

wilderness, arrests attention and commands our sympathy. The words of at least one copy of the Septuagint have tended to circulate the mistake; for they represent Abraham, as not only giving to Hagar the bread and the bottle of water, but as placing Ishmael also on her shoulders; and many have been confirmed in this error, by the hasty perusal of those two passages in our own translation of the scriptures, where it is said, 'She cast the child under one of the shrubs, as if she had been hitherto carrying him; and those words of the angel, 'Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand,' as if this language meant that she was to raise and support him in her arms. But on examining the record, you will find that Ishmael was not, at this moment, such a child as to be capable of being so treated by Hagar. In Genesis xvi. 16, we are told, that, at the birth of Ishmael, Abram was fourscore and six years old; and in Gen. xxi. 5, that he was an hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him, at which time Ishmael must have been fourteen years of age. Further, from the verses that immediately follow in the chapter last referred to, we learn that it was not till Isaac was weaned, and probably some considerable time after this, that Ishmael departed from his father's house. It is disputed at what period children, in those days, and in those countries, were weaned. Some say that it was not until they were five, others, until they were three, years of age. The latter opinion seems to be confirmed by the speech of the mother to her son in 2 Maccab. vii. 27, 'O my son, have pity upon me that bare thee,—and gave thee suck three years, and nourished thee, and brought thee up;' and from what is stated in reference to children of three years of age, in 2 Chron. xxxi. 16. From what is written concerning Samuel when he was weaned, 1 Sam. i. 22—23., it is certain that he must have been at least three, if not four or five years of age. Adding those three or four years then, during which Isaac was weaned, to the age of Ishmael at the birth of Isaac, Ishmael, at the time of his departure from the house of Abraham, must have been a lad of seventeen or eighteen years of age; and instead of being borne, in this journey, in the arms of his mother, he must himself have assisted her in bearing the provisions with which Abraham had furnished them.

His youth accounts for his failure from fatigue, before the strength of his mother, a woman in mature life was exhausted; and what is meant by 'her casting the child under one of the shrubs,' is simply this,—that, having endeavoured to support him for a time, giving him her arm, when suffering from heat and thirst, she laid him down at length, perhaps at his own request, and in the thought that he was about to die, under a shrub, whose shade and moisture might somewhat soothe his throbbing temples,—and that she did it also with those feelings of distraction, by which, in such circumstances, a mother's heart must have been torn; and those words of the angel, 'Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand,' are simply to be understood as a command to persuade him to attempt to rise, and to assist him in that attempt, that he might better receive the cooling draught she

was to bring from the well which the angel was about to show to her. These facts, in reference to the age of Ishmael, then, should banish from our minds the mistake to which we have been adverting. They relieve the sacred narrative on this point from misconception, and should guard us against the many surmises of harshness and cruelty, which those who overlook these acts, are ready to entertain concerning this part of the conduct of Abraham.

The wilderness in which Hagar and Ishmael wandered, was the wilderness of Beersheba or Shur,—the same desert into which Hagar fled at her first dispute with her mistress Sarai. Whether this desert was chosen by Ishmael, as perhaps one of the nearest to his father's dwelling, and where, in its vast solitudes, he might soonest bury the wrath and disappointment of his proud spirit,—or whether it was chosen by Hagar, as the nearest route to Egypt,—we are not informed. It is not unlikely that the latter was the truth. It was natural for Hagar to seek refuge in the place of her nativity. Among her own kindred she might hope to find the asylum which had been denied her by Sarah; and here also she would obtain protection and guardianship for her son; but if this was her intention, it was not, through the over-ruling purposes of Heaven, at this time, at least, to be accomplished. The wilderness of Beersheba lies at the north-eastern extremity of the Red Sea, and is the northern part of the great desert of Arabia. According to some persons, it is of vast expanse, and cannot be travelled in less than forty days by the nearest route, and "so wild and desolate, that no blade of verdure is to be seen; and were it not for a few hardy plants, such as the tamarind and acacia, it would seem a region wherein nature was wholly dead;" but, according to others there are within it spots, where bushes of various kinds are to be found, such as the thorn-tree and certain odoriferous plants; but the most pleasing descriptions that are given of it, represent it as being, generally, a fearful scene. We do not mean, however, again to dilate on those awful sufferings to which travellers in these deserts were exposed from the burning sands, the heat of the sun, and the scarcity of water. You will remember the descriptions we have already given, and be able to appreciate the miserable prospect, and the actual sufferings, of Hagar and Ishmael. Even where springs of water exist in these wilds, they are not always easily discovered by a stranger; and travellers, after much fruitless search for this precious liquid, have frequently lain down to die, even in the neighborhood of a well. Theve-not, in this very wilderness, found a languishing Arab, who had been without food or drink for five days, and who, like Ishmael, had laid his head under a bush to smell the damp of its scanty verdure; and Campbell, who had travelled one whole day without obtaining water, and halted at sunset in great distress from thirst, found, on the return of morning, that he had rested within a few yards of a fountain. These facts show us that we need not imagine, as some have done, that the well which Hagar saw when 'the angel of the Lord opened her eyes,' was one that, at the will of heaven, had at that instant sprung into being. Hagar, in such a situation, might well be in despair, like others who