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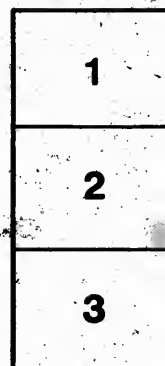
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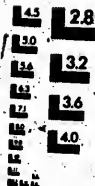
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THE CHARACTER OF ABRAHAM

CONSIDERED IN

FIVE LECTURES,

DELIVERED DURING LENT, 1868.

IN

ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH,

SALVAGE, BONAVIDA BAY,

NEWFOUNDLAND,

BY THE

REV. CHARLES ROCK WEST.

ST. JOHN'S NEWFOUNDLAND,

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1869.

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TO

GEORGE WELTON, ESQ.; M. D.,

FROM WHOSE PERSONAL SERVICES THE AUTHOR HAS

DERIVED GREAT BENEFIT,

THESE LECTURES ARE

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PREFACE.

THE following Lectures were originally written for delivery at the Wednesday evening services, held at Salvage, during Lent, 1868. Consequently they were not intended for publication; but, as the friends of the Author expressed a wish to have them issued through the press, he now sends them forth with the hope that they may be found, in some small degree, useful and acceptable.

Residing at such an inconvenient distance from St. John's, the Author has had no opportunity of seeing "proofs," and should any trifling errors be detected he trusts they will be excused.

The critical reader will doubtless discover many faults and failings in the work; which might, perhaps, have been prevented, had the Author been able to devote more time to its preparation. However, he believes that all who may peruse this volume will quite understand that the various engagements and requirements of an Out-harbour clergyman, are always sufficient to prevent uninterrupted study.

The Parsonage, }
Salvage, }
Nov. 16th, 1868. }

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LECTURE THE FIRST.

Genesis 12 chap. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, verses. "Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, into a land that I will show thee; and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the Land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."

The history of the great patriarch, who is here introduced to our notice, is full of deep interest to all who love the study of those "holy men of old" who, under a former dispensation, were "the righteous of their time" and the glory of their age. Certainly, amongst the number of Old Testament saints, Abraham occupies a most prominent and important position, for "all the preceding part of the book of Genesis is only introductory to the birth of Abraham, the illustrious ancestor of the Israelites and of the Jews; the father of the faithful" called also by a title of wondrous honour and dignity, namely "the friend of God" (James 2—23.) (Is. 41—8.) and (2 Chron. 20—7.) Nor need we wonder at this arrangement of Scripture history when we bear in mind that its whole scope is to develop a mighty and majestic plan of redemption—the "great salvation"—the grand scheme of atonement for sin to be effected on Calvary's cross by Him who should, in after ages, take man's nature upon Him and enter this sinful world "veiled in flesh," and that very "flesh" derived from Abraham's posterity, through the stupendous wisdom and condescending mercy of God! Hence we perceive how Abraham was a blessing to the world, namely, in being the privileged ancestor of Christ's humanity "in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed." Under such interesting circumstances, therefore, the study of Abraham's character must be useful, as well as attractive; and though I can-

not promise that I shall, in these lectures which I have announced, do justice, in any adequate degree, to such a noble theme; yet I humbly hope to be enabled, according to the ability which God has given me, to teach you from this topic, many important lessons and truths which, if blessed by God's Holy Spirit, will abundantly reward your attention and justify the manner in which I propose to deal with the subject. My aim and intention is to consider some of the *chief events* in Abraham's history with a view to set before you as an example, those noble and upright features in the patriarch's character, which, being applied to our position and circumstances as professing christians will tend to exalt and purify our motives and actions.

You will observe that I have already anticipated the change in the patriarch's name, of which we are informed in the 17th Chapter, when God gave him the covenant of circumcision, and I have adopted this plan because it is by the altered form that he is most familiar to christians. The difference of meaning in the two names "Abram" and "Abraham" being simply that the former signifies "the father of elevation or height"—the latter, "the father of a great multitude or of many nations" and the reason of the change may have been in order that Abraham might always remember the "holy covenant" or agreement which God had made with him.

Respecting the character of Abraham, before he was called by the Almighty to quit his native country, we know nothing; yet I think we may safely infer that he was a man of virtuous life, though living amongst idolatrous people; because, out of a whole nation, he alone was chosen by God to be the receptacle of a more clear and definite dispensation respecting the Divine Will. From the statement in Joshua 24—2, some have thought that Abraham himself was a worshipper of idols in his native country "but that God giving him a better understanding, he renounced that kind of worship;" the text referred to is as follows:—"And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor:

and they served other Gods," but whether the word "they" includes Abraham or not, we need scarcely enquire. It is sufficient for our purpose to know that Abraham was chosen by God himself to be the founder of that race and family from which our Blessed Lord, in "the fulness of time" should derive his mortal nature; and without enquiring into Abraham's early days, concerning which the scriptures are silent, we shall do well to reflect on his implicit obedience and wonderful faith when receiving the first intimation of the Almighty's will.

The command "get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house" was truly a requirement of no ordinary nature: and whether we suppose, as some people do, that it was not made suddenly, and without some previous announcement, by which Abraham was "well convinced of the authority which commanded him to undertake that journey," or whether we incline to the opinion that he obeyed on the very first injunction so to do, without any consideration whatever, we cannot fail to perceive that his faith in God and his prompt obedience are brilliant and striking traits in his character which shine forth before the world without a human parallel! Which of you, my brethren, would be so entirely uninfluenced by worldly considerations in the performance of a command like this? Surely there were many strong, *earthly reasons* which, if indulged, might have kept back the patriarch from undertaking such a long and troublesome journey! He was not, remember, *a needy adventurer*, ready to grasp at any chance which might tend to improve his circumstances. Evidently he was possessed of wealth and surrounded plentifully by earthly comforts. Doubtless he lived happily and peaceably with his relatives and neighbours. His domestic life unquestionably was serene and free from distracting cares. Neither could curiosity, or a desire to travel and see the world, have had many charms at his time of life, for we read that "he was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran"; and, although men lived then to an infinitely longer age than is now permitted them; yet, a man so far advanced towards a century would

be likely, according to nature, to desire a permanent dwelling place, especially when there existed *no actual necessity* for living an unsettled life. In short, while many earthly considerations might have prevented Abraham from quitting "Ur of the Chaldees," had he been what in our day is termed "a worldly-minded man"; nothing, but the fear of God, and a desire to serve and please Him, could have induced the patriarch to seek his home in a land of which he knew little or nothing, beyond what was contained in God's command to go thither.

Again; the encouragements offered to Abraham, as an inducement to undertake this journey, were not exactly the kind which would influence a mere selfish and sordid man. What weight, for instance, would there be in the simple assurance "I will make of thee" (after thy death, that is to say) "a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed?" Such promises, correctly understood, would scarcely attract that man whose sole aim in life is personal comfort and convenience. Had Abraham regarded the pleasures of this life as chiefly conducive to personal happiness he would have sought for something more tangible than promises of fame and glory to his posterity and a name that should survive his decease. He would have desired some great compensation—some advantages proportionate to the sacrifice of his ease and temporal comforts. In short, some earthly reward which he might enjoy in his own life time, apart from the honor to be conferred on his descendants.

Moreover, the very promises which induced Abraham to comply with the divine command; depended, for their fulfilment, on a domestic bond which was lacking at the time they were made; nor was there any probability, humanly speaking, that it would ever be supplied. How, then, were these promises to be realized by the posterity of him who was childless? How could "all families of the earth" be blessed in him who

was without the prospect of progeny? To an earthly reasoner such things would not only have been regarded as improbable, but actually impossible; yet no difficulty appeared to arise in the mind of Abraham. He was ready and willing to go at God's command without asking for proofs that the promises would be fulfilled. And here it is that his great and wonderful faith manifests itself so illustriously, which, connected with his cheerful obedience, renders him such a noble example to Christians in every walk of life; St. Paul, in reference to these points in Abraham's character, says, "by faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11—8).

It is not, I conceive, straining the subject to conjecture some difficulties and temptations to which Abraham may have been exposed, before setting out, by the opposition of his neighbours and acquaintances. It is true the sacred narrative does not mention nor even hint such things: yet, from the very nature of the case, I think we are at liberty to suppose, that Abraham could scarcely depart from his native country, without being subjected to many remarks and questions as to his reason for so doing. No doubt there were people in his day, as in ours, ever ready to discuss their neighbours' affairs and offer advice thereupon; and it is only reasonable to assume that there would be many, with whom Abraham was acquainted, who could neither understand nor appreciate his motives for quitting their neighbourhood and society: and from such he was not likely to meet with either encouragement or sympathy, but the reverse. Nor is it altogether improbable, that Abraham had some trouble in persuading his own wife even, as to the propriety of the step he was about to take. Nay, if we may judge from the disposition she manifested, on a subsequent occasion, when God assured Abraham that she should become a mother, (Gen. 18—12 &c.) we may perhaps conclude that Abraham had to contend with some opposition from her; and, if so, who can tell what an amount of trouble and anxiety he experienced within the limits of even his own household!

We cannot, of course, determine what motive may have induced Abraham's nephew, Lot, to join him in the enterprise. We read simply that "Lot went with him"; but how far this was due to his uncle's persuasion, or his own natural affection and inclination, we cannot pretend to say. On reflection, however, it seems scarcely probable that Lot consented to accompany his uncle without some advice, and, perhaps, argument on the part of Abraham; in which case, we must admire his earnestness, as we cannot help noticing his perseverance, amidst such obstacles as I have imagined: the *exact nature* of which we have not been permitted indeed to know; though, as I before remarked, I see no reason why, in studying the character of Abraham, we should refrain from supposing that he met with some.

But it is now time I should gather, and set before you, some *practical lessons* from the subject, so far as it has been considered, which may tend to instruct and edify you,

In the first place, my brethren, I would have you bear in mind that *there can be no real piety without earnest faith, combined with a cheerful obedience to God's commands.* St. Paul tells us in Heb. 11—6. that "without faith it is impossible to please him;" hence it follows, that he who would daily walk with God must exercise a regular and constant faith amidst all circumstances pertaining to the present life. You must never lose sight of this requirement: it is the very essence of true religion. Like Abraham you must be content to believe that God designs your well-being although your natural inclinations suggest otherwise. When exposed to those daily trials, which are sent to perfect our faith and patience, you must pray for the influence of the Holy Spirit that you may be enabled to stand securely against those faithless and God-dishonouring suggestions of the devil, by means of which the confidence of too many professing christians is shaken and overcome. Reflect often on the numberless blessings already received, and the wonderful encouragements given you to trust in God! Let past experience be brought forward to prove this—not an experience of days or months merely—but of years upon years of never-failing mercies

and paternal love ! This will prove that, in reality, you have more cause even than Abraham to exercise a lively faith. As far as we can perceive he had no such experience to guide and encourage him ; because it is doubtful whether his knowledge of God's will, previous to his being called to quit his native land, was sufficiently clear to enable him rightly to comprehend the dealings of Almighty providence in relation to his former life. How different, however, is it with ourselves ! From infancy we have known something of God, and since then have had daily reasons for believing, trusting and obeying Him.

Obedience, indeed, depends upon a right and proper faith for its perfection. Only let a man have faith in all its fulness—faith in its beautiful simplicity—and he will, like Abraham, readily obey all the commands of God. In short, true faith and obedience are inseparable. The one cannot properly exist without the other. When *both* are manifested we learn to love God in sincerity and serve Him from pure motives. Then we are ready and willing to obey the command because we have confidence in the commander.

Secondly : You must remember that *true religion requires some sacrifices*. You can never serve God rightly while you are willing to retain your own natural wishes and propensities. Abraham had to leave the land of his nativity and so, also, must you leave that state in which, by nature, you were born into the world. Abraham gave up all his prospects of earthly advancement amongst his idolatrous neighbours, and was content with whatever divine providence might prescribe ; and you must be willing to forego every thought of worldly glory and honour which would hinder you from seeking eternal promises, or make you dissatisfied with God's appointments. Pleasurable and attractive as earthly joys may appear, all that interfere with your souls' everlasting interests must be sacrificed. As Abraham was not permitted to find a home in "Ur of the Chaldees" neither may you seek one, in "the vanity of this sinful world." The command is "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1st John 2—15.) and there is reason in this. Just as God had far better things in store for Abraham than any he possessed: so God, through Christ, has "prepared for them that love Him, such good things as pass man's understanding;" and to love earthly things better than heavenly is not only to slight the love of God, but also to refuse all prospect of solid happiness.

Think it then, brethren, your greatest privilege when you are called upon to sacrifice anything earthly for the sake of Him who offers you an eternal reward—a reward which He has purchased at a price far beyond all mortal calculation, the price of his own atoning blood!

Thirdly: *True religion demands energy and perseverance.*—The Christian is to be far removed from that feeling of weakness which is influenced by the bad example and opposition of the World. You must not allow the evil, by which you may be surrounded, to make you careless and slothful in reference to the duties of religion. If Abraham had been exercised by the influence of that idolatry, which existed in his native country; or if he had been wanting in energy and perseverance, doubtless he would have remained in his own land. But he surmounted every obstacle and strove against all opposition, and you, my brethren, must "go and do likewise," if you hope to gain "the promised land."

Your lives must be earnest, active, regular and persevering. "Onward and upward!" must be the Christian's daily motto. If you allow yourselves to be swayed by the arguments of the wicked and foolish; or if you are easily hindered, and turned aside, from the right path, by difficulties and discouragements of any kind; you will run the christian race in vain.

Listen to no argument but the constraining love of Jesus. Be influenced by no advice but the Word of God. Heed no call but that of the Saviour, whose voice of sweetest melody is ever to be heard, by the willing ear, more powerful, more

thrilling and more attractive than all the glittering toys of earth—that voice which ever is saying to the christian, "follow me."

"Jesus calls us, o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild restless sea.
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, "Christian, follow me."

Jesus calls us—By thy mercies,
Saviour, may we hear thy call,
Give our hearts to thy obedience,
Serve and love Thee, best of all."



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LECTURE THE SECOND.

Genesis 12 chap. 10, 11, 12, 13, verses. "And there was a famine in the land; and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land. And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon; therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister; that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee."

HAVING considered the character of Abraham in reference to his prompt obedience, to God's command, we now come to enquire how it fared with him after he arrived in the land of Canaan. The scriptural narrative here is so remarkable, and so different from what we should naturally expect, that some little surprise at the statement, is not to be wondered at. A casual reader will scarcely be prepared to expect such statements as are contained in the above verses. So far from supposing that Abraham would so soon meet with adverse circumstances, and have to quit for a time, the land for which he had forsaken all; one would naturally imagine that he would have experienced some earthly proofs that he had not served his "God for nought."

Again: so far from supposing that he who manifested such wonderful faith in the greatest matters, should evince an actual weakness in reference to an imaginary evil, we should rather look for such a disposition of firmness and dignity in Abraham as would render him far above the influence of minor trials. And yet what are the facts before us? Abraham, after surmounting every obstacle, great and small, in order that he might enter the promised land;—after leaving his natural home where, it may be assumed, he dwelt in happiness and plenty;—after a long and tedious journey,—enters, indeed, the land of Canaan, but dwells there *only as a stranger* having no tangible reward for his obedience but the promise renewed "unto thy seed will I give this land" (Chap. 12. 7 v.): or, as St. Stephen states in the Acts of the Apostles, 7th chap. 5th

verse, God "gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child." Still further. Abraham on his arrival was not only without a *personal possession* in the land; but was, moreover, actually *obliged to leave it again* to save his very existence; for we read "there was a famine in the land," and yet he remained faithful as regards the promise of his God! We do not even read that he was surprised at the circumstances in which he was placed, much less that he was disappointed. Here, then, we see the faith of Abraham to advantage,—here we must admire his patience and courage.

But this is only *one part* of the present subject,—another fact is before us:—one quite as remarkable and surprising as the other, though totally different in its nature. Abraham, "the father of the faithful," shows a weakness! He who in the greatest trials was enabled to overcome them "nothing doubting," yet gives way to fears, in relation to his domestic happiness!—He who expressed no surprise nor dissatisfaction at having to go "down into Egypt to sojourn there" nevertheless manifests anxious fears lest his life should fall a sacrifice to his wife's personal attractions!

The anomaly is so extraordinary that our best consideration of the whole matter will, perhaps, be in observing the two following points:—

First:—Abraham's faith *severely tried*, found *equal to the trial*. Secondly:—Abraham's faith *scarcely tried* found *unequal to the trial*.

From the study of this apparent paradox I trust you will gather much instruction. While I would urge you to cultivate all such virtues as arise from trust and confidence in God, in relation to affairs of magnitude and importance; I would caution you against permitting the trifles, and lesser trials of this life, to affect your religious courage and serenity of your minds.

In turning to the first point, or division of the subject, we cannot fail to discover that Abraham's faith was severely

tried. In short God's dispensations, from the time the patriarch was called upon to leave the land of his birth, until the circumstances named in the verses under consideration, were such as to test, most searchingly, the confidence of Abraham in Almighty wisdom and goodness. One short year had barely elapsed, after Abraham had left his home at God's command, e'er he was made to feel the wants and pinches which famine, and its attendant evils, entail upon mankind! What a strange proof, argues the unbeliever, of the love of God towards the man who manifested such wonderful faith and love toward Him! What poor encouragement to such implicit confidence! These ideas might appear to have some weight, if it could be shown that God *intended* to reward Abraham in his life time, for his untiring devotion and self-denial; but we must bear constantly in mind that God's purposes, in His manifold dealings with this patriarch, were, not to reward him with earthly and perishable honors, but so to discipline his life on earth that he might long all the more for those glorious and eternal blessings which Heaven alone can confer.

Had it been otherwise, had Abraham looked "only for *transitory promises*" (see 7th article of the Ch. of England) surely he must have died a disappointed man; for he received none of these things. By faith, however, he had a heart and an eye far above the tinsel glories of the world. In common with other old Testament Saints, as they are termed, (and amongst that number were some of his own descendants) "he had respect unto the recompence of the reward:" and, as St. Paul says of him, and them, in Hebrews 11. Chap. 15. 16. verses, "truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: *for he hath prepared for them a city.*"

We are not, then, at liberty to question the fact that Abraham's faith taught him to look, far beyond the present, to the eternal world, for the consummation of his happiness and reward. But when we reflect how often a christian is

cast down by earthly trials;—how often a pious man is tempted to exclaim "all these things are against me;"—when he meets with crosses and reverses of fortune: we must regard the example of Abraham as being truly wonderful and extraordinary.

Think of the trying circumstances by which he was surrounded! Think of a wealthy man suffering want! Think of him, obliged to leave the promised Canaan, because "there was a famine in the land"! Who is there of you, my brethren, who would still be unmoved—still "trust in the Lord"? Who can tell how keenly the patriarch suffered from this trying dispensation! We read simply that "the famine was grievous in the land": but this statement may comprehend an awful amount of want, anxiety and suffering.

Now was the time for Abraham to feel regret at his leaving "Ur of the Chaldees," had he been an earthly-minded man! It is a sore evil to be surrounded by famine even in one's native country, and amongst one's own friends and relatives; but what must it be to feel the sorrows, evils and inconveniences of want in a strange land, aggravated by the thoughts of home and plenty! The sad and affecting reflection of the "prodigal son"—"How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Luke 15 c. 17 v.) comes strikingly to our minds at the idea. In his case, however, it was through lust and extravagance that he felt the sharp sting of famine; and he had, moreover, a home to which he could return, and which it was his wisdom to seek. But Abraham could not look back with a longing eye, and with a desire to return from whence he came, without sacrificing his eternal welfare and injuring his faith. He was obliged to remain a stranger in a strange land. His only resource for sustaining life being actually dependant on his undertaking another journey, (not a homeward one cheered by pleasing thoughts and anticipations,)—a toilsome journey into *another strange land!*

Doubtless Abraham received some intelligence from the Almighty, desiring him to go "down into Egypt to sojourn

there" or he would not have left his position, however severe the famine might have been. To suppose otherwise would be to cast a slur on Abraham's faith which we are not justified in doing, and which would detract much from that filial conduct towards God which made him so ready to obey all the commands of the Almighty. It is, then, quite clear that Abraham was exercised by no ardent desire to seek his former abode; and that amidst such a series of heavy trials he still exercised a firm, unwavering faith. Had it been otherwise "the journey back, to the land he had left, was not so long or perilous that he could not retrace his steps. It would have been no more difficult or dangerous for him to do that than it was to make the journey at first. This shows that his remaining as a sojourner and a stranger in the land of Canaan was voluntary. He preferred it, with all its inconveniences and hardships, to a return to his native country." The same thing is true, in a spiritual sense, of all God's people now. "If they choose to return to the world and to engage again in all its vain pursuits, there is nothing to hinder them. There are opportunities enough. There are abundant inducements held out. There are numbers gay and worldly people who would regard it as a matter of joy and triumph to have them again return to vanity and folly." There is nothing more voluntary than religion; it is the "better part" which all may secure, if they choose, or may cast off and renounce if such be their inclination.

Severely, the faith of Abraham was tested, by manifold circumstances, that he was quite equal to the trial. From this we learn the truth of what St. James asserts, "the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1 c, 3 v.) St. Paul also states the same thing, in his epistle to the Romans, 5th chap. 3rd. verse—"tribulation worketh patience." Would you then, my brethren, desire to possess faith and patience? Remember you must, like Abraham, be exercised by trials.

We now come to consider the second part of the subject,

which, though of such a strange and conflicting nature, is nevertheless quite true to life, when applied to human faith generally. We have seen Abraham's faith *secretly tried found equal to the trial*; let us now behold the reverse of this, namely, *Abraham's faith scarcely tried found unequal to the trial.*

How passing strange it appears, at first sight, to remark that one who could, and did, prove himself so firm and resolute under heavy temptations; should, in a matter so comparatively trifling as his fears respecting domestic peace and happiness, when about to sojourn in Egypt, lose confidence in God! Did Abraham think that the Almighty, who had sustained and comforted him through so many difficulties, would leave him and his wife to become the victims of the licentious Egyptian people? Could he possibly have forgotten God's promises and assurances relative to his posterity? If not, how could he imagine that his life would be sacrificed, unless his partner should consent to represent herself as his sister? Truly there was a mortal weakness here! For the first time we read of fear in the mind of Abraham. He who showed such confidence in God, as to trust his life to apparent uncertainties of a continuous nature, now pleads earnestly with his own wife, to disguise from the Egyptians the fact that that she bore such a relation to him. And this he does while *only supposing* that such a step *might be necessary*. So over-anxious does he appear in this matter that he even urges the point with words of extreme earnestness; "say, *I pray thee*, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee."

Now before proceeding to account for this weakness on the part of Abraham, it will be necessary for me to show you, my brethren, that the patriarch was not altogether guilty of falsehood, as some have supposed, in asking his wife to change the name of the actual position in which she stood to him: We must remember that "in the infancy of the human race, the relations of life were so few and so very intimate, that

"it was then next to an impossibility for the nearest in blood "not to intermarry." We must bear in mind that Abraham lived before the delivery of any definite code of laws respecting marriage; that is to say before the Levitical law commenced. It seems, also, to have been the custom of the Hebrew families in later times to use the term "sister" to denote not only that particular relation, but also a wife or a companion; thus St. Paul, in 1 Cor. 9th chap, 5th verse asks whether it was not lawful for him "to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as the other apostles;" meaning, of course, by the term sister a Christian female companion.

Nor was the case under consideration, the only time when Abraham (who seems to have been particularly fearful concerning his wife) was led to apply the same term to Sarah; for we read in the 20th chapter of Genesis, that when he sojourned in Gerar, he asserted to Abimelech, the King of that country, that she was his sister; and in the 12th verse of that chapter, he explains in what sense she was so. There Abraham states "and yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife." Though Abraham manifested a great weakness in the matter, he may yet stand acquitted of having stated a positive untruth. But this conduct of Abraham can scarcely be regarded as otherwise than a defect in his faith, and should serve to teach us the constant necessity of watchfulness and prayer. It may also be regarded as an encouragement for hoping that when, at any time, through the weakness of our mortal nature, we happen to fall away from the correct line of faith; we shall not, perhaps, be altogether rejected by Him who "knoweth our frame" and "remembereth that we are dust." It should also be considered that Abraham was, at this time, in a state of natural religion; he was not yet circumcised: nor yet, professedly, entered into covenant with God, as we are. His frailty, therefore, is no excuse for ours when, in times of trifling difficulty or danger, we happen to betray an unworthy fear or use unlawful means to escape from impending dangers. We

must not "do evil that good may come." Moreover we must bear in mind that though we are considering the character of a man remarkable for wonderful piety and intense faith; we are yet considering the character of a fellow mortal—a son of our common sinful parents, Adam and Eve. And as the history of Abraham is "written for our learning," so nothing is kept back that may instruct and admonish us.

Had the sacred historian written for the purpose of exalting man; he would, no doubt, have screened the patriarch from "all appearance of evil," and would have exhibited only those traits in his character which are illustrious, noble and satisfactory. But the Bible is the word of God, and He has caused that word to be set forth in all truthful simplicity—abounding in bright examples of faith and holiness, as also in warnings against weakness folly and sin.

Again: it is not singular, though it is worthy of observation, that men who are eminent for faith and virtue, often prove, like Abraham, very weak and defective in faith under the smallest trials. While they are, by God's grace, able to bear up against heavy afflictions, and amidst storms of trouble are enabled to say, from the heart, in strongest faith and in submission to God's purposes, "thy will be done;" yet, in little, petty grievances and difficulties, such people will, too-often, show themselves strangely susceptible to mortal fears, weakness and impatience. All this, however, only serves to show and prove how necessary it is to seek the aid of the Holy Spirit regularly, and with reference, even, to the minor affairs of this life. Have the Apostolic caution ever before you—"let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

From Abraham's apparent weakness, in the matter before us, we may learn that even the best of men are far from perfect; and this very frailty in the character of the patriarch has, perhaps, been recorded for the purpose of teaching us that however far advanced a man may, by God's grace, become in true faith and holiness; he still will have much more to learn; many virtues to cultivate; and many that

have been cultivated, in some degree, need to be more firmly established, strengthened and settled. But the consideration of this subject will, also, further teach the necessity of seeking advice and protection from God, in all the various circumstances of the present life; whether they be great or small, simple or difficult. The encouragement recommended by St. Peter, in his first Epistle 5th chapter 7th verse,—“casting *all* your care upon him; for he careth for you”—is just as applicable to those little daily anxieties which beset us in our worldly affairs, as in relation to more important matters; because it is evident we do not carry out the injunction if we keep back *anything* that disturbs our peace, from Him who, for our sake, on earth experienced *all the troubles of life*; and who also, for our sake became “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” To cast, therefore, *all* our cares upon Jesus is to seek Him at all times: proposing no plans, performing no actions, without first seeking His divine aid through the Holy Spirit. And whenever we are exercised by thoughts and circumstances which conscience tells us may not be carried to the throne of grace, to seek a blessing on them; we ought to perceive, at once, that they are sinful affairs, and should forthwith be cast aside. All our concerns, whether of great or small degree, that are lawful and honest, we may, and should, commend to the notice of our Heavenly Father, with all earnestness and faith. By so doing we shall avoid all unlawful expedients, and preserve our confidence towards God from being molested, and fatally assaulted, by our great enemy the Devil; who, like a skillful warrior, is always looking out for the weakest point on which to direct his attack.

Such, my brethren, are some of the lessons which this event in Abraham's history is designed to teach. May you “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort” of this, as well as every other part of God's “holy word” you “may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life,” which God has “given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

LECTURE THE THIRD.

Genesis 13th chap. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 verses.

"And Lot, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left."

As my intention in these lectures is not to write a *history of Abraham*, I shall not, therefore, pause to consider *every* part of the sacred narrative—not, however, because it would be uninteresting or un instructive to do so, but solely because such consideration would swell my remarks beyond the limit I have set apart for them. You will therefore perceive that the subject of the present discourse is a little in advance of those events which formed the basis of my last week's lecture. We there left Abraham preparing to go "down into Egypt" under very trying and gloomy circumstances; but, at the commencement of this chapter, we read that "Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." Here, then, we may see that it pleased the Almighty by the direction of His Providence, to bless Abraham in temporal things; after he had willingly and cheerfully submitted himself to trying dispensations. He had so faithfully and patiently conducted himself under heavy trials and reverses of fortune, that God now gave him a proof that he was not expected and required *always* to suffer privations and losses. And this will serve to show us that obedience to Divine command will surely bring its own reward, even in this life: though, like Abraham, we should not look for it; but be content with whatever position may be assigned to us here below. Still, how true it

is that no man becomes the poorer, in the end, for the sacrifices he may make to religion! "Them that honour me I will honour" is an assurance and encouragement which may be well relied upon. We see it exemplified in Abraham. Meekly bowing to the dispensations of an all-wise God he went into Egypt to save himself and his household from starvation; and, in about two years time, we behold him returning in a flourishing and wealthy condition! Truly "the works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." (Ps. 111. 2nd v.)

Having previously contemplated Abraham's disposition under adverse circumstances; let us now direct our attention to his conduct in prosperity. While his temporal prospects appeared gloomy we saw that his behaviour was praiseworthy: we shall now have to notice what effect wealth and abundance had upon him. It is a lamentable fact that, generally speaking, any sudden change of fortune, from poverty and obscurity to wealth and importance, has a bad effect upon men. They are apt to be as much lifted up in their dispositions as they are in their means. Many a man, who in poverty was humble and meek enough; has become, by suddenly acquired wealth, proud, imperious and overbearing; nor does it always require *great acquisitions* to effect an alteration of this nature in a man's general behaviour. Some people are wonderfully soon "puffed up" by the slightest addition to their means or alteration in their circumstances: their whole appearance and deportment will be changed; they will endeavour to make the utmost of themselves before other people; and you will hear, from the lips of such persons, all kinds of petty boasting which is always disgusting to properly constituted minds. How often, too, it happens that when people have been blessed in temporal things that they become dissatisfied, grasping and covetous. Instead of being contented and thankful with what they have, they will be more and more eager to possess a still greater abundance; not caring, oftentimes, what means are used for that purpose.

In the study of Abraham's character we shall find nothing

whatever of this kind, but the reverse. The spirit manifested by him, in relation to his nephew Lot is worthy of attention and admiration. Lot had amassed considerable substance, as well as Abraham, and we read that he was possessed of "flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together." Now, though I think we may reasonably suppose that Abraham regretted the necessity of a separation quite as much as Lot might have done; yet, as the elder of the two, and especially as the man to whom God had promised the whole land as a possession for his posterity, he might have been justified had he desired and requested Lot to seek an abode in some other country altogether: and had he been influenced by motives of mere worldly wisdom, or had he indulged in a spirit of covetousness; it is probable his proposal would have been very different from that which is here recorded. We are informed that, owing to the large increase of their flocks and herds, "there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle," which "strife" or dispute was most likely caused by the question as to which had the greatest right to the pasture; or, perhaps, it arose from the same cause as that mentioned in 26th chapter of Genesis, 20th verse, concerning Isaac's herdmen, where we read that "the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying the water is ours." Though, to us, it may appear strange that such an article as common water should be thought worth disputing about; yet, when we remember its great scarcity in hot countries, we need not wonder at the circumstance. In the east, a well, or fountain of water, is a possession of the utmost importance. Hence the many references in Holy Scripture thereto. Hence also we find Moses, when speaking of God's goodness to the Israelites, naming, amongst many other mercies, not only "great and goodly ~~creeks~~ ^{creeks} which they builded not," but also "wells digged, which they digged not." (Deut; 6 c. 10. 11 v.) But, whatever may have been the actual cause of the strife, we see how kindly Abraham interposed to prevent its continuance, and also how fair and disinterested was his proposal. "Abram

said unto Lot Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me, if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." When we consider the dignity and power of Abraham—his seniority in relation to Lot—his consequent right to assume a more paternal and commanding tone toward his nephew—we cannot fail to see the affection and amiability of his character. Indeed it is evident that he was a humble minded man. Worldly riches and blessings had not affected the simplicity of his disposition. He did not clamour for his rights, or take upon himself to decide who had the greatest claim on the wells or pasture; much less did he throw the blame of the strife upon Lot or any of his household. He did not ask for any arbitration, nor wait to hear what his nephew might propose, but quietly and kindly strikes the balance of the matter by offering himself to take the *second choice*, provided Lot were willing to choose *first* for himself, whichever part of the country seemed most desirable: "if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go the left."

Such a proposal was, certainly, a manifest condescension on the part of Abraham; but it shows that his mind was raised above all petty considerations and that he valued peace and harmony far above personal interests. What a noble example there is here to christians in the settlement of ordinary disputes! If people would only remember and act upon our blessed Saviour's Golden Rule, laid down in the 7th chapter of St. Matthew and the 12th verse—"whatsoever ye would that men should do to you do ye even so to them"—we should see many more *practical proofs* of the beatitude—"blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." (Matthew. 5 c. 9 v.)

I think moreover, we may trace in this transaction, a desire on the part of Abraham, to avoid giving an occasion to the in-

habitants of that land—the Canaanite and the Perizzite—for reproaching and reflecting upon the behaviour of those who professed a holier religion than those idolaters. Doubtless those people would have rejoiced at any quarrel between Abraham and Lot, and would have been only too glad to take advantage of it to the injury of the patriarch and his nephew. It would be well, my brethren, if christians in the present day would be as prudent in their general conduct and reflect upon the influence their behaviour may have on those around them. If persons “professing godliness,” would only consider how ready their less scrupulous neighbours are to reflect on their conduct, when it appears at all inconsistent, and how the godless always exult when they chance to witness anything like enmity or variance between professing christians; many a quarrel would be avoided and many a dispute amicably settled. If people would only bring their religious principles more into practice in their ordinary dealings between man and man; christian society would become far more harmonious and agreeable. The injunction of St. Paul in Philippians 2nd chap. 14th verse—“do *all things* without murmurings and disputings”—is not sufficiently heeded in the present day. Neither do people, generally, reflect on Solomon’s assertion and advice in Proverbs 17 c. 14 v.—“the beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.”

The affectionate disposition of Abraham towards Lot, is not only to be seen in his kindly offer respecting the division of the land; but also (and in a very eminent degree) in the next chapter; where we read that in consequence of a war breaking out amongst the kings of the neighbouring cities,—four kings against five—Lot and his family fell into the hands of the conquerors, “and when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them”—that is, those who had carried off Lot.—We are then informed of Abraham’s success, and that he “brought back” not only “all the goods” but Lot also and all his household. (Genesis 14 c. 14, 15, 16 v.). No stronger proof

of his regard for Lot could be given than this. Abraham, at much inconvenience and great risk, acts the part of a true friend in time of need. This shows that he was not a selfish man, but that he had the interest of his relative at heart. Had Lot been his own son, he could not have shown greater affection for him; nor could he have manifested more brave and noble conduct.

It would be well if all persons who are connected by the ties of actual relationship could be found to exercise similar proofs of kindness and good-will in times of necessity or difficulty. The spirit of the world is too selfish and cold hearted. People, generally, seem too much absorbed in their own *personal* welfare to care much about the circumstances of others. If, however, this spirit served as a check, in any way, on *idle interference* in other peoples' business, it would not be without some beneficial result; but I do not think that this is the case generally speaking. It too often happens that those who are most selfish and cold hearted are, at the same time, the greatest busybodies in other mens' matters; but only for the purpose of taking advantage thereby, in some way or other, and not with a view to be of service to their neighbours and friends.

It certainly is most lamentable that the so-called christianity of some people is sadly below the standard of that sympathy and affection which we see manifested in the simple and kindly manners of the patriarchs; who, without having received any special commands and without any illustrious examples, may yet teach christians their duties towards their neighbours; even after all the teaching and example of our Great Pattern and Divine Instructor, Jesus Christ! But, my brethren, this "ought not so to be." We, as christians, ought to be in advance even of the old Testament worthies, as regards the manifestation of domestic virtues. We profess to be followers of Him, who has not only given us noble and self denying precepts, but who has set before our eyes, in His own spotless history, practical examples and illustrations as to the manner in which we should deport ourselves in

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every relation of life. Such divine instances and encouragements the old Testament Saints had not so clearly defined and developed in their day. They could not take up the four gospels, as we can, and behold "God manifest in the flesh" preaching the most noble and glorious truths: teaching, as well by beautiful examples as by self-subduing precepts, the God-like spirit of kindness, forbearance, longsuffering, forgiveness and fellow-sympathy. Abraham had no such wondrous instance before him; therefore I think his amiable disposition is the more to be noticed and admired. His virtues appear the stronger, because he lived in an age when the true principles of nobility and philanthropy were but vaguely understood and practised.

The cultivation of a truly liberal and kind-hearted spirit is not only a positive christian duty, but also a source of much happiness and consolation to its possessor. I cannot understand what pleasure those persons enjoy who are naturally mean and selfish; such as rarely, or never, do a kind action; and if they do, will expect some great return for it, and feel annoyed if their apparent kindness is not sufficiently remembered and appreciated. I never can conceive what happiness or comfort people have, who are narrow-minded and disagreeable; who are always complaining and grumbling; ever brooding over some fancied slight or injury; never satisfied unless they can have their own way in everything; never contented except they have all their fancied wants supplied without delay. Such people can have very little satisfaction in the present life itself, being nearly always out of humour; and, as for life eternal in heaven, such a disposition would be sadly out of place there. On the other hand, how happy and contented, notwithstanding all the trials of this world, are those genial spirits who, like Abraham, place their whole trust in God, and study always to have a conscience void of offence towards men—those who show that they love Christ by loving their brethren! Such persons are worthy of all admiration; they are truly the "salt of the earth." To them the present pilgrimage of life, though attended with many crosses, is yet sweetened and sanctified by a constant

imitation of that lovely and heavenly disposition which was so conspicuous in that Divine Master whom they seek to serve and obey. Such characters, like that of Abraham, must command our respect in every walk of life; as also they are bright examples for us to follow.

Bear in mind, brethren, that it is the duty of every believer to cultivate *all* the christian graces and virtues. He who would aim at perfection must not be satisfied with his present attainments in the path of holiness—he must be “still achieving, still pursuing;” or, as St. Paul expresses it in *Phillippians* 3rd c. 12th v. :—“not as though I had already attained; either were already perfect;—but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.” And, to effect this, who does not see what constant untiring efforts are necessary in order that *all* our actions may be fully adjusted, by the holy and exalted standard of Christ's everlasting gospel! In conclusion, let the teaching of St. Peter admonish you as to the work to be done. In his 2nd epistle, 1st c. 4th v. he speaks of such as “having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust,” and urges them further to “add” to their “faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness *brotherly kindness*; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

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LECTURE THE FOURTH.

Genesis 18th chap. 17, 18, 19 verses. "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

In the four preceding chapters, many important events in the history of Abraham are recorded. As, for instance, the visit of that mysterious personage called "Melchizedek king of Salem," "priest of the most High God," who met Abraham after his return from the rescue of Lot, and to whom Abraham gave the tenth part of his spoils. And the promise renewed by God, respecting Abraham's posterity, was more clearly and definitely set forth, by the positive assurance that Sarah, his wife, should have a son. The bondage of Israel in Egypt was also foretold by the Almighty. Then there is the narrative of Hagar and Ishmael and the institution of the rite of circumcision. All these subjects contain many useful reflections on the character of Abraham, and their consideration would be interesting and instructive if taken singly; but for the present purpose, I think we may find a full and fair analysis, of the patriarch's conduct through all these affairs, in the words of the scripture which I have selected for the head of this discourse.

The occasion on which the Almighty was pleased to confide in Abraham His great designs and purposes, was when the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrha had become so awfully great, as to call down Divine vengeance upon the inhabitants of those guilty cities. Abraham dwelt at that time in the neighbourhood of these places, and had their destruction occurred without any intimation being given to him beforehand, the shock would have been more awful than it actually was. But it pleased God to make His will known to His servant Abraham, in this matter; though, the effect thereof.

could make no *material difference* to him. God's promises to Abraham were beyond the influence of any event that might happen to others. It was not, therefore, because it was *absolutely necessary*, for the furtherance of Divine purposes, that the awful judgments against the cities of the plain were previously made known to Abraham, but as an honour and reward for his general piety and upright conduct. He had passed through so many trials in which he had acquitted himself honorably, that God was pleased to give him a further proof of intimacy and friendship by making him acquainted with matters which did not actually concern him. In this we may see, I think, a type of that fellowship which exists between every true believer and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Not, indeed, that the believer is permitted, in the present world, to have a full insight into all God's dealings with mankind; for that is unnecessary under the clearer light of the gospel: but forasmuch as the true christian is prepared, by faith and experience, to place his whole trust in God, through Christ Jesus, so he is never taken by surprise by any events or circumstances in which the power and providence of God are developed. Though mere worldlings may be startled, the disciple of Jesus feels as calm and secure as if he were actually leaning upon the breast of his Almighty Friend and Saviour. And this is just what the Bible asserts respecting those who, like Abraham, have learned to love and fear God. In the 25th Psalm and the 14th verse we read that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant," and in the 3rd chapter of the prophet Amos and the 7th verse we read, "surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." Although the primary meaning here, refers to a former dispensation; yet, in the main, its truth is fulfilled in that confidence which exists between the true believer and Christ Jesus. Indeed our Blessed Lord himself declares this truth in the 15th chapter of St. John and the 15th verse where He assures His disciples of a bond of intimacy between Him and them not to be misunderstood— "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant know-

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It was, then, a mark or proof of Divine favour towards Abraham in that he was made acquainted with God's purposes concerning Sodom and Gomorrha. The Almighty had proved him by many dispensations, and the result promised well for future integrity and piety of the patriarch. He who had so faithfully obeyed the commands of his God, during his past career, was not likely to renounce his allegiance towards the end of his days, much less neglect to train up his family in "the way of the Lord." Doubtless there was something peculiarly promising in the character of Abraham, for the development of piety and virtue, or he would not have been chosen as the founder of a family and race amongst which true religion was to become a prominent feature. God foresaw that Abraham would prove worthy of the trust reposed in him, by not only becoming an illustrious example of piety and uprightness, but also a teacher and commander of virtue amongst his children and household. No higher praise could be awarded to any man than this "*for I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.*" Such is the Divine testimony respecting Abraham's principles, and happy would it be if the same could be asserted, more generally, of those to whom God has given the care of children.

The duty of parents towards their offspring appears to be most sadly and shamefully neglected in the present day. There are few, even amongst professing Christians, who recognize and perform this solemn and important duty as Abraham did. Some parents seem to think that all God requires, of them is to provide for and maintain their children—send them to school and place them in the way of learning some useful employment. Such persons too often imagine that after their sons and daughters have advanced somewhat beyond the age of childhood, the strictness of parental authority and

watchfulness may be relaxed or withdrawn. Such at least appears to me to be the case in this colony, to a very great extent; and what is the result? Numbers of young people grow up careless, bold and head-strong—"without natural affection"—and worse, *vicious and depraved!* It has been my sad experience too often, during my comparatively brief ministry, to witness the lamentable results of indifference in the bringing up of children. Many times have I had occasion to rebuke sharply the young of both sexes for immorality and licentious conduct. Surely, in such cases, it is quite reasonable to suppose that home discipline has been but little enforced; that prudent watchfulness has been too much neglected by those whose duty it is, not only to set a good example themselves, but also to "*command*" their "*children*" and their "*household*" that "*they shall keep the way of the Lord!*"

A very heavy responsibility rests upon every Christian parent and woe to such as wilfully or carelessly neglect to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord!" It is not sufficient that you profess religion and shun vice yourselves: you must regularly and constantly aim to influence and control your families in whatever is right, pure and good, if you would avoid the censure and displeasure of God. Witness this in the remarkable case of Eli the high priest, recorded in the second and third chapters of the first book of Samuel. Eli himself led a pious and exemplary life; yet he failed in his duty towards his children; being contented with merely administering a very mild rebuke, when he ought to have punished his sons severely: for neglecting which, the Lord visited him with an awful proof of divine displeasure. In the 13th verse of the 3rd chapter we read "I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." What a contrast, my brethren, between the character of Eli and that of Abraham, respecting parental duties! Let these two examples be ever before you: the one as a warning, the other as an encouragement to do your duty towards your children with firmness and faithfulness. Remember the injunction and assurance of

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Solomon in Proverbs 22nd c. 6th v. "train up a child in the way he should go : and when he is old, he will not depart from it." I have often heard parents regret that their children grow up wayward and self-willed; and no wonder if they are not correctly trained. Unless they are educated upon Bible principles it will be useless to expect that they will become otherwise than unruly and obstinate. What a blessing, both to parents and children, it would be if the former were more exact in *commanding* the obedience of their offspring to the law of God ! And this may be done as well now as in the days of Abraham. What hinders ? Some people say "what is the use of commanding obedience when children will not obey ?" I answer, your duty both to them and to God, requires you to do so : and you are responsible for no more than the *faithful* discharge of your duty. Abraham is not commended because of his childrens' obedience, but because God foresaw that he would be sufficiently firm and faithful in the direction of his commands,—“ I know him, that *he will command* his children and his household.”

I have not, as yet, said anything respecting the regulation of Abraham's "household"; because, if people neglect to train their children rightly, it is hopeless to suppose that they will interest themselves in the welfare of their dependants. Yet it seems clear that Abraham not only commanded his children, but also "*his household*"; which, I think, implies *all over* whom he had personal influence. Many of you, my brethren, have in your families servants and dependants, over whom you necessarily exercise power and authority; you expect them to be obedient to your commands in all matters pertaining to a domestic and business nature; but do you sufficiently reflect on the fact, that your duty to them is but *partially performed* unless you endeavour, not only to set them the example of a Godly life, but also make use of every opportunity to commend to them the duties of religion and "the way of the Lord ?"

It certainly is the duty of every master, mistress, or head of a family, to command the household to abstain, at least,

from open vice and misconduct ; and to require a regular attendance at the house of God and family prayer.

At this point in the patriarch's history, we ought not to overlook that beautiful and affecting instance of his intercession on behalf of the guilty city of Sodom, where his nephew Lot was dwelling. The earnestness with which Abraham pleaded for those vile sinners, is a bright and beautiful trait in his character. How like a truly Christian spirit was this ! A believer, instructed in all the principles of the New Testament, in addition to the precepts of the Old, could scarcely display a more noble and sublime disposition. Abraham was importunate in pleading for others. Some Christians are not half so earnest in prayer for themselves ; and are little more than formal, perhaps, when they supplicate for the poor, the helpless, the benighted and the wandering !

From this feature alone, in the character we are considering, what practical lessons are suggested to every thoughtful mind ! Amidst all our advantages and privileges ; notwithstanding the enlightened age in which we live ; Abraham is still a wonderful instructor. " He being dead yet speaketh." May you, my brethren, learn from his pious example to maintain true holiness in yourselves and in your respective families, and may you increase in earnestness, watchfulness and prayerfulness until you become completely imbued with the spirit of true charity, which is the spirit of God !



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LECTURE THE FIFTH.

Genesis 22nd chap. 1st and 2nd v. "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

In this chapter is recorded the greatest of all the trials to which Abraham was exposed; and no part of his eventful career displays his character more strikingly, in reference to faith and obedience. The narrative here is most touching: an affectionate father is commanded by God to sacrifice an only and beloved son; yet for the promise of that very son, the father had patiently abided through a long course of years—endured many trials and difficulties—and had been encouraged to do so, by the assurance that his son should be the means of perpetuating his name and race. Now that parent is required to yield his promised son to the decree of Omnipotence—a decree, the very nature of which is sufficient to shake the courage of the bravest heart, and perplex the most exalted mind. What parent, however void of natural affection; what mortal, however callous, could remain unmoved and indifferent to such a command! Yet it does not appear to have taken Abraham altogether by surprise; neither did he repine because he was told to perform an unnatural action. And why? Because he was now a man of wonderful experience in the ways of God. He had learned many a lesson in faith ere this. He knew "whom" he had "believed." He had gained that high standard of confidence in a Heavenly Father's will, which makes the child of God trust where he cannot trace, Divine purposes—that confidence which knows no fear but calmly resigns life, reason, position—all things, into the merciful hands of Jehovah. Abraham was now in a position to reflect profitably on past events. He could reason with himself somewhat after the following manner:—"I have been long in the service of my God and I

have ever found His covenant ordered in all things and sure." His providence has always been directed by supreme wisdom and though I have had to encounter many trials, while following and obeying the dictates of that providence, still I have proved that the ways of my God are "just and true" nor can I, upon calm reflection, doubt that the present severe and heart-rending trial will prove otherwise, in the end, than a "blessing in disguise." One thing I know, it *must be necessary* for the furtherance of God's purposes, or He would never require *such a sacrifice* at my hands. God is far too kind and good to "afflict willingly"; therefore "I will trust, and not be afraid."

"He who hath helped me hitherto,
Will help me all my journey through."

Some such ideas as these must have occurred to the mind of Abraham, ere he felt ready and willing to "take" his "only son into the land of Moriah," to offer him there for a burnt offering; unless we assume that the patriarch was not susceptible to the feelings of our common nature; which would be a strange, and far from truthful, theory. Doubtless both he and Sarah his wife felt as keenly as we do, those anxieties and fears which are inseparable from thoughts of danger and death, where children are concerned. We know not, indeed, the actual state of their feelings under such a peculiar trial; but this we may, I think, safely conclude, that *both* were now so well schooled in the ways of the Almighty, as to be able to "endure hardness" and maintain steadfastness through the "cloudy and dark day." And here it is we behold the great triumph of faith. It is not at all likely, in the very nature of things, that Abraham would, at the commencement of his eventful career, have been prepared to undergo such an ordeal as that under consideration. Human nature would, perhaps, have rebelled, sadly at an earlier stage in his history. Though trials of a less searching nature—yet great in themselves—found the patriarch equal to the occasion, as we have already seen; yet such a startling command as this—"take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offer-

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ing"—required infinitely more faith and resignation than Abraham had previously exercised. Compared with that faith which this extraordinary trial rendered necessary, all former illustrations were but experiments—mere rays of that clear noon-day sunshine of implicit and holy confidence which he now exhibited.

But, by what process did he become possessed of this exalted and radiant faith? By continually exercising himself in the will of God. By expanding his trust in Almighty Wisdom, in proportion to the development of that providence by which he was so willingly led. Abraham had gradually and imperceptibly to himself, arrived at this glorious triumph of faith over human feelings and frailties. What then does this teach? That the spiritual life is *progressive* in its nature—that the true strength of faith is acquired only by the experience of trials—that the christian ought to become *more courageous* after each successive trial.

There is, however, one point in particular to which I would call your attention by way of profitably considering this important part of the history and character of Abraham; namely, that while Abraham could so *readily and unfeignedly* resign himself to the command of God, in a matter *so heart-rending in its nature*; many christians, eminent for piety, often show *great reluctance* when required to yield some *similar object* of affection to the Divine Will.

Christian faith is often greatly deficient when compared with that which characterized the patriarchal age; and, notwithstanding all the noble illustrations and examples which are set before us in Holy Scripture, and all those brilliant instances of devotion and sacrifice with which we are furnished in the lives of the ancient martyrs, there is too little in the present day to indicate the existence of a truly exalted standard of christian faith. Those who should be, "living epistles" of enduring piety, have been found to waste their zeal and learning in raising futile objections against the fundamental principles of our holy religion. Instead of studying the history of the Old Testament worthies, for the

purpose of imitation ; some in these "latter times," appear to have read the scriptures rather to cavil at their simplicity, and thus undermine and unsettle the faith of those to whom they should be both patterns and guides.

Let however, the humble believer learn the lesson which is set before him in Abraham's wonderful and willing compliance with the decree of God. This is the important point to be enquired into ; with all minor details we have nothing whatever to do. You are to observe, my brethren, that Abraham's obedience was not a *constrained and reluctant affair*, but a *perfectly willing submission* to the command of God. The whole narrative proves this. Abraham appears throughout perfectly calm and collected. Whatever might have been his first impressions, when summoned to hear the dread mandate, he did not retract from the prompt reply "here I am"; but, on the contrary, "rose up *early in the morning*" to fulfil the terrible task assigned him. Some would have *delayed*, as long as possible, a journey so mournful and affecting; many would have *begged for time to consider*, or, at least, to prepare their minds for such an awful sacrifice ; but Abraham, like a brave and loyal soldier, stood ready for the post of duty, albeit that duty was inevitably surrounded with suffering and death ! We can form no idea as to what conflicting thoughts passed in his mind, during those three momentous days which intervened, ere he arrived at the fearful altar ! If we were to give vent to imagination, what tragic effect might be produced from this touching narrative ! Who can tell the various feelings with which Abraham poured forth his supplications, during that trying journey, accompanied by alternate thoughts of hope and fear ! However that may have been, certain it is that he pursued his course, and every advance he made was a step in the path of a most arduous duty.

Contrast this example of Abraham with the many instances wherein christian parents are required to resign, in a *natural way*, a beloved child (though not always, as in Abraham's case, an "only son") into the hands of its creator ; and you will perceive, my brethren, how little *real fortitude* is mani-

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fested, even where we are apt to think the most humble submission exists. Many a parent has been known to receive a death shock in consequence of losing (as we term it) a fondly loved child! Many a hearth has been made gloomy and desolate for years, merely because it has pleased God, in mercy, to take "away from the evil to come" some promising bud which, to earthly minds, seemed teeming with every virtue! Even if we closely examine those cases wherein we find bereaved parents bowing with meekness to the will of God—exclaiming, with all sincerity, "It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good"—we shall yet discover that the *force of circumstances*, rather than "a *willing mind*," has produced the spirit of obedience.

Of course the world is not without its many instances of heroic sacrifice and devotion to noble causes; but these have, usually, been effected for glory and renown—prompted by some hidden motive, quite different from that which the true christian must possess, in order that he may "present" a "living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." In the instance under consideration, no motive was assigned by the Almighty for such a tremendous sacrifice; and while there was every *natural reason*, why Abraham should shrink from it, there was but one, which could prompt its performance, namely—*obedience to God*. But a *forced* obedience can never be ranked with such an instance as that of Abraham being willing to offer up Isaac. A man may submit to God's providence, when the object of earthly affection has been *actually taken away*; but, to be willing *beforehand* to relinquish natural desires in deference to God's purposes, while yet a hope exists that the trial may be averted—this is a point in the spiritual life which is attained by comparatively few. The best of men, perhaps, are only able to follow the example of David, and become reconciled to the will of God, only when all hope of the child's recovery has been taken away (see 2 Samuel 12 c. 16 v. &c.) In Abraham, however, we behold the brightest feature of resignation. He was not only willing to sacrifice his son, but also ready, at God's command, to be the instru-

ment of effecting his death. Some would have pleaded hard to be spared this part of the trial, and would have considered the sacrifice sufficiently dreadful in being required to yield *such* a victim; but Abraham stipulated for no conditions. When once he knew what was demanded, he immediately endeavoured to comply: What a noble lesson this, for many a christian parent, when called upon to stand at the bedside of a beloved child and soothe the anguish of the dying hour! My brethren, if ever that trial falls to your lot, let this case of the patriarch afford you fortitude and courage. *Your* case, dreadful as it may prove, will never be what *his* must have become, had he actually been permitted to slay his son "for a burnt offering." And yet, when he set out for "the land of Moriah," he had to prepare his mind to witness the awful death-throes of his beloved son—that promising youth, whose life he doubtless expected would be spared to comfort his declining years! Severe as the trial must be, to watch the sufferings of those we love, yet how much more so would it have been the case with Abraham, who knew that the dying pains and struggles of his only son were to be caused by his own—a *father's*—hand!

No greater test was required to prove the sincerity of Abraham's faith. He passed that dread ordeal so nobly, that he at once received the commendation of his God. "And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." (Gen. 22 c. 11 12 v.)

And here, I think, we may very properly close this interesting subject; for in this, the most affecting part of the patriarch's history, we have his full character beautifully displayed. Would that his noble disposition were more often emulated! What advances in true faith and piety would be constantly effected, if christians aimed at living as near to God as did Abraham! He was always ready to obey his

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Lord's commands—ever seeking the path of duty and walking therein with meekness and perseverance. Like him then brethren, may you aim to bear true allegiance to the "King of Kings." May you "press toward the mark," as earnestly as he did, until you obtain "the prize" of your "high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Remember that it was "after he had *patiently endured*," that "he *obtained* the promise,"; and all who desire to be "blessed with faithful Abraham"; must constantly strive, "watch and pray" that they may "be accounted worthy to obtain that world" of everlasting joy where "the Lord of hosts shall be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people."

"O happy servant he,
In such a posture found!
He shall his Lord with rapture see
And be with honour crown'd.

"Christ shall the banquet spread
With His own royal hand,
And raise that faithful servant's head
Amid the angelic band."

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