

"Neither has the author been at any pains to conceal this. He has been at greater pains to collect and preserve all the available information, than to piece it together into one fluent and smooth-flowing narrative. He allows you to see the joinings. He does not fuse the original stories and run them out again in continuous stream into an entirely new mould, but bolts them together, for the most part solid and intact as he finds them.

"It is to this circumstance we owe the singular simplicity and everlasting beauty of the Book of Genesis. The grace and vividness of these stories that we never weary of reading, and in which each character stands with a clearness and individuality which the most brilliant writer of fiction has never been able to rival—this fascination of the narrative, is due to the circumstance that these stories were moulded by oral tradition and were handed down from sire to son, told and retold for centuries, before they were ever set down in writing."

The Structure of Genesis

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The Bible is the story of God's love.

The first six books of the Old Testament, Genesis to Joshua, tell the early story of the people to whom God chose to declare that love.

The message had to come through a messenger. At first that messenger was Israel, and Israel had to be specially prepared and equipped for the task God had set them to do.

The story of those early days of preparation and discipline is opened by the book of Genesis.

Now this large purpose of God has never to be forgotten when we are reading the simple, familiar stories of the early books of the Bible. They are more than interesting tales: they are radiant with some thought of God. It is for us to see that thought, and to see behind the progress of the narrative, from story to story, how the divine purpose is marching on, and God is shaping men and events to fulfil His will.

Now what is His will? His will is to save men from sin; and to declare this gracious purpose to mankind, He selects out of all nations, a particular people, viz., Israel.

There lies

THE KEY TO GENESIS.

These two thoughts divide the book. The first eleven chapters show us a world lying in sin. The rest of the book, beginning with chapter 12, shows us how God selected, trained, and disciplined, often sternly enough, the fathers of the Hebrew nation,—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph—that nation which, in the fulness of the time, was to give us Christ.

The opening chapter reminds us that man was the crown of God's creation, the last and highest. Yet his history is from the beginning a tragedy—the tragedy of false choice. And how rapid and pathetic his decline! On he goes from bad to worse. The disobedience of chapter three becomes the murder of chapter four, which ends in a cruel song of revenge. A lurid light plays about the ancient world that passes across those pages. That world finally becomes so corrupt that God, whose delight is in goodness, can bear it no longer: and He sends His fierce flood to execute His righteous will. But through the wrath gleams gentleness, and He is graciously pleased to give the world a fresh start in Noah. But its new career is like the old. Men cherish soaring ambitions, and strive to thwart God's purpose.

It is against that gloomy back-ground that the ever winsome patriarchal figures are set. The world needs redemption sorely enough. It is God's nature to redeem, but it is His way to choose men as the agents of His purpose. So, with this deep end in view, chapter 12 introduces us to

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM.

For many reasons, which cannot here be set forth, it was especially fitting that the long discipline to which God was going to subject the people He had chosen should take place in Canaan. So He put it into Abraham's heart to leave his eastern home, and Abraham obeyed the voice. Now there,