

in Abraham's response to the divine call,

THE FIRST REAL STEP

is taken toward the fulfilment of God's purpose. For Abraham is thus brought to the land on which the great work has to be done, and *he is disciplined as a man*: he learns what faith is, and obedience and sacrifice, and trust of the unseen. That is the note that was through all God's dealings with him, and not with him only, but with all who stand in

THE GREAT SUCCESSION

after him, and prepare the way, first for Israel and then for Christ. In all that happens to Abraham afterwards, there is a divine hand shaping him so as to make him a worthy ancestor of the chosen people, and a divine love watching over him, and preserving him both from the dangers of his new life, and from the effects of his own folly.

And look how unflinchingly Abraham responds to all this tender care of his God! He does not shrink from doing that which will break his heart, if only he believes the voice to be divine. He yields in unwavering response to the touch of the mighty hand that is moulding his life; for "he believed in God."

The divine purpose, which began to work itself out in him, is continued in his son Isaac. For though the generations pass away, God and His purpose are eternal. The troubles and triumphs of Isaac's life are not unlike those of his greater father. On the whole his figure is more shadowy; but once we see him standing sharply out against the sky as, waiting for his bride, he goes out to meditate at the turning of the evening. In the purpose of God there will always be room for the thoughtful hearts as well as for the strong hands.

At once more vigorous and more versatile is

HIS GREAT SON JACOB,

whose career is but an epitome of the world which God is yearning to save; marred by sin, and saved by the strong hand of love that is laid upon him. Not only at Peniel,

but throughout the whole of Jacob's life, God was wrestling with him. He was indeed a mighty man, of vast resource and deep cunning. But God had to teach him that there was more in the world than he was taking account of. It was his sin that drove him into exile, and his sin that made the thought of seeing his brother a terror to him. But God grasps this wanderer's life, and shapes it, now by exile, now by sorrow, into the thing that he would have it be, and in the night seasons he teaches him, now by gracious dreams, now by fierce wrestlings. Then, after all this discipline, he takes his rightful place among the fathers of the Hebrews, and the interest gathers round Joseph.

This clear-sighted, beautiful dreamer has a great work to do; he is destined in the providence of God to be one day governor of Egypt. He must therefore be the object of

A SPECIALLY SEARCHING DISCIPLINE,

and he learns more of sorrow than his fathers had done. In him, patience and hope are tried to the uttermost, but out of it all he emerges with shining face. It is through pain and sorrow like his that God qualifies men for the service to which He calls them. But again notice how, in spite of all manner of obstacles, the divine purpose for this man, and for Israel through him, is fulfilled. Again and again it would seem that, humanly speaking, he is lost. But nothing can be lost that is kept by God; and through all impediments the divine purpose cleaves its way triumphantly until at last it sets Joseph next the throne.

But it is the throne of Egypt; and with that the strange romance of Genesis ends. Jacob and Joseph both die in another land than that which God had promised to their fathers. It is for the remaining five books to tell how their descendants, after much waiting and many sorrows, at last were brought again to the land in which their work for the world was to be done.

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"Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." John 8 : 56.