Date Due

OCT 18 1967 MP			
JAN 1 3 1999			

ISAAC AND JACOB:

THEIR LIVES AND TIMES.

BY

GEORGE RAWLINSON, M.A., F.R.G.S.,

RECTOR OF ALL HALLOWS, LOMBARD STREET, AND CANON OF CANTERBURY; CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF TURIN; AUTHOR OF "THE FIVE GREAT MONARCHIES OF THE ANCIENT EASTERN WORLD;" "MOSES: HIS LIFE AND TIMES;" "THE KINGS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH," ETC., ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK:

ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH & COMPANY,

182 FIFTH AVENUE.

PREFACE.

THE Book of Genesis is almost the sole original authority for the lives of Isaac and Jacob. A few additional touches are derivable from the New Testament, especially Gal. iv. and Heb. xi. Josephus adds scarcely anything, and what he adds is of doubtful value. The lives of the Second and Third Patriarch must be made out almost wholly from a careful study of Gen. xxi.—l. inclusive. In thus studying them, however, considerable assistance may be obtained from the works of several modern writers, who have devoted special attention to the period. Among these the most valuable are Dean Stanley's "Lectures on the Jewish Church," and Ewald's "History of the People of Israel," so excellently rendered into English by Mr. Carpenter. A clever monograph upon Jacob has been recently published by Mr. F. B. Meyer, throwing fresh light occasionally on his motives and character. The articles of Mr. W. T. Bullock on "Isaac" and "Jacob," in Dr. Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," though rather slight, are also of value. The light, however, which can be thrown at the present day on the "lives and times" of the two patriarchs proceeds mainly from the progress of geographical and archæological research. Such works as Dr. Robinson's "Researches in Palestine," Canon Tristram's "Land of Israel," Thomson's "The Land and the Book," Stuart Poole's "Cities of Egypt," Conder's "Tent Work in Palestine," Geikie's "The Holy Land and the Bible," and Harper's "The Bible and Modern Discoveries," furnish an inexhaustible store of illustrations bearing upon the patriarchal histories, and enable vivid representations to be given of almost every scene and step in the narrative. The author has largely

availed himself of all these sources, and feels that what he has borrowed from them will constitute the principal attraction of his pages. He cannot allow his essay to go to press without making full acknowledgment of the great advantage which he has derived from the labours of these eminent persons.

LONDON, *April* 26, 1890.

CONTENTS.

ISAAC: HIS LIFE AND TIMES.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER I.

ISAAC'S BIRTH AT BEERSHEBA.

Antecedents of the birth—Isaac "the child of promise"—Circumstances under which the birth took place—The name Isaac and its meaning—How the birth affected (1) Abraham—(2) Sarah—(3) Hagar—(4) Ishmael.

THE promise of seed—of seed in which "all the families of the earth should be blessed"—was made to Abraham before his departure from Haran (Gen. xii. 1–3). It was not till a quarter of a century later that the promise was fulfilled. Meanwhile, however, from time to time, fresh intimations came from the Divine Source of life and light, confirming the original promise, and adding to it continually more gracious and more glorious assurances. Abraham, in his impatience, had concluded at one time, that the "seed" was to be an adopted one, and looked for a while on Eliezer of Damascus as his heir (Gen. xv. 2); but this delusion was dispelled, and he was plainly told—"He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir" (ibid. ver. 4). The "great nation" of the earlier prophecy was expanded into a countless multitude—"Look now towards heaven," it was said to him, "and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: so shall thy seed be"; and Canaan was declared to be the land in which the "great nation" would grow up (ibid. ver. 7). Canaan, moreover, was explained to mean the entire tract intervening between the Euphrates and the river of Egypt—the land of "the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaim, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the

Jebusites" (vers. 19–21). When ten years had gone by without any further result from the promises made, and Sarai had reached the age of seventy-five, and deemed herself altogether beyond child-bearing, she suggested to Abraham that he should take a secondary wife, and look for the fulfilment of the announcements that had been received by him, to a semi-legitimate issue (Gen. xvi. 2). Hagar the Egyptian became the patriarch's concubine, and in due course Ishmael was born; and now for thirteen years it would seem that Abraham contentedly acquiesced in the notion, that here was the fulfilment of the original promise made to him, and that it was through Ishmael that all the generations of men would obtain their blessing (Gen. xvii. 18). But at length the time had come when God's intention was to be made fully known—"Sarai thy wife," Abraham was told, "shall bear thee a son indeed" (ibid. ver. 19), and "with *him*"—not with Ishmael—"will I establish My covenant for an everlasting covenant, and *with his seed* after him." And a definite date for the birth of the son was assigned—"My covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee *at this set time in the next year*." Then there was waiting and expectation. The "child of promise" was now definitely known. Sarah shortly found herself about to become a mother. Whatever incredulity had been hitherto felt, passed away; and the patriarch and his wife awaited, in patient faith (Heb. ix. 11) and full assurance of hope, the "set time" which was to crown their marriage with the blessing of offspring.

As the "set time" approached, Abraham desisted from the ordinary wanderings of the nomadic life, and pitched his tent (probably) at "the Well of the Seven"—Beer-sheba. Here was an altar which he had erected to "the Everlasting God," and here was the tamarisk-tree, or "grove," which he had planted, to mark the spot as his own. The tent of the great chief would be of large size, containing many compartments—a special chamber for Sarah, another for Hagar and her son, others for the numerous attendants who would perform the domestic offices for the sheikh and his family. Round about would be scattered over a large space the smaller habitations of the "trained servants" (Gen. xiv. 14)—more than three hundred in number—who served the sheikh as shepherds and herdsmen (Gen. xiii. 8), or, if need were, as soldiers (Gen. xiv.

14). They, with their families, would amount to above a thousand persons, and their tents would be dotted about the Beersheba valley, and its slopes on either side, for a considerable distance. The patriarch had reached his hundredth year. Sarah was ninety. Doubtless there was joy and rejoicing in the great tent as the critical time approached, but there must also have been excitement and anxiety. Even in the East, where the dangers attendant upon child-birth are comparatively slight, the first *accouchement* of a nonogenarian must have been recognized as hazardous. But Sarah, "judging Him faithful who had promised" (Heb. xi. 11), did not allow herself to be dismayed, but "through faith having received strength to conceive," also through faith bore up against natural weakness, and natural apprehension, and finally against the keen pangs of travail, giving birth to a man child "at the set time of which God had spoken" (Gen. xxi. 2), and hailing the fulfilment of the promise with a burst of delight. "God," she cried, "hath made me to laugh, so that all who hear me will laugh with me. Who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have borne him a son in his old age" (Gen. xxi. 6, 7). Orientals exhibit their feelings in a way that is not natural to the colder people of the West. "When the tidings arrived that Xerxes was master of Athens, such was the joy of the inhabitants," says Herodotus, "that they forthwith strewed all the streets with myrtle boughs, and burnt incense, and fell to feasting *and merriment*."[1] So now Sarah's gossips and her handmaidens gathered about her, and in their joy "*laughed* with her" at the auspicious event, congratulating her, and each other, on the crowning blessing that had been granted to their master and mistress—a blessing which, under the circumstances of their advanced age, was almost miraculous. And then came the question as to the naming of the wonderful child. No doubt many names were suggested, for the secret commandment given by God to Abraham (Gen. xvii. 19) would probably not have been generally known: but the father and mother had laid up the injunction in their inmost hearts, and when the day for circumcising the child, and for naming him, came, they called him "Isaac"—literally, *Jitskhak*—which means "He laughs," or "The Laughing one."[2]

[1] Herod. viii. 99.

[2] See the note of Bishop Harold Browne on Gen. xvii. 19 in the

They felt, as Zacharias and Elisabeth felt (Luke i. 60–63), and as Joseph and Mary doubtless felt (Matt. i. 21–25), that a God-given name carried with it a blessing to the recipient, and could not possibly be set aside. They recognized also, it is probable, the appropriateness of the name, partly to the antecedent circumstances, which had so often connected laughter with the child,[1] but also, and still more, to the relation in which the child stood to the scheme of Redemption, as he in whom "all the families of the earth should be blessed"—he through whom should come upon the earth the joy of deliverance from sin and Satan, the restoration of peace, and the right to bask once more in the smile of a reconciled God. Of course, we cannot tell the extent to which "the Father of the Faithful," and his faithful wife, realized the scheme of Redemption, or understood how the whole world was to be blessed in their son and his seed; but we may presume that they had sufficient knowledge to make their joy and rejoicing not the mere natural delight of parents at the birth of a legitimate heir, but a religious uplifting of the soul in gratitude and thankfulness to God.

Abraham's position as the sheikh of a tribe was not greatly altered by the birth of Isaac. He had already a son, who might have succeeded him in the chieftainship—the actual issue of his loins, and towards whom he felt all the tenderness of a warm-hearted father. He had been quite content for years to look on Ishmael as his successor (Gen. xvii. 18). But, as soon as Sarah had conceived, his views and intentions were, as a matter of course, changed. The child of the true wife in the East always takes precedence of the children of concubines, and Hagar was not even, in the full sense of the word, a concubine. She had become the partner of Abraham's bed without, so far as appears, any legal ceremony. Isaac, as the son of the legitimate wife, was entitled to the succession, and, as "the son of promise," was, if possible, even more entitled to it. To Abraham it must undoubtedly have been a high satisfaction to have a thoroughly legitimate heir; but, as in the world wherein we live there are few advantages without their drawbacks, he must have felt at once that in his cup of

"Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 121; and compare Ewald, "History of Israel," vol. i. p. 339.

[1] Gen. xvii. 17, xviii. 12–15, xxi. 6.

joy there would be likely to be a dash of bitterness. *Surgit amari aliquid.* The disadvantages of polygamy are brought out especially in connection with the conflicting claims of the several wives' children, and the higher the position of the father, the more likely are such claims to cause trouble and disturbance. Without undue anticipation of occurrences which will be considered in another chapter, we cannot but glance here at a shadow which must have somewhat dimmed, even from the first, the patriarch's joy, and produced within him a certain amount of anxiety.

To Sarah, on the other hand, the event would have been one producing unmixed delight and wholly unalloyed satisfaction. First, there would be the gratification of the maternal instinct, the more keen perhaps for having been so long suppressed and dormant. Next, there would be the peculiar delight and exultation which all Hebrew mothers felt in the possession of offspring, from the shame that rested on barrenness, and the taunts and jeers to which childless wives were exposed at the hand of their adversaries (Gen. xvi. 4 ; 1 Sam. i. 6, 7). Further, there would be the sense of gratified pride, in that now at length she was indeed a "princess"—the mother of "kings of people" (Gen. xvii. 16)—the undoubted mistress of the tribe, whom none could presume to rival. And lastly, there would be the religious exaltation arising from the gracious and glorious, even if obscure, promise, that in the babe whom she had borne "all the nations of the earth should be blessed." Sarah's status in the tribe could not but be improved by the mere fact of her becoming a mother ; and the circumstances of the case would secure her an almost religious reverence. It is not on record that any other woman ever became a mother at so advanced an age, and the astonishing occurrence would be likely to impress the simple shepherds and herdsmen very sensibly. They would see in their chieftain's wife one specially favoured of Heaven, and would regard her as a probable channel through which blessings of all kinds might be expected to descend upon the tribe. She would thus become a personage of extraordinary importance, whose wishes would be consulted in every way, and who would be held in the highest honour.

The case would be very different with Hagar. Nay, it would be the exact reverse. All that Sarah gained by her new posi-

tion, Hagar lost. Hitherto, Hagar had been generally looked upon and treated as the mother of the heir-apparent, the coming mistress of the tribe, when Abraham should have departed this life, and Ishmael should have taken his place. Tradition says that she was a king's daughter;[1] and though in the slave condition, since her mother had been a slave, yet well known to have royal blood in her veins. No doubt this fact had gained her from the first a certain amount of respect in the tribe, and had made her connection with Abraham appear to the tribesmen neither unfitting nor incongruous. When Abraham consorted with her, this respect increased, and when a son was borne by her to the hitherto childless chieftain, the satisfaction of the tribe must have been extreme, and their regard for the mother of their (supposed) future lord and master must have deepened and been intensified. Flattery and adulation, we may be sure, followed; and for thirteen years the "handmaid" was, more or less, a rival to the legitimate wife, by many probably more courted and looked up to than Sarah, considered to be the rising sun, before whose beams the lesser light would pale and sink into obscurity. With the birth of Isaac all this was changed. Hagar dropped back into a wholly secondary position; her parasites fell away from her; the customary obeisances ceased; she was once more the mere "slave-wife"—the handmaid, whom her master's favour had distinguished for a while, but whose importance was now ended. Very bitter to Hagar must have been the consciousness of this great change. Hitherto she had, either openly (Gen. xvi. 4) or secretly, "despised" her mistress, looked upon her as already her inferior, and as one day to be subjected to her rule: now she saw her mistress firmly fixed in her exalted place for the rest of her life, first in her husband's affection, first in the regards of the tribesmen—surrounded with a sort of holy halo on account of the strangeness of what had occurred to her, and of the promises whereof her child was the object. Hagar must have felt herself

> "Fallen, fallen, fallen—
> Fallen from her high estate"—

and, as a woman of a high and haughty spirit, must have been filled with bitter grief and keen resentment.

[1] See Beer, "Leben Abrahams," p. 25.

But on Ishmael probably the blow fell with the greatest severity. He had reached his thirteenth year, and was consequently just at the age which in the East is regarded as incipient manhood. He was of a proud, hot, and overbearing temper, ambitious, and impatient of restraint. From his infancy, all through his boyhood, for thirteen long years, he had lived under the conviction that he was his father's heir, the hope of the tribe, their coming leader in war and judge in peace. He had been the delight of the tribesmen, whose labours and sports he had shared, who had admired his courage and fierce spirit, and made him as true a child of the desert as any of themselves. Hagar had exercised no restraining influence over him, but had rather fostered his ambitious hopes, encouraged his proud temper, and taught him to cherish the feelings and assume the airs of a young chief. To him Isaac's birth must have been the most cruel disappointment, upsetting all his illusions, and toppling him down from the high place which he had hitherto occupied, not in his own thoughts only, but in the thoughts of all with whom he was intimate, into a position of dependence, and (as he would feel it) of degradation. We cannot but sympathize with the poor youth thus suddenly disillusioned, waking from the daydreams in which he had so long very naturally indulged himself to the conviction that they were empty visions, and that the reality was wholly different. As Abraham's only son, Ishmael was his successor, his heir, the assured head of the tribe when his aged father should die, the ancestor (by promise) of a long line of kings (Gen. xvii. 16), the prince, in whose seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. As one merely of two sons, whereof the other was son of the legitimate wife, he lost the succession, he lost the heirship, he stood outside the promises, he sank back into "the son of the bondwoman" (Gen. xxi. 10), without rights, portionless, prospectless, not very much better in position than a purchased slave. So great a change could not but be a sore trial to any youth. To one of Ishmael's temper it must have been felt as almost unendurable. None could be surprised if it led to some outbreak, and to a disruption of the family which had hitherto been united, if not contented.

CHAPTER II.

ISAAC'S BRINGING UP.

Position and surroundings of Beersheba—Infancy of Isaac—Tent life—Rude conduct of Ishmael towards his brother—Special insult on the day when Isaac was weaned, and consequent expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael—Isaac's boyhood—Influences of his outward life—Influences of his close companionship with his father.

BEERSHEBA lies at the southern extremity of the Holy Land, on the very verge of the desert. It is far away from the coast, in E. Long. 34° 47′ nearly. Eastward, between Beersheba and the Dead Sea, lies the high rocky desert of Paran, which extends also far to the south, running parallel with the Red Sea and the Arabah. To the west is the low sandy tract, called in Abraham's time "the Desert of Shur," the region commonly traversed by those who proceed from Gaza (*Ghuzzah*) to Egypt. A watercourse, known now as the Wady es Seba, runs down from the high ground, which is a continuation of the Highland of Judæa, with a course that is at first from east to west, but, after pursuing this direction for some miles, it turns towards the north, and effects a junction with the Wady Ghuzzah a little to the south of the great Philistine city. The Wady es Seba is a well-watered and fairly fertile district. In winter it "contains a running stream, which drains a large area, and many springs rise in the western part of the plain into which it opens."[1] In almost any part of the Wady water may be found by digging, and generally it is tolerably near the surface. Beersheba derived its name from the well which Abraham dug, when he was sojourning in Gerar, and was on

[1] "Abraham: His Life and Times," by the Rev. W. J. Deane, p. 126.

friendly terms with the Philistine chief, Abimelech (Gen. xxi. 22–32). The name has clung to the place, and the modern Bir-es-Seba, so remarkable for its two great reservoirs,[1] marks beyond any reasonable doubt the site of Abraham's favourite abode in his later years and of the birthplace of Isaac.

The situation is a remarkable one. Beersheba lies on one of the two great highways to Egypt. It is the last outpost on the skirts of the cultivable ground upon the more inland of these two routes, and looks back on the one side to the soft-swelling hills of Judæa, while on the other it gazes down upon a green plain which gradually fades into the desert. The traveller may imagine that he sees Egypt in the far hazy distance. Around him and about him is an "undulating plain," without forest trees, but "sprinkled with shrubs,"[2] and in the spring clothed with the innumerable wild flowers, which make the lands adjacent to the desert for some weeks a carpet of the most brilliant and varied hues. There is excellent pasture for flocks during the greater part of the year; and if, on the whole, the landscape has a bleak appearance, yet good crops of grain can be raised without difficulty on the lower slopes of the hills, and in the beds of the valleys. Wells are necessities, for in the summer the torrent-courses are dry, and even the springs mostly fail, while, if we except an occasional thunderstorm, rain is for many months almost unknown. The wells are consequently a feature of the district. They are "dug far into the rocky soil, and bear upon their stone or marble margins the traces of the long ages during which the water has been drawn up from their deep recesses."[3] The famous Beersheba sources are reservoirs, rather than wells—one is five feet, the other twelve and a half feet in diameter; the larger of them is excavated through sixteen feet of the solid rock, and the water commonly lies at the depth of forty feet below the level of the soil at the mouth.[4] Drinking-troughs for cattle are still, as in the days of old, clustered around the margins of the pools, and the water is still daily drawn up by hand and poured into the troughs for the flocks of the neighbouring Arabs. It is cold and of good quality—pure, sweet, and refreshing. There

[1] Thomson, "The Land and the Book," p. 297; Grove, in "Dictionary of the Bible," *ad voc.* Beersheba.

[2] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. i. p. 35. [3] Ibid.

[4] Conder, "Our Work in Palestine," vol. ii. p. 95.

are remnants of an ancient village on the hills immediately north of the wells, but they do not show much trace of antiquity, and are consequently of but little interest. Still, they probably mark the site of the hamlet which grew up on the spot, and was reckoned the last village of Palestine upon the south, as Dan was the last towards the north (Judg. xx. 1).

In Abraham's day the village had not yet sprung into being, and Isaac's first experience was not of life in a house, but of life in a tent. He was suckled by his mother for some considerable time, probably for the full "three years," which appears to have been the customary period with the Hebrews of a later age.[1] During this space he was no doubt carefully looked after, and had his own special attendant or attendants, besides being the peculiar object of his mother's regard and protection. The tent life brought him into frequent contact with his brother, Ishmael, whose resentment at his birth was in no way appeased or softened by the infantile prattle, or the witching ways of "the Laughing one," but grew with his growth, and strengthened with his strength, until it attained the dimensions of an active and continuous "persecution." "He that was born after the flesh *persecuted* him that was born after the spirit" (Gal. iv. 29), was insolent to him, perhaps "mocked" him (Gen. xxi. 9), derided his childish speech, and made sport of his weakness and inexperience. The merry boy, safe in his mother's, or his nurse's, arms, may not have greatly heeded, or even understood, his half-brother's insolence; but Sarah took it to heart; and the day came when she could no longer patiently endure her infant's wrongs, but resolved on proclaiming and avenging them. The time for weaning the child had at last arrived, and Abraham, in the joy of his heart at the troubles of infancy being so far surmounted, had "made a great feast" (Gen. xxi. 8) in honour of the occasion, which probably was felt by Ishmael as a special grievance, since when (he would ask himself) had a great feast been made for him? Hereupon, to vent his rage and his disappointment, the rough, ill-mannered youth indulged his mocking vein freely and openly, deriding the young heir in the actual presence of his mother (ibid. ver. 9). Naturally, she was greatly vexed. Allowing her anger no time to cool, she made immediate appeal to her husband, told him what had occurred, and pre-

[1] 2 Macc. vii. 27; Josephus, "Ant. Jud." ii. 9, § 6.

ferred a peremptory demand, that a stop should be put at once, and for ever, to Ishmael's rude impertinence. "Cast out," she said, "this bondwoman and her son, for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." In judging her conduct, much will depend on the view that we take of Ishmael's previous action. If the mockery of the weaning day was a mere piece of boyish petulance, an isolated act caused by a special provocation, then to insist on the dismissal of Hagar, and the expulsion of her son from the family, on account of it, would certainly seem to have been a severe proceeding, indicative of a harsh and spiteful temper. But if, as St. Paul's language shows him to have understood the matter,[1] the mockery on the particular occasion was no isolated act, but part of an established system of persecution, in which the rough boy was abetted by his passionate mother, in that case Sarah may well be exonerated from blame, and regarded as having merely pointed out the course which justice, and a prudential consideration for the welfare of the family, required. The disruption of a household is, at the best, a sad and sorrowful thing; but if the discontented son had his feelings permanently embittered, if he was determinately set on thwarting, and vexing, and in every way causing annoyance to the legitimate heir, and if his mother was likely to aid and abet him in the line of conduct whereon he was bent, then it is plain that to have kept the family together would have been injudicious, would have led to continual bickerings and jars, would have caused Ishmael's character to deteriorate, and have exposed Isaac to trials for which his quiet and gentle nature was unsuited. Clearly, the Divine approval, which would not have been given to spite[2] or to injustice, rested on Sarah's demand; and it was not because his wife urged him, but because God endorsed her words (Gen. xxi. 12), that Abraham adopted the course which Sarah had recommended, and sent his concubine and her son to seek their fortunes in the desert of Paran (ibid. ver. 21).

A strange lull must have followed their departure. The jars

[1] It is to be specially noticed that St. Paul, in Gal. iv. 29, uses the imperfect tense (ἐδίωκε), which is frequentative—"kept persecuting"—and not the aorist (ἐδίωξε).

[2] Sarah's insistence has been called "spiteful" (Deane, "Abraham: His Life and Times," p. 130).

and bickerings, the taunts and jeers, the persecution and the complaints that persecution naturally arouses, suddenly ceased. Sarah found herself without a rival, unquestioned mistress of the whole domestic establishment, with none to thwart or vex her, or spy upon her actions, or divide with her the affection of her husband. Isaac, no longer mocked or bullied, but on all sides flattered and made much of, experienced a pleasing, if not altogether a salutary, relief. Abraham exchanged a condition of perpetual disquiet and annoyance for one of domestic tranquillity and repose, only shadowed by occasional regret at his separation from a companion who had grown dear to him, and from a son whom he tenderly loved (Gen. xxi. 11). But sacrifices made at the command of God, however grievous, are always followed after a time by compensations; and the disappearance from his life of the two, who had possessed so much of his heart, enabled the patriarch to concentrate his affections upon the legitimate wife and the legitimate heir, and to give them a deeper, fuller, and intenser love than had been possible previously. In the hushed calm of so profoundly happy a family life Abraham's spirit doubtless gathered strength and refreshment, while Isaac profited vastly by a change which not only freed him from constant spiteful annoyance, but brought him so much nearer to his father, and made him the one object of that father's tender solicitude.

Isaac's boyhood, after the departure of Hagar and Ishmael, must have been a peculiarly delightful one. He was the apple of their eye to both his parents, known to both as "the son of promise" through whom God would do great things for mankind at large, the "only son" (Gen. xxii. 2) left to Abraham, absolutely the only child of Sarah, gentle, affectionate, tender-hearted, a boy to love and to be proud of. Like other Eastern children, he was no doubt until the age of eight or nine brought up in the female apartments, under the charge and under the careful supervision of his mother. He would then become his father's charge, and his constant companion. He would wander with the patriarch over the swelling slopes of the grey featureless hills, seeing that the flocks were rightly cared for, and that no danger threatened them; or he would rest at noontide under the shadow of a "white chalk cliff;"[1] or he would return at even to the patriarchal tent, with the shepherds, who led their

[1] Conder, "Our Work in Palestine," vol. ii. p. 84.

flocks back to the sheepfolds. He would become familiar with nature, as she shows herself on the verge of the desert, in all her varied aspects. The beautiful verdure of spring, the brilliant flowers of a thousand different hues, the pink and white blossom which covers the broom or "juniper" (1 Kings xix. 4), the numerous "tufts of plants and shrubs,"[1] the feathery tamarisk trees, now single, now clustered in a "grove," the showers, and "fierce rains," and occasional dense sand-storms of the spring season,[2] would be known to him so intimately as scarcely to obtain conscious notice. He would hear the lark carol in the bright blue sky, or even when seated on the ground, and see the plovers and the sand-grouse running along the chalky soil, and the pigeons and turtle-doves flying from tree to tree, and the jerboa[3] peeping from its burrows and then hastily concealing itself, and the vultures wheeling in wide circles through the sky on the outlook for a strayed lamb or a sick kid. As spring advanced into summer, he would see the flowers wither, the rich herbage shrink and pale, the hill-sides grow brown, the torrent courses dry up, the springs cease to flow, the hot air quiver and palpitate. Then, every evening, would the flocks and herds, weary and athirst, be collected by the herdsmen to the great wells at Beersheba and elsewhere, and boys and men would set to work to draw the precious liquid in buckets of skin from the deep recesses, the drawers keeping time together by the help of a rude chant, and waking the echoes of the rocks with a sound harsh and wild, yet musical. Soon the stone troughs would be filled, and the impatient animals be allowed to satiate their thirst, before being led away to be folded and secured for the night. Now and then, on such occasions, strife might arise. Though Abraham had made a covenant with Abimelech, the Philistine prince, and had had the property in certain wells conceded to him (Gen. xxi. 25–32), yet the rude nomads may not always have adhered to the compact, but, as when Isaac had become the chief of the tribe, the "herdsmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdsmen" (Gen. xxvi. 20, 21), so in his boyhood Isaac may have witnessed scenes of contest when water was scarce, and finding their own wells fail them, the Philistines, not over scrupulous about the difference between *meum* and *tuum*, may

[1] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 258.
[2] Ibid. p. 259. [3] Conder, vol. ii. p. 95.

have made a raid upon the wells of their neighbours. As summer passed into autumn, and autumn deepened into winter, the season of heavy rains, and even that of snow, would arrive; the torrent courses would be filled from time to time with a loud rush of turbid water, rendering them temporarily impassable; the flocks would require the carefullest tending to save them from the baneful effects of snow and frost upon the uplands, and of heavy rain on the plains;[1] sometimes they would have to be housed in some of the many caves with which the chalky cliffs are penetrated; above all, they would have to be guarded from the wolves, hyænas, and jackals, which are ever on the look-out for prey, and are most ravenous and most daring in the winter time. Isaac would grow familiar with all these sights and sounds as he gradually advanced from boyhood towards manhood, and would doubtless bear his part in much of the rough work that had to be done by the tribesmen; for the sons of sheikhs are not more delicate than their daughters, and, as the latter draw water for the household use (Gen. xxiv. 15) and for the flocks (Ex. ii. 16), so the former act as shepherds on occasion, and lead out the sheep and goats, and bring them home, and watch the folds, and take part in the shearing, and are ready to lend a hand whenever there is important work to be done and an extra hand is of value. Nurtured on the simplest food—milk and cheese principally—and passing the greater part of his time in the free and open air, engaged in healthful occupations, he would naturally grow up into a strong, active, vigorous youth, not perhaps so daring or adventurous as Ishmael, but still a youth of promise, with his physical nature well developed, his frame braced by exercise, his moral qualities such as the air of the desert is apt to produce in those who breathe it—brave, high-spirited, cheerful, capable of endurance—well suited to be the prop of his father's declining years, and to succeed him as sheikh of the tribe, which, after passing through great dangers and difficulties, was now entered upon a period of tranquillity.

But, if Isaac's character was formed in part and fixed by the outward circumstances of his life during these years, in all its most essential qualities it was still more determinately settled by the close relation into which he was brought with his father, Abraham—the "father of the faithful," and the "Friend of God."

[1] Geikie, vol. i. p. 225.

Great must have been the privilege, in those days, of close and continuous contact with one so deeply religious as Abraham, so full of an abiding trust in the Almighty, so perpetually conscious of the Divine Presence, so self-denying, so reverent, so full of high and holy aspirations. God-fearing men were few. It was Isaac's happy lot to have in his father one of God's specially chosen ones, and to have him almost wholly to himself, to be the main object of his care, with one exception his best-beloved, and his most constant companion. Good men have an atmosphere of piety around them which affects all who come within the sphere of their influence. Isaac *dwelt* in this atmosphere. Naturally, and without effort, he became partaker of those high thoughts concerning God which filled the patriarch's soul, shared his spirit of faith and of obedience, shared probably with him whatever knowledge God had vouchsafed him of the scheme of Redemption. It was an exceptionally happy boyhood. If the infancy of Isaac had been troubled by the petulant provocation of his rough and arrogant brother, at any rate his passage from infancy to manhood was a calm and placid time, a time to be ever remembered with devout thankfulness, as beyond the ordinary lot of man—tranquil, peaceful, and, above all, pure—free from those fleshly defilements which are the ruin of so many, free from all storms of passion and all sufferings of a violent kind—in thorough harmony with the name which had been given him by the direct command of God—the name of "the Smiling one."

CHAPTER III.

FIRST GREAT TRIAL.

Isaac called upon to accompany his father to Mount Moriah—The journey—His outward behaviour during the journey—His probable inward feelings—Isaac's question and Abraham's ambiguous response—The scene on Mount Moriah—Severity of Isaac's trial—His release—Influences and thoughts that sustained him during the trial.

THE tranquil life which Isaac had led from the age of three to, probably, that of about twenty, was suddenly broken in upon by a strange and terrible trial. Early one spring morning [1] he was summoned to sally forth with his father from the patriarchal tent, still pitched at Beersheba, on a journey of which the object was at first wholly unknown to him. Abraham had risen from his bed, had saddled the ass which he usually rode ; [2] had cleaved with his own hands a quantity of wood, had arranged it upon the back of the animal, had roused two of his men-servants from their sleep, and had then sent for his son Isaac, and together they had all started on a journey into the north country. He seems to have given no explanation of his purpose either to Isaac, or to any one else. Sarah certainly cannot have been apprised of it, or she would at least have bidden her loved ones adieu. Most likely she would have remonstrated, and made a scene; and this Abraham would naturally have been desirous of preventing, so that his departure without any notice to his wife is not surprising. The route taken was probably that which led north-eastward, over the bare limestone hills, by way of Anab and Debir (Dhaberiyeh) to Hebron,

[1] This is conjectural; but there seems a fitness in the type having been made to correspond to the anti-type in this as in other respects.

[2] "*His* ass" (Gen. xxii. 3).

where Abraham had friends, and thence nearly due north, by Bethlehem, to Jerusalem. The counter-theory, that Mount Gerizim was the point aimed at, though it has in its favour some great names, as those of Bleek, De Wette, Dean Stanley,[1] and Tuch, is scarcely more than a fancy, without support either from Scripture or from any tradition at all worthy of trust. "Moriah" is not "Moreh" (Gen. xii. 6), which is rather the name of a man than of a place (comp. Gen. xiv. 13). The word "Moriah" means "the Vision of Jehovah," the place where Jehovah was seen and worshipped, and is applied in Scripture to no other place but that sacred hill on which Solomon built his Temple (2 Chron. iii. 1), where the Shechinah, or "Glory of God," was from time to time wont to appear (2 Chron. vi. 14; vii. 3).

Starting off then from the encampment at Beersheba, Isaac, in company with his father and the two servants, and the ass bearing the cleft wood, proceeded to mount that rugged and rocky plateau, seamed with water-courses, which stretches from Beersheba to Hebron, and again, at a lower level, from Hebron to Jerusalem, forming a continuation of the great Samaritan and Judæan upland, which has been called "the backbone of Palestine." The table-land consists for the most part of open downs and arable soil of soft white chalk; but much of it rises up into rounded hills, from the sides and tops of which the bare limestone "stands out in huge sheets and rough masses, giving the whole landscape a ghastly white colour."[2] For some distance from Beersheba there are no trees. The land continually rises, sometimes in great sudden steps difficult to climb; and the ascent is so considerable and so constant that on the hills north of Hebron the traveller finds himself at an elevation of 2,700 feet[3] above that from which he started at Beersheba. Water is scarce; for many miles from Beersheba there are no streams and no springs. The traveller depends wholly upon wells, unless he has brought water with him, and so do the flocks and herds of the district during the greater part of the year. In spring, however, there is a burst

[1] "Sinai and Palestine," p. 251; "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. i. p. 49.

[2] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 362.

[3] Ibid. pp. 345, 346.

of verdure, accompanied by the usual carpet of flowers, and if the journey was made in the latter part of March, or the beginning of April, Isaac would see the upland plains and the hill slopes covered in many places with the loveliest tints, and would find the air scented with the sweetest perfume. At all times of the year there would be pasture. As Hebron was approached—especially if it was approached, as is likely, by way of El-Dilbeh—the general aspect of the country would improve. There are at El-Dilbeh fourteen springs, gathered into three groups, which form together a considerable brook, and the waters of which, if there were energy to utilize them, would suffice to turn the whole valley into a paradise.[1] Beyond El-Dilbeh the hills begin to show a clothing of trees and bushes; dwarf oak and arbutus appear, and on nearing Hebron are seen vineyards and olive-grounds, together with orchards of pear, fig, quince, pomegranate, apricots, and other fruits, extending in some directions for miles.[2] Anciently it is not to be supposed that there would have been so much variety, but still Hebron would have had special charms, with its grove of terebinth trees (Gen. xviii. i. Rev. Vers.), and its rich vineyards (Num. xiii. 22–23), and probably its figs and olives; and the tired travellers, having journeyed a distance of twenty miles over the hot hills, would naturally halt there, and refresh themselves in preparation for their further travel.

From the hills north of Hebron the country has a gentle descent, not of course without frequent interruptions, but still tolerably persistent, so that while near Hebron an elevation is attained of 3,500 feet above the sea level, the elevation at Bethlehem, fifteen miles further to the north, is no more than 2,550 feet.[3] The decline is thus one of very nearly a thousand feet. A rugged pathway, very direct, and sometimes paved with rough stones, but which can never have been passable for wheels, connects the two places, and has every appearance of having been always the highway between them. The scenery is still bleak and bare to a Western eye; but occasionally there are patches of verdure; a low scrub often clothes the sides of the hills, hiding the bare chalk; fine vineyards are to be seen growing on terraces here and there; olive grounds are frequent; and in places the soil is suitable for the cultivation of grain or

[1] "Quarterly Statements of Palestine Exploration Fund" for 1874, p. 55.
[2] Geikie, vol. i. p. 364. [3] Ibid. pp. 345, 431.

vegetables. Water is supplied no longer from wells, but from natural founts and sources, which are sometimes really copious. At Urtas, a few miles south-west of Bethlehem, are the extensive "Pools of Solomon," supplied by a number of springs,[1] while at the same site "a fountain sends forth an abundant supply of fine water, which flows in a bright murmuring stream, all the year round, down the valley." [2] Along its sides there are at the present day "gardens of citrons, pomegranates, figs, oranges, pears, apples, and cherries, intermingled with plots in which grow cauliflowers, turnips, and potatoes." [3] Further north, as Bethlehem is approached, the hills are now "terraced into a succession of hanging gardens, rich with olives and other fruit trees, great walls running along the ascent to form the level breadths. Down the valley rich groves flourish everywhere, till, as the eye follows them, green fields and ploughed land, in some directions, gradually take their place." [4] At the end of their second day's journey Abraham and Isaac may probably have found themselves in this locality, and have passed the night at Ephrath, which became Bethlehem (Gen. xxxv. 19). From the height on which Bethlehem stands they would have looked down on less cultivation, and less variety of foliage than the eye now rests upon, but probably upon a richer natural vegetation; dwarf oak would have covered the hill-sides, abundant grass and flowers the valleys. Still the general features of the scene would have been the same. Grey rock would have predominated in the view, whichever way the eye was turned; but the purple-pink Moabite ridge would show to the east, aglow with the bright tints of sunset, and the deep blue waters of the Dead Sea would be seen at their base, sunk in the shades of evening.

The third day was come, and the travellers once more set off, probably in the cool morning air, still shaping their course northward, and most likely pursuing the route that continues in use to the present day. They would pass the site of "Rachel's Tomb," [5] not as yet hallowed by the reception of her earthly remains, and would scarcely note it as in any way remarkable; and they would then, after a short descent, begin to mount the

[1] Robinson, "Researches in Palestine," vol. ii. pp. 164–167.
[2] Geikie, vol. i. p. 382. Compare Robinson, vol. ii. p. 168.
[3] So Geikie, vol. i. p. 383. [4] Ibid. p. 407.
[5] Ibid. p. 436. Compare Robinson, "Later Researches," p. 271.

longer and steeper incline, which leads to the summit of the ridge now crowned by the "Monastery of Great Elias." Here, on the top of this ridge, their steps were suddenly arrested. Abraham, lifting up his eyes, saw "afar off" (Gen. xxii. 4)—at the distance of about three miles—"the place of which God had told him" (ibid. ver. 3), and at once recognized it. The rocky summit stood up, directly opposite to him,[1] seen distinctly in that clear air, though as yet unoccupied by any building, and, with a thrill of anguish, he beheld the goal of his long journey, the place whereto he had been commanded to come, the spot as yet undistinguished, but now about shortly to attain its first distinction, and destined in the course of ages to become the most sacred spot on the entire earth's surface.

The journey, however, was not yet ended—it had but entered upon a new phase—a phase which demanded fewer witnesses, greater secrecy. "Abide ye here with the ass," said Abraham to his young men, "and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you" (Gen. xxii. 5). And Abraham took the wood, which he had cleaved, from off the back of the ass, and laid it upon Isaac, and took fire in his hand—a pan of burning charcoal probably—and a knife also; and the two descended the gentle decline on the northern side of the ridge, where the road sinks and sinks gradually, passing across the "Valley of Rephaim," by stony slopes that yet can produce fair crops of grain,[2] and leading into the "Valley of Hinnom," or deep cleft on the western side of the Holy Mountain. Then a last ascent had to be made. A steady rise of two hundred feet up the limestone hill[3] would bring the father and the son to the summit of the platform on which the Sacred City was afterwards built, and then a short walk over a slightly undulating surface would conduct them to the culminating point of the eastern hill, the "Mount Moriah" of the Bible.

What, we may now ask, was the outward conduct, and what must have been the inward thoughts, of Isaac, during this long journey? His father, it would seem, was preoccupied, did not

[1] Geikie, p. 454. It has been argued that a distance of three miles does not suit well with the phrase "afar off." But that phrase is used with a good deal of latitude by the sacred writers. (See Gen. xxxvii. 18; Ex. xxxiii. 7; Ezra. iii. 13, &c.)

[2] Geikie, p. 455.

[3] Ibid. p. 456.

take him into his confidence, went on his way in silence, oppressed with secret grief. Isaac, so far as his outward conduct went, was for the first two days simply acquiescent. We need not suppose that no words passed between the son and father, but the root of the matter was not touched upon. Neither Isaac nor the "young men" made any inquiry as to the object of the journey, or its probable duration, or the goal to which it was directed. Isaac, however, must have soon begun to form conjectures. It is not in the nature of active, lively, effervescent youth to be devoid of curiosity, contentedly to do whatever it is called upon to do without speculating on what is to come of it, calmly to await issues, and make no sign: or, at any rate, if it makes no sign, it does not any the less turn over in its secret thought all the various probabilities—nay, even the possibilities—of the situation. Isaac must soon have concluded that his father was bent upon a sacrifice. To what other purpose the cleft wood, and the knife, which no doubt hung from his girdle? Abraham had in the past erected altars in various places—at Sichem (Gen. xii. 6, 7), at a spot between Hai and Bethel (ibid. ver. 8), at the oak-grove of Mamre, near Hebron (Gen. xiii. 18)—might he not be intending to revisit one of these well-remembered scenes, and to make an offering on one of these long-disused altars? All the places lay towards the north; and it would not be till the second day, when Hebron was left behind, that the possibility of the journey being terminated by a sacrifice upon the altar at that place would have been eliminated. As the second day progressed, gloomier thoughts may have suggested themselves. If Abraham travelled on for the most part in absolute silence, bearing on his countenance the marks of a secret consuming sorrow, if he glanced at his son from time to time with looks that spoke of almost uncontrollable love and pity, if he was moody and unapproachable, wrapped in meditation and taking small heed of external objects, then it would be only natural that suspicion should arise in Isaac's mind as to the nature of the sacrifice that was contemplated. The Canaanitish nations, in contact with whom he had been brought up, were undoubtedly in the habit of offering their children—by preference their eldest sons—to the deities whom they worshipped.[1] Isaac could scarcely have grown to manhood without

[1] See Lev. xviii. 3, 21; 2 Kings xvii. 17. The Phœnicians probably adopted the practice (Philo Byblius, Fr. 5) from the Canaanites.

some knowledge of this horrid custom. Was his father contemplating a human sacrifice? And, if so, who was to be the victim? An inward thrill of pain, an awful shudder, must have passed over him when the idea first occurred, if it did occur, that the victim was perhaps to be himself. But as yet he said nothing—he asked no question—probably he put the thought away as a suggestion of the evil one. No—his father, his tender, loving father, from whom he had hitherto received nothing but protection, kindness, and anxious care, *could* not surely be meditating in his heart anything so unkind, anything so dreadful, as his own destruction! Was he not his father's best-beloved—the apple of his eye—his darling? And again, was he not the child of promise, the destined father of nations, he with whose *seed* God was about to establish an everlasting covenant? (Gen. xvii. 19). He *could* not be about to be cut off in his prime, before he had any children, before he was even married; for so the promises of God would be made of none effect, the distinct pledge—"In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. xxi. 12)—would fail. By such considerations and arguments Isaac may have calmed his fears for the first day, and the second day, but on the third day they must have revived again.

His father laid the wood upon him—separated him from the two faithful servants who had been his companions thus far—would have no witnesses of the deed that he was about to do—left the servants with the ass, and took with him his son only. And why? On what plea? "Abide ye here with the ass, while I and the lad will go yonder" (Gen. xxii. 5). But the ass was surely as much needed now as ever, to carry the heavy burden of wood up the steep side of the Holy Mountain. It must have been a grievous toil to Isaac to do so—a toil prefiguring that grievous trial of our Lord (John xix. 17) under which tradition says that He fainted. And the servants' strength might well have been utilized in bearing some of the wood, and in collecting the stones for the altar and building it up, instead of Abraham undertaking the task (Gen. xxii. 9) at his advanced age. The patriarch's plea could satisfy none of those who heard it, and his words had probably an untrue ring. "I and the lad will go yonder and worship *and come again* to you." He did not expect that *both* would "come again." Isaac was probably quick to note both unsatisfactory plea and false tone. More than ever

must his fears have been aroused. At length, therefore, speech is wrung from him—"My father," he says, "behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Ah! where is the lamb? Does he not feel, as he stands so lamblike by his father's side, that he is himself the lamb? Does he not at any rate suspect that this may be so? If he does, the reply will scarcely disarm suspicion—"My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (Gen. xxii. 8)—it is too oracular, too ambiguous, too obscure. But Isaac, in his gentle humility and submissiveness, accepts it, and says no more. "So they went both of them together."

Moriah was at length reached, and all further concealment on the part of Abraham was necessarily laid aside. Abraham collected stones, and built an altar, and arranged the wood upon it, as was proper for a burnt offering, and then proceeded to "bind Isaac his son" (Gen. xxii. 9). Now Isaac's trial reached its culminating point. He had suspected for days, but had hoped against hope, had half persuaded himself that his suspicions *could* not be well-founded, and had therefore kept his thoughts to himself, had appealed to no one for help, had made no attempt to escape. Now there could be no longer any doubt. If he submitted to be bound, he would be at his father's mercy, and could look for nothing but death. Should he then submit? "It is certain that he was old enough to resist his father's will had he been so minded, and that it must have been with his own free consent that he had allowed himself to be bound hand and foot with cords, and laid upon the altar."[1] He was in the full vigour of youth, probably about twenty years of age;[2] Abraham was verging upon a hundred and twenty. Nothing would have been physically easier than to have snatched the cords out of his father's hands, and carried them off, or flung them down the nearest precipice. He could have quitted the Mount, and thrown himself into the desert, as Ishmael had done before him (Gen. xxi. 20, 21), or he could have returned to Beersheba, and have appealed to the tribe to judge between him and his father. But he did not take either of these courses. On the contrary, he submitted himself unreservedly, allowed his limbs to be shackled with the constraining cords, made no resistance as he was lifted from the ground and placed upon the

[1] Deane, "Abraham: His Life and Times," pp. 144, 145.

[2] Josephus makes him twenty-five ("Ant. Jud." i. 14).

altar (Gen. xxii. 9), lay there impassive, tranquil, without an attempt to struggle—waiting the blow that was to end his life on earth, and either bring his existence to a close, or give him entrance into a new state of being.

Thus was Isaac tried on this great occasion, and thus he bore the trial. Attention has been so much concentrated on Abraham's part in the tremendous scene, that Isaac's has scarcely attracted any great share of men's thought or consideration. But, if the attitude of the father is grand, that of the son is not less so. Endurance is always more difficult than action. The father's faith, and enthusiasm, and zeal, nerved him to an almost superhuman deed of devotion. But the son was set a harder task. He had to "suffer and be still." It has been said, that "we scarce know which most to admire—the brave spirit of the patriarch, or the meek resignation of the youth";[1] but certainly the son "exceeds in humble endurance." He is the type of that Perfect Humanity, which, upon the cross, bore the worst that could be inflicted, patiently, uncomplainingly. His suffering, it is true, was in the spirit only, not in the flesh; but mental agony is sharper than any bodily anguish. Isaac's is the glory of having come near to his Lord's patience and uncomplainingness, and to have done so before the example was set, of his own proper notion as to how it was fitting to act.

The last agony was spared him. As the knife gleamed before his eyes, he heard the angelic voice which cried, "Abraham, Abraham" (Gen. xxii. 11), and arrested his father's arm, and went on to say, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me" (ibid. ver. 12). Then Isaac was released by his father, and the substitution of the ram made, and the scene was ended.

Can we to any extent conjecture what thoughts, feelings, or influences sustained Isaac under his trial, and produced his calm submissiveness? First, there would be the habit of obedience. Isaac had all his life been accustomed to obey his father absolutely in all that he commanded, and his instinct would be to obey and submit, unless some very strong emotion prompted an opposite course. Secondly, there would be his implicit confidence in his father's care and love for him, his feeling that, whatever were the appearances, his father must

[1] Deane's "Abraham," p. 145.

really have his welfare in view, and would not hurt him unnecessarily. Thirdly, as Abraham must have thought human sacrifices permissible in certain cases, when he "took the knife to slay his son" (Gen. xxii. 10), so Isaac may have thought; and he may even have reached the surmise, that it was God's will which his father was executing. Fathers were in ancient times regarded by many nations as having the power of life and death over their children. We know too little of early Semitic beliefs and customs to be sure what were the Semitic ideas on this subject; but it is quite conceivable that they held the view[1] which was common to many Asiatic peoples with the Romans. As a Roman son would have quietly submitted to death at his father's hand, so Isaac may have regarded it as his duty to submit. Finally, he may have been upheld in his patient unresisting submission by the thought and hope of a future life. It has been too much the habit of modern theologians to accept the arguments of Warburton in his "Divine Legation," and to regard the patriarchs generally as looking only for transitory promises; but the discoveries of modern times have shown, that, not in Egypt alone, but in Assyria and Babylonia also,[2] the expectation of a future life prevailed from the very earliest times; and it is inconceivable that Abraham, with his spiritual leanings, should not have gone as far at least as the Chaldæans, with whom he was brought up at Ur, in the expectations and longings which constitute a main part of natural religion, and which were certainly a part of the Chaldæan primitive belief. If then Abraham "looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker was God" (Heb. xi. 10), so must Isaac have done; and this belief, and confident outlook, would have been a very powerful support and stay to him, when his trial came, and he had to choose between yielding himself wholly to his father's will, and making an unseemly and desperate resistance.

[1] See Gen. xlii. 37.

[2] See the Author's "Religions of the Ancient World," pp. 62–64.

CHAPTER IV.

MARRIAGE.

Isaac's return to Beersheba—Death of his mother—His grief—His marriage determined on—Abraham's servant sent to Haran—Scene between the servant and Rebekah—Communications between the servant and Laban—Rebekah's willingness—The return journey—Meeting of Rebekah and Isaac—Marriage.

ISAAC and Abraham returned together to Beersheba (Gen. xxii. 19), their mutual affection probably enhanced by the terrible trial which both of them had undergone. Isaac, no doubt, recognized the truth, that the trial was from God, and that his father was in no way to blame for its bitterness and severity. The two were drawn the more closely together by the threatened separation. The son had seen his father's anguish; the father had witnessed his son's submissiveness; each had become more convinced than before of the strong love borne him by the other; each was probably henceforth more regardful of the other's feelings, more tender, more anxious to please. It would seem that they continued to live together, first at Beersheba, and later on at Hebron, for about seventeen years, before any further event happened to disturb the domestic peace and tranquillity. Then Sarah died. At the age of a hundred and twenty-seven (Gen. xxiii. 1), thirty-seven years after she had given birth to Isaac, the pattern wife (1 Pet. iii. 6) and—may we not add?—pattern mother, so jealous for her child, so careful of his interests (Gen. xxi. 10), passed away. The death of a parent at so advanced an age could not greatly shock or surprise; but it was felt nevertheless deeply, poignantly; and Isaac continued for three years after his mother's death, sad

and uncomforted (Gen. xxiv. 67). Then Abraham, either because he took note of his son's prolonged grief, and thought the time had arrived for checking a feeling that was in danger of becoming morbid, or because he himself wished to re-marry, and deemed it right that Isaac should be settled in life, and have his own household before his father's household should undergo so great a change and one that would be naturally so distasteful to him, resolved to make arrangements for his son's marriage.[1] Marriage in the East is rarely left to the mere personal preference of the individual. Great sheikhs, especially, arrange the marriages of their sons with extreme care,[2] determining both the time of life at which they shall marry, and very frequently selecting the individual. Purity of blood is held in high esteem; and, as there is a general rule not to marry out of the tribe, so, in many tribes, there is a strong inclination to seek for the wife who is to carry on the family among near relations. In Abraham's case there was more than ordinary difficulty in procuring a suitable bride for his only legitimate son, first of all, from the fact that the nations of his immediate neighbourhood were, one and all, worshippers of idols, and secondly, from the circumstance, that the collateral branches of his family, to which he would naturally look, according to the ideas of the time and social phase, resided at so great a distance. Haran, or Harran, from which Abraham had come to Palestine, and where he had left all his near relatives, was distant from Beersheba at least four hundred and fifty miles, and by any practicable route must have been distant at least fifty miles further. The most direct route, that by way of the Hauran (Auranitis), Damascus, and Tadmor, was in great part destitute of water. The route most ordinarily used, at any rate in later times, up the Cœlesyrian valley to the site of Antioch, and then by Aleppo and Bir to Harran, was very circuitous. Consequently, from the time of Abraham's removal into Palestine there can have been but little intercourse between the different branches of the Terahites, though it appears that there was some intercourse, since Abraham knew that his brother, Nahor, had a large family of sons, and at least one grand-daughter (Gen. xxii. 20–22). Under all the circumstances, Abraham

[1] So Jewish tradition (Beer, "Leben Abrahams," pp. 83, 198).
[2] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 438.

came to the conclusion, that his best course would be to re-open communications between his branch of the Terahites and those which had remained in Mesopotamia, and to seek a wife for his son among the unmarried females belonging to the houses of Haran and Nahor.

He did not, however, deem it right to send Isaac himself on this quest. It is not improbable that the perils of the journey were considerable, since wild tribes roamed freely in those early days over all the Syrian and Mesopotamian lowlands, which do not seem to have been as yet under any settled government. Isaac's life was too valuable to be risked. The task was therefore confided to a trusty servant, "the eldest servant of the house, and the ruler over all Abraham's substance" (Gen. xxiv. 2), in whom most commentators have seen the "steward," who once filled the position of heir-presumptive (ibid. xv. 2), Eliezer of Damascus. Eliezer's local knowledge might point him out for the service on which he was sent, and it is even possible that he may have had relations with some of the desert tribes, which made it safer for him than for another to adventure his person among them. He was not allowed, however, to set forth as a mere private person, but took his departure with some pomp, as an envoy sent from chief to chief, with an important business to negotiate. Ten camels accompanied him, laden with provisions and presents for the bride and for her family—"all the goods of his master" (Gen. xxiv. 10)—and no doubt he had a sufficient escort of guards and attendants, always necessary in those regions.[1] Nothing is told us of the route which he selected, or of the manner in which he crossed the Euphrates; but as in the spring, before the melting of the snows, the river between the thirtieth and thirty-second parallels is fordable in places, we may suppose that the camels were able to pass it with their loads, and that the men who accompanied them either constructed rafts or got across by swimming.[2]

The envoy, at any rate, reached his destination, and arriving near the city of Harran towards the evening, halted by a well of water outside the town, as a Bedouin or nomad would naturally do,[3] and, making his camels kneel down (Gen. xxiv. 11),

[1] See Ezra viii. 22.

[2] Compare the Assyrian sculptures, *passim*.

[3] The nomadic population of Palestine and Syria hates to enter a town, and usually camps for the night outside the walls.

relieved them of their loads and prepared to water them. But first, he must think of his errand. He knew he was at the place where, "at the time of the evening," the women would "go out to draw water" (ibid.). So he waited, and while waiting prayed, not in any spirit of advanced faith, but as a Bedouin of the time would be likely to pray—"O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water, and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink, and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also; let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast shewed kindness unto my master" (ibid. vers. 12–14). It would have been simpler and more straightforward to go into the city, and ask for Nahor, or his nearest male representative, and open the matter to him privately. But the Bedouin mind likes indirect courses, rejoices in signs and omens, and does not feel it to be irreligious to leave to the arbitrament of chance even the most important issues. Eliezer therefore, or whoever was the messenger, took the course sketched out in his prayer. He waited, and when a damsel came out of the city, carrying a pitcher, and "went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up" (ibid. ver. 16), he addressed her as he had proposed to do, and carefully noted her reply. Without corresponding exactly to the terms which he had laid down, it was sufficiently near them to make him suspect that his prayer was answered; for after saying, "Drink, my lord," and putting the pitcher to his lips, she added, "I will draw for thy camels also" (ibid. vers. 18, 19). And the word was followed by the deed. "She hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels." A charming picture of combined simplicity and kindliness! The messenger stood awhile wondering, whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not (ibid. ver. 21), and then put the crucial inquiry, "Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee"—to which he received the answer that he had hoped for, but scarcely ventured to expect—"I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor." Of Abraham's kindred on both sides, uniting the blood of Nahor with the

blood of Haran, and having in her veins no admixture of any foreign element, she was exactly the bride that was wanted by Abraham for his son. The messenger felt that his steps had been divinely guided, and that his way had indeed prospered: so he brought forth from his treasures adornments suitable for a bride—a nose-ring,[1] probably (Isa. iii. 21), of half a shekél weight, and two bracelets for the hands of ten shekels weight of gold (Gen. xxiv. 22), and put them on the blushing maiden, who could not fail to half understand, and who ran away to hide herself in her mother's arms (ibid. ver. 28) after proffering to the stranger the hospitality of her father's residence.

Eliezer, however, if we may so call him, was in no haste to avail himself of the invitation. He still remained by the well. It would not have been consonant with Oriental etiquette for him to have thrust himself over-readily on the hospitality of one wholly unconnected with him. He therefore waited. His errand would, he felt, be guessed from the presents which he had made to the damsel. If the dispositions of the damsel's nearest male relatives were favourable to it, they would come out and press their offers of entertainment on him. If not, he could abide where he was.

In the residence of Bethuel, Rebekah's news produced considerable stir. Laban, her brother, appears to have been favourably impressed. Bethuel, her father, was perhaps ill,[2] perhaps imbecile. Laban was, practically, the head of the household, and had to determine what should be done. He at once gave his orders, had apartments prepared for the stranger and his retinue, and room made for the camels. He then went in person to the spot where he understood the stranger to be, and warmly pressed him to become his guest. "Come in," he said, "thou blessed of Jehovah; wherefore standest thou without? For I have prepared the house, and room for the camels" (Gen. xxiv. 31). His invitation was accepted—"the man came into the house, and ungirded his camels" (ibid. ver. 32); and Laban provided straw and provender for the beasts, and had water brought for the

[1] The use of the singular number is against the translation of the A.V., "ear-ring." The rendering "nose-ring" has the support of Gesenius, Winer, Rosenmüller, Hartmann, Schröder, and others.

[2] Jewish tradition says that he died on the day of Eliezer's arrival ("Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 151).

stranger and his retinue to wash their feet, and refreshments prepared and set before them. But Eliezer refused to eat: he must first tell his errand. So he proceeded to set forth who he was, and what instructions he had received from Abraham, and what had happened between him and Rebekah at the well, taking occasion also by the way to enlarge upon the wealth of Abraham in flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses (ibid. ver. 35), to notify that Isaac, for whom he was seeking a wife, was heir of all, and to imply that he was not too old for Rebekah, since he was the child of Sarah's old age. The result was that Laban was persuaded; and he and Bethuel gave their formal consent to the marriage—"The thing," they said, "proceedeth from the Lord"—we can say nothing—"we cannot speak unto thee good or bad. Behold Rebekah is before thee; take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken." Then the faithful steward, having done his master's bidding, and procured him the wish of his heart, proceeded to return thanks to God for his good success—"he worshipped the Lord, bowing himself down to the earth" (Gen. xxiv. 52). And his duties towards God and man being thus properly discharged, he consented at length to think of himself, and to accept the proffered entertainment—"They did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night" in Bethuel's house.

The marriage had been negotiated. The customary presents, whereby a bride was bought of her relatives by the bridegroom,[1] had been handed over (Gen. xxiv. 53); but the consent of the maiden had not been asked. Oriental custom assigns to the father, or brother, the duty of arranging for the marriage of each maiden of the house as she becomes marriageable, and takes the acquiescence of the maiden herself for granted. It would be indelicate on her part to have an opinion. But in this case it so happened that the bride was able to show something more than her mere acquiescence in the disposal made of her. Eliezer, having concluded the compact, and rested himself and his company for a single night under the hospitable roof of Bethuel, was eager to be gone, so soon as the morning broke, in order to shorten the term of suspense

[1] Ginsburg in Kitto's "Cyclopædia," s.v. *Marriage.*

and anxiety for his master. He asked, therefore, to be allowed to take his departure, and carry away with him the bride, at once. But the relations protested. Their feelings must be considered. They must be allowed time to brace themselves for the parting. "Let the damsel," they said, "abide with us some days, at least ten"[1] (ibid. ver. 55): "after that, she shall go." But Eliezer was not to be persuaded: he still urged his request, that he might be permitted to set forth without delay. At last it was agreed to refer the matter to Rebekah herself, and let her decide it. "So they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go." Though her affections could not yet have been touched, her imagination at any rate was pleased with the prospect opened to her, and she accepted her new position willingly. It was something to have been sought in marriage from such a distance for the son of so great a sheikh; it was more to have been the object of special Providential care and guidance. She was therefore willing to go, and to go at once. Hereupon her relations yielded, and sent her away, with her attendant maidens, and her old nurse, Deborah (Gen. xxxv. 8), invoking blessings on her head, and exclaiming—"O our sister, be thou the mother of thousands of ten thousands, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them" (Gen. xxiv. 60, Revised Version).

The bridal party went forth from "the city of Nahor," Eliezer, and his men, and the ten camels, and Rebekah, and Deborah, and Rebekah's maidens, in a long procession. The women were made to mount upon the beasts, in consideration of the weakness of their sex (ibid. ver. 61); and their gay dresses and golden ornaments and trinkets shone brightly in the morning sun. Camel followed camel in a long string, each probably led by his own special driver, intimately acquainted with his temper and his ways. Eliezer, with the rest of his retinue, brought up the rear, the old man probably seated upon an ass, or upon the hindmost camel. Slowly they journeyed southward or south-westward, for the tender maidens would scarcely be able to endure the jolting of the camels for many hours at a time. Safely they passed the Euphrates at one of the well-known fords, probably either at Bir, or Thapsacus (Tiphsach),

[1] Others translate, "a week or ten days" ("Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 151).

and steadily, if slowly, they pursued their journey, by the longer or the shorter route,[1] to Palestine.

Meanwhile Isaac had remained at Beersheba or in its neighbourhood, still dwelling with his father Abraham, and with the varying seasons moving from place to place. He had just returned one evening from visiting the well Lahai-roi,[2] and had gone out alone into the plain, either to meditate, or to gather sticks for the evening fire,[3] when, lifting up his eyes, he saw a caravan of camels approaching from the north, which at once arrested his attention, and caused him to bend his steps in their direction. If they proved a caravan of strangers, it would be his duty to offer them hospitality ; but he may at once have suspected that they were not strangers. Calculations had been doubtless made, by himself or Abraham, as to the time at which Eliezer might be expected to return from Haran, and the time must have been known to be approaching. A *small* caravan, coming from the *north*, was exactly what had been looked for, and Isaac would no sooner discern it on the far horizon, than he would conjecture that here was Eliezer bringing home his bride. When the camels came near enough to be counted, conjecture would become conviction, and when female figures were seen mounted on most of the camels, conviction would pass into certainty. Isaac quickened his steps. Rebekah, on her part, seeing a man of a dignified presence approaching, put a question to Eliezer—"What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?" (Gen. xxiv. 65) ; and Eliezer, who had recognized Isaac, replied, "It is my master." Then Rebekah did "just as an Arab bride would do now on being brought to her future husband"[4]—she hastened to veil herself with "the long cloak-like veil"[5] with which Eastern women cover, not the face only, but the whole body, since she must not appear unveiled in the presence of the bridegroom before marriage ; and she "lighted off the camel" (ibid. ver. 64), not so much because she saw before her a man of distinction, as because it would have been

[1] See above, p. 27.

[2] The site of Lahai-roi is doubtful, but it can scarcely have been so far from Beersheba as *Ain Muweileh*, where Geikie and others place it.

[3] So Bottcher, "Ærenlesen," vol. i. p. 19.

[4] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 439.

[5] "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 152.

unseemly for her to continue to ride while her future husband was on foot. She acted in every way suitably; and Isaac, having heard what Eliezer had to tell, and seen the maiden's modesty and grace, was content, and had her conducted to the portion of Abraham's tent which had been his mother's, and there installed as its mistress.

The marriage ceremony would follow. We do not really know what were the ceremonies of a Hebrew wedding at this early date. But the following description by one intimately acquainted with the East may be accepted as probably giving no very untrue account: "Rebekah would be led to the tent by her nurse and her maids who had come with her; but, one by one, these would leave her, till she was all alone with the nurse, wondering whether she would please Isaac when he came. After a time the nurse would throw a shawl over her head, and, a signal having been given, the curtain would be pushed aside for a moment, and the bridegroom would enter and the nurse withdraw. Now came the moment for removing the veil, or shawl, that hid the bride's face. If he had been a modern Oriental, Isaac would have said, 'In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful,' and then raising the shawl would greet his wife with the words, 'Blessed be this night,' to which her answer would be, 'God bless thee.' This was the first time Isaac had seen Rebekah unveiled; and it would be an anxious matter for the nurse and the maids, and, above all, for Rebekah herself, whether she pleased or disappointed her husband, for there might have been an anticipation of Jacob's trouble, by finding a Leah instead of a Rachel. But Rebekah's face pleased her future lord, as indeed the face of a bride generally does a bridegroom; and he would announce this fact to the anxious women outside, who forthwith, no doubt, set up a shrill cry of delight, just as their sisters who stand in the same relation to a young wife do now. To the Semitic races this shout of the triumphant and satisfied bridegroom is one of the most delightful sounds that can be uttered, and has been so for immemorial ages; and it is to this that our Saviour alludes when He says, 'He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice." [1]

[1] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. pp. 439, 440.

CHAPTER V.

EARLY MARRIED LIFE.

Abraham gives Isaac a step-mother in Keturah—Her sons—Rebekah's barrenness and Isaac's prayer with respect to it—Prophecy given to Rebekah—Birth of Esau and Jacob—Abraham with his grandsons—His death and burial—Probable reconciliation between Ishmael and Isaac—Isaac's removal to Labai-roi, and life there—Contrast of disposition between his sons—Parental leanings—Esau sells his birthright to Jacob—Consequences.

SHORTLY after Isaac's marriage had been concluded, and Rebekah received into the tribe as the legitimate wife of the heir-apparent, Abraham allowed himself the solace of a second "concubine-wife" (1 Chron. i. 32), by name Keturah. The idea that this Keturah was really Hagar, whom Abraham received back under a new name,[1] is a mere Jewish fancy, quite inconsistent with the plain words of Scripture, which tell us of Abraham's "concubines," in the plural (Gen. xxv. 6), and assign to Keturah six children only (ibid. ver. 2; comp. 2 Chron. i. 32), of whom Ishmael is not one. She was probably a young woman, such as aged sheikhs seek to comfort their old age; and she bore to Abraham in rapid succession six sons, who received the names of Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. The birth of these sons made, however, no difference in the affectionate terms on which Abraham and Isaac still lived together; Abraham continued to regard Isaac as his sole heir (Gen. xxv. 5); and, as the sons of Keturah grew to manhood, he portioned them sufficiently, and "sent them away from Isaac his son" (ibid. ver. 6),

[1] So Rashi and R. Eliezer in "Pirke," c. 30; and even Jerome ("Quæst. in Gen.").

that they might in no way trouble or molest him. Their dwelling-place was "the East country,"[1] or the tract east and south-east of Palestine, which is chiefly desert, but has some fertile oases. Isaac remained at Beersheba, or in its neighbourhood, leading a peaceful and eventless life from the age of forty to that of sixty (Gen. xxv. 20, 26), happy in the affection of his father, and in the warm love which he bore to his young wife[2] (ibid. xxiv. 67), only disturbed in mind on one account, namely, that Rebekah appeared to be, like Sarah, barren, no child having been borne to him by her for above nineteen years from their wedding-day, and no prospect of a child showing itself. Doubtless, Rebekah herself was deeply distressed. Like Sarah, like Hannah, she felt her barrenness as a sign of the Divine disfavour, as well as a reproach, lowering her in the eyes of men. What had she done that God should "shut up her womb"? (1 Sam. i. 5). Was she not worthy to bear the promised seed, and through her unworthiness was the promise to be made of none effect? When she caught her husband's eye resting sorrowfully upon her, or saw him cast envious glances at the children of happier men, what a sharp pang of anguish would wring her soul! How bitterly would she feel the disappointment of the husband she so tenderly loved, and of the father-in-law, whom she could not fail to respect! Abraham, we may be sure, when he sought a wife for his son Isaac, had hoped to clasp in his arms, and dandle on his knee, an infant grandchild, one further link in the sacred chain that was to connect him with the "Desire of all nations," the special "seed" in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed (Gal. iii. 16). Rebekah's failure to bear children would grieve him almost as much as Isaac. Isaac, however, was the first to seek, and to seek in the right quarter, a remedy for the misfortune. He "intreated the Lord for his wife" (Gen. xxv. 21). Greatly desiring issue himself, and perhaps moved by the spectacle of Rebekah's silent sorrow, he in the twentieth year after his marriage, when he had reached the age of sixty, took the cause before God,

[1] The Beni Kedem, or "Children of the East," joined with the Midianites and Amalekites in Judges vi. 3 and vii. 12, may have been the descendants of these sons of Keturah.

[2] Probably about twenty-six years younger than himself, fourteen when he was forty, thirty-four when he was sixty.

and pleaded earnestly on his wife's behalf and on his own. It is thought that he made a formal solemn sacrifice before the altar at Beersheba, offering incense upon it,[1] and praying before it at great length, urging his request importunately. And the request was granted. Not long after, Rebekah conceived (Gen. l.s.c.). When the new life began to stir within her, the unaccustomed movement at her time of life caused her so much pain and discomfort, that she repented of having desired a child, and petulantly exclaimed[2]—"If it was to be thus with me, why did I conceive?" So it is often with foolish, impatient, ungrateful humanity. We pray for what we regard as a blessing, without counting the cost. It is granted us, and at once we begin to complain and to repine. We had not reckoned on the drawbacks that are attached to every earthly advantage, and would buy relief from a little present annoyance by the sacrifice of the far more important future benefit of which we had once thought so much.

Rebekah, however, had too much natural piety, and was too far advanced in the school of grace, through contact with such characters as those of her husband and father-in-law, to be petulant in act, even if she was now and then petulant in speech. She knew where every trouble should be taken, and, alarmed at movements which, she thought, portended evil to herself or offspring, she determined to "inquire of the Lord" (Gen. xxv. 22). There must have been some recognized mode of making such inquiry at the time in the family of Abraham, and some way in which those who inquired obtained a Divine response. Perhaps, priests of God, like Melchizedek (Gen. xiv. 18), or prophets, like Abraham (Gen. xx. 7), were consulted, and empowered by inspiration to give replies. Perhaps, there was a method by which an inquirer passed into the ecstatic state, and while in that state saw visions, or heard words, which conveyed to him a message from God. In the present instance the response was in the recognized prophetic form of "antistrophic parallelism,"[3] and ran as follows:—

[1] Gesenius, "Thesaurus Hebraicus," p. 1085; Deane, "Abraham: His Life and Times," p. 168.

[2] The words are variously rendered and explained. This is the explanation of the Targums, and is adopted in the Vulgate.

[3] "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 155. On the use of this rhythm in prophecies, see Gen. iv. 23, 24; ix. 25-27.

> Two nations are in thy womb,
> And two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels:
> And the one people shall be stronger than the other people;
> And the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. xxv. 23)—

but whether it was heard in ecstasy, or delivered from the mouth of Abraham, or Melchizedek, or made known to the anxious mother in any other way, it is impossible to determine. She would gather from it that she bore twins in her womb, that both would come safely to the birth, that each would be the progenitor of a nation, and that God's special blessing would rest upon the younger. The movements that she felt typified the strife of the two kindred peoples, but did not portend any immediate ill result, either to herself or to her offspring.

Time went on. "Her days to be delivered were fulfilled" (Gen. xxv. 24); and the prophecy received a first accomplishment. Twin boys proved to be in Rebekah's womb, and came to the birth, one after the other: and she was safely delivered of them. There was a physical contrast between the two. "The first came out ruddy, all over like a hairy garment" (ibid. ver. 25, Rev. Vers.); and Rebekah, or her attendants, "called his name Esau," *i.e.*, "hairy." The second had neither a red skin, nor any hair upon it; but his hand had hold on his brother's heel when he was born, and therefore he was named Jacob, *i.e.*, "he that takes by the heel"—or, as the word came to be understood at a later date (Gen. xxvii. 36), "the Supplanter," "he who takes by the heel to trip up." Great must have been the joy of both parents, and great the joy of Abraham, at the double birth. Such births are uncommon in the East, as elsewhere, and, when they occur, are reckoned a special blessing. Rebekah could not but deem herself happy in having thus not only escaped her reproach, but placed herself in the rank of women favoured by God above others. Her husband's affection towards her; and pride in her, would be stimulated; and the domestic circle would—at any rate for some years—be enlivened, brightened, and made happier.

It would seem that Abraham's life was prolonged sufficiently for him to see his grandsons grow up almost to manhood. Chronologists calculate from the Biblical numbers, that he was alive till Esau and Jacob had attained their fifteenth year.[1]

[1] "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 151.

Thus, the boys "grew up under their grandfather's eye."[1] During so long a space he was enabled to experience the joys for which he had in past years sighed—the delight of "beholding his children's children," and amusing himself with them, and instructing them, and waking up to life their nascent intelligence. There is a curious sympathy, for the most part, between grandparents and grandchildren. Special traits of character drop out for a generation, to reappear in the third degree of descent; and the grandfather is apt to understand and appreciate his son's children more than the son himself, who has the burden and responsibility of them, and feels anxieties which the grandsire does not share.

It would not be difficult to draw in some detail a pleasing picture of this grandfather and these grandchildren. The aged patriarch, with his long white beard and snowy hair, still hale and hearty at the age of a hundred and seventy years (Gen. xxv. 7, 8), sitting on the ground outside his tent in the cheerful light of the sun, in spring or autumn, his grandchildren playing at his knee, stroking his cheek or his beard, and plying him with the incessant questions—questions so hard to answer—with which the innocent curiosity of childhood tries the patience and sagacity of old age. Fondly would his eye rest on each—each in some sort the child of promise—each destined to share in the great and often-repeated blessing—"I will multiply thee exceedingly, and make thee exceeding fruitful, and thou shalt be a father of many nations, and kings shall come out of thee; and thy seed will I multiply as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies." Curiously would he speculate upon the different fortunes awaiting the two children, of whom the elder was to serve the younger, and of whom, while both were strong, the younger was to be the "stronger." Little reeking of such distant matters, the twin boys would be engaged in games, or quarrels, or mimic fights, each striving to surpass the other, and appealing at intervals to their grandsire for his judgment as to which of them had shown himself the superior. But historians are not allowed to give free flight to their fancy. It is at most permitted them covertly to indulge it within limits for the enlivenment of their narrative, which would

[1] Deane, "Abraham: His Life and Times," p. 169.

otherwise be, it is to be feared, to most of their readers, "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable."

When Isaac's twin sons had reached the age of fifteen, Abraham died. He had lived to the great age, as we now regard it, of one hundred and seventy-five. But his father, Terah, had exceeded this length of life by thirty years (Gen. xi. 32), and it did not perhaps, either to himself or to his contemporaries, appear extraordinary. The physical strength of man was greater in those early days than it has now become, the conditions of life were more healthful, and the approaches of decay slower. Isaac, as we shall find, had even a longer life than his father (Gen. xxxv. 28), and Jacob, who considered his days to be "few and evil" (Gen. xlvii. 9), reached the term of a hundred and forty-seven years. It is likely that Abraham retained his faculties to the last, and not impossible that, as the legend of his death tells us,[1] his great desire upon his deathbed was to bless, instruct, and impress the dearer of his two grandsons, Jacob, whom he knew to be the heir of the promises. The particular lessons of piety and morality recorded in the "Book of Jubilees" have but little claim on our attention; but it may well be that the aged saint was occupied during his last hours with thoughts respecting the future of his race, and that it was to Jacob especially that he gave his latest words of counsel, warning, and encouragement. Isaac was present, and perhaps Ishmael, who at any rate bore a part in the funeral ceremony (Gen. xxv. 9); and the two sons, brought together by the sad occasion after having been separated for so long a time, may probably have been softened by the common affliction and reconciled to one another.[2] At any rate, conjointly they conducted the solemn ceremony of the interment, took their father's body to the cave of Macpelah at Kirjath-Arba or Hebron, and laid it in the tomb, purchased long before of Ephron the Hittite, by the side of the mortal remains of Sarah. There it is possible that the bodies rest to this day,[3] perhaps not yet resolved to dust, in the dry air of the caverns (ibid. vers. 9, 10).

Isaac, after the death of his father, appears to have removed

[1] See the "Book of Jubilees," ch. xxii. (ed. Rönsch).

[2] "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 154.

[3] See Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. i., Appendix II. pp. 488–513.

from Beersheba, and transferred his residence to the neighbourhood of the well Lahai-roi (ibid. ver. 11). We are told that "God blessed him;" and we may regard him as living prosperously and contentedly in the Negeb, "or South country," growing continually richer in flocks and herds, beloved by all the tribesmen for his gentle and amiable disposition, and enjoying a more than ordinary share of domestic peace and tranquillity. One of his chief pleasures must have been to watch the development of his twin sons' characters, and check or encourage their several tendencies. Unlike most twins, who are remarkable for the extreme affection which they bear one another, as well as for general similarity of disposition, the sons of Isaac exhibited from the first a marked contrast of temperament and inclinations, such as the physical difference between them, which had been noted at their birth (Gen. xxv. 25, 26), perhaps indicated. Esau resembled his uncle, Ishmael. He, too, was a "wild man." Tent life had no charm for him; the sports of the field formed his sole delight and his constant occupation. Roaming from morn to night over the Negeb, and the still more savage tracts, on which it adjoins, he passed his time in the chase of the wild animals that inhabited those regions, then probably much more numerous and more varied than is the case at the present day. A modern sportsman will scarcely find much to engage his attention, either on the high upland of the Negeb, or even in the desert of Tih; but in ancient times lions may have wandered into these parts from Philistia (Judg. xiv. 5); leopards and lynxes may have been more common; the antelope tribe, represented in Scripture by "the hart, and the gazelle, and the roebuck, and the pygarg, and the chamois" (Deut. xiv. 5), may have bounded freely over the plains or hidden themselves among the tangled rocks, and the ibex and wild sheep may have frequented the desolate valleys Esau threw himself into the wild and half savage life of the primitive hunter, consorted with the wholly unsettled tribes which came and went as the seasons changed, now shadowing the thin verdure of the southern plains with their dark tents of goats' hair, anon transported to the skirts of Gilead or to the vicinity of the Euphrates. His enterprise and daring charmed his peaceful father, who naturally admired in another the qualities in which he himself was deficient. Esau

became his father's favourite, and perhaps returned his affection—at any rate was careful to foster it by small attentions, which Isaac did not fail to appreciate. When he returned at evening from his long hunting expeditions, tired in every limb, he would nevertheless see that some of his venison was set before his father, who delighted in the "savoury meat" (Gen. xxvii. 4), "longed for it," and "loved" Esau all the more on account of it. A strange mixture of worthy with unworthy motives! The father admires his son's activity and daring, is pleased by his attentions, but "loves him because he did eat of his venison" (ibid. xxv. 28), giving evidence thereby of a spirit, which, lapped in a life of ease, had become in a certain measure tainted with sensuality, not of a gross kind, indeed, but still such as seriously to weaken his character, and to place him on a lower level of spiritual development than either his father Abraham or his son Jacob.

The leanings of Jacob differed wholly from those of Esau. He was "a plain man, dwelling in tents" (ibid. xxv. 27). Hunting had no attractions for him. "He was a man of steady, domestic habits."[1] Instead of wandering abroad over the wild country, on the verge of which he dwelt, and engaging day by day in the excitement of the chase, "he stayed at home, attending to the pasturing of the flocks and the business of the family,"[2] so gaining a reputation the exact opposite of Esau's—that of "a plain man," quiet, homely, unadventurous—plodding, it might be, but safe. To a son of such a temper—which in a great measure reflected her husband's—Rebekah was irresistibly attracted; and the favour of the father towards the elder, was balanced by the inclination of the mother towards the younger, twin (ibid. ver. 28). Unfortunately, the mother's influence was, in this case, not wholly for good. Jacob grew up with high notions of the rights and privileges that attached to him as the future lord of the tribe and the inheritor of the promises, but not inclined to be very scrupulous as to the methods which he should employ in securing his rights and accomplishing the ends of Providence. His mother probably stimulated his ambition by often repeating to him the oracle which she had received of God—"Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one nation shall be stronger than the other nation; and

[1] "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 156. [2] Ibid.

the elder shall serve the younger." At the same time she would recommend him to watch and wait—to do nothing hastily—above all, not to think of resorting to violence, or of matching his undeveloped *physique* against the exceptional strength of the trained hunter and athlete, hardened by continual exercise, by exposure to the extremes of heat and cold, by daily toils and nightly watches, and by frequent encounters with wild beasts. The woman's weapon is art, not force; and Rebekah's influence would be used to impress on Jacob that it was art on which he must rely. A time would come, sooner or later, when an opportunity would show itself. Only let him be quick-witted enough to take advantage of it, and not, through stupidity or timorousness, suffer it to slip by.

The time came, suddenly, and in a way that no one could have anticipated. Esau had gone, as usual, to enjoy the pleasures of the chase, while Jacob had stayed at home, and, as the day advanced and he became hungry, had made himself a rich soup of the red lentil. The food is one that is still a favourite dish in many parts of the East, and is said not only to be palatable to the taste, but to exhale an agreeable odour, "very tempting to a hungry man."[1] At the moment when the pottage was ready for the table, Esau returned from his hunting, faint and weary, and rushed into the tent. He was ravenous, exhausted—perhaps he had been engaged in the chase all night. Seeing the smoking dish in his brother's hand, and probably tempted by the delicious odour of which travellers speak, he exclaimed—"Feed me, I pray thee, with that red, that red" (Gen. xxv. 30)—"Give me," *i.e.*, "some of it, here, now, at once"—"for," he added, "I am faint." Then the reply came, cold and calculating, devoid of any touch of tenderness—"Sell me this day thy birthright" (ibid. ver. 31). The famished hunter, deeming himself "at the point to die," and feeling that, if he dies, his birthright will certainly be no profit to him, asks no time for consideration or for taking advice, but promptly consents—at Jacob's demand, ratifies his assent with a solemn oath, sells his birthright, and receives in exchange the soup which he so greatly desires—"Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way" (ibid. ver. 34).

The father and mother seem to have been, both of them,

[1] Thomson, "The Land and the Book," p. 587.

absent from this scene. Apparently the father, on hearing of it, refused to regard the transaction as serious.[1] Appreciating, as Esau could not, or, at any rate, did not do, the privileges attached to the birthright, not so much generally, as in this particular case, Isaac declined to admit that they could be bartered away for a "mess of pottage." His first-born son was still his firstborn son to him (Gen. xxvii. 1–4), and entitled to a firstborn's blessing. Esau does not even seem to have sunk seriously, if at all, in Isaac's regard, or to have lost his place in his affections, on account of the folly, whereof he had been guilty. Perhaps he regarded it as excused by the necessity in which Esau stood at the time, since "Necessity has no laws"; perhaps he held that such an important change could not be made without the formal assent of the family, and the tribe. His own consent, at any rate, he might deem to be required, and he had not given it. Thus the sale of the birthright by Esau to his brother made no ostensible difference in the relations of the several members of the family one to another. Jacob was not allowed to assume any novel state or rank; Esau suffered no outward degradation, on account of it. The main difference was, that enmity set in between the brothers, each of whom thought that he had a right to complain of the other—Esau of Jacob for having taken an unfair advantage of him in his dire need, and extorted a consent, and an oath, by what was practically compulsion; Jacob of Esau, for comporting himself as if the birthright were still his, and continuing to claim the status of the elder brother. A note of discord was thus struck which disturbed the harmony that had hitherto prevailed in the household—"a little rift within the lute" appeared, destined to lead on to violent and dangerous discord.

[1] This conclusion may, I think, be drawn from Isaac's conduct and language, as set before us in Genesis xxvii.

CHAPTER VI.

SECOND GREAT TRIAL.

Famine in Palestine—Isaac, by the Divine direction, goes to Gerar—Description of Gerar—Isaac repeats his father's evasion with respect to his wife—He is rebuked by Abimelech—Degree of his culpability—After relations of Isaac with Abimelech—Required to quit Gerar—His return to Beersheba and covenant of peace with the Philistines.

THE placid life of Isaac glided peacefully away. Happy in his unalterable love for Rebekah, which never wavered, never wearied, never strayed from its first object, and happy in a warm affection, at any rate, for his elder son, content to live a life without adventures and seldom enlivened by any change, Isaac passed a term of years, the length of which cannot be exactly measured, in the vicinity of Lahai-roi, while his sons grew to full manhood, but still remained inmates of his tent. The dispositions of his sons did not alter to any appreciable extent. Esau continued the energetic hunter, who delighted to roam the desert plains in search of game, and, when he had brought the quarry down, to bring it home for the delectation of his father. Jacob occupied himself with the folds and with the flocks, giving them the careful superintendence, which Isaac could no longer conveniently give, and at the same time being always at his mother's beck and call, ready to do whatever she required of him. But the even tenor of these various lives was suddenly interrupted. "There was a famine in the land besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham" (Gen. xxvi. 1). Palestine is very liable to famines,[1] which are ordinarily produced by drought, the rains failing in the winter, or spring, or

[1] Compare Gen. xii. 10; xlii. 5; xliii. 1; 1 Kings xvii. 7; xviii. 5; 2 Kings viii. 1; Amos iv. 6, 7; &c.

both, and the brooks then ceasing to flow, the wells shrinking or drying up, and pasturage altogether disappearing from the hills and even from the valleys. Especially is the Negeb, "the South country," where Isaac was now settled, liable to this scourge, being the least fertile part of the Holy Land, and the most scantily supplied with water. When the rains fail in the Negeb, it becomes scarcely distinguishable from the Desert on which it abuts; the torrent courses are wholly dry; the crops fail; the hill-sides are covered with a sapless, straw-coloured herbage, from which even goats can extract no nourishment; the stunted bushes and shrubs, which dot the plains and slopes, grow dry and leafless; and the scanty population is forced to seek shelter and sustenance elsewhere. Under ordinary circumstances, Isaac with his family and tribesmen, would naturally have done, as Abraham did on a similar occasion (Gen. xii. 10), that is to say, would have taken refuge in Egypt, always a land of plenty, and the refuge for the distressed of neighbouring nations, in any time of famine. And we may gather from the narrative of Genesis (ch. xxvi. 2, 3) that he contemplated this course. But, for some reason which is not declared to us, he was forbidden thus to act. "The Lord appeared unto Isaac and said, Go not down into Egypt." Perhaps a king ruled, who would have been less hospitable than the Pharaoh of the time of Abraham, and would have refused to receive him into the country, or have permitted his entrance and then ill-treated him. Perhaps the country was in a state of anarchy and confusion, the troubles having commenced which led on to the Hyksôs conquest.[1] At any rate, the Divine Wisdom saw it to be unfitting that Egypt, the destined oppressor and afflicter of the people of God (Gen. xv. 13), should for a second time be their refuge in the hour of distress, and interposed to prevent it. "Go not down into Egypt," was the Divine mandate conveyed to Isaac; "dwell in the land which I will tell thee of: sojourn in this land." And then the promises were repeated to Isaac which had been so often given to Abraham—"I will be with thee and will bless thee; for unto thee and thy seed I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be

[1] See the author's "History of Ancient Egypt," vol. ii. p. 188.

blessed ; because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws " (ibid. xxvi. 2–5). The country indicated appears to have been Gerar ; and thither Isaac very shortly transferred himself, his family, and his people (ibid. ver. 8).

Gerar, as a district, would seem to have been the tract lying west and north-west of Beersheba, watered by two wadys—the Wady-es-Seba, and the Wady-esh-Sheriah. These two water-courses collect all the rains which fall on the highland of Southern Palestine between the thirty-first and thirtieth parallels,[1] and during the rainy season convey a large body of water to the Mediterranean. The course of the Wady-es-Seba for a considerable distance from Beersheba is nearly due west, after which it becomes north-west to its junction with the Wady-esh-Sheriah, and so continues until, as the Wady Ghuzzeh, it reaches the sea. A little below the junction of the two water-courses, on the right bank of the Wady Ghuzzeh, lay the city of Gerar, next to Gaza the chief town of these parts, and still known as Umm-el-Jerrar,[2] a ruined site ten miles to the south of Gaza. The country in the vicinity is a "succession of rolling pasture-land, seamed with dry water-courses, some small, others showing that large streams rush through them in winter."[3] It is at all times a moister district than the more inland plateau, in the first place because the vapours which float in from the Mediterranean are here first arrested, and further because the winter rains which rush down from the plateau, as they flow off, sink into the sandy or chalky soil, and lie in it, at a lesser or a greater depth, all the summer-time. The country about Gerar is famous for its numerous wells and cisterns. The ruined site itself "has a dozen cisterns on the top of a low swell,"[4] their breadth from four to five feet, and their depth, when not filled up, from six to eight feet. On the great map issued by the Palestine Exploration Fund, twenty-four wells are marked within a circle of two miles, nearly all close to the great Wady Ghuzzeh or to the subordinate torrent-bed, Wady-esh-Sheriah, which runs into it. The scene from Gerar at the

[1] The results of recent explorations are well shown in Dr. Geikie's map prefixed to "The Holy Land and the Bible."

[2] Deane, "Abraham : His Life and Times," p. 120.

[3] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i p. 235.

[4] Ibid. p. 237.

present day "reminds the traveller of Salisbury Plain; flocks here and there; the country undulating; the chalky soil sprinkled, rather than covered, with grass. To the east the limestone crops out here and there, as the land rises in long round-topped waves towards the distant mountains."[1] There is cultivation in barley and melons; and the whole district, though infertile to a European eye, is, under ordinary circumstances, an excellent pasture country, capable of supporting large flocks of sheep and goats, though scarcely suited for cattle of the larger kind.

Apparently, the Philistines had continued on friendly terms with the family of Abraham since the time when the great Patriarch "made a covenant" with their king, Abimelech, at Beersheba (Gen. xx. 32). Eighty years had elapsed since that event; but Isaac, when the Divine intimation came to him, that he was to sojourn in Gerar, and not to go down into Egypt, seems to have found no difficulty in making an arrangement with the existing king of the country, whereby he and his people were permitted to reside in it until the pressure of the famine should be past. The king is given the same name as Abraham's contemporary, viz., Abimelech, and may possibly be the same person, considering the longevity that prevailed at the period; but perhaps it is more probable that he was a son, or grandson, of the former monarch, and that "Abimelech" was an official title of Philistine kings,[2] as Pharaoh of Egyptian, Syennesis of Cilician, and Arsaces of Parthian sovereigns.

While his people were no doubt scattered far and wide over the territory of Gerar, Isaac and his family took up their residence in the city of the same name. And here it was that Isaac experienced his second great trial. Rebekah was, like Sarah, "fair to look upon" (Gen. xxvi. 7). Though probably not less than fifty years old, she still retained her personal attractions; and Isaac, on entering the foreign city, was beset with the same doubts and fears which had tried his father on two several occasions, first when he went down into Egypt (ibid. xii. 11–13), and again when he too "sojourned in Gerar" with the first Abimelech (ibid. xx. 2). Isaac feared, like Abraham, lest

[1] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 239.

[2] See especially the heading to Psa. xxxiv., where the title of "Abimelech" is given to Achish, the king of Gath who gave a refuge to David (1 Sam. xxi. 10; xxvii. 3).

his wife's beauty should attract the regard of some among the men of the place, who would wish to contract a marriage with her, and, if they knew that he was her husband, would kill him in order to make the marriage lawful. In a rude state of society there can be no doubt that such a course of proceeding was quite possible, and that Isaac's apprehensions were far from visionary. The lives of foreigners were seldom held as of much account in ancient communities, and the Philistine community of Gerar was certainly not one in which the reign of law and order could be regarded as firmly established. Isaac therefore might reasonably consider that his life would be in danger if the real nature of his relations with Rebekah were known. Would it not be best to conceal them? Isaac persuaded himself that it would; and consequently, "when the men of the place asked him of his wife, he said, She is my sister; for he feared to say, She is my wife" (Gen. xxvi. 7). Both the people of Gerar, and Abimelech the king, appear to have accepted the statement in simple good faith, and for "a long time" nothing happened to undeceive them.

But, at last, it chanced that Abimelech, looking out of one of the windows of his palace, saw Isaac and Rebekah, probably on the roof of their house, so comporting themselves as only married people would do, and felt certain that he had discovered the real relation between the two. Upon this, he sent for Isaac, and taxed him with his duplicity—"Behold, of a surety she is thy wife: and how saidst thou, She is my sister? What is this that thou hast done?" (Gen. xxvi. 9, 10). What evil consequences might not have flowed from such deceit? What guiltiness might not have been brought upon the entire Philistine community? Any one might have asked Rebekah in marriage, and Isaac could not have refused, if the suitor were a fitting one, and the marriage might have been consummated, and then what sin would there not have been, and what disgrace? A stranger wronged—the marriage tie violated—an adulterous connexion established, which might have brought down upon the whole city and people the wrath of God! Isaac had not a word to say in his defence. The man of God, the representative of the chosen race, stood rebuked by an uncircumcised Philistine, one outside the covenant, a mere heathen, probably an idolater! In his second trial Isaac had failed, had fallen; instead of maintaining the high standard of his youth, he had

sunk to a lower level, and had given the enemies of Jehovah occasion to blaspheme.

The root of Isaac's evil-doing on this occasion was selfish, faithless, fear. "They will kill me," he thought, "for Rebekah" (Gen. xxvi. 7). Well, what if they should? He did not flinch from death, when he was a lad of eighteen or twenty—why flinch now? "Let right be done, though the sky fall." What was death, that he should fear it so, especially now? Now he was a father—the child of promise was born—the seed was come through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. Why should his life be so precious to him? It may be said, and said with truth, that the patriarchal idea of the future state was sombre and unattractive—that as yet no revelation had been made to man of the transcendent bliss which awaits the glorified saint in the life beyond the grave—and that naturally human nature shrinks from death and shudders at the mere thought of it; but why is the aged saint timid, when the neophyte was so bold? Must we not admit with sorrow that Isaac's calm, placid life had not been elevating—that he had not gone on "from strength to strength," but that, on the contrary, through growing sensuousness and self-indulgence,[1] his moral and spiritual nature had deteriorated, so that his character in advanced age fell far short of the promise of his youthful prime? No doubt, truthfulness had not yet been laid down by any positive law to be a duty; and the nations among which he dwelt—Arab and Syrian for the most part—regarded skilful evasion and equivocation as cleverness, and did not much scruple about attaining their ends by actual open lying. But there is an instinct in the heart of man which protests against all falsehood and deceit. The light of nature bids him to "speak truth with his neighbour." Every one who has any nobility of character feels a contempt for lies and deceit; and Isaac's inability to justify his conduct when reproached by Abimelech shows that he was himself conscious of wrong-doing. It has been sought to excuse him on the ground that Rebekah was really his "sister" in the wider sense of the word,[2] being his first cousin once removed, and therefore a very near kinswoman; but this defence clears him, at the utmost, of direct verbal falsehood, while leaving him guilty of deceitfulness

[1] See Gen. xxv. 28; xxvii. 7, 25.

[2] "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 158.

and equivocation. The *suppressio veri* is a *suggestio falsi*. When the men of Gerar inquired of Isaac what were his relations towards Rebekah, the question meant primarily, "Are you husband and wife, or not?" and to answer, "She is my sister," was tacitly to imply that this was their sole relationship, and that they were not married. It is a mistake to suppose that the Old Testament saints, or indeed that any of the saints of God, are to be vindicated in all their actions. All human goodness is imperfect, and "even the just man falleth seven times" (Prov. xxiv. 16). Isaac certainly, on the occasion of this, his second trial, was "overcome of evil," fell below the standard which he might have been expected to have maintained, and brought religion into discredit. Christians at the present day bring religion still more into discredit, if they justify or palliate action which the moral sense of mankind at large condemns.

It is possible that, to himself, Isaac justified his conduct by the example of his father. Abraham's lapses into duplicity had indeed taken place before his birth, so that he could not be personally cognizant of them; but the facts were no doubt handed down among the traditions of the tribe, and Abraham may even have spoken of them in the conversations which he held with the son whom he loved (Gen. xxii. 2). He had perhaps excused them, or at any rate had not condemned them very severely, his standard of morality not being the Christian one. If this were so, Isaac's behaviour, though still blameworthy, would not be deserving of very severe censure. It would be the fault of a well-meaning but timid man, not strong in faith, easy-going, not deeply impressed with the sacredness of truth, not rigidly attached to any very lofty or unbending rule of right and wrong.

The after relations of Isaac and Abimelech were not seriously affected by the patriarch's deviation from truth on the occasion which we have been considering. No actual harm had come of it. Abimelech, on discovering the real relation between the parties, had solemnly "charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man, or his wife, shall surely be put to death" (Gen. xxvi. 11). Henceforth, Isaac knew himself secure. Abimelech continued his friend and protector. The patriarch dwelt in the land, not only pastured his flocks on it, but also "sowed in that land" (ibid. ver. 12), raised crops of corn and vegetables,

as do the Bedouins of the present day,[1] and obtained an abundant return, a hundred measures for each measure sown, it would seem, which is a very unusual, though not a wholly unprecedented,[2] increase. He and his people flourished greatly. "The man" (*i.e.* Isaac), "waxed great, and grew more and more until he became very great: and he had possessions of flocks, and possessions of herds, and a great household, and the Philistines envied him" (ibid. vers. 13, 14; Revised Version). The native inhabitants of the land, not unnaturally, began to feel jealous of the incomers, whose skill and industry were probably greater than their own, and who, under God's blessing, certainly prospered more than they, and grew wealthier and wealthier. Disputes and quarrels began to arise. Abimelech's native subjects filled up the wells which Abraham's servants had dug when he sojourned in Gerar, and which were claimed as their own by Isaac's herdsmen. Such a measure is one of extreme hostility, implying great bitterness of feeling, and foreshadowing an internecine war, unless something were done to appease the angry temper that had been called into existence on both sides. Abimelech saw the peril of the situation, and met it in what was probably the best way. "Go from us," he said to Isaac, "for thou art much mightier than we"—"Go," *i.e.*, "from the near vicinity of the city—withdraw to a greater distance—remember that thou art here on sufferance—it is my country, not thine—thou wert received into it as a sojourner (ibid. ver. 3), under the pressure of a famine—the famine is now over—is it not time for thee to retire and leave us?" Isaac did not fully acquiesce[3]; but he made no remonstrance. Abimelech was within his right—his words could not be gainsaid. Isaac therefore retired, first to "the valley of Gerar," probably a portion of the Wady-es-Seba between Gerar and Beersheba, then further eastward and south-eastward (ibid. ver. 22), and finally to Beersheba itself (ibid. ver. 23). For a while the hostility of the Philistines pursued him. They complained that he was still within their borders, and claimed that the water which he found was theirs, even although the wells from which he procured it were freshly dug by his own

[1] Robinson, "Researches in Palestine," vol. i. p. 77; Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 240.

[2] See Herodotus, i. 193.

[3] Isaac's sense of wrong having been done him appears in verse 27.

servants (ibid. vers. 19–21). But at last they considered that he had withdrawn far enough, and was beyond their limits, which they did not regard as extending more than about thirty miles from the coast. When Isaac reached Rehoboth, the modern *Ain-er-Ruheibeh*,[1] they were contented (ibid. ver. 22), and still more, when he went northwards, and once more established his headquarters at Beersheba (ibid. ver. 23).

Abimelech, however, the Philistine monarch, was vexed and disturbed by the rupture of the friendly relations so long established between his people and the family of Abraham, whose goodwill he was reluctant to lose. His intercourse with Isaac had convinced him that the blessing of the Almighty rested in some peculiar way upon that chieftain and his followers. He desired, therefore, to have them for friends, not for discontented neighbours, far less for enemies. To secure this end, he resolved to pay Isaac a visit. Not long after the return of the patriarch to Beersheba, the king of Gerar, accompanied by Phichol, the commander-in-chief of his army, and Ahuzzath, one of his friends—possibly his vizier or chief minister—arrived unexpectedly at Isaac's encampment, and desired an interview. They were at first received with coldness. "Wherefore come ye to me," was the patriarch's greeting, "seeing that ye hate me, and have sent me away from you?" (Gen. xxvi. 27). Ungracious words, indicative of soreness and offence. Isaac had evidently felt aggrieved at his dismissal, and, rightly or wrongly, a sense of injury still rankled in his breast. The Philistines, by sending him away, had shown that they "hated" him—why now affect friendship? To feel as he did was scarcely just, but it was natural. A favour long enjoyed is apt to become, in the eyes of the recipient, a right, and its withdrawal is frequently resented. With true wisdom Abimelech took no notice of the ungraciousness of the answer given him, but proceeded to unfold the object of his coming, and the reasons which had prompted it. He put in the forefront his conviction, that Isaac and his people were "the blessed of the Lord" (ibid. vers. 28, 29). He claimed that he had laid them under an obligation—negatively, by doing them no harm, when he might have done them harm—positively, by doing them good, and "nothing but good;" and he asked in return simply for a negative engagement—a covenant that they, on their part, would abstain from doing his

[1] Robinson, "Researches in Palestine," vol. i. p. 289.

people any injury, would neither fill up their wells, nor damage their crops, nor carry off their cattle, nor in any way harass or disturb them. The two tribes would, he assumed, continue to be neighbours, they would be in perpetual contact—without a covenant, alien tribes, in the then-existing state of society, lived in a condition of hostility, lifted each the other's cattle, received each other's runaway slaves, stole each other's water, damaged each other in every way that was possible. Abimelech proposed that Isaac, on the part of his people, should covenant to do none of these things; though it is not so expressed, he no doubt intended that the engagement should be reciprocal—neither tribe should injure the other—and he proposed that the covenant should be confirmed on either side by an oath. Whatever had been Isaac's feeling at the first, his sense of wrong passed away as he listened to the fair, friendly, and in fact flattering, speech. The Philistine king and his suite were invited to partake of his hospitality—were feasted and given a lodging for the night (Gen. xxvi. 30). In the morning the covenant was concluded; the oaths were sworn; and the guests departed in peace (ibid. ver. 31).

CHAPTER VII.

DOMESTIC TROUBLES.

Marriages contracted by Esau—Isaac's sight fails—He proposes to give the blessing of the firstborn to Esau—Deceit practised on him by Rebekah and Jacob—Jacob gets the blessing—Scene between Esau and Isaac—Esau also blessed—Contrast between the two blessings—Esau's resentment—Plot and counterplot.

DURING Isaac's stay at Gerar, his sons appear to have reached middle age. Esau was the first to enter into the estate of matrimony. Contrary to the wishes of both father and mother (Gen. xxvi. 35), he contracted marriages with women belonging to the idolatrous races of Canaan, which lay under the Divine displeasure, and were about to forfeit their land on account of their iniquities (ibid. xv. 16). There is some difficulty with respect to the names, and number, of his Canaanitish wives, and even as to the exact race whereto they belonged; but, on the whole, it seems to be most probable that, at the age of forty, he took to himself two wives, Aholibamah, the daughter of Anah, son of Zibeon, a Horite, otherwise called Judith, the daughter of Beeri, and Bashemath, otherwise called Adah, the daughter of Elon, a Hittite.[1] These unions were "a bitterness of spirit" (ibid. xxvi. 35) to Isaac and Rebekah, who were totally opposed to any intermixture of the blood of the chosen race with that of the people whom God had appointed them to succeed. Such intermarriages were contrary to the ancient tribal spirit; they imperilled the purity of the religious faith, which was the ground of Abraham's selection to be the progenitor of God's people; and it might reasonably be feared that the curse of God would rest upon them. Considering the evil results which followed

[1] See the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. pp. 192, 193.

upon idolatrous marriages in later times, as especially on those of Solomon (1 Kings xi. 1–8) and Ahab (ibid. xvi. 31–33; xxi. 25, 26), we must approve and admire the instinct, which set the patriarchs and their wives[1] against them before they had been forbidden by any positive law, and when the verdict of condemnation had not yet been delivered by history.

Time went on, and Isaac felt the infirmities of age creeping upon him. He was a hundred years old when Esau contracted his unsatisfactory marriages. Some time after this, but how long after there are no means of determining, having found his sight beginning to fail him (Gen. xxvii. 1), he bethought himself of his latter end (ibid. ver. 2). Ere he died, he wished to bestow a formal blessing—a blessing which would have a prophetic force and efficacy—upon his elder and favourite (ibid. xxv. 28) son, who had not, even by his hateful marriages, alienated his father's affections from him. As a preliminary, he summoned Esau to his presence, and communicated to him his intention. It was the admitted privilege of the father to dispense to his progeny blessings and curses.[2] Isaac, as inheriting the prophetic office that had been Abraham's (ibid. xx. 7), would speak with extraordinary prescience and authority. His words would not be mere good wishes, but effectual to bring about what they foreshadowed. Both he and Esau felt the solemnity of the occasion. But, as prophets in after times needed music to develop the prophetic *afflatus* (2 Kings iii. 15), so Isaac felt that he required a certain amount of physical comfort to cheer and warm him to a satisfactory delivery of the thoughts that stirred his heart. He begged his son, therefore, to take his weapons, and go out into the hunting-grounds, and procure him venison, and dress it, and bring him the "savoury meat, such as he loved," that in the glow of satisfied desire he might pronounce a worthy blessing upon him.

Esau quitted the tent, to do his father's bidding. But it so chanced, or rather it was so arranged by the providence of God, that the wife and mother, the partisan of the younger son (Gen. xxv. 28), overheard all that her husband had said, in secret as he thought, to the elder one. At once her keen wit went to work. She must frustrate Isaac's design. She must contrive that the blessing, which the father intends to bestow upon the elder,

[1] Compare Gen. xxiv. 3, 4; xxvi. 34, 35; xxvii. 46; xxviii. 1, 8.

[2] Ibid. ix. 25–27; xxvii. 12; xxviii. 1–4; xlix. 3–27.

shall, in point of fact, be bestowed upon the younger son. Rebekah, no doubt, was convinced that her end was good. She had accepted, in fulness of faith, the Divine intimation given her before her children were born—"The elder shall serve the younger." She had always looked upon her youngest born as "the child of promise." She had set her affections upon him, partly, perhaps, on that account. She had probably heard, and heard with pleasure, of her reckless elder son selling his birthright to her astute younger son, and had rejoiced at the transaction as entitling the latter to those superior rights and privileges which she desired for him. The will of Heaven was, in her judgment, declared. But now her husband was about to do his best to frustrate the will of Heaven—to make the promise of God, "The elder shall serve the younger," of none effect. Would she not be justified—nay, would she not be doing her plain duty—in stepping in to thwart her husband's self-willed action, and forward the designs of Providence even by means which a rigid moralist might consider to be wrong, or at any rate questionable? But Rebekah perhaps scarcely argued the case. More probably, she acted on impulse. Her extreme partiality for her younger son swept before it all minor considerations, and made her resolve unhesitatingly, that Jacob's rights, as she regarded them, should not be filched from him, if by any action of hers she could prevent it. There was scant time for plotting and planning. Esau had started forth upon his quest, and, if fortunate in falling in with game, might be back in an hour or two. She must utilize this little breathing-space. At once she devises a scheme—that with which we are all so familiar. She takes Jacob into her confidence—tells him what she has heard his father say, and so reveals to him the peril in which he stands of losing his father's principal blessing—she then bids him "obey" her (ibid. xxvii. 8)—taking upon herself, so far as possible, all the responsibility, she sketches for him a plan of action, which he has only to follow out, and all will be well—let him hasten to the flock, and bring her a couple of kids, and she will make a savoury dish that shall readily be mistaken for venison—let Jacob pretend to be Esau, and take this in to his father and so vindicate his rights, and get the blessing that will otherwise slip from him (ibid. vers. 9, 10). Jacob objects, but his objections are overruled—"Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice." And Jacob obeys;

and the trick is played ; and the blind and half imbecile father is successfully imposed upon, albeit he has a suspicion that "the voice is Jacob's voice, though the hands" — roughly covered with the skins of the kids—are seemingly "the hands of Esau" (ibid. ver. 22). Convinced at last by the smell of Esau's clothing, in which Rebekah has taken care to dress Jacob, the aged chief accepts the meat as venison brought by his elder son, eats and drinks, feels the prophetic afflatus descend upon him, and at length utters the blessing (ibid. vers. 25–29) :—

"See the smell of my son
Is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed :
And God give thee of the dew of heaven,
And of the fatness of the earth,
And plenty of corn and wine :
Let peoples serve thee,
And nations bow down to thee :
Be lord over thy brethren,
And let thy mother's son bow down to thee :
Curseth be every one that curseth thee,
And blessed be he that blesseth thee."

Very sad, very pitiable is the picture of the blind father cozened by his wife and child. But sadder and even more pitiable the scene which follows. All unconscious of what has happened, Esau returns from the chase successful, joyous, happy. He has found his game, and killed it, and brought it home, and made it into a dish of savoury meat, such as he knew that his father loved ; and he comes in to his father, radiant, and expectant of good—"Let my father," he says, "arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me." Isaac is astonished, confounded—what strange thing can have happened? what mean the words that he hears? "Who art *thou?*" he ejaculates. Is it Jacob, seeking such a blessing as his father can spare to him after the best promises have been lavished on his brother? Or is it, can it be Esau, only now just returned? The answer makes all clear—"I am thy son, thy firstborn, Esau." Then Isaac comprehends the situation. He has been overreached, cheated. His dearly-loved elder son, his darling, has lost, finally lost, the blessing of the firstborn, for that, once given, can never be retracted. And this has been done by the wife of his bosom in league with his younger son. His foes have been "they of his own household."

As such thoughts passed through his mind, Isaac "trembled with a great trembling greatly" (Gen. xxvii. 33, marginal rendering). "Who then is he," he exclaims, "that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him?—yea, and he shall be blessed." But he has no need to ask, he knows too well; it is the brother, who "has come with subtilty," and taken away the firstborn's blessing. Then the truth bursts also upon Esau, and he raises "a great and exceeding bitter cry"—a cry of rage, and grief, and disappointment—and asks that he at any rate may be blessed, as well as his brother (ibid. ver. 34). Isaac hesitates, but is at last prevailed upon by the touching, melting appeal—"Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." Then, such blessing as he could, Isaac gave:—

> "Behold, of the fatness of the earth shall be thy dwelling,
> And of the dew of heaven from above;
> And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother;
> And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt break loose,
> That thou shalt shake his yoke from off thy neck."

Each son, we see, was promised "of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven"—a fertile territory, that is, with the blessing of God upon it, and therefore much temporal prosperity; but while "peoples and nations" were to serve the one, the other was simply to maintain his existence by his sword; above all, the posterity of Esau was to "serve" that of Jacob—not, however, for all time. Ultimately, the yoke was to be thrown off, and both nations—Israelites and Edomites—to be equally free and independent. It is needless to say that the prophecies were accomplished in all particulars.

It is not surprising that the successful plot of Rebekah and Jacob resulted in further domestic troubles. Esau, though he had obtained a blessing, was none the less aggrieved at his brother's proceedings. He does not seem to have expected that the sale of his birthright was really to result in his being supplanted, or to subject him to practical loss or disadvantage of any kind. But now Jacob had proved himself an effectual "supplanter." He had stepped into the position of the elder son. He was "lord over his brethren," and "his mother's sons" were bound to "bow down to him." The fiery, impetuous

Esau could not endure such a position, and at once determined on what he would do. His father would, he supposed, not live very long. As soon as the grave closed over Isaac, and the days of mourning for him were accomplished, Esau made up his mind that he would be content with no half measures, but would take his brother's life (Gen. xxvii. 41). Nor was this a mere secret resolution, which he kept locked up in his own heart. On the contrary, he divulged his intention to his friends, and it was talked about so openly that Rebekah heard of it. Here was the first stroke dealt by the avenging Nemesis, which, sooner or later, is sure to punish evil-doing. The over-partial, over-ambitious mother is made to tremble for the very existence of her favourite, is made to feel that his life is in peril, and that the peril which threatens it comes of her own act. If there should be a secret assassination, or a fratricidal conflict, in which, as the weaker, Jacob would be certain to succumb to his brother, it will be her plotting that has brought about the calamity. She will have put the knife to her son's throat. Nay, the trouble will be even worse. If Esau slays Jacob, he will be a murderer, and must either suffer death himself at the hand of justice (Gen. ix. 6), or become an outlaw and a vagabond, like Cain. And so Rebekah will "be deprived of both her sons in one day" (ibid. xxvii. 45). It is a melancholy outlook, and she has once more to set her keen wit to work, in order to meet the perils which threaten, and especially in order to preserve the life of her favourite son, for whom she has ventured so much.

Ere long she forms her plan—her counterplot to Esau's plot. Like Esau, she seems to have looked for Isaac's early death, and to have thought it necessary, or at least prudent, to remove Jacob out of his brother's reach without delay. She therefore at once reveals his danger to Jacob himself, and warns him that he will have to take a distant journey. She has steeled her heart to endure his prolonged absence, provided only that she can save his life; but she makes light to her son himself of the parting and the absence, which, she says, is only to be for a short time—"Flee thou to Laban my brother, to Haran; and *tarry with him a few days*, until thy brother's fury turn away; until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then will I send, and fetch thee from thence" (Gen. xxvii. 44–45). It was doubtless easy

to persuade Jacob under the circumstances; but there was something more to be done. Rebekah had to persuade Isaac also. It is difficult to realize Isaac's condition of mind at this juncture. We can scarcely conceive that he was not greatly vexed at his deception. He must have been angry with both Rebekah and Jacob; but, so far as appears, he made no complaint. Not only did they still live with him—still abide in his tent—but he appears still to have been on friendly terms with them. Perhaps he excused Rebekah's deception to her mother's heart, and Jacob's to Rebekah's influence over him. At any rate Rebekah does not hesitate to apply to Isaac in her difficulty; and, though she does not venture to put before him her real trouble for fear of arousing unpleasant reminiscences, yet she imparts to him a secondary trouble, as though sure of sympathy, and at once evokes it, and obtains his help. "I am weary of my life," she says, "because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these, of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?" We may suppose that Esau's Hittite wives (Gen. xxvi. 34) had continued to be a vexation to Rebekah, and had daily brought it more home to her, how evil a thing it was to be "unequally yoked together with unbelievers." Isaac also may have been vexed and annoyed by them, since Esau, we are told, "saw that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father" (ibid. xxviii. 8). At any rate, when Rebekah made her appeal to her husband, he immediately came into her views. Jacob must not be allowed to marry a daughter of Heth. He must be sent elsewhere. So "Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of peoples; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee, that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham." Isaac evidently has accepted it as the Divine appointment that Jacob, and not Esau, is to be the heir of the promises. He has learnt the Divine will, and has submitted himself to it. If he has not wholly forgiven Jacob for

deceiving him, he has at any rate determined to act as if he had forgiven him. In sending him away to a foreign land for an indefinite term, when he is himself so advanced in years, and thus running the risk of never seeing him again, he feels that he cannot let him go without a blessing; and if a blessing is to be given, he feels that it should be that to which Jacob is by the Divine decree entitled. He therefore devolves upon him "the blessing of Abraham"—voluntarily and freely he gives him all that Jacob had previously extorted by deceit—the blessing of abundant posterity, the blessing of the inheritance of Canaan, the blessing finally of all that was understood to go with that inheritance—glory, precedency, dominion—ultimately, "a seed in whom all the inhabitants of the earth should be blessed" (Gen. xxii. 18).

So Jacob departed; and Rebekah was left to mourn the separation, which she had brought upon herself. There is reason to believe that she never saw her favourite son again.[1]

[1] Rebekah is never mentioned in Genesis as alive after this time. The absence of all mention of her in the account given of Jacob's return from Haran to Palestine seems to imply that she was no longer living.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLOSING YEARS OF ISAAC'S LIFE—HIS DEATH AND BURIAL.

Isaac's later years uneventful—Esau's third marriage—Isaac's bereavements—Death of his brother Ishmael—Death of Rebekah—Death of Rachel—Re-union with Jacob—Death—Burial—Character.

ISAAC lived, after Jacob had left him and departed to stay with his uncle Laban, according to one calculation, forty-three, according to another, sixty-three years.[1] He did not quit the earth until he had reached the great age of a hundred and eighty years (Gen. xxxv. 28), thus living forty-three years longer than his brother, Ishmael (ibid. xxv. 17), and five years longer than his father, Abraham (ibid. ver. 7). But these later years of his life were very uneventful. He remained in the south country, at Beersheba, Lahai-roi, or Hebron, still the patriarchal chief, but of weak vision, perhaps blind, perhaps imbecile. The last act that we find ascribed to him is his blessing Jacob and sending him away to Padan-aram, "to take him a wife from thence" (ibid. xxviii. 6); the last influence which we find him exerting is an influence over Esau, which induced that affectionate but self-indulgent person to select his third wife from a less objectionable quarter than that which had furnished the two earlier ones, "since he saw that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac" (ibid. ver. 8). Esau, on this occasion, "went unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth" (ibid. ver. 9). It was, no doubt, well done, if he must have a third wife, to take his first cousin, and the marriage probably pleased Isaac. Esau still lived with his father, and his household soon became a large one, since all his wives

[1] See "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. pp. 160, 161, and pp. 177, 178.

bore him children, both sons and daughters (ibid. xxxvi. 2–6). It appears not to have been until his reconciliation with Jacob, that Ishmael removed from Canaan altogether, and transferred his permanent residence to Mount Seir.[1]

Isaac, however, soon after Esau's third marriage, began to suffer the bereavements which must happen to all who attain an advanced period of life. At the age of one hundred and twenty-three, six years after Jacob's removal to Haran, he lost his elder brother, Ishmael. Then Rebekah would seem to have died, and to have been buried in the cave of Machpelah at Hebron (Gen. xlix. 31). Next, in his hundred and fifty-eighth year, he lost his daughter-in-law, Rachel, whom he had never seen, while in his hundred and sixty-eighth year his grandson, Joseph, disappeared, and was thought to have been devoured by wild beasts (ibid. xxxvii. 33). At last, his own end approached. He had removed from Beersheba, and fixed his residence at Hebron, the favourite abode of Abraham, and the last resting place of the family. Here Jacob "came to him" (ibid. xxxv. 27), and, we may presume, cheered and comforted his latter days. It is remarkable that Jacob, though he had now returned from Padan-aram, and been reconciled to his brother for above twenty years, made no effort, so far as appears, to see his father, until towards the very close of his life. He resided at Succoth in the valley of the Jordan (ibid. xxxiii. 17), at Shalem near Shechem (ibid. ver. 18), at Luz or Bethel (ibid. xxxv. 6), and at the tower of Edar, near Bethlehem (ibid. vers. 19–21), but there is no indication of his having proceeded any further south until a short time before Isaac's death, when he "came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned" (ibid. ver. 27).

It may be hoped that the meeting was peaceful and happy. While Jacob's long delay may seem to point to some coolness as still existing between the father and the son, his frequent moves, all in one direction, show that he was being gradually drawn by the cords of affection nearer and nearer to the author of his being, in spite of what had occurred, in years that were now long past, to separate them. Before Jacob left him, Isaac

[1] So Bp. Harold Browne ("Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. pp. 179, 189); but the narrative in Genesis xxxii. and xxxiii. might seem to imply an earlier removal.

had practically forgiven him his treachery. It was perhaps not so easy for Jacob to forgive himself. We may see, in his long holding back, a sense of shame and of injury done, which rankles in the heart and conscience far more than injury received. Affection, however, overcame shamefacedness; and finally the guilty son drew close to his injured father, and gave him the solace of his company and his care. When Isaac died at length, "old and full of days" (Gen. xxxv. 29), Jacob was still with him, to the last his support and stay.

It is uncertain whether Esau was also with him. As the son whom his father especially loved, he certainly should have been there. But the narrative is silent upon the point. He may have been summoned to his father's deathbed, or he may have come without being summoned; but we are not told whether he was there or not. It appears, however, that he was present at the burial. When Isaac "gave up the ghost and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days, *his sons Esau and Jacob buried him*" (Gen. l. s. c.). Parted as they had been in life, death brought the family together; and the twin sons, no longer enemies, joined in paying the last rites to the mortal remains of their father.

Isaac was buried, like Abraham, and Sarah, and Rebekah, in the cave of Machpelah, at Hebron, which Abraham had bought for a burial-place (Gen. xxiii. 16–20; xlix. 31). His tomb is still shown at the present day.[1] In the great mosque of Hebron, in the body of the sacred building, on the right-hand side as the traveller enters from the porch, occupying the centre of a small domed chapel, and separated off from the nave of the edifice by iron gates, is an oblong square monument, which the guardians of the place declare to be "the tomb of Isaac." The monument corresponds exactly with another on the opposite side of the nave, which is known as "the tomb of Rebekah." It is not pretended, however, that the bodies of the personages named rest within these tombs. They are, admittedly, cenotaphs, or monuments in honour of the dead, who repose at some distance beneath them. Under the floor of the mosque, and of the area in front of it, is a dark cavity, to which the only present access is by a species of shaft inside the mosque, down which it is thought that a man might

[1] See Dean Stanley's "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. i. pp. 488–513, from which the account in the text is chiefly taken.

be lowered by a rope. No European, however, has entered into this subterranean vault, at any rate within the memory of man;[1] and nothing can be said to be *known* of it, except the little that was revealed, when, on the visit paid to Hebron in 1881 by two English princes, a lamp was let down by a string into the cavity through the above-mentioned shaft. Then the dim light revealed a chamber about twelve feet square, and fifteen feet below the floor of the mosque, which was bare and empty, but which evidently led, by a square-headed doorway on its south-eastern side, into a further inner chamber, which probably represents the original cave, and the actual patriarchal burying-place. The mystery of this inner chamber remains still unpenetrated; but it is believed that within it are the actual tombs, perhaps loculi, perhaps sarcophagi, which once received the bodies of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Joseph.

When the Prince of Wales and his suite, in the year 1862, were admitted within the mosque of Hebron, and allowed to inspect, more or less closely, the several cenotaphs, the guardians of the place, who had thrown open to them the shrine of Abraham, intreated them not to insist on entering that of Isaac. On seeking an explanation of what seemed to them so unaccountable a distinction, they were told, that "the difference lay in the characters of the two Patriarchs—Abraham was full of loving-kindness; he had withstood even the resolution of God against Sodom and Gomorrah; he was goodness itself, and would overlook any affront. But Isaac was proverbially jealous, and it was exceedingly dangerous to exasperate him. When Ibrahim Pasha on conquering Palestine had endeavoured to enter into his shrine, he had been driven out by Isaac, and fallen back as if thunderstruck."[2]

It is difficult to understand how the gentle Isaac can have left behind him such a character. "The child of laughter and of joy"[3]—his portrait, as drawn for us by the author of Genesis, is one full of softness and amiability, with scarcely a single

[1] Benjamin of Tudela claims to have entered it in the year A.D. 1163; but it may be doubted whether his description of the cavern contains anything but what he heard. For the description see Deane's "Abraham: His Life and Times," p. 157.

[2] "Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. i. p. 500.

[3] Ibid. p. 37.

harsher trait in it. As a boy, he is not the persecutor, but the persecuted; as a youth, he is the willing, uncomplaining victim, type of Him, who "was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened he not his mouth" (Isa. liii. 7). As a man, he is the loving son, the faithful husband, the tender father. Deeply attached to his mother, it is long before he can be comforted after her decease (Gen. xxiv. 67). Filled with love for his wife, he gives no thought to any other woman. Alone of the Patriarchs, he stands aloof from the prevailing polygamy and affords it no countenance, becoming thus an example to Christian husbands.[1] As a father, he is not wholly free from blemish, since he allows himself in favouritism (ibid. xxv. 28); but, even to the son whom he least loves he is gentle and forgiving (ibid. xxviii. 1–4). Quiet, patient, unadventurous, he passes his life in a circumscribed space—the Negeb—does not travel, has little contact with foreigners, engages in no war, scarcely leaves his mark upon the page of history. He is not a "hero," like Abraham;[2] and, if we except his one great act of submission and self-abnegation, when he let himself be bound for sacrifice, there is little in his life or character to provoke our admiration. But he makes appeal to our affections. How touching his words on the ascent to Mount Moriah—the only words of expostulation that he utters—"My father, behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" How kindly his resolve to "intreat the Lord for his wife, because she was barren" (Gen. xxv. 21)! How deep his sympathy with his supplanted firstborn, when, on surmising the truth, he "trembled very exceedingly" (ibid. ver. 33)! How gracious his behaviour to the trickster, Jacob, when, on sending him away, he freely "blessed" him with "the blessing of Abraham" (ibid. xxviii. 4)! Even his very faults and lapses have something in them which moves our sympathy, with which we have, more or less, a fellow feeling. "Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison" (ibid. xxv. 28). What father among us has not felt a special tenderness for a child who afforded him special gratification? "Isaac feared to say of Rebekah, She is my wife, lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah (ibid. xxv. 7).

[1] "See the prayer in the Marriage Service beginning 'O eternal God."

[2] Newman's "Sermons," vol. v. p. 91.

Do not we feel that we might have done the same under similar circumstances? Isaac is unheroic; he is far nearer than Abraham to the level of ordinary humanity. He shrinks from death, and does not scruple much about the means he uses to escape from it. He is devoid of any stern sense of the duty of veracity. He likes "creature comforts," and unduly favours the son who provides them for him. But though falling short of the moral standard, which some Old Testament saints attain, in some points and on some occasions, taking his character as a whole, it attracts us more than that of many who were made of sterner stuff. He is so kindly, so gentle, so patient, so loving, so sensitive. Once only does he show resentment, when the Philistines, who have driven him from among them, come to him with professions of special regard and friendship (Gen. xxvi. 26–29). And even then, his resentment soon passes away, and he "makes a feast for them" (ibid. ver. 30).

Religious feeling is far less prominent in Isaac than in Abraham. Once only do we hear of him as "building an altar to God" (Gen. xxvi. 25). Once he prays to God on behalf of Rebekah his wife, and with such faith and earnestness that he obtains his request, and the "barren" one becomes "a joyful mother of children" (ibid. xxv. 21). Once only is it recorded that God appeared to him and spake with him (ibid. xxvi. 2–5), renewing with him the covenant that He had made with Abraham. Once only are we told that he "called upon the name of the Lord" (ibid. xxvi. 25). Too much, however, must not be inferred from the mere fact that no more than this is put upon record. Isaac certainly remained all his life a faithful worshipper of the God of Abraham, believed in the promises which Abraham had received from God, obeyed God's will when it was clearly signified to him (ibid. xxvi. 2–6), and looked to God as the source whence proceeded every blessing (ibid. xxv. 21; xxvii. 27, 28: xxviii. 3). He had no leaning to idolatry, even in its mildest forms,[1] no inclination to desert the worship of Jehovah for that of "the gods of the nations." But he is not presented to us as an eminently religious man. He has no special title, like that given to Abraham—"the Friend of God." No formal eulogy is bestowed upon him, either in Genesis, or in the rest of Scripture. The Apocryphal writers, who delight in lauding the worthies of early times, pass him over almost in

[1] See Gen. xxxi. 19–35.

silence.[1] Isaac is, like his son Jacob "a plain man" (ibid. xxv. 7). He has many virtues and graces—faith (Heb. xi. 20), obedience (Gen. xxii. 6–9), affectionateness (ibid. xxiv. 67; xxv. 28; xxvii. 27, 33), conjugal fidelity, gentleness; but he is not among the foremost of the Bible saints. His goodness is passive rather than active, draws forth our sympathy rather than our admiration. Still, there is something peculiarly touching and attractive about his character; and, as it is impossible that we should all be heroes, we may be thankful to have set before us in the Second of the Patriarchs a type of excellence, not so unattainable, not so remote from ordinary humanity, as that presented to us in the First.

[1] Isaac is mentioned only in 2 Esdras iii. 16; Judith viii. 26; Ecclus. xliv. 22; and Apoc. Dan. iii. 12.

JACOB: HIS LIFE AND TIMES.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND BRINGING UP.

Rebekah's barrenness—Isaac's prayer—Rebekah conceives—Struggles of the two children in her womb—Circumstances of the birth—Jacob's name and the meaning of it—His early life—His probable aspirations—Rebekah's share in them.

FOR twenty years after their marriage, Isaac and Rebekah were denied the blessing of children. Greatly must the faith of the whole patriarchal family have been tried by this long and persistent sterility. In Isaac was Abraham's seed to be called (Gen. xxi. 19); in Isaac were all the nations of the earth to be blessed (ibid. xxii. 18). Yet it seemed as if Issac was to have no offspring. The disappointment must have been grievous to all, but especially it must have pressed upon Rebekah. To be without offspring is, in the East, a woman's greatest affliction and reproach. It subjects her to scorn and contumely; it causes her adversaries to rejoice; too often it deprives her of the regard and affection of her husband. She is supposed to have provoked in some way or other the anger of God, who has therefore "shut up her womb" (1 Sam. i. 5), as a mark of His displeasure. The husband can generally, if he pleases, console himself by taking another wife, or, if he be rich enough, several; but this, of course, only increases the first wife's affliction, who feels herself degraded, supplanted, cast aside. It comports well with the general amiability of Isaac's character, that he declined to have recourse to a remedy, which, however usual it may have been,[1] would, as he must have been aware, have increased Rebekah's sadness and sorrow. He was too

[1] See Gen. iv. 19; xvi. 3; xxvi. 34; &c.

loving a husband to adopt such a course. No—he bethought him of another and a better way. God, he knew, had opened his mother Sarah's womb after a sterility of much longer duration, and when she was actually past the then established age of childbearing. Rebekah was still in the vigour of womanhood—probably not more than thirty-three or thirty-four years old.[1] He might intercede with God for her without asking for a miracle, and might without undue presumption hope that his intercession might prevail. The marriage was not one brought about by the mere workings of human passion, nor "enterprised unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly," but one where parental guidance and the leadings of God's Providence had been followed.[2] Isaac therefore "went boldly to the throne of grace," and confidently "intreated the Lord for his wife" (Gen. xxv. 22); and the result was that "the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived" (ibid.).

As if to afford the parents a compensation for their long childlessness, it pleased God that, when Rebekah's hour of conception came, "there should be twins in her womb" (Gen. xxv. 24). And the twins seemed to her after a while to struggle together within her. The Divine purpose in causing Rebekah to have this sensation was, apparently, in part to typify the antagonism in which the twin brothers were to stand, the one towards the other, during a great portion of their lives, in part to lead on by natural steps to the delivery of a prophecy, whereby the will of God with respect to the two children should be declared, and the absolute right of God to dispense to His creatures blessings and favours at His own mere will should be vindicated (Rom. ix. 10–14). The potter has power over the clay to make one vessel to honour and another to dishonour (ibid. ver. 21): not that this is done irrespective of desert, for "whom God foreknew He also did predestinate" (ibid. viii. 29), and Jacob was "loved," Esau "hated" (ibid. ix. 13), while still in Rebekah's womb, because of their foreseen qualities. The apparent struggle between the twins, while yet unborn, led Rebekah to "inquire of the Lord" (Gen. xxv. 22) concerning the phenomenon; and her inquiry elicited the well-known oracle—"Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be sepa-

[1] Rebekah was a girl (*na'ar*) at the time of her marriage (Gen. xxiv. 16)—therefore probably not more than thirteen or fourteen.

[2] See above, p. 30.

rated from thy bowels; and the one nation shall be stronger than the other nation; and the elder shall serve the younger." It was the will and the decree of God, that, in this particular case, primogeniture should not enjoy its natural rights, but that, on the contrary, all the privileges usually attached to it should devolve on the younger of the two children—the one which should quit the womb last. Under these circumstances the birth took place. "When Rebekah's days to be delivered were fulfilled," and "there were twins in her womb, the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau," which meant "hairy" or "the hairy one": "and after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel, and his name was called Jacob" (ibid. vers. 24–26), *i.e.*, "he who takes by the heel."

It is not to be supposed that any moral meaning attached originally to either name. The two words connoted simply the most striking and salient of the physical facts which were observed by those who were present at the birth of the children. The one name, Esau, had no second meaning; it simply marked the fact that the firstborn of the two children was covered with hair, almost like a wild animal, even at his birth; but the other name, Jacob, had other possible senses. It might mean, not only "he who takes by the heel," but also "he who takes by the heel to trip up," and hence "he who outwits or supplants."[1] There came a day when Esau's antagonism to his brother induced him to place on the word the worst possible sense (Gen. xxvii. 36), and this signification became, in course of time, the accepted one. But at the time of his birth, it is probable that not even Rebekah understood that her younger was to "supplant" her elder son, though she may have conjectured that "the blessing of Abraham" was, in some way or other, to be transferred to him.

Jacob's early life was the usual life of a Bedouin boy, the son of a great sheikh, who was half agriculturist (Gen. xxvi. 12) half nomad (ibid. vers. 17, 22, 23). He would be much with the cattle. As his father roamed over the Negeb from one place to another, according to the season of the year, or according to the reports which he received of the condition of the pasturage in this or that district, Jacob and Esau would accompany him, and would become familiar with all the ordinary routine of the

[1] "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 156.

pastoral life, with the feeding and the folding, the careful watching by night, the less anxious tending during the day, the exposure to heat and cold, the encounters with ravenous beasts, the occasional brush with marauders from a hostile tribe. At the same time they would learn the prevalent methods of such agriculture as existed at the day, the light scratching of the soil with a primitive plough, the hoeing and weeding, the irrigation with the hand or with the foot (Deut. xi. 10), the labours appropriate to seed-time and harvest, the arts of sowing, and reaping, and winnowing, and storing the grain. The various circumstances of the life gave room for the display of idiosyncrasies. Esau was excited by the contact with the wild beasts of the field, and after a while gave himself up almost entirely to the delights of the chase. Jacob was comparatively a stay-at-home, remained with the tents, and carried on the business of the family. He thus became, naturally enough, his mother's favourite (Gen. xxv. 28), while Esau ingratiated himself with his father. The brothers, however, grew up together in apparent amity, or at any rate without open breach. Their opposite leanings kept them mostly apart. While Esau indulged the strain of wildness that was in his blood by scouring the plain after the gazelle, or lying in wait among the rocks for the ibex, or perhaps stalking the bustard,[1] Jacob was looking after the cattle, leading them out to pasture in the morning, or seeing them home in safety to the fold at night, or preventing them from straying by his crook or by his voice, or engaged at the shearing, or the watering, or otherwise employed in doing shepherd's work. The long hours of the summer days, during which he would sit with the flock in the shadow of a rock, or in the cool recess of a cave, would give him ample time for meditation, at once on the wonders of the past, and on the mysteries of the future. Rebekah had doubtless often feasted his ears with the words of the precious oracle given to her before his birth, which she had perhaps not made known generally; had inspired him with the hope of becoming the progenitor of a great nation, and repeated to him the words, "The elder shall serve the younger." His grandfather, too, if we may trust the legend,[2]

[1] Gazelles and bustards still frequent the neighbourhood of Beersheba (Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries, p. 30).

[2] See the "Book of Jubilees" quoted by Mr. Deane in "Abraham: His Life and Times," p. 169.

had singled him out for special notice, and had spoken of him to Rebekah as the child of promise—"the medium of blessing to the whole race of Shem, and the ancestor of a people to be severed from all other nations"—one whom she would do well "to watch carefully, and to keep as the apple of her eye, promoting his well-being by every means in her power." If these things came to Jacob's ears, either directly from Abraham, or indirectly through his mother, they would tend to raise in him ambitious thoughts and aspirations, and to make him discontented with the position and prospects of a younger son. He would come to view himself as the favourite of Heaven, and would cast about in his mind for some mode whereby he might remedy the accident of his birth, and take the station which he would regard as rightfully his own.

How far his mother shared these thoughts and aspirations may be questioned; but, on the whole, considering how great and commanding was her influence over him at a later date, it would seem to be most probable that during all his childhood and his youth she had worked upon his mind, partly representing to him his merits as greater than those of Esau, partly dwelling upon the supernatural communication which she had herself received (Gen. xxv. 23), and on the strength of it urging him not to be wanting to himself, but to bend all his efforts towards obtaining the position which the prophecy indicated to be rightly his. "The elder shall serve the younger." If in the heavenly counsels it was decreed that such should be the ultimate result, could it be wrong to work towards it; and seek to hasten it? Probably, neither Rebekah nor Jacob thought it wrong. It requires a somewhat advanced morality to lay it down that the end does not justify the means—that in no case is it lawful for us to do evil that good may come. Rebekah and Jacob, with their Oriental training, could scarcely have been expected to rise so high. The natural conscience may have made a feeble protest. But convention and usage put a bandage on the spiritual eye, which prevented it from discerning the right.

CHAPTER II.

PURCHASE OF ESAU'S BIRTHRIGHT.

Nature of the "birthright," 1. Generally; 2. In the Abrahamic family—How far the sale and purchase were justified—Consideration of Esau's conduct in the matter—Consideration of Jacob's conduct—Influence of Rebekah probably traceable in the transaction.

IT is impossible to judge aright the transaction by which Esau lost, and Jacob became possessed of, the "birthright" in the family of Abraham, without first inquiring and determining what the advantages and privileges were which were regarded as properly belonging to the eldest son in patriarchal times. These rights have been laid down as three[1]:—1. The right of rule in the family, and still more in the tribe; 2. The right to a double portion of the inheritance; and 3. The right of exercising the office of priest in the family and high-priest in the tribe whereto the individual possessed of the birthright belonged. That the right of rule passed to the firstborn is certain. Hence Reuben's pre-eminence among his brethren (Gen. xxxvii. 21–29; xlii. 22, 37; xlviii. 5) until the birthright was for sufficient reason (ibid. xlix. 4) taken from him. Hence the hereditary succession which we find established in all ancient kingdoms. Hence the pretensions of Absalom and Adonijah (2 Sam. xv. 1–12; 1 Kings i. 5–40), even when the succession had been formally devolved upon Solomon. The right rests upon natural grounds, in the first place, because the eldest son, having ordinarily the advantage of at least a year over any other is during boyhood the strongest and *takes* the rule, while the others, being weaker, are subservient; and, secondly, because, as the firstborn, he naturally holds the first place in

[1] See Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. i. p. 622.

his parent's affections, and so is more considered by them than his brothers. When the family passes into the tribe, the eldest son of the original sheikh or chief naturally succeeds him, being already accustomed to command, and not likely to yield the first place to another without a struggle. The right of the eldest son to a double portion of the inheritance, that is, to twice as much as each of the younger sons, is more conventional, but seems to have been well-established in the family of Abraham (Gen. xlviii. 22; Deut. xxi. 17), and perhaps extended to the Semitic race generally. With regard to the third right—that of the priesthood—there is more uncertainty. It has been said, that "the theory that the eldest son was the priest of the family rests upon no Scriptural statement,"[1] and remarked further, that "the Rabbis appear divided on the question." But the balance of Rabbinical opinion is certainly in favour of the priesthood of the firstborn in pre-Mosaic times; and the priestly acts recorded in the early Scriptures are assigned to eldest sons or to those who have the right of the eldest son (Gen. viii. 20; xii. 7, 8; xiii. 4; xiv. 18–20; xv. 9–10; xxii. 13; xxvi. 25; xxxi. 54; xxxiii. 20; xxxv. 7; &c.). The priesthood of eldest sons seems also to be implied in the "redemption of the firstborn," instituted on the transfer of the sacerdotal office from this class of persons to the entire tribe of Levi (Exod. xiii. 12, 13; xxii. 29; Num. viii. 18; &c.).

Such, then, were the privileges attaching to the birthright according to prevalent Oriental ideas in patriarchal times. But, in the family of Abraham, the birthright meant more than this. It was "a spiritual heritage. It carried the privilege of being the depositary and communicator of the Divine secrets. It constituted a link in the line of descent by which the Messiah was to be born into the world. The right of wielding power with God and men, the right of catching up and handing on—as in the old Greek race—the torch of Messianic hope; the right of heirship to the promises of the covenant made with Abraham; the right of standing among the spiritual aristocracy of mankind; the right of being a pilgrim of eternity, owning no foot of earth, because all heaven was held in fee—this, and more than this, was summed up in the possession of the Abrahamic birthright."[2]

[1] See Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. i. p. 216.

[2] Meyer, "Israel; a Prince with God," pp. 23, 24.

It is clear that, if rights such as these attached to the position of the eldest son in the family of Abraham, that position ought to have been highly valued, and set store by. To part with it voluntarily ought to have been an almost impossible idea. On the other hand, to covet it would be natural, since whatever is good is naturally desired by man. Ordinarily, however, the idea of a transfer would be out of the question, and would not arise. We can only account for the idea having arisen in the mind of Jacob, and having been entertained as a practicable one as soon as it was presented to the mind of Esau, by the fact of the prophecy given to Rebekah—"Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and *the elder shall serve the younger*." Rebekah must have dwelt in thought upon this prophecy, must have cherished it, have seen in it a transfer by Divine authority to her younger son of the right by nature belonging to the elder one, and have brought up Jacob in the belief that the "birthright" was to be one day made his somehow or other, and that he was in a certain sense entitled to it. Many a time and oft may the ambitious youth, thus prompted by the parent with whom he was always first, have schemed and planned how the end might be effected; but it is scarcely likely that, amid the infinite variety of possible circumstances, he ever anticipated the conjuncture of which he actually took advantage.

"Jacob sod pottage; and Esau came from the field, and he was faint." The red lentil is the common food of large classes in the East. At present it is especially affected by the poor in Egypt; but it is used also by the Arabs of the Tih, and has been found "very palatable," even by Europeans.[1] The pottage, or porridge, made from it is of a bright red colour, and has a savoury smell, which is described as "very tempting to a hungry man."[2] Jacob had just made a mess of this kind, probably for his own eating, when his brother Esau came into the tent from his hunting, tired, hungry, and faint. Probably he had been unsuccessful in his search for game; perhaps he had been vainly seeking it from early dawn; possibly he had been up all night. It could be no ordinary fatigue that had wearied out the almost indefatigable hunter, and brought him to the verge

[1] Robinson, "Biblical Researches," vol. i. p. 246.
[2] Thomson, "The Land and the Book," p. 587.

of deliquium. Seeing the tempting dish in his brother's hand, he felt an irresistible craving for it, and exclaimed—"Feed me, I pray thee, with that red mess of thine; for I am faint" (Gen. xxv. 30). Then there flashed upon Jacob the thought that this was his opportunity. "Sell me this day thy birthright;" was his reply. The hungry man was startled—was a little loath to comply with the demand made on him; but his immediate need made him reckless. Exaggerating his necessity, he says—"Behold, I am at the point to die"—and if I die, "what profit shall this birthright be to me?" What is the good of it? Will it bring me to life again? Certainly not. Then I may as well part with it. And his assent is signified. But Jacob will have more than his bare assent. "Swear to me, this day," he says. "Confirm thy promise with a solemn oath. So shall there be no misunderstanding between us, and no contradiction or retractation on thy part." And Esau swears, and the bargain is completed. So Esau "sold his birthright unto Jacob" (Gen. xxv. 33). "Then Jacob gave Esau bread[1] and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright" (ibid. ver. 34).

How far, it may be asked, was the transaction a justifiable one on the part of either brother? And if not justifiable, what excuses may be made for either, or for both? Primarily it may be said, and certainly will be said in a commercial age, and among those who have been called "a nation of shopkeepers," a man has a right to sell anything that belongs to him, and what one man has a right to sell, any other man has a right to buy. The price must be determined by the laws of supply and demand; and as no blame attaches to the seller for trying to sell as dear as he can, so, by parity of reasoning, none attaches to the buyer for buying as cheap as he can. On purely commercial grounds, therefore, there is nothing to blame in the transaction. Esau may have been foolish, and Jacob may have been sharp, "smart," a hard bargainer; but the modern man of business will see no moral fault in either. It is otherwise, however, if we transfer the cause from the tribunal of a Chamber of Commerce to one in which sentence is passed by Sentiment, Conscience, Moral Reason. There, Esau must be condemned, not only for egregious folly in bartering what was worth all the

[1] Bread is still eaten with their lentile pottage by the inhabitants of the Negeb (Thomson, l. s. c.).

treasures of the Indies for "a mess of pottage," but for a weak yielding to carnal appetite in a matter where the highest interests were at stake, for reckless haste in deciding on the impulse of the moment what needed the most careful consideration, and for spiritual deadness in having no just conception of the value of that which he was surrendering, no feeling that there are things which ought to be dearer to a man than life itself, of which he ought to allow nothing to deprive him. Esau was hungry, famished; but he was certainly not "at the point to die," or his unrestrained indulgence in a full meal would have killed him. He felt faint; but he would not have died—probably he would not even have fainted away—if he had controlled his appetite, and gone elsewhere for food; to his father's servants, who would have been able to bring him food of some kind; to the fold, where he might have drunk his fill of goat's milk; to the nearest tent of any retainer of his father. But he gave no thought to any of these alternatives. The savoury dish, close to him, in his sight, with its tempting look and smell, carried him away, took his whole attention, shut out every other consideration. He must have inherited some of his father's sensuousness, some of his undue desire for savoury food, to have found the mess of pottage so great a temptation. And he must have "despised his birthright" (Gen. xxv. 34), deemed it a slight matter, regarded it with little interest, if he did not even view it as a myth, a dream, an unreality. Hence the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews calls him "a profane person" (Heb. xii. 16)—that is, a man without spirituality, whose thoughts were given to, and bounded by, the things of this life, who set no store by spiritual blessings, had perhaps no appreciation of them. If there be any excuse at all for Esau, it is to be found in his rough, coarse, materialistic temperament, partly a defect of nature, partly (it is probable) the result of his hunter's training, which had developed the physical, rather than the spiritual, side of his nature.

But, if Esau is to be blamed—severely blamed—for his share in the transaction, Jacob is still more to be blamed. It was unbrotherly, it was ungenerous, it was cruel, to take advantage of his brother's need, and of his impetuosity of character, to extort from him that, of which he well knew the value, if his brother did not. It was undutiful towards Isaac to hurry forward, and, so far as was possible, conclude, a matter of such vital impor-

tance to the family as the transfer of the birthright without his knowledge. Further, if we suppose, as most of those who have treated of the character of Jacob suppose,[1] that Jacob justified to himself his conduct by the revelation which God had made of His will to Rebekah—"the elder shall serve the younger"—and considered that he was helping forward the purposes of God by acting as he did, then we must lay to his charge the sins of presumption and unfaithfulness—presumption, if he thought that God needed his help in order to accomplish what He had determined and revealed; unfaithfulness, if he doubted that God both could and would perform His promises. "Jacob," as a recent writer on the subject observes, "was not only a traitor to his brother, but he was faithless towards his God. Had it not been distinctly whispered in his mother's ear, that the elder of the brothers should serve the younger? Had not the realization of his loftiest ambition been pledged by One whose faithfulness had been the theme of repeated talks with Abraham, who had survived during the first eighteen years of his young life? He might have been well assured that what the God of Abraham had promised He was able also to perform; and would perform without the aid of his own miserable schemes. But how hard is it for us to quietly wait for God! We are too apt to outrun Him; to forestall the quiet unfolding of His purposes; and to snatch at promised blessings before they are ripe."[2]

Many excuses have been made for Jacob; but most of them are untenable. It has been said that "the unsophisticated reason of man always refuses to ratify the rights of mere primogeniture as established by custom or law among many nations;"[3] and implied that Jacob's action was a protest against the law of primogeniture as unjust and unnatural. But it is hard to see how an intense desire to transfer the privilege to himself can have been compatible with the wish to extinguish it. Again, it has been rather sophistically argued, that, as Esau and Jacob were twins, the law of primogeniture did not apply in their case, and that Esau had therefore "no valid claims of precedence" over his brother.[4] But this is to ignore the fact, that in every

[1] "Bullock in "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. i. p. 913; Bp. Harold Browne in "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 157; Meyer, "Israel: a Prince with God," pp. 22, 26, &c.

[2] Meyer, p. 26.

[3] Thomson, "The Land and the Book," pp. 587, 588.

[4] Ibid. p. 586.

case of twins one is born before the other, if it be but a minute before, and therefore is the firstborn, however soon the other twin follows him. Wherever privileges attach to primogeniture, this fact is taken into account, and estates, and titles, and even sovereignty itself,[1] descend to the elder twin. Further, it is urged, that Jacob had in fact "the best right" to the succession, since he highly valued it, while Esau despised it, and that he had "largely augmented the family estate, while Esau had rather squandered than added to it."[2] But we do not make a thing that belongs to another ours by valuing it more than the owner does; otherwise a very considerable amount of property would have to change hands; and even careful stewardship of a man's estate does not entitle us to it at his death, if he leaves it to another. Thus most of the apologies made for Jacob fail to clear him of blame. And the only excuses which can be regarded as, in any degree, valid, are those touched on at the end of the last chapter—the imperfect development of the moral perception in Jacob's time, and the influence probably exercised over him by his mother. Jacob may have thought himself justified in taking advantage of his brother's need, and compelling his assent to an iniquitous bargain, because he was thereby working out the purposes of God; and although *we* see in his conduct at once presumption and want of faith, it may not have occurred to him that he was taxable with either. He "snatched at promised blessings before they were ripe," as Jeroboam did, as Jehu did, as Hazael did; but he may not have known that it was wrong to do so. There are Christian casuists even now who hold that "the end justifies the means." In Jacob's day such a sentiment may have been the general one.

The influence of Rebekah over her younger son—the natural result of her extreme affection for him (Gen. xxv. 28)—may also have tended to blind Jacob to the true character of his action. Not that we can suppose her to have suggested the particular means to which he had recourse. They presented themselves suddenly, unexpectedly—flashing in a moment of time across the astute mind of the younger brother. But the over-fond mother may have been—probably had been—for years preparing the way for the action, by stimulating and fostering her younger

[1] See Herod. vi. 52.

[2] Thomson, "The Land and the Book," p. 588.

son's ambition, by impressing it upon him that the birthright was really his, since God so willed it, by counselling him not to be wanting to himself, but to win by subtlety what chance had denied him. Revelation is here silent; but our knowledge of the nature of woman assures us, that the devotion of Rebekah to what she regarded as her favourite son's best interests, would cause her to work unweariedly in this direction, to impregnate his mind with her views, and to make light of any objections, that he may have felt, to taking unfair advantage of his brother. Rebekah herself had no scruple about taking unfair advantage, even of her nearest and dearest (Gen. xxvii. 6–17); and, in her anxiety to promote the advancement of her son, would, we may be sure, do her best to imbue him with her own unscrupulousness. Her morality was distinctly lower than that of her time; and we cannot be surprised if it affected unfavourably the son, who was so much with her, and on whom she doted. So far, then, we may allow that there was some excuse for Jacob's unbrotherly act; and, though we must still blame him, we may view his conduct as less culpable than it appears at first sight.

CHAPTER III.

DECEPTION OF HIS FATHER.

Jacob in Gerar—Isaac's resolve to bless his firstborn—Rebekah's interference and plot—Behaviour of Jacob—His success—Rebekah's short-lived triumph—Threat of Esau, how met by Rebekah—Jacob's expatriation punishes both himself and his mother—Isaac's second blessing.

THE purchase of the birthright by Jacob does not seem to have led to any outward change in the relations, one to another, of the several members of Isaac's household. Jacob, we may be sure, imparted the news to his mother; but it is not clear that Isaac was made acquainted with it. To all outward appearance, things remained as they had been. Esau was still recognized as the heir (Gen. xxvii. 1), and passed his days according to his old habitudes (ibid. ver. 3). He continued to be his father's darling, and made him "savoury meat, such as he loved"—he went out daily to the field, with his quiver and his arrows and his bow, and never wearied of his hunting. Jacob continued a stay-at-home, and more and more endeared himself to his mother. The writer of Genesis gives us few notes of time; and it is impossible to say what exact interval separated the purchase of the birthright from the next great event in Jacob's life, his deception of his father and crafty acquirement of the firstborn's blessing. We only know, that, when this latter event occurred, Jacob was more than forty years old (ibid. xxvii. 34); and we may perhaps assume, that, at the purchase of the birthright, he was about twenty. If so, there would have been a space of about twenty years between the two events, the greater part of which time Jacob must have passed in Gerar, with his father and mother, first in the city of the name, where Isaac

and Rebekah "dwelt" for a considerable space (ibid. xxvi. 6), and then in the stretch of country between that city and Beersheba, or still further south, in the tract between Beersheba and Rehoboth (ibid. vers. 17–22). This was a period of distress and difficulty. The drought which had caused Isaac to betake himself to Gerar, still more or less continued: and water was only to be obtained by digging fresh wells in the most promising places. Isaac's flocks and herds had increased (ibid. ver. 14), and needed a wider space than formerly for their pasturage. The Philistines of the district, consequently, felt themselves aggrieved, and there was constant contention between "the herdsmen of Gerar" and "Isaac's herdsmen" (ibid. ver. 20). What part Jacob took in the strife is uncertain; but his inclination would probably have been towards peace, and it may have been partly through his influence that open war was avoided by the yielding up of well after well to Philistine pressure. When all Gerar was evacuated, and Isaac's flocks and herds withdrawn to the immediate vicinity of Beersheba and Rehoboth, the Gerar herdsmen were satisfied, after which a formal treaty sealed the peace between the contending parties (ibid. vers. 26–30).

The double marriage of Esau with idolatrous wives followed (Gen. xxvi. 34), and then an interval of uncertain duration, in the course of which Isaac found the infirmities of age creeping upon him, and thought it his duty to "set his house in order," and make all needful preparation for his departure from this sublunary sphere. A part of such needful preparation he held to be the devolution of "the blessing of Abraham" on the elder of his two sons. It is clear that he was either unaware of Esau's sale of his birthright to his younger brother, or determined to attach no weight whatever to that nefarious bargain. It had taken place without his knowledge, it had not received his sanction; it could in no way bind him, or restrict his liberty of action. He viewed the blessing as Esau's right (Gen. xxvii. 35), and apparently had never wavered in his intention of bestowing it upon him. He may never have known of the response given to Rebekah (ibid. xxv. 23); or he may have forgotten it; or he may have interpreted it of the nations whereof his sons were to be the progenitors, and not of his sons themselves. He therefore summoned Esau to his presence, and announced his intention of "blessing him before he died" (ibid. xxvii. 1–4). He

would first eat some savoury meat of his son's killing, and then he would formally pronounce over him, as priestly and prophetic head of his house, a solemn benediction.

The intention would have been carried out, all would have gone as Isaac purposed, had not Rebekah interfered to frustrate her husband's design. Rebekah's love of her younger son was not only intense, but overwhelming. It dominated every other motive, and rendered her wholly unscrupulous as to what she did in furtherance of his interests. It made her fertile in conception, prompt in act, and skilful in execution. We need not follow out in detail the particulars of that clever *ruse* whereby she imposed upon the aged, infirm, and dim-sighted patriarch, and secured to her son the benediction intended for his brother. It is mainly important, in the present place, to consider the action of Jacob under the circumstances, the weakness of character which he revealed when temptation came upon him, and the lengths of ill-doing whereto he was, by a sort of necessity, carried, so soon as he overstepped the limits of right.

It is evident that Jacob had no share in the concoction of the plot. It is evident that he was even a somewhat unwilling instrument in carrying it out. He clearly did not like the part which he was called upon to play. He doubted whether it would succeed. When his mother first suggested it to him, he met her with an objection—"Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: my father will peradventure feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing" (Gen. xxvii. 11, 12). But his mother's influence was too strong. If she did not succeed in silencing his conscience altogether, or in quite removing his fears, she was able to brush these obstacles from her path, and to dominate his will, by offering to take on herself all evil consequences, and insisting that it was his duty, not to cavil or argue, but to obey (ibid. verses 8, 13). "Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me the kids." Here Jacob's weakness shows itself. He was a man of about forty years of age, fully responsible in God's sight for all that he did. His conscience told him that to do as his mother wished was wrong; but he yields to her as if he had been a boy of ten! He "went, and fetched, and brought the kids to his mother," and allowed her to dress him in his brother's clothes, and to cover his smooth hands with the hairy

skins of the young goats ; and he took from her the savoury meat which she had made, and went in to his father. He was as wax in her hands—not persuaded, but dominated, as weak characters always are by stronger ones. He went in, having consented to the scheme which he had not originated, and pledged himself in a way to do his best to carry it out.

He went in with fear and trepidation, having to personate his brother, and having a nervous dread, lest, either by eye, or ear, or touch, his father should detect him. Dimmed eyes will occasionally see, in a momentary flash, exactly that which they are not wished to see. Would Isaac experience such a lucid moment? If he did not, would his ears be more acute? Jacob would no doubt resolve to make his voice as like that of his brother as he could; but would his imitation be successful, would it impose upon his father? If it did, there was still the third ordeal of touch, which could scarcely be avoided, when food was passed from hand to hand, and the son came close to his father to receive his blessing? His nervous anxiety affected Jacob's voice, and the first words which he uttered on entering Isaac's presence—"My father"—raised in the patriarch's mind a certain amount of suspicion. They did not sound genuine. The address was not that to which he was accustomed—and the question arose to Isaac's lips—"Who art thou, my son?" (Gen. xxvii. 18). Here Jacob was at once immeshed in his own snare. If Isaac had been wholly without suspicion or doubt, if he had assumed without question that it was Esau who had come in to him and brought him the savoury meat which he loved, all might have gone smoothly—Jacob might not have been brought into the predicament, that he must either confess his intended deception and lose the fruits of it, or tell a lie. But when the question came, "Who art thou, my son?" there was only this alternative. And so, having consented to deceive, negatively, he is at once led on—dragged on, as it were—into an open positive falsehood—"I am Esau, thy firstborn; I have done as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me" (Gen. xxvii. 19). Nor is this the worst. Surprised that the savoury meat has been brought to him so soon, Isaac innocently asks, "How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son"—and Jacob impiously answers—"Because the Lord thy God brought it to me," or "Because the Lord thy God gave me good speed" (ibid. xxvii.

20, Rev. Vers.). "The covering of his falsehood by this appeal to the Most High is," as has been well said, "the worst part of Jacob's conduct."[1] First, weak yielding to persuasion against the voice of conscience and consent to take part in a deceit, then a flagrant falsehood, or rather a string of falsehoods; finally, a blasphemous introduction of the name of God into the business, and a pretence that God had helped what God must have viewed with high displeasure. So facile is the descent towards Avernus!

But Isaac's suspicions were not yet lulled wholly to sleep. The accents that fell on his ear still sounded to him more like the voice of Jacob than the voice of Esau (ibid. ver. 22). So he resolved on another test. "Come near," he said, "I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not" (ibid. ver. 21); and Jacob drew near, and Isaac touched his hands, and perhaps his neck, which Rebekah had covered with the skins of the kids, and finding the surface to be hairy, was at length satisfied—not, however, without one more question which drew forth one more falsehood—"Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am" (ibid. ver. 24). Then, Isaac accepted the savoury meat, and ate and drank, and in the warmth of his affection kissed his son, and smelt the accustomed smell of his raiment, for which Rebekah's foresight had provided (ibid. ver. 15), and, all doubt being thus removed, blessed him with the blessing which made him lord over his brethren, and required all other children of his mother to bow down to him, and applied to him and his decendants after him the exact words of the blessing which God had bestowed at the first on Abraham (Gen. xii. 3)—"Cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee" (ibid. xxvii. 29). Successful, yet fuller probably of shame than of joy, the impostor quitted his father's presence hastily, lest his brother should come in and see him in his disguise, and denounce him, and induce his father to recall the blessing, or change it into a curse; and, we may suppose, returned to his mother, and made her acquainted with all that had occurred—with his tremors, his success, and what his success had cost him.

Rebekah had gained her heart's desire, but did not long enjoy her triumph. Ill-gotten triumph is ever a "Dead Sea fruit," which, however "fair to view, yet turns to ashes on the lips."

[1] Bp. Harold Browne in the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 162.

Esau, when he understood all that Jacob had done, came to the terrible determination to kill his brother so soon as Isaac should be dead, and not only formed the resolution, but let it be known, so that Rebekah heard of it (Gen. xxvii. 42). Isaac's death was supposed to be imminent (ibid. vers. 2, 41), though in fact he survived his deception for a long term of years; and thus Rebekah was at once thrown into a state of extreme alarm, thinking that her husband might die any day, and that then a domestic tragedy would follow—Esau would slay her darling. It would be an awful Nemesis. All her trouble, all her scheming, all her contrivance would have been in vain; instead of exalting her favourite to the honour of recognized head of the tribe, it would have led to his being cut off in his prime, and to her own bereavement and desolation. Thus she had to cast about in her thoughts for some remedy. How could she save Jacob from his impending fate? Her ingenuity and finesse were equal to the call upon them. She must induce her husband to send Jacob away to a distance, and so place him beyond Esau's reach, at any rate until Esau's anger had evaporated. But she shrank from making known to him the real circumstances which made Jacob's absence desirable, partly perhaps lest she should give him pain, partly because he might have reproached her with being the cause of the whole difficulty. Her cleverness readily suggested to her another, quite sufficient, reason which she might give her husband for sending Jacob on his travels. She had only to remind him that it was high time their younger son—now certainly forty, perhaps fifty, years of age or even more [1]—should marry, and the danger, if he remained where he was, of his following his brother's example and taking a Hittite woman to wife; Isaac would then of himself see the necessity of sending him away, and the danger would be escaped without any inconvenient revelation, or painful raking up of the past. Once more her craft succeeds. "I am weary of my life," she says to Isaac, "because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"—and Isaac, falling into her views, calls Jacob, and bids him "arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel his mother's father, and take him a wife from thence of the

[1] Fifty-seven, according to some (ibid. p. 178), seventy-seven, according to others ("Dictionary of the Bible," vol. i. p. 912).

daughters of Laban his mother's brother" (Gen. xxvii. 46; xxviii. 2).

The difficulty is thus met, and the worst peril—the peril of death—which seemed imminent, is avoided: but the trickster and his mother do not escape punishment. Jacob has a long and tedious journey set him, and a long and weary service at the end of it, and then quarrel and complaint to meet (Gen. xxxi. 1, 26–30), and a crisis of distress and alarm to pass through (ibid. xxxii. 6–23; xxxiii. 1–11), before he once more returns to the promised land, and again sees his father, and is folded in his arms. *He never more sees his mother, and she never more sees her son!* The inexorable Nemesis requires that she herself shall send away far from her the light of her home, the apple of her eye, the joy of her heart, send him to toil and peril, to the society of cold and grudging relatives, to misconception, misinterpretation, envy, hatred, obloquy. She flatters herself that it will be only for a short space—"a few days" (Gen. xxvii. 44)—but the days lengthen into weeks, and the weeks into months, and the months into years, and still either she does not think it safe to recall him, or he is deaf to her summons—at any rate he does not come. Sad and solitary—for Esau leaves her too (Gen. xxviii. 9) and she remains the only permanent attendant on her aged and infirm husband—Rebekah, faint with the heart-sickness of hope deferred, goes down the hill of life, and dies while her darling son is still in the exile to which she has herself sent him. Never was sin visited with a severer temporal penalty. Excited by maternal love, but a love excessive and ill-regulated, Rebekah by one and the same act tricks her husband, robs her firstborn son, and leads her younger son into sin—the result of the act is a lifelong separation from the child in whom she is wrapped up, and for whom she has transgressed, lifelong anxiety on his account, and, so far as appears, an entire cessation of intercommunication. We must not press unduly the silence of Scripture; but the circumstances of the time, so far as they are known to us, would seem to have been such as to render communication by letter or messenger between places so distant as Haran and Beersheba, if not impossible, at any rate exceedingly difficult, and thus rare and infrequent.

Isaac, on sending away his son to the distant region of Padan-aram, whence it was uncertain whether he would ever

receive him back, thought it right to bestow on him once more, knowingly and voluntarily, "the blessing of Abraham" (Gen. xxviii. 4). Apparently, he recognized the overruling hand of God in what had occurred, and, as he held that the blessing once given could not be recalled (ibid. xxvii. 33), deemed it best to submit himself wholly to the Divine decree, and show his acquiescence in it by a reiteration, which was intended as a ratification and confirmation, of his preceding act. "God Almighty bless thee," he said, "and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of peoples ; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee, that thou mayest inherit the land of thy sojournings, which God gave unto Abraham" (ibid. xxviii. 3, 4 ; Rev. Vers.). Thus Jacob went forth from his home in peace, forgiven, reconciled to his father, reconciled also, we may hope, to his heavenly Father, whom he must have grievously offended by his undutifulness, his lies, and his profane use of the Holy Name (ibid. xxvii. 20).

CHAPTER IV.

FLIGHT TO HARAN, AND EARLY LIFE THERE.

Halt at Bethel—Character of the site—View southwards—Jacob's ladder and vision of God—His pillar—Journey from Bethel to Haran—Probable route followed—Meeting with Rachel—Reception by Laban—Laban's trickery and double marriage of Jacob.

THE route of Jacob from Beersheba to Haran was probably much the same as that which Abraham's trusted servant—Eliezer, according to the general opinion—had pursued seventy years earlier (Gen. xxiv. 10). It led at first over the tracts known in later times as the highlands of Judæa and Samaria, preserving a general direction of from south to north, at any rate as far as the plain of Esdraelon. It is not to be supposed that Jacob pursued it in a hurried manner, beset by fears, expecting every moment that Esau would be upon him, seeking revenge and eager to take his life.[1] Esau's intention was to slay his brother, so soon as their father Isaac was dead, and the mourning for him over (Gen. xxvii. 41); he had no thought of slaying him during Isaac's lifetime. Jacob probably went on his way with caution, and circumspection, as a modern traveller would do, if unattended, or scantly attended. On his way northwards, he arrived after some days at the site afterwards known as Bethel, a site near to which Abraham had already erected an altar (Gen. xii. 8), and at which he may have determined to make a halt on that account. The site is now one of great bleakness and barrenness. "Bethel," says a modern traveller, "is one of the most desolate-looking places I ever saw. Long round hills of bare grey stone, russet spots of thorns and coarse herbage

[1] So Meyer, "Israel: a Prince with God," p. 47.

rising in their cracks, and poor specks of ploughing among the stones, where there was any surface to be stirred ; a small valley with an old tank, in the dry bottom of which our tents were raised ; a wretched village on the crest of one of the broad-backed earth-waves, or rocky bubbles of hills ; the cabins rudely built of stone filled in with mud, though there are two or three better houses of two storeys ; rough stone fences with some fig-trees ; spots of lentils and grain in one of the valleys, the side of which was nothing but weather-worn stone ; sheets and shelves of rock everywhere, unrelieved by any trees ; a few poor vines above the village ; a high square low-domed building, rising on the top of the hill on which the village stands ; some ancient tombs on the sides of the neighbouring valleys—such is Bethel."[1] Over this stony district Jacob made his way, and arrived towards evening at "the place" (*ham-makom*) which he was bent on reaching, the spot already hallowed by Abraham's altar, and perhaps even earlier a holy place to the primitive inhabitants of the land. The sun had set (Gen. xxviii. 11) ; and, weary with long travel, the solitary wanderer laid him down upon the bare ground, with a smooth stone—one of the many scattered over the surface of the soil[2]—for his pillow, and the star-spangled vault of heaven as a canopy over his head. Abraham's altar would screen him from the night wind, apt to blow coldly over so exposed a height, and Abraham's God would look down upon him from above, and protect him from every kind of danger.

Perhaps, ere composing himself to sleep, and ere darkness fell, he gazed round upon the circumjacent landscape. On three sides, northward, eastward, and westward, the view was shut in, at no great distance, by grey rounded hill-tops, which stood like sentinels keeping watch upon the place. But, on the fourth, he would see, stretching towards the south, "the heights and valleys of Benjamin,"[3] gradually receding and reaching in a long succession to Mount Moriah and the hills which in later times stood round about Jerusalem. There Abraham had built another altar (Gen. xxii. 9), and laid his son Isaac upon it, and been prepared to sacrifice him ; and there would one day be sacrificed the antitype, whereof Isaac was the type—the one

[1] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. ii. p. 185.
[2] Conder, "Tent Work in Palestine," vol. ii. p. 252.
[3] Geikie, p. 186.

oblation that alone was expiatory in itself, and had power to take away and blot out the sins of the whole world. But of these deep mysteries Jacob would probably know nothing ; perhaps he would not even distinguish Mount Moriah from the neighbouring heights, or know that he was looking on the place where his father's life had so nearly come to a close.

His last look, we may suppose, ere slumber closed his eyes, was towards the glorious star-spangled sky, which he would view as the dwelling-place of God, whence alone could come to him help, protection, guidance, forgiveness, blessing. His last thought would probably be a prayer—perhaps a prayer for pardon ; at any rate, a prayer to be guarded, shielded, and protected from all evil during the hours of sleep. He closed his eyes ; and lo ! a vision came to him. "He dreamed, and behold a ladder set up upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven : and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold the Lord," or, according to another reading,[1] "the glory of the Lord, stood above it" (Gen. xxviii. 12, 13). It has been supposed that the circumstances of his surroundings "wove themselves into his dreams." The huge slabs of limestone lying about him drew near together, and "built themselves up into a gigantic staircase, reaching from the spot where he lay to the starry depths above him" ;[2] and then, by the association of contrast, the "most desolate region" where he lay became "peopled" with a multitude of angelic forms, ascending and descending in interminable succession between the earth and the sky. It may be that there is some truth in this view ; but, on the whole, we must regard the vision as sent straight by God from heaven to comfort the solitary wanderer, and as, in the main, intended to assure him, that "there is a way from God to man, and that man might by God's help mount up by it to heaven, that angels went up from man to God, and came down from God to man, and that there was a continual providence watching over the servants of God."[3] Whether the vision conveyed, or was intended to convey, any deeper meaning than this to Jacob, we cannot say ; whether he could at all have any dim conception, that the true "Ladder," the true and only "Way" from Earth to Heaven, was that "seed" promised to

[1] See the Targum of Onkelos.

[2] Meyer, "Israel : a Prince with God," p. 49.

[3] See the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 166.

Abraham (Gen. xxii. 18) and promised to Isaac (ibid. xxvi. 4), and now about to be for the third time promised to himself (ibid. xxviii. 14), in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed, and by whom the angels of God should ascend and descend upon mankind so long as the world lasted (John i. 51). Most probably this deep truth, first openly revealed by Christ Himself, was beyond Jacob's imagining; but to see straight into heaven, to perceive that he was cared for, to behold God's ministering spirits moving about him and guarding the spot whereon he lay, must have been an inexpressible comfort, an ample compensation for the loss of home and friends, a foretaste of the blessedness of eternity!

And then, beside and beyond the vision of angels, there was revealed to him, above the ladder, in the Heaven of Heavens whereto it conducted, the Glory of the Lord—the Lord Jehovah Himself, the King of Heaven, the Maker of the angels, the God of his fathers; and a voice fell on his ears which said—"I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed; and, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. xxviii. 13-15). Precious promises, assuring him not only of honour and glory in the distant future, of a numerous posterity, and a wide dominion, and the issue from his loins of that marvellous One in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed, but also of present protection, present support and guidance, and of a safe return to the land which he was now quitting as an exile. "Behold, I am *with thee*." "God with us" is the thing that we most need; "with us," not against us; our friend, not our enemy; and close to us, by our side, ready to help and protect us, to guard us, not only from external dangers, but from the inward perils of foolish thoughts, and vain imaginations, and evil desires, and faithless doubts, and coward fears, and all that tends to separate between us and Him, and make us unworthy of his near presence. "I will keep thee." "Keep thee"—not let thee go—not leave thee to thine

own guidance, but preserve thee, be ever with thee, give thee power and strength, so that thou shalt "mount up with wings as eagles," and "run and not be weary," and "walk and not faint." An ineffable consolation must the thought of these promises have been to the exile through his long and weary wanderings, in the desert solitudes, in the more dangerous haunts of men, amid all the perils that beset him from slippery rocks, from yawning precipices, from carnivorous beasts, from savage predatory tribes, from drought, from hunger, from exhaustion.

But he woke up from his vision, astonished and "afraid" (Gen. xxviii. 17). Human nature cannot come into contact with the things that belong to the other world without a creeping sensation of fear. "How dreadful is this place!" was Jacob's first feeling. "Woe is me, for I am undone," was Isaiah's, when his eyes had seen the King, the Lord of Hosts (Isa. vi. 5). "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die," was the address of the Israelites to Moses, when they had heard God's voice at Sinai (Ex. xx. 19). We shrink from, and tremble at, the supernatural. "Surely," said Jacob, "the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Gen. xxviii. 16, 17). No craven fear, but a hushed sense of awe and reverence fell upon him. The spot on which he had slept was "holy ground." God, no doubt, was everywhere—we must not suppose Jacob to have been ignorant of this truth—but he did not manifest Himself to man everywhere; and the places where He did manifest Himself became to a pious soul specially holy through such manifestation. Jacob therefore proceeded to an act of consecration, selecting the stone which was most like a pillar from among the boulders wherewith the ground was strewed—the same which he had used as a pillow during the night—he set it up on end, as a memorial, to mark the site, and at the same time "poured oil upon the top of it" (ibid. ver. 18), to hallow and consecrate it. Both ceremonies were probably old-world rites, common to the family of Abraham with many other tribes and even nations,[1] and not yet perverted to super-

[1] It is a reasonable conjecture, that the rude stone monuments, called menhirs, dolmens, &c., so widely spread over Europe and Asia, are of kindred origin with Jacob's "pillar," and even more ancient.

stitious uses, or not so perverted as to be beyond reclaiming to the service of true religion. A finger pointing heavenward is one of the earliest and the simplest forms in religious symbolism; and it seems to be this form which lies equally at the basis of the Egyptian obelisk, the Phœnician stêlé, the Babylonian *ziggurat*, the primitive dolmen, and the tower or spire of a Christian cathedral. Men's hearts need to be directed upwards; and the earliest religious instinct recognizes the need, and provides for it in one way or another. Sanctifying with oil is also a very early, and a very persistent, religious usage, appearing alike in idolatrous worships,[1] in the Hebrew ritual (Ex. xxx. 25–30), in Apostolic practice (Mark vi. 13; Jam. v. 14), and in usages within the Christian Church of to-day. Jacob set up his pillar in a truly religious spirit, not as an object of worship, but as a memorial of his vision, a memorial dedicated to God, and intended to mark the place on which he had seen his vision as specially holy—a true "house of God" (Beth-el), and a true "gate of heaven."

And then, before quitting the spot, Jacob "vowed a vow" unto the Lord, "saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God; and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (Gen. xxviii. 20–22). It has been said that, in thus speaking, Jacob was showing his worse self, and seeking to drive a bargain with his Maker, promising Him fidelity only on certain conditions.[2] But we are scarcely fair to the patriarch, if we construe his words so narrowly. God had promised to do all that Jacob wanted him to do. Jacob does not doubt the promise, but accepts it fully, and in his gratitude seeks to make to God some return. His "if" is equivalent to "since"—"Since God is going to be with me, and to keep me, and give me all I need, and bring me back to my father's house in peace, since He has promised all this and will assuredly perform it, I for my part pledge myself that He, and He alone, shall be my God, shall have my obedience, my worship, my trust, my adoration, my

[1] See Clem. Alex. "Stromata," vii. p. 713; Arnob. "Adv. Gentes," i. 39; Pausan. vii. 22, x. 24.

[2] Meyer, "Israel: a Prince with God," p. 62.

love; and further I pledge myself to render Him that tenth of all my possessions, which is traditionally fixed as the right and proper proportion."[1] Jacob does not bargain with his Maker, but, stirred by a sense of the Divine bounty and loving-kindness, offers "the calves of his lips" in response, and binds himself to a lifelong service. It is a moment of self-consecration, and may well be viewed as the turning-point of Jacob's life—the moment when, constrained by the love of God, he gave himself up to Him, and resolved no longer to "live to Himself," but to be God's faithful soldier and servant to his life's end.[2]

"Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the East" (Gen. xxix. 1). The route followed by Jacob between Bethel and Haran is uncertain; but, on the whole, it is perhaps most probable that he proceeded northward over the Palestinian highland, to the sources of the Jordan, and thence along the Cœlesyrian valley, still in a northerly direction, to the site of Antioch, whence he deflected his course to the east, and passed, by way of Aleppo, to Haran. This is the easiest and the best-watered route, as well as the most frequented in ancient times. It presents no great stretch of waterless desert, into which an individual would be afraid to plunge, no mountain tract at all difficult to traverse, and no river hard to cross but the Euphrates. Even the Euphrates is fordable in places between the 35th and 37th parallels; and we may suppose Jacob to have crossed either at Birehjik or at Suriyeh, the ancient Thapsacus. A short journey through Mesopotamia would then bring him to Haran, the city of Nahor, whither he was bound (Gen. xxvii. 23).

Arrived in the vicinity of Haran, Jacob, like Eliezer (Gen. xxiv. 11), halted at a well (ibid. xxix. 29). The well was "in the field," that is, in the open pasture land.[3] The tract about Haran (now Harrán) is sufficiently watered, partly by the river Belik, partly by a number of springs. Wells, however, would still be needed; and indeed natural springs themselves—"wells of living water"—are in the East often walled round, and covered with a stone, which is not removed very easily. Dr. Thomson says[4]—"Who that has travelled much in this country,

[1] See Gen. xiv. 20; and compare Deane, "Abraham: His Life and Times," pp. 73, 74.

[2] Meyer, l.s.c.

[3] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. . p. 443.

[4] "The Land and the Book," p. 589.

(Syria) has not often arrived at a well in the heat of the day which was surrounded with numerous flocks of sheep waiting to be watered? I once saw such a scene in the burning plains of Northern Syria. Half-naked, fierce-looking men were drawing up water in leathern buckets; flock after flock was brought up, watered, and sent away; and, after all the men had ended their work, then several women and girls brought up their flocks and drew water for them. Thus it was with Jethro's daughters, when Moses stood up and aided them; and thus, no doubt, it would have been with Rachel, if Jacob had not rolled away the stone, and watered her sheep." Jacob, on arriving about midday, or soon after, "looked, and behold a well in the field, and lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks; and a great stone was upon the well's mouth. And thither were all the flocks gathered, and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place" (Gen. xxix. 2, 3). He spoke to the shepherds who were tending the "three flocks," and said unto them—"My brethren, whence be ye? and they said, Of Haran are we. And he said unto them, Know ye Laban, the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him. And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep" (ibid. xxix. 4—6). Then Rachel herself appeared upon the scene. "While he yet spake, Rachel came with her father's sheep: for she kept them" (ibid. ver. 9). "The daughters of the flock-masters," says a recent traveller in the East, "still go, in many places, to tend and water the flocks. You may see them thus engaged near almost any Arab tents in the plain of Sharon or of Philistia."[1] Rachel was probably of tender age, not more than ten or eleven years old; for "only young girls of that age are allowed to tend the sheep, or go alone."[2] Yet Jacob's heart goes out to her, and, having first drawn water for her and watered her flock, he tells her of his near relationship, and kisses her (ibid. ver. 11).

"It was," as has been said,[3] "love at first sight." The human heart, and especially the heart of the Oriental man, is so constituted, that, not infrequently, it gives itself away in a moment of time. One meeting of the eyes, one touch of the

[1] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 443.
[2] Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries," p. 38. [3] Ibid.

hands, and a feeling arises, deep, true, and, in many an instance, undying. So it appears to have been in Jacob's case. Jacob's love for Rachel is one of the most beautiful points of his character. It bursts into life full-grown; it never wavers, never lessens; it outlives her, and become an affection, an undue affection, for her children.

Laban received his nephew with every outward appearance of satisfaction—"he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house" (Gen. xxix. 13). It is the ordinary practice of Orientals to kiss effusively on meeting a friend or neighbour.[1] Laban was no doubt sincerely glad of Jacob's coming, saw in it a prospect of establishing satisfactorily one at least of his daughters, and may even have had an eye to further advantages. But to thoughts of this kind he gave no utterance. The rôle which he elected to play was that of the affectionate kinsman and the hospitable sheikh. "Surely," he said to Jacob, "thou art my bone and my flesh," and on the strength of the near relationship he gave him free entertainment for a whole month (ibid. ver. 14). But the time came, when the duties of hospitality seemed to have been fully discharged, and it was felt, perhaps on both sides, that the relations of the uncle and nephew ought to be placed upon a business footing. Laban, as was fitting, took the initiative. "Because thou art my brother," he said, "shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? Tell me, what shall thy wages be" (ibid. ver. 15). And Jacob answered—"I will serve thee seven years for Rachel, thy youngest daughter" (ibid. ver. 18). It is always necessary in the East to buy a wife.[2] As Jacob had no worldly goods to dispose of, having crossed the Jordan with nothing but his staff (ibid. xxxii. 10) and the clothes that he wore, he could only effect the purchase by mortgaging his labour. This he proposed to do for a term of seven years, at the end of which Rachel would be marriageable; and Laban, always covetous and grasping, readily accepted the terms and concluded the bargain.

So Jacob once more resumed his shepherd's occupation, but no longer as the proprietor, tending his own sheep, and at liberty to work as much or as little as he pleased. Now he was but a servant and a hireling, at the beck and call of a master, and that master, albeit his uncle, evidently a hard man, who would exact full labour for the promised wage. Nevertheless

[1] Geikie, l.s.c.

[2] See above, page 31.

Jacob felt it a happy time—perhaps the happiest time in all his long life—for he was an inmate of Laban's house, and every day was in the company of his beloved, and saw her charms ripen as she passed from childhood to womanhood, and felt that each day his term of waiting was drawing nearer to its close: so the seven years passed as though they had been but "a few days, for the love he had for her" (Gen. xxix. 20). And now at last the term of seven years was ended, and the labourer was entitled to his wage. So "Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for the days are fulfilled" (ibid. ver. 21); and Laban could not dispute the claim, but, professing the utmost willingness to comply with it, "gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast"—the customary marriage festival, to which friends and neighbours commonly flock, and which is celebrated with songs, and dances, and music, and rough jollity often for seven days continuously.[1] The delivery of the bride takes place "in the evening" (ver. 23) of the first day, after dark[2]—the maiden, closely veiled, is conducted by her father and her female attendants from her own home to that of her husband, and left there. So it was on this occasion — "it came to pass in the evening that he (Laban) took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him." The cheat was possible, because of the darkness, only lit up by a few torches, and of the close shrouding in an ample veil, which concealed not only the face but the figure. Jacob did not discover the trick that had been played him till the next morning—"in the morning, behold, it was Leah" (ver. 25)—and the deceiver of his father found himself deceived by his uncle, overtaken by a just Nemesis, albeit one not deserved at Laban's hands. Naturally, he was indignant. The modern poet[3] suggests, that every husband is in the same way dis-illusioned when the marriage-veil is lifted; but at any rate the shock does not come suddenly, as it did to Jacob, when in his bride he recognized the plain, "sore-eyed" (ver. 17), unloved Leah, in the place of the beautiful, delicate, long and tenderly beloved Rachel. But the wily Syrian had his excuses ready, and together with them an offer

[1] See Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol i. pp. 101, 102.

[2] Ibid. vol. ii. p. 216.

[3] Arthur Hugh Clough. (See the "Bothie of Topa-na-Fuosich.")
—("With Rachel we lie down at night—in the morning, behold, it is Leah.")

which he felt sure would pacify his angry son-in-law—it was not the custom of the country, he said, to allow a younger daughter to marry before her elder sister; but she might follow her sister to the same domicile, and he was willing to make Jacob doubly his son-in-law in a week's time, when Leah's wedding festival was over (verses 26, 27). The excuse probably overstated the case. Orientals wish to marry off their daughters in the order of their birth, but there is no absolutely rigid custom on the point—had there been one Jacob would have known of it. The wrong committed would, however, in Jacob's eyes, be fairly well atoned for by the compensation offered—he might not want Leah, but he could put up with her, if Rachel were given to him as well. And he did not even grudge another seven-years' service under his grasping relative, or, at any rate he was ready to consent to it, in order that the desire of his eyes and of his heart should be his. The agreement was therefore made, and carried out. At the end of a week, Laban gave Jacob "Rachel his daughter to wife also" (ver. 28), and Jacob continued to serve him as a shepherd for seven additional years, without any further wage than his own sustenance, and that of his family (ver. 30).

CHAPTER V.

DOMESTIC UNHAPPINESS.

Evils inherent in polygamy—Leah's unhappiness not much diminished by her fruitfulness—Rachel's unhappiness at her sterility—Addition to the household of two secondary wives—Rachel's reproach removed by the birth of Joseph—Fresh contract with Laban, and its results—Dissatisfaction of Laban and his sons—Dissatisfaction of Jacob with his position.

POLYGAMY is a natural source of domestic unhappiness. As originally instituted, marriage was the lifelong union of one man with one woman (Gen. ii. 22–24). But man, having corrupted his way before God, began very early to kick against this wholesome restriction. In some places polygamy, in others polyandry, prevailed. But still the natural, and only legitimate, order of things maintained itself, and almost everywhere among nations that possessed even a rudimentary civilization, we find monogamy the rule, polygamy either non-existent, or the exception. In the family of Abraham the monogamist principle was, clearly, in the ascendant; and while exceptional circumstances were regarded as justifying polygamy within narrow limits, the primeval marriage law was, for the most part, upheld and observed. Abraham conformed to it, excepting that, at his wife's suggestion and persuasion, he gave Hagar the position of a secondary or concubine wife, for a term of years. Isaac yielded it an unqualified obedience. Jacob would probably have done the same, had he not found himself most exceptionally circumstanced. Saddled by fraud with an uncongenial wife, a wife whom he "hated" (Gen. xxix. 31), he was then offered, as a compensation, the woman whom he loved, and whom he thought he had married. We can scarcely blame his accept-

ance of the offer very severely. Mutual consent is of the very essence of the marriage contract, and his first marriage had not really had his consent. Still, as the outward forms had been complied with, it was reckoned a legal marriage; and probably a man of a deeply religious spirit would have resisted the temptation to which Jacob succumbed, and declined Laban's offer. But Jacob was certainly not as yet a man of deeply religious spirit. He had experienced one burst of passionate religious feeling, when he woke up from his vision (ibid. xxviii. 16–22); but religion had not become his main motive or permeated his whole being. Under the circumstances of the time, we can feel no surprise that he accepted his uncle's suggestion, and took to wife both sisters, marriage with a wife's sister not having been yet prohibited.

But the result was such as to show how inexpedient is polygamy, and how especially to be avoided are double marriages with near relatives. Jacob's two wives were placed in a position of antagonism from the first. Rachel was "loved"; Leah was "hated" (Gen. xxix. 30, 31). Rachel, the younger, was in all respects preferred over Leah, the elder sister. The partiality was so pronounced, that God's compassion was called forth by it, and he "opened Leah's womb," while He closed the womb of Rachel. Leah bore to Jacob, in quick succession, four sons, whose names indicate at once her husband's indifference and her own hope of overcoming it. Full of exultation at the birth of her firstborn, she called him Reuben, "See, a son," for she said—"Surely, the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore will my husband love me" (ibid. ver. 32). But the love which she counted on was still withheld, and her prayers went up for a second son, and were heard; and she called her second son Simeon, *i.e.* "Hearing"; for she said, "Because the Lord hath heard that I was hated, He hath therefore given me this son also" (ibid. ver. 33). A third son followed, and she called him Levi, "Conjoined," saying, "Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have borne him three sons" (ibid. ver. 34); but the hoped-for union of hearts was as far off as ever. Still the unloved wife did not despair. She bore a fourth son, and called him Judah, *i.e.* "Praised," because she praised God for him. But her husband's heart, to all appearance, remained untouched, and Leah was no dearer than when first forced upon him.

Nor was Rachel much happier. That her sister should be so prolific, while she continued barren, filled her soul with envy and bitterness. "Give me children," was her cry to Jacob—"Give me children, *or I die!*" (Gen. xxx. i.) The unreasonable reproach, for as such he would feel it, angered Jacob, and he replied with acrimony, "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" Thus the domestic peace of even the happier of the two wives was troubled.

It would have been well if Rachel had carried her care to God, and prayed Him, as earnestly as Hannah did in later times (1 Sam. i. 11–13), to remove the curse of barrenness from her; but, instead of so doing, she fell back upon a mere human device—the ordinary resource of the barren woman in her age[1]—and gave her handmaid, Bilhah, to Jacob, that she might "have children by her" (Gen. xxx. 3). Thus, still more polygamy was introduced into the household, and with it still more occasion for quarrel, envy, and disagreement. Bilhah, shortly, bore Jacob two sons, and Rachel was pleased, and called one of them Dan, *i.e.* "Judge," because God had judged her (ibid. ver. 6), and the other Naphtali, *i.e.* "My wrestling," because, she said, "With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed" (ibid. ver. 8). But this partial triumph of her sister's gave offence to Leah, who, by way of reprisals, "took Zilpah her maid, and gave her to Jacob to wife" (ibid. ver. 9); and Zilpah became the mother of two sons by Jacob, who were called respectively Gad and Asher. Thus, the complexity of the household was still further increased, and what gave happiness to one wife aroused enmity and jealousy in the others.

Leah's triumph—so far as offspring was concerned—seemed complete, when, after "hiring Jacob with Reuben's mandrakes" (ibid. ver. 16), she became the mother of two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun, and felt confident that thenceforth her husband would "dwell with her, because she had borne him six sons" (ibid. ver. 20). The birth of a daughter, Dinah, (ibid. ver. 21), was not necessary to add the final touch to her triumph, but it may have been felt by Rachel as a further blow, and may have helped to humble her in the dust before her Maker.

[1] See Gen. xvi. 2. Comp. Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 290.

Rachel, at last, turned to God and prayed to Him, as Hannah afterwards prayed; and God "remembered her, and hearkened to her, and opened her womb" (Gen. xxx. 22). It must have been towards the end of Jacob's second seven-years' term of service, that this change took place, and Rachel "conceived, and bare a son," and was able to say, "God hath taken away my reproach" (ibid. ver. 23). It is difficult for us to realize the greatness of her joy and delight. Barrenness is so looked down upon in the East, the barren woman is so despised and flouted, that when one who has been long regarded, and has long regarded herself, as sterile, becomes a mother, the reaction is excessive, and the change of feeling extraordinary.[1] We see something of Rachel's extravagant mood in the name that she gave to her son—Joseph, *i.e.* "He shall add," and her confident assertion, in justification of it, "The Lord shall add to me another son" (ibid. ver. 24). She may have had this conviction divinely impressed upon her, in which case her words were a prophecy; but she may have been merely giving vent to her own sanguine expectations, in which case they were a boast. She is to be excused, if, under the exciting circumstances, she was not altogether mistress of herself, and having suffered under depression so long, was now unduly exalted.

To Jacob the birth of his eleventh son, borne to him by the only wife of his choice, seemed to set the seal to all that he had done in Mesopotamia, and to bring his life there to its natural term. "When Rachel therefore had borne Joseph," Jacob went to Laban, and said to him, "Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee" (Gen. xxx. 25, 26). It does not appear that he had received any message of recall from his mother, or any notification that his brother's anger was appeased; but he may have thought that his fourteen years of exile would probably have softened Esau's heart, or he may have resolved to run all risks rather than continue on with Laban, serving him only for his sustenance. Laban, at any rate, seems to have thought that his nephew did not so much really wish to leave him as to alter the terms of his service; and, feeling how valuable that service had been, recognizing the fact that he had been blessed by God for Jacob's sake

[1] See Hannah's song of rejoicing in 1 Sam. ii. 1–10.

(ibid. ver. 27), and that thence had come the increase in his wealth, and his general success and prosperity, he declared himself ready to hire his nephew's services for the future at any price that he liked to put upon them—"Appoint me," he said, "thy wages and I will give it" (ibid. ver. 28). Upon this Jacob made a suggestion, which, in the natural course of things, would have given him only a small return for his toils, but which he hoped to increase by artifice and arrangement into an ample payment. He would have from Laban no hire in the shape of money, nor any fixed proportion of the annual increase of the flocks under his charge, but would be content to receive as his share only such lambs and kids as should be marked at birth with spots or speckles or ringstrakes. As the sheep of Syria and Mesopotamia are usually white, while the goats also are commonly of a uniform colour, either black or brown,[1] Laban readily consented, expecting that Jacob would thus become possessed of only a small per centage of his flock, while far the greater number would continue his own. This was the more probable, as Jacob proposed to separate Laban's existing flock into two portions, one to consist of all the animals that were speckled, spotted, or ringstraked, the other of those which had no such marks on them, but were entirely white, or black, or brown, and to tend only these latter.

The division was accordingly made; and Laban committed to the care of his own sons the speckled, spotted, and ringstraked portion of the flock, to Jacob the portion in which each animal was of one uniform colour: and further, that there might be no accidental admixture of the two, he "set three days' journey between himself and Jacob" (Gen. xxx. 36), thus pasturing the two flocks in districts remote from each other. Jacob then had recourse to his famous artifice. He "took him rods of green poplar, and of the almond and plane tree, and peeled white strakes in them and made the white appear which was in the rods. And he set the rods which he had peeled over against the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink; and they conceived when they came to drink, and the flocks conceived before the rods, and the flocks brought forth ringstraked, speckled, and spotted" (Gen. xxx. 37-39, Rev. Vers.). It is scarcely necessary to say, that so simple an artifice was quite insufficient in itself

[1] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. pp. 224, 233, &c.

for the production of the result desired; and that, if success attended it, the effect must be attributed, not to Jacob's contrivance, but to the Divine Will, which was bent on enriching him, and compensating him at Laban's expense for the hard measure which he had received at Laban's hands. Jacob may at first have regarded his success as due entirely to his own cunning; but, if so, he was undeceived when, on a certain occasion, he "lifted up his eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle were ringstraked, speckled, and grisled, and the angel of the Lord spake unto him, saying, . . . Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grisled; *for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee*" (Gen. xxxi. 10–12). Jacob's artifice was really puerile, and would by itself probably have had no effect at all. It was, in fact, as Leah and Rachel afterwards observed (ibid. vers. 14–16), God that took their father's riches from him, and gave them to his injured son-in-law. Jacob's small artifice cannot be commended, but it scarcely deserves the severe condemnation that has been heaped upon it. It does not show that "Jacob acted as a cheat and a rogue."[1]

The conditions of Jacob's service having been thus altered, he practically entered on an entirely new life. Instead of being a hired shepherd, he became a sheep-master. Together with his wives and children, he lived apart from Laban, in his own home, and only occasionally—perhaps only once a year—had communication with his uncle and his uncle's sons. His life as a head of a family now began. He had to be the ruler of a separate and independent household—to provide for its wants, to direct his wives, to bring up his children. The pastoral life is necessarily a wild life; and the guardianship of twelve children would tax the strength and judgment of any father severely. Jacob, incessantly occupied with the care of Laban's flock and his own, would find it difficult to exercise a very strict superintendence over his belongings. His sons must have been left very much to themselves, and naturally grew up rude, self-willed, and inclined to violence. If his wives lived in tolerable amity, now that they had, all of them, children, yet the household can scarcely have been a very happy one. The seeds of mischief are sown when once the original marriage law is departed from,

[1] Meyer, "Israel: a Prince with God," p. 77.

and in the fruitful soil of a polygamous household, they are sure, sooner or later, to spring up, and produce difficulty and disturbance.

So long, however, as the children continued young, these evils were in abeyance. Jacob's troubles during this period were rather with his father-in-law than with his family. Laban soon became dissatisfied with the agreement that he had made with his son-in-law, and insisted on altering the terms of it. Of course, Jacob might have held him to his bargain, but this would have led in all probability to an open breach, and perhaps to actual violence. Jacob therefore "suffered himself to be defrauded." He allowed Laban to "change his wages" repeatedly, and consented at one time to have the speckled cattle only as his portion, and at another the ringstraked only (Gen. xxxi. 8). But, whatever arrangement was made, the result was always the same—the great majority of each year's lambs and kids had the marks which made them Jacob's, while only a minority, and those the weaker ones (ibid. xxx. 42), had the marks which made them Laban's. Laban's cattle thus continually decreased in number, while Jacob's increased. After six years, or (according to some) twenty-six years,[1] of this continual loss on the one side and gain upon the other, the patience of Laban's sons became exhausted. It was intolerable to them that the interloper from beyond the Euphrates should have grown into a man of vast wealth (ibid. ver. 43) at their father's expense, while their father had become impoverished. They were, of course, interested in the matter, as their father's heirs; and they were naturally jealous of being eclipsed by a comparative stranger. Laban took the same view as his sons; and the result was, if not an open quarrel, at any rate, great coldness and estrangement. "Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him, as before" (Gen. xxxi. 2). He recognized that he was no longer looked upon with favour by his father-in-law, and knew that his brothers-in-law spoke of him in a tone of indignation, as having wrongfully deprived their father of the greater part of his wealth (ibid. ver. 1). Perhaps his conscience smote him to some extent, though he made no acknowledgment of having been in the wrong. But he must have felt dissatisfied with his position, and

[1] Bp. Harold Browne in the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. pp. 177, 178.

desirous of making some change or other in it. It was under these circumstances, that he once more heard the voice of God speaking directly to him, and distinctly pointing out the course which he was to take.

CHAPTER VI.

RETURN FROM HARAN TO PALESTINE.

Jacob commanded to return—His consultation of his wives—Their consent given—Jacob's clandestine departure—Pursuit of Laban—His vision—Interview between Laban and Jacob—Search for Laban's gods—"Heap of Witness"—Laban's departure—Jacob at Mahanaim—His messengers to Esau, and their report—His alarm—His prayer—Present sent by him to his brother—His "wrestling with an angel"—His ascent of Penuel—Reconciliation with his brother.

JACOB had been at least twenty years in Mesopotamia, either at Haran itself or in the neighbourhood, when the warning came that he was to leave the country and return to his proper home. "The Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee" (Gen. xxxi. 3). The purpose of God, first revealed to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts vii. 2, 3), still held good. Not Mesopotamia, but Palestine, was to be the country of the favoured race, the place where God would plant His name, and set up His tabernacle, and have His peculiar people worship Him. And Jacob therefore was recalled. His memory, no less than the memory of Abraham, and the memory of Isaac, was to overshadow the "Holy Land," and to hallow in the eyes of future generations a large number of its most important sites. Mahanaim in Gilead was to enshrine the recollection of his second vision of angels (Gen. xxxii. 2), and Penuel to be inseparably associated with his "seeing God face to face" (ibid. ver. 30). Succoth in the valley of the Jordan was to hand down to future ages the tradition of his wealth in cattle (ibid. xxxiii. 17); Shechem to show his well (John iv. 12): Allon-bachuth, "the Oak of Weeping," to be a memorial of his kindness to a dependent (Gen. xxxv. 8);

and Bethlehem-Ephratha to show for centuries the monument which he erected to his best-loved wife (ibid. xxxv. 16–20). Jacob in no way hesitated as to obeying the call that he had received. "I will be with thee" (ibid. xxxi. 3) was enough for his own guidance; and, without ascertaining what were the feelings of his brother, Esau, towards him, he was ready to set forth. But he felt that he was bound to consult his wives. Would Rachel and Leah (for in that order he thought of them) be equally willing to leave country, and kindred, and all associations, and the comfortable home which he had made for them, and to become wanderers, to plunge into new scenes, to go among strange peoples, to affront perils, to risk the chance of a cold welcome when they should reach their husband's kindred—and all for love of him, and consideration of the difficulties of his position? He misdoubted what their inclination would be, and therefore put his case to them with some art and some eloquence. "Your father," he said, "is displeased with me—his countenance is not toward me as before. And yet ye know that I have served him to the utmost of my ability—"with all my power." He indeed has never been faithful and honest towards me—he has "deceived me, and changed my wages ten times." Sometimes he has said, "The speckled shall be thy wages; and then all the cattle bare speckled;" sometimes, "The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked." I have always acquiesced. It is not I, but God, who "has taken away the cattle of your father, and has given them to me." Long ago it was revealed to me in a vision how it would be. Now, lately, I have had another vision, and the command has been given me—"Arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred" (Gen. xxxi. 5–13). Jacob's wives, convinced by his speech, and already somewhat alienated from their father by his conduct towards them, by the terms on which he had given them in marriage, and his general want of consideration for their interests, consented to the change of abode which Jacob had proposed, and expressed their perfect willingness to accompany him (ibid. vers. 14–16).

It happened that Laban was at the time engaged in shearing his sheep, which were pastured at a distance of three days' journey from those tended by Jacob (ibid. xxx. 36). This gave an opportunity for a clandestine departure. Jacob suddenly "rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels,

and carried away all his cattle, and all the goods which he had gotten . . . and stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled" (ibid. vers. 17–20). Rachel too, with the craft inherited from her father, took the opportunity of his absence to "steal his gods," or (in other words) seized and carried off the images (*teraphim*) which he reverenced and perhaps regarded as the tutelary genii of his mansion. These teraphim were either busts, or whole length figures in the human form, apparently of no great size (ibid. ver. 34), resembling probably the statuettes of gods which were so much affected by the ancient Egyptians. They were certainly objects of superstitious regard, but perhaps rather viewed as amulets, than as positive objects of worship. Rachel's theft of them shows that she participated to some extent in the superstitious credulity of her father and her father's house, which was tainted with the idolatrous beliefs and practices prevalent in Ur of the Chaldees.[1]

Jacob fled "with all that he had" (Gen. xxxi. 21)—not only his wives and children, but his "menservants," and his "maidservants," his household goods, his cattle, his camels, and his asses (ibid. xxx. 43; xxxi. 18). His setting forth must have been like that of an Oriental caravan. Four wives and twelve children mounted upon camels, a flock of sheep and goats to be counted by hundreds or by thousands, a considerable number of horned cattle, bulls and kine (ibid. xxxii. 15), numerous asses, and "milch camels with their colts" (ibid.), much furniture, several tents (ibid. xxxi. 33), and a long train of attendants, male and female, would imply a considerable company. The Euphrates, we are told, was passed (ibid. ver. 21), and the third day had arrived, before Laban received any intelligence of his son-in-law's flight. It may have been some days later before he discovered that his teraphim had been carried off. Then he determined on pursuit. Taking with him "his brethren" (ibid. ver. 23), *i.e.* a number of his tribesmen, sufficient to overawe the company which had gone forth with Jacob (ibid. ver. 29), whom it must have taken some time to collect, he "pursued after" Jacob, and, moving at great speed, overtook him in the more northern part of the land of Gilead, the modern Hauran (Auranitis), after a journey which is reckoned at "seven days" (ibid. ver. 23). The route taken

[1] Comp. Josh. xxiv. 2.

both by the pursuers and the pursued was, apparently, the direct one, which crossed the Euphrates at Thapsacus, and thence struck south-westward, by way of Palmyra and Kuryetein, to the neighbourhood of Damascus.[1] It was perhaps better watered in ancient times than it is at present; but small caravans still traverse it without much difficulty. We do not know how long Jacob was occupied in accomplishing the distance;[2] but Laban's light expedition, mounted on swift dromedaries, may easily have performed the journey in the time stated.

In the night, before Laban overtook the fugitives, he had a vision, in which God appeared to him, and said, "Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad" (Gen. xxxi. 24, 29). He understood this warning, not as prohibiting a conference, but as precluding the employment on his part of threats or force. The interview which took place was thus less stormy than might have been expected. Laban limited himself to two complaints. How could Jacob justify his clandestine departure, which had made it impossible for Laban even to take leave of his daughters, much less to give them the parting festival which was their due; and, what excuse could he give for having carried off his—Laban's—gods? To the former of these questions Jacob had a ready reply—he had been afraid of losing his wives, if he had announced his departure—he had thought that Laban would probably take them away from him by force (ibid. ver. 31). But to the second question he had no answer, except a denial. So far as he knew, nothing that was Laban's had been carried off. Let search be made, and, if anything were found, let the thief, whoever he was, be put to death—assuredly he would give him no protection (ibid. ver. 32).

So the search began. First Jacob's tent was entered and ransacked; then Leah's; then the tents of the two secondary wives, Zilpah and Bilhah; finally, the tent of Rachel, the favoured wife, who was considered to be entitled to more respect than the others. Here Rachel was found, seated upon the ground, and excused herself from rising by pleading

[1] See Porter, "Five Years in Damascus," pp. 250, 251.

[2] It has been illogically concluded from Gen. xxxi. 22, 23 that the time occupied was only ten days. But this allows no interval for the collection of the force with which Laban went in pursuit.

the state of her health. In fact, she had secreted the images under her garments, and thus, as delicacy prevented her disturbance, no discovery was made (ibid. vers. 33–35). Jacob, who knew nothing of Rachel's proceedings, was naturally indignant that such a charge had been brought, and took the opportunity to reproach his father-in-law with the many wrongs that he had suffered at his hands (ibid. vers. 36–42). Laban was forced to be apologetic. He drops his charge of theft—cheated by his daughter, as he had formerly cheated his son-in-law—he declares that he has no intention of reclaiming his daughters or interfering with Jacob's possession of them—he only wants friendship, and a promise that his children shall not be "afflicted" or superseded in Jacob's affections by younger wives (ibid. ver. 50)—he is ready to "make a covenant" (ibid. ver. 44) on this understanding. So a covenant is made, and a "heap of witness" erected; and it is agreed that there shall be peace henceforth between the father-in-law and the son-in-law — neither shall pass that "heap" to injure the other—and then, for the solemn ratification of the covenant of peace, as is still customary,[1] they "ate bread" together; and Laban's party "tarried all night in the mount" (ibid. ver. 54), and "early in the morning, Laban woke up, and kissed his sons (*i.e.* grandsons) and his daughters, and blessed them; and departed, and returned unto his place" (ibid. ver. 55).

So this danger was escaped. Humanly speaking, Laban seems to have had Jacob and his possessions completely in his power (Gen. xxxi. 29, 42); he was justly offended; stricter search would have shown that he had been robbed; his sons and tribesmen would gladly have seen Jacob stripped of what they considered his ill-gotten gains (ibid. ver. 1); he himself had not in his heart any friendly feeling towards his son-in-law; but the hand of God restrained him. God had bidden Jacob "go forth," and had promised to be "with him" in the way. He was "with him" in this crisis. It can have been nothing but the appearance of God to Laban on the night before he overtook the fugitives that saved Jacob from severe chastisement. "Take thou heed," rang in Laban's ears; and he had so much belief in the God of Jacob, and His power, that he did not dare to neglect the warning (ibid. ver. 42). Thus the

[1] Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries," p. 39.

two bands parted without hostile collision ; and Jacob was able to pursue his way from Mount Gilead southward without further hindrance.

His first rest was at the place to which he gave the name of Mahanaim. Mahanaim, if marked now by the ruined site known as *Birket Mahneh*,[1] is charmingly situated. Around it and about it are "miles of forest, with abundance of open glades"—a country which Robin Hood would have delighted in.[2] Not far off is the broad plain, which lies between Gilead and Bozrah—fertile in the highest degree, and even now often covered with luxuriant crops. The site itself is "a sort of gently-sloping amphitheatre,"[3] grass-grown, and descending gradually to a natural *Birket*, or pool. Here, it is probable, not far from the edge of the pool, Jacob, tired with his journey, laid himself down to sleep. In the night he once more saw a vision of angels (Gen. xxxii. 1). Two hosts seemed to compass him in, occupying the amphitheatre on the right hand and upon the left. He knew them for that celestial company which he had already beheld at Bethel (ibid. xxviii. 12–19) on his way to Haran, and recognized that they had come to meet him and welcome him on his return. "This," said he, "is God's host" (*mahaneh*) ; and he called the name of the place Mahanaim, *i.e.* "the two hosts" or "the two camps," probably because he saw them on both sides of him (ibid. xxxii. 2). The sight was most comforting, for it gave him ocular demonstration that he was under God's special protection, and therefore need not fear what flesh could do unto him. One danger was just surmounted ; but another danger, and a greater one, impended—the danger from which he had originally fled—the anger and probable hostility of his brother. He had heard that Esau was in Mount Seir, either settled there, or on an expedition ;[4] and had sent messengers to him, deprecating his anger and announcing his own approach (ibid. vers. 3–5). The return of these messengers he was now awaiting with considerable anxiety ; and a fresh assurance of God's protecting care must have been felt by him as most precious and cheering.

Presently, the messengers arrived (Gen. xxxii. 6). They had seen Esau, and delivered Jacob's message to him, but had not

[1] So Porter, Tristram, Bp. Harold Browne, and others.
[2] Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 482. [3] Ibid. p. 483.
[4] So Bp. Harold Browne ("Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 179).

been entrusted with any definite reply. All that they were able to report to Jacob was, that his brother had immediately set himself in motion, and was coming to meet him with a body of four hundred followers. At this intelligence Jacob, we are told, "was greatly afraid and distressed" (ibid. ver. 7); the large number of the followers seemed to him to imply a hostile approach, and he felt that it would be madness to attempt resistance to so strong a band. In his distress he had recourse at once to prayer and to planning. No blame justly attaches to him for this. "Aide-toi, le ciel t'aidera," is a sound maxim; and, as in the sickness of parent or child, we besiege the throne of grace with our supplications, and yet call in the physician's aid likewise, so when we are in external peril it is the best course at once to make our prayer to God, and to take precautions. Jacob's prayer deserves our attentive consideration: it is "one of singular beauty and piety."[1] "O God of my father Abraham," he said, "and God of my father Isaac, O Lord, which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will do thee good: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two companies. Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he come and smite me, the mother with the children. And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude" (ibid. vers. 9–12). His precautions were twofold. In the first place, he divided his followers and his flocks and herds into two separate bodies, placing a certain distance between them, so that they could only be attacked one at a time, calculating that while one was attacked in this way the other might retreat and make its escape (ibid. vers. 7, 8). Secondly, he selected from the animals in his possession a goodly number—two hundred she-goats, twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes, twenty rams, thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten foals—580 in all, and sent them in a long procession of drove after drove on the line of route by which Esau was expected to come, under the charge of servants, who were instructed to

[1] So Bp. Harold Browne ("Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 179).

present themselves at intervals, one after another, before the Great Sheikh, and, when interrogated, to explain that they were Jacob's servants, commissioned by him to convey a series of gifts to "his lord Esau" (ibid. vers. 13–20). In this way Jacob hoped to pacify his injured brother, if he were still angry with him, and coming with intent to revenge himself.

Evening had arrived, and the actual meeting of the brethren could not take place till the next day. Jacob had now reached the banks of the Jabbok, a fine clear copious stream, which, descending from the mountains of Gilead, makes its way in a deep ravine, with many a cascade, to the Jordan. Around him and about him the scenery was delightful. Southward lay "a natural park," with grassy glades spotted with "trees and shrubs grouped in graceful variety;"[1] northwards were the darker forests of Ajlun, composed of pine, holm oak, and arbutus;[2] below, the bright stream flashed in its rocky bed, now bursting into sight, now hidden by dense masses of oleander. The cattle, camels, and asses, sent to propitiate Esau, had already passed the stream by its only fordway in this part of its course;[3] as night approached Jacob made his own "two bands" (Gen. xxxii. 7) cross also. He himself, however, remained on the north bank (ibid. vers. 23, 24), with no companion, absolutely "alone." It seems as if, under the pressure of his awful anxiety, he "could not bear the noise of the camp, the prattlings of the children, or even the presence of the only woman he ever really loved."[4] He needed solitude, perfect quiet, a time for undisturbed meditation, reflection, prayer. So, in the stillness of the night, on the banks of the Jabbok, he lay, and thought, and prayed, when suddenly he was aware of a strange presence—"there wrestled a man with him" (ibid. ver. 24).

All through the livelong night the struggle continued, neither wrestler prevailing over the other. As the day broke beyond the eastern mountains, Jacob's antagonist exerted a superhuman power, and by a touch of his hand put Jacob's thigh out of joint, at the same time saying, "Let me go, for the day breaketh." But Jacob, though disabled, would not yield. "I

[1] Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 557. [2] Ibid. p. 559.

[3] Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries," p. 91; Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 558.

[4] Meyer, "Israel: a Prince with God," p. 98.

will not let thee go," he said, "except thou bless me." Plainly, he had recognized the fact, that his antagonist was a heavenly visitor, potent alike for good and evil, one who could bless as surely as he had injured, and a blessing he will, if possible, have. The boon craved is granted to his persistence. "Thy name," says the mysterious one, "shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God, and with men, and hast prevailed" (ibid. ver. 28). The changed name indicated a changed character. No more should he be Jacob, "the Supplanter"—the dark crafty character of his youth, purged in the furnace of affliction, should pass away;[1] henceforth he should be Israel, "the Prince of God"—mighty with Him, prevailing, powerful—his original mean and sordid temper changed into the princeliness and royalty of character which in the remainder of his life he exhibited.

But who was it, with whom Jacob had wrestled? In the text he is called "a man"—by Hoshea "the angel" (Hos. xii. 4)—but by Jacob himself he is recognized as God. "Jacob called the name of the place Peniel" ("the face of God"); "for," he said, "*I have seen God face to face*, and my life is preserved" (Gen. xxxii. 30). And so the ancient commentators generally,[2] who recognize this as "one of the many manifestations of the Logos, or Son of God, anticipatory of His incarnation."[3] If such manifestations are allowed to have been possible, the present would seem to have been no unfitting occasion for one. "The time," as Bishop Harold Browne observes, "was an important epoch in Jacob's history. It was a turning-point in his life. There had been much most faulty in his character, which had led him to much trouble, and subjected him to a long penitential and reformatory discipline. He was now returning after an exile of twenty, or more probably forty, years, to the land of his birth, which had been promised to him for his inheritance. It was a great crisis. Should he fall under the power of Esau, and so suffer to the utmost for his former sins? Or should he obtain mercy, and be received back to his father's house as the heir

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," vol. i. p. 66.

[2] See Justin Martyr, "Dial. cum Tryph." §. 126; Tertull. "Contr. Marcion." c. 3; Euseb. "Hist. Eccl." i. 22; Augustine, "De Civ. Dei," xvi. 39; Theodoret, "Quæst. in Gen." 92; &c.

[3] Bp. Harold Browne in the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 181.

of the promises? This eventful night, this passage of the Jabbok, was to decide; and the mysterious conflict, in which by Divine mercy and strength he is permitted to prevail, is vouchsafed to him as an indication that his repentance, matured by long schooling and discipline, and manifested in fervent and humble prayer, is accepted with God, and *blessed by the Son of God*, whose ancestor in the flesh he is once more formally constituted." [1]

The spiritual interpretation of the history is nowhere better indicated than in the "noble hymn" of Charles Wesley:—

"Come, O thou traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold but cannot see!
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee:
With Thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

* * * * *

Yield to me now, for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair:
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak:
Be conquered by my instant prayer.
Speak! or Thou never hence shalt move,
And tell me if Thy Name be Love.

My prayer hath power with God: the grace
Unspeakable I now receive;
Through faith I see Thee face to face—
I see Thee face to face and live!
In vain I have not wept and strove:—
Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love."

The light grew brighter in the eastern sky, and Jacob, having crossed the Jabbok, ascended the ridge, to which the name of Penuel afterwards attached, as the first rays of the sun fell upon it (Gen. xxxii. 31). This ridge is probably that which culminates in the high summit of Jebel Osh'a, north of Es-Salt, whence there is one of the finest views east of Jordan. "Here may be seen the whole western watershed from Jericho to Tabor; and far below are the sandstones of the lower spurs which run out into the Jordan valley, being an almost precipitous slope. Seen in the shifting lights on an April day, this

[1] Bp. Harold Browne in the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 181.

wide view of mountain and valley, which opens as the traveller reaches the edge of the cliff, is wonderfully picturesque and suggestive. The distant ranges, faint and blue in the afternoon shade, the strange peaks of the marl at Sartaba and near Jericho, the dark line of Jordan, the green corn of its valley, the warm hues of the sandstone, the wild broom and cytisus, the thyme and rock-roses, the thorny bell'an and bushes of arbutus and laurestinus, which form the background on this breezy height, combine to produce a picture in some respects not unlike the highlands of Scotland, and remarkably unsuggestive of the burning East. On the south the Dead Sea is hidden by a projecting ridge; but the plateau of Neby Musa, the plains of Jericho, Olivet, Neby Samwil, and Baal Hazor, are all distinguishable: over the valleys of Phasaelis and Far'ah are seen the Samaritan ridges, Ebal, Gerizim, Neby Belan, Sheikh Beiyazid, the Sartaba, Jebel Hazkin, with the isolated tops near Tammûn and Tubâs. From the Ras el Akr'a the Gilboa chain commences, and Tabor, Neby Duhy, and the site of Beth-shean are all prominent objects. The Damieh ford is distinguishable on the road from Sâlt to Shechem. The grey barren ridges of Ajlûn, whence Gilead obtains its name of 'rocky land,' run out on the north, concealing Hermon, and here on the sky-line stands the Crusading castle of Er-Rubud, one of the strongest of their chain of strongholds."[1]

Such, in general outline, was the scene on which Jacob's eye must have rested, if from the heights of Jebel Osh'a he cast a glance towards the right over the land which was to be his inheritance. He may, however, have been more intent on scanning the district immediately in front of him towards the south, where, through the glades and plains about Es-Salt, sprinkled with trees and shrubs, the four hundred spearmen of Esau might be seen approaching, with Esau himself in the midst of them (Gen. xxxiii. 1). Still Esau's intention was obscure. He was not bringing with him the present of cattle, camels, and asses, which Jacob had sent on in advance to propitiate him—he had not as yet accepted it; and as he had not done so, it remained uncertain whether he were friend or foe. Each moment brought him nearer. Jacob, still timid,

[1] Conder, "Heth and Moab," pp. 186–188; compare Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 556.

rearranged the company that was with him, placing his secondary wives with their children in front, next to them Leah with her children, last of all his most dearly beloved Rachel and Joseph (ibid. verse 2). Then, he himself went on before them all, and, as his brother approached, "bowed himself to the ground seven times" (ibid. ver. 3)—an act of extreme humility. Esau, at the sight, forgot his wrongs, if he had hitherto cherished a remembrance of them, and running forward to meet Jacob, "embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept" (ibid. ver. 4). The past was forgotten, or at any rate forgiven. The brothers were at one again.

Jacob's wives and their children were now presented by him to his brother, and "bowed themselves" before him in Oriental fashion; and Esau, after making some difficulty, accepted his brother's present (ibid. ver. 11)—an acceptance which implied complete reconciliation. He then offered to escort his brother to his own country of Seir, or else to leave with him a number of his spearmen as protectors; but Jacob declined both offers as unnecessary, and indeed as inconvenient, since it would hurry his cattle and his children too much if they had to move as fast as Esau's soldiers (ibid. vers. 12–15). With characteristic reticence, he did not tell his brother whither he was bent on going, but spoke as if he was about to visit him in Seir shortly (ibid. ver. 14). The two then parted on the most friendly terms; and "Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir" (ibid. ver. 16).

CHAPTER VII.

LIFE AT SUCCOTH AND SHECHEM.

Settlement at Succoth—House built there—Life in Succoth—Removal to Shechem—Line of route—Beauty of the country about Shechem—Shechem in possession of the Hivites—Jacob's purchase of land there—His well—Dinah outraged by the Hivite prince, Shechem—Proposal of marriage—Accepted on condition of the tribe's adoption of circumcision—Massacre of the Hivites by Simeon and Levi—Jacob's alarm—Commanded to remove to Bethel—Burial of idols.

ESAU having departed, and Jacob being free to go where he pleased, he appears to have desisted from the southern course, which he had so long followed, and to have struck westward into the Jordan valley, which would supply abundant pasturage for his flocks and herds. It seems strange that he did not at once proceed to join his father, Isaac, at Hebron; but perhaps he thought that his flocks and herds were too numerous to be welcomed in a region where the herbage is at all times scanty. He had reached "the land of his fathers"—the "country," whereto he had been commanded to come (Gen. xxxi. 3; xxxii. 9), and was minded, apparently, to settle himself in the more productive region of central Palestine, rather than in the comparatively arid and infertile south. The Jordan valley might well attract him; it is warm, sheltered, with a soil "of almost incredible richness, watered every mile by some little perennial brook,"[1] with palm-trees growing here and there singly or in clumps, and covered through the whole year with a luxuriant vegetation. Jacob, descending from the highlands of Gilead, reached the Ghor—as the Jordan valley is called—somewhat to the north of the mouth of the Zerka (Jabbok), and

[1] Tristram. "The Land of Israel," p. 570.

settled for a time on the eastern bank of the stream, in the flat plain between the river-course and the mountains. Here he "built him a house" (ibid. xxxiii. 17), showing his intention to remain; and here also he constructed with the reeds and osiers of the locality a set of booths or sheds for his cattle, which gave the name of "Succoth" to the place.

Life in Succoth must have been dull and unexciting. Jacob's possession of the tract appears to have been undisputed. The Palestinian region generally was sparsely peopled, and the Ghor has at no time supported a large population. It is a dreamy sleepy region, with a climate that is enervating and relaxing.[1] Jacob, after his weary servitude in Haran, his rapid and fatiguing journey, and the excitement of his interviews with Laban and Esau, may have felt that he needed an interval of repose and rest—a brief space of lotus-eating. But ere long he roused himself. The Ghor was not a suitable residence either for his cattle or for his people. The vegetation was too rich and rank for the one, the air too oppressive and unhealthy for the other. Though he had built himself a house at Succoth, it was not long before he quitted the place, and leaving the Jordan valley behind him, mounted up to the breezy highlands of the western Palestinian region, which were blessed with a pure yet soft air, and with excellent pasturage.

His line of route was, almost certainly,[2] up the little stream, which flows in a south-easterly direction from the plain of Shechem, between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, down to the Jordan. The ascent along the valley would be easy, and the flocks and herds might spread over the hillsides, and obtain sufficient herbage for their sustenance. This valley conducted him to a place called Shalem, now Salim, situated on the plain at the eastern foot of Mount Ebal, at the distance of about a mile from the more important city of Shechem. Shechem was beautifully situated. "There is no wilderness here," says a modern traveller,[3] "there are no wild thickets, yet there is always verdure, always shade—not of the oak, the terebinth, and the caroub-tree—but of the olive grove, so soft in colour, so picturesque in form, that, for its sake, we can willingly dispense with all other wood. There is a singularity about the vale of

[1] Grove in Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," vol. ii. p. 675.
[2] Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 144.
[3] Van der Velde, "Travels," vol. i. p. 386.

Shechem, and that is the peculiar colouring which objects assume in it. All know that, wherever there is water the air becomes charged with watery particles, and that distant objects beheld through that medium seem to be enveloped in a pale blue or grey mist, such as contributes not a little to give a charm to the landscape. But it is precisely those atmospheric tints that we miss so much in Palestine. . . . It is otherwise in the vale of Shechem, at least in the morning and the evening. Here the exhalations remain hovering among the branches and leaves of the olive trees, and hence that lovely bluish haze. The valley is far from broad, not exceeding in some places a few hundred feet. This you find generally enclosed on all sides; here likewise the vapours are condensed. And so you advance under the shade of the foliage, along the living waters, charmed by the melody of a host of singing birds—for they too know where to find their best quarters—while the perspective fades away and is lost in the damp, vapoury atmosphere." "The whole valley," says another,[1] "is filled with gardens of vegetables, and orchards of all kinds of fruits, watered by fountains, which burst forth in various parts, and flow westward in refreshing streams. It came upon us suddenly like a scene of fairy enchantment. We saw nothing to compare with it in all Palestine. Here beneath the shadow of an immense mulberry tree, by the side of a purling rill, we pitched our tent for the remainder of the day, and the night. . . . We rose early, awakened by the songs of nightingales and other birds, of which the gardens around us were full." "It was impossible," says a third,[2] "to leave a place so charming as the vale of Shechem without a final stroll down the plain. A fresh glorious spring morning invited it. Nature was in all her beauty. Fine walnut trees rose over thick groves of almond, pomegranate, orange, olive, pear, and plum trees, from whose branches came the music of birds. Thousands of cyclamens, red anemones, and dwarf tulips looked up from amidst the grass. The blessings of Joseph indeed prevailed 'unto the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills' (Deut. xxxiii. 13–15). Wherever the rich streams could be led, fertility was luxuriant; but high up on the far-off shelves and cliffs of the mountains, scorched and split as they are by the sun, the Israelite long ago learned to look to the

[1] Robinson, "Researches in Palestine," vol. iii. pp. 95, 96.

[2] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. ii. p. 227.

heavens, knowing that, to obtain a harvest in that lofty region, the clouds must give their rain and dew."

The city of Shechem, and the rich country about it, were, at the time of Jacob's visit, in the possession of the Canaanite tribe known as the Hivites (Gen. xxxiii. 19; xxxiv. 2). Hamor was the "prince of the country," and claimed all the land as his own. It was necessary, therefore, that Jacob, if he desired to settle in the vicinity, should purchase of this chieftain a portion of the territory with rights of pasturage. This, accordingly, he did. In the place where he had pitched before the city, apparently on its eastern side, where it fronted towards the Jordan valley, he bought "a parcel of a field" (Gen. xxxii. 19, A.V.), or rather "the parcel of ground" (Rev. Vers.), where he had on his first arrival encamped, paying for it a hundred *kesitas*—bars probably or ingots of silver.[1] It is uncertain whether he here built himself a house, as he had done at Succoth, or continued to dwell in tents; but perhaps the latter is more probable. His sheep and goats fed freely on the flanks of Ebal and Gerizim; his camels and horned cattle remained about the tents, on the plain between Shalem and Shechem; his herdsmen watered their charges out of the rippling brooks, which starting from the Shechem plain flow over beds of shining white stones[2] in two directions, eastward to the Jordan, and westward to the Mediterranean. For some time he had no quarrel with the Hivites. To guard against the chance of such disputes as had arisen between his father and Abimelech of Gerar in the Philistine region during a time of drought,[3] he dug himself a capacious well deep into the limestone rock, which still exists, though choked with many feet of rubbish, near Nablous, the ancient Shechem, at the present day. It was carried first through loose soil, to a depth of twenty feet, and in this part carefully built in with neatly dressed and squared stones, the masonry resembling, it is said,[4] that of the wells of Beersheba, after which the bore was made through the solid limestone rock. The entire depth was, in the year 1881, sixty-seven feet,[5] but in 1866 it was seventy-five feet,[6] and may

[1] Gesenius, "Thesaurus," p. 1241.

[2] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. ii. p. 228.

[3] Supra, p. 52. [4] Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 143.

[5] "Quarterly Statement of Palestine Exploration Fund" for July, 1881, p. 212. [6] Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries," p. 45.

originally have been a hundred, or a hundred and fifty, for stones are continually dropped into it by visitors. The width of the bore is nine feet,[1] and as much as twelve feet of water have been found in it recently,[2] but at present it is frequently dry in the summer-time.[3] The work, however, if it be really Jacob's, is very remarkable. "To sink such a shaft," (nine, or even) "seven and a half feet broad, through perhaps a hundred and fifty feet of earth and rock, was an undertaking involving no little skill, as well as a large outlay; and its existence is a proof both of the enterprise and of the wealth of the patriarch."[4]

His children were, in the meanwhile, growing up. The elder sons may have attained to manhood in Haran, if the sojourn there was so long as some imagine. At Shechem the younger sons, excepting Joseph, reached the age of virility; and even Dinah, Jacob's only daughter, and the youngest of all his children but Joseph (Gen. xxx. 21–24), approached to womanhood. Womanhood arrives early in the East, and we need not suppose Dinah to have been more than about fourteen years old. Hovering, it may be, between girlhood and womanhood, a prey to all the curiosity and vague desires which beset young maidens at such a time, weary perhaps of her solitary life as the only girl in the family, she took advantage of the liberty allowed her sex in the family of Abraham, to leave her father's abode and go out "to see the daughters of the land" (ibid. xxxiv. 1). It was an innocent act. Even if it be true, as Josephus reports,[5] that the Shechemites held a festival that day, and that Dinah was attracted by the gay doings—the music, and the dancing, and the feasting—that were sure to be taking place at such a time, we cannot regard her as much to blame in going out to see and hear. Her desire was to converse with "the *daughters* of the land"—the young girls whom she would behold from her tent door, with their pitchers on their shoulders, going to or returning from the fountains, of which there were so many near the town. Such a desire would be very natural. It would have been better, no doubt, had she gone with her mother, or one of the other wives; but she may not have anticipated any rudeness, much less any such evil as befell her. "Shechem, the son of

[1] Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 145; Dr. Geikie says "seven and a half feet" (vol. ii. p. 210).

[2] Geikie, l.s.c.

[3] Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 145; Geikie, vol. ii. p. 211.

[4] Geikie, l.s.c.

[5] "Ant. Jud.," i. 21, § 1.

Hamor, prince of the country, took her," we are told, "and lay with her, and defiled her" (ibid. ver. 2). Whether the case was one of seduction or of violence, we are not informed; but, under the circumstances of the time, it is not unlikely to have been the latter. But, whether this were so or not, at any rate the young prince repented of the wrong that he had done to the maiden, and did his best to repair it. He found that he "loved the damsel" (ibid. ver. 3), and "longed" for her to be his wife (ver. 8). He therefore went to his father, told him how matters stood, and begged him to negotiate a marriage between himself and the girl whom he had injured. The Hivite chief accepted the embassy, and after consultation between all the parties concerned—Hamor, Shechem, Jacob, his sons, and the people of the city (verses 6–23)—it was agreed that the marriage should take place, on the condition of the two tribes being fused into one, and the Shechemites adopting the Hebrew rite of circumcision. The Shechemites, suspecting nothing, agreed to the terms imposed on them, and the rite was performed; after which, on the third day, when the pain and fever resulting from the operation would be at their height, Simeon and Levi, two of Dinah's own brothers, executed the bloody vengeance, for which it would seem (verse 13) that they had schemed. Taking their swords, and entering the peaceful city by one of the open gates, they went from house to house, and "slew all the males" (ver. 25). A body of their retainers probably accompanied them; but the deed appears to have been done without the knowledge of Jacob or of the remaining brothers, who were less affected by Dinah's dishonour, or less revengeful, than Simeon and Levi. Taking their sister with them, but leaving the booty that there was in the town untouched, these two, who regarded themselves simply as judicial avengers of crime, "went out" (ver. 26). Then the other sons of Jacob "came upon the slain, and spoiled the city," carrying off from it sheep and oxen and asses, and "all that was in the field," together with "all that was in the city"—the wealth stored in the houses, and the wives of the adult males, and their "little ones" (vers. 28, 29). Both Shechem, and Hamor his father perished in the massacre.

When the circumstances were reported to Jacob, he was greatly alarmed. It does not appear that he was shocked by the wickedness of what had been done—the combination of treachery, cruelty, and covetousness which had been exhibited

—though in his old age he could denounce it (Gen. xlix. 5–7); but he was terrified by the thought of what the immediate consequences were likely to be. The Hivite tribe, with which he had come into contact, was closely allied to the Perizzites and the other races included generally under the name of Canaanites. What if these kindred peoples should regard the injury done to the Hivites as done to them, and should resent it, take it up as a blood feud, and prosecute it to the bitter end? He would at once be involved in hostilities with an enemy of vastly superior strength, who might gather themselves together against his small tribe, and utterly destroy it (ibid. xxxiv. 30). His sons had made it necessary for him to remove at once from the vicinity. They had "caused him to stink among the inhabitants of the land." He must begone as soon as possible; but whither was he to go? Canaanitish tribes were predominant throughout the entire Palestinian region. Unless he were at once protected, and directed, by God's providence he was lost. So he waited, and no doubt prayed, for Divine guidance. In a little time it came. "God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there" (ibid. xxxv. 1).

Bethel, or more properly at this time Luz, was where Abraham had sojourned for a while after he left Sichem (or Shechem), and where Jacob himself had had his first vision of angels (Gen. xxviii. 11–91). Abraham had erected an altar there (ibid. xii. 8), and thus made the place in some sort a "House of God," and Jacob on his former visit had consecrated and set up a pillar there (ibid. xxviii. 18), so that of all the sites in central Palestine it would seem to have been at this period the most sacred by its traditions and associations. It was distant only about eighteen miles from Shechem, and could thus be easily reached, while it was in a stronger and more mountainous district, and was thus more readily defensible. Jacob did not hesitate to accept the Divine guidance, and transfer his abode to the spot hallowed to him by such solemn recollections. First of all, however, he felt that he must purge his own household. Never could he conduct to the holy shrine of Bethel—"God's house and the gate of heaven" (Gen. xxviii. 17)—those pollutions which he knew to be continued within the limits of his own domicile, and which existed also—probably to a greater degree—among the servants and retainers, who formed the bulk of his following. Rachel's theft of her father's teraphim had

shown how widespread the corruption was, since it had tainted the very highest classes; while among the lower classes it seems to have shown itself in an attachment to talismans and amulets, worn about the person, most commonly as appendages to earrings (Gen. xxxv. 4). Having therefore received the Divine command to proceed to Bethel, Jacob called his household and followers together, and solemnly addressed them with the words—"Put away the strange gods that are among you, and purify yourselves, and change your garments; and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went" (ibid. vers. 2, 3, Rev. Vers.). All obeyed: "they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and the rings which were in their ears" (ibid. ver. 4); and Jacob took them and buried them under the oak, or oak grove, that was by Shechem—the oak, or oak grove, noticed in the history of Abraham.[1] Thus were the pollutions put away, and hidden out of sight; Shechem was quitted; and the tribe resumed its wanderings. No one pursued or attacked them—"the terror of God was upon the cities that were round about" (ibid. ver. 5)—and the whole band, with its camels, and its flocks and herds, its asses, and its Sichemite captives (ibid. ch. xxxiv. 29), was allowed to pursue its way unmolested from Sichem to Luz, and there to form a new settlement. No immediate punishment followed the cruel treatment of the Sichemite people. It was regarded as the special crime of Simeon and Levi, and was ultimately visited on their posterity (ibid. xlix. 7).

[1] See Deane's "Abraham: His Life and Times," p. 31.

CHAPTER VIII.

BETHEL, BETHLEHEM, AND HEBRON.

Altar set up by Jacob at Bethel—His brief sojourn there—Reasons for his leaving—His regrets—Death of Deborah—Removal to the neighbourhood of Bethlehem—Birth of Benjamin, and death of Rachel—Rachel's tomb—Residence near the "Tower of Edar"—Wicked conduct of Reuben—Jacob visits Isaac at Hebron—Death of Isaac, and meeting between Jacob and Esau.

JACOB no sooner reached Bethel than, as he had done previously at Shechem (Gen. xxxiii. 20), he set up an altar there (ibid. xxxiv. 7). It is not recorded that he built himself any house. Probably Bethel did not seem to him to satisfy the requirements of a permanent settlement. The neighbourhood is barren, bleak, and stony. If the bare hill-tops and the narrow valleys might furnish sufficient sustenance for a moderate number of sheep and goats and camels, there would assuredly have been but little pasture suited either for horned cattle or for asses. True, Abraham had sojourned there for a while after he came out of Egypt (ibid. xiii. 3–18), together with Lot his nephew; but the strife between their herdsmen (ibid. ver. 7) soon showed the incapacity of the district to produce sufficient food for the flocks and herds of the two; and even after Lot had withdrawn into the Jordan valley, it was not long before Abraham was forced to move on, and wander southward, in search of "fresh fields and pastures new." Jacob, we may presume, experienced similar difficulties. He had with him, not only the numerous cattle, with which God had blessed him in Haran, but the sheep and oxen and asses of the Shechemites (ibid. xxxiv. 28) whereof his followers had become possessed—probably a much larger number.

Yet it must have been with regret that he resolved to shift his quarters. There was no spot as yet in the entire "Holy Land" so intensely holy as Bethel. Abraham had been the first to hallow it (Gen. xii. 8). Then God Himself had conferred on it the most solemn consecration by the vision of the ladder and the angels ascending and descending upon it, which he had there shown to Jacob (ibid. xxviii. 11–19). This consecration had been followed by Jacob's erection of a sacred pillar upon the spot, as a memorial of what he had there seen and heard (ibid. xxviii. 18), and by his imposition of the name "Bethel" upon the site which he held to be at once "the house of God" and "the gate of heaven" (ibid. vers. 17, 19). Finally, now on his return from Haran, God had appeared to him at Bethel for the second time, and had renewed all the promises previously made (ibid. xxxv. 11, 12), and confirmed to him his name of Israel (ver. 10), which meant that he should "prevail with God," and formally "blessed him" (ver. 9). Jacob, in commemoration of this second appearance, had erected another pillar, and consecrated it by "pouring a drink offering thereon, and pouring oil thereon" (ver. 14). But, notwithstanding all these sacred associations, he felt impelled to move, and is not blamed for moving. He and his "journeyed from Bethel" southward (ver. 16), not many months after their arrival, partly compelled by circumstances, partly perhaps drawn in a southern direction by the desire to see once more the patriarchal head of the tribe, Jacob's aged father, Isaac, who, blind and infirm as he was, yet survived, and had his abode at Hebron.

One circumstance only imparts an element of human interest into this sojourn of Jacob with his followers at Bethel. It was here, and now, that Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, who had in some way that is not explained become attached to Jacob's household, gave up the ghost (Gen. xxxv. 8). She must have been well advanced in life. Jacob, in whose earliest recollections she must have had a part, appears to have been sensibly affected by her loss. He gave her honourable burial under an oak tree near Bethel, and mourned her with so deep a grief, that the tree which marked her grave became known in after times as Allon-bachuth, "the oak of weeping." Such attachment to a humble dependent is a touching trait in the character of the patriarch, and well deserves the record which has been accorded to it by the sacred historian.

Jacob "journeyed from Bethel," and after travelling a distance of about fifteen miles through the hilly region afterwards assigned in part to Benjamin, in part to Judah, had approached near to Ephrath or Bethlehem—Bethlehem-Ephratah; as it is sometimes called (Micah v. 2)—when he met with another and a greater misfortune. His fondly cherished wife—the light of his eyes and the darling of his heart—the tender, delicate Rachel—was suddenly seized with the pains of childbirth, and for the second time became a mother. In sorrow and extreme suffering she brought forth her second-born, and "called his name, Benoni"—Son of my sorrow (Gen xxxv. 18), for she felt that her end was approaching. Nothing availed the midwife's care, or her cheering words (ibid. ver. 17)—Rachel's life ebbed rapidly away, and the child was scarcely born into the world ere the mother had departed. It was with a grief too deep for tears that the bereaved husband consigned the body of his best-loved consort to the bosom of the earth in the place where she had died—"on the way to Ephrath" (ibid. ver. 19), a little to the north of the village. On the place where he had buried her, Jacob set up a memorial pillar—not certainly in any superstitious spirit, as has been supposed by some,[1] but as a monument, to mark the site, to prevent its being disturbed or intruded on, and to preserve the memory of the departed. The pillar was still standing four hundred and sixty years later, when Moses wrote (ibid. ver. 20); and though it has now long since gone to decay and perished, yet the "Tomb of Rachel" still remains a sacred site, and is "one of the few spots [in Palestine] respecting which Christian, Jew, and Mohammedan agree."[2] "The present building consists of four square walls, each twenty-three feet long, and about twenty feet high, with a flat roof, from which a dome, with the plaster over it in sad disrepair, rises for about ten feet more. The masonry is rough: the stones set in rows with no attempt at finish, or even exact regularity. Originally there was a large arch in each of the walls . . . but these arches have at some time been filled up. . . . Joined to the back is another building, consisting of four stone walls roughly built, and about thirteen feet high, the space enclosed being thirteen feet deep and twenty-three broad—that is, as broad as the

[1] See Robertson Smith, "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church," pp. 226, 353.

[2] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 436.

domed building: with a flat roof. Behind this again the walls are continued, at the same height, for twenty-three feet more each way, forming a covered court, used for prayer by the Mohammedans. Under the dome stands an empty tomb of modern appearance."[1] No part of the existing building is thought to date further back than the twelfth century after Christ.

It is somewhat strange that Jacob did not allow his youngest son to bear the name assigned him by his mother with her dying breath, but changed Benoni—"Son of sorrow"—into Benjamin—"Son of the right hand"—equivalent to "Son of strength" (Gen. xxxv. 18). Perhaps he thought Benoni an ill-omened name, which would bring its possessor ill-luck; or perhaps he did not like to be continually reminded of the chief grief of his life.

From Bethelem, after he had buried Rachel and erected her memorial, Jacob "journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar" (Gen. xxxv. 21). "The tower of Edar" is a somewhat doubtful site, but, on the whole, may perhaps best be placed a little to the east of Bethlehem, in the "narrow plain, bare and treeless, with white stony slopes, and a few crumbling ruins,"[2] which conducts to the "terrible wilderness that stretches above the Dead Sea on the west, and creeps up almost to the vines and olive-groves of Bethlehem."[3] Here are found such names as the "Shepherds' Plain," the "Ruin of the Sheepfold," and the "Church of the Flocks," with which Migdol Ḗdar—"the Tower of the Flock"—may very reasonably be compared. "The Ruin of the Sheepfold," says a recent writer, "consists of walls, cisterns, vaults, and tombs—probably early Christian ruins." These are situated "about four miles and a half from Bethlehem . . . close to the so-called 'Shepherds' Plain.' There is no spot in the country about so well fitted for an encampment."[4]

At Migdol Edar, if it has been rightly located, Jacob would be not more than fourteen miles from the Dead Sea. It would have been the nearest approach that he had made to it. We may, without much stretch of fancy, imagine him, in search of better pasture for his flocks, exploring the country in this direction, and becoming acquainted with the frightful land of

[1] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. pp. 436, 437.
[2] Conder, "Tent Work in Palestine," vol. i. p. 293. [3] Ibid.
[4] Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries," pp. 47, 48.

Jeshimon, where "the white soft chalk is worn by the winter rain into long, knife-edged ridges, separated by narrow ravines with stony beds"; and where there is presented to the eye, "throughout nearly the whole year, a long succession of glaring ridges, with fantastic knolls and peaks, and sharp rugged spurs, absolutely treeless and waterless."[1] "Everything in this desert is of one colour—a tawny yellow. The rocks, the partridges, the camels, the foxes, the ibexes, are all of this shade; and only the dark Bedouin and their black tents are distinguishable in the general glare."[2]

It was while Jacob, his household, and his retainers were encamped about "the tower of Edar," that a crime was committed among them of a deeper dye than any that had as yet stained the family of Abraham. Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob, his natural successor in the headship of the tribe, was guilty of the heinous sin of incestuous intercourse with one of his father's secondary wives, Bilhah, the handmaid given in marriage to Jacob by Rachel (Gen. xxxv. 22). Jacob's grief and anger must have been great; but a veil is thrown over them in the narrative, where no more is said than that "Israel heard of it." Later on, we find that it cost Reuben his birthright (ibid. xlix. 4). Judah's pre-eminence is to be ascribed, in part to Simeon and Levi's cruelty (xxiv. 25), in part to this unnatural sin of Reuben, which, though it called forth no immediate rebuke or sentence, rankled in the patriarch's mind, and was remembered by him upon his deathbed.

After a short sojourn in the region "beyond the tower of Edar," Jacob, having perhaps exhausted the scanty pasturage of the district, found it necessary to move on. This is the law of their existence to all pastoral tribes, and guides the movements of the Arab hordes in Syria and Mesopotamia as absolutely at the present day, as it did those of Jacob and his followers three thousand five hundred years previously. He still proceeded southward. Isaac was living in advanced old age at Hebron. Jacob had long been naturally drawn thither by his filial affection, and, being now so near, determined to rejoin his father. It may be hoped that he was privileged for several years to be the support and comfort of his father's declining strength, and to relieve him from the cares of govern-

[1] Conder, "Tent Work in Palestine," vol. i. p. 296.

[2] Ibid. p. 297.

ment and direction, which must for some time have severely taxed his enfeebled powers. Not only was Rebekah dead, but Esau had, many years earlier, withdrawn himself into the wild regions of Seir, which gave him ample scope for the hunting whereto he was so much addicted, and afforded a wide space for the settlement of his sons and grandsons (Gen. xxxvi.). Isaac had been left alone, without the solace of either wife, or child, or grandchild, with no one to care for him but hired attendants, or slaves born in his house. It was a sad condition for one who was old and infirm, drawing near to the grave, with his sight impaired, and his other bodily powers, in all probability, more or less weakened. When "Jacob came unto Isaac his father to Mamre, to Kirjath-jearim (the same is Hebron) where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned" (Gen. xxxv. 27), an extraordinary change must have taken place in his father's surroundings. For the care of hirelings, or slaves, was substituted the care of his loving son, and of his three daughters-in-law, who would vie with each other in the performance of those gentle offices that are woman's special province. The prattle of Jacob's grandchildren would sound in his ears, and awake early reminiscences. He would see with joy the numerous progeny wherewith God had blessed his son, and would recognize the fact that the prophecies of a seed that should be countless, were already on the way to their accomplishment. He would note with satisfaction Jacob's wealth, and manifest prosperity, and would feel that the time was come when he might "depart in peace," since he would leave behind him so worthy a successor.

As the time for his father's departure drew manifestly nigh, Jacob, it is probable, summoned Esau from the adjacent country of Seir, to witness his last moments. There is no express statement to this effect; but it seems natural that Jacob should have so acted, and considering the shortness of the interval between a death and a burial necessitated by the conditions of the East, Esau's presence at the funeral, which is distinctly declared (Gen. xxxv. 29), may be regarded as implying his arrival at Hebron before Isaac died. The two brothers we may well believe to have fallen on each other's necks over their father's death-couch, and buried in that embrace any remnant, that may still have existed, of the old animosity. Conjointly they prepared their father's funeral: conjointly they

carried it out. Isaac was deposited within the cave of Machpelah, "being old and full of days," by the side of Rebekah his wife. (ibid. xlix. 31), who had been previously interred there, and in close vicinity to the graves of Abraham and Sarah. An account of his resting place has been already given.[1] Jacob and Esau, after the completion of the funeral rites, parted once more, Esau returning into Seir, his adopted country. So far as appears, they never met again.

[1] See above, pp. 65, 66.

CHAPTER IX.

RESIDENCE AT HEBRON.

Position occupied by Jacob in Palestine—Advantages of Hebron as a residence—Regions occupied by Jacob's sons—Discord introduced into the family through the special favour shown by Jacob towards Joseph —Imprudent conduct of Joseph—Plot to murder him—He is sold to the Midianites, and reported as dead to Jacob—Jacob's extreme grief —His affections transferred to Benjamin.

THE death of Isaac established Jacob as acknowledged head of the tribe, which, partly by right of occupation, partly by treaty, was recognized as settled, and as having certain very important rights, in central and southern Palestine. Jacob himself, after his father's death, appears to have taken up his residence at Hebron (Gen. xxxvii. 14). It was the most commanding position in southern Palestine — it was the place of his father's and mother's sepulture—it was one of the spots on which he had a sure hold, a site there having been purchased by Abraham for four hundred shekels of silver from the children of Heth. (ibid. xxiii. 16) And it was about the most eligible spot for a pastoral settlement of all in the South country. Its great reservoirs, probably already excavated, supplied abundant water; the hillsides of its valleys were noted for their vines; olives clothed many of the slopes; and there was a fair amount of soil suitable for the growth of barley and lentils. The short herbage of the hills furnishes the best possible pasture for sheep, and the shrubs and bushes which abound afford the food which is most coveted by the goat. A sort of wild thyme flourishes everywhere, and "fills the air with its sweetness."[1] Though to a European eye the aspect of the

[1] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 363.

entire district is bleak and bare, yet to Oriental shepherds it would present itself as a far more eligible residence than either Jordan's lush green vale, or Sharon's fertile stretches. Jacob seems to have remained at Hebron, until he "went down into Egypt" (Gen. xxxvii. 14; xlvi. 1), living a peaceful life, contented with his position.

Meanwhile, his sons were scattered somewhat widely over the Palestinian region. Their flocks and herds were so numerous that they filled the land. All "the South" was regarded as theirs, from Bethlehem as far as Beersheba. They held possession of Shechem, and fed their father's flock on its rich plain (Gen. xxxvii. 12). Northward, beyond this, they claimed a right of pasturage in Dothan (ibid. ver. 17), which is not far from the valley of Esdraelon; and westward they extended their wanderings into the Philistine lowland, and are found at Achzib[1] (ibid. xxxviii. 5) and Timnath (ibid. ver. 12). They lived on friendly terms with the other inhabitants of the land, and were to some extent corrupted by the contact (ibid. vers. 2–7). Speaking generally, we may say that they formed a united family, sympathized with one another, and probably held their position among the many Canaanitish tribes by the firmness of their union.

Unfortunately, however, there was one exception. "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age" (Gen. xxxvii. 3); and this injudicious favouritism was the cause of dissension and strife entering into the family. The elder brothers naturally felt aggrieved and jealous at their father's partiality; and their jealousy became hatred when, by the gift of a special dress, which distinguished him above all the rest, the idea was spread abroad that his father designed to confer on Joseph the right of primogeniture and to leave the headship of the clan to him.[2] Kings and chiefs in the East are generally regarded as entitled to select their successor from among their sons; and nothing is more common than the designation for the office of the first-born son of a favourite wife to the injury, or at any rate to the

[1] The "Chezib" of Gen. xxxviii. 5 is probably the place more commonly called Achzib (Josh. xv. 44; Micah i. 14), which was in the low Philistine country.

[2] See Bp. Harold Browne on Gen. xxxvii. 3 ("Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 194).

disparagement, of his elder brethren. So David selected Solomon to succeed him, the eldest surviving son of his favourite Bathsheba, in preference to Adonijah and others, who were older; and so Darius Hystaspis selected Xerxes, the firstborn of his beloved Atossa, in preference to Artabazanes, Ariabignes, and others, born long before Xerxes.[1] But such preferences naturally arouse resentment, and are often the cause of serious troubles. David's selection of Solomon to be his successor produced the revolt of Adonijah (1 Kings i. 5–49). Jacob's favouritism made all his elder brothers "hate" Joseph, and so exasperated them against him that they "could not even speak to him peaceably" (Gen. xxxvii. 4).

Under these circumstances it behoved the favoured one to be careful and circumspect in his conduct, to avoid arrogance, and give his brothers no handle against him. But Joseph, with the imprudence and the unsuspiciousness of extreme youth—he was but seventeen years of age (ibid. ver. 2)—acted in the exactly opposite spirit. Having been sent by his father to tend the sheep for a while in company with four of his brethren, namely, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher, he "brought unto his father their evil report" (ibid.), or, in other words, gave his father a bad account of them. This was to be a spy and a tell-tale, and naturally provoked their anger, and made them his enemies, whereas otherwise he might have had them for friends, since, as sons of the concubines, they would have had small hope of the succession. Further, he rashly communicated to his brethren the visions with which he now began to be favoured—secret and mysterious intimations vouchsafed him from heaven, which he had far better have kept to himself, or, at any rate, have made known to no one but his father. First, he dreamt that he and his brethren were together, binding sheaves in a cornfield, and while his sheaf "arose and stood upright," their sheaves "came round about it and made obeisance to it" (ibid. ver. 7). Then, after a short interval, he had an even grander and prouder dream—he stood in the midst, and the sun, and the moon, and eleven stars came round about him, and made obeisance to him (ibid. ver. 9). The dreams were talked over in the family, when the brethren were all gathered to their father's residence at Hebron, and even Jacob "rebuked" his favourite for speaking of such things, though at the same

[1] Herod. vii. 2.

time he did not, like Joseph's brethren, think scorn of them, but "kept the saying in mind" (ibid. vers. 10, 11).

The ten brethren went forth again from Hebron, and resumed their pastoral labours in central Palestine, leaving "the dreamer," as they called him (ibid. ver. 19), with their father. Presently, however, Jacob became anxious to hear of their welfare, and once more sent his favourite and most trusted son to bring him tidings—"Go, I pray thee," he said, "see whether it be well with thy brethren and with the flocks, and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem" (ibid. ver. 14). Failing, however, to find his brethren there, and learning that they had removed to Dothan, or Dothain, seventeen miles further to the north, Joseph at once set off in pursuit. Dothain, so called from its two wells,[1] one of which is still known as Bir-el-Hufîreh, "the Well of the Pit," was situated on the direct route between Shechem and the Esdraelon plain, in an "upland enclosed basin," containing "the best pasturage in the country."[2] The soil is dark; the herbage green and luxuriant. Fig trees grow beside long cactus hedges;[3] the hills around are "covered with groves of flourishing olive trees,"[4] while the untilled parts of the valleys are "dotted with broom and hawthorn."[5] Towards the west shows plainly "the dark brown plain of 'Arrâbeh, across which runs the main Egyptian road—the road by which the armies of Thothmes and Necho came up from the sea-coast,"[6] when they made their great expeditions. Elsewhere the oblong plain is surrounded by "low verdant hills,"[7] among which Tel Dothan, the site of the ancient town (2 Kings vi. 13, 14), is conspicuous.

Before Joseph arrived at Dothan, he was seen by his brethren. "Here," says a recent writer, "is a touch of local truth; for, after climbing the high hill north of Samaria, which would be Jacob's route, he would then descend the steep northern slope of the ridge, and at Dothan would be easily seen 'afar off' (Gen. xxxvii. 18). His figure would tell against the sky-line."[8]

[1] Conder, "Tent Work in Palestine," vol. i. p. 107; Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. ii. p. 244.

[2] Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 132. [3] Conder, l.s.c.

[4] Thomson, "The Land and the Book," p. 466.

[5] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. ii. p. 245.

[6] Conder, "Tent Work in Palestine," vol. i. p. 107. [7] Geikie, l.s.c.

[8] Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries," p. 53.

And as he approached, they "conspired against him" (ibid.). Nine of the brethren seem to have been together; but Reuben was absent. The result of their deliberations was, that it would be best to "slay him," and then "cast him into some pit," and report that an "evil beast had devoured him" (ibid. ver. 20). But Reuben obtained a knowledge of their design, and opposed it. "Let us not kill him," he said. "Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him." Reuben, as the eldest, felt called upon to be the protector of his young brother, and intended, if he were left at the bottom of one of the dry pits, or wells, in which the district probably abounded, to return after his brethren had retired, and draw him up, and deliver him to his father (ibid. vers. 21, 22; comp. xlii. 22). But, having obtained his brethren's consent to this modification of their original design, he seems to have withdrawn, perhaps feeling that the flock was his especial charge, and believing that he had sufficiently provided for the safety of his youngest brother.

During his absence, suddenly and unexpectedly, a new disturbing element made its appearance upon the scene. The nine brethren, who had originally decreed Joseph's death, had stript him of his much-envied "coat," had lowered him into a dry well or "pit," where they intended him to remain until they had come to a final determination as to his fate, and had sat down to their mid-day meal (ibid. ver. 25), when, "lifting up their eyes, they looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels, bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt" (ibid.). The great highway from Gilead to Egypt still passes by Dothan. "The caravans come up the Ghor Beisan, pass by Zerin, enter the hill country of Samaria by the wady of Dothaim, and thence go on to Ramleh, Gaza, and Egypt."[1] Canon Tristram fell in with a "long caravan of mules and asses" on the spot, laden with merchandise, and on their way to Egypt from Damascus.[2] The sudden sight of the Ishmeelite caravan, accompanied, as it was, by "Midianites, merchantmen" (ibid. ver. 28), put a new thought into the minds of the nine brethren, stirred their commercial instincts, and showed them a way to be rid of their brother without imbruing their hands in his blood. The thought took

[1] Thomson, "The Land and the Book," p. 466.

[2] Tristram, "Land of Israel," p. 132.

word by the mouth of Judah, who, addressing the rest, said to them, "What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, our flesh" (ibid. vers. 26, 27). The proposal was accepted by the others. Joseph was drawn up out of the pit, and sold to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver; and the caravan then proceeded on its path, and pursued its way to Egypt (ibid. ver. 28). A recent traveller remarks that the "modern Ishmaelites would not now hesitate to make just such a purchase, and actually do so in certain parts of the country."[1]

After the sale had been effected, and the caravan had gone upon its way, and perhaps disappeared from sight, Reuben, wholly ignorant of the transaction between the nine brethren and the merchants, returned to the pit wherein Joseph had been hidden, expecting to find him still there, and intending to release him and take him back to his father (Gen. xxxvii. 29). But he found the pit empty. Alarmed and grieved, he "rent his clothes," not doubting but that his brothers had, during his own absence, returned to their original design, and put Joseph to death. It seems that they, ashamed probably of what they had done, determined to leave him under this impression, and not enlighten him as to the real facts of the case.[2] So they made no reply to his exclamations. It was necessary, however, that, on their return to Hebron, they should make some answer or other to the inquiries which their father would be sure to address to them respecting his best-loved child—"Had they seen him? Where was he? What had they done with him?" and the like. Alas! they determined on a cruel deception. "They took Joseph's coat"—the coat of many colours—"and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; and brought it to their father, and said, This have we found; know now whether it be thy son's coat or not" (ibid. vers. 31, 32). One conclusion only was possible. "Jacob knew the coat, and said, It is my son's coat: an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces" (ibid. ver. 33; comp. ch. xliv. 28).

The grief of Jacob was excessive, and can scarcely be realized

[1] Thomson, l.s.c.

[2] See Gen. xlii. 22, which shows that Reuben remained convinced of Joseph's death.

except by those who have experienced a blow of the same kind. Young manhood suddenly cut off just as it is in full vigour, and in the first burst of youthful hope, is one of the saddest things in life; and when it is a father who believes such a fate to have befallen a favourite son, words can scarcely express the extremity of his anguish. More especially must this be the case where there is no firm belief in a happy hereafter. Jacob not only "rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins"—customary indications of sorrow, like our own black garments—but also "mourned for his son many days, *and refused to be comforted*" (Gen. xxxvii. 34, 35). In vain did his sons and his daughters[1] gather around him, and do all that was in their power to console him and assuage his suffering. If we think of our own griefs, and remember how utterly futile and foolish seemed to us all the consolations and condolements addressed to us, when we were struck down, by our dearest friends and relatives, we shall readily understand his feelings. The comfort offered to him was no comfort. None of the topics of consolation suggested caught hold of him, or in the slightest degree lessened his sorrow. This is the universal experience. If we have truly loved, we shall feel as he did, when he said, "I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning" (ibid. ver. 35). It is time alone, the great softener, that brings alleviation of our grief.

Bereaved of Joseph, Jacob clung the more to Benjamin, the only remaining son of his most tenderly beloved wife. Benjamin was growing from a boy into a man. He was probably about ten years old when Joseph was sold into Egypt, and twenty-three when Joseph became governor of Egypt under Pharaoh.[2] Without ever ceasing to grieve for the loss of Rachel's elder child, Jacob allowed the vacant place in his heart to be filled, or, at any rate, partly filled, by the younger. His nature was essentially affectionate. Disappointed in his elder sons, he threw all the tendrils of his loving heart round the younger ones, and, deprived of Joseph, he concentrated the whole of his affection upon Benjamin. We shall see, as we advance, the depth of his tenderness. It is sufficient in the present place to note that the jealous brethren gained but little by their plots

[1] Jacob may have had other actual daughters besides Dinah; or his sons' wives may be called his "daughters."

[2] Bp. Harold Browne in the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 178.

and machination against the hated Joseph. In removing him, they did but prepare the way for the elevation over their heads of another favourite—the true child of Jacob's old age—the child of Rachel's sorrow—the child of Jacob's strength[1]—the wolf (Gen. xlix. 27)—the "little ruler" (Psa. lxviii. 27)—Benjamin.

[1] Gen. xxxv. 18. See above, p. 133.

CHAPTER X.

FAMINE IN CANAAN.

Liability of Palestine to famine—Apathy of Jacob's sons—Jacob sends them into Egypt to buy corn—Line of route which they would pursue—Gaza—Gerar—The Desert—Sin or Pelusium—Tanis or Zoan—Reception by officials—Presentation to Joseph—His behaviour to them—His detention of Simeon—Their return and Jacob's grief—His reluctance to send Benjamin overcome by Judah—Second journey into Egypt—Kind reception by Joseph—Dismissal—Arrest on charge of theft—Bidden to depart, leaving Benjamin as bond-slave—Judah's remonstrance—Joseph discovers himself—Reconciliation—Jacob invited to come and settle in Egypt.

THE liability of Canaan to famine has already been spoken of.[1] Abraham experienced it soon after his first arrival in the country, and to escape it transferred his abode to Egypt (Gen. xii. 10). Isaac suffered from it, when "there was a famine in the land beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham" (ibid. xxvi. 1), and he took refuge with Abimelech, king of Gerar. Now Jacob experienced the visitation. It arises commonly from prolonged drought (1 Kings xvii. i. 7; Amos iv. 6, 7; Haggai i. 11) though sometimes it may be produced by a plague of locusts (Joel i. 4; ii. 2–11, 25), which spread rapidly over the whole country, and, where the land is as rich and fertile as "the garden of Eden," convert it into "a desolate wilderness" (ibid. ii. 3). We are not told the origin of the famine in Jacob's time; but, as it was "in all lands" (Gen. xli. 57), we may presume its cause to have been a general failure of rain throughout the East. Even Egypt suffered, the usual land of plenty; but there God's providence had so arranged matters

[1] See above, pp. 45, 46.

that the time of dearth was preceded by a time of unexampled abundance (ibid. vers. 26, 29–31, 47), and advantage was taken of this happy circumstance to lay up in store a vast amount of corn of every description (ibid. vers. 48, 49). In the adjacent countries no such preparation had been made, and, as time went on, their inhabitants were reduced to the greatest straits.

It would seem that, in Palestine, a dull apathy came over the sufferers, who, regarding death as inevitable, sat with folded hands, doing nothing, making no effort, but simply "looking one upon another" (Gen. xlii. 1). Such, at any rate, was the behaviour of the sons of Jacob, until their father, who, though so old, surpassed them all in energy, aroused them from their lethargy of despair. "Why do ye look one upon another?" he said. "Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us corn from thence; that we may live, and not die" (ibid. vers. 1, 2). The sons of Jacob were not able to gainsay the wisdom of their father's advice, and went, excepting Benjamin. The loving father could not spare his youngest and best beloved, could not bring himself to expose him to all the manifold dangers of the way, or to the contact with foreigners and the chances of being ill-received by the Egyptian authorities, who were not generally very cordial to strangers. It is unlikely that he had any special knowledge of the political circumstances of Egypt at the time, or of the feelings with which the great Vizier of the reigning monarch was likely to regard suppliants from Palestine. His conceptions on the subject of Egypt, which neither he nor his father had visited, would be vague. He would know it mainly as a land of plenty, where, if anywhere, corn was likely to be found; besides this he had, perhaps, some special information of the actual abundance, derived from merchants, Philistine or other, who had recently visited the country, and had their wants relieved. (Note the expression—"When Jacob *saw* that there was corn in Egypt.")

The ten brethren "went down to buy corn in Egypt." They followed probably the well-known route along the low coast region, which led by way of Gaza, Gerar, and Rhinocolura, to Pelusium and Tanis. To reach this, they would have to quit the upland country, and either strike across the hills nearly due west to Gaza, or else descend the Wady el Hesy as far as Deir Sineid, and then begin their southward journey parallel with

the coast-line. The country about Deir Sineid is fairly productive ;[1] and that in the vicinity of Gaza, which lies about seven miles off to the south-west, still more so. The city is at the present day "embowered in great olive-woods, which stretch north-eastward a distance of full four miles," and "girdle Gaza on nearly all sides in a wide sweep."[2] Water is supplied abundantly by numerous wells ; date-bearing palms are frequent ;[3] and there are prolific orchards of figs and pomegranates. The plain between Gaza and the Judæan mountains is rich in the extreme, and the entire district has a pleasing and fertile character. A recent traveller thus describes the view from a short distance to the south-east.[4] "On the south-east lay the track to Beersheba, over the open field ; and on the east the mountains of Judæa bounded the view ; low tawny hills, with cactus hedges over their tops, lying close below El Muntar, and beyond them vast stretches of rolling pasture, ploughed land, wheat, and barley, to the foot of the mountain range. On the west spread out a vast wood of olive and fig-frees, broken here and there by green fields, and by low rough hills, reaching to the sand-dunes, which were being slowly blown over the cultivated land. Beyond these the great sea spread out to the horizon, its deep blue contrasting in rich effect with the yellow sand-hills at its edge. North-west lay Gaza, on its long, low hill, embowered in a sea of green, two minarets rising from the town itself, and three from its suburb, Sejiyeh, the quarter of the weavers, a place bearing a very bad name. The sand-hills rose close to the town on the west. Cactus hedges streamed in all directions, over height and hollow ; and palms in numbers waved high in the air among the gardens, but not in groves, as in Egypt. On the north-east a track over the wide common showed the way to Hebron."

It can scarcely be supposed that, when Jacob's sons arrived, they were greeted by so fair a prospect. "The famine was over all the face of the earth" (Gen. xli. 56.)—certainly over all those regions which lay near to Palestine and Egypt, over Philistia,[5] Gerar, Edom, probably over Phœnicia and Syria. The

[1] Thomson, "The Land and the Book," p. 547 ; Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 155.

[2] Geikie, vol i. p. 158.

[3] Thomson, l.s.c.

[4] Geikie, vol. i. pp. 186, 187.

[5] Originally "Philistia" and "Palestine" designated the same tract ; but usage has extended the latter name to the entire Holy Land.

travellers' eyes must have fallen upon leafless orchards, withered shrubs, scorched pastures, dry arid plains. The city itself, being a stronghold of the Philistine league (Judg. xvi. 21), would scarcely attract them; and they probably passed it hastily, and pressed on to Gerar, where, if the covenant of Isaac (Gen. xxv. 28–31) still held good, they might expect a friendly reception. Gerar, however, is likely to have been even more parched, and dry, and famine-stricken than Gaza, since it lies nearer the desert, and its natural advantages are fewer. Umm-el-Jerar is at best an unattractive situation, with a soil that is poor and chalky, and "sprinkled rather than covered with grass."[1] Under a prolonged drought its aspect would be forbidding, and the weary travellers would have small temptation to arrest their march. Rather must we suppose them to have plodded onward, with as few stoppages as possible, along the well-trodden route, with the fiery sun above them and the scorching sand below, through the treeless, shadeless desert, which begins when the Wady Ghuzzeh is passed.

The breadth of the absolutely waterless desert was reckoned by Herodotus as a journey of three days.[2] But, as the distance between the Wady Ghuzzeh and Pelusium does not fall much short of a hundred and twenty miles, we must understand him as referring to the passage of a lightly equipped traveller, mounted on a good dromedary, rather than to that of a body of footmen accompanied by asses. Such a body would scarcely accomplish the journey under six days, at the least. For six days, then, the ten sons of Jacob toiled along the weary desert route, with the blazing sun scorching them by day and the keen desert air chilling them by night,[3] meeting probably few wayfarers, but passing the bleached bones of many an ass and camel, which had succumbed to the difficulties of the journey. Vultures hovered in the air, fresh from stripping the last of the fallen animals, and perhaps followed the little caravan for miles in the hope of descending upon a new victim. There were no streams, there were no trees, there was no verdure. Across the asses' backs must have been slung skins of water, filled at the last well upon the route that still held out, and carefully watched and husbanded, lest they should be emptied before Egypt was reached. As the sixth morning's sun arose, every eye would be

[1] Geikie, "The Holy Land and the Bible," vol. i. p. 239.

[2] Herod. iii. 5, *sub fin.*

[3] Compare Gen. xxxi. 40.

strained to see if on the horizon's utmost verge there were any appearance of a watery haze, or of a wavy outline which might indicate the tops of palms, or of a green streak, which would be almost equally welcome, whether it spoke of corn, or grass, or mere coarse marsh-grown vegetation.

At last Sin, the Greek Pelusium, would be reached, probably along a causeway, with a marsh on either side. All northern Egypt is marshy, the Nile stagnating over the low ground, and the sea occasionally breaking through the narrow spit of sand which alone is interposed between the great marsh tract and the Mediterranean. Pelusium was situated on a branch of the Nile, in a green swampy district, where great reeds and bulrushes abounded, and which was the haunt of eels and water-snakes. It was the frontier town towards the north-east, and foreigners had to be inspected and catechised before they could enter it. Companies of any considerable size were always stopped at the frontier; a careful description of them was drawn up by the local officials, and transmitted to the Court, where the ministers of the sovereign perused it, and gave such directions to the local officials as they thought expedient. But, under the circumstances of the time, it may be doubted whether ten poor shepherds, come to buy corn, would have attracted very much attention. Every day probably brought hundreds of strangers on the same errand. The officials at Pelusium would inform such persons how they were to proceed. In the present instance, it seems that they bade the new arrivals to make their way to the capital, where alone the business of the sale of corn to needy foreigners was being conducted.

What then was the Egyptian capital at this period? Originally it was Memphis, situated a little above the apex of the Delta. Next, it became Thebes, three hundred miles further up the river. Then, for a time, it was Zoan, or Tanis, on the Tanitic branch of the Nile, not very far from Pelusium. Later on, it was once more Thebes; still later, once more Memphis. Chronological considerations, and other historical evidence, make it in the highest degree probable, if not absolutely certain, that the capital, at the period of which we are now speaking, was Tanis.[1] Tanis, or Zoan (now San), lay at the distance of about forty miles from Pelusium, in a direction a very little to the north of west. It was probably united to Pelusium by a

[1] See the author's "Egypt and Babylon," pp. 181–193.

causeway, which was carried across the great marsh, now Lake Menzaleh, almost along the line of the thirty-first parallel. A wall of crude brick enclosed the town, which was of considerable size, and lay on the eastern bank of the river.[1] Temples in the ordinary Egyptian style, with lofty pyramidal towers, and spacious courts, and corridors, especially one which had been erected by the reigning monarch to Set or Sutekh, adorned it. "Troops of priests paraded the courts and halls, here offering incense, there sacrifice, or marching in solemn procession, singing hymns to the music of flutes and pipes, of cymbals and harps and drums. The streets were astir with busy crowds, bent on traffic or on pleasure. Brown Egyptians, red Arabs from the Yemen, stalwart blacks from the Soudan, pale blue-eyed Libyans from the north African coast, . . . jostled each other in the broader thoroughfares, whence they had to remove into the side lanes, or to take refuge in corners, when the great noble, borne in his palanquin by his domestic slaves, or the young dandy, driving his pair-horse chariot, claimed a passage that it would have been rash to refuse. Outside the town was the river, navigable from the sea, and covered with ships and boats. Here glided arks containing images of the gods; there hurried on the galley of a grandee, with its sail set, and impelled besides by forty or fifty rowers; heavy merchantmen floated down the stream, or were towed up from the shore; light skiffs of the papyrus plant—"vessels of bulrushes"[2]—darted in and out of the shipping in all directions. From the river on either side branched out canals, which contained fish of various kinds, and conveyed the Nile water far and wide over the soil that is now so parched and arid. The land about the town—"the field of Zoan"[3]—everywhere bore grain, or fruit, or vegetables."[4]

It was upon such a scene as this that the ten sons of Joseph gazed, as—their long and weary travel ended—they passed the gates, and entered the streets of the Egyptian capital. Stately officials, no doubt, received them at the gates, and conducted them to the presence of the minister, to whom the sale of the corn was entrusted, and on whose will it depended whether

[1] R. Stuart Poole, "Cities of Egypt," p. 69.

[2] Isa. xviii. 2; Wilkinson in the author's "Herodotus," vol. ii. p. 154, note 1.

[3] Psa. lxxviii. 12, 43.

[4] See the author's "Biblical Topography," pp. 108, 109.

each batch of foreign applicants was received with favour and allowed to make the purchase which it desired, or not. The individual before whom they were brought was their brother Joseph, who, by the blessing of God, had risen from the condition of a slave to this lofty rank and important office. Twenty years of residence in a foreign land had no doubt greatly changed his appearance, and his adoption of the Egyptian costume, and manner of wearing the hair and the beard, must have had a further effect in making him unlike his former self; so that we hear without surprise that not one among his brethren recognized him. But *he* knew *them* at a glance (Gen. xlii. 8). They would be dressed as he had always seen them, and being older than he, would have been less altered in face and appearance; not to mention that he would naturally scrutinize all Palestinian arrivals, while they, having no conception that they could find an acquaintance in an Egyptian official, would not think of scrutinizing him. The ten brethren made the usual Oriental prostration before a superior—"they bowed themselves down before him with their faces to the earth" (ibid. ver. 6); and Joseph "remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them" (ibid. ver. 9) in times long past; but their thoughts were engaged with the present, and no suspicion came over them that they were fulfilling the prophecy which they had flouted (ibid. xxxvii. 7, 9, 19).

Joseph had now to determine how he should behave to his brethren. Should he make himself known to them? Should he welcome them with a burst of fraternal affection? Should he bid them dwell in the land? This would have been his course of action, probably, had he yielded to impulse; but several considerations kept him back. What had become o Benjamin? Why was he not with them? Had they made away with him also—killed him, or sold him as a slave? These doubts must be resolved before he could feel cordial towards them, or even forgive them fully for the conduct they had pursued towards himself. He therefore "made himself strange to them" (Gen. xlii. 7) and "spake roughly"—declaring his belief that they had come to Egypt on no such innocent errand as they pretended, but "as spies"—the tools and instruments of some of Egypt's Asiatic enemies, who had sent them to "see the nakedness of the land" (ibid. ver. 9), or, in other words, to observe and report on the weak points in Egypt's military

defences, and the mode in which she could be attacked with the best prospect of success. It was in vain that they protested against the injustice of attributing to them such motives and sought to impress the great man favourably by going into details with respect to their family and their family history. "Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan ; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not" (ibid. ver. 13). Joseph persisted in his pretence of mistrust, and declared with an oath [1] that in no other way could they convince him of their truthfulness and honesty than by producing their younger brother before him. At first he threatened to keep nine out of the ten in prison, while he sent one of their number back to Palestine, to fetch the youngest-born, and he even went so far as to commit them all to an Egyptian gaol for three days (ibid. ver. 17) ; but ultimately he offered them better terms—"This do," he said, "and live ; for I fear God : if ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison : go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses : but bring your youngest brother unto me ; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die" (ibid. vers. 19, 20). To this, reluctantly, they consented ; and Simeon was "bound before their eyes," and retained in custody, while the remaining nine received as much corn as their sacks would hold, and started off on their return to Hebron.

The return journey was effected, probably, along the same line of route as that which had been pursued on the way out, and was accomplished without misadventure. Pelusium, Gerar, Gaza, were once more passed, and Hebron was reached in safety. There confession of the circumstances under which Simeon had been left behind, had to be made to Jacob, and the condition on which alone his release could be obtained had to be imparted. The aged patriarch was well-nigh overwhelmed with sorrow, and the bitter cry went forth from him—"Me have ye bereaved of my children ; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away : all these things are against me" (ibid. ver. 36). Subsequently he expressed himself thus, when he had reflected on the communication made to him :—"My son shall not go down with you ; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone ; if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go,

[1] "By the life of Pharaoh" (Gen. xlii. 15).

then shall ye bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave" (ibid. ver. 30).

But the inexorable march of events, arranged and determined on long before in the Divine counsels, laughed the feeble determinations of the human will to scorn. Time went on, and ere long the family and dependents of Jacob "had eaten up the corn which had been brought out of Egypt" (Gen. xliii. 2), and yet "the famine was still sore in the land" (ibid. ver. 1). Jacob, without other resources, had once more to command his sons—"Go again, buy us a little food" (ibid. ver. 2). In the first burst of his grief at the detention of Simeon and the prospective loss of Benjamin, Reuben, the firstborn, had taken the word, and had endeavoured to overcome his father's scruples by undertaking, if Benjamin were sent, that he would assuredly bring him back, and offering to leave with Jacob "his two sons"—the two elder probably of his four sons (ibid. xlvi. 9)—as hostages, to be slain if Benjamin were not restored (ibid. xlii. 37). But this offer appears to have fallen dead, and to have in no wise moved the anxious and doting father. Reuben had apparently offended him too deeply (ibid. xxxv. 22) to be listened to. Now, when the crisis had arrived, and the choice lay between sending to Egypt once more and submitting to actual starvation, it was Judah who came forward to reason with his father, and to show him that there was but one course which could be followed. To Jacob's orders—"Go again, buy us a little food"—he resolutely replied—"The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food: but if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down; for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you" (ibid. xliii. 3–5). Jacob, in the irrational spirit of old age, which betakes itself to recrimination when it can find no answer to an argument, replied—"Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?"—a thrust which was easily parried by the response (ibid ver. 7)—"The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? Have ye another brother? And we told him according to the tenor of these words. Could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down?" Jacob could make no reply to this, and Judah continued (vers. 8–10)—"Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that

we may live and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever: for, except we had lingered, surely we had now returned a second time." Jacob then, at last, gave way. He felt that there was no other course open to him. He *must* yield, or they would all perish together. And his opposition had effected one thing—it had secured Benjamin a special protector, pledged to watch over him, in Judah, one of the elder sons, and now, when Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had through their sons forfeited the birthright, in some sort the head of the family.[1] Jacob could better bear to part with his darling under these circumstances. So he consented. "Take your brother," he said, "and arise, go again unto the man: and God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. And if I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved" (ibid. ver. 14).

This is the culmination of Jacob's time of sorrow. No doubt, he had richly deserved sorrow by his conduct to his brother (Gen. xxv. 29–34) and his father (ibid. xxvii. 19–30); and sorrow had pursued him from the time of his deception of Isaac to the present. He had been exiled from his home; parted from his mother, whom he never saw again; forced to take the toilsome journey into Mesopotamia to the dwelling of Laban; cheated by Laban in the matter of his marriage; brought into a weary servitude; compelled to accept a change of wages "ten times"; at last frowned upon and driven to take secret flight; then pursued, overtaken, and reproached; terrified by his brother; smitten and afflicted, first, by the loss of Rachel, then by that of Joseph, later on by that of Simeon, and now by that of Benjamin; vexed and distressed also by the wickedness of his sons, Reuben (ibid. xxxv. 22), Simeon and Levi (ibid. xxxiv. 13–30), even Judah (ibid. xxxviii. 2–26); he had been tried and tested in the furnace of severe affliction and had borne the trial, had been cleansed, purified, strengthened by it; now, after one more short period of suspense, he was to receive his reward—a time of joy was before him; the misfortunes that had so severely taxed his endurance during his later years were to turn out blessings in disguise—Joseph, Simeon, Benjamin, were to be restored to him; he was to "taste and see how gracious the

[1] See Bp. Harold Browne's note on Gen. xlix. 8.

Lord is," and to feel in his inmost heart, "blessed is the man that trusteth in Him" (Psa. xxxiv. 8, Prayer Book Version). But for the present he had still during a brief space to suffer. All his sons quitted him. He was left alone—left in suspense for many weeks—a prey to fears, suspicions, surmises. No intelligence would reach him during this terrible period of waiting. There were no telegraphs—no posts even. Sick with hope deferred, the solitary patriarch waited day after day, longing for the return of his sons, or some of them, yet dreading what news they might bring.

Meantime, the little knot of travellers was making its way along the now familiar line of route, which connected Hebron with Tanis, at its best speed, not without its own anxieties. How would Simeon have been treated? Would they find him well, or worn with suffering? And how would the Great man receive them? A matter connected with their last visit, and inexplicable to them, had disturbed their serenity on their return with their sacks of corn from Egypt—each of them had found the money which he had paid for his corn returned to him and deposited in his sack (Gen. xlii. 27, 35). Would this be made a charge against them when they reached Tanis? Any such charge they had prepared themselves to meet by bringing with them on the present occasion "double money" (ibid. xliii. 12, 21, 22); but they could not tell whether they would be held blameless in the matter, or dealt with severely as cheats, or even robbers. It was with some tremors and misgivings that they found themselves once more in the Governor's presence. Their fears were increased, when, instead of transacting business with them in the public place as before, Joseph had them brought to his own house by one of his servants, and there lodged, and cared for. "Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time," they said, "are we brought in; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses" (ibid. ver. 18). But this state of alarm soon passed. First, Simeon was restored to them. Then the Great man came at noon (ver. 25), and spoke kindly to them, and accepted a small present which Jacob had sent him (ibid. vers. 11, 26), and asked after their father's health, and reassured them through his servant as to the returned money (ibid. ver. 23), and feasted them in his house, and sent them messes from his own table, and made them drink and be merry (ibid. ver. 34).

He did not, however, even yet reveal himself. He had prepared a more dramatic *dénouement*—one which should further test his brethren, and should especially show how they were disposed towards his young brother, his full brother, his own and his father's favourite, Benjamin. He would see whether they had transferred to Benjamin the envy and jealousy which they had felt towards himself, and would gladly rid themselves of him, or whether their dispositions were changed.

So the brethren were feasted, and their sacks filled with corn, and the "corn money" again replaced in them, and "as soon as the morning was light, they were sent away, they and their asses" (Gen. xliv. 3). But by Joseph's order, his own silver drinking-cup was secreted in Benjamin's sack, "in the sack's mouth" (ibid. ver. 2), as if it had been hastily thrust in at the last moment. Then a hue and cry was raised. Joseph's servants hurried after the small travelling-company, and speedily overtook them, and taxed them with the theft. On their indignant denial, and proposal that, if the cup were found with any of them, he should be put to death, while the rest should be the Governor's bondmen, Joseph's steward said it would be enough if the one with whom the cup was found became a bondman; the others should be held blameless (ibid. vers. 4–10). On search being made, the cup was of course found where it had been placed, and the brethren, overwhelmed with shame and grief, were marched back to the city, and conducted again to Joseph's house. Brought before him, they made no defence—guilty in the sight of God they confessed they were—of the particular crime charged on them, they had no means of clearing themselves—they would, all of them, be the Governor's bondslaves henceforward (ibid. vers. 11–16). Then Joseph brought forward his crucial test. "God forbid," he said, "that I should do so: the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; but as for you, get you up in peace unto your father" (ibid. ver. 17).

The ten elder sons of Jacob might, upon this, have left Benjamin behind with the Egyptian ruler, and have returned home safe and free, rid of both the brothers who had been their father's favourites. But this they refused to do. Judah took the word, and pleaded earnestly for the restoration of Benjamin to his father as necessary for his father's life (ibid. ver. 31); offering at the same time to take his place as an Egyptian

bondman (ver. 33), if the liberty of some one out of the eleven must be regarded as forfeited on account of the cup. At this act of self-sacrifice Joseph's reserve broke down. "Then Joseph could not refrain himself . . . and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren" (Gen. xlv. 1). A perfect reconciliation followed. Joseph excused his brethren, bade them not be angry with themselves (ibid. ver. 5), declared that the whole matter was God's doing, not theirs (ibid. ver. 8), kissed all his brethren and wept upon them, and sent them all back in a body, to fetch their wives and "little ones," and their father, and come down to Egypt to sojourn there. The Pharaoh gave his express sanction to the immigration (ibid. vers. 17–20), and assigned the brethren a number of "wagons," or rather carts, for the conveyance of their belongings, together with ample "provision for the way" (ibid. ver. 21). Joseph gave to each "changes of raiment, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of raiment; and to his father he sent after this manner: ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way" (ibid. vers. 22, 23). When all was ready, he dismissed his brethren with the warning phrase—the only token which he showed of doubt or distrust—"See that ye fall not out by the way" (ibid. ver. 24).

CHAPTER XI.

LIFE IN EGYPT.

Jacob invited by Joseph to remove to Egypt—Importance of the removal—Jacob's doubts—All doubt ended by a vision seen at Beersheba—The tribe sets forth—Description of its probable appearance—The route taken—Condition of Egypt at the time—Recent conquest by the Hyksôs—Their original barbarism and later adoption of Egyptian civilization—Joseph's Pharaoh probably Apepi—His marked character—Meeting of Jacob and Joseph in Goshen—Five of his brethren presented by Joseph to the Pharaoh—Separate presentation of his father—Jacob blesses Apepi—Returns to Goshen—His peaceful life there.

THE return journey of the eleven brethren was made with speed and safety. They were eager to relieve their father's anxiety, as well as to bring him the food necessary for himself and his retainers. It is probable that they found him still at Hebron. After the first greetings were over, they told him their marvellous news—Joseph was alive—he was Governor over all the land of Egypt—he wished his father, his brethren, and the whole tribe, to come to him there. At first Jacob was incredulous. Was not the news too good to be true? "His heart stood still, and its machinery almost threatened to break down,"[1] under the pressure of conflicting feelings—joy, doubt, astonishment. To convince him, his sons not only "told him all the words of Joseph," but "showed him the wagons of Pharaoh which Joseph had sent" (Gen. xlv. 27). The visible and tangible evidence had an effect on him beyond the power of mere words, and assured him that all which he had been told was no more than the truth. So "his spirit revived" within him; and Israel

[1] Meyer, "Israel: a Prince with God," p. 142.

said, in a burst of gratitude and faith, "It is enough: Joseph my son is yet alive; I will go and see him before I die" (ibid. ver. 45).

It was a momentous resolution. To descend into Egypt, with the whole of his belongings, to place himself and his tribe under the protection of Pharaoh, was to give up for himself and them the freedom and independence which had been enjoyed now for above two centuries, and to become a mere dependent on a powerful and absolute monarch, whose will would be law to himself, his children, and his descendants. It was not now as in Abraham's time. Then the patriarch and his wife, with no children, and only a moderate band of followers, could seek a temporary shelter, and look to returning into Canaan when a few years were past. But now, when the males of Abraham's stock were seventy in number (Gen. xlvi. 27), and the households probably not less than thirty or forty, and the retainers perhaps some thousands,[1] the movement was a veritable migration, a fresh settlement, a removal into a new and strange land for an indefinite period. No doubt there were constraining causes which left little room for choice. The desire to see Joseph was intense, and could not otherwise be gratified, for the Pharaoh was not likely to give his minister leave of absence from the court. The famine was still "sore in the land," and would continue, according to God's word to Joseph (Gen. xli. 27; xlv. 11), for another five years. Starvation stared him in the face, if he elected to remain at Hebron, while in Egypt were ease, plenty, "good things" in abundance. There was also, but we do not know whether Jacob bethought himself of it, the prophecy given by God to Abraham soon after he entered the Holy Land —"Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance . . . In the fourth generation shall they come hither again" (ibid. xv. 13–16). This prophecy, if borne in mind, might have been taken to justify a removal, and to render it an act of faith, rather than one of faithlessness, which it would have been otherwise. Still Jacob, even when he started on his journey, would seem to have been doubtful as to his proper course, or even, as has been said, "engaged in eager debate as to the path

[1] See Kurtz, "History of the Old Covenant," vol. ii. p. 149, E. T.

of duty."[1] Abraham, when in Egypt, had been brought into great danger (ibid. xii. 10–19); Isaac had been forbidden to go thither (ibid. xxvi. 2). Moreover, Egypt was not only a heathen land, but one in which idolatry had been long practised and had assumed gross forms of a revolting character. "Jacob therefore might naturally fear to find in it dangers both worldly and spiritual."[2] Still, it would seem, though in much doubt, he determined to go—he quitted Hebron, and "took his journey, with all that he had" (ibid. xlvi. 1), and proceeding southwards to the extreme limits of the Holy Land, to the very verge of the Desert, halted at Beersheba.

There, his doubts were ended. Beersheba was a holy site. Abraham (Gen. xxi. 33), and again Isaac (ibid. xxvi. 25), had built altars there. Jacob, on arriving, "offered sacrifices unto the God of his father, Isaac," and no doubt prayed to the God of his fathers earnestly for help and guidance. His prayer received a direct and clear answer. "God spake unto Jacob in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And He said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt, and I will also surely bring thee up again; and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes" (ibid. xlvi. 2–4). Where light is earnestly desired and asked for, light is sure to be given. Jacob had doubted, hesitated, debated with himself, feared to go down into Egypt, sacrificed, prayed—now his way is made plain before his face—he is to go down into Egypt, and God will go with him. All doubt is ended, and the "travelling company" (Isa. xxi. 13) sets forth.

It must have been a strange sight, that travelling company! The Great Sheikh, with snow-white hair and beard, wrapped in an ample abba, and seated, or reclining at length, in the best of Pharaoh's wagons, with his daughters (Gen. xlvi. 7) and his daughters-in-law, and their children, in the other wagons, and around them a body-guard of sons and sons-in-law, and grandsons, armed perhaps differently, some with bows and arrows (ibid. xxvii. 3), some perhaps with spears, all with knives, and then a motley crowd of slaves, attendants, and retainers, with their wives and children, mostly on foot, but some mounted on

[1] Meyer, "Israel: a Prince with God," p. 142.

[2] Bp. Harold Browne in the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 217.

asses, some perhaps on camels (ibid. xxxi. 17), amounting in all to "several thousands,"[1] and bringing with them all their possessions, camels in scores, asses probably in hundreds, horned cattle—cows and bulls—in equal number, sheep and goats in thousands, tents and tent-poles, carpets, hangings, furniture, tools, household utensils—all probably mixed together in greater confusion than is seen even in modern caravans, and doubtless indulging in equal noise, shouting, screaming, gesticulating, huzzahing, occasionally perhaps fighting or quarrelling. The camels and many of the asses would be laden with water-skins, absolutely necessary for crossing the Desert; the wagons would convey, besides Jacob's daughters, and his daughters-in-law, and their "little ones," much of the household stuff (ibid. xlvi. 6); the rest would have to be carried on men's backs, or women's shoulders, as we see pictured in the sculptures of Assyria.

The route which was taken from Beersheba to Egypt is to some extent uncertain; but most probably it was "the way of Shur" (Gen. xvi. 7). This would lead from Beersheba, in a south-westerly direction, by way of Bered and Rehoboth, into the actual desert, which it would traverse from east to west through country that is still unexplored, striking the Egyptian frontier near Daphné, or Tahpehnes, considerably to the south of Pelusium. Hence the way to Tanis lay through the Delta, over solid ground; and the capital would be approached from the south-east, instead of from the north-east through the marshes. The distance was somewhat greater than by the northern route, or "way of the Philistines" (Ex. xiii. 17); but the difference was not very considerable; and there may have been circumstances which at the time rendered the southern route more eligible for a large caravan than the northern one.

It is impossible to say how much, or how little, knowledge Jacob possessed, of the Egypt which he was approaching. The Abrahamic traditions would tell of the Old Empire.[2] They would speak of Egypt under native kings, whose main capital was Thebes, but who bore sway both over the Upper and the Lower country, leaving special traces of their activity in the Fayoum, and who had advanced their kingdom to a high pitch

[1] See above, p. 159.

[2] This, no doubt, is disputed. (See Mr. Deane's "Abraham: His Life and Times," p. 48.) But it still seems to me almost certain.

of prosperity and glory, partly by their architectural works—their temples and their obelisks, partly by their labours for the extension and improvement of agriculture by means of canals and works of irrigation. There is every reason to believe that Abraham visited Egypt when it was governed by the kings, either of the twelfth, or the thirteenth dynasty, before there had been any important foreign invasion, while the religion, the art, the literature were thoroughly native, wholly, or almost wholly, free from any foreign admixture. But, between the time of the going down of Abraham into Egypt and the migration under Jacob—a space of above two hundred years—great and extraordinary changes had occurred. Egypt had been invaded, overrun, subjugated. A race of which little can be stated positively, except that they were of Asiatic origin, and invaded Egypt from the side of the isthmus of Suez, had overpowered the primitive Egyptians, and not only taken possession of their territory, but outraged their feelings by a general destruction of the temples which they revered so highly. The strength of Egypt had gone down, like corn before the reapers, on the tremendous onslaught of the Asiatic horde; the civilization of above a thousand years had seemed to be destroyed; and a dark cloud had settled upon the land, which had so long been a centre of light, of culture, and of refinement.

Who the people were by whom this extraordinary revolution was effected, is one of the most difficult problems of history. It has been usual to call them "the Hyksôs"; but that name applies properly, not to the people generally, but only to their kings. The people were called by Manetho, in one place "Phœnicians,"[1] in another "Arabs."[2] It is perhaps best to regard them, with Lenormant,[3] as "a collection of all the nomad hordes of Arabia and Syria," the chief directing power being with the Hittites. Manetho's account of the invasion—the only original account which has come down to us—is as follows:—"There was once a king of Egypt, whose name was Timæus. In his reign the gods being offended, for I know not what cause, with our nation, certain men of ignoble race,

[1] Ap. Syncell. "Chronographia," vol. i. p. 61, B.
[2] Ap. Joseph. "Contr. Apion." i. 14.
[3] "Manuel d'Histoire Ancienne de l'Orient," vol. i. p. 361.

coming from the eastern regions, had the boldness to invade our country, and, falling upon it unawares, conquered it easily without a battle. After the submission of the princes, they conducted themselves in a most barbarous fashion towards the whole of the inhabitants, slaying some, and reducing to slavery the wives and children of the others. Moreover, they savagely set the cities on fire, and demolished the temples of the gods. At last, they took one of their number called Salatis (Saïtes?), and made him king over them. Salatis resided at Memphis, where he received tribute both from Upper and from Lower Egypt, while at the same time he placed garrisons in all the most suitable situations. He strongly fortified the frontier, especially on the East, since he feared that the Assyrians, who were then exceedingly powerful, might desire to make themselves masters of his kingdom. Having found, moreover, in the Sethroite nome, to the east of the Bubastite branch of the Nile, a city very favourably situated, and called, on account of an ancient theological tradition, Avaris, he rebuilt it and strengthened it with walls of great thickness, which he guarded with a body of two hundred and forty thousand men. Each summer he visited the place, to see their supplies of corn measured out for his soldiers, and their pay delivered to them, as well as to superintend their military exercises, in order that foreigners might hold them in respect." We may gather from it, that the invaders poured into the country in overwhelming force—multitudinous, impetuous, irresistible. "It was as when the northern barbarians swooped down in their countless thousands on the outlying provinces of the Roman Empire, or as when the hordes of Jingis Khan overran Kashgar and Kharesm —the contest was too unequal for anything that could be called a struggle to be made. Egypt collapsed before the invader. There was no battle. The terrified inhabitants fled to their cities, and endeavoured to defend themselves behind walls; but it was in vain. The walls of the Egyptians were rather banks to keep out the Nile inundation than ramparts to repel an enemy. In a short time the strongholds that resisted were taken, the adult male population put to the sword, the women and children enslaved, the houses burnt, the temples ruthlessly demolished. An iconoclastic spirit possessed the conquerors. The gods and worship of Egypt were hateful to them. Wherever the flood passed, it swept away the existing civilization, deeply

impregnated as it was with religion ; it covered the ground with the *débris* of temples and shrines, with the fragments of statues and sphinxes ; it crushed existing religious usages, and for a time, as it would seem, substituted nothing in their place. . . . Fortunately, however, the whole country was not overrun. So far as appears, the actual occupation of Egypt by the Hyksôs was confined to the Delta, the Lower Nile valley, and the district of the Fayoum. Elephantine, Thebes, Abydos, escaped the destroyers, and, though forced to certain formal acts of submission, to an acknowledgment of the Hyksôs suzerainty, and to the payment of an annual tribute, retained a qualified independence. The Theban monuments of the eleventh and twelfth dynasties were undisturbed. Even in Lower Egypt there were structures that suffered little or nothing at the conqueror's hands, being too humble to attract his attention, or too massive to yield to the means of destruction known to him. Thus the Pyramids scarcely suffered, though it is possible that at this time their sanctity was first violated and their contents rifled. The great obelisk of Usurtasen I., which still stands at Heliopolis, was not overthrown. The humbler tombs at Ghizeh, so precious to the antiquary, were for the most part untouched. Amenemhat's buildings in the Fayoum may have been damaged, but they were not demolished. Though Egyptian civilization received a rude shock from the invasion, it was not altogether swallowed up or destroyed ; and when the deluge had passed it emerged once more, and soon reached, and even surpassed, its ancient glories." [1]

Even before this consummation was reached, a remarkable reaction set in. When the conquest had been effected, and the whole population had become either quiet and unresisting subjects or submissive tributaries, a perceptible softening took place in the manners and general character of the conquerors. As the Mongols and the Mandchus in China suffered themselves by degrees to be conquered by the superior civilization of the people whom they had overrun and subdued, so the Hyksôs yielded little by little to the influences which surrounded them, and insensibly assimilated themselves to their Egyptian subjects. They adopted the Egyptian dress, titles, official language, art, mode of writing, architecture. In Tanis,

[1] See the author's "Story of Egypt," pp. 135, 136.

especially, temples were built, and sculptures set up, under the later "Shepherd Kings," differing little in their general character from those of purely Egyptian periods. The foreign monarchs erected their effigies at this site, which were sculptured by native artists according to the ordinary rules of Egyptian glyptic art, and which only differ from those of the earlier native Pharaohs in the head-dress, the expression of the countenance, and a peculiar arrangement of the beard.[1]

It was into an Egypt of the reaction period, but still one which possessed peculiar features, that Jacob was about to be introduced. Chronological considerations alone would place the ministry of Joseph towards the close of the Hyksôs period. Tradition connected him in an especial way with Apepi, the last king of the great Hyksôs dynasty which began with Salatis or Saïtes.[2] Apepi stands out from the Egyptian kings of the period as a monarch of a distinct individuality, and with a marked character. He built a great temple to Set or Sutekh at Tanis, his principal capital, composed of blocks of red granite, and adorned it with obelisks and sphinxes. The obelisks are said to have been fourteen in number, and must have been dispersed about the courts, instead of being placed, in the ordinary way, in pairs before entrances. The sphinxes, which differed from the ordinary Egyptian sphinx in having a mane like a lion, and also wings, seem to have formed an avenue or vista leading up to the temple from the town. They were in diorite, and are still to be seen at San, with the name of Apepi engraved upon them.

But it was in the religious changes which he introduced, that Apepi's individuality appears most strikingly. The other Hyksôs monarchs had, apparently, after their first outburst of fanaticism, adopted the old Egyptian religion in its entirety, encouraged polytheism, and distributed their favours impartially among the various members of the Egyptian Pantheon. Apepi became a monotheist. Singling out from the multitudinous gods of Egypt one special personage—the divinity Set or Sutekh—he made him the sole object of his worship, "refusing to serve any other god in the whole land."[3] He even became an apostle of monotheism, imposing the worship of a

[1] See the author's "Story of Egypt," p. 140.
[2] Syncellus, "Chronographia," vol. i. p. 62, B.
[3] "Records of the Past," vol. viii. p. 3.

single god on the tributary monarch of Southern Egypt, who held his capital at Thebes. Whether he carried out his religious ideas to the extent of requiring conformity to them on the part of his Egyptian subjects generally is uncertain—perhaps he scarcely ventured so far; but in Tanis and Avaris the unity of God seems to have been proclaimed—in each of these cities the king built a single great temple "of goodly and enduring workmanship,"[1] where on festival days sacrifice was offered to Sutekh with those rites which elsewhere in Egypt were regarded as appropriate to the divinity known as Ra-Harmachis. Ra-Harmachis was the Rising Sun; and we may therefore regard it as most probable that Apepi, like the later Egyptian monotheists who are known as the "Disk-Worshippers,"[2] identified his sole deity with the bright orb of day, the great source of Light and Life to the universe.

Such was the monarch to whom Jacob was now, in his old age, to be introduced, and under whom he was to live out the remaining period of his existence upon earth. The long and weary journey from Palestine had been safely accomplished—the land of Goshen, which Joseph had pointed out as the fittest place for his father's residence (Genesis xlv. 10), had been reached—Joseph had met his father Jacob there, and Jacob had "fallen on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while" (ibid. xlvi. 29), and exclaimed—"Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, and thou art still alive" (ibid. ver. 30)—it remained for Joseph to introduce his father and his brethren to the Pharaoh, and to obtain his express sanction to their location in the land of Goshen, which was "the best of the land" (ibid. xlvii. 6), the part most suitable for flocks and herds, and the place where the Pharaoh pastured a portion of his own cattle (ibid.). The distance was not far from Goshen to Tanis; and Joseph, having first prepared his master for the reception (ibid. ver. 1), took his father and five of his brethren with him (ibid. ver. 2), leaving the rest in charge of the cattle and retainers, and conveyed them to the Court for presentation to the Great King.

We may image to ourselves the Pharaoh seated in his royal palace on the appointed day, surrounded by his courtiers. The palace itself was probably "a large square or parallelo-

[1] "Records of the Past," vol. viii. p. 3.

[2] See the author's "History of Ancient Egypt," vol. ii. pp. 272–279.

gram, enclosed within high walls, with gates guarded by pylons, or semi-pyramidal towers, on two or more of the sides, like the gates of temples in miniature. The grounds would be divided out into formal courts and alleys, planted with trees in rows, the trees being of various kinds."[1] Here the graceful palm uplifted its feathery top, adorned with rich clusters of bright-gleaming dates. There pomegranates blossomed, or vines were carried along upon trellises. Ponds or reservoirs, rectangular in shape, were frequent, and gave the charm of freshness in a climate where, without constant irrigation, vegetation languishes. The palace itself consisted of numerous courts surrounded with colonnaded cloisters, and entered through pylons, with here and there a group of apartments, into which light was but scantily admitted by small windows placed high up in the walls. Much taste was shown in the designs of the pillars, and especially of their capitals, which combined animal and vegetable forms after a manner that was at once curious and pleasing. The walls and ceilings were painted in the brightest colours, sometimes with figures of men walking in procession, sometimes with representations of domestic life, occasionally with battle scenes. Hieroglyphical inscriptions accompanied the drawings, and explained their meaning. The number of apartments was not great, life being chiefly passed in the colonnaded courts, and in the grounds, where a sufficiency of immediate shade could be combined with the charm of remoter sunlight, with the plash of water, and with the free play of the atmosphere. Luxurious furniture garnished most of the apartments—armchairs, fauteuils, ottomans, sofas—in exquisitely carved woodwork, and with cushions of brilliant hues and delicately patterned, that invited the visitor to repose. Conspicuous among the apartments must have been the throne-room, where the monarch gave audiences, received ambassadors, perhaps delivered judgments and heard complaints, seated high above his courtiers, on a throne of some precious wood, or of ivory, elaborately carved with figures of men and animals, his feet resting on a footstool of scarcely inferior magnificence.[2]

So sate Apepi, his guards on either side of him, in their plain white linen tunics, armed with short spears and falchions, and perhaps with shields, his courtiers dispersed about the hall

[1] See the author's "History of Ancient Egypt," vol. ii. p. 355.

[2] Lepsius, "Denkmäler," part iii. pl. 208, *a*.

in groups, with their eyes fixed upon the main entrance, when, at a signal, there advanced from the doorway the Grand Vizier, or "Governor over the land," Joseph, habited as an Egyptian of the first rank, with double tunic, and perhaps plaited robe, and collar about the neck, and staff, and jewelled bracelets. Accompanying him were five men in the plain garb of shepherds, whom he presented to the monarch as his brethren (Gen. xlvii. 2). The Pharaoh condescended to converse with them. "What," he said, "is your occupation?" They replied—"Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers" (ibid. ver. 3), as Joseph had advised them (ibid. xlvi. 34); and they added, "For to sojourn in the land are we come, for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen" (ibid. ver. 4). And Apepi consented. Turning to his minister, he said—"Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee; the land of Egypt is before thee" (*i.e.* at thy disposal); "in the best of the land make thy father and thy brethren to dwell; and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle." So the interview came to an end. The consent of the Pharaoh was given to the location of the family of Jacob, with their dependents, in the land of Goshen, on the extreme north-east border of Egypt,[1] which was at once the best pasture ground, the tract nearest to their own country, whither they always looked to return, and the place where they would be brought into the least close contact with the native Egyptians, to whom "every shepherd was an abomination" (ibid. xlvi. 34).

But the scene was not yet over. Joseph signified to the Pharaoh, that his father was in attendance, and received a gracious permission to introduce him. Leaning on his son's arm, the white-haired old man advanced up the throne-room from the entrance, simply apparelled, but with all the dignity of a Great Sheikh, whom no outward display of courtly grandeur could disconcert or trouble, and while the courtiers fell back on either side and left an avenue open for him to pass through their midst, approached the Royal presence. It was expected, probably, that he would prostrate himself;[2] but, instead of so

[1] For the exact situation of Goshen, see Mr. R. Stuart Poole's "Cities of Egypt," ch. vi. pp. 89–101.

[2] As his brethren had done before Joseph (Gen. xlii. 6).

doing, the aged patriarch, as he drew near, lifted up his right hand, and formally "blessed" the king (Gen. xlvii. 7), as Melchizedek had blessed Abraham (ibid. xiv. 19), claiming to be spiritually his superior. There was great respect for old age in Egypt; and Apepi, who might have resented the assumption of superiority, had it been made by a younger man, yielded gracefully to one so far advanced in years, and bent, it may be, to receive the benediction.[1] Then he entered into friendly conversation with him. "How old art thou?" he asked, and Jacob replied—"The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers[2] in the days of their pilgrimage" (ibid. xlvii. 8, 9). Probably other words passed; but these alone are recorded. Jacob, however, ere he retired, blessed Apepi a second time, and then withdrew, doubtless on his son's arm, as he had entered, and was conveyed back to the land of Goshen (ibid. ver. 11).

For seventeen years the land of Goshen was the quiet resting-place of Jacob's old age (ibid. ver. 28). During this space his life seems to have been absolutely eventless. His sons, grandsons, and dependents were prosperous and happy, grew in wealth, and "multiplied exceedingly" (ibid. ver. 27). The same Pharaoh remained upon the throne; Joseph continued to be Prime Minister. If the previous years of Jacob's life had been, as he complained to Apepi (ibid. ver. 9), "few and evil,' at any rate God allowed him, ere he died, a term of unbroken repose. While the famine lasted "Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families" (ibid. ver. 12). Afterwards, the land of Goshen was ample for their support, and they lived their old pastoral life in peace and security. Thus, Jacob had no cares. A space was allowed him, during which he might detach himself from earth, meditate on heavenly things, repent unfeignedly of the many "sins and offences of his youth," wrestle in prayer, as "a prince with God," and prevail. Happy they to whom such a quiet time is granted, free from distracting cares and anxieties, from want, from trouble, from

[1] So Meyer, "Israel: a Prince with God," p. 143.

[2] As Terah (Gen. xi. 32), Abraham (ibid. xxv. 7), and Isaac (ibid. xxxv. 28).

professional toils, from grave responsibilities, and leisure given to prepare for the great change that must come to them, when the body is laid aside, and the soul finds itself "unclothed," in a wholly new and hitherto quite unimagined sphere of being

CHAPTER XII.

ILLNESS, DEATH, AND BURIAL.

Failure in Jacob's strength—He arranges with Joseph for his funeral—Falls sick, and is visited by Joseph and his two sons—Blesses Ephraim and Manasseh—Solemn address to his twelve sons from his death-bed—Strict injunctions given to all as to his place of burial—Death and embalmment—Mourning for him—Great funeral *cortége*—Interment—Character.

AT the end of the seventeen years, when he was now one hundred and forty seven years old, Jacob fell sick. "Few and evil" as he deemed his days to have been, they yet exceeded the longest term that nowadays is granted to humanity. But they fell short of the term previously customary in his family. The life of man, was, in fact, gradually contracting. Whether from a certain exhaustion of the primitive vigour of the race, or from a deterioration in the surrounding circumstances, the duration of man's life rapidily diminished during the earlier ages of the world's history, until by the time of Moses[1] it can scarcely be said to have much exceeded the limit which we find existing at the present day. And, as to each generation of men death came sooner and sooner, so decay also seems to have set in earlier. Abraham was vigorous, and took another wife (Gen. xxv. 1), when he was as much as 140; but Isaac's eyes began to be dim soon after he was a hundred (ibid. xxvii. 1), and he gave no token of vigour or directing energy after he was 120. Jacob's power to rule his tribe ceased when he was about 110; and, when he went down into Egypt, at the age of 130, his strength had almost wholly departed from him. Later on, his eyes, like

[1] See Deut. xxxiv. 7, and compare Psa. xc. 10, which has the title, "A prayer of *Moses*."

Isaac's, failed him (ibid. xlviii. 10), and "were dim for age, so that he could not see." The "sickness," as it is called (ibid. ver. 1), which befell him, was not so much any special disease, as a failure of the vital power. Already, before he took to his bed he had sent for Joseph, and, in a way, announced his coming decease, by making arrangements for his burial. "Bury me not," he had said, "I pray thee, in Egypt, but carry me out thence: I will lie with my fathers; bury me in their burying-place" (ibid. xlvii. 29, 30). The request indicates a sense of approaching dissolution, and at the same time a lively faith in the promises of God to himself and his descendants—a conviction that they would not always remain exiles in Egypt, but would return one day to their own "promised land," there to continue a great and powerful people until their destiny was accomplished. It was his desire to cast in his lot with his people. The glories of an Egyptian funeral, of embalming, of a gorgeous mummy-case and a richly ornamented sepulchral chamber, perhaps surmounted by a handsome monument, did not tempt him for a moment to swerve from his design: he would be buried in the dim and bare "cave of Machpelah" at Hebron, "*with his fathers*" (ibid. ver. 30), with Abraham, and Isaac, and Sarah, and Rebekah, and Leah, in the tomb that Abraham bought of Ephron the Hittite, together with the field wherein it lay, for a possession of a burying-place. Joseph gave his promise to do as his father desired (ibid.); but a bare promise was not, in Jacob's eyes, enough. "Swear unto me," he said; and Joseph sware unto him" (ibid. ver. 31). And then Israel "bowed himself" (ibid.), and "worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff" (Heb. xi. 21).

It was afterwards, but probably not long afterwards, that "one told Joseph, Behold thy father is sick" (Gen. xlviii. 1), and Joseph went a second time to visit Jacob, and "took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim" (ibid.). They found the aged patriarch stretched upon his bed, in a state of great physical weakness, but still able, when made aware of his favourite son's approach, to rally, and sit up (ibid. ver. 2). His thoughts were busy with his past life, and especially with its crises—his flight from Esau, the first manifestation of Himself which God made to him—the ladder reaching from earth to heaven, and the blessed words of promise (ibid. vers. 3, 4)—the return from Padan-aram, the death of Rachel, and her burial a

little way from Ephrath (ibid. ver. 7). As the dying so often do, he recalled scene after scene, touching each in a few words, and passing abruptly from this to that, intermingling at the same time with his own recollections, thoughts concerning the future of Joseph's offspring (ibid. vers. 5, 6). At first he seems not to have seen the lads, since his eyes were dim ; but, after a time, becoming aware that there were others besides Joseph present, he asked, "Who are these?" and learning that they were the children of whom he had been speaking, "Bring them," he said, "I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them" (ibid. vers. 8, 9). Joseph accordingly brought them near, and Jacob having embraced them in his arms and kissed them, proceeded to carry out his design of giving to each an appropriate blessing. They had been so placed by Joseph that Manasseh, the elder, was towards his grandsire's right hand, and Ephraim, the younger, towards his left ; but Jacob, seeing this, crossed his hands, "guiding them wittingly," and placed the right upon Ephraim's head, the left upon Manasseh's. It was in vain that Joseph sought to alter the arrangement; Jacob had made it designedly, under the guidance of the prophetic insight, and being simply the interpreter of God's purposes, could make no change. Ephraim was to be greater than Manasseh, and the manner of the blessing must show it. So, with his hands still as he had at first placed them, the patriarch blessed his grandsons in the words following :—

"The God, before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk ;
The God, which hath fed me all my life long unto this day ;
The Angel, which hath redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads !
And let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers,
Abraham and Isaac ;
And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

Finally, turning to Joseph, he said : "In thee" (*i.e.* in thy children) "shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh. Behold, I die ; but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers. Moreover, I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the land of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow" (ibid. vers. 13–22). In this last announcement, some see a bequest to Joseph of the parcel of ground near Shechem which his father had bought of Hamor (ibid. xxiii. 18–20) ; but

the gift is better explained as that of a double share in the Holy Land, when it should be conquered, to the descendants of Joseph, which was fulfilled in the separate assignments made by Joshua to the tribes of Ephraim (Josh. xvi. 1–8) and Manasseh (ibid. xvii. 1–17).

It cannot have been long after this interview that the actual end came. Jacob, feeling that he was dying, summoned his twelve sons around his deathbed, saying, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the latter days" (Gen. xlix. i., Rev. Vers.). All came, obedient and disobedient, loved and (on account of their conduct) unloved, the sons of the despised wife Leah, the sons of the two concubines Bilhah and Zilpah, the sons of the true wife of his bosom, Rachel. The twelve hale, strong men, stood around the couch of the dying one. But though his bodily powers were at the lowest point, yet his spirit did not quail or blench. The shadow of death may have been upon his face, yet his eye gleamed with the light of prophecy.[1] One by one, he utters their names; one by one, he touches on their past; one by one, he announces their future:—

"Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength,
The excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power.
Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel,
Because thou wentest up to thy father's bed—
Then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch" (Gen xlix. 3, 4).

Reuben, Leah's firstborn (ibid. xxix. 32), had possessed the birthright, had been looked on as the heir of promise, had been in some sort set over his brethren, and regarded by Jacob with pride and trust, as the firstfruits of his manhood. But he had forfeited his position by one heinous sin (ibid. xxxv. 22), and had thereby lost all claim to any pre-eminence. The sentence upon him was, that he "should not excel"; and it is in vain that we search the records of Hebrew history for one great action done by any Reubenite, or one great man produced by the tribe, be it prophet, or judge, or captain. Except for the fact that it produced Dathan and Abiram — the rebels against Moses whom the earth swallowed up alive[2]—the tribe is wholly undistinguished.

[1] Compare Meyer, "Israel: a Prince with God," p. 147.
[2] Num. xvi. 1–33.

"Simeon and Levi are brethren:
Their swords are instruments of violence.
O my soul, come not thou into their secret;
Unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united:
For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.
Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce,
And their resentment, for it was cruel;
I will divide them in Jacob,
And I will scatter them in Israel" (ibid. vers. 5–7).

Simeon and Levi, Leah's second and third sons, had forfeited their place in Jacob's affections by their treachery and cruelty towards the Shechemites. He had at the time remonstrated with them on the imprudence of their action (Gen. xxxiv. 30). Now, he condemns its wickedness. It was cruel; it was self-willed; it was disgraceful. He disclaims act or part in it. The punishment decreed against both brethren is the dispersion of their descendants. This was literally fulfilled on the conquest of Canaan, when the Levites had a certain number of cities assigned to them in each of the tribes (Josh. xxi. 1–42), while the Simeonites were located at various scattered sites within the territory of Judah (ibid. xix. 1–9). The result, however, was very different in the two cases. With Simeon, it was as if the tribe had been wiped out from the nation. In its corporate capacity, it receives no further mention during the entire remainder of the history, while even individual Simeonites are rare, and, except in the thoroughly apocryphal book of Judith, wholly undistinguished. Levi's dispersion, on the contrary, tends rather to the honour of the tribe than to its disgrace. It results from the Levites being selected to be the priests of the nation—their guides and instructors in religion. It keeps them ever in the fore-front of the people, rather than in the background, gives them a place in its history, whatever happens to be the scene, and leads to their constantly filling very high—ultimately, even the very highest, situations. Levi's curse was thus, in process of time, turned into a blessing, the faithfulness of Moses, Aaron, and their fellow-tribesmen at the time of the Exodus being accepted as compensating for, and outweighing, the original offence of the tribe-founder, which brought the curse upon him.

"Judah, thee shall thy brethren praise;
Thy hand shall be on the neck of thine enemies:

Thy father's sons shall bow down before thee.
Judah is a lion's whelp:
From the prey, my son, thou art gone up.
He stooped down, he couched as a lion,
And as a lioness; who shall rouse him up?
A sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a law-giver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh come:
And unto him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
Binding his foal unto the vine,
And his ass's colt unto the choice vine,
He hath washed his garments in wine,
And his vesture in the blood of grapes:
His eyes shall be red with wine,
And his teeth white with milk" (Gen. xlix. 8–12).

Judah, the fourth son of Leah, though he too had sinned (ibid. xxxviii. 14–18), had not so sinned as his elder brothers, and was not regarded as having forfeited the birthright, which naturally descended to him, when they proved themselves unworthy of it. It has been truly said of him, that he "showed more nobleness than any of the elder sons of Jacob."[1] His father compares him to a lion's whelp, an old lion, and a lioness, not so much for any personal qualities of his own, as on account of the bravery of the tribe which would spring from him, and of its many warlike exploits, which the prophetic spirit enables him to foresee. After distinctly conferring on him the birthright by the words—"Thy father's sons shall bow down before thee"—he raises him to kingly dignity by means of the declaration—"A sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a Lawgiver (ruler's staff?) from between his feet until Shiloh come." Various explanations have been given of the word "Shiloh," into which it is not necessary to enter. The prophecy is certainly Messianic, and was acknowledged to be such by all Jewish, as well as all Christian, antiquity. Shiloh is to be regarded as one of the many names of the Messiah; and the special promise to Judah is a promise of independence and sovereignty (in some sense of the term) until Messiah should make his appearance. This part of the prophecy may be considered as fulfilled by the continuance of Judæa as an independent kingdom until Rome established her dominion over it by the appointment, in A.D. 8, of Coponius, the first Procurator. The concluding verses are

[1] Bp. Harold Browne in the "Speaker's Commentary," vol. i. p. 227.

obscure, since it is uncertain whether they refer to "Shiloh" or to "Judah." In the latter case they may be expounded of the great productiveness of Judæa, especially in the vine, while in the former they must be interpreted spiritually.

> "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea,
> And he shall be a haven for ships;
> And his border shall be toward Zidon" (Gen. xlix. 13).

The personal character of Zebulun, Leah's youngest son (Gen. xxx. 20), was negative: he had distinguished himself by no act worthy of mention, either good or bad. Jacob therefore neither praises him, nor blames him, awards him neither curse, nor special blessing. He deems it enough to indicate, and that vaguely, what should be his geographical position.

> "Issachar is a strong ass,
> Couching down between the sheep-folds:
> And he saw a resting-place that was good,
> And the land that it was pleasant;
> And he bowed his shoulders to bear,
> And became a servant unto tribute" (Gen. xlix. 14, 15).

Issachar, Leah's fifth son (ibid. xxx. 17, 18), was personally as undistinguished as Zebulun. The tribe, however, attained to some distinction, since it furnished one judge to the entire nation, viz., Tola, and two kings to the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, viz., Baasha and Elah. It was located by Joshua in the rich plain of Esdraelon (Josh. xix. 17–22), and was "an indolent agricultural people,"[1] very ready to submit itself to oppressors. Hence the image of the "strong he-ass, crouching down between the sheep-folds" (or "the hedges") in "a resting-place that was good, and a land that was pleasant," is very suitable.

> "Dan shall judge his people,
> As one of the tribes of Israel:
> Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
> An adder in the path,
> That biteth the horse's heels,
> So that his rider falleth backward.
> I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord" (Gen. xlix. 16–18).

Dan, the eldest-born of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid (ibid.

[1] Bp. Harold Browne on Gen. xlix. 14.

xxx. 6), was by his name "a judge"; and perhaps no more was here meant by Jacob, than that, despite his comparatively humble origin, he should be counted as head of a tribe, and, so far, be on a par with his brethren. Or perhaps he foresees the "judgeship" of Samson (Judg. xiii. 2, 24). Dan alone among the tribes of Israel was located at two extremities of the Holy Land —the extreme north-east, and the extreme south-west. In both places he was "a serpent in the way, an adder in the path" of a foe, too unimportant to be the object of attack, but, when passed by, ready to spring on the enemy's rear, and so do good service to the nation. "I have waited for thy salvation, O Jehovah!" was perhaps his war-cry.

> "Gad, a troop shall troop upon him,
> But he shall troop upon their heels" (Gen. xlix. 19).

Gad was, by his name, "a troop," since Leah had thought that he presaged the coming of a troop of children (ibid. xxx. 11). Jacob harps upon the name, and prophesies, that many a troop shall come against the Gadites in hostile fashion—Ammonites, Moabites, and Arabs from the Syrian desert—making raids into the country, but after a time retreating, while the Gadites shall hang upon their rear as they retire.

> "Out of Asher his bread shall be fat,
> And he shall yield royal dainties" (Gen. xlix. 20).

The location of Asher was on the rich coast plain, from the foot of Carmel to the neighbourhood of Zidon (Josh. xix. 24–30). It was a most fertile territory, producing corn, wine, and oil—all of them "royal dainties"—in profuse abundance.

> "Naphtali is a hind let loose:
> He giveth goodly words" (Gen. xlix. 21).

According to Jewish tradition, Naphtali, the younger son of Bilhah (ibid. xxx. 8), was a swift runner, and the first to bring to Jacob the tidings that Joseph still lived. As on this occasion he "gave goodly words," so, in the Christian dispensation, it was from Naphtali that the messengers went forth who carried the glad tidings of the gospel throughout all known lands (Isa. ix. 1; Matt. iv. 16).

> "Joseph is a fruitful bough,
> A fruitful bough beside a fountain—

His branches overrun the wall.
Sorely have the archers grieved him,
Shot at him, and hated him:
But his bow abode in strength,
And the arms of his hands were made strong
By the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob,
(From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel)
Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee,
And by the Almighty, who shall bless thee,
With blessings of the heaven above,
Blessings of the deep which lies beneath,
Blessings of the breast, and of the womb.
The blessings of thy father have prevailed
Above the blessings of my own progenitors,
Unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills:
They shall be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of him
That is prince among his brethren" (Gen. xlix. 22–26).

For Joseph, the first-born of his best-beloved wife, Rachel (ibid. xxx. 22–24), for seventeen years from his birth his favourite child (ibid. xxxvii. 2, 3), and for seventeen years before his own death his support and stay (ibid. xlvii. 28), the aged patriarch has, naturally, nothing but blessing and praise. He is "a fruitful bough"—the progenitor of two tribes instead of one only, like the other sons—one of the two tribes being the *great* tribe of Ephraim, of all the tribes the most important, next to Judah. "His bow abides in strength." Vainly do the archers grieve him, shoot at him, and hate (or persecute) him—his arms and hands are made strong by the hand of the Almighty against them: in the civil wars he holds his own against Judah (1 Kings xv. 12–21; 2 Kings xiv. 8–14; 2 Chron. xxviii. 6–8); for centuries he withstands Syria (1 Kings xx. 1–34; 2 Kings vi. 8–33; vii. 1–16; xiii. 25; xiv. 28, &c.). He is "prince among his brethren"—so much the foremost tribe, that eventually his name becomes generic, supplanting that of Israel (Isa. vii. 2, 5, 8; ix. 9; xi. 13; Hos. iv. 17; v. 3, 9, 11, 13; vi. 4, 10, &c.) to a great extent. Blessings rest upon him—blessings of the heaven above, and blessings of the deep beneath, and blessings of the breasts and of the womb—blessings greater far than those earthly ones which Abraham had pronounced on Isaac, and Isaac on Jacob, blessings which would endure as long as the everlasting hills. (Compare Rev. vii. 6, 8.) If the crowning blessing of all—the birth of the Messiah from his stock—could

not be Joseph's, since Israel's king must come of Israel's royal tribe, which was Judah (Gen. xlvii. 10), yet from him should arise one of Messiah's principal types, the only one that bore his name, Joshua (comp. Acts vii. 45; Heb. iv. 8)—a true "shepherd" and a true "stone" or "rock" of support to the house of Israel, he who led them into Canaan, and gave them the "rest," which was typical of that eternal rest granted by Christ to them that are His, in heaven.

> "Benjamin is a wolf that ravineth:
> In the morning he shall devour the prey,
> And at night he shall divide the spoil" (Gen. xlix. 27).

The warlike character of the tribe of Benjamin was to differentiate it from all the others. This warlike character appears most markedly in the great Benjamite contest (Judg. xx. 14–46), when the single tribe, though numbering no more than 27,300 men, resisted in arms the whole of the rest of Israel—a force eighteen times as numerous—and gained two great victories before being defeated and almost destroyed. It is also seen in the bravery of the great captains, Ehud, Saul, and Jonathan; and again, to some extent, in the reckless daring of Rechab and Baanah, who murdered Ishbosheth (2 Sam. iv. 2–7). The Benjamites added to their bravery a skill in arms beyond what was common: they were dexterous archers, and "could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones, and shooting arrows out of a bow" (1 Chron. xii. 2).

When Jacob had finished this long address to his sons, which must have greatly exhausted him, and which the prophetic *afflatus* alone could have enabled him to carry through, he spoke to them upon another point. "He charged them," we are told, "and said unto them, I am to be gathered to my people: bury me with my fathers in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a burying-place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth" (chap. xlix. 29–32). It was the same thought, and earnest wish, which he had

previously expressed to Joseph alone (chap. xlvii. 29, 30), and which he had bound Joseph to carry out by an oath (ibid. ver. 31). He must rest with his fathers, in the land which was his and his people's by promise, in Abraham's purchased possession, where he could regard himself as under the protection of the God of Abraham, not in alien soil, in a land where foreign kings reigned and foreign gods were worshipped, and his own people were but sojourners. And so strong is his feeling upon this point, that he will not trust it altogether to Joseph, not even to his oath, but must lay it as a "charge" on all his sons, "commanding" them to see his wishes carried out (ibid. xlix. 29, 33). It is only after this "command" is given, that he can compose himself to die, "gathering up his feet into the bed," and calmly "yielding up the ghost."

Then "Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him" (Gen. l. 1). Joseph also took the entire direction of the funeral. First of all he delivered the body of his father to his own private physicians for embalmment. The custom of embalming was very ancient in Egypt, certainly long anterior to Jacob, and even to Abraham. In the later times of the Egyptian monarchy it was the work of a special class of persons, not physicians, who made it their trade,[1] and gradually brought the art to a high perfection. But, in Joseph's time, it is not at all improbable that physicians were called in, at any rate in the case of great personages, to direct and superintend the operation. The father of Joseph would be a great personage. We are told that "forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those who are embalmed" (ibid. ver. 3). In the time of Herodotus (B.C. 450) the period was at least seventy days,[2] while in the time of Diodorus (A.D. 30) it was no more than thirty.[3] It is natural to suppose that the period would vary from age to age, as the skill of the embalmers, or the fashion of the time, varied.

The mourning, which probably began before and continued after the embalming, occupied a space of ten weeks or seventy days (Gen. l. 3). The Egyptians took full part in it. After it was over, Joseph requested permission of the Pharaoh, who was still probably Apepi, to take his father's body, and carry it to Canaan, and bury it in the place where Jacob had wished it to

[1] See Herod. ii. 86; Diod. Sic. i. 91.
[2] Herod. l.s.c. [3] Diod. Sic. l.s.c.

be buried, and where his own oath bound him to deposit it (ibid. xlvii. 31 ; l. 5), at Hebron in the cave of Machpelah. The Pharaoh consented—"Go up," he said, "and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear" (ibid. l. 6). Then a grand procession was formed. Not the family of Jacob only, or his retainers, but all the principal Egyptians—"all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt" (ibid. ver. 7) joined in doing honour to the aged father of their king's principal minister, and "went up" together with Joseph. It was a magnificent *cortége*. The leading courtiers, the great grandees of Egypt, all the highest officials, many of them nearly related to the Pharaoh, many priests probably[1] from Heliopolis and elsewhere, attached themselves to the company which Joseph was conducting, and swelled its numbers, mostly mounted in their chariots (ibid. ver. 9), drawn by two prancing steeds, held well in hand by the charioteer. The line of route followed is uncertain. If we were bound to accept the view of Jerome,[2] who identifies "the threshing-floor of Atad," with Beth-hoglah between the Jordan and Jericho, we should have to suppose that a most circuitous road was taken, one which passed to the east of the Dead Sea, crossed the Jordan near its mouth, and thence struck south-westward to Hebron. But for so circuitous a route, which would greatly increase the distance, no reason can be given, while it is quite certain that it would have been wholly impracticable to the Egyptian chariots. We must suppose then that Jerome was mistaken, and that Gosen-Atad lay, where Mr. Harper would place it,[3] on one of the outlying Judæan hills in the vicinity of Beersheba, at a point beyond which the Egyptian chariots could not proceed further northward. In this case, "the way of Shur" was probably that along which the *cortége* proceeded, and the stoppage at Gosen-Atad was necessitated by the physical conditions, which forbade the Egyptians to proceed further. Joseph, perceiving that here must be the last conjoint mourning of his dead father by the two nations that honoured him, made a halt of seven days at the place (ibid. ver. 10), for the completion of the ceremonies. In this exhibition of grief the Egyptians took the principal part, and made themselves so conspicuous, that they

[1] Compare Gen. xli. 45.

[2] See Jerome's "Onomasticon" *sub. voc.* "Area-Atad."

[3] Harper, "The Bible and Modern Discoveries," p. 73.

especially impressed the Canaanite inhabitants of the land, who, on account of their "grievous mourning," gave a new name to the spot, calling it Abel-Mizraim, "the mourning of Egypt" (ibid. ver. 11).

The last rites had still to be performed. Leaving the Egyptians at Gosen-Atad, Joseph and his brethren bore their father's body the rest of the distance that had to be accomplished, and, having reached Hebron, buried it in the ancestral tomb, "in the cave of the field of Machpelah" (Gen. l. 13), where it probably still rests. According to the tradition of the place, Jacob lies side by side with his first wife Leah,[1] in the more northern portion of the double cavern. Above, on the paved platform, are two shrines or chapels, closed with iron gratings, and having vaulted roofs, within which are to be seen the monuments or cenotaphs erected in honour of the dead who repose beneath. Like those of the other patriarchs and their wives, they are of very plain construction and of no great antiquity. The actual tombs in the sepulchral chamber below are practically unexplored, not having been shown to any European visitor. It is quite possible that the embalmed corpse of Jacob is still in its old resting-place.

The character of Jacob was one of that mixed kind which it is peculiarly difficult to estimate. It was a character, as Dean Stanley says,[2] "not all black nor all white, but chequered with the mixed colours which make up so vast a proportion of the double phases of the leaders of the Church and world in all ages"; and which through their very weakness and imperfection are all the more attractive and interesting. Jacob is introduced to us first as "a plain man," or "a quiet man" (Gen. xxv. 27, Rev. Ver.), one who made no display, who seemed to have no ambition, who was content to remain with the tents and occupy himself with household tasks—a "home-keeping youth," who might therefore be supposed to have only a "homely wit." He did not seek adventures: the life of the hunter had no attraction for him; until driven to it, he never wandered into foreign lands; indeed he scarcely strayed from the domestic hearth. But underneath the mask of calmness and indifference a depth of strong desire and firm resolution was lurking. Jacob was "steady, persevering, moving onward through the years with

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," p. 501.

[2] Ibid. p. 57.

settled deliberate purpose."[1] The birthright was always before him. He had a capacity for religious faith and fervour. "He could understand, as Esau never could, the meaning of the birthright, with all its spiritual glow and glory."[2] He could understand it, and appreciate it, and earnestly, intensely, desire it. There was a deep strain of devout religiousness in his nature. Now it broke out in "angel-haunted dreams";[3] now it showed itself in profoundly reverent ejaculation—"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not! How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" Presently, it made itself apparent in the sincerest humility and self-abasement—"O God of my father Abraham, . . . I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant." But it was a religiousness which did not for long years penetrate the whole nature. Jacob during his earlier life was self-seeking, narrow, "a typical Jew," bent on advancing his own interest, and unscrupulous as to the means which he employed for the purpose. He entrapped and over-reached his brother, tricked, deceived, and lied to his father, astutely met his uncle Laban with his own weapons, dissembled even when he did not plan to deceive,[4] was full of suspicion and distrust, ever calculating and contriving, inclined to regard discretion as the better half of valour, and when danger approached, to avoid it by flight (Gen. xxviii. 5; xxxi. 19–21; xxxv. 3–6). But these defects and weaknesses were mostly conquered in course of time. From the day that he was given the name of Israel, or "Prince with God" (ibid. xxxii. 28), he laid aside deceit, subterfuge, falsehood. He might be reticent, but he avoided untruth. He is taxable, during this period, with no distinct sins, except sins of omission. We can scarcely lay it as a charge against him that he specially loved and favoured Joseph. He was a man of a strongly affectionate nature; but his affections were not widely diffused; rather they were concentrated on a few persons. In his younger days, his mother seems to have drawn to her all the tenderness of which he was capable, to the exclusion of his father and brother. In his middle life, Rachel, the only wife whom he ever desired, and who was not thrust upon him,

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," p. 55.
[2] Meyer, "Israel: a Prince with God," p. 22.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Gen. xxxiii. 14–17.

possessed all his heart, and the permanence and intensity of this affection are most strongly marked in the narrative. "Jacob loved Rachel" (Gen. xxix. 18). He "served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love that he bore to her" (ibid. ver. 20). He "loved Rachel more than Leah" (ibid. ver. 30). In his meeting with Esau, when he misdoubted what reception he might have, it was Rachel especially whom he endeavoured to protect and shield (ibid. xxxiii. 2). When Rachel died, all the light went out from his life. Nothing seemed to remain to him but to transfer his love from the mother to the children. Hence the favouritism displayed towards Joseph (ibid. xxxvii. 2-4), and, at a later date, towards Benjamin (ibid. xlii. 4; xliii. 3-14). Rachel's two sons were more to him than all his other ten. The thought of Rachel and her burial-place remained with him to the last (ibid. xlviii. 7). In his old age it was Joseph especially to whom his love was given. He had received him back from the dead, as it were, in a figure. With what effusion did he "fall upon his neck" in Goshen, and "weep on his neck *a good while*" (ibid. xlvi. 29)! With what deep joy and perfect content did he exclaim—"Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive" (ibid. ver. 30)! With what satisfaction did he bestow on this dearest of his children "one portion above his brethren" (ibid. xlviii. 22)! In Joseph's absence, Benjamin had been the cherished one (ibid. xlii. 4, 38; xliii. 6, 14); but, when Joseph is restored to him, the greater eclipses the lesser love.

In Jacob, "patience has her perfect work." "By toil and struggle," by holy meditation and self-chastening thoughts, "Jacob, the Supplanter, is gradually transformed into Israel, the Prince of God; the harsher and baser feelings are softened and purified away: he looks back over his long career with the fulness of experience and humility."[1] At each stage of his existence he rises to a higher level. Tenderer and truer at Haran than at Beersheba, at Hebron than at Haran, in Egypt than at Hebron, there is reserved for the last scene of his life a new and special glory. On the dying saint descends the gift of poetic and prophetic utterance. His last address to his sons is an idyllic poem. How true to nature are the numerous images—the lion's whelp couched down and ready to leap on

[1] Stanley, "Lectures on the Jewish Church," p. 55.

the prey—the ass and foal browsing on the tender shoots of the vine—the adder in the path springing at the horse as he speeds by—the wolf that ravins at night prowling about with stealthy tread—the hind let loose running at speed over the plain—and again, the vineyards with their ruddy grapes that stain the garments of the vinedresser—the vines with their luxuriant growth, overrunning the walls—the sea-coast with its havens of ships—the bubbling fountain—the everlasting hills—a poet's eye had noticed all the various forms of natural beauty that came within its view, and a poet's tongue describes them in terse graphic phrase. And the poet's descriptive power is heightened and sublimated by the prophet's fire. The lesser tribes are touched off, each with its characteristic mark. In the blessings pronounced on Judah and Joseph the prophetic vigour reaches its full height. To Joseph are assigned the greatest of all temporal blessings—fruitfulness, triumph over enemies, warlike strength—blessings of the heaven above, and blessings of the deep beneath, and blessings of the breast and of the womb, such as made Ephraim so great in the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, while the blessing of Judah culminates in the announcement of the "Shiloh" who is to come—the Rest-giver—the Prince of Peace, to whom the obedience of *the peoples—i.e.* of all the nations of the earth—shall be.