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"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning."—Psalm 137, 45.

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM.

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"Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people."—Gen. xlv. 8.

Now that he is gone, we may be able to get a clear view of his whole character, and to see how one part looks in the light of another. It is almost impossible to be just to any living man who is doing a great work, because we see his imperfections, we are perhaps fretted by the manner in which he does it, and we are not quite sure that he may not yet spoil it by a blunder or a crime. But when he has laid down his tools, and left his work for the last, we may look quietly at the whole character stretching clear through from youth to old age, and form a sound opinion of its quality and value.

Abraham is by far the greatest man we have met with in these studies, and his greatness is our difficulty, because we may judge him by ourselves. That, indeed, is the difficulty of reading all the best biography; we think what we should have done, and if the hero did not do just as we should have acted, it is very seldom that we give him the advantage. It must be difficult for a highly educated parrot, that has been taught to talk like a silly housemaid, and that has done the next best thing to being at a Board School, to have any patience with an eagle that never knew the advantages of an enlightened kitchen. We do not always know the agonies to which culture exposes both bird and man. In some respects Abraham was the first great traveller in the world; and his difficulty in travelling was the greater because he did not leave home to gratify any curiosity or whim of his own, but in obedience to a spiritual influence which bore him forward by a mighty impulse which he could hardly have put into words. We should call a man who acts to-day as Abraham acted thousands of years ago, a fanatic; we believe in a respectable and decorous Providence; not in the God who drives us before the breath of a storm and makes us helpless under the spell of an irresistible inspiration. And we should doubt a man who acted like Abraham all the more because he did not get the very thing which he said God had promised to him before he left

home! That would be fatal to any man's claim to having been directed of God now-a-days. We judge the Providence by the prize. If you succeed, then you have been divinely guided; if you fail, then you have either "not asked, or else you have asked amiss." If you are invited from one church to another as pastor, your wisdom in accepting the invitation will be judged by the congregations you gather, if you fill the pews and have to enlarge the building, people will say, "You can have no doubt now that God sent you;" but if the hearers be few and poor, the same people will tell you that you have missed "your providential way." Judge by this standard of mis-called success, Abraham's migration is the greatest blunder in the pages of religious history. It was a failure. Canaan was promised to him, and he never got a foot of it! Surely, then, a respectable and commercial piety may fairly call him a mistaken man, an amiable enthusiast, a clairvoyant dreamer, who mistook a morning mist for a great estate. I wish, therefore, to learn from Abraham's character the right way of judging Providence; to learn from a Jew how to be a Christian! The rough and ready way of stating this case is: Abram went out from his kindred and his father's house to get a land that God would show him. Abram did not get that land, but actually "sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country," and was buried in a grave which he had to buy; it is clear, therefore, that he mistook a dream for a reality, a mirage for a landed property, and he was punished for his selfish ambition. I fear that this notion of God's providence is not unknown among ourselves: that we think nothing is heavenly but success; and that it never enters our minds that God's way may lie through the dreary region of hunger and loss, pain and sorrow, weakness and death, and that failure itself may be a sign of God's presence and care in our life.

Abraham's case shows that God may have fulfilled a promise when He has apparently broken it; and that God's promises are not to be measured by the narrowness and poverty of the letter. God promised Abraham and his seed a place or land called Canaan, and yet Abraham and his seed never held the land, Abraham "sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;" he had "no inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on;" yet God promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child" (Acts vii: 5). Now, this brings us, so to speak, into close quarters with God's providence, and Abraham's char-