

Our Contributors.

FOR DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN.

Historical Criticism, XI. *

Genesis xvii, xxii.

If the task of criticism were to raise difficulties and perplex men's minds with involved discussions it would find scope for such exercise in connection with some incidents in the life of Abraham. There has been much discussion about the three very similar stories which relate how Abraham twice, and Isaac once, passed of his wife as his sister, and some difficulty has been found in explaining Abraham's alliance with Keturah. But these questions need not detain us; they sink into insignificance when we allow our minds to dwell on the greatness of Abraham's personality and on the spiritual lessons which his life contains. We do not mean to say that these difficulties are not proper subjects of investigation by the critic. But we must keep in mind the relative importance of things and make sure first of the fundamental ideas.

We have already spoken of the work which God called Abraham to do, viz., to inaugurate His redemptive purposes toward man; and we have remarked the sublime faith with which he responded to God's promise. We now go on to speak of the special covenant between God and Abraham, and the means used to commemorate it, which are narrated in ch. xvii, a chapter from the Priestly Code as its style at once proclaims.

By the revelation of God as El Shaddai, which means the one who causes all things to exist, Abraham is taught that all the events of man's life find their source in God; that the religious conception of history is the true one; that God is not merely indwelling or immanent in all His works (though that is true) but that He is also transcendent over all things—a distinct personality with whom communion is possible. That Abraham had this belief is evidenced by his raising altars everywhere as he moved up and down the land, thus taking possession of the land for God.

To impress on Abraham, and on his descendants that they had a special destiny, God changed his name, and appointed the rite of circumcision. Rites, institutions, though they are apt to be a snare to man as we lately pointed out, have their use. Children need to be brought up under definite rules. When they can understand the principle behind the rule they will not need the rules. So at this stage a mark was necessary to emphasize the fact that they as a nation were set apart to do a special work. This was the significance of this rite which they alone among the peoples of that country observed.

We must now pass on to the offering up of Isaac (ch. xxii). We must remember that Abraham lived among people who sacrificed their children to their gods in the belief that it was the highest form of religious duty. The Ammonites offered their children to Chemosh, and the Moabites theirs to Moloch. We see then that Abraham had the limitations of his time. But God proposes to give him a higher

* Notes of the eleventh of a series of sermons by Rev. G. M. Milligan, D.D., of Old St. Andrew's Church, Toronto.

revelation of Himself, and He allows him to go on in the performance of this sacrifice, which Abraham wrongly supposes to be the most acceptable worship he could offer to God, until the intensity and sincerity of the man's religious aspirations are evidenced by a complete surrender of his only son, in whom were centered not only his fatherly affections but all his hopes for the future of the race and the fulfilment of God's promise. Finally God vouchsafes the revelation of Himself as a humane Being, not delighting in man's self-imposed pains, but only in the homage of the heart.

From the history of Abraham, we may draw valuable lessons on the subject of national life. We see (1) that the fundamental thing in the nation is character. That the founder of the race died landless is a standing proof that land is not the first thing, that not material resources, not mines or forests, but character is to make a nation great. "Seek first the kingdom of Heaven, and all these things will be added unto you" came true in Abraham's life, and so it will in ours.

(2) The importance of race. The promise was to Abraham and to his seed after him. The race must be kept pure, and just because Esau would not conform to this requirement because he placed little importance on race, he was rejected. The investigations of modern science of the laws of heredity have made this question familiar to every one. It remains for us to make the application in national and in individual life. Endeavour to keep the family name untarnished; let there be no blot on the scutcheon.

(3) That religion is indispensable to the well-being of a nation. Not until we regard ourselves as stewards of God, entrusted with certain talents for the use of others, and for the accomplishment of God's high purposes, can our private or our public affairs be properly administered. The fate of a nation is bound up in its attitude to these three things, righteousness, race, religion.

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Concerning Juvenile Crime

BY KAWARTHA.

The Inspector's report of Crime in Toronto for year just past, disclosed the fact, that *juvenile crime* is on the increase. The Globe, in an editorial discussing the cause of this increase, is inclined to lay the blame at the door of the lady school-teachers, and amongst other things says, "that there is a period in a boy's life when he holds all women, even his mother, in a sort of contempt." It is a question that deserves careful consideration. What is the foundation of national life? Is it the school? Is a nation the aggregate of public schools? To come back to the beginning must we not say that the *home* is the foundation upon which national life is built.

Home is the child's first school, its true educator of character. Here the child receives his first impressions. And these have very important consequences. At the fountain of a river, a very gentle application of the hand will send the flowing waters into channels which lead into

quite contrary directions. So the little attentions and directions given to a child at first, when its thoughts and affections are unfolding, will help it to form those principles which shall rule its after life. What the child learns in early years becomes, very especially, a part of it, and forms the grain of its character.

It is said that the Church is losing its hold upon the young, but in nine cases out of ten where the young do wrong, it is the fault, neither of the Church nor the Public School, but of the home. Where the children hear in the home nothing but talk of gaieties and pleasure and dress, the conduct and demeanor and failings of neighbors, you cannot expect the stream to rise higher than its source.

But where they have evidence that there is sincere love to God and man, as shown by self sacrifice, and a spirit of helpfulness among the members of the family, then in the words of the college song, "As the old ones crow the little ones learn." Reformatism must begin at home. Could the complete history of the most pious and eminent of every age be exposed to view, there can be no doubt but that to the instrumentality of home influence the world is indebted for her greatest benefactors, her most illustrious statesmen, and the Church her most faithful ministers.

It was the Spartan MOTHER and her influence that gave character to the Spartan nation. Her training nerved her sons in the wild tumult of battle, either to bring home their shields or be brought home upon them.

That young man Pearson, who was hanged in Hamilton in Dec of 1901, in his statement given to the public said, "I attribute my evil career to this, that when I was young my home training was sadly neglected. I never had either good example or advice. I was allowed to run the streets at all hours and with all kinds of companions, where I formed the habits that have ruined me."

Naturally he was not a criminal nor bad hearted, but neglect of home-training was responsible for his death on the gallows.

In one of the numbers of the Popular Science monthly for 1897, there was a notable article entitled, "Parental Neglect The Cause of Hoodlumism." And the point that weighed most strongly with the writer was, that hoodlumism was not confined to the Southern States, which the Civil War had demoralized, nor to the Western States, where the rudeness of frontier life was no stimulant to virtue, but the New England States, the home of Puritan order and virtue suffers from it.

He claimed, and proved his contention, that this deplorable state of affairs was due to a weakening of home discipline.

Look at the streets of our villages and towns swarming after nightfall with rude unmannerly boys taking their first lesson in hoodlumism. Is this laid to the charge of the school teacher? When we call in the curfew bell and the policeman to send our children home at nine o'clock, it is a confession of failure our part. Parents must be kings and priests in their home, if young people are to learn reverence for God.

This is a subject not to be settled in a half hour, but the conclusion to which thinking minds are driven, is, that the *home*, not the *lady teacher* is responsible for the increase in juvenile crime.

Bobcaygeon, Feb. 4, 1903.