

acter becomes a medium through which we learn divine lessons. Abraham suffered for us. It is beautiful beyond expression to see how the true idea dawned upon the mind of the man of faith, that is to say, how he got from the letter to the spirit, and saw God's meaning at last. When he came out of the land of the Chaldeans he had a very small notion of his future; but as he went on and on, from Charran, building his altar and pitching his tent, his eyes pierced beyond the little land of Canaan, and "he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." He could not have taken in the grandeur of that idea at first. It was too spiritual for him. He must have real land, real stones, real possessions of divers kinds, and by and by there would break upon his mind the higher light; these things would show their own worthlessness as mental supports and tonics, and he would let them slip out of his hands that he might become a citizen of "a better country that is an heavenly," "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," and the literal Canaan would cease to have a single charm for a man that had seen the "holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband." I beg you not to let this point slip, or you may "charge God foolishly;" you may say, "God promises one thing, and gives another, therefore He disappoints and distresses the believer of His promises. Now, that is true as to the first part, and untrue as to the second, for it is in evidence in all the volumes of history and personal experience that God's way of fulfilling His promises always astonished with glad surprise the very persons who at first saw nothing but the letter, and grasped nothing but the common meaning of the word. God's promises are not broken; they are enlarged and glorified. The receivers themselves are satisfied, are overwhelmed with thankful amazement, and instead of complaining that the letter has not been kept, they say, 'He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think;'" and so deep is this impression that they have said, and are saying every day, the things that are seen are not worthy to be compared with the glories which shine on the eyes of the heart. Now this I hold to be the explanation of the difficulty arising from the supposed discrepancy between the promise and its fulfillment. It is fulfilled beyond all expectation. The answer is as a river which overflows the channel of the promise.

Your little boy is five years old; promise him that if he will learn such and such lessons he shall have the finest rocking-horse in the world when he is fifteen; I can easily imagine him seizing his lessons with great earnestness; at five a rocking-horse seems the finest of prizes; the child works, and reads, and learns (the figure of the rocking-horse still being before his imagination), but as five becomes seven and seven grows into nine, and nine enlarges into twelve, and the mind strengthens and brightens by the very work which was to bring the prize, the rocking-horse goes down in value, until at fifteen the intelligent, well-trained, glad-hearted youth declines the very Canaan which he so eagerly started to win, and is almost insulted if you name to him the promised prize. Why does he decline it? Because he has got something so much better; he has got information, culture, discipline, habits of reading and observation, and these very things which he had no idea of getting when he started have actually wrought in him a proper contempt for the very prize that was promised.

So I see Abram starting from the land of the Chaldeans with a promise of getting another land. At first he thinks much about it. He wonders how long it is and how wide, and how rich in

wells and thick pastures, and many a long dream he has about the country far away; travel tries him; little disappointments trouble his daily life; sorrow comes, death overshadows him, great judgments come down from heaven; a solemnity grows upon his heart as he sees the seasons rise, flourish and die, and life run its little round; many a word God speaks to his heart; he learns something of the greatness of manhood, new possibilities disclose themselves, unusual aspirations give a higher dignity to his prayers, and his soul almost unconsciously enters into new alliances and companionships, until at last he declares plainly, even in Canaan itself, that he seeks a country, a better country, a richer Canaan, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. It is thus our manhood grows. "When I was a child I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things." I needed a promise suitable for a child; I sigh for a fulfillment worthy of a man.

When the young man started in business he probably set before his mind the idea of twenty years' service, a modest competence, and long years of leisure, a Canaan easily gained and easily held. As he went forward, the very effort he was required to make created new possibilities, new habits, and new ambitions, until his first notion became ridiculous even to himself. Thus we are led on. First, that which is natural; afterward, that which is spiritual. To begin with, we must have something to look at and to touch; by and by our better nature will be awakened, and spiritual meanings will be realized. "It does not yet appear what we shall be" in spiritual elevation and desire; in our meaner selves we think that the earthly will be enough, but in our better moments we shall earnestly desire our house from heaven. The young lad whose pocket money is fourpence per month, quite long for the time when he will be called upon to pay the income-tax. He says he will be only too glad to pay the tax when he gets the income, but I listen in vain for any special gratification in the matter of the tax. The veteran servant who has received a gift of honor from his admirers, tells them that much as he values the silver and gold, he prizes the love which gave them infinitely more. This is the same principle; it is the spiritual absorbing the material. The principle may be applied to heaven itself. The young Christian thinks of heaven as a magnificent collection of all the finest things he has ever heard of—of harps and trumpets, of gardens and fountains of water, of processions, and banners, of crowns and thrones; as he grows in holy life he sees that something better must be meant; as he gets nearer and nearer the promised land he cares less and less for the magnificence which once satisfied him; and at last he sees all the heaven he needs in being "for ever with the Lord."

These are beautiful words as showing one side of Abraham's character: "And his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah." I am not aware that those names are thus united in any other transaction. Abraham never ceased to care for Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, the wanderer; and Ishmael showed how he valued his father's care by thus uniting with Isaac in the last act of filial love. How true is it that sometimes relatives only meet one another at funerals! For years they may never speak to each other, but some cold, sad day they set out on a journey to one common grave. "Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac," yet Ishmael went to the funeral! Isaac and Ishmael met over their father's dead body, and then probably separated forever. Ishmael might have had hard feelings as he stood so near the bones of Sarah, thought of his mother and of that day when she and he went forth into