned that of all virtues the Egyptians set greatest store by truth, and that lying was the vice they held in greatest abhorrence.

Here then was the whole promise and purpose of God in a most precarious position; the land abandoned, the mother of the promised seed in a harem through whose guards no force on earth could penetrate. Abram could do nothing but go helplessly about, thinking what a fool he had been, and wishing himself well

back among the parched hills of Bethel. Suddenly there is a panic in the royal household; and Pharaoh is made aware that he was on the brink of what he himself considered a great sin. Besides effecting its immediate purpose, this visitation might have taught Pharaoh that a man cannot safely sin within limits prescribed by himself. He had not intended such evil as he found himself just saved from committing. But had he lived with perfect purity, this liability to fall into transgression, shocking to himself, could not have existed. Many sins of most painful consequence we commit, not of deliberate purpose, but because our previous life has been careless and lacking in moral tone. We are mistaken if we suppose that we can sin within a certain safe circle and never go beyond it.

By this intervention on God's part Abram was saved from the consequences of his own scheme, but he was not saved from the indignant rebuke of the Egyptian monarch. This rebuke indeed did not prevent him from a repetition of the same conduct in another country, conduct which was met with similar indignation: "What have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom this great sin? Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done. What sawest thou that thou hast done this thing?" This rebuke did not seem to sink deeply into the conscience of Abram's descendants, for the Jewish history is full of instances in which leading men do not shrink from manœuvre, deceit and lying. Yet it is impossible to suppose that Abram's conception of God was not vastly enlarged

by this incident, and this especially in two particulars.

(1) Abram must have received a new impression regarding God's truth. It would seem that as yet he had no very clear idea of God's holiness. He had the idea of God which Mohammedans entertain, and past which they seem unable to get. He conceived of God as the Supreme Ruler; he had a firm belief in the unity of God and probably a hatred of idolatry and a profound contempt for idolaters. He believed that this Supreme God could always and easily accomplish His will, and that the voice that inwardly guided him was the voice of God. His own character had not yet been deepened and dignified by prolonged intercourse with God and by close observation of His actual ways; and so as yet he knows little of what constitutes the true glory of God.

For learning that truth is an essential attribute of God he could not have gone to a better school than Egypt. His own reliance on God's promise might have been expected to produce in him a high esteem for truth and a clear recognition of its essential place in the Divine character. Apparently it had only partially had this effect. The heathen, therefore, must teach him. Had not Abram seen the look of indignation and injury on the face of Pharaoh, he might have left the land feeling that his scheme had succeeded admirably. But as he went at the head of his vastly increased household, the envy of many who saw his long train of camels and cattle, he would have given up all could he have blotted from his mind's eye the reproachful face of Pharaoh and nipped out this entire episode from his life. He was humbled

both by his falseness and his foolishness. He had told a lie, and told it when truth would have served him better. For the very precaution he took in passing off Sarai as his sister was precisely what encouraged Pharaoh to take her, and produced the whole misadventure. It was the heathen monarch who taught the father of the faithful his first lesson in God's holiness.

What he so painfully learned we must all learn, that God does not need lying for the attainment of His ends, and that double-dealing is always short-sighted and the proper precursor of shame. Frequently men are tempted like Abram to seek a God-protected and God-prospered life by conduct that is not thoroughly straightforward. Some of us who stately ask God to bless our endeavours, and who have no doubt that God approves the ends we seek to accomplish, do yet adopt such means of attaining our ends as not even men with any high sense of honour would countenance. To save ourselves from trouble, inconvenience, or danger, we are tempted to evasions and shifts which are not free from guilt. The more one sees of life, the higher value does he set on truth. Let lying be called by whatever flattering title men please – let it pass for diplomacy, smartness, self-defence, policy, or civility – it remains the device of the coward, the absolute bar to free and healthy intercourse, a vice which diffuses itself through the whole character and makes growth impossible. Trade and commerce are always hampered and retarded, and often overwhelmed in disaster, by the determined and deliberate doubleness of those who engage in

them; charity is minimised and withheld from its proper objects by the suspiciousness engendered in us by the almost universal falseness of men; and the habit of making things seem to others what they are not, reacts upon the man himself and makes it difficult for him to feel the abiding effective reality of anything he has to do with or even of his own soul. If then we are to know the living and true God we must ourselves be true, transparent, and living in the light as He is the Light. If we are to reach His ends we must adopt His means and abjure all crafty contrivances of our own. If we are to be His heirs and partners in the work of the world, we must first be His children, and show that we have attained our majority by manifesting an indubitable resemblance to His own clear truth.

(2) But whether Abram fully learned this lesson or not, there can be little doubt that at this time he did receive fresh and abiding impressions of God's faithfulness and sufficiency. In Abram's first response to God's call he exhibited a remarkable independence and strength of character. His abandonment of home and kindred on account of a religious faith which he alone possessed, was the act of a man who relied much more on himself than on others and who had the courage of his convictions. This qualification for playing a great part in human affairs he undoubtedly had. But he had also the defects of his qualities. A weaker man would have shrunk from going into Egypt and would have preferred to see his flocks dwindle rather than take so venturesome a step. No such hesitations could trammel Abram's

movements. He felt himself equal to all occasions. That part of his character which was reproduced in his grandson Jacob, a readiness to rise to every emergency that called for management and diplomacy, an aptitude for dealing with men and using them for his purposes – this came to the front now! To all the timorous suggestions of his household he had one reply: Leave it all to me; I will bring you through. So he entered Egypt confident that single-handed he could cope with their Pharaohs, priests, magicians, guards, judges, warriors; and find his way through the finely-meshed net that held and examined every person and action in the land.

He left Egypt in a much more healthy state of mind, practically convinced of his own inability to work his way to the happiness God had promised him, and equally convinced of God's faithfulness and power to bring him through all the embarrassments and disasters into which his own folly and sin might bring him. His own confidence and management had placed God's promise in a position of extreme hazard; and without the intervention of God Abram saw that he could neither recover the mother of the promised seed nor return to the land of promise. Abram is put to shame even in the eyes of his household slaves; and with what burning shame must he have stood before Sarai and Pharaoh, and received back his wife from him whose wickedness he had feared, but who so far from meaning to sin as Abram suspected, was indignant that Abram should have made it even possible. He returned to Canaan

humbled and very little disposed to feel confident in his own powers of managing in emergencies; but quite assured that God might at all times be relied on. He was convinced that God was not depending upon him, but he upon God. He saw that God did not trust to his cleverness and craft, no, nor even to his willingness to do and endure God's will, but that He was trusting in Himself, and that by His faithfulness to His own promise, by His watchfulness and providence, He would bring Abram through all the entanglements caused by his own poor ideas of the best way to work out God's ends and attain to His blessing. He saw, in a word, that the future of the world lay not with Abram but with God.

This certainly was a great and needful step in the knowledge of God. Thus early and thus unmistakably was man taught in how profound and comprehensive a sense God is his Saviour. Commonly it takes a man a long time to learn that it is God who is saving him, but one day he learns it. He learns that it is not his own faith but God's faithfulness that saves him. He perceives that he needs God throughout, from first to last; not only to make him offers, but to enable him to accept them; not only to incline him to accept them to-day, but to maintain within him at all times this same inclination. He learns that God not only makes him a promise and leaves him to find his own way to what is promised; but that He is with him always, disentangling him day by day from the results of his own folly and securing for him not only possible but actual blessedness.

Few discoveries are so welcome and gladdening to the soul. Few give us the same sense of God's nearness and sovereignty; few make us feel so deeply the dignity and importance of our own salvation and career. This is God's affair; a matter in which are involved not merely our personal interests, but God's responsibility and purposes. God calls us to be His, and He does not send us a-warring on our own charges, but throughout furnishes us with *everything* we need. When we go down to Egypt, when we quite diverge from the path that leads to the promised land and worldly straits tempt us to turn our back upon God's altar and seek relief by our own arrangements and devices, when we forget for a while how God has identified our interests with His own and tacitly abjure the vows we have silently registered before Him, even then He follows us and watches over us and lays His hand upon us and bids us back. And this only is our hope. Not in any determination of our own to cleave to Him and to live in faith on His promise can we trust. If we have this determination, let us cherish it, for this is God's present means of leading us onwards. But should this determination fail, the shame with which you recognise your want of steadfastness may prove a stronger bond to hold you to Him than the bold confidence with which to-day you view the future. The waywardness, the foolishness, the obstinate depravity that cause you to despair, God will conquer. With untiring patience, with all-foreseeing love, He stands by you and will bring you through. His gifts and calling are without repentance.

IX.

LOT'S SEPARATION FROM ABRAM

Genesis xiii

Abram left Egypt thinking meanly of himself, highly of God. This humble frame of mind is disclosed in the route he chooses; he went straight back “unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, unto the altar which he had made there at the first.” With a childlike simplicity he seems to own that his visit to Egypt had been a mistake. He had gone there supposing that he was thrown upon his own resources, and that in order to keep himself and his dependants alive he must have recourse to craft and dishonesty. By retracing his steps and returning to the altar at Bethel, he seems to acknowledge that he should have remained there through the famine in dependence on God.

Whoever has attempted a similar practical repentance, visible to his own household and affecting their place of abode or daily occupations, will know how to estimate the candour and courage of Abram. To own that some distinctly marked portion of our life, upon which we entered with great confidence in our own wisdom and capacity, has come to nothing and has betrayed us into reprehensible conduct, is mortifying indeed. To admit that

we have erred and to repair our error by returning to our old way and practice, is what few of us have the courage to do. If we have entered on some branch of business or gone into some attractive speculation, or if we have altered our demeanour towards some friend, and if we are finding that we are thereby tempted to doubleness, to equivocation, to injustice, our only hope lies in a candid and straightforward repentance, in a manly and open return to the state of things that existed in happier days and which we should never have abandoned. Sometimes we are aware that a blight began to fall on our spiritual life from a particular date, and we can easily and distinctly trace an unhealthy habit of spirit to a well-marked passage in our outward career; but we shrink from the sacrifice and shame involved in a thoroughgoing restoration of the old state of things. We are always so ready to fancy we have done enough, if we get one heartfelt word of confession uttered; so ready, if we merely turn our faces towards God, to think our restoration complete. Let us make a point of getting through mere beginnings of repentance, mere intention to recover God's favour and a sound condition of life, and let us return and return till we bow at God's very altar again, and know that His hand is laid upon us in blessing as at the first.

Out of Egypt Abram brought vastly increased wealth. Each time he encamped, quite a town of black tents quickly rose round the spot where his fixed spear gave the signal for halting. And along with him there journeyed his nephew, apparently of almost equal, or at least considerable wealth; not dependent on

Abram, nor even a partner with him, for “Lot also had flocks and herds and tents.” So rapidly was their substance increasing that no sooner did they become stationary than they found that the land was not able to furnish them with sufficient pasture. The Canaanite and the Perizzite would not allow them unlimited pasture in the neighbourhood of Bethel; and as the inevitable result of this the rival shepherds, eager to secure the best pasture for their own flocks and the best wells for their own cattle and camels, came to high words and probably to blows about their respective rights.

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