

THE BLESSING.

It is surprising how little we know of Isaac, in comparison with his father and son. He makes no stir in the world; no noise; he excites no emotion. We only catch glimpses of him now and then, sufficient to enable us to recognize him as a dutiful son to his father, a loving son to his mother, an affectionate and uxorious husband, a partial father, and a pious but weak old man. He seldom speaks. He wants force of character; and soon subsides into an instrument in the hands of others, who use him for their own purposes. It is the destiny of such to be acted upon, rather than to act upon others. So we never meet with Isaac in positive and decisive action; but commonly find him in some instrumental position or other. He seems to have also been of a weakly constitution. We read of infirmity or illness in none of the other patriarchs, till they came to their death-beds; but at an age far short of that which his father, and even his son, attained, we find him blind and feeble, confined to his bed, and expected to die.

By far the most important and most fully recorded incident of his life occurs while he is in this condition; and as thus the fullest picture of him is given,

"In age and feebleness extreme,"

we perhaps derive therefrom an impression of his character, different from that which might have been entertained, had we been permitted to behold him as distinctly in the prime and vigor of his days. We would suppose that the quiet and home-staying Jacob was more likely to be a favourite with such a father than the rough, boisterous, and rambling Esau. But we constantly observe that persons manifest the greatest liking for those whose character and habits are least similar to their own. Esau, and not Jacob, was the favorite of Isaac. Believing death to be near, he privately desired this beloved son to procure him, by his hunting, some food, such as he was particularly fond of, that after partaking of it, he may bestow on him the paternal benediction. This is overheard by Rebekah, whose skilful cunning contrives to pass off Jacob upon him for Esau; and thus the blind old patriarch is led to believe that he is invoking blessings upon his elder son, when it is in fact the younger whom he addresses. The details of this scene of unprincipled deception—the more shocking from such advantage being taken of the infirmities of a father—are familiar to the reader, and we may gladly be spared following the particulars which the Scriptures necessarily, for the coherence of the narrative, relates. By sparing ourselves this pain and regret, we obtain room for a few observations on some remarkable circumstances in the narrative.

It is the mother who suggests the device, and who, in fact, seeks to ease the alarm of Jacob's conscience by taking all the consequences upon herself. It is quite possible that she thought she was doing a duty. Knowing that the blessing Isaac was about to bestow on Esau belonged, in the purposes of God, to Jacob, and was his also as a portion of his purchased birthright, she might easily conceive that she was preventing a wrong—was only doing evil that good might come. It was "a pious fraud;" and when we consider how dubious great authorities—favoured with all the light of Christian morality and doctrine—have been on the subject of such frauds, we need not too greatly wonder that Rebekah and Jacob failed to see the path of right and duty clearly. It appears to us that Rebekah felt all to be right—both means and end; and that Jacob thought the end to be right, but was staggered at the means, until his mother succeeded in soothing, if not in extinguishing, his alarms. Jacob was, however, not a child. He was fully forty years of age, and very well capable of exercising an independent judgment in a matter which concerned him so nearly. All the responsibility of the transaction cannot be shifted to the mother, willing as she was to take it upon her.

Rebekah, with only a kid, prepares for Isaac "savory meat," intended to be passed upon him—and which does pass upon him—for the very same that he loved, and desired as the produce of Esau's hunting. How is it that he, the possessor of numerous flocks, should depend upon his son's hunting for a feast, which might thus easily be prepared to his liking with his own kids? And what kind of game might that be, for which the flesh of a kid could be taken? In answer to this, it suffices to refer to a former statement—that an animal from the flocks or herds is rarely killed and eaten, save to entertain a stranger; and the possessors of untold herds and flocks would deem it unheard-of extravagance to slay an animal to supply a meal for himself. Hence the Israelites, with all their cattle, in the wilderness groined for the taste of flesh, and had to be supplied with game by miracle. Particular objections is also felt to the slaughter of young animals, regard being had to the value to which they will grow if suffered to live. In fact, this is regarded among pastoral people in the same point of view, as that in which living upon a capital is regarded in this commercial country. Thus a stray wild animal, or bit of game, is as highly prized and as eagerly sought after by them as by any people. It may thus appear that Isaac, at a hundred years old, scarcely knew the taste of kid's flesh. Or if he did, the flesh of a kid is not unlike that of a young gazelle, and, prepared in the way that both are usually dressed in the East, might easily be taken for one.

Esau must have been a remarkably hairy person—for, that Jacob may pass for Esau, in case Isaac should feel him, the skin of the kid is placed by Rebekah upon his hands and "the smooth of his neck." If he were thus equipped to resemble Esau's smoothness, what must Esau's roughness have been? The smooth of his neck, however, means the part not covered by the beard. There is no doubt that Esau's hairiness was very extraordinary—he being, even at birth, described as if invested all over

with a hairy garment. There is, however, perhaps no animal whose skin might be so easily taken for that of a very hairy man as the skin of a kid. It is well known that the long silky hair of the Angora goat was used among the Romans as an artificial succedaneum for human hair. Wigs made of Angora goat's hair are mentioned by the Roman satirist Martial. Besides, it is to be borne in mind that the senses of Isaac appear to have become obtuse with age, which had produced the failure of his sight.

It is an interesting fact, that Jacob was clad in a dress of Esau's, which, notwithstanding that he had several wives, and therefore a home of his own, his mother had in her charge. The object seems to have been, that the fresh smell, which the garments had imbibed from the herds of the field, might assist the deception. Isaac expressly alludes to it,—"*Behold, the smell of my son is the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.*" Some think the garments were perfumed,—but if so, this could not have been distinctive of Esau. Others apprehend that the odor was that peculiar one which the dress of a hunter contracts, from his handling the skins and furs of animals. But, it is surely enough to suppose, that the fragrance of Esau's garments proceeded from the herbs and flowers of the field, his constant abode. Ancient writers concur with modern travellers, in speaking with delight of the aromatic odor of the Syro-Arabian meadows and plains. The natural odors of Lebanon are frequently mentioned in the sacred Scriptures.

It is remarkably true that every scene of deception, however well planned and artistically managed, fails in some point or other. The ordinary reading or experience of every one will supply examples of this. So, in the present instance, while Rebekah and Jacob had so carefully disguised the outward man of the latter, the necessity of disguising the voice had been wholly overlooked. This single oversight had nearly exploded the entire plot. The suspicions of Isaac were violently awakened at hearing a voice, which he recognized as that of Jacob, speaking in the person of Esau. At the first sound of that voice he asks, "*Who art thou, my son?*" and still not satisfied with the assurance, "*I am Esau, thy first born,*" he says, "*Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be really my son Esau or not.*" An alarming moment was that for the deceiver—a moment of agony, almost a sufficient punishment for his crime, when his father passed his hands over him. "*The voice,*" said the old man, "*is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.*" But he was satisfied; the feel of the hands and fresh smell of the raiment prevailed over the misgiving which the voice had awakened;—and the much-desired blessing was bestowed.—*Killo.*

RELIGION PREFERABLE TO INFIDELITY, EVEN FOR THE PRESENT LIFE.

When the unbelieving and worldly-allege or imagine that a religious life consists of nothing but self-denial, and penance, and mortification, and whatever else is vexing for the flesh and wearisome for the spirit, they make the charge on the ignorant presumption, that there can be no pleasures but those which gratify *them*—their balls, and routes, and theatres, and gambling, and debauchery; and when they see the saints abstaining from such things, they affect to pity them, as if they could have nothing else in which is possible to find delight. But what signifies it, in forming a judgment in this matter, though *their* depraved minds cannot comprehend how there can be any pleasure in life, in the absence of such indulgences? And what signifies it, though they wonder and stare in incredulity, at any one saying, that he finds a wide field of enjoyment in the exercises of religion? When the enquiry respects a man's happiness, the question is not, whether he be possessed of what gratifies you? but whether he be possessed of pleasures which gratify him, as much as yours gratify you? Accordingly, though the Christian is shut up from many things in which the worldly revels, he is admitted to other pleasures in their stead, which are as gratifying to his regenerated taste, as are those of the natural man to his depraved and vitiated taste. When the one chants with *glor* his loose or bacchanalian song, in the midst of his dissipated companions; the other may, with joyous feeling, I ween, be singing a hymn in praise of his Redeemer, in company with brethren ransomed from the world's follies and sins. When the one is away to the race-course to delight himself with its cruelties, is it difficult to conceive of the other being as pleasantly engaged in visiting the abodes of indigence, and witnessing the happiness which his alms-giving communicates?—When the one at the theatre enjoys the scenic representations of some bloody murder; may not the other be as pleasantly occupied by some death-bed, in ministering the triumphs of faith to a soul about to pass into eternity? And when the one lies on his bed and delights himself with the fancy of that splendour and high station in the world, to which, by the success of his speculations, he hopes to attain; the other may be surely as joyous in the anticipation of that time when he shall be raised to a principality in the kingdom of God. It is thus that the Christian neither shares, nor desires to share, the enjoyment of the pleasures of the worldling, but possesses others, which, in their sweetness and dignity, far more than compensate for them.

Although, then, religion had demanded of its disciples the surrender of much that is naturally and truly pleasurable, yet they would have had no ground of complaint, since it opens up for them so many other sources of enjoyment. But when profane men are accustomed to mock at the superstitious weakness and cowardice which submit to so many restrictions, we claim that they state with some precision and particularity what