

A MAN WITH A HANDICAP

By REV. G. D. BAYNE, B.A., PH. D.

"As for Ishmael, I have heard thee; Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall be begotten, and I will make him a great nation."
—Gen. XVII. 20.

Ishmael entered life's race under a handicap. It was imposed upon him at his birth, nay, by the very fact of his birth. The conditions under which he ran that race were fixed for him before he was born. He did not make those conditions. He was not consulted about them. He was not responsible for them. Yet there they were, and they handicapped him. Which way he turned were disabilities, discouragements and hindrances.

He himself was the fruit of unbelief. His existence was due to Sarah's impatience and distrust of God's promise. God had promised that Abraham and Sarah should become the progenitors of a great nation and that in them all nations of the earth should be blessed. In practical distrust of this promise, Abraham, Sarah and Hagar entered into a compact which was responsible for Ishmael's existence. So that he was the fruit of unbelief. We should leave both the end and the way to the end in God's hands and trust Him where we cannot trace Him.

The conditions of Ishmael's birth were discreditable, even in that age. Hagar was not in concubinage; there was no Morganatic alliance, nor was there any pretence of polygamy. So that a withering social blight for which there was no remedy, from which there was no escape, and for which he was not to blame, rested on the unhappy youth. He was indeed the scion of a patriarch but he was also the son of a heathen maid.

Egyptian blood flowed in his veins. This not only debarred him from the privileges and advantages of the covenant people, but it also gave to his character that restless, roving, pleasure-loving disposition by which he was known. Goethe makes him say: "From my father comes the bodily stature, the bearing of the higher life; from my mother the joyful disposition and love of pleasure."

Then, there were domestic troubles of which his existence was the prime cause. When Hagar found how things were to be, she began to put on airs and to lord it over Sarah. Sarah repented of her part in the scheme, rebuked the maid, reminded her of her proper place and wound up by unloading the whole grievance on the head of her devoted husband, Abraham.

Anything short of hell-fire is better than domestic broils. Give a man

"A hut in some vast wilderness, A boundless contiguity of space." Let him be "crazed with care or crossed in hopeless love"; let him lose fortune and comfort and friends; and let him be driven forth a penniless wanderer on the face of the earth, but let him have peace at home. He or she incurs an awful responsibility who breaks up the peace of a home. For home is the purest, sweetest type of heaven here below. Home! There is music in the very word. To the old it is the dearest memory, to the young it is an enchanting strain. To speak of home is to strike a chord in every heart, the tones of whose vibrations are deep and long. The husband, wife, son and daughter or interloper who breaks up the peace of a home, deserves, and usually gets the execration of all men. Now this was the predicament of Ishmael, innocently to a degree, it is true. Yet when he had grown to be a youth of sixteen it became evident that the patriarchal home would be broken up unless this

wayward half breed and his mother were sent away, and away they were sent accordingly.

Once more it was predicted of Ishmael, (Gen. 16:12), "And he shall be as a wild ass among men; his hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him." Whether this constitutional attitude toward humanity was hereditary or voluntarily assumed, or both, makes little difference. It is an awkward and unenviable reputation for any man to get—that of being a mere fighter. Nobody wants a mere fighter; nobody loves him; nobody trusts him; nobody wants to have him around. Yet such was Ishmael, for the prediction respecting him was fulfilled.

Now all this was a heavy handicap under which to enter on life's race. It was a fearful load to carry. It could not be got rid of, for no power in heaven or on earth can turn back the wheels of time or take a fact out of human history. He could not live it down. He could not blot out the fact of the past or eliminate the Egyptian blood from his veins. What could he do? As far as man's philosophy could direct, the only thing to do was to shoulder the load and go manfully forward.

This suggests the remark that

Many Enter Life's Race Handicapped.

That is the fact. Account for it as we may or draw from it what inferences we choose, there is the fact. The infant that has done no evil inherits evil. Innocent human beings come into the world, bringing with them the most terrific downward tendencies. Bad traits and good traits descend by inheritance, and "the child cannot help it." Why then, does the child suffer? That question I shall answer later. Meantime, fix attention on the fact of the man with the handicap. Look at him in the bloom of youth. He is the picture of health. His eye is as bright as are his hopes. His step is elastic as he hastens to charm the social circle or adorn a profession. He is manly and generous in every instinct and movement. Moral, strong and clean is he, inexperienced and untainted of the world. What is his future to be? Who may tell? It may be dark and wretched; black and bleak as a night of Egypt, athwart whose gloom there shoots no ray of light, and men may turn away and say,—"good had it been for that man had he never been born." Or it may be bright and happy and beneficent. He may rise like a benignant star to shed light and blessing on his fellow-men, and one generation after another may rise up to call him blessed. So is the future hidden from us. But know this: that back of that youth there may lie, in the slumbering past, generations of strong social instincts and convivial habits, and that he may be weighted at the very start with inherited tendencies that may wreck him in billows that another would out-ride in safety.

Here is another, born amid surroundings from which no good can be looked for. The atmosphere of his youth is laden with impurity and profanity. Honor and honesty are there unknown—poverty and ignorance are the heritage of this unfortunate. And yet this child comes as innocently to this awful inheritance as does yours or mine to a better lot.

Another comes innocently by a dishonored name. It is no fault of his or hers. But one day the dread fact is thrust upon the mind of happy, guileless childhood, and the light heart of youth seems suddenly to turn to stone; the skies that were radiant yesterday are leaden to-day, and the earth that then was decked with flowers is to-day the

blackest of moors. And from this day onward the young life is handicapped.

Another is born to poverty—to clean, honest poverty, but poverty which hinders development, which clips the wings that would soar, and takes out of life its poetry. Born to poverty, clean and honest. Yes; but poverty that spoils with its dull, grey reality the radiant dreams of youth—poverty with its fearful snares into which have fallen the brightest and best.

Yet another is born to wealth, which is the next worst thing to poverty; to wealth with all the subtle temptations which it brings in its train. It is a dire misfortune to inherit by birth a condition in which work is not a necessity. You cannot raise men without working them. You may make humpy-backed bicyclists and sabbath-breaking dudes, but not Men. And the

"Child of prosperity,
Nursling of vanity,
Slave to preference, to wealth and renown."

is often as seriously handicapped in the race of life as the child of honest poverty.

These are notorious facts. We cannot answer all the questions that may be asked about them. Throw two men up in the air; one lights on his feet, the other on his head. Why? That is the question. Some are more favorably equipped than others. Why? That is still the question.

Life is a race. It is a journey whose steps are never retraced. The traveller who comes after us may trace our wandering footsteps, now this way and now that, but ever nearer to the beach where the ocean of eternity rolls, till he comes to the last foot-print, half-washed away by the tide, where we plunged into the deep and disappeared forever. And we never get a chance to run the race over again.

Now then, HOW ARE WE TO DEFEND THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT IN VIEW OF THESE FACTS? Why are some men handicapped? Why do not all get an even chance? Is there unrighteousness with God? Let us see.

God Makes Allowance and Compensation for Every Handicap.

He did so in the case of Ishmael. That was a sad home-leaving for Hagar and her boy. It was painful for Abraham too, for he had not known the honor and love of fatherhood until Ishmael was born, and the tendrils of his time-worn heart had all gone out and fastened themselves around his first-born. Isaac was as yet an infant in arms and had not grown into the patriarchs' love as had the wayward Ishmael. The offering up of Isaac later on could scarce have been more painful than the giving up of Ishmael, the bright boy of sixteen. And the poor slave-maid with her boy went out. Wandering off southerly from Beersheba she took her way toward the great desert. At length "the water was spent in the bottle." The boy was doomed to die of thirst. Mother-like, there was no thought of self. Every resource had been exhausted. At last in sheer despair she hid the wearied one down to die and hastened off like some hunted beast so that she might not see the end. The Bible is always just to the heathen. Were it not divine, it would not be so. Here see a mother's love in all its humanness and beauty. Hagar is in dire distress. She lays her child down under the protecting shadow of a bush and, rushing away, seats herself over against him at the distance of a bow-shot. Torn by conflicting impulses, she weeps aloud. Her heart is breaking. She will not see him die, and yet she cannot leave him. Ye know what this means.

"Ye who believe in affection
That hopes and endures and is patient;
Ye who believe in the strength and beauty of woman's devotion."
Ye have been there—there at life's