

great commentator has truthfully observed: "The early death of Abel was no punishment. He seemed in fact to enjoy the peculiar favour of God, and his offering was accepted. We find in this narrative the great and beautiful thought, that life is not the highest boon: that the pious find a more blessed existence and a better reward in another and a purer sphere; but that crime and guilt are the greatest evils; that they are punished by a long and wearisome life, full of fear and care and compunction of conscience." Abel the shepherd, an eminent type of Christ, the good shepherd, has a halo of saintliness and beauty about him, which is indescribably interesting. His obedience, his faith, his devotion, have placed him in a foremost rank among those who suffer at the hands of men for the very nobility of their natures. But our attention to-night should be called to a more general application of Cain's peevish question: "Am I my brother's keeper"? He attempted to repudiate the notion, that was not even suggested, that he was to be the custodian of Abel, and to look after his personal safety; and, like a fretful child, he disclaimed a responsibility that was not really imputed to him, in the hope perhaps that he might divert attention from his evil deed. But he was his brother's keeper in the sense, that, as an elder, he should have watched over him, have protected him if necessary, and through the ties of natural affection, he should certainly not have been the one to do him injury. And though kinship is the first, and one of the most sacred, of all the bonds, that unite human beings to one another, though a person who is devoid of love for his family and relations, is an absolutely abnormal being, though St. Paul, in the 1st chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, 1st c., 31st v., speaks of Gentiles, in their most frightful excesses of crime, as "without natural affection," yet a truly large-hearted person does not limit his kindness to those of his own blood. That is the first in order of time, the most elementary, the most instinctively natural, as we can see in the very word "kind," which, strictly speaking, denotes the sentiment called forth by blood relationship. Moreover, no one can be truly in heart benevolent to his fellow citizens, or mankind in general, who neglects home duties, who is not a dutiful son, a loving and wise father, and an affectionate brother. Our neighbour is he who is nearest to us. We must therefore begin with the smaller circle at home, before we extend our area to the

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