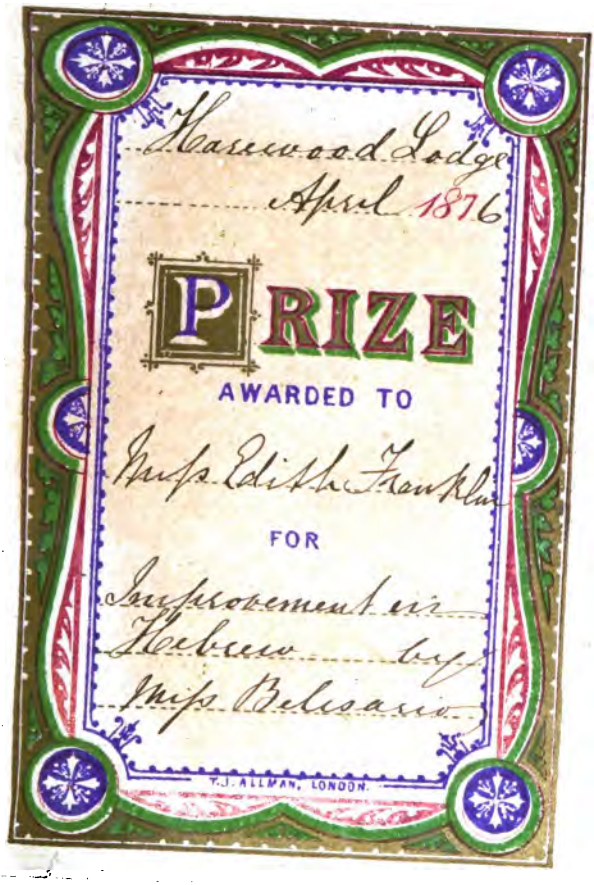
Harewood Lodge
April 1876
PRIZE
AWARDED TO
Miss Edith Franklin
FOR
Improvement in
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SABBATH STORIES

FROM

THE PENTATEUCH.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

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A New Year's Gift

FOR

BIRDIE.

SEPT., 5634—1873.

THESE Papers originally appeared in the "JEWISH CHRONICLE, and are now, by the kind permission of the Editor, republished in a collected form. Their publication, week by week, entailed often somewhat hasty writing; but the Author has done what was possible in the way of revision, and hopes, that in their present shape, they will be found a welcome New Year's Gift to the little people, whose libraries are probably not overstocked with this sort of literature.

THE LESSONS OF THE LAW

OR

SABBATH STORIES FROM THE PENTATEUCH

I.

בראשית.—The Story of Creation.

Genesis i.—vi.

The story of the Creation! What a wonderful story it is—a picture painted in the simplest, and yet most enduring colours—with those few broad touches! One can see the darkness and nothingness struggling into troubled, formless light, as the Spirit of God moved serene and powerful over the waste of waters. Gradually the trees waved in the sweet new sunshine, and the just-fledged birds sang on the boughs, or waited for the pretty twinkling stars to come out and inspire them with the thousand suggestive fancies that night bears in its train. Then followed fish and fowl and creeping thing, each finding its own fit place in creation, and each in its turn pronounced by its Maker "good." And at the last, when all was ready to make this newly given life a wonderfully blessed and happy possession, came the Man, who was to find out its use and enjoyment. With his body formed of perishable earth, and his soul instinct

with the immortality and purity of its Giver, we can understand the vague yearnings and unsatisfied longings to which, in his lonely musings, Eden even soon ceased to be a Paradise. God knew and understood; and gave him a companion, who, by sympathizing with all his joys and sorrows, and often, even through her silent, gracious presence suggesting better thoughts, should become in very truth a "helpmate" to him.

Hand in hand Adam and Eve must have often wandered in those quiet glades of Paradise, finding a new meaning in the birds' songs—a diviner melody now that their own hearts gave the keynote. We can fancy them, too, walking on and on where each animal they met was more or less a known and familiar friend—a friend who was grateful for notice and quick to understand—like all dumb animals are now-a-days, when people pet them and are kind to them.

It seems like a fairy story—one can believe at any rate that all fairy stories of happy people have been imagined from this record of the lives of our first parents; and one would willingly linger at this part, and not speak of the sin and sorrow that so soon came to change it all. We can picture to our minds Eve passing that fatal tree in her daily walks; and each day, perhaps, lingering a little longer, and wondering more and more what sort of knowledge the simple eating of that innocent-looking fruit would bring. We can imagine how serpent-like her thoughts clung and twisted, and twined themselves ever more closely round each drooping bough, till, in the end, she plucked and ate, half persuading herself that knowledge

must be good in itself, and that now she would be a more fitting companion for her lord. I don't think she sinned for the sake of sin, or even altogether from greediness or curiosity; but from that perilous dallying with wrong-doing — that justifying of means for the sake of the end for which the Bible injunction as to evil,—"Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away," is the only safe course out of temptation. So she ate, and incurred the penalty; and Adam, out of his love for her, not willing that she should sin and suffer alone, ate also; and in the evening,—when the Voice was heard—instead of springing forward to enjoy the sweet sunset hour of converse with their God, they fled affrighted from His justly-offended presence. So they were driven out of their Paradise, and set to earn and deserve, and work for, a Heaven.

Soon little children came to comfort them; and in her babies' smiles Eve must have been consoled for her lost Eden. But, as the boys grew up, new troubles arose; and Cain's jealousy of the love his brother's gentle disposition gained, must have caused frequent uneasiness before it broke forth in the ungovernable passion which stamped him for all time as the first murderer.

Small beginnings again. For I daresay Cain as little dreamt when he played with his young brother, and perhaps grew childishly angry when his mother gave the little one an extra kiss, that his baby hand would one day become stained with that brother's blood, as his mother could have thought of all the trouble that would follow her stretching out her hand for that much-coveted fruit.

* Prov. iv. 15.

But all sorrows bear a consolation as well as a meaning. Eve may have found hers in her husband's love, and in the thought that even in the waste wilderness, they had neither enjoyed nor suffered alone; and to us the meaning is very clear. The glimpse of an unearthly, unearned, unprized Paradise, which these early chapters in Genesis present, suggests to us thoughts of that other Paradise, which is imperishable, whose beauties "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard;" where the flowers never fade, and all tears change into rainbows as they fall—the Paradise we call Heaven, which we mean to work for, and which once gained we can never lose.

II.

מ.—The Story of the Deluge.

Genesis vi., xi.

As men and women began to people the fair earth, sin and sorrow, as well as love and happiness, came in their train; and the women of that time were not good and pure, or they might have made things better. Instead of that, their bodies only, and not their souls, were "fair," and so they corrupted the good men, "Sons of God," as the Bible calls them, who took them for wives. Thus, the whole beautiful world grew more and more sinful; till the kind, good God looked down with grief, seeing what wreck mankind had made of His perfect work. So wicked had it all become, that in all that erring generation, doomed to pass away—leaving no trace save the warning of their fate—there was but one family deemed worthy to be saved.

Noah must have been very good; for the goodness which can stand firm in the midst of sin, braving its ridicule as well as its temptation, is of a very high order. He "walked with God," and so we can undertand his never stumbling. It was not till the people had had for six hundred years the unheeded example of his life, to turn them from their evil ways, that God's justice determined that time enough had been given for their reformation; and the windows of heaven were opened, and a forty days' continuous rain poured upon the earth, that its impurities might be washed away. On what a

changed world must the eyes of Noah and his family have rested when "he opened the window of the ark that he had made!" Very considerately had the Lord shut him in, that those dreadful scenes of dying, and of struggling life—life mis-used, mis-spent and yet so dearly prized, should not pain his vision, as they must often and often have haunted his imagination.

Most painful, perhaps, in all that sad time must have been the moans of the poor drowning animals. Were it not that our doubts and questions are quieted by knowing that "God's ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts," we might be troubled at the thought of so much innocent suffering; but these words prevent us from presuming, out of mistaken feeling, to judge of God's doings by the standard of our own actions.

In an illustrated Bible, I have seen a wonderfully pathetic picture, shewing what may have been an incident of the flood.—There was a bare rock standing out on the waste of waters, and on it desperate, drowning figures, struggling for the chance of momentarily prolonging life. On the top crouches a tiger, holding up her cub, unmindful of the instinct of hunger, which could be so soon and horribly satisfied, in the stronger and no less natural instinct of affection. It is a nobly suggestive picture.

Well, the waters rolled back in time, and left a world cleansed alike of sin and sinners; and a very sad and solitary world it must have looked to the eight people who formed its population. Noah's first act was wisely as well as piously conceived. Sad as it all was, they could not have felt quite so lonely and desolate as the incense

from their altar went up to Heaven, and words of trust and worship first broke the stillness of those solitudes. Then came the answering blessing and gracious promise, and the beautiful bright-coloured rainbow, as an encouraging sign of the everlasting covenant. One can fancy that little family, so wonderfully preserved, who had been actually face to face with death, gazing up into the clouds; and so gaining hope and courage for their mission to renew and replenish and reform the world. There seems a special fitness in the selection of the rainbow as a token of trust. Not formed wholly from light, so that it should seem to disregard and almost mock our trouble as the sunshine does, but springing from the storm-cloud's breast, and shining after tears, and almost out of tears, it seems a good augury for the often-dimmed eyes, which look up, as these first eyes must have done, through a mist of sorrow and loneliness.

It appears strange that a generation or two later, a doubt of God's promise should have grown strong enough to induce men to build a tower of defence against another possible flood. Fancy, a tower of defence against God! His knowledge made Him merciful to that form of unbelief that is born of ignorance, and they were punished only by a sudden confusion of tongues falling on them. In their despair, they ceased from their presumptuous work, and were scattered widely abroad. Those who spoke the same language naturally went together, and in the several communities thus gradually formed we see the origin of the differing dialects which are spoken in different parts of the world.

III.

לך לך.—The Story of Abram and Sarai.

Genesis xi.—xvii.

The world had grown in numbers since the time of the Flood: and one day the word of the Lord sounded in a remote corner of the earth called Haran, desiring a man, named Abram, to leave home, friends and country, and to follow whither the Lord would lead. Unquestioningly and trustingly, he obeyed; and in this ready obedience he showed a nature ready to receive a religion, in which faith is an element, though not the sole essential. Reared among idolators, he moved among them, but was not one of them; and when the voice came, he, who had communed with it so often, recognised its tones, and was prepared, not only to believe in, but to act up to, its teachings.

Not altogether alone in his wanderings, but accompanied by his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot, he journeyed on and on, from place to place, leaving altars as landmarks. And at last, grown rich, both from industry and regal presents, encamping on a plain between Bethel and Ai, a quarrel arose between his and his nephew's servants, concerning the accommodation for their flocks and herds; and the masters were called on to settle it. Very characteristically did Abram act. He saw at a glance that their vast possessions no longer

left them space to dwell together in peace; and under any other conditions he would not dwell. His first words showed how he intended to act: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee," he says at once to his nephew — hot-headed and impatient, as young people are apt to be; and since the most effectual means of stopping a quarrel is for one to give way, he, the elder, took this wise and dignified course—so much wiser and more truly dignified than the obstinate holding out which is falsely called standing on one's dignity. The whole land was before them where to fix on a new and more spacious dwelling, and Abram unselfishly gave Lot the choice. Caught by appearances, noting only that the plain of Jordan looked fruitful and well watered, not waiting to ask the character of the inhabitants, Lot took advantage of Abram's generosity, and chose what seemed to him the best.

When, a little time later, in one of the raids which those uncivilized tribes often made on each other, Lot was taken prisoner, Abram lost no time nor pains in rescuing his nephew, who, as far as we can judge from the scanty incidents the sacred record gives us of his life, does not seem to have been worthy of his uncle's kindness.

Again, after this incident, and for the third time, God renewed His promise of protection and blessing to His faithful servant; adding to it now, the special hope that in him and his descendants, who should become numerous as the stars of heaven, all future ages should be blessed. You will remember that at the time this promise was made Abram was an old and childless man,

and as he listened gratefully to God's words, neither questioning nor doubting their truth, but believing in them from the simple fact that it was God who spoke, we can understand that God loved him for this simple child-like trust, and "accounted it to him for righteousness." Sarai, his wife, had less of this instinct of faith; for, when a little later, she overheard the angel's promise, she laughed—a disappointed unbelieving, sad, little laugh it must have been—and very reassuring was the gentle reproach of the answer, "Is anything impossible for the Lord?"

Thirteen years before the promise was fulfilled, Abram had had a little son, whose mother's name was Hagar, and whom poor jealous Sarai, with a jealousy that was very natural and womanlike, had never half loved. Abram, however, did not forget the claims of his first-born, not even in the first flush of joy which he felt when listening to God's gracious promise, that was to be fulfilled in Isaac. Nor when he heard that his own name and his wife's name would afterwards, in that glorious future which God had shown him, be changed into another name that should have a fuller and a deeper meaning, did Abram forget his little Ishmael; but with a constancy to old affections which is ever beautiful, he entreated the Lord, on behalf of his firstborn, who was thus to be superseded, and said, "Oh! that Ishmael, too, might live before Thee." God promised this, but distinctly repeated that His covenant was to be established with Isaac and Isaac's descendants.

IV.

וירא.—Continuation of the Life of Abraham.

Genesis xviii.—xxiii.

As Abraham* was one day sitting at the door of his tent, half thinking, half dreaming perhaps, of that great joy which was so soon to come into and colour his possibly once dreaded grey old age, the Lord appeared to him, and told him of the destruction that was soon to overtake the doomed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah—the cities, if you remember, of the plain where Lot had pitched his dwelling. It was a message of sin and sorrow which broke in thus suddenly on Abraham's thoughts, as we find him sitting in that calm still scene, brightened by the rays of the sinking sun, so peaceful and so happy, and now and then exchanging a word with the loved old wife, who within the tent, according to the custom in those days, was busily superintending household matters. Very nobly does Abraham's character come out at this juncture.

A French philosopher has written that there is "something not absolutely displeasing to us in the misfortunes of our friends;" and without altogether accepting this

* Both Abram and Sarai's names were now changed, the שָׂרַי my princess, was now שָׂרָה, the princess; and אַבְרָם father of a people was אַבְרָהָם, father of many people.

unamiable axiom—too many of us, I'm afraid, do at any rate hear of our neighbours' troubles, with something very like indifference. Instead of showing unconcern, or what is even worse a half concealed satisfaction and pride in not "being as these are," we find Abraham genuinely sorry, heartily, earnestly entreating God to pardon the guilt which he was not even quick to believe in. Argument after argument he urged for the doomed cities, till the gracious God acceded to his request—that if ten righteous men should be found within the walls, for their sakes the cities should be spared. Into what a dreadful state of sin they must have sunk, is suggested by the fact that these ten could not be found. Lot only and his family escaped.

Not long after this event Isaac was born; and his proud and happy mother grew more and more jealous of that other mother who had enjoyed a like blessing all those previous years. The envy of Hagar's motherhood was natural, perhaps, from the childless wife; but we can have no sympathy with the poor, petty feeling which grudged a happiness which could be now so thoroughly understood. At last Sarah's unkindness was so great that poor Hagar fled from her into the wilderness, and then lay down with her boy, as she thought, to die. But God willed otherwise, and opened the eyes, so dimmed and dulled with grief, and made them look up, through their tears, to see and believe in the possibility of the happier time that was promised. Refreshed and strengthened she went on her way; and the boy Ishmael, no longer teased and irritated into naughtiness by the partiality shown to his little brother, grew up brave and

manly, and in time married, and became the head of a wandering tribe, whose descendants we find now in the modern Arabs.

The cause of dissension thus gone from their household, Abraham and Sarah had no more welcome task than the training of their son; and when this child of their old age was beginning to reward them for all their care, and was growing tall and loveable, and promising to fulfil all their hopes, the word of God came one day, desiring Abraham to take this Isaac—this "only child whom he loved"—and offer him as a sacrifice to the God who had given him. One can hardly understand what conflicting emotions this command must have aroused in Abraham. It struck not only at the roots of his affections, but worse, at his knowledge and belief. How could he comprehend that the loving humane God, who, he knew hated heathen practices, with their horrible human offerings, could demand of him a like sacrifice? And the promise of descendants—through whom God's word should be made known—how could this come to pass, when the life that was to be the beginning of so many blessings was to be thus cut short? Questions like these must have arisen; but questions and feelings were both resolutely quelled—his faith in the living and loving God was above and beyond all such misgivings. He believed in the Lord, "whose ways are not as our ways;" and without a question or a doubt, he prepared to obey. With the gentleness and consideration, which were as much a part of his, as of all noble natures, he did not tell Sarah for what and for how long a parting she was saying "farewell" to her son; but

with the half truth of a "short journey to sacrifice to the Lord," he set out bravely and quietly on his errand. We all know the sequel of this beautiful, suggestive story. How the *proof* of trust and obedience—the readiness to give up life itself to the Giver—was all that was required; and we can understand the thankful feeling of relief with which Abraham heard the loving God gladly exclaim: "Lay not thy hand upon the lad; neither do thou anything to him; for now I know that thou fearest God, since thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only one, from me." How very thankful he must have felt that he never had doubted God!

V.

חיי שרה.—Eliezer's Mission.

Genesis xxiii.—xxv.

Spared the great grief from the dread even of which Abraham had spared her, Sarah lived a few years longer in the enjoyment of her son's as well as her husband's love; and it was not till she had reached the good old age of a hundred and twenty-seven years that Abraham was called on to lose her. The something grotesque and almost comic, which mingles so oddly with the most pathetic incidents of life, comes in at this point, when we read of the strange interview between Abraham and the sons of Heth, relative to the purchase of a field in their possession for a burial-ground. Abraham, rising up from his mourning, goes to the sons of Heth to find a fitting place of burial for his beloved dead. Ephron, who was the chosen spokesman, answers with the reverence that Abraham's position and his grief exacted, and with somewhat of ostentation, altogether rejects the idea of a purchase; and adds, "In the presence of all my people I give it thee; bury thy dead." Then Abraham courteously refuses it in this way; and Ephron replies, with an odd bargaining sort of generosity which provokes a smile—"The land is worth four hundred shekels of silver; what is that betwixt thee and me?" So the scene is concluded, as Ephron probably expected all the

time, by the money being weighed out, and the field—Cave of Machpelah—being made sure unto Abraham.

By and bye, Abraham began to think that the time was drawing near when of all his vast possessions, he should require one little corner only of this new field as a resting-place. So he called to him a servant, who, in the pleasant patriarchal custom of those days had grown old in his service, and told him of the dread which lay on him, which alone made death feared, that his son, now grown old enough to think of marrying, might perhaps choose a wife from the idolatrous families among whom they dwelt in Canaan.

We can imagine the old father and the old servant—who was almost a friend—consulting over the future of the young man, who, in different ways, must have been so dear to both, and the long, prayerful discussion which ended in the entrusting to Eliezer the difficult and delicate mission of choosing, and bringing from Abraham's own birthplace, a wife for his son. Laden with rich presents for the destined and, as yet, unknown bride Eliezer sets out, and the rest of the story reads like an Idyl.

Travelling towards Mesopotamia, in the golden Eastern sunset, he arrives at last at the gates of the city of Nahor, and there making his tired camels rest by the well, which in these hot countries formed always a prominent feature in the landscape, he offers up an earnest prayer to God for further guidance. With a simple, almost child-like, faith, which in ignorant, irreverent minds might degenerate into superstition, he prayed God for a sign that what should happen would be of His ordaining. It was such a great, such a solemn res-

ponsibility, this choosing a helpmate for a man whose future meant so much for his descendants, that we can understand in how thorough a sense he elected to "cast his burden on the Lord."

We shall see how beautifully in this case the conditional promise was fulfilled—and the "Lord sustained him." The half-uttered, half-thought prayer was, that among the maidens who should presently come to the well to water their flocks, the one who should notice his tired animals and his own travel-stained looks, and should kindly and modestly offer her service in drawing water for the old man, should be the one whom God had appointed as a wife for Isaac. And presently, in the glowing even-tide, down trooped the veiled maidens; and one steps aside, and unconsciously and courteously fulfils the first part of his hopes. Then as he sets the pitcher down, and she fills it again for the camels, he, marvelling more and more, arrays her in the betrothal gifts, sets the bracelets on her arms and the earrings in her ears, and asks her name; and she, wondering, replies that she is the granddaughter of Nahor—so you can easily see what relation to Isaac—whom Eliezer was quick to remember was Abraham's own brother. One can sympathise in the grateful impulse which made the man "bow his head and worship the Lord," ere he accepted the readily offered hospitality of the East, and followed Rebekah into her father's dwelling. Then the wonderful story had to be repeated, even from the beginning. Her father and mother, seeing God's guidance so clearly in it all, could only give a ready and reverent consent; and when Eliezer

urged them to hasten his departure, and confide the maiden to his keeping, she was called, and to their questioning simply replied, "I will go."

So with many prayers and blessings Eliezer set forth, his mission accomplished and blest beyond all hopes. And it was again in the sweet even-tide that the little cavalcade entered a field near home, and Isaac was seen walking, and, as the Bible says, "meditating;" probably on her. So she alighted from her camel, and stood half shy, half hopeful, to meet him; and the sequel of the story is as pretty as the rest, for we read he brought her into Sarah's tent, and "so was comforted after his mother's death."

VI.

תולדות.—JACOB AND ESAU.

Genesis xxv.—xxviii.

TIME went on, bringing its chances and changes, its sure alternations of happiness and sorrow; and in the birth of his little twin sons, Isaac found a consolation and new interest in life, which roused him from the grief of seeing his father laid by the side of his mother. Different in appearance and disposition, even from the cradle, these babies soon became the occasion of divided interests and affections to their parents.

Esau, a little the elder, was wild, passionate and impetuous, but withal of a loving nature. His chief delight was to pass long days in the open air, chasing the wild animals—fearless and brave, and nearly as untamed as they. In his youthful strength he seemed to possess an attraction to the father, who now somewhat failing in health fancied he saw in this bold hunter a better prop for his declining years—a surer means of transmitting the promised blessing—than in the younger, quieter, and more timid Jacob. He, with his gentle, home-like ways, was, we can understand, the

favourite in the tent, and especially of the mother, who had no daughter growing up to share and lighten her household cares; and this preference, natural perhaps to the parents at first, as they found in each child the special sort of affection they each needed, was allowed to grow and develop into a most unwise and fatal favouritism. With careful and loving training Esau's impetuosity might have been checked, and an outlet found for his over abundant energy and spirits in little loving offices for his mother; and Jacob, on the other hand, might have been encouraged to share more in his brother's sports, and so lose the narrowness to which his disposition and stay-at-home habits tended. Thus "each might have fulfilled defect in each;" but instead of this, the foolish partiality which the parents exhibited, made Jacob grow greedy and deceitful; and changed the very virtue of Esau, his courage, into recklessness. An incident in their boyhood shows this very strongly: for one day, tired and faint from hunting Esau asks of his brother a share of the pottage which the more prudent Jacob had carefully brought with him. One would fancy that Jacob would have offered it to his twin brother, without waiting to be asked, and we have small sympathy with the meanness which made a bargain out of the transaction. "Give me in return," says Jacob, "your birthright:" and Esau—hungry and weary, too tired to dispute, muttering, half in disgust, half in carelessness, "Of what use is my birthright to me if I die, as I surely must otherwise from hunger?" —sells his rights as elder son to his brother for a meal.

We may imagine that this affair did not promote better feelings between them. Time went on, and Isaac and Rebekah grew older, without growing wiser in their treatment of their sons. In those days great stress was laid on the dying blessing of a father; for besides the veneration naturally attaching to it, these patriarchs of old had a gift of prophecy, which made their last words peculiarly impressive. Knowing this, Rebekah secretly determined that when the time came for Isaac to call his sons to him to receive his dying counsels, the blessing of the elder should be secured to her darling.

Isaac had grown old now, and his sight as well as his strength was failing; and these causes which should have made it harder for Rebekah to deceive, seemed to have occurred to her as special advantages to make her plan succeed. Overhearing her husband desire Esau to go out and find in the chase such food as his delicate appetite relished, so that, having eaten, he might feel refreshed and strengthened to give the blessing, Rebekah as soon as she saw that he had gone, called her younger son to her. She told him what she had heard, and how to make use of this opportunity which she had desired "Go quickly," she says, "to your father ere Esau return, and bring him a dish of savoury food which I will prepare, and say, Here father, is the meat that thou didst ask for and lovest; give me now thy promised blessing."

Jacob does not seem half so indignant as we should like to see him. The cruel deceit, the actual theft, does not seem to shock him so much as the fear of being found out; and his reply points only to the difficulty and

the consequences of counterfeiting his brother, who was so different in appearance. But the mother solves that by dressing him in Esau's clothes, and putting hairy skins on his neck and hands; and, so arrayed, sends him into his father's presence. "Who art thou?" says the blind old man, who, with the quick instincts of old age, hears a something different from what he expects in the quiet entrance. "I am thy son, Esau," he has the wicked courage to reply; "Let my father sit and eat of my venison." The gentle answer perplexes him, the smooth accents sound unfamiliar. When Esau comes in presently, we see the contrast at once, for, quickly and impetuously he says, "Let my father arise and eat." So, unsatisfied, and yet not possibly guessing the hideous truth—that his own wife and his own son were deceiving him—the poor old father asks, "How is it thou hast found it so quickly, my son?" and treacherously, with the sure fatality which makes so many untruths necessarily follow the first, Jacob answers, "Because God brought it to me." Once more the reply sounds odd and unaccustomed to the father's ears, and he says, "Come near, that I may feel thee." We can a little fancy what Jacob's feelings must have been as he stood trembling under that anxious blind scrutiny; but at last, when the reply came, "I am," in answer to the last appeal, "Art thou indeed my very son, Esau?" the poor father could doubt no more and Esau's blessing was given.

Hardly was it finished when Esau comes in, and his brother's treachery is discovered. We can very keenly sympathise in the exceeding "loud and bitter cry" with

which Esau greets it, and begs so pitifully—careless, passionate fellow as he was—that he too might have a father's blessing—only the blessing; he did not care for anything else.

Our story for the week may well end here; but the sequel will show us how, in God's wonderful mercy, all things work out for good; and how wrong-doing, even in this world, surely brings its punishment.

VII.

וַיֵּצֵא.—JACOB AND RACHEL.

Genesis xxviii.—xxxiii.

So the blessing was obtained, and Rebekah's great desire gratified; but like most things coveted at any cost, it did not prove a blessing in possession. The things we long for blindly, and strive for recklessly, not understanding that they are in mercy withheld, are sometimes granted as if to teach us, that though it is in the nature of us all to hope and strive, yet our hopes should have somewhat of trust in them, and our striving should never hurry us into any unworthy means of gaining the desired end.

We can understand that Rebekah must have learnt something of this, in the pitiless light of experience, as she heard her elder son, in his first natural bitterness, declare he waited but for his father's death to avenge that cruel deceit. "Then will I slay my brother Jacob," that trembling mother had to hear. Her punishment was but begun; for the son for whom she had sinned and plotted she was destined never to see again. The first consequence of that falsely obtained promise of inheritance was that Jacob for twenty years became an exile from his father's home; and we can believe that Rebekah herself, with feverish haste and trembling

fingers, helped in the preparations for his departure He, too, the mother's darling, must have thought much of his changed position, and of the causes which had led to it, as he lay down by the roadside to sleep, with a hard stone for a pillow, and dreamed the dream which was mercifully sent to point to the past, to console the present, and to shape his future*

Full of good resolutions, repentant for his wrong doing, and willing to work for the forgiveness and deserve the possibilities so foreshadowed, he went on his way: and in the house of his mother's brother he met a new, and, perhaps—for he was but young—a yet stronger inducement to persevere. He loved Rachel, his cousin, directly he saw her; and for her sake was content to work without wages, serving a not very just master for seven long years. When they at last were ended, eager and loving, he sprang to claim his wife, and discovered in the closely veiled figure whom Laban brought him, not Rachel, but Leah.

We can understand the otherwise wonderful absence of reproach, the quietness with which he bore this terrible mortification and deceit at the hands of his kinsman. "Why have you dealt thus with me?" he asks. "I served for Rachel." And when the shifty excuse of the "custom of the country" was urged, he bore it without further words, and consented to serve yet another seven years for the reward. Then, indeed, he must have keenly felt what his father had experienced, and he could

* My little readers should read this dream for themselves; they will find it in the xxviii. chapter of Genesis.

see now, in clearer colours, the utter wickedness of deceit; and, remembering his own sin, he had no courage to reproach Laban with the like. He must have recognised a wonderful justice in God's dealing, which we have always to believe in, without always being able to see it quite so plainly. He went on working, leading out his sheep to pasture and bringing them to the fold at night; his great love throwing a glow over all that was commonplace and monotonous in his occupation, and making the seven long years pass as if they were "but as a few days."

We begin to grow fond of Jacob at this period of his career, and to give some of the sympathy to the patient, loving man, which we withheld from the petted, selfish boy. His love and his work gradually changed his character, and purified and strengthened him, and as we read, we begin to see how what seemed so evil, was already turning into good, and the blessing so unconsciously and unwillingly given, was in God's wise design in safer keeping than had it been bestowed on Esau, whose very generosity and impulsiveness were qualities which in his careless nature, would have rendered him untrustworthy to receive and transmit so great a charge. Six years longer Jacob remained in Laban's employ, and then grown rich, rather in despite than because of his kinsman, he took his wives, and family and possessions, and set out to return to his native country.

VIII.

וישלח.—Jacob and Esau.

Genesis xxxiii.—xxxvi.

So Jacob journeyed towards home—to the place from which, twenty years before, he had fled fearful and solitary. Now he came "bearing his sheaves with him." He had gone forth weeping; but the "seed he had borne was "precious;" he had "sown with tears," repentance, and resolution, love and endurance; now it had ripened into goodly fruit, and he was to "reap in joy." Coming into his brother's territory—that brother whose justly excited anger he fancied might be yet smouldering—he sends messengers before him, entrusting rich presents to their keeping, and courteous words of almost humble greeting, hoping that these may be accepted as peace-offerings by Esau. Then, as his wives and children, flocks and herds, are all calmly sleeping, he, restless and disturbed, leaves the quiet encampment, and comes by the roadside, in the stillness of the night, to commune with God. Very earnestly, very humbly he prays, with absolute trust and gratitude, and an almost desperate longing to be reconciled to his brother.

It is difficult, perhaps, to forgive those who have injured us; but I fancy it wants even a greater effort to feel kindly towards those whom we have injured; our

wrong doing leaves a bitter taste in our mouths, as it were, which makes the uttering of pleasant speeches difficult, and the swallowing of them well nigh impossible. Jacob prayed, as I have said; he actually wrestled in prayer; his life, indeed, for all that twenty years, in its patience and its love, had been one long act of praise to his Creator; and the vision, which ere the morning broke came to him in answer, blessed him, and so gave us, through him, the wonderfully comforting assurance of the possibility, in our own lives, of living down sin, conquering our evil passions, and, with God's help, working out our own salvation. His name was changed from יעקב, which means "cunning," to ישראל "Prince of God," and we, who inherit this beautiful name may be proud of the man who bequeathed it to us, seeing that he was not born to it, but earned it,—earned it as we may, having passed through sin and suffering to reach the goal. He would seem to have been purposely selected to teach this lessson; he, rather than any more perfectly stainless man, such as Abraham or Moses, for instance, in order that we might, in bearing his name, take courage from the story of his life, and believe that in God's boundless mercy no sinner need despair, and that repentance and the atonement of our own better lives are the only "mediators" He requires or recognises.

So, strengthened and encouraged, Jacob continues his journeying, and putting his most loved wife and her little son in the safest place, in case of a hostile attack, he halts as he sees in the distance the dim clouds of dust

which precede his brother's approach. In that moment of waiting all the past must have come vividly before him; and although prosperous now, and forgiven, the old sin must have brought its sting of remembrance, showing the Divine Justice as well as the Divine Mercy towards wrong-doing. All sins though forgiven, leave results, so that none can think things can be ever quite the same to sinners as to sinless. "I am the Lord who healeth thee," says our God; but the scar must remain, and we must not grumble if it sometimes pricks and throbs. The meeting between the brothers is very beautiful and characteristic, and once more we are compelled to have a thrill of sympathy and admiration for Esau as he embraces his brother, who addresses him as "my lord," and generously refuses his gifts, and then more generously, with a true touch of delicacy, accepts them, as Jacob urges, in token of peace and good-will.

Very strongly Jacob expresses himself; and yet we may be sure it was thoroughly meant, when he exclaims, "I have seen thy face as though it had been the face of God." We know that there is nothing more God-like, no action which stamps us more truly as having been created in God's image, than the forgiveness of injuries. Esau was wild, and rough, and careless, and had married more to please the "inclination of his eyes" than for God's service or his parents' pleasure; and yet this manner of meeting his brother endears him to us very much. They did not meet again for years, not until they came together to bury Isaac, and we can be very glad that the poor old father, before he died, had the intense happiness of knowing that his twin boys, now grown and

bearded men, stood re-united beside his bed, as in all those long dreary years between, he must have so longed, and scarcely dared to hope, might be. This was not the first nor the saddest death-bed Jacob had to witness; but a short while before Rachel, the love of his youth, his wished-for, worked-for wife, had died, giving him a little baby, whom she, poor mother, leaving the life he had made so happy for her, called, in her despair, בן אוני, "son of my sorrow," but whom the father, taking to his heart, called, with a higher trust and a loving remembrance of the dear dead wife בן־ימין, "son of the right hand."

IX.

יוֹסֵף.—JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN.

Genesis xxxviii.—xl.

IN the land of Canaan, to which his father had come a stranger, and which his descendants were to possess, Israel continued to live, seeing his twelve sons grow up around hm; but loving most those two whom Rachel had given him. Of the baby Benjamin we don't hear much yet; but Joseph, now a lad of seventeen begins to play a very important part. His father's partiality showed itself in a hundred little ways, but most quaintly and obtrusively, as it were, in a "coat of many colours," as the Bible calls it, which he lovingly made him wear. One can understand the teazing Joseph must have often had from his big brothers on account of this fantastic garment—and pets, we know, have sometimes a rather pettish way of resenting teazing—so that the father's extra love did not bring its object any extra happiness. The brothers should certainly have made some allowance for the reason of this partiality, and each one happy In his mother, should have looked kindly on this little orphan, and not have grudged him the extra love and care which was to make amends for what he had lost. was very ungenerous of them, and when, by and bye

the little boy began to dream dreams, which to the Eastern mind always bore a certain meaning, and this meaning was interpreted as putting them, the elder brothers, in a position in the dim future, in which *he* should be yet more the head and chief, to whom *they* must give way and pay respect, the Bible says, "they hated him yet the more for his dreams." Perhaps it was not very wise of Joseph to tell them what he had dreamt about, when he saw how the recital provoked and vexed them; but I think he did it only in the natural boyish openness of his heart, and could have had no idea of the passionate resentment it aroused.

At length, one day when the brothers were tending their flocks at some distance from home, and Jacob had grown anxious about them, he sent Joseph, whom, we see by this little incident, was generally at his old father's side, to see that all was well with them, and to bring him word again. Brightly and happily he set forth on his errand, rather glad perhaps of the pleasant excursion, and certainly never dreaming of the dark wicked thoughts that his coming would suggest to his brothers. Far off, in those quiet country fields, they saw him approach, and whispered among themselves, calling him not their brother, but "this dreamer of dreams," and so growing bolder, to propose a plan by means of which their ears might never be irritated with tales of possible humiliation to them in the future. "Let us kill him," they mutter, "and then we shall see what will become of his dreams." But Reuben, the only one merciful enough to think of the poor father at home, whose eyes would never more be gladdened by the sight of this petted

son of his old age, entreats them not to slay him, but to put him in a pit, and bring home his pretty coat, all stained with the blood of a goat, which they could kill for the purpose, and so leave Jacob to suppose some deadly accident had befallen the boy. Reuben, we see, was not quite courageous enough to dissuade them from their wickedness altogether, but meant to gain time this way, and afterwards rescue him from the pit. But it is always a mistake to delay doing right; for while he hesitated, waiting for an opportunity, Joseph had come, and had been set upon by these cruel young men, and only thrown into the pit to be dragged from it again, and then sold, at Judah's suggestion, to a company of Ishmaelitish merchants who passed their way. These men were travelling towards Egypt, and were willing to give twenty pieces of silver for the pretty looking boy, and add him as a slave to the stock they had to sell. Then the brothers set their faces homeward, thinking how the dreams that had so vexed them could now never be fulfilled.

I wonder if they would have felt sorry for their cruelty or only for its result, if they could have known, as we do, the end of the story, and seen that the very means which they had taken of preventing the fulfilment of the visions—such sure means as they seemed too—by selling the dreamer of future greatness as a slave in a foreign country, were, by God's working, the very first steps through which those dreams came true. They came home to their father and gave him the coat of many colours—in which he had so lovingly seen his boy set forth—all stained with blood, and could see him cry

over it, believing the blood to be Joseph's, and that some evil beast had met and torn him to pieces; they could see all this, and hear the bitter grief which refused to be comforted, and not one was brave enough to take this crushing sorrow off their poor old father, and confess his wickedness. It does seem wicked, almost beyond pardon, but through the dark cloud, which must have settled on the houshold, *we* can see God's justice shining. It involves no excuse for their cruel deceit, but a reason for the suffering it entailed for so many years on their father. We remember how he, when a boy, had in like manner acted a lie towards *his* father—poor old blind Isaac. God in his infinite mercy forgives sinners, but the natural consequences of any sin follow us, as He said they should, in often the strangest and most unexpected ways, "unto the third and fourth generation." That God pardons wrong-doing does not wipe out the wrong. He does not daily work miracles for us; and it is of the seed we sow that we reap the harvest.

I shall tell you of Joseph's adventures in Egypt in the next lesson.

X.

מִקֵּץ.—JOSEPH IN EGYPT.

Genesis xli.—xliv.

So JOSEPH was brought down into Egypt by these rough Ishmaelitish traders with the rest of their merchandize; and there he, the petted darling of his home, was sold as a slave to one Potiphar, who was an officer in the king's guard. Very hard work and very hard fare Joseph must have had to put up with; at the best, it must all have seemed sadly different from the old life; but the strangeness and difficulty of his new position only brought out all that there was of good and noble in his character. At once he determined to make the best of things, and whatsoever his hand found to do, to do it with "all his might," and to do it cheerfully; and this honest, brave resolve, actively carried into practice, soon gained him his master's confidence. Step by step the foreign slave became of more and more importance in the household; his willingness to oblige, and his cleverness, and his honesty, and perhaps, just a little, his good looks, all were in his favour, and in a very little time we find him trusted as overseer of all his master's property, which, by God's goodness, prospered under his management.

So all went on well for awhile, and except for the thought of his beloved old father, Joseph must have been content and almost happy with the sense of usefulness which his new duties and responsibilities gave him. But

bye-and-bye a stop, for a little time, was put to his prosperity, and a trial to his faith was sent. He had the choice which comes to us all, in some form or other, and at some time in our lives, between good and evil—between the evil which seems so easy and pleasant, and the good which seems so hard and difficult—and God helped him, as He is ready to help all of us, and gave him strength to choose the good. Poor fellow! it must have seemed very hard to him when he was sent to prison, as he knew, for *not* doing wrong! but I don't fancy, after the very first, he was altogether unhappy even there.

> Stone walls do not a prison make,
> Nor iron bars a cage,

the poet writes; and the thought of his innocence must have lightened his imprisonment. His goodness and gentleness soon gained him a friend in the governor; and bye and bye his skill, God-given, in interpreting the dreams of his two fellow-prisoners, indirectly became the means of restoring him to the outer world again. The chief butler of the king, when again filling his situation, restored to him as Joseph had foretold, for a time forgot his friend in trouble, but the occasion came when it was his interest to remember, and Joseph was summoned from the prison house. The king Pharoah had dreamt dreams which nightly disturbed his royal rest; and when the skilful men of the East had been called and failed to unravel their meaning, the butler suddenly recollected the pleasant companion of his captivity, who had so truly predicted the events foreshadowed in *his* dreams, and suggested him to Pharoah as a possible interpreter. So Joseph came, and religiously disowned at once any power

on his own part to do this thing; but, asking God's assistance, as you know, succeeded. And when seven years of great plenty, to be followed by seven years of as great a scarcity had been found to be the hidden meaning of these dreams, Pharoah thought the man who was so wise to interpret would be equally wise to direct, and asked his advice that some of the dreadful consequences of a famine might be averted. Then Joseph made out a wise plan of storehouses in which the grain could be piled, and taxes which could be paid in grain during the years of plenty, and Pharoah gratefully and gladly made him chief and overseer of the system he suggested.

So now we see our poor slave promoted to a place in the kingdom second only to Pharoah himself, married to a beautiful wife, riding in grand chariots, and the most intimate and honoured companion of the king. And this young man—for he was now only thirty years old—was as wise and modest and gentle in his new circumstances as in the old sad days. The seven years passed quickly and prosperously by, and presently when the years of famine came, Egypt, through his prudent management, had become the general storehouse to which the neighbouring nations journeyed to buy food. Among those by whom the scarcity was felt was the family of Jacob; and one day the old man called his sons to him desiring them to travel into Egypt, and change their silver and gold into bread for their households. So the ten men went, leaving Benjamin, the youngest, the only child remaining of his loved wife Rachel, with their father. who grudged to expose him to the dangers of the journey, Bowing to the ground, they entered the presence of the

ruler of Egypt, not recognizing in the grandly apparelled stranger their scarcely remembered brother, who, at the moment even of seeing his half-forgotten dreams so wonderfully fulfilled, knew them at once. He asked them questions about home, but spoke roughly and through an interpreter, and pretended to think them spies, that they might not yet guess that he was Joseph; and when he had made them speak of their father and their youngest brother, he thought of a plan by which he might see if Benjamin were suffering from the same spirit of jealousy from which he had suffered in those far away days of his boyhood. "Take corn," he said, "but to prove you are true men and not spies, you must come again with this young brother of whom you speak, and I shall detain one of you as a hostage till your return."

They tried to persuade him, and spoke of their father's great age and his love for this boy, but arguments and entreaties were useless, and not knowing that Joseph wept as he heard them reproach each other with their long ago cruelty to him—so explaining this trouble that was befalling them—they had to see Simeon bound as a hostage, and sorrowfully return with the news to their father.

XI.

וַיִּגַּשׁ.—Joseph's Reunion with his Family.

Genesis xliv.—xlvii.

At first Jacob was resolute in refusing permission for Benjamin to accompany his brothers. Better starve, he thought, than obtain food at such a price; and as in our little knowledge we often judge others so blindly and wrongly, perhaps his thoughts of the man who could exact so hard a condition, were very bitter. But the famine pressed sorer and sorer, and each must have looked in the other's face, gradually growing pinched with want, and yet each must have lacked the courage to suggest to the father that for all their sakes he should part with his darling. At length it became impossible longer to avoid the subject and Israel saw its necessity. Very pitifully the father entrusted this child of his old age to his brothers' care. "Joseph is not," he says, "and Simeon is not; and now, Benjamin ye will take away." With a loving sort of cunning, born of his great fear, he bids his sons take with them a little fruit and some other simple home dainties as a present to conciliate this dreaded ruler. Then, at the last, he sends them forth with a prayer, which we may be sure,

could have been scarcely audible through his tears. "May God Almighty give you mercy before the man," he exclaims; and we follow him, in imagination, into his lonely tent, and feel the intense despair which he must have felt as he ends with that pitiful cry, "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved."

Coming again into Egypt, the brothers tell their story first to Joseph's steward, and Simeon was brought to them, and they were presently conducted into their still unknown brother's presence. We can well believe in the beautiful Bible language how Joseph "yearned" to embrace Benjamin, his own dead mother's son; but a little longer he restrained himself, designing yet further to test their improvement before he gratified his own loving, forgiving desires.

He causes Benjamin to be accused of theft, and the missing cup to be found on him; and then proposing that he alone shall be punished and all the others may go freely home with their possessions, he waits to see the result. There is scarcely a more impressive scene in the Bible than where Judah steps forward from the midst of that breathless, trembling group, and makes his touching appeal on his brother's behalf. It is too beautiful to give only part; it wants reading for itself. We can imagine a little how Joseph must have felt as Judah spoke of the old father with two sons whom of all his children he loved most, and how one of these had gone forth and been mourned for as dead, and how now "his life was bound up in this lad's life;" and when he finishes by offering his own in exchange, lest the father's "grey hairs should be brought with sorrow to the grave,"

we can understand how Joseph could no longer restrain himself, but, bursting into tears, strong man as he was, and exclaiming, "I am Joseph. Is my father yet alive?"—so made himself known to his brothers.

At first surprise made them dumb, and then we can imagine a host of feelings which would follow to keep them so. This their brother! This mighty ruler, whose word was law to thousands, could it be he, the poor little lad whom they had teazed and hated, and at last got rid of by selling as a slave? Were his dreams indeed so wonderfully fulfilled? And then must have come quick and distinct from the crowd of other thoughts, the terrified foreboding,—"Now he has the power, will he not exercise it to be cruel to us? Will he not remember our wickedness and return evil for evil?" No wonder they were dumb, and it was Joseph's voice again which broke the stillness of that wonderful interview with loving, gentle words. "Come near to me," he says. "and do not be grieved or angry with yourselves that you sold me hither, for it was God who did send me before you to preserve life." It was so grand and noble of him to try and make them feel less ashamed before themselves by speaking of it in this way; not making a parade of his forgiveness, but giving all the glory to God for the happy end of the story, without blaming them for having been the unworthy means. They must have felt more sorry and more ashamed than if he had stormed at them. Then he went on to speak of his father, so giving them time to recover themselves a little, and promised them protection and love in the most generous and delicate manner, and then kissed them all, and Benjamin especi-

ally; "and after that," the Bible tells us, his brethren "talked with him."

When Pharoah heard the news, he was delighted at what so pleased his good servant, and was very ready to give his share of the welcome. So waggons were sent and provisions of all sorts, and on a happier errand the brothers once more returned to their father. When they told him the wonderful happy fact, "Joseph is yet alive, and is governor over all the land of Egypt," he could scarcely believe them; but when they talked further, and he saw all the thoughtful preparations for his journey, hope and courage returned, and he forgot his age and infirmities, saying, "It is enough; Joseph, my son, is yet alive. I will go and see him before I die."

One can picture to oneself what their meeting must have been. Joseph, we read, went to meet his father, and put away all his state and dignity, and let his own loving simple nature show itself as "he wept on his neck a great while." Then the old patriarch was introduced to Pharoah, and blessed him for his goodness to his dear son; and the king finished the interview by allotting the land of Goshen, which was in his dominions as a dwelling-place for Israel and his family.

XII.

וַיְחִי.—THE DEATH OF JACOB.

Genesis xlvii.—L.

So the years went on, the five famine years which had still to be lived through after Jacob's arrival, and twelve other years, which, through Joseph's wise management, passed away in peace and plenty. And then the time came for a longer parting and a surer hope of re-union between the father and son, who had been so sadly separated once before. He who had so bitterly mourned for his darling as dead, refusing to be comforted, had by God's mercy been spared to see those childish dreams come true, and to find him again, happy and honoured, beyond what the wildest imagination could have pictured. And, best of all, in the tall, bearded man, so rich, grand and powerful, he had found his own dear, loving boy, whose heart was "as that of a little child," just as fond and simple, and natural as in the olden days when he had played in the tent at home, and his grandest garment had been the "coat of many colours," fashioned by the father's own hands.

As the old English poet says, "One loving hour for many years of sorrow doth dispense;" and the meeting alone, when Joseph clasped and kissed his father, feeling

like a boy again, not as a ruler, or legislator or a great potentate, but simply as a son, must have wiped away in its great joy almost the remembrance of those long weary years. We can fully realize how proud the old man was to receive so many evidences of Joseph's thoughtfulness and love, and those seventeen years in Goshen must have passed away very happily. Jacob and his household held entire possession of this little tract of country, where, peacefully and unmolested, they could follow their own occupation of shepherds. They could not have tended their flocks at will among the pasture lands of Egypt; for bulls and sheep were objects of worship to the Egyptians, and that was the reason why Pharoah, when he found that Joseph's brothers were shepherds, gave them a land all to themselves to live in.

Often, I dare say, Joseph may have left the cares and duties of the State to pay a visit to this quiet little homestead, where we can well imagine the proud and happy welcome he would receive. At last one of these visits was paid in some anxiety, for a message had come to Joseph that his father was ill, and so with his two sons he went quickly to see him, and found the old man sitting up in bed, weak from age, but strengthened by the glad sight of his good son. He put out his hands to greet and bless his grandchildren, and with the gift of prophecy, which, as in Isaac's case, made the deathbed scene doubly impressive, he foretold the life-story of these lads,—Ephraim and Manasseh—in whose names parents bless their little children even in these days, saying, as Israel predicted they would, "God make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh." Then all the other sons joined Joseph, and

stood around the bedside of their father, and he lifted up his voice to say farewell, and for the last time to bless them. And, as these twelve sons, the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel, stood listening at that solemn time, he spoke of all that would befall them in the latter days, and in each case his prophetic words, as in the case of all God's inspired servants, have been absolutely fulfilled. Then, when he had finished, he gave them a charge concerning himself: made them promise not to bury him in Egypt. He had been happy and content to sojourn there; but with the feeling of death, there came on him that sure and eager longing which is almost an instinct amongst us Jews, that his bones should rest among his own people, and solemnly his sons promised that they would bear his body to Canaan and lay it in the Cave of Machpelah, beside the great ones gone.

So satisfied, he died, with Joseph's kisses and tears falling on the calm, old face; and when the days of mourning were fulfilled, his last wishes were carried into effect. Returned from their sad errand, a great fear fell on the brothers. "Now," they thought, "Joseph will take his long delayed revenge for our cruelty to him while our father was alive; and it has been for his sake, not to grieve him by quarrelling, that our brother has lived peaceably with us. Now we have cause to dread his anger;" and in a body they waited on him and prayed his forgiveness.

We who know Joseph's loving, forgiving disposition, can understand how they wronged him by such a fear, and how he wept at their suspicions, knowing it was their conscience that made them cowards. Very nobly

he rebuked them. "Am I," he said, "in the place of God?" meaning that "vengeance belongeth alone to God"—we, who sin so often and need mercy so much, must not presume to deal out the strict justice which we pray to be averted from our own wrong-doing. Asking forgiveness so frequently, we must give it, and be glad of an opportunity of sometimes returning good for evil. So he comforted them, and told them not to fear, and sent them happy to their homes again. And bye-and-bye, when his turn came to die, we may be sure his deathbed was all the more happy for thinking of the mercy rather than justice which he had exercised. He lived to see his great-grandchildren grow up, and died when he had reached the age of one hundred and ten, exacting a like promise from his descendants to that which his father had from his children:—that when God visited the Israelites, and brought them into the Promised Land, they would carry his bones with them.

XIII.

שמות.—THE EARLY DAYS OF MOSES.

Exodus i.—vi.

SEVENTY years had passed since the little colony, of which Israel was the head, had first settled in Goshen, and now these Israelites numbering many thousands, instead of holding the position of their ancestors, as happy honoured guests of Egypt, were down-trodden, wretched slaves. A new king reigned, "who knew not Joseph," the Bible tells us. The story of his wise counsels, which had "saved many people alive," was all forgotten; and the people for whom his greatness and generosity had gained protection, were now only feared less than they were hated. In spite of all persecution they grew in strength and numbers, till the Egyptians, dreading a Jewish rebellion in case any foreign foe gave them an opportunity of up-rising, determined to guard against the future by ordering all the little new-born boy-babies to be thrown into the river Nile.

Fancy into what a dreadful state of trouble this cruel order must have thrown all the poor Jewish mothers. Poor and sad as their little homes might be, in their babies' pretty ways, they could often forget for awhile their own grown-up troubles. We can understand the deep resentment such an edict must have provoked.

There was one brave Jewish mother, at any rate, who determined that her little one should not be sacrificed; and for three months, this woman, who was called Jochebed, managed to hide her baby from Pharoah's officers; and, what was more wonderful, prevented him crying loud enough to be heard by them. But by the end of that time concealment became impossible, and with many prayers she laid her dear little boy by the river bank among the rushes, and set his sister to watch what would happen. Presently the Princess of Egypt came down to bathe, and saw the pretty baby; and partly from pity, and partly perhaps from a girlish fancy for such a nice toy, determined to take him home, and bring him up in the palace. Then a nurse was wanted; and the little sister, who was watching, asked should she bring one of the Hebrew women, and when the Princess said, "yes," ran joyfully as you may fancy, to fetch her own mother; so the baby, whom the Princess called Moses, (meaning from out of the water), had home nursing in his grand new abode. I daresay that was partly the reason that, despite his palace training, he was always an Israelite, never an Egyptian. His mother's teaching kept him true to his religion and his people. The first act recorded of him shows this. Going out one day, he saw the probably not uncommon sight of an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. In his indignation he fell on the Egyptian, and, perhaps striking a harder blow than he quite intended, slew the man. The thing got known, and he had to flee the court, where sympathy for the oppressed Hebrews would be coldly looked upon.

He escaped to Midian, and there, resting by a well, he unknowingly helped his future wife to draw water for her flocks. The young girl for whom he did this little act of courtesy was one of the seven daughters of Jethro, the priest of Midian, and the intimacy that grew out of this incident resulted in the marriage of Moses to its heroine, Zipporah. He was forty years old at this time, and the next forty years of his life was spent very calmly and peacefully amid the pastures of Midian, tending the flocks which formed the wealth of his father-in-law. We, who know what his mission was to be, can see what a wonderfully good preparation these quiet years must have been; how, in the beautiful still country, the hot passions of his youth had time and opportunity to calm down, and untroubled by outward cares, he had leisure to grow wise and thoughtful. How his very occupation was a training for the future, and in his tender care of the dumb, trustful creatures confided to him, he was laying up a store of patient experience for the greater charge he was to assume bye-and-bye.

When presently the summons came—the Voice sounding from the Burning Bush—it found him reverent and ready to believe in the Power which promised deliverance to his people, but distrustful of his own fitness as a messenger. "Who am I," he modestly exclaims, "that I should go to Pharoah, and bring Israel out of Egypt?" And God comforted him and said He would be with him to help and direct him in the great task. He moreover appointed him a companion and spokesman in his elder brother Aaron, for Moses, like many great and good men, was not as quick with his speech as

he was wise in his action. So with permission gained from Jethro, he set out on his mission; God having further encouraged him by giving him the power of turning his staff into a serpent, and then again into a staff, as signs of the greater powers that as yet lay sleeping in him. And when the message of the Eternal came to Pharoah, "Let my people go, that they may serve me," the heathen king answered with an angry, and to us who know the sequel, a very sad truthfulness, "I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." He had to acquire this knowledge, to learn it with his experience. We shall see by what means in the next portion.

XIV.

וארא.—Moses and Pharoah.

Exodus vi—x.

It was not the least hard part of Moses' mission that the very people he had come to redeem did not welcome him. It was not that they *would* not so much as that they *could* not believe. "They hearkened not unto Moses," the Bible tells us, "for anguish of spirit and for cruel bondage;" and though we can understand this, and pity them for the suffering which made even hope impossible, yet we can see how dispiriting such a reception must have been; and when he found that the first message to Pharoah served only to make the king harder to the people, we can sympathise even in the impatience with which, doubtful of his own powers, he again went before God. It is so hard to try and do good, and feel how much there is to be done, and how little all one's best efforts seem to effect; and Moses, as he went out from these interviews with Pharoah, must have had many a foretaste of the chill and sorrow which in his later years he felt, and which all reformers and all earnest men, striving for the good of their fellows, experience, both in the difficulty of their task and in the indifference of those for whom they labour. God knew: and in His infinite knowledge and infinite mercy understood all the doubts and the difficulties, and soothed the one and smoothed away the other by often repeated words of counsel and encouragement. He did not tell Moses he

would be all at once successful, but neither did He tell him at first how long he would have "to serve and wait."

In all the troubles and difficult or disagreeable tasks we may have to perform, it is a good plan to take "short views" of things, to do the work that lies straight before us bravely and uncomplainingly, without giving too much thought to the possible result; to do what we ought—which means all we can—and have trust enough not to trouble about more, nor to wish to know what God mercifully conceals. I think this section of the Law teaches us this lesson very strongly, though in a somewhat indirect way. You see, God did not say to Moses,—"Ten times you will have to go to Pharoah, and ten plagues will have to be brought upon his land before he will let the people go; each time you will think your mission will be successful, and each time you will be disappointed." Had God spoken to Moses in this way, we can see with how little hope and energy he could have performed the work entrusted to him, but because the present only was his, and each day brought and made its own history, he had courage and strength to go on doing his duty.

When first the brothers waited on the king with the message of the Most High, "Let my people go, that they may serve Me," an absolute and unbelieving refusal was the only answer they received. Then as they performed the miracles with which God had entrusted them, as signs of their being His true ambassadors, the king waited awhile to look and wonder: but when the court jugglers produced an imitation of these seeming

wonders with their arts, the unbelief returned. The next attempt on the king's hard heart was the command from God that Moses should stretch forth his hand over the river, and cause all the waters in Egypt to be turned into blood. But this plague God permitted the magicians also to imitate, and all the fish in the rivers and ponds died, and seven days the waters flowed like blood, and still Pharoah remained obstinate and unconvinced. Then Moses and Aaron again entered the presence-chamber, repeating God's desire that His people should be set free, threatening, in case of refusal, that the land should be infested with frogs. And again Pharoah refused, and the frogs were sent. In the houses, bedchambers and kitchens, these little hopping creatures came, which we are not too fond of finding at close quarters with us even in the fields; and Pharoah in haste and fright promised that the people should go "to-morrow" if this plague might be removed. And it was; but the occasion past, the momentary repentance passed also, and once more Pharoah's heart was hardened. Again and again this was repeated—the command, the threat, the punishment, and the hasty insincere promise, born of fear and not repentance. All the dust of the land became suddenly full of life, changed into minute disagreeable insects, and to this plague swarms of flies succeeded, and we, who have a taste of these visitors every summer, know how very much their unpleasantness would be aggravated by numbers. Then came a fearful disease among the cattle, which formed a great part of the wealth of Egypt; then, in order that the trouble might more nearly touch the Egyptians themselves, boils broke

out upon men as well as beasts. Again in haste Pharoah promised, and the disease died away; but obstinacy returned with health. God's anger was made manifest next, in a more striking way, by a most awful storm. Thunder broke, lightning flashed, and hail swept the ground, destroying the early harvest, and so laying up trouble for the coming season. The frightened people sought shelter; and again Moses and Aaron were pitifully entreated by the king. We shall hear the result of his eager promises in the next lesson; but lest you should be anxious about the Israelites during all this sad time, I will tell you at once that they were as safe and free from harm in their little land of Goshen, as if they had been in ever so far and distant a country. God took care of them, and in a literal sense, "no plague came nigh their dwelling."

XV.

בֹּא.—THE JOURNEY FROM EGYPT.

Exodus x.—xiii

AGAIN the brothers stood before Pharoah; and again fresh disasters on the sorely stricken land were threatened if he still persisted in his refusal to let the people go. On all the sweet fresh country fields, where the rain and wind had already made such havoc, they told him multitudes of tiny, devouring creatures should swarm, eating up every green thing that the storm had spared. In view of this new trouble, even his own servants entreated the king to make terms; and in desperate fear and rage he made the angry offer that the *men* might depart to serve their God. "Not so," answered Moses; "with our young and with our old, with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds, will we go;" and this courageous reply, incensing the king yet more, the brothers were driven from his presence, and the plague of locusts followed. The whole face of the fair smiling Eastern country was darkened by them, and the people had to see all their fruit and flowers and vegetables disappear as if by magic. It was a terrible plague in its effects on an agricultural people, and once more Moses and Aaron were sent for in haste. The locusts were removed in

answer to their prayer; but the king still hardened his heart, and a thick darkness next fell upon the land—a darkness darker than the darkest night; a blackness so intense that, the Bible tells us, it could be "felt." Three days and nights the people cowered in their dwellings, too frightened to move; and it was better terms that Pharoah offered when this plague was stayed. "Only leave your flocks and herds," he entreats, "and you may all go forth—old men and young, women and ltttle children," but this compromise also was refused; and the tenth, and most terrible, and last of the plagues was predicted.

In every house in Egypt, from the king's palace to the poor beggar's hut, the eldest child was to die; the whole land was to mourn, with a like bitter cry to the poor Hebrew mothers when their little ones were torn from them. This was to be the last of the means employed by God to make the heathen king "know" Him; the knowledge of His Power, that we gain through love and worship and praise, he had learnt against his will, through these awful proofs of it. "I know not the Lord," he had answered in his pride and contempt when the message first came, and the knowledge which was open to him, as to us all, through a thousand channels of love, was rejected in that form, to be completed now by the most terrible of His messengers—the Angel of Death. In the dead of night, in the stillness and silence, God's angel came, laying a cold gentle hand on the little sleeping children, who passed away in his embrace. When the morning broke, a great cry rang through Egypt, for there was not a house in which there

lay not one dead. The trouble and sorrow fell so heavily and yet so justly. On the young children "taken away" from the evil to come, death came only as a deeper sleep than usual, and a far more beautiful awaking; but God's justice, as perfect as His mercy, made it felt in a very different manner by the unhappy parents. In bitter, desperate grief, the whole nation was roused at last to send forth the people for whom their God fought with such terrible weapons; and with the fawning and favour, born of fear, they urged and hastened and made easy their departure. In their travelling garments, standing as they ate, the Israelites took their last meal in Egypt, and carried rough, hastily made, cakes of flour, strapped on their shoulders, for the sun to bake as they journeyed. In view of the results of this last plague, Moses had bid them make all ready, and demand of the Egyptians jewels and ornaments, and vessels of silver and gold. And the frightened nation, thinking perhaps that by these means they might gain favour with the strangely-protected people, had readily given what was asked. We can imagine them bringing their rich possessions—seeking shelter in the homes of the Israelites, and looking on their gifts as bribes, praying and hoping that thus, they too might be held exempt from those terrible visitations,—the "plagues" which we know came not "nigh the dwellings" of our ancestors. So with "great substance," as the Bible tells us, the despised, down-trodden, people left the land, as God had predicted to Abraham they should, 430 years before. Literally that promise had been fulfilled.—(Gen. xv. 13—14). That four hundred years had seen strange

changes in the history of our race. With Joseph sold into Egypt as a slave, the period commences; he prospering, the little colony of seventy souls who migrated thither with Jacob and settled in Goshen, rose with his fortunes, and the history flows on peacefully for awhile; then come the troubles, through all of which the divinely guarded people increase and multiply, till it is a great host of six hundred thousand that Moses leads triumphantly out of Egypt. The great festival of Passover was instituted in remembrance of this event; but it is too large a subject to tell all about in such a little space as this. It wants a whole story book to itself, and I dare say you may be able to find such a one,

XVI.

בשלח.—The Exodus from Egypt.

Exodus xiii.—xviii.

Thus, free at last, the people left the land of their bondage not unmindful, even in the first flush of their strange, new feelings, of that long ago promise made to Joseph, which he, forseeing events, had exacted. "God will surely visit you," he had said, "then ye shall carry up my bones from hence," and that sacred burden was never forgotten throughout all their wanderings, till bye-and-bye, as Joseph had wished, they laid it peacefully and tenderly to rest in the Promised Land. But the journeying thither had now but begun, and the first obstacle in their path threatened to take away all their new-born courage and that trust in God and themselves, which had needed all those miracles to arouse. Hardly had the sound of their retreating footsteps died away in Egypt, when Pharoah, with the occasion for it past, forgetting his fear, and regretting already the loss of such useful servants, repented of the permission to depart which he had at last so hastily given. Quickly his horses were harnessed and the chariots of war made ready, and with his army he set out in hot pursuit of the Israelites. On the borders of the Red Sea he over-

took them, and with an enraged enemy behind, and a pathless waste of waters before them, one can scarcely wonder that for a moment the newly rescued people stood overwhelmed and "with no language but a cry." As they found their voices, the air was filled with their bitter exclamations of fear and complaint, but these again were stilled as Moses was heard desiring them to stand quiet and not to fear, for "that the Lord would fight for them." "The Egyptians," he says, "whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see again no more for ever," and the awed people held their peace as he desired, and "stood still to see the salvation of the Lord."

Between the camps, all through the silent night, stood the Presence of the Lord, in the form of a cloud—His protection giving light to His people, but making the darkness more dense to their enemies. And when the morning came, directed by God, Moses stretched out his hand towards the sea and an exceedingly strong wind swept over the waters, driving them back, and leaving a dry pathway for the Israelites to cross. The Egyptians seeing their prey thus escape them, followed them still, but the angry waves rushed on, closing on the heels of the Israelites, and drowned their pursuers. When the people so saved summoned courage to look back on the danger past, a wall of waters rolled between them and the land of their captivity, and on the shore, lying in all their brave battle array, in the pitiless morning sunshine, they saw their cruel taskmasters quite still and dead. At the sight of this "great work," the Bible tells us "they feared the Lord, and believed in his servant, Moses;" and we can understand even, with all these

centuries between, and when only reading the record of such an event, what a wonderful impression it must have made. It is only surprising that the intense feeling which expresssed itself in the beautiful song of triumph that Moses led* was not more lasting.

It is very disappointing to read almost in the next verse of grumbling and discontent. It was but three days' journey they had gone, and the echoes of this national hymn, which Miriam and the women had also joyfully sung, could scarcely have died away, when we find them murmuring against Moses, because the springs they had to drink from were bitter. God showed him how to make them sweet, and desired him to take this opportunity of asking them to be a little patient and trustful.

Onwards they went, traversing the wilderness, and now they murmured for bread to eat, and in answer food was sent from Heaven. Each morning as they arose they found all the ground around the camp white with little round things looking like hoar frost, but which on tasting proved delicious cakes. One condition only accompanied this gift, and that was designed to teach them the lessons which they were so slow to learn—of trust and moderation. They were to pick up sufficient of this food to last for the day's needs only, relying on God's promise for the morrow; and those who were greedy and disregarded this, and laid up stores of the Manna as it was called, found it become stale and unfit to eat. Only on the eve of the Sabbath were they to gather a double portion, and this being designed to save work

* Exodus, cap. xv.

on God's day of rest, was always as good as if it had been freshly found. Satisfied with food, again they grumbled at the scarcity of water; and God commanded Moses to strike a rock, and water gushed from it; choosing this means rather than leading them to a spring, to impress them with the Power as well as the Goodness of their Creator. This rock was called Meribah, from a Hebrew word which means strife, and so it remained as a sad memorial of the impatient spirit which grumbled and clamoured for what it wanted, instead of waiting patientlv, or, more nobly still, learning cheerfully to do without.

XVII.

יתרו.—THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

Exodus xviii.—xx.

WHEN Moses had been some few weeks in the desert, his father-in-law, Jethro, came to see him; and, as the Bible tells us, "rejoiced" at all that Moses gratefully related of the wonderful deliverance from Egypt. A great feast was made in honour of this visit, and the priest of Midian joined with the elders of Israel in sacrificing to God. On the morrow, Moses, as usual, attended to his duties; and Jethro found, to his surprise, that one of these was to sit in judgment for the people, unhelped and unrelieved, from morning till evening. His father-in-law questioned him about this, and wisely advised him to lighten such heavy labour. "Let," he said, "the people still continue to bring difficult matters for your decision; but for lesser things appoint lesser judges, who may listen to their disputes and troubles, and settle them in accordance with what they know would be your judgment." And Moses, though he was so wise and powerful, listened gratefully to the advice which the older man gave him, and acted on it at once, appointing officers under himself to administer justice; he remaining still as a sort of supreme court of appeal. Then Jethro left the people with their

good and patient leader, encamped at the foot of the mountain of Sinai, and went back into his own land.

Here they rested while Moses was called to the crest of the Mount to receive God's directions for the preparation of the people to listen to the Ten Commandments, which He would pronounce as a Statute for all time. On the third day the mountain quaked and trembled, and the air was heavy with thunder, and every now and then, through glaring and fitful flashes of lightning, the awe-struck people discerned a thick cloud resting on the summit. And through the darkness came a Voice. Then the people were frightened, and in the words of the Bible, "stood afar off." Their few weeks' knowledge of the Lord had not yet taught them to know and love Him with that "perfect love which casteth out fear," and it was Moses, the servant of the Lord, who alone dreaded not to "draw near unto the thick darkness, where God was." Grandly impressive must those solemn words have sounded through the stillness of the desert; and the first sentence, "I am the Lord, thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage," must have riveted their attention, and by recalling so recent a memory, have disposed them to listen with reverence and gratitude to One whom they had found so great and so good.

First comes the command on which Judaism rests—"Thou shalt have no other God but Me." So short, so simple, so decisive, that our consequent firm belief in the Oneness of our God is naturally unshaken by argument. This one command of itself raises it out of the region of debate.—the unity of God must ever remain

an unquestionable fact to the Jews. Then follow the injunctions for serving Him; to let no idol of any form whatsoever usurp His place in our hearts: to honour His holy name, never speaking it lightly or using it falsely: and to remember His sabbath and "keep it holy.' These first four include our duty to God, and the other six relate to our mutual duties to each other, placing the "honour" due to our parents at the head of these. Concerning our own actions to our fellow creatures, we are enjoined not to steal their goods, nor to covet their possessions, nor to murder, nor bear false witness; perhaps, this last is the command we most frequently transgress, in the love of gossip which we all, I fancy, share. It is so difficult sometimes "to speak no slander, —no, *nor listen to it*;" but we must remember it is a grave offence, or God would not have included it in this code, which was to be, and is, an "everlasting statute throughout all generations." One so often bears false witness without meaning to tell a lie or do an injury; one is so quick to believe in wrong motives, and to repeat little things not quite accurately. It is because it seems such a little fault, and because it is so easy and sometimes even so pleasant to sin in this way, while the other sins are so great that the temptation mercifully comes seldom in our way, that I specially dwell on this, and want you to be careful to avoid it. It is often greater in its effects than would seem possible, seeing that it proceeds from so small a cause. A large amount of unhappiness may be brought about by half-an-hour's loose, careless talk, where we *meant* no harm, and have only forgotten that—

"Evil is wrought by want of thought
As much as want of heart."

Our wise king, Solomon, has written, "Fear God, and keep His commandments, for that is the whole duty of man;" and we, to whom those commandments were given nearly 3,000 years ago, should be most anxious to fulfil them worthily, that we may show the value of God's gift, of which He made us the guardians.

XVIII.

מִשְׁפָּטִים—The Mosaic Code.

Exodus, xxi.—xxv.

Besides the Ten Commandments which God gave to Israel, and through Israel to all nations, to be for all time the foundation or groundwork of the morality which all forms of religion teach, God gave to us a whole series of laws to guide and direct every step, in every path through which our lives might lead us. Some of these concern such trifling every-day matters, that it would almost seem to you as if the Great God were stooping very much from His high throne to see such little things. But in His sight, to Whom "a thousand years are but as a watch in the night," there is no meaning in our words *small* and *great*. Prince and peasant are equal to Him, who "looketh not on the outward appearance, but on the heart;" and to His All-seeing Eye, which pierces the clouds of the future, and knows what will be the end at the very beginning of our efforts, what things can we say are *trifling?*

I mean to tell you of some of these מִשְׁפָּטִים—judg-

ments—which form the Sedrah of the week; but first we must try and realize a little what sort of a people it was to whom they were given. Just released from a captivity which had lasted over 200 years, and in bondage to a nation whose religion was a degrading worship of idols, the people, through whom it had been prophesied to Abraham all nations of the earth should be blessed, required, when thus suddenly restored to freedom, to be educated into receiving as well as transmitting the promised blessing. The Revelation from Sinai, coming after signs and wonders, in its grand simplicity, its stern, quiet "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not," making unquestioning obedience the first thing necessary, was admirably suited to a people whose freedom was as yet barely seven weeks old. In the utterly new life, with its daily needs supplied by miracles which succeeded the hard monotonous slave work to which they had been accustomed, the new religion had gradually to be unfolded. The Ten Commandments became the text as it were, and the after revelations were the fuller commentary which Moses was always at hand to interpret. And the wonder and the beauty of the Divine code strikes us specially in this, that although given to a people under these peculiar circumstances, and three thousand years ago, yet its age and its design takes nothing from its value; it has served as the foundation for all laws that have since been written for the guidance of mankind; and in its broad, general principles of justice, mercy and prudence, it is as much needed now for the welfare of living humanity as it was in those far off days when it was first revealed in the desert

to a handful of newly-rescued slaves. There is one principle running clearly throughout the whole code. Justice, pure even-handed justice is the ruling idea —never, on the one hand, hardening into cruelty or vindictiveness; nor, on the other, being lost in a mazy, miscalled, sentimental "feeling." A law, which was to be a law of action, to show men and women how to deal with the practical every-day troubles of every-day life, was, necessarily and firstly, just. Mercy was not forgotten; "Do justly and love mercy," writes the prophet Micah; "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee," says the wisest of men, and what they *counselled* the law of Moses *commanded*. But because they were commands, intended to be obeyed and not only admired, we find no extreme and impossible injunctions: no beautifully sounding exhortations to a love and a charity, which to be literally fulfilled would first require the crushing of all human nature in us. The law was given from Sinai to a band of absolutely lawless men. The religion of Abraham had become but a tradition, a scarcely remembered legend, which old men and mothers may have told as tales to their children. The law to which they had bent for all those long years in Egypt was the lash; the one they were to recognise now, and to transmit to all the great hereafter, which they guessed at dimly through the thunders and lightnings of Sinai, was one which their reason as well as their gratitude might induce them to obey. They were to be God-fearing and God-loving; to respect themselves and each other; to do justice and to exact it; to be pitiful to the weak, the poor and the oppressed, "remem-

bering how ye were strangers in the land of Egypt;" in a word, to be holy, as "I the Lord thy God am holy."

How they were to do this Moses learned from God in the forty days and nights he was with him on Mount Sinai; and some of the most striking of the מִשְׁפָּטִים I shall explain to you in the next portion, instead of telling you about the actual Sedrah, which is not quite so interesting for children as usual; and I think you will now a little understand the nature of the people to whom, and the circumstances under which, the Law was given.

XIX.

תרומה—About the Precepts.

Exodus, xxv.—xxvii.

I HEARD once a very eloquent sermon preached on that text in Micah which I spoke of in our last lesson, —the injunction to "do justly and to love mercy," and the preacher dwelt at length on the divinity and beauty of the attribute of justice. Coming out of the synagogue the congregants spoke to one another of the force and charm of the sermon, and one criticism I overheard struck me very much. "I agree with every word," said this critic, "I might have preached it myself. Have justice, that's it; that's what I've always wanted." Do you see how he had missed the point of the command? How he interpreted the "do justice" into "have justice," forgetting the "love mercy" altogether. So, losing the beauty and wisdom of the text, he justified hardness and strictness in dealing to his own conscience.

It is somewhat in this spirit that many criticize our Law, not wilfully unjust perhaps, nor yet wilfully ignorant; but wofully blind to its completeness of justice *and mercy*, which they naturally overlook in tearing one poor verse away from all its companions. "Your law of Moses is harsh," they say, "fitted in its sternness for a people fresh from a debasing servitude; we can offer you a law of love." Why cannot they see that ours *is* a law of love, a wise law, meant to control men—with men's passions and men's temptations—not to be preached to creatures who, if they listened and obeyed, would be something between babies and angels. No text has suffered more from this well-meant but

ignorant handling than the 23rd, 24th, and 25th verses of the 21st chapter—the "eye for eye" law, as it is called. "Revenge and vindictiveness!" they exclaim. "What! if a man injures you must you exact revenge by inflicting a like injury? Rather do as *we* say: if one side of your face is slapped, give the other side also to the aggressor. If a man robs you of your coat, offer him your cloak too." Now, beside the disadvantage and disagreeableness of carrying this advice into practical effect, and not to speak of the absolute injustice of, even at one's own expense, thus encouraging wrong-doing, we will first see how far the charge of vindictiveness" or "revenge" holds good against this command of ours.

First, I am not at all sure whether the punishment of a wilful offender by the infliction, if possible, of a like pain to what he had caused, would be in any case more or less than just punishment.

But history abundantly shews that the law never was carried out according to the literal meaning of the words. It would have been practically impossible. A money compensation was given to the injured in proportion to the loss he had sustained through the injury, on the same sort of principle that railway companies pay damages now in case of injuries inflicted through their means. And again, the wording of it must be remembered. It is not "Thou shalt take life for life, eye for eye," &c., but "Thou shalt give." Not "take" as an individual act of retaliation or revenge, but *give;* that is, the judges, or the properly-constituted authorities, should "give" or award the compensation.

Thus we see the motive of the command. "Be careful," it seems to say, "not to be tempted from passion to injure your fellow-creatures, or you by my just law shall suffer the like." Its object was the protection of society, not the gratification of revenge; to prevent the spread of sin, rather than to encourage it through weak indulgence. Men were to act, in all cases and above all things, *justly* to one another. God knew they could not then fail to act kindly also. A just person would never be harsh or cruel or uneven in his dealings, which a simply generous person might be. To do unto others as we would be done unto, is a command easy to understand and safe to practise; not more nor less is required by our code.

To return to this special law, its justice does not need a defence even on the ground of its having been given in the first instance to a set of rough, half-civilized men. It is as little "harsh" or "vindictive" in its meaning or its application to us as to them. Besides, to guard against any possible injustice in the execution of the sentence, a broad distinction is made between sins wilfully committed, and injuries which may have been inflicted through heedlessness or sore provocation. The former class only—the transgressors "with guile" as the Bible calls them, were subject to this strict code of reprisal; for the others, our Law, our "harsh" Law, provided cities of refuge, whither the unfortunate man might flee; and where, safe from vengeance or pursuit, he would be free to begin again a better life.

Greediness and covetousness and excessive love of money, were checked by similar wise provisions. The first fruits were not to be eaten, but given gratefully to their Giver as freewill offerings. In business arrangements, if a poor man gave all he had—his clothing, for instance, in pledge, the lender of money was strictly forbidden to let him suffer from the want of it: it must be returned ere the sun went down. Usury, that is making an undue and unjust profit out of a neighbour's temporary necessity, was most sternly prohibited. For no motive, for no gift, under no influence of numbers, was a man ever to be untruthful—to raise a false report, or to be an unrighteous witness. Most especially were justice and tenderness to be shewn to widows and orphans and strangers; and with a beautiful gentle appeal to their hearts, God enforces this, by adding, "For ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." Justice, *our* justice, taught us, too, to be honourable in our dealings with our enemies. If we saw the ox or ass of one who had injured us, going astray, or halting under a burden, we were not to hesitate in giving all the help we could; not, you see, as is so often done, to avenge our grievances on some innocent and unconscious object, as an indirect way of spiting our enemy. And so, as it is hard to retain bad feeling, after one has done a kindness, this wise law, perhaps, often brought about a better state of things between those who had quarrelled; and still no impossible excercise of forbearance was demanded, but charity and love grew naturally out of justice, which is the surest foundation for those virtues.

XX.

תצוה—The Garments of the Priests.

Exodus xxvii.—xxx.

With very great care the garments of the high priest and the common priests are described in this Sedrah. Aaron and his sons are bidden to consecrate themselves for the service of the priesthood. They and their garments should belong to God. Differing from all other men, they were to be clad according to the word of the Lord; and the robe and the girdle and the ephod are minutely described in the sacred narrative. The Israelites in the desert knew no king, nor lords, nor princes; there was but One Being to whom they owed absolute obedience, and God, their only Lord, was to be publicly served by Aaron and his sons. And so the highest dignity belonged to the priests, who were set apart from all other men to minister before the Lord. They were the servants of God, who were intended to bring the people to recognise and understand His supreme goodness. It was, therefore, necessary that these priests should be altogether sacred; they should be pure and teach purity; everything about them must be holy, even to the robes that covered them. To excite feelings of reverence

in the children of Israel, and to make the priests themselves clearly see how very sacred a duty they were called upon to perform, they were wholly separated from other men. Their mode of living was different. They were not permitted to engage in any worldly pursuit, and their very garments were to be as sacred as the Tabernacle in which they should officiate. In fact, they were to become a part of the Tabernacle itself, and all their thoughts were to be fixed on the duties which they were chosen to discharge.

In later times, unhappily, the priests forgot the lessons which this section of the Bible teaches. They wore the sacred garments, but these no longer covered a holy heart. They grew corrupt and wicked, and made their sacred office the means of satisfying their greedy and rapacious spirits. Then God grew angry with them, and raised up men to show them all their wicked ways. And these great men were prophets, of whom we shall at some future time speak more fully. And a thousand times more wicked were the priests who sinned than other men, for all their brilliant garments, were given them לכבוד ולתפארת, "for glory and for distinction"—to make them better, purer, and less selfish than their fellows, and that they might be distinguished for their piety and goodness; for God could not suffer that any but the holiest men should minister in His holy name. So we shall read later how severely wicked priests were punished who made so bad a use of those sacred vestments which are here so carefully described.

It is pleasant to picture to ourselves the high-priest of old, with his tunic of white linen tied with an embroidered girdle, with his beautifully woven ephod which covered the shoulders, and the long robe of blue which hung from it. The Bible tells us of the precious stones which glittered on the shoulders of the high-priest, on which were engraved the names of the children of Israel—"six of their names on one stone, and the six remaining names on the other." It tells us of the gold, and blue, and red, and crimson, and fine twined linen which were blended in the ephod; it tells us of the beautiful mitre that he wore, with its glittering plate of gold, and it tells us of a breastplate that covered the front of his tunic, brilliant with sparkling stones. The white linen garments which belonged to all the priests seem to show us that the life of the priests should be spotless and pure, that those only are fit to officiate who endeavour to withstand the temptation to do evil. But the breast-plate which the high-priest wore, with its rows of brilliant stones, was by far the most curious part of his attire. These stones are supposed to have formed what the Bible tells us Aaron bore upon his heart—the Urim and Thummim. These the high-priest consulted when the people, not knowing how to act, came to him in their trouble, and whilst he looked upon them the answer that he should give came into his mind. It was only when his own heart was as free from flaw as the precious stones which covered it, that he was capable of revealing God's will to those who sought it. By their brilliancy he was constantly reminded that the work which God

had given him was the grandest and the noblest that man could possibly perform, and the sight of them filled his mind with great and holy thoughts, and he became the medium through which God told His will to those who came to ask it.

Clad in these holy garments, the high-priest and the other priests were allowed to enter the Tabernacle, and to approach the sacred altar; and graciously has the Lord said unto us: "I will dwell among the children of Israel, and I will be their God." Ever and again God tries to bring His children near unto Him, and to make them good and holy by showing them that He Himself is holy. We might think that the great God, who has created all the stars, the earth, and moon, and sun, would be so far removed from man that man could not hope to approach Him; but God says that He will dwell among us, extending His mercy and kindness to all who need them, and listening to the prayers of all who call on Him in truth. In the Tabernacle God has promised to meet the children of Israel. Little children of Israel should think of these words each time they go into their synagogue; for in our wanderings the synagogue has become our tabernacle, and we have become a kingdom of priests. As the Jews pray on sabbath and festivals with their heads covered, in remembrance of the turban which the sons of Aaron wore, and on their shoulders the white garment with its thread of blue, every Jew is in himself a priest of God, and can make known unto the Lord the secret wishes of his heart, without the aid of any other human being. Now

that our sacred temple is destroyed, the priest no longer officiates in all the splendid robes which formerly he wore: but we can see a meaning in almost every garment that the Bible so carefully describes, and we should try to apply that meaning to ourselves. Each of us should think himself a priest of God, and should endeavour to lead a life as spotless as the priestly tunics, and to possess a heart as pure as the precious stones that were set in Aaron's breast-plate. If we are to derive "a lesson" from this Sedrah it may be given in the great teacher's words: "Let thy garments be always white!"

XXI.

כי תשא THE DESCENT OF MOSES WITH THE LAW.

Exodus, xxx.—xxxv.

MOSES remained on the Mount of God, as I told you, forty days and forty nights; and when that period of wonderful communion was fulfilled, he prepared to descend the slopes of Sinai, bearing in his uplifted hands the two tables of the Law, on which the Commandments were inscribed in characters traced "by the finger of God." One would imagine a people waiting, almost breathless with gratitude and reverence, to receive such a gift. One would picture the interval of forty days, spent in solemn, patient expectation, and the moment of their leader's return being greeted with full, deep, low-toned hymns of praise. Some such vision may have flitted through Moses' mind as he prepared to leave that awful and mysterious Presence Whose wise and tender massage he bore. A confused sound of shouting and tumult was borne to him on the breeze; and Joshua, who had come to meet him, suggested—with the soldier-like instinct of a young warrior—that it was a sound of battle. "Not so," said Moses, with the subtle sense of coming trouble, which often seems mercifully sent as a sort of preparation. "Not so, these are neither sounds of victory nor defeat, but shouts of song and merriment." But when they came close, and

the actual sight met their eyes—not God's warning of what would be, nor Moses' own forebodings, nor even his own experience—wide enough already—of impatience and unbelief, were sufficient to enable him to look calmly on, with only the righteous indignation of a judge. Straight from God's pure Presence, he beheld this people, whom he had left but those few short weeks —left to receive instruction for their good and guidance —he beheld them dancing, singing, rejoicing, around a golden calf; this people, for whom so much had been done, for whom God had fought, returned to the base idolatry of their bondage, crying to one another,—"*These* be thy Gods, Oh Israel! which brought thee out of the land of Egypt."

No wonder that Moses, most enduring of men, as he is called, (not "meek," as it is wrongly translated), no wonder that even he, in holy speechless anger, cast God's great gift, all broken at their feet, disdaining to give the work of his Master into hands that had fashioned that molten image. One can try and picture that scéne in the desert; the grand figure of the Lawgiver in his holy wrath—which after all had so much more of sorrow and disappointment than mere anger in it—standing among those groups of passionate, excited men and women, and gradually quelling the tulmult. Then came enquiries and punishment. Aaron was gravely rebuked for his weakness in yielding to the clamour of a mob whose faith had waned in a leader who had past for a little while from their sight and hearing.

What a hopeless task it must have seemed to Moses to have to educate a people, whose faith in the Unseen

could not stand a forty days' test, into a religion where faith must be the groundwork! And what a grand religion it must be which made its way through these dense obstructions of ignorance, impatience and unbelief —which made itself recognised in spite of all by its own force and beauty, and through all ages has proved as undying as the little tribe to which it was first revealed in the wilderness. When the people through suffering had been cleansed of this sin, God's Presence descended in the camp, and the people, awed and humbled, stood afar off to worship. Moses drew near, and then came a test of his character. "My presence shall no more guide this erring people," the Lord had threatened. His faithful servant, Moses, should take their place, and of him and his descendants He would make a nation. As Abraham, ages ago, had pleaded for the sinful and condemned, so Moses, even more nobly, pleaded now. The ingratitude he had experienced was forgotten; the self interest he might serve was not even remembered; and with a wonderful absence of all petty personal feeling, he ended his beautiful appeal to the justly offended God by offering himself, his own life, as an atonement in their stead. We know that the whole principle and spirit of our Law would render this sacrifice impossible for God to accept. "Him that hath sinned against Me," answers our just God, "him will I blot out of my book." Him and no other. But the beauty of Moses' appeal remains; and you see now how we have in our Bible the text story with all its divinity, of this noble wish of a man to die to save souls; we feel all the intense admiration that such a wish inspires, and

we have besides the unmistakable proof that such an atonement, in God's just, wise plan of each soul bearing its own sin, and, with His mercy, working out its own salvation, *is not possible nor right.* Very tenderly the loving God said "No" to the passionate entreaty of His faithful loving servant—the servant who so loved His creatures—and to him in reward, or, as I almost think, in consequence of this great trial, in which he had not been found wanting, God revealed Himself more fully than He has ever condescended to any human being before or since. "Moses saw God." God spoke to him "face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend;" and I think the meaning of this and of the wonderful vision which swept by him on the rock when the Voice proclaimed the attributes of the Mighty Spirit, is this: that Moses, through long trial-years of suffering, had grown brave enough, and pure enough, and loving enough, to receive the blessed knowledge which only such as he could attempt to grasp. In the highest sense, "He that loveth, knoweth God; for God is love."

XXII.

ויקהל ופקודי—The Sabbath Ordinance.

Exodus, xxxv.—xl.

So Moses went up again into the Mount, and received another Table of the Testimony from the Lord. And when he descended this time, with the wonderfully inscribed stone in his hands, the people, with shrinking reverence, perceived that he moved among them, but was not of them. "His face shone;" the pure and perfect light of the mysterious Presence in which he had dwelt, had left its reflected glow and glory on his features; and even so, a reflection only, it was too intense for mortals to gaze on without awe; and before he spoke with them again he covered his face with a veil. Then he gathered all the congregation together to give them yet again, and yet more impressively, the command to keep the Sabbath. "Six days thou shalt labour, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest." Thus both work and rest are God-given injunctions: and as this institution of a day of rest—which in some form and on some day is universally observed—was first given to us, we will wait here a minute to try and discover what the Jewish Sabbath really means and what it *should* be.

"It shall be to you a holy day," Moses explains; and Isaiah, who is very often like poetry to history, when speaking on like subjects, says a great deal about it, and

specially this: "Ye shall call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable." So you see it was to be at one and the same time a happy day and a holy day to us. This is the ruling idea of the Jewish Sabbath—holy to the Lord and a delight to ourselves.

In our wise, merciful Law, given to guide us to Heaven, and not to bring Heaven down to us, the fact of the Law being designed for the use of human creatures, with human likings and dislikings, passions, wants and temptations, is never once lost sight of in the smallest detail or the largest command. We hope to reach our Heaven by no impossible hair-wide bridge—such as the Mahommedan faith believes in or perhaps employs as a type—such a bridge could never even have its foundations firmly fixed in such quicksands as our ignorance and unbelief would prove. So our Law gives broad beautiful *practical* injunctions, and specially so in this instance. Work was holy and honourable in God's sight. Adam's punishment was a hidden blessing to his descendants. No pleasure is so keen as the sense of having worked well and cheerfully, and earned the rest or the reward that follows. Even the working, the actual labour, has a charm of its own; and I am quite certain that no much-desired happiness of any sort which we might "drop into," as the saying is, would be half as intense in the enjoyment as one we had worked for honestly, bravely and patiently, and so at last earned. Thus we were to work in order to gain earthly as well as Heavenly well-being, and in some form or other we nearly all do; and lest those whose work is less hard or less apparent should be envied or misunderstood by

those who literally toil by the "sweat of their brow," the command both for labour and repose was made absolute and universal. None were to be exempt from honest industry. The manna, a gift from Heaven, which God could as well have let lie at each man's tent door as "all about the camp," taught this lesson; before sitting down to eat, they were to go out and gather it; but on the Sabbath, none, as you know was to be found—rest was earned and deserved on that day by the labour of the other six. All *unnecessary* work was forbidden; the man who in open disobedience to God's will, and defiance of His minister went out to gather sticks on the Sabbath, was put to death; while on the other hand, as if to show us that God looks deeper than we, and punishes or rewards the motive rather than the act, we find the Maccabees fighting on the Sabbath for their homes and their religion, and this "work" being crowned with victory.

By the Jewish law and practice, work holds a most honourable position; and not only the work, as a sort of vague sentimental idea, but practically and openly the workers also. No broad distinctions were made between the different sorts of toilers—brains and hands, as in the pretty old fable, were each to honour each—and you will see a grand foundation for this oldest and most true form of "liberal principles" in the next Sedrah, which is also read this week. Our greatest teachers and thinkers were in the most literal sense "working men," actual handicrafts-men, who were not petted or patronised in those days, but were honoured, not in spite of, nor because of their work but independently of it altogether.

The law of labour was general, instituted by God Himself, Who made the act of Creation a six days' progressive work and then rested on the seventh as if to show us the equal beauty and necessity of repose. Then He gave us the Sabbath telling us to rest, and to "make it holy." In order that life should be worthily fulfilled —all its aims, objects, and purposes honestly and patiently worked for—these little weekly halting places are given us to stay a while, and look around and upward, seeing how best we can make them the days of rest God intended. Rest to our bodies and rest to our souls, a ceasing for a little space from all troubles and passions and cares, all evil thoughts and unkind words, as well as all actual and daily work; a day to be spent in praise and thanks to God for the blessings He has given, and in honest healthy enjoyment of these. No puritanical or monastic ideas enter into the law of the Jewish Sabbath. The prophet Isaiah warns us against the only pleasures we may not indulge in. "Keep thy foot," he says, "from doing *thine own* pleasure on My holy day." Rest, that is, from all selfish enjoyments, all pleasures of which our own gratification is the sole object, and make it, as far as possible, a rest to other toilers besides ourselves, and then we can scarcely fail to make it in the sense God would have us—a holy day.

XXIII.

וַיִּקְרָא—Concerning Sacrifices.

Leviticus i.—vi.

If you just glance at this and next week's portion of the Law, I am afraid you will feel inclined to close the Bible and say, "Oh, it looks all about sacrifices and offerings; that can't be interesting to us; let us read some other part." I thought at first of humouring this rather natural feeling of yours, and of finding some story from the lives of our great men to tell you about instead; but it was said to me that no part of our beautiful perfect Law can possibly be uninteresting even to little children if properly explained, and so I mean to try and make these first few chapters in Leviticus as suggestive and instructive to you as the more familiar ones in Genesis and Exodus.

From the earliest times we find sacrifices forming an important part of men's worship. You remember how Cain and Abel both brought offerings to God; and how Noah's first act on leaving the safe shelter of the ark was to express his gratitude in a great sacrifice, the "sweet savour" from his altar ascending to Heaven, whence fire came down consuming and accepting the gift. So it would seem that the *desire*

to sacrifice, to make offerings in this form, existed before the *command*, and it was entrusted to Moses, the wise legislator, to frame rules, in order that this instinct or impulse might be developed and educated, and under the name of Ceremonial Judaism guard and give expression, at one and the same time, to the spiritual part of the religion; our very nature, our double life of body and soul—the two-fold experiences these were to know in earth and Heaven, made a double form of religion necessary for the full satisfaction of both. A religion which should be all spiritual, the knowledge of which must be conveyed to us neither through eyes nor ears nor senses, would make too great a strain on the faith which craves to be brought near, close to the Being on which it is told it depends. The bodily nature needs to express itself in some form, and therefore in the early ages of the world, when all things were more natural and simple than they are now, this form of worship was permitted as being the most fitted for the people's needs.

With change of circumstances and surroundings, the outward forms of religion change, as the outward manners and customs of human nature change; but the religion remains as the nature itself, in its principle unchangeable and essentially the same as when God called it into being and pronounced it "good." So we see the motive of sacrifices can be found in the nature itself of man. It was obeying the same impulse which makes you long to give little gifts to those you love, and rejoice to see the smile or feel the gentle touch which accepts and rewards

the offering. As Abel brought the firstlings of his flock, the best and fairest of his possessions, and saw them disappear in the holy fire which burned on his altar, he must have felt a sense of intimate communion with his God, which could never have existed if his worship had been denied this, or any like means of actual and visible expression. As the world grew older, danger came of the expression being followed, and the idea which made its value and its beauty being lost sight of. In that long sojourn in Egypt, even before the sojourn was turned into slavery, the Israelites, always so susceptible to influence, must have had their notions of religion dreadfully degraded by the base forms of worship they saw around them. God, meant no longer a wonderful unseen Spirit, Whose goodness and graciousness showed itself now and again in visions of the night to patient believers, and always in loving, if invisible, protection to all His creatures; instead of this pure ennobling idea of a Deity, they beheld a confusing multitude of so-called gods, each with his own especial attribute of mischief or capricious kindness, fashioned in familiar forms of bird or beast, and requiring the most horrid rites from the poor ignorant worshippers. Rescued at length from this debasing idolatry to be the possessors and transmitters of the one true religion which was to endure for all time and prove a blessing to all peoples, we see at once in these conditions a necessity for the revelation of Sinai to adapt itself in a measure to the peculiar circumstances. What we understand in these days by

Judaism is *essentially* in its *principles*, the same as was revealed to Moses in the wilderness. Our religion, like its Giver, is Eternal, undying and unchangeable; but the outward circumstances of that time differ widely from those of this time, and so, in some *outward* particulars, does the religion. The needs and requirements of that age were not identical with ours, and chiefly and most especially in this ordinance of sacrifices. Fresh from Egypt, with its horribly material worship—that is, its religion satisfying the body only, and exercising and gratifying only the senses—a religion all spiritual, an invisible God to be adored only by silent praise, would have been too great a change. The new religion had to be nursed, and the God they were to recognise and worship had to be brought near to them through the medium of sacrifice. This was its primary object, to familiarize them with the idea of an All-powerful and yet invisible Creator, a Being they must believe in without seeing, and yet could serve in this substantial and tangible form; appealing, as it were, to their mind through their senses.

This, it seems to me, was the first and most important part that sacrifices played; as educating the people to the pure worship of the one true God. A secondary good must have grown from it, in the habits of self-denial and charity which its performance involved. Of the "firstlings of their flocks," of the best of their possessions, the offerings were commanded to be made; no room being left in this exact code for meanness to creep in or any dangerous bargaining with

conscience. As the trespass offering or sin offering was laid on the altar, a man must have felt, knowing that part of it went to the poor, that in so depriving himself of what he valued, he was, as far as he could, making amends for his fault and letting good grow out of evil. The public acknowledgement must have been useful discipline too; and lest they might grow to consider the sacrifice itself as the atonement instead of it being only the outward sign, the command comes: "If a soul sin . . . lie unto his neighbour, in what was delivered to him to keep, or in finding what was lost, or in taking by violence . . . he shall restore the principal to him to whom it belongeth, and add a fifth part thereto." . . . . and *then* "he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord." You see then, that though the sacrifices were permitted as an outward form of worship, how carefully the possibility was guarded against of their standing in place of the virtues they were only meant to express.

XXIV.

—Concerning Sacrifices.

Leviticus vi,—ix.

So you will see from what I have told you concerning the *motive* of sacrifices, something of their value and necessity at the time they were instituted. As men gradually grew into a more intimate knowledge of God; as they learnt the lessons His Law proclaimed, and so saw and recognised Him in His works; you can understand how the idea of a God—Israel's God, the Unseen, but always-felt Presence, Whose throne is Heaven and Whose footstool is earth—became in time and by slow degrees as firmly rooted and as actual to the soul's vision as those material gods which they had known in Egypt. The unseen God became at last as *real* as those images of wood and stone, which in the dark days of ignorance and unbelief men worshipped as visibly interpreting their dim vague longings for a something better, something higher, than they found in their fellow-men. But the pure, beautiful belief grew, as you will know the more you read of our history, by very gradual, very slow degrees, with frequent stumblings. frequent impatient lapses into the more easily practised idolatry by which they had been surrounded. They found it difficult to be good, to believe in what they could not see, to worship what they could not touch; and God understood and made allowances for this want of spiritual faith, knowing it

must come in time, and led them to it, letting them bring to Him His own gifts, all through the lives of the patient patriarchs, and many succeeding ages. On the barren desert, on the slopes of Mount Carmel, on the marble courts of the glorious temple, wherever men raised the altar with humble reverent hands, God's holy fire descended in answer to the visible prayer with which they sought to come near him. "I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or burnt offerings," He says, "though every beast of the forest is Mime, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." He did not *need* our gifts, but in His goodness and wisdom gave us this and every other possible help and incentive to be good. He knew life must seem hard and thorny to those poor wandering ancestors of ours, and sinful paths smooth and pleasant and easy to their tread, so He guided and helped them, and took away the desire to follow the all but universal custom of offering to strange gods, by saying, "Bring your offerings to Me."

Sacrifices then, you see, were needed, in the same sense, and for the same purpose as you have seen props used in building a house. When with much care and after much time the house stands firmly on its own foundations, the props are naturally taken away; so through the wanderings in the wilderness, when the religion had to be built up, as it were, these aids to its life and strength were permitted. When they at last entered into possession of the Holy Land, the faith had still to be fostered and guarded from the surrounding idolatry; and sacrifices were still an outward necessity to rouse and stimulate the people through the rule of the Judges and

the Kings. Every now and then, however, emphatic warnings were uttered by the prophets, the "men of God" of those times—insisting on the meaning and the use of sacrifice, and showing the people of how little value the thing itself was in the sight of God. It was not, and never was, the sacrifice which formed the atonement; it it was accepted only by Him as an outward sign or expression of the penitence felt. I cannot find words too strong to impress you with this; for the one point on which conversionists have a chance with ignorant Jews is the argument that the sacrifice which forms the groundwork of their faith was prefigured and led up to in the general system of sacrifices, which forms so large a part of the Mosaic code.

I hope I have made you understand a little how impossible this is—how the whole ordinance of sacrifices was only needed for a time, and only given for the time when it was needed. That sacrifices never took the place, and were never intended to take the place of atonement; nor to stand, whether as sin-offerings, or as trespass-offerings, as free-will offerings, or gifts of thanksgiving, in lieu of what they so represented. As the religion grew better understood, and the spiritual notion of its Divine Giver better appreciated, the question which Samuel asked, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying His voice?" found wider and wider echoes in the circles of mankind; and the answer of men's hearts—hearts through these long ages, grown into a surer "likeness" of the image in which they were created—is heard saying, that they can walk now in the path He has shown, by the light of

His law, without these props, these visible material helps, which He permitted them to use for a time. We know blood and incense were never pleasant to Him for, and by themselves; they were only means to an end, never in any sense to be used or understood as an end in themselves. Now, prayer takes the place of sacrifice. Since the burning of our beautiful temple no high-priest has ever stood at God's altar interpreting between Him and His people. Good has grown out of evil. In all the centuries that have rolled between—centuries which have held for us persecution, cruelty, exile—we have yet been drawn nearer to our God and Father, who has been in so true and literal a sense our "Shield, and a very present Help in time of trouble." Now, without the medium of sacrifice, we "enter His courts with thanksgiving, and joyfully sing hymns to Him," in the sure hope that the "offering of our lips will be as acceptable as the blood of bulls." It is a fact very suggestive of comfort for us that God permits outward forms of religion to change with outward circumstances—but the rind, which varies with the "times and the seasons" in shape and substance guards the kernel of the fruit.

I do not know that I can conclude these chapters better than by telling you what the Prophet Micah says on the subject He lived in the days when the Israelites were governed by kings, and the people worshipped, now their God and now their idols, and grudged Him the worship which, even when scrupulously performed in the letter, yet found no favour in His sight. They come to Micah, loud, angry in their impatience. "What does the Lord require?" they demand. "Shall I come before

Him with burnt-offerings, with year-old calves? Can we please him with thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil?" Wonderfully calm is the holy man's reply to the loud clamour of the excited multitude. Wise, gentle words, falling low and softly, but leaving an echo for all time "He hath shown thee what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee? only to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God."

XXV.

שמיני.—The Breastplate of Gems.—The Descent of the Holy Fire.—Disobedience.

Leviticus ix.—xii.

So the ordinances of the sacrifices were completely explained to Moses, and Aaron was ordained as high priest. This office was to be hereditary, which I daresay you know, means continuing in the same family always. The tribe to which Aaron belonged was that of Levi, and in each generation some members of it were set apart for the holy service. A special dress also distinguished the office, and about this even special directions were given. The wonderful part of it I must describe to you somewhat at length. This was a breastplate formed of twelve large precious stones, on each of which the name of one of the twelve tribes was engraved. By means of these stones the priest would "enquire of the Lord," as it was called: that is, in any matter in which he needed higher guidance than his own judgment or conscience supplied, he would seek it from the Lord in this way. The priest would ask the question, and the reply would come from the stones—a light would play on those letters which were to form the answer, and by that light

he would be guided. The brilliancy and purity of the stones was intended to typify the character of the priest; and looking on that shining breastplate he was to see his own life, as it were, reflected in those gems. On the most stainless jewels only could any revelation of God's will be seen; and it was the most stainless men only whose sight was pure enough and keen enough to see it. The stones must be without flaw which expressed God's will, and the lives must be without flaw which were to interpret it. A blemish in either—the meaning was lost. This is the interpretation which tradition gives of what the Bible calls enquiring of the Lord by the Urim and Thummim. It was a beautiful idea, and it is sad to know that the miraculous appearance left a loophole for superstition or imposture to creep in. In after times false priests were not wanting, who would sometimes use these means to mislead the people.

When all was ready, God's cloud, as I have told you filled the Tabernacle; and Aaron, the newly appointed priest, offered the first offering in the name of the people, and the answering Glory was visible to all. Solemnly in the presence of that vast multitude, and using the consecrated vessels—consecrated, that is made holy in a double sense, for they were sacred to God's worship and sacred too as being free-will gifts made for that worship—Aaron blessed the congregation in the name of the Lord. And as they saw the holy fire descend to consume the offering, and felt as well as saw the wonderful Cloud which symboled the awful Presence, Whose love and power they daily experienced, we can understand that once more, though only for a time, they were impressed;

and as they "shouted and fell on their faces," for the moment, the full beauty and meaning of their religion must have been present to their minds.

In the very next chapter we read of a fresh sin, and that too in the family of the high priest. Nadab and Abihu, take vessels from the altar, put "strange fire therein," and offer therewith to God. Fire from Heaven comes in this instance also, but in terrible answer—consuming both sacrifice and worshippers. "The men died before the Lord. . . . And Aaron held his peace." It is a sad little tale told in three short verses; but the moral and the meaning are so large that the text may well be simple. At first sight the sin does not seem so great. "only offering one sort of fire instead of another," you may say; yet *that* was the sin—a type of the sinning which has made us what we are—a people without a country—clinging to a religion, whose glorious shrine has been twice destroyed. Dispersed, homeless, persecuted, at the best strangers and sojourners, learning to "sing the Lord's song in a strange land," if we are only true to ourselves, we can trace the beginning of all our troubles to that seemingly small sin for which Aaron's sons died—the sin of disobedience. It is the one fault to which we have been always, at all times, the most prone, offering, as it were, "strange fire" instead of what was ordained, and seeing no difference; and since both made a blaze, wondering why we should be punished when the result seemed the same. The disobedience had its roots too in self conceit. "Why should not our fire, the fire we offer, be as good as any other? Why should not our way of doing things be the right way?"

Read by the light of history, this story of Nadab and Abihu is very sad and suggestive: perhaps it was only over-zeal on the part of these young men, eagerness which needed another Samuel to remind them that "to obey" is better than to sacrifice, and then the punishment does seem severe; but it stands out for us all the clearer by that fierce light, as a lesson and a warning that God's laws are given to be obeyed, that we are to do His Will and in His Way. It was a lesson needed for their own good by those Israelites of old, who were very like you, little children now, both in their faults and their virtues. God knew it was best for them, as your parents and elders know it is best for you, to yield simple obedience, without indulging in argument, for which experience is needed, or wanting too much explanation, which requires reason to understand. The great help to obedience is trust; and the great barrier to it is conceit; so now you will know when you are debating whether you shall take your own way or the way that has been pointed out —what two forces are at work within you. If our ancestors had believed in the Lord and His servant Moses; had trusted in His Love and Wisdom rather than in their own conceited little knowledge; had followed the directions of the Law, rather than the "inclinations of their eyes and their hearts;" how much trouble would have been spared them. Those who cannot obey can never rule. All our greatest leaders and judges learnt this truth, and Samuel's childhood is perhaps its prettiest illustration. The moral of this sad incident is complete in the sorrowful little sentence which sums up the father's feeling at the terrible death in one day

conscience. As the trespass offering or sin offering was laid on the altar, a man must have felt, knowing that part of it went to the poor, that in so depriving himself of what he valued, he was, as far as he could, making amends for his fault and letting good grow out of evil. The public acknowledgement must have been useful discipline too; and lest they might grow to consider the sacrifice itself as the atonement instead of it being only the outward sign, the command comes: "If a soul sin . . . lie unto his neighbour, in what was delivered to him to keep, or in finding what was lost, or in taking by violence . . . he shall restore the principal to him to whom it belongeth, and add a fifth part thereto." . . . . and *then* "he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord." You see then, that though the sacrifices were permitted as an outward form of worship, how carefully the possibility was guarded against of their standing in place of the virtues they were only meant to express.

XXIV.

✠—Concerning Sacrifices.

Leviticus vi,—ix,

So you will see from what I have told you concerning the *motive* of sacrifices, something of their value and necessity at the time they were instituted. As men gradually grew into a more intimate knowledge of God; as they learnt the lessons His Law proclaimed, and so saw and recognised Him in His works; you can understand how the idea of a God—Israel's God, the Unseen, but always-felt Presence, Whose throne is Heaven and Whose footstool is earth—became in time and by slow degrees as firmly rooted and as actual to the soul's vision as those material gods which they had known in Egypt. The unseen God became at last as *real* as those images of wood and stone, which in the dark days of ignorance and unbelief men worshipped as visibly interpreting their dim vague longings for a something better, something higher, than they found in their fellow-men. But the pure, beautiful belief grew, as you will know the more you read of our history, by very gradual, very slow degrees, with frequent stumblings. frequent impatient lapses into the more easily practised idolatry by which they had been surrounded. They found it difficult to be good, to believe in what they could not see, to worship what they could not touch; and God understood and made allowances for this want of spiritual faith, knowing it

must come in time, and led them to it, letting them bring to Him His own gifts, all through the lives of the patient patriarchs, and many succeeding ages. On the barren desert, on the slopes of Mount Carmel, on the marble courts of the glorious temple, wherever men raised the altar with humble reverent hands, God's holy fire descended in answer to the visible prayer with which they sought to come near him. "I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or burnt offerings," He says, "though every beast of the forest is Mime, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." He did not *need* our gifts, but in His goodness and wisdom gave us this and every other possible help and incentive to be good. He knew life must seem hard and thorny to those poor wandering ancestors of ours, and sinful paths smooth and pleasant and easy to their tread, so He guided and helped them, and took away the desire to follow the all but universal custom of offering to strange gods, by saying, "Bring your offerings to Me."

Sacrifices then, you see, were needed, in the same sense, and for the same purpose as you have seen props used in building a house. When with much care and after much time the house stands firmly on its own foundations, the props are naturally taken away; so through the wanderings in the wilderness, when the religion had to be built up, as it were, these aids to its life and strength were permitted. When they at last entered into possession of the Holy Land, the faith had still to be fostered and guarded from the surrounding idolatry; and sacrifices were still an outward necessity to rouse and stimulate the people through the rule of the Judges and

the Kings. Every now and then, however, emphatic warnings were uttered by the prophets, the "men of God" of those times—insisting on the meaning and the use of sacrifice, and showing the people of how little value the thing itself was in the sight of God. It was not, and never was, the sacrifice which formed the atonement; it it was accepted only by Him as an outward sign or expression of the penitence felt. I cannot find words too strong to impress you with this; for the one point on which conversionists have a chance with ignorant Jews is the argument that the sacrifice which forms the groundwork of their faith was prefigured and led up to in the general system of sacrifices, which forms so large a part of the Mosaic code.

I hope I have made you understand a little how impossible this is—how the whole ordinance of sacrifices was only needed for a time, and only given for the time when it was needed. That sacrifices never took the place, and were never intended to take the place of atonement; nor to stand, whether as sin-offerings, or as trespass-offerings, as free-will offerings, or gifts of thanksgiving, in lieu of what they so represented. As the religion grew better understood, and the spiritual notion of its Divine Giver better appreciated, the question which Samuel asked, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying His voice?" found wider and wider echoes in the circles of mankind; and the answer of men's hearts—hearts through these long ages, grown into a surer "likeness" of the image in which they were created—is heard saying, that they can walk now in the path He has shown, by the light of

His law, without these props, these visible material helps, which He permitted them to use for a time. We know blood and incense were never pleasant to Him for, and by themselves; they were only means to an end, never in any sense to be used or understood as an end in themselves. Now, prayer takes the place of sacrifice. Since the burning of our beautiful temple no high-priest has ever stood at God's altar interpreting between Him and His people. Good has grown out of evil. In all the centuries that have rolled between—centuries which have held for us persecution, cruelty, exile—we have yet been drawn nearer to our God and Father, who has been in so true and literal a sense our "Shield, and a very present Help in time of trouble." Now, without the medium of sacrifice, we "enter His courts with thanksgiving, and joyfully sing hymns to Him," in the sure hope that the "offering of our lips will be as acceptable as the blood of bulls." It is a fact very suggestive of comfort for us that God permits outward forms of religion to change with outward circumstances—but the rind, which varies with the "times and the seasons" in shape and substance guards the kernel of the fruit.

I do not know that I can conclude these chapters better than by telling you what the Prophet Micah says on the subject He lived in the days when the Israelites were governed by kings, and the people worshipped, now their God and now their idols, and grudged Him the worship which, even when scrupulously performed in the letter, yet found no favour in His sight. They come to Micah, loud, angry in their impatience. "What does the Lord require?" they demand. "Shall I come before

Him with burnt-offerings, with year-old calves? Can we please him with thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil?" Wonderfully calm is the holy man's reply to the loud clamour of the excited multitude. Wise, gentle words, falling low and softly, but leaving an echo for all time "He hath shown thee what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee? only to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God."

XXV.

שמיני.—The Breastplate of Gems.—The Descent of the Holy Fire.—Disobedience.

Leviticus ix.—xii.

So the ordinances of the sacrifices were completely explained to Moses, and Aaron was ordained as high priest. This office was to be hereditary, which I daresay you know, means continuing in the same family always. The tribe to which Aaron belonged was that of Levi, and in each generation some members of it were set apart for the holy service. A special dress also distinguished the office, and about this even special directions were given. The wonderful part of it I must describe to you somewhat at length. This was a breastplate formed of twelve large precious stones, on each of which the name of one of the twelve tribes was engraved. By means of these stones the priest would "enquire of the Lord," as it was called: that is, in any matter in which he needed higher guidance than his own judgment or conscience supplied, he would seek it from the Lord in this way. The priest would ask the question, and the reply would come from the stones—a light would play on those letters which were to form the answer, and by that light

he would be guided. The brilliancy and purity of the stones was intended to typify the character of the priest; and looking on that shining breastplate he was to see his own life, as it were, reflected in those gems. On the most stainless jewels only could any revelation of God's will be seen; and it was the most stainless men only whose sight was pure enough and keen enough to see it. The stones must be without flaw which expressed God's will, and the lives must be without flaw which were to interpret it. A blemish in either—the meaning was lost. This is the interpretation which tradition gives of what the Bible calls enquiring of the Lord by the Urim and Thummim. It was a beautiful idea, and it is sad to know that the miraculous appearance left a loophole for superstition or imposture to creep in. In after times false priests were not wanting, who would sometimes use these means to mislead the people.

When all was ready, God's cloud, as I have told you filled the Tabernacle; and Aaron, the newly appointed priest, offered the first offering in the name of the people, and the answering Glory was visible to all. Solemnly in the presence of that vast multitude, and using the consecrated vessels—consecrated, that is made holy in a double sense, for they were sacred to God's worship and sacred too as being free-will gifts made for that worship—Aaron blessed the congregation in the name of the Lord. And as they saw the holy fire descend to consume the offering, and felt as well as saw the wonderful Cloud which symboled the awful Presence, Whose love and power they daily experienced, we can understand that once more, though only for a time, they were impressed;

and as they "shouted and fell on their faces," for the moment, the full beauty and meaning of their religion must have been present to their minds.

In the very next chapter we read of a fresh sin, and that too in the family of the high priest. Nadab and Abihu, take vessels from the altar, put "strange fire therein," and offer therewith to God. Fire from Heaven comes in this instance also, but in terrible answer—consuming both sacrifice and worshippers. "The men died before the Lord. . . . And Aaron held his peace." It is a sad little tale told in three short verses; but the moral and the meaning are so large that the text may well be simple. At first sight the sin does not seem so great. "only offering one sort of fire instead of another," you may say; yet *that* was the sin—a type of the sinning which has made us what we are—a people without a country—clinging to a religion, whose glorious shrine has been twice destroyed. Dispersed, homeless, persecuted, at the best strangers and sojourners, learning to "sing the Lord's song in a strange land," if we are only true to ourselves, we can trace the beginning of all our troubles to that seemingly small sin for which Aaron's sons died—the sin of disobedience. It is the one fault to which we have been always, at all times, the most prone, offering, as it were, "strange fire" instead of what was ordained, and seeing no difference; and since both made a blaze, wondering why we should be punished when the result seemed the same. The disobedience had its roots too in self conceit. "Why should not our fire, the fire we offer, be as good as any other? Why should not our way of doing things be the right way?"

Read by the light of history, this story of Nadab and Abihu is very sad and suggestive: perhaps it was only over-zeal on the part of these young men, eagerness which needed another Samuel to remind them that "to obey" is better than to sacrifice, and then the punishment does seem severe; but it stands out for us all the clearer by that fierce light, as a lesson and a warning that God's laws are given to be obeyed, that we are to do His Will and in His Way. It was a lesson needed for their own good by those Israelites of old, who were very like you, little children now, both in their faults and their virtues. God knew it was best for them, as your parents and elders know it is best for you, to yield simple obedience, without indulging in argument, for which experience is needed, or wanting too much explanation, which requires reason to understand. The great help to obedience is trust; and the great barrier to it is conceit; so now you will know when you are debating whether you shall take your own way or the way that has been pointed out —what two forces are at work within you. If our ancestors had believed in the Lord and His servant Moses; had trusted in His Love and Wisdom rather than in their own conceited little knowledge; had followed the directions of the Law, rather than the "inclinations of their eyes and their hearts;" how much trouble would have been spared them. Those who cannot obey can never rule. All our greatest leaders and judges learnt this truth, and Samuel's childhood is perhaps its prettiest illustration. The moral of this sad incident is complete in the sorrowful little sentence which sums up the father's feeling at the terrible death in one day

of his two sons—"and Aaron held his peace." He knew his God was just, even as that other father centuries later heard of the doom coming on his sons, with the resigned expression: "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth to Him good." It was the Lord, and it was good—good even for the sinners themselves—that this grave fault of disobedience should be severely punished, in order that the conceit and ignorance and obstinacy, which are its roots, might be plucked out; that the trouble and sorrow, which are its sure fruits, might wither before they had time to grow and "bear seed according to their kind."

XXVI.

The Story of Naaman, the Leper.

On the Haphtorah of תזריע.

Long after the time when the events recorded in the portion of the Bible we have been considering took place; long after they had been gathered into history and made, under God's guidance, into an inspired Book; long after the time when the history so written was read out in weekly portions on the Sabbath to the assembled congregation; a new custom arose out of that old institution. When strangers held possession of our beautiful country, when they tried, as the only means of crushing the nation, to stamp out the religion, this weekly reading was forbidden, and every Scroll of the Law that could be found was destroyed. The tyrants thought the surest means of making the people forget their God was to deprive them of this opportunity of hearing the stories of His goodness and power and wisdom; and possibly the plan might in time have succeeded had not our ancestors thought of another means by which they might be regularly reminded of His wondrous acts to His chosen people. The law of Moses —the Pentateuch—with all it holds of valuable in

counsel and story, was indeed closed to them; but the chronicles of their kings and judges, and the exhortations of their prophets, were still left, and from this vast storehouse they might yet glean in their sore need. Sadly and piously the wise men of those times selected portions from the sacred writings which, in ever so slight a way, should bear a resemblance to the Sedrah of the week, to which under happier circumstances, they would have reverently listened. These substitutes for the Law, the Torah itself, were called Haphtorahs and were read in its place. Now, though the occasion for it is happily past, the custom is still observed; and the Portion from the Prophets take its place by the side of the Portion from the Law in the Sabbath service in most of our synagogues. In making their selection, a very slight resemblance was sufficient to satisfy these sages of old; for instance, one of the portions of this week treats of leprosy and disease. The section that supplied its place is found in Kings, and is the story of a leper, and it is about that I mean to tell you.

Of course, in a code which was so comprehensive as the Law of Moses—which was given to teach religion and morality to a nation absolutely ignorant of both, which was to be a statute book supplying legal and physical as well as moral guidance—in such a code you can well understand that there must be many chapters quite beyond the intelligence of children to even appreciate. When we come to such, and I cannot find even a verse on which to hang a story that would be simple enough to interest you, I shall, as in this instance, turn to the Haphtorah, and so give you a glimpse into another part of the Bible.

It was a long while after the events recorded in the Pentateuch, when the Promised Land, which had been fought and toiled for, and which the patient leader had never entered, had been for centuries in the possession of the Israelites, that a good man named Elisha lived and laboured in the cause for which Moses and Joshua, and so many other brave and wise and tender hearts have lived and died. They, with all that generation, had long passed away, and the impatient people who had chafed under the gentle leadership of Moses, and rebelled again and again under the sterner rule of the judges, had asked and obtained a government by kings. Under this form they were still sinning and discontentented, and only happy by fits and starts. They lacked the power of self-government and self-control, which gives to obedience and serving as true a dignity as to ruling. So when this story opens, both king and people were on bad terms with themselves and with each other. Quarrels and troubles within the gates had led, as is always the case, to strangers taking advantage of the circumstance to profit themselves; and the Syrians, a neighbouring tribe, had carried away many a captive from Israel in the sorties which they had successfully made against the idolatrous, disunited city. Among these, serving in the family of the most valiant of the Syrian King's generals, was a little maiden, who, amid all the new scenes, did not forget the old home and old associations. She waited on this general's wife, who, one would fancy, must have made the little captive's duties as easy as kindness and consideration could suggest, for we find the maid sympathising with the mistress's

trouble, which could hardly otherwise have been the case. This brave, great general, who was named Naaman, suffered from the loathsome disease of leprosy, and in the constant trouble of the household, the little Israelitish girl thinks of her God—the God Who proclaims Himself as the Lord "Who healeth all thy diseases." Her thoughts wander from the strange land in which she is a little favourite slave, and travel back, recalling old scenes and older memories. A vision comes to her of a corn field, all glowing in the Eastern sun, and a little lad, an only child, stricken down by sore and sudden sickness. She sees him—for the tale has made a wonderful impression on her childish mind—carried home to the poor mother, who held him close to her till he died. And then she sees a man of God come into the sorrowful chamber of death, and lay holy hands upon the child, and restore him warm and living to his parent's arms. She thinks of other like deeds of this great prophet, in which the wonder and the miracle is lost in the love; and, suddenly, with the sure faith which, once implanted, no exile or captivity can crush out, exclaims: "Would God that my master were with the prophet that is in Samaria! *he* would recover him of his leprosy." And the little maid's earnestness made an impression on her captors, unbelievers though they were; and when her words were carried to the King, he counselled his general to make the journey. Rich presents were prepared, and the King of Syria wrote to the King of Israel, with whom he was just then on terms of treacherous friendship, commending Naaman to his good service in the mission which brought him to

Samaria. The friendship was a hollow one, being founded on no mutual esteem, nor any common ground of religion or nationality; and the King of Israel thought he saw in this courteous letter an occasion sought for quarrel. "Am I God," he said, "to kill and make alive, that this man sends to me to recover a man of his leprosy?"

XXVII.

THE STORY OF NAAMAN—(CONTINUED.)

When Elisha heard of the weak king's angry fear, he went to him, and with a grand scorn of his cowardly unbelief, asks, "Why hast thou rent thy clothes? Let this man come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." In the spirit of that beautiful passage in the Hallel, beginning, לֹא לָנוּ ה׳ לֹא לָנוּ "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name is honour," Elisha's thought was not for the glory of the king or the kingdom, nor personal desire for fame, but that the heathen prince might see that Israel's God had not left His people—fallen though they were—without a witness of His power and love. So with his horses and chariot Naaman came, and the great cavalcade stopped at the door of Elisha's humble dwelling, The good, simple-minded prophet, who was grateful for a "bed, a table, a stool, and a candlestick" wherewith his kind hostess at Shunem had, as he considered, amply furnished his room, must have felt inclined to smile at the state and magnificence with which the foreign general sought to impress him. He sends a messenger to the waiting prince with the simple direction, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh will be clean." Extremely indignant at the message and the manner, Naaman turns and goes away in a rage—at the least he

had expected the prophet himself would come out to him; and then placing his hands upon him, and calling on the name of the Lord, have so healed him in a grand impressive manner—a manner as he would consider worthy of so illustrious a suppliant. But a message! and simply to wash and be clean! and in the Jordan, a small stream of this small Palestine! "Are not Arbana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus," exclaims the proud Syrian, "better than all the waters of Israel?" If so simple a means as bathing was to effect a cure, why the need for this long journey, and the hopeful humble petition to the prophet. Were not Arbana and Pharpar flowing close to his own vineyards? "May I not wash in *them* and be clean," he demands, and turns away in a rage.

The wise and gentle Elisha does not heed nor answer the proud angry words; and it is one of his own servants who ventures to suggest second and better thoughts to the impatient Naaman. "My father," says the servant, "if the prophet had told thee to do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather when he saith to thee only 'wash and be clean?'" It was a wise way of putting a very wide and universal, and often forgotten truth. We are all so ready to be cured of any fault or blemish, but then it must be in our own way; and if the means are not to our liking, how eager we are in saying we would, if things had only been different so that we could! How often we exclaim, "Oh! I would give the world to do so-and-so?" As it is not ours to give, the generosity does not count for much. Would we give any portion of our own small

possession in it? That is the truer test. When some object is striven for, one frequently says, "I would do *anything* to attain it;" anything is so vague, and means just—nothing.

This story of Naaman bears a very wide moral. If Elisha had desired him to go on a long weary pilgrimage, or to give half his fortune to do "some great thing" as the price of his cure, his spirits would have risen to the occasion, and he would have cheerfully set about it at once; but the small, simple, common-place direction seemed beneath his care. And yet in small every day things often, lie our nearest duties, and the need for our truest energies. The whole spirit of our beautiful Law inculcates this—preaching no impossible efforts of self-sacrifice, no necessity of "leaving all to follow God," but showing the highest good in the plainest way, and pointing to obedience as the surest means of attaining it. To us all it is not given, or needed, to brave the dangers of a lion's den for the sake of our faith; but the courage that gave Daniel strength to stand unmoved in such a scene, was gained in that three years' *small every-day* effort of courage and self-denial, when he refused all the nice things from the King's table, and lived only on pulse and water, for the sake of his religion. It would have been so easy and pleasant to be greedy, and so much nicer to pretend to despise such a small matter as eating, and to have said, "Oh, a great thing I would do if it came in my way;" but, believe me, the truest, noblest natures find their duty in what is set before them, small or great, and in just doing that as well as ever they can.

Some glimmer of this must have come to Naaman as

his servant spoke to him. It speaks well for him that he was willing to listen, and not too proud to own that he was wrong. He goes to the river Jordan, whose waters had reflected so many wonderful sights of God's power and providence, and, having bathed, returns cured of his loathsome disease, to bless and thank the prophet. He accepts the healing and its lesson, and the God Who gave both. Very gratefully he acknowledges, "Now, indeed, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel," and in the name of that Mighty One he presses rich gifts on His servant. But in like manner as Joseph, ages before, thankfully but firmly refused the grateful King of Egypt's offered rewards for a service of which he knew he was only the instrument, so Elisha now puts from him the silver and gold which Naaman presses on his acceptance. "Not unto us, but unto the Lord give honour," the pious spirit of the prophet inwardly exclaims; and Naaman in acknowledging Israel's God, finds that His worship is all the service that is required of him. This he promises, but with a little touch which reminds us that he is Naaman the statesman and prince, as well as Naaman the grateful convert, makes the one condition, that when his master the King leans on his arm in the house of the idol Rimmon, the Lord may pardon the bow which the occasion demands, and the failing in which, might imperil his position. And Elisha, the good and unworldly, tolerates in the lower nature what to himself would be impossible, and with a mild, "Go in peace," dismisses the cured leper, and sees him depart for his own land.

XXVIII.

אחרי מות.—The Doctrine of Atonement.

Leviticus xvi—xix.

The Sedrah of this week treats of the most important principle of our religion—a principle valuable and important in and for itself, and scarcely less so as indirectly confirming and strengthening our faith in what constitutes the groundwork of our religion, the foundation on which it all rests—the absolute Unity of our God. Long ages before, God had said that the "imagination of man's heart was evil from his youth;" and this "imagination" often proving stronger for a time than right and conscience, a means of atonement became needful in His wise just plan for the well-being of the creatures He had formed. As one of His prophets, speaking both from the experience of the past and the inspiration of the future, tells us, "God does not desire the death of the sinner," but only that he should "turn from his evil ways and live." So now in the solemn wilderness, where Nadab and Abihu, the two sinning sons of the high priest, had just been stricken with sudden and dreadful death in sight of, and in warning to, the often sinning people, Aaron, the father, who, even as he sorrowed, acknowledged the justice of the Judge Who smote, was to receive and explain the system by which sin might be

atoned for and forgiveness gained. One day in the year was to be solemnly set apart for this purpose, and the institution of the יום כפור is first commanded in this Sedrah. It was to be a day spent in prayer and fasting, in penitent acknowledgment of past sin and earnest resolution of future amendment. "That ye may be clean from your sins," is the reason God gives for the observance of this tenth day of the seventh month; and the motive of the command must be understood, and the day kept in the spirit which God intended, if the happy result would be attained.

I cannot explain to you in this little space the whole beauty and meaning of this solemn Fast of ours; but I want you to recognise in it the like principle which shines in every part of this most perfect code. Sorrow and sin God knew must cast occasional shadows over this beautiful world, but He showed His creatures how such shadows would surely disappear in the light which they themselves must shed of repentance and amendment. The honest owning to a fault, the sincere endeavour to repair its effects, these are what God expects and accepts as atonement. Fasting, to awaken our conscience, so often sent to sleep by soft every-day surroundings; prayer, for forgiveness when our eyes are opened to our wrong-doing; are the two great essentials of this solemn day. Greater charity for the failings of others—our own needing so much—is another lesson it teaches; but the primary idea of it—the one on which I wish to speak to you to-day—is the Jewish doctrine that it is by and through ourselves *only*, that we can make atonement for our sins, and with God's help,

conquer them, and through His mercy be forgiven and "clean." To impress this strongly on men's minds, Aaron was commanded to perform a most peculiar ceremony, when the people should come before him, bringing their trespass and sin-offerings, in acknowledgment of their transgessions. A goat was to be selected from the herd; and in presence of the assembled congregation the high-priest was to solemnly proclaim aloud the confessions of wrong-doing which had been penitently made to him; then laying his hands on the head of the goat, he bade it bear away the forsaken sins, and go forth with this burden, which the people had voluntarily laid down, to roam in the wilderness.

Now I want you to understand this ceremony, and to estimate it at its just value and no more, for it has been twisted by interested interpreters of our Law into an argument and an illustration of the doctrine of "vicarious atonement," it is called, which is utterly opposed to all Jewish ideas. They who hold this notion of atonement believe that our sins may be washed away and forgiven through virtue of sacrifice alone; and that this scapegoat bearing away the sins of the people is a type or emblem of a later history, in which a human life is made to bear, by its sacrifice, a like atonement for the sins of the world. But the meaning of the ceremony —which was not even exactly this—began and ended with its use in the wilderness, as we shall soon see, if we consider for a moment the circumstances under which it was instituted. The people had not only to receive a new religion, but the traces which centuries of degrading idolatry had left on their minds had to be carefully

effaced. The whole system of sacrifices is based on this fact. "That ye shall no more offer to devils; that ye may bring your offerings to Me," is over and over again repeated among the formal directions which we find in the Pentateuch on this subject. Used, then, to those idolatrous rites, in which form and ceremony played so large a part, how was the idea of sins being blotted out and forgiven to be conveyed to their uneducated minds, so quick to receive all outward impressions, except through some imposing visible means? Moses might have preached for ages, and Aaron and the priesthood might have aided him in explaining the sublime idea of a God just and loving, "forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin," and requiring only amended ways and doings in atonement, without the people ever gaining a full notion of what it meant. The words "Though your sins be scarlet they shall be white as wool," may convey a meaning to *our* ears, which have listened through ages to the never-failing story of God's unchanging love; but to our fathers the actual sight of the goat, which their quick Eastern imaginations could fancy actually bearing away the sins which all of them together had cast down, must have conveyed a more vivid impression that the sin was actually *gone*, than any amount of mere words could have conveyed. *We* can see what the people only learnt slowly and by degrees; that the sorrow and the amendment were the true atonement—of which sacrifice and scapegoat were but the outward and at that time needed signs—and that we can by our own efforts repent of, and atone for, our own faults, and gain what was so impressively shown in the wilderness—a reconciliation with the Lord.

XXIX.

קדושים.—The Holiness of a People.

Leviticus xix—xxi.

"Ye shall be holy, as I the Lord your God am holy," is the opening verse in the Sedrah קדושים, supplying the key-note of the chapters which follow. "Ye shall be holy" is the command, giving as standard and incentive the simple and sufficient motive, "for I the Lord your God am holy." Then come the injunctions showing what is meant by being "holy," and how we can become so; and from these I shall select a few that we may see what beautiful, pure, useful lives Jews must lead if they only "hearken and obey."

The first law we come to seems specially adapted to you—"Ye shall fear every one his mother and his father," we read; thus you see placing love and obedience to our parents at the head of the list of duties. What we should understand by "fear" is I think, no cowardly dread, such as slaves feel towards harsh masters, but a love so strong that it would fear to offend, and try to keep from doing

wrong from the knowledge of the grief it would cause. In the same sense as, and only in a lesser degree than we fear God—prizing the love so much that we would hesitate to cause it pain or to risk its loss—should we fulfil this duty to our parents.

Here is another wise command which I fancy you will find as useful and necessary in your nursery or schoolroom as those grown-up ancestors of ours found it in the desert —"Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people." So much mischief is often made by the neglect of this rule, that it is well to think of it for a moment. Telling tales is a fault so easy to fall into, and so very hurtful in its results. It is so difficult, with even the best intentions, to repeat a thing exactly as it happened—and then a little mistake makes so much difference. On the whole, and under most circumstances, it is better and kinder not to "tell." If punishment is deserved for a companion's fault, it is pretty sure to come, and you would be none the happier for it coming through your means, if even, which is assuming a great deal, you managed to give an absolutely true version of the case. Talebearing is always mean and often mischievous and very seldom indulged in from good motives.

"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart," the next verse tells us, so looking deep down below what the world sees of fair words and kindly acts, and bidding us not even in our heart—that secret dwelling place of our own—to let bad revengeful feelings find a home. Mere negative good, which is simply abstaining from evil, is not sufficient in God's sight. It is not enough to refrain from injuring one who perhaps has injured us. Side by side with the

command "thou shalt not avenge nor bear a grudge," is this injunction, which must ensure a full thorough *spirit* of forgiveness, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in *thy heart*." We must not indulge ourselves by nursing bad feeling, cradling angry passions in our secret selves, which only prudence or self control, or worldly wisdom induces us so to hide. Our hearts which "He seeth" must be "holy" as well as the "outward appearance" on which only "man looketh." On the other hand, we are not weakly to see wrong-doing, and let it, by cowardly silence or time-serving, go unremarked. "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin (to rest) upon him" we read; in a word "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," which is the safest rule and includes all. For in giving the love we feel and expect for ourselves, we shall extend at once the charity and forgiveness for faults, and the anxiety to see them avoided which we exercise on our own account. The wider duties which we owe each other are not forgotten; we are not to "steal or deal falsely or lie to one another," and these again are made more emphatic both by frequent repetition and by the details and particulars with which these broad rules are further explained. "Just balances," "just weights," were not considered as trifles beneath the dignity of God's Lawgiver to mention; no "unrighteousness" was permitted in "judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure." Equally in the grand court, where justice made itself seen in the imposing form of the elders of the land sitting in solemn council, equally there as in the humble stall of the poor traffic merchant, where justice was represented in his weights and scales,

was righteousness to be done, without respect to the person of the poor or honour to the person of the mighty. Without fear or favour, throughout the length and breadth of the land, alike in its courts of law as by its poorest and humblest traders, was strict justice to be observed. Strangers were to be included in the observance of this command; and so liberality and tolerance—those two most useful virtues—grew like so many others out of this parent one of justice.

"Ye shall not vex a stranger." "The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be as one born among you: thou shalt love him as thyself," is repeated with a wise care, lest the advantage or the revenge that might not be exercised against a brother in faith might be taken with impunity of a stranger. "For ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" is touchingly added, suggesting to ears that heard, according to the nature of the hearer, sad memories of past trials, or grateful recollections of a yet further past, when happy years were spent under those foreign skies "for Joseph's sake." And in either case, such recollections could not fail of the result desired—to make them just and pitiful to "the stranger." Respect and consideration for age and infirmities were enforced; no laughing at old people's funny looks or ways was to be indulged in; they were to "rise up before the hoary head and honour the face of the old man" a custom which with young people in these days has somewhat gone out of fashion. Equally important and suggestive is the command to "put no stumbling-block before the blind" nor "to curse the deaf." The deaf could not hear, you will say, nor the blind see. Quite right; but

that is the very reason for our being more careful rather than less. Our wise merciful code exacts from us more consideration towards those who are afflicted—so that their infirmity, far from being taken advantage of, should gain for them the greater love and care of their happier neighbours.

XXX.

אמור.—The Feasts of the Lord.

Leviticus xxi.—xxv.

A very important subject is spoken of in this Sedrah, no less a one than the mention of our several Holydays, the institution and solemn observance of which was to aid in the general purpose which can be traced throughout all our code and which God expresses when He says:—"I the Lord have separated you from other people, that ye should be Mine." The distinction between "clean and unclean," the outward ceremonial observances, have all helped in the object of keeping Israel separate and distinct from all other nations, among whom our lot has been thrown, and so better enabled us to fulfil the mission for which we were selected to be "God's witnesses." Rising in the wilderness, the stream of Judaism has flowed on under strange skies, and through very varied countries. Its own waters often rough and troubled, and yet, thanks to these high banks which were raised then to guard it, in the form of these strict and peculiar rules, the stream has come down to us, spite of all foreign

influences, pure as it rose, under Moses' guidance. Chief among ceremonial observances are our Fasts and Festivals, which are briefly mentioned in a chapter of this week's Portion. First in order of need and sacredness is the God-given, God-kept Sabbath, the Holy "Seventh day," on which the Lord Himself rested from all the work which He had done, and which He pronounced to be "good." In like manner, our six day's labour, must deserve a like verdict, that the seventh day's rest may be earned and enjoyed, and so made "holy." First, of the annually recurring Festivals, is the Passover, for the institution of which the very months of the year were changed, that it might be "a statute throughout your generations for ever." As we eat the unleavened bread, and taste the bitter herbs, recounting the sorrows of our ancestors, we seem to live for a brief space, in the shadow of that far away past. Recalling the season of our bondage and humiliation, we must, if we think at all, learn national lessons of gratitude and trust, which a mere anniversary of victory alone, could never teach. "Out of the darkness," He brought us into light, and the memory of that cruel bondage, and the glorious freedom to which it was the sad prelude, binds us Israelites together in the strongest bond of a common brotherhood of sorrow and deliverance. Counting night by night till the tale of seven weeks is told, we come to another incident in that wonderful history, when all that multitude, men, women, and little children, stood encamped round the Holy Mount, and saw Moses descend the slopes of Sinai, with the tables of the Law in his hand. At this season, the first fruits of the fertile land were brought to Him Who

watereth the furrows, and the observance of this שבעות, Feast of Weeks, was likewise made an enduring command. Next in order comes the anniversary of the creation of the world; since the change in the almanac made at the Exodus from Egypt, now, by the new reckoning falling in the seventh month of the civil year, and being held as the first day of the first month in a religious sense only. Very aptly this ראש השנה, the head of the year is to be held very sacred, and observed as a solemn Sabbath, part of the day spent in prayer and praise, so asking the Divine blessing on the year just commencing, and making good resolutions to ensure it being "a happy New Year" to ourselves and others. On the tenth day of the same month comes the great Day of Atonement, the solemn fast, the motive of which we examined together some few Sedrahs back. This alone, of all the great Holydays has its origin in *our natures*, rather than *our history* in the passions that need forgiveness, rather than the occasions on which they have in any manner been brought into play. On this most holy of all the holydays, we are always actors; the human nature of those far-off days is unchanged in us, and now, as then, the merciful institution of a Day of Reconciliation with an always, loving often slighted, often offended God, is valued and needed by all Israelites in all times and countries. On the fifteenth day, still in this same month of Tishri, is held the Feast of Tabernacles, which like the two other great festivals of the year, recalls grateful memories. As we visit the flower decked סוכה in the court of the synagogue, we think of a time when such frail dwellings stood for all they knew, house and home of through forty

years to God-guided wanderers in a desert. We think of a merciful loving God, Who tells us, "forty years was I grieved with this generation," grieved with the impatience and greediness and disobedience so often displayed, and so often forgiven. We recall the wanderings directed by the miraculous Cloud, and see the trust which each fresh encampment of those tent dwellings must have taught anew. "Seven days shall ye dwell in booths," is the command, given in order that that this episode in our history may live in our memories, and as the difference in climate and condition does not permit us now to *literally* obey, there is the more reason that the poetry and meaning of the observance should find a place in our hearts. We can resolve to learn from those lessons of the past, to make our journyings to the Promised Land, with less frequent stumblings, to trust more and grumble less at the obstacles in our way, and not cause our God to declare again, that "it is a people of an erring heart who should not enter into His rest." These are, in brief outline "the feasts of the Lord," on which occasions, in olden times, all the congregation came before God with special offerings, and which we, still, His chosen people, in these days, observe as strictly, if with somewhat changed surroundings; in order that we may recognize in and to ourselves the truth of that glorious heritage which has been bequeathed to us;

"I the Lord have separated you from among all peoples—that ye should be Mine."

XXXI.

בהר ובחקתי.—The Law of "Rest."

Leviticus xxv. to end.

The 25th Chapter of Leviticus opens with a very important law, and one which tried the faith of the Jews in after years. Moses speaking in the name of God, tells the people that when they come into the Promised Land they shall let the ground rest every seventh year, so that it too may enjoy a Sabbath. "Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard and gather in the fruit thereof. But in the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of Rest unto the land, a Sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field nor prune thy vineyard." God did not intend, by this command, that the people should starve during the seventh year: for the Sabbath and everything connected with it was a season for joyful repose, for delight and not for sorrow, but he wished that they should trust to him to supply their wants. So God promised them, every sixth year should yield sufficient corn and fruit to satisfy all their requirements for the coming year, and then what was left

over should be enough for the eighth and ninth years also. "Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years." Now you may ask why was it necessary that the sixth year should be so plentiful. Would it not have been enough if the harvest, when gathered, should have proved sufficient for the year of rest? Certainly not, for if the land were to enjoy during the seventh year a perfect rest, no seeds could be sown till the eighth year, and consequently no fruit could be eaten, except from the old store, till the ninth year.

It was a great trial of faith to ask the people to let the land thus rest; and Moses must have been certain that God would fulfil His promise before he could have expected the people to obey such a command. That this law was observed in the Holy Land, clearly shows that the word of God was verified; for it is almost impossible to believe that the people should have suffered the ground to lie idle for a whole year, if the previous ingathering of fruits had not been sufficient for their coming wants.

A law like this was not given to show God's power, nor to test men's faith. God's power is displayed a thousand times in every leaf that grows, in every little creeping thing that moves upon it; and man's faith is daily tested by his actions, by his willingness to give up things that seem to him a pleasure, for the sake of duty, however painful or disagreeable. But, this law of the land's Sabbath was made binding on the people to prevent the recurrence of those fearful famines of which we have heard so much in the history of Abraham and Joseph, and which brought such suffering to the people of these

times. Everything, even the land is worn out by constant use; and just as we, who have worked hard and diligently for six days, require one day's rest, that we may again pursue our labours with advantage, so too the land stands in need of rest, or change of occupation, in order that it may continue to yield its fruits.

And further on, we read of the grand jubilee that was to be celebrated every fiftieth year, Liberty was to be proclaimed throughout the land. Those who had been unfortunate and had been compelled to sell their fields, were to be allowed to return to them with joy. Every one in that year was to come again into his old possession. What a happy return it must have been to many who for years had been a stranger to their own homes! Who can say what adverse circumstances may have forced a man to part with his inheritance, who can withhold his pity for the brother that has waxen poor and fallen into decay? But in those days poverty did not last for ever; if a man sold his property, he knew it would be his again in the year of jubilee; and he who bought it suffered no injustice, for he too was well aware that the time would come when he should be asked to restore it. Then as now, some were more fortunate and more industrious than others; but the rich were forbidden to oppress the poor, and many are the laws in this very chapter, which tend to protect the fallen and lessen the poor man's woe. Constantly, Moses tells the people to remember that they were once slaves in the land of Egypt, in the hope that the recollection of the sufferings they there endured, should make them merciful to others. But the remembrance of sorrows does not abide long with us. When troubles

weigh heavily upon us, and we look around us in vain for help, our hearts are open to all who sorrow with us. We feel very acutely their troubles, and wish we had but the power and the means to relieve them. But by and bye, when the cloud has passed over our heads, and the sunshine plays merrily about us, its very brilliancy seems so to dazzle us, that we forget the many poor creatures still sitting in the dreary shade. That we may be ever mindful of those less fortunately situated than ourselves, God bids us cherish the remembrance of the bitter slavery we endured in Egypt.

Severe indeed are the penalties which God told the people, would follow their neglect of the statutes He had commanded them to keep; and very sad must they have felt in after years when disobedience had brought upon them all these sorrows, and they read, alas too late, the words of warning contained in these sections of the Law. "Ye shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary." This was the great precept they were required to obey: it is the precept to which all who desire to lead a religious life should constantly attend. The observance of the Sabbath and true respect for the spot that is dedicated to God's name, are the foundations of all religious feeling. If the Israelites had been true to this command, they might have never experienced the many sorrows history tells us they have suffered. For God promised a rich reward if they would but walk in His statutes and "keep His commandment to do them." All the joys of earth were to be theirs; all their enemies were to fall before them, and the blessings of peace were to crown their

land. But more than this God promised: for He told them that He would walk amongst them, directing their destiny, watching over their lives, and casting the glory of His presence over all their actions. No greater blessing than this can be conceived. Our constant prayer should be that we may grow so good, that it may please God "to have respect unto us," and "walk with us."

XXXII.

במדבר.—The Numbering of the People.

Numbers i.—iv.

We begin this week the fourth book in the Pentateuch, and the command from which it takes its name is given in the second verse. Moses was desired by God to make a complete numbering of the tribes, seeing how many there were in each family and what proportion were strong and "fit for war." I daresay you have heard something last year of the census, and of papers left at each house in which all details as to members and ages of each family had to be filled in; and you may have been curious enough to enquire the reason of this; but in case you have not, or have forgotten the answer, I will risk telling you again. It is an enquiry made by the nation, and answered as it were by itself, in order that it may gather up from the knowledge so given by each individual, a consciousness of its strength and weakness, may know its own numbers, and glean a general idea of the condition of its members. It is very strange to look back through all the mist of the years and see the like wise

measure taken all these centuries since. It was but in the second year of their wanderings that, without all the aids which civilization gives, the first census was held in the wilderness. I dare say you know what poet has said, "Order is Heaven's first law;" and I am even more sure that the truth and application of the axiom has been very often, and in many ways and by many people impressed upon you. It *is* a most necessary virtue in every community, either large or small, and it is another indirect, and therefore the more valuable evidence of the truth of our Law, that these more practical and common-place duties were as fully indicated and explained as the higher ones, which, in a mere sentimental *theory* of religion, would alone have been thought worthy to hold a place.

So Moses, the great lawgiver and prophet, was commanded to institute a general numbering and arrangement of the tribes, apportioning to each its place and its occupation; reserving, as I think I have told you before, the most holy service of the priesthood to the tribe of Levi. And Moses, assisted by Aaron and the elders, began and completed this work, thus making it easier to Joshua to lead the people, so wisely classified, and trained to duties, into the Promised Land.

The reading of this Sedrah brings to mind another numbering of the people, not God-directed nor God-blessed, and as showing you how the same thing may be done, and yet from such widely different motives—that, the one effort may be happy and successful, and the other result in trouble and remorse—I think it as well to tell you of this other numbering, as a sort of sequel to this portion. It was many years after the troubled sojourn

in the wilderness, and the restless people had longed, and had their longing gratified, for a king; had had their pride satisfied in their chosen Saul, who was a "head and shoulders" taller than their tallest; had ceased to remember this their king, whose dead body was left to a poor woman's love to guard from the birds of prey; had seen David rule in his stead, and had fought on either side in the rebellion of Absalom, which had embittered the king's latter days. That dreadful struggle was just over, and David, sorrowful conqueror in the victory secured by that bad and yet so much beloved son's death, seeking to distract his mind perhaps and gain a confidence in his people, which he would have better felt in his God, desired Joab his general to number for him the tribes of Israel and Judah. There was no good motive to justify this reckoning of the people whom God had declared should be countless as the stars of His Heaven or the sands of His sea. Joab tried by gentle flattery to dissuade the king, but in vain; and so at the end of nine months and twenty days he brought the sum of the nation to his master. Then David's heart, which if quick to sin was also quick to repent, in the Bible words, "smote him," and he acknowledged that he had not only "sinned greatly," but "done very foolishly." The punishment was quick to follow—though a choice of chastisement, by "the hand of God or "man" was permitted to him. With the trust which is so beautiful a trait in David's very human character, he elects to receive his punishment from the God whom he had offended, saying, "for His mercies are great." So a terrible pestilence fell on the land, and seventy thousand died; and David, who was so

loving and gentle, had to bear the terrible pain of seeing the people whom he had so proudly counted, suffer and die through his fault.

This was a sad numbering of the nation, and may serve as another illustration of the value of the rebuke, "It is better to obey than to sacrifice." David may have deluded himself, as people are so fond of doing, by thinking that in following his own wishes he was only doing what Moses had done; but Moses' numbering was done in obedience to God's will, and David's in gratification of his own. I think you can draw the moral for yourselves.

XXXIII.

נָזִיר.—The Story of Samson. [Judges xiv.—xviii.]

Numbers iv.—viii.

Among the further ordinances given in this week's portion for the moral guidance of the people, was one concerning the Nazarites, who were so called as separating themselves from the rest of the Congregation to devote themselves to God. By peculiar personal observances, such as not shaving their hair or drinking strong drinks, they held themselves apart from other men, and were recognised at once as being specially enlisted in the service of the Lord. As the rest of the Sedrah would not be very interesting to you, I shall tell you instead the story of a celebrated Nazarite named Samson.

The Israelites had entered ino their warlike possession of the Promised Land, fighting inch by inch with its heathen occupants, and gaining God-given victories, when they were of God deserved. This, I am sorry to say, was not always, or even often the case; and they had been forty years oppressed by one of the most hostile tribes—the Philistines—when a little baby was born,

who, God promised, should grow up to deliver his people. The father's name was Manoah; and both parents seem to have been God-fearing, religious people, for they asked many questions of the angel who brought them the tidings, concerning the best way to bring up the child who was to be given them for this purpose. He was to be a Nazarite from his birth, the angel told them; and no scissors were ever to cut his hair or his nails; he was to drink no wine, and be very temperate.

We don't hear much of his babyhood, beyond the fact that "he grew, and the Lord blessed him." Also we read, that "the spirit of the Lord moved him at times;" and though we are not told in what way, or by what means, yet we can gather that evidences were occasionally given, to keep alive the parents' faith in the promises of the angel, who was God's messenger. The occasion soon came which was to make him his people's champion, but it came through his own passions rather than from a single minded desire to wage war against the enemies of Israel. He went one day to his parents, saying he had seen a young Philistine girl whom he would like to marry; and notwithstanding their grief and objections, he determined on following "the inclination of his eyes," and, obtaining leave of her parents, he married her. Sorrow soon came of it; they had no religious feeling in common, and she did not honour her husband and he did not trust her, so they quickly quarrelled, and his fancy died out, and what he had mistaken for love turned to hate against her and her people. The strength which had been given him for the object of delivering Israel from the Philistines, was now angrily put forth for that pur-

pose, but not, as you see, from that motive. His story for a long while after this consists of a series of successes, and more wonderful feats of strength than have been recorded of any giant. At one time we find him killing a thousand Philistines with the jaw-bone of an ass—the only weapon in his strong hands; at another, escaping from a city, where they had carefully barred the gates, and so sought to entrap him, by walking away quietly in the night with gates, bars and all, on his shoulders. Once he took a more cunning way of troubling his enemies. In the harvest time he fastened firebrands to the tails of foxes, and then set the frightened creatures loose, among the standing corn and the fair olive yards and vineyards. What was to be done against an adversary at once so cunning and so strong? The elders of the Philistines took counsel together, and reckoning on the weakness of the man's moral nature, devised a plan by which he should be shorn of that dangerous bodily strength. They knew he was very fond in his way of a daughter of the Philistines, and this girl, who was called Delilah, was not good or true; and they got her to persuade him to disclose to her, in what lay the secret of his strength. So this heathen woman coaxed and flattered him, in a way which would have been impossible had she been either loving or religious; till at last, half doubting, he confided it to her. As he slept, the treacherous woman cut off those long locks of hair, then shouting, "the Philistines be upon thee!" the giant awoke to find it no grim jest, but that he was in sad truth, weak and powerless at last, in the hands of his enemies. Very pitiless ones they proved; for remembering his old powers, they

were not contented with holding him weak and a prisoner, but put out both his eyes, to render escape impossible; and now and again, at their games and festivals, brought him out, guarded and in triumph, to make sport for them.

In those bitter moments of humiliation, as well as in the long sad prison hours, Samson must have often thought of how he had wasted the great gift God had conferred on him; of how worse than useless his mighty strength had proved, for want of the moral strength to direct it aright; of how, sadly his Nazarite vows had been fulfilled, and how only in those outward signs of hair and nails, had he shown himself devoted to God's service. It seems to show us of how little value outward observances and peculiar personal rites are, without the spirit which should animate them; for when Samson forgot the object of his strength and disclosed its secret to his enemies, the power left him. Alone, in prison, perhaps some such thoughts may have come to him, while, unnoticed by his cruel captors, his shorn locks began to grow again, and some of his old strength to revive. It was on the occasion of a grand feast to their idol Dagon that for the last time the sightless prisoner was brought forth to be mocked at by that heathen multitude. What memories of long past, gentle home-teachings, of wasted opportunities; what longings for revenge, may have crowded into his mind at that supreme moment we have no means of knowing, as grasping the pillars of the heathen temple, he buried himself and the jeering crowd in the ruins which crashed under his mighty effort. We read that "those he slew at his death were more than they whom he had slain in his life." It is a

sad story of a Nazarite, and shows us how badly men may use special gifts, and yet how, by God's mysterious working, those who are devoted to His service fulfil His ends, though the means they choose are crooked, and they prove themselves but unworthy instruments.

XXXIV.

בהעלותך.—MOSES TRIED, AND NOT FOUND WANTING.

Numbers viii.—xiii.

IT was in the first month of the second year after the departure from Egypt that the Israelites celebrated this first anniversary of their deliverance, and solemnly observed the Passover. One would have thought that the memories, thus religiously awakened, of the past unhappy bondage and the glorious redemption, would have sufficed to keep them good and grateful, at any rate for a time. But, unhappily, the easily roused nature "which took full easily all impressions from below, and half despised the height to which it would not, or it could not, climb," too soon forgot the enduring lessons of trust and content which such mercies should have taught and began grumbling, and wearying Moses anew with complaints.

It would be almost laughable, if it were not so sad, to see the greedy form this discontent took. "We remember the fish," say these rescued slaves, for whom miracles

had been wrought, "we remember the cucumbers, and the melons, the leeks, the onions and garlick which we did eat freely of in Egypt," and the complaints grew louder and fiercer. Fancy the greediness, the utter want of self-restraint or self-respect which could set them longing for delicacies which, after all, must have had a bitter taste of bondage in the eating; fancy the utter ingratitude which loathed the God-sent manna; and we shall not wonder that "the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly, and that Moses also was displeased."

Very sorrowfully the good, patient leader turns in his trouble to God, asking why he should be so afflicted; why he should have all a parent's trouble and anxiety, without the personal love to make the responsibility pleasant, and with this vast multitude which so enormously increased the difficulty. "How," he exclaims almost in despair, "can I find flesh to feed them; for they weep unto me saying, Give us flesh that we may eat." So the Lord answers His poor tried servant in the gentlest way, desiring him to gather the elders of the congregation together, that they may help him to bear the burden and anxiety, and adds, the sure help, "*I* will come down and talk with thee there." Further, the gracious God promises that the mighty multitude shall be fed, and with flesh; and when Moses, wondering both at the mercy and the power implied in such a promise, speaks of the numbers so greedy to be fed, the Lord only answers, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?" The people soon learnt, as we all have to learn some time, by sad experience, the sorrow of *granted* wishes. We grieve often over unfulfilled desires, unsatisfied longings, ungranted

prayers, and now and again, like our murmuring ancestors of old, have to find the real sorrow comes only when the gift is given, in angered answer to our blind impatient craving. "He gave them their own desire," says the Psalmist speaking of this incident; and the little sentence bears a wide meaning and wide moral. A desire so granted, in reply to selfish longings rather than patient strivings, proves often a curse rather than a blessing. It was so in this instance; in the words of the Bible, "a wind went forth from the Lord and brought quails from the sea." "And the people stored up all that day and all that night and all the next day, gathering the quails." Just as the manna had laid all round and about the camp, so now lay these quails, and the people were able now to "eat flesh" to their full.

While the coveted taste was yet fresh in their mouths, God smote them with a very great plague, so that numbers died in the very moment that their desire was granted, perhaps in consequence of it; for the food so greedily longed for, and which might have been both good and pleasant for them in the days of hard work in Egypt, they had never in their ignorant greediness stayed to consider, might affect them quite differently under their changed mode of living in the wilderness. God gave them their desire; but you see they would have been much better and happier if they had been content with their manna, and had had faith enough to believe, that God gave, what He in His wisdom knew was best suited for their needs.

That trouble was scarcely over, and the pestilence

stayed, when Moses had a fresh annoyance, and this time from his own family. Miriam and Aaron grew jealous of his influence, and spoke to each other in low discontented tones concerning him; flattering themselves by saying, "Hath the Lord spoken only by Moses? Hath He not spoken also by us?" and the Lord, Whose right was thus questioned, in the Bible words, "heard it," and Himself defended His faithful servant. "Wherefore were ye not afraid to speak against him?" God asks, and His anger was kindled, and their unworthy jealousy was punished. As the Cloud departed from the Tabernacle, the culprits looked at each other, and Aaron saw that his sister was stricken with that most awful disease of leprosy. We do not read that Aaron also suffered; so probably, as in most sorts of ill-natured gossip, the blame was unequally divided; and Aaron's share was sufficiently punished by the severe rebuke which God administered, which, as Aaron was the High Priest, must have been specially hard to bear.

When Moses saw Miriam suffer, his first thought was one of sorrow for her pain, and his second a prayer that she might be healed. The same grand nobility of character, which could feel neither jealousy nor revenge, showed itself now as it had done before, when you remember he had been appealed to in haste, because the spirit of God seemed to be showing itself in others in the camp, and they too were prophesying. In the same spirit, so beautifully free from all pettiness and unworthy jealousy, as he had answered then to the eager "Forbid them my Lord;" with the noble words, "Why enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were

prophets, and that His spirit rested on them all:" so now he prayed for forgiveness of the sin that had been sinned against him.

It is the absence of *littleness* that makes one truly great; and the life of our Lawgiver, apart even from its direct teaching, holds volumes of lessons which we, his people, should specially try to learn. You will be glad to know that God did heal Miriam in answer to her brother's prayer.

XXXV.

שלח לך.—Telling the Truth.

Numbers xiii.—xvi.

They had entered now on the borders of the Promised Land, and Moses received commands from the Lord to select a man from each tribe who should go into this new country, and bring word to the waiting expectant people of what their inheritance was like. So twelve men were chosen, and we can imagine the eagerness with which they set forth on the quest, and the impatience with which their return was longed for. Day after day passed in its monotonous course in the quiet wilderness, and we can fancy the groups round the doors of their tent dwellings, discussing and wondering over the possible adventures of their brethren in the new strange land.

When forty times the sun had risen and set on these accustomed scenes, the twelve men were seen approaching, and the multitude pressed around them with quick questions and wondering exclamations. Wide-mouthed, they gazed on the specimens the men brought with them

of the fair land—a bunch of grapes, so large and heavy that two men bore the cluster between them—and quicker, we may be sure, grew the eager questionings and louder the longings, that they too might enter so goodly an heritage. When brought before Moses and Aaron, the men were desired to tell the story of their forty days' adventures, and to give the result of their experiences with the "courage" with which they had been bid set forth on their mission.

Now, as I daresay you know, there are two ways of telling every story—it is quite possible to say nothing absolutely false, and yet to convey an entirely false impression. This is what the spies managed to do. There was the fruit of the land, bearing its own evidence of the richness of the soil, and so much they owned; "It floweth with milk and honey," they said; "but the people that dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are walled and very great." And the manner and the words depressed the much excited people, who "took full easily all impressions from below," and murmurs succeeded to the first shouts of welcome which had greeted the return.

Presently, through the tumult which grew, a voice was heard "stilling" the angry impatience. "Let us go up at once," came the brave tones; "we are well able to overcome the land." But louder in reply came the unbelieving voices, gaining cowardly courage from numbers, "We are not able to go up; the people of the land are giants, and we are but as grasshoppers in their sight." So the sun went down—on what should have been such a happy day—throwing his beautiful red light on sad,

sullen faces, blinding themselves in their own unbelief. All that night the people wept bitter, angry tears. "Would God we had died," was the cowardly prayer. It is so easy to ask for death, when life, with which to struggle on and strive to conquer, seems the harder boon.

Then the murmurings grew to mutiny, and they said to one another, "Let us make a captain and return to Egypt." See how the evil had spread—the false report, false half in intent and half in heedlessness, was bearing vaster proportions of mischief than the instigators could have foreseen.

> "A lie which is all a lie,
> Can be met and fought with outright:
> But a lie which is half a truth
> Is a harder matter to fight,"

writes the poet; and so Joshua and Caleb, the two good men and true, found, when they endeavoured to counteract the effects of their companions' words. "It is an exceeding good land," they proclaimed; "the inhabitants we need not fear, for the Lord is with us." But the people would not listen; the story of the giants rang in their ears, and their fright made them cowards, and their answer to those brave words was to bid "Stone them with stones." All honour to these men, Caleb and Joshua—names which shall be honoured to all time, as of men who were neither ashamed nor afraid to speak their convictions; who could tell the honest unpalatable truth in spite of numbers; who could stand out alone in an unpopular cause, and could speak up for their

God and their religion. I don't think all history shows two better heroes than our Caleb and Joshua.

Suddenly on the scene—shining on the bent forms of Moses and Aaron, lighting up the gloomy threatening crowds, and illumining the faces of the two brave speakers—appeared the glory of the Lord, and in the solemn stillness, which as suddenly fell, came the awful Voice. "How long will this people provoke Me? How long will it be ere they believe Me, for all the signs which I have shown them?" One can imagine a great revulsion of feeling in the multitude as they listened to these words, so tenderly reproachful. But the Lord goes on to threaten punishment for this dreadful eagerness of unbelief; and Moses, the good and gentle, once more intercedes for the people who so little seem to deserve forgiveness. "And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word." Once more the sin was condoned; and the sentence pronounced was, that those who had doubted God's power should never see it made manifest; they should never enter the land which they had feared to possess. For forty years the people should continue their wanderings, and in the wilderness lie down to rest. Caleb and Joshua only, of all that sinful generation, were to live to enter Canaan—they only having had the courage to believe in God, and the better courage still to proclaim that belief—when speaking the truth meant danger, and perhaps death; and a lie, only a little silent lie, just saying nothing, would have gained them a whole congregation for friends. I think you will agree they chose the better part.

XXXVI.

קרח—The Rebellion of Korah.

Numbers xvi.—xix.

The next trouble that Moses had to encounter arose from the same national defect in character, which proving stronger than family pride and affection, had caused Aaron and Miriam to grudge their brother his God-given authority. The conceit and want of veneration which crop out so often now in communal matters, found an outlet then in the mutiny of two hundred and fifty "men of renown" in the congregation, who, headed by Korah, Dathan and Abiram, in the Bible words, "gathered themselves together against Moses and Aaron, and said unto them, 'Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy. . . Why lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?'"

Once more Moses covered his face before that ungrateful accusing crowd. What struggles for patience, for self-control—what prayers for Divine help passed through his mind at these supreme moments, the God with Whom

he communed alone can know; but we may judge what victories over self such prayers and struggles may gain, when we contrast the Moses, who—hot and impatient at a wrong—slew the wrong-doer, with the Moses who answers now in such calm measured accents to upbraidings, which, for causelessness and ingratitude, may well have provoked wrath. "Gather yourselves together," he answers, "and to morrow the Lord will show who are His and who are holy." So the morrow came; and all the would-be priests brought their censers with incense, and stood at the appointed meeting place—the door of the Tabernacle.

It was a stormy assembly. The first summons had been met with a flat refusal. "We will not come up," had answered Dathan and Abiram, and it was at the bidding of their own self elected Korah, that the discontented members of the community stood in an angry, sullen group over against the rest of the congregation. Suddenly, shining on the troubled scene, appeared the Glory of the Lord, and the Voice was heard commanding Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from the rest, that the sinners might be "consumed in a moment." Harassed as he was, revenge was not what Moses desired. "Oh, God," he cries, "the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wrath with all the congregation?" In the hush that followed we can imagine each casting frightened, shrinking looks at those who had incited them to sin; and when the command came that Korah, Dathan and Abiram were to stand forth alone with their belongings, and all were to "depart from the tents of those wicked men," not the least bitter

part of their punishment must have been that "standing forth alone," and seeing their impressionable followers shrink and fall from them in their disgrace. That this lesson might have more than a momentary effect, Moses proclaimed that if the doom that overtook these men could be accounted for as an ordinary occurrence, then was their doubt of his ministration justified; but if a miracle was worked, then they must acknowledge God's Power and God's right to choose His own instruments to do His work. And as he ceased speaking, the ground opened under their feet, and the sinners went down alive into that dreadful grave Shuddering, the people fled, murmuring as they ran, that Moses had "killed the people of the Lord." This refusal, even in their fear, to recognise God's hand and thus to murmur at His servant was punished by another proof of His awful Power, and a pestilence fell on the frightened people. When at last the plague was stayed, thousands had died; and in the homes that were left saddened and desolate, we may hope that death helped to teach the lesson which Moses preached, and which miracles were wrought to enforce.

"Obedience is better than sacrifice," and obedience to rule, and respect to authority, is what in all ages we have been slowest in learning. Possibly it is our vanity—the same feeling which caused Korah to exclaim, "Is not all the congregation of the Lord holy?" and which finds expression now in the phrase "Is not one as good as another?" and the result is bad always. One is *not* as good as another in that sense. Some must obey and some must rule, and it is only conceit which makes us agree to this with the understanding that we ourselves are specially

fitted for all the higher parts. Miracles enforced this truth in the wilderness, and it needed, you see, an earthquake to persuade the foolish people that Korah, Dathan and Abiram were not prophets as great as was Moses. Depend upon it the noblest natures can find something to admire outside themselves; and it is a pretty safe rule that those who grumble at all authority, and find fault with all exercise of it, would at the least be equally bad administrators themselves.

One more miraculous proof was given to the people that their leaders were of God's choosing. The head of each tribe was desired to bring a rod into the tabernacle of the Lord; and the owner of the rod, which, contrary to rod-nature, should break forth into bud and blossom, was to be considered as chosen by God. So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each chief of a tribe gave him a rod, and Aaron, of course, as head of the tribe of Levi, also gave one, and they were all put together in the tabernacle. When on the morrow they entered the holy place, the rod of Aaron was covered with beautiful almond blossoms, while all the rest remained mere sticks. So the people were convinced that God had chosen Aaron and the Levites to be His priesthood, and that grumblings and jealousies were offences against Him, Whose right of choice and Whose wisdom were thus questioned.

XXXVII.

חקת—More of the Narrative of the Wanderings.

Numbers xix—xxii.

The people continued their God-directed wanderings, and, abiding for a while at Kadesh, a death occurred which must have powerfully awoke memories which for near a century had slept in the tender heart of the good leader. As he laid Miriam down for her last deep sleep in the quiet wilderness, we may fancy that his mind went back to the time when she, that grey-headed woman, had watched as a tiny maiden by his infant slumbers on the banks of the river Nile; and we may be quite sure that none but these sweet old memories of childhood—no thoughts of after-days, when jealousy and punishment embittered their holy relationship—found place in the heart or mind of the patient loving brother as he reverently buried his dead.

No long space was left him to mourn, or indulge in recollections "as sad as sweet;" the angry clamour of the

inconsiderate people soon broke on his ears, bringing him back to that every-day trial, of ministering to a multitude of little faith. They clamoured for water. "Why did ye bring us here?" arose the angry shouts, "Why bring us to this evil place? Why have you made us come out of Egypt?" In face of a nation which could forget miracles, to hunger after "pomegranates, figs and vines," one can fully sympathize with the utter despair which must have fallen on Moses, and can understand his lapse in this one instance from the exemplary patience he had hitherto displayed. To find people always falling short of the standard one has a right to expect is intensely disappointing; if they in their carelessness could only guess *how* disappointing, it might keep them a little from such constant stumbling. "But Israel does not know, my people do not consider," as wrote the prophet Isaiah centuries after; and Moses, perhaps from grief and age, and the stirring of old recollections at his sister's grave, was less fitted to bear this new ebullition of childish impatience and unmanly doubt. "How now, ye rebels," he exclaims—the old impetuosity which had been kept under so many years for once breaking out again—"must we draw water for you from this rock?" And as he spoke, he struck the rock, with the holy rod with which God had permitted him to work so many miracles. Water flowed at his command. God, the good and just, would not humble His faithful servant before his congregation; and so, not in answer to prayer or patience, but once more in anger, "He gave them their own desire."

The punishment, this time, fell on the one whom we

pity most; but we see God's justice shining in the sentence; he who would govern, *must* be able to govern himself: and great powers entail great responsibilities. "The fierce light which beats" on every prominent position, obliges the one who fills it to avoid more carefully than others the smallest spot or stain, which shows so clearly and so widely from his high place. The impatience of the congregation hurt only each one who displayed it, or, at the most, his own immediate circle—but a fault in the great leader could have infinite results of harm. So when the people thirsted, and clamoured and cried for the water which their God was willing to give, Moses should have "spoken" to the rock as God commanded, so teaching trust and gentleness, and should have made some allowance as the Merciful God did, for the cruel thirst, which a little excused the impatience of their demand. Failing in this one instance in the lessons he had hitherto practised as well as preached, God called him, as the satisfied people withdrew with their pitchers filled, and told him what was to be his punishment. Into the Promised Land—which was set as the goal of all their hopes, the blessed rest to all their wanderings—he must never enter with them. His eyes might gaze, but his feet would never tread, on those smiling plains. We who read may think the penalty hard for that one fault; but he who listened knew it was just, and that for his people's sake it was well, that there should be no one spot on their leader to which they could point in justification of their own shortcomings; for his own sake even, the disappointment once conquered, we can see it was well also—that the trials of the wilderness should

end all his trials on earth, and that the Promised Land which he entered from Mount Nebo should be an eternal home. But the end did not come yet, and more battles had to be fought, in a literal and figurative sense, before our hero could lay down his arms, so bravely held in the service of the Lord.

They had hardly quitted Meribah (which your Hebrew knowledge should tell you means "strife," and your Scriptural knowledge will add, because of this incident) when they had to go a long way round on account of the enmity of Edom, who would not let them on any condition pass through their territory; and we next find them encamped at the foot of Mount Hor. Here Aaron died; and Eleazar, his son, was ordained priest in his stead; and in the thirty days' mourning, in which all Israel joined, Moses must again have found occasion in private grief and recollections, to forget awhile public cares and dissensions. He was soon recalled by fresh murmurings, and fiery serpents were sent among the unbelieving people. Moses again prayed for them, and they were healed by faith—those who would look on a brazen serpent which was erected, believing in God's power to cure them, recovered from their deadly wounds.

I have been so long telling you these incidents, that I must tell you the story of Balak, in the next chapter, and may leave out פִּינְחָס, which is not very full of interest for you.

XXXVIII.

בלק—The Story of Balak.

Numbers xxii—xxv.

The Israelites were encamped on the plains belonging to the hostile tribe of Moab, and they, to whom the fame of Israel's conquests had spread were, in the Bible words, "distressed because of the Children of Israel." They had heard of the wonderful people for whom an invisible God fought; and the victory over their neighbours, the Amorites, was yet fresh in their recollections. So Balak, their king, conceived, as he thought, a very good plan for protecting himself and his people against the miraculously successful nation. If their victories, he argued, were gained by supernatural means, could not defeat be ensured in a like manner? So he sent messengers to Balaam, great men and honoured in their own country, and with rich gifts in their hands, and this was the object of their embassy—to bid Balaam come out and

curse Israel. To the ignorant mind of the heathen king, the words of this divine, or so-called prophet, could, work a spell mighty enough to reverse the will of the most High God.

So the princes of Moab and Midian set forth on their errand, and delivered to Balaam the message of their master. Balaam hesitated—his desires pointed one way and his conscience and judgment the other. He saw the rich gifts—he knew the great power of these chieftains —and must he resign all this, he thought, for the sake of the right and the truth, for which there would come no quick reward? He took an always unsafe course—he tampered with his conscience and delayed his answer. "Wait," he says to the ambassadors, "and I will enquire of the Lord." As if he did not know what God's will would be in the matter; as if it could enter into His plan, to let His people be cursed at the bidding of a heathen prince, for a certain price. But God bore with the enquiry, and vouchsafed an answer. "Thou shalt not go with them: thou shalt not curse the people, for they are blessed." There was a reply, about which there could be no possibility of a doubt or mistake. If even Balaam's hesitation had arisen from a genuine anxiety to be quite sure of the will of God, he could not doubt now, and his answer should have satisfied the messengers of this. But his manner, if not his words, must have made them think he was open to persuasion; for their report to king Balak resulted in his sending a second mission of greater men, with promises of yet more tempting bribes. So again he went through the form of "enquiring of the Lord;" and this time, in anger, God "gave him his own

(unspoken) desire," and said he might go with the men, that only which the Lord permitted should he speak.

On the way a wonderful incident occurred, which has given rise to a vast amount of speculation and commentary. The Bible record tells us that the ass on which he rode refused to move, and when struck and urged forward, spoke, reproaching his rider, and showed him an hitherto unseen angel standing in the way; seeing whom, Balaam acknowledged his sin, and offered to turn back. Many read this as an allegory rather than a miracle, and I myself incline to that view. It would seem that Balaam's greed had set him on the wrong path, and made him deaf and blind to Conscience, which stood, an unseen angel, by his side. The humblest instruments are often able to awaken us to its pleadings, even as the ass was mercifully allowed to do in this case. So whether reading it as God-permitted fact, or God-inspired fable, the moral is the same. Balaam saw he had done wrong in letting ambition and reward, rather than truth and honesty, be his aims; and in the first impulse he would willingly have returned. But God desired to make the incident a lesson for the nation as well as the individual, and to show that "all things," through whatsoever means they in their blindness employ, are but instruments "fulfilling His Word." Often by crooked ways and paths we know not, He leads us "to the haven where we would be." "His ways are not our ways," as the heathen king and this tempted servant were soon to see. We can understand too Balak's persistency in his object. There was some amount of judgment as well as superstition in his plan. No doubt he believed with the force

of his heathen education in the efficacy of the curse he longed to hear pronounced, but also he reckoned on the impressionable nature of those who were to hear it; and in the easily aroused fear of the Israelites he saw his best weapon towards its fulfilment. But the curse was never spoken. Once, twice, thrice, the king went forth with the prophet, after grand preparation of altars and sacrifices had been made; and each time, without his will, perhaps even against it, Balaam broke out into loud-toned blessings instead of cursings. "I have received a commandment to bless; He hath blessed, and I cannot reverse it," fell on the ears of the heathen king; and has left an echo for all time as to God's disposition towards us, His chosen people, and a warning to all who, like Balaam, would be inclined to disregard it. Wishes, threats, bribes, were all alike powerless in enabling curses to fall where He had decreed blessings, and this story clearly shows that Israel is divinely guarded, and that, in the words of the prophet, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper . . . this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord."

XXXIX.

מטות ומסעי—Vows and Oaths.—The Division of the Land and the Cities of Refuge.

Numbers xxx.—xxxvi.

In the first part of the two Portions of the Law which we consider to day, Moses gives the people God's directions concerning vows and oaths. He shows them the solemn obligations of a promise, and how a responsibility must not be lightly undertaken, nor lightly abandoned. Rash promises made by young people—their parents disapproving at the time—were not to be binding; but every vow pronounced seriously and thoughtfully as becomes such solemn things, "with the lips," was to "bind the soul." In moments of difficulty or danger impulsive people might be apt to make wild offers, which, when the moment of release came, they would be loth to discharge. You remember the story of Jephtah, and the sort of condition he made with God in case the victory were given to him over the Ammonites. Coming back

successful, he vowed to sacrifice the first object he met on his return; and one can fancy what his feelings must have been, as he beheld his daughter in advance of all others, running forth to meet him with words of happy welcome on her lips. It was to guard against such rash vows being made, to ensure promises being thoughtfully uttered and religiously kept, to make men and women honourable in their obligations to each other, that the injunctions in this 30th Chapter of Numbers were given.

The next incident in the history of the wanderings is a successful battle against the Midianites, in which Balaam was slain. To guard against the contamination which these heathens might bring into the camp of Israel —for moral diseases are to the full as infectious as physical ones—Moses commanded that no captives, even among the women, were to be spared, except those who were too young to know evil. Of the spoil, a part was reserved for God's service, which included His priesthood and His poor; and when this was all righteously settled, the officers of the army drew near to Moses and brought the booty which each had secured for himself, and gave it to him as a freewill offering for the treasury of the Lord. An act like this must have given Moses new courage and hope, and it is pleasant for us to read of it, as showing that our ancestors had their impulses of generosity and good feeling as well as of impatience and idolatry, which we have so often to hear about. Then two tribes—Reuben and Gad—came before Moses with a petition that they might have their possessions in the

land of Gilead which was already conquered, and that they might not cross the boundary line of the river Jordan. And Moses, who thought he saw in this request cowardice and faint-heartedness, reminded them of the sin of the spies, who saw only difficulties and disagreeables in their path, and were punished for their want of faith and courage. Then the spokesman of the tribes explained that their hesitation to cross the river did not spring from such unworthy motives: that they were willing and eager to join their brethren in the war of extermination which should presently commence, and only wished to leave their wives and little ones in these safe cities of Gilead, and that they would not themselves enter into possession till their fellow-soldiers, helped by them, should also have lands allotted to them. So Moses was satisfied, and willingly agreed to this arrangement.

"By the commandment of the Lord," we next read, "Moses wrote all the journeyings of the Israelites from the very beginning, when they went out of Egypt with a high hand, in the sight of all the Egyptians." Then followed the division of the land, Eleazar the high priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, being appointed to the responsible office of superintending the division. There seems a beautiful fitness in thus making the representatives of religion and honest manly courage undertake the duty. The condition of inheritance was impressively repeated, that they should "drive out the inhabitants of the land, destroy their pictures, their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places." That all incentives to sin should be removed was the reason of this

absolute and unconditional command, and to make it yet more impressive the threat is added: "If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, it shall come to pass that those which remain shall be pricks in your eyes and thorns in your side, and shall vex you in the land wherein you dwell; moreover, it shall come to pass that I will do unto you as I thought to do unto them." It seems strange that such emphatic words should have failed to have an effect.

In the division of the land which ensued, the Levites were given a special inheritance of their own—walled cities and pleasant suburbs—in which they were to dwell without toil or strife, pursuing only their holy labours of love, ministering to the moral and educational wants of the people, softening, refining and elevating their natures as is the mission of all truly religious leaders. Among the forty-two cities thus peacefully set apart from the toils and troubles of the time, were six "cities of refuge," as they were called, and their object beautifully illustrates the divine mercy of this inspired code of Laws Hither the rash, impetuous sinner, the one who sinned from quick impulse or sudden passion, and who longed to atone for the moment's crime by a long lifetime of remorse, could flee, secure from the "avenger of blood," and pass the days left him "in alms-deed and in prayer." Premeditated sin, that is wrong thought of and planned beforehand, was to be judged and punished; but the sin born of heedlessness, or accident, or impulse—the sin for which even human judgment might make allowances—was allowed by God

these six harbours of safety in the land, where alone, separated from family and friends, taken from old influences and old temptations, the sinner "might turn from his evil ways and live."

XL.

דברים—The Recapitulation.

Deuteronomy i—iii.

We commence reading to-day the fifth book of the Pentateuch, and seem to approach the beginning of the end. It was in the eleventh month of the fortieth year of the wanderings that Moses assembled all his congregation together, and began recounting to them the wonderful incidents which had marked and guided their progress. He commences at the time when having left Mount Horeb and encamping in the wilderness, the burden and the strife grew too much for him, alone, to bear, and he recalls to their memories how, by God's permission, he appointed officers and judges to assist him in the task. He reminds them of how God's promise, that they should be numberless as "the stars of heaven," was being fulfilled; and interrupts his narrative to add fervently the loving wish, "The Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times as many as you are, and bless you as He hath promised you." He speaks of

his charge to the judges, to deal righteously and "respect no persons in judgment," to listen to the small equally with the great, and to fear no man in giving sentence; to remember always that the justice they administered was direct from God, and dictated from no feeling of their own. Then he recounts to them the story of the spies; how the people drew near the borders of the Promised Land, and grew anxious to have some description of it before entering; how the request was treated as just and reasonable, and twelve men, one from each tribe, were selected to inspect the land and bring back a faithful report. He repeats the sad sequel of that quest, and lets them see their own ingratitude and little faith. "Ye had seen," he says, with sorrowful emphasis, "how that the Lord thy God bare thee as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went until ye came unto this place; yet for all this ye did not believe in the Lord your God." They were so dreadfully slow to *trust*. It is so much better, and it makes one so much happier too, to look out for the sunny side of things—not to turn the seamy parts of a garment, at it were, outside—but to believe and hope for the best; and often the belief and the hope are strong enough to act as spells and bring about the conclusion we desire. At the worst, we have had the hope and the cheerfulness, which, after all, are better than dreading or crying over an evil which *may* never come.

I daresay, the Israelites thought of many things while Moses related that story which had happened so long ago, and which in those monotonous wanderings, when every day passed so much like another, must yet have scarcely seemed divided from them by a length of forty

years. Their memories must have been busy filling up the gaps which death had made in their ranks, while their good leader went on to speak of the two courageous ones—Caleb and Joshua, honoured names!—who had the trust to believe, the courage to dare, and the honesty to proclaim their convictions. He told how they, now standing in their midst, alone out of all that sinful generation, were to enter that longed-for land, on whose threshold they had hovered all those long years. With a touching humility and consideration he glances at the fact that he also shares in their exclusion. "The Lord was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither." They must have been so sorry for their sins when they heard their patient leader speak thus, and must have felt the reproach which he was too gentle to express, that it was through momentary impatience at their frequent and most trying unbelief that the great desire of his life was to be unfulfilled, that the mission of his life must remain incomplete, and his leadership just stop short of the happy end. He did not dwell on it. He goes on to speak of the victories gained and the difficulties surmounted. He reminds them of the incident of Sihon, king of Heshbon, of whom they entreated permission to pass peacefully through the highway of his land, offering to pay for what they required, and to turn neither to the right hand nor the left. He told how the offer was refused and a great battle was the result, in which God fought for His people. Then he recounts the victory gained over the giant king of Bashan, whose bedstead was of iron and nine cubits in length. They must have seen in their own lives the truth which we

read in the book of Psalms, that "the battle is not to the swift nor the victory to the strong;" how over and over again our national history illustrates what our national poetry so beautifully expresses. "Surely unless the Lord build the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain." They had leisure to dwell on the contrast between the utter victory gained over the Amorites, where the cities were "fenced with high walls, gates and bars," and yet "there was not a city which we did not take from them;" they had leisure to contrast this with the utter defeat suffered at the hands of the same tribe but a short while before, when they went up "presumptuously against the command of God," and, "the Amorites who dwelt in the mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah, and ye returned and wept before the Lord."

I daresay, the memory of those long ago shed tears came back to them; and the recollection awoke new and better thoughts, as the God-inspired narrator simply told the story, and left them to draw the moral for themselves.

XLI.

וְאֶתְחַנַּן.—The Exhortations of Moses.

Deuteronomy iii—vii

Then Moses gives to the listening multitude a little glimpse into his own personal history, and tells how he had entreated of the Master Whom he had so patiently served, permission to enter the land to which his steps and hopes had been directed for forty patient years. In his own words, so touchingly pathetic in their very simplicity and earnestness, he narrates how his prayer to "go over and see the goodly land" was refused; "the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me," he says so quietly and unreproachfully. "The Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee, speak no more to Me of this matter." Permission was given to go to the top of Mount Pisgah, to see the land which he must not enter; and a charge was given to strengthen and encourage Joshua to fulfil the task which he must resign. Without a word of comment he ends the story; and, perhaps, not one in a hundred of his hearers guessed at the agony of

self-sacrifice which lay hid under those quiet words. "So we abode in the valley over against Bethpeor," he finishes, as if it were but an ordinary incident he had been relating; but we may be sure God appreciated this religious submission to His Will on the part of His servant, who so nobly practised the lessons of patience and trust and resignation which he so often vainly preached.

Next he exhorts them to hearken to the statutes and judgments which he taught and to "do them," adding with a wise fore-knowledge of the faults to which they were so prone, "Ye shall not add to the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it." He feared the heedlessness which led to sins of omission, "diminishing from the Law," no less than the impulsive over-zeal which in a moment of remorseful reaction "added to it." He knew the God-inspired "Word" which he taught was in very truth a "Law of Life to them who lay hold on it;" and his sight, grown clear by experience and bright by inspiration, looked into the future, and feared for the pure observance of the Law he loved. Hence the warning, "Ye shall not add nor diminish" to the God-given perfect code. It is in itself a fence and a defence, and all-sufficient for all needs. "What nation," he exclaims, "has statutes and judgments so righteous as this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed and keep thy soul diligently lest thou forget. . . . Teach thy sons, and thy sons' sons."

Then he reminds them of that solemn day before Mount Horeb, when, afraid themselves to hear the Lord speak with them, they had entreated him to act as inter-

preter, and how he, standing reverent and unmoved amid the thunderings and lightnings, had received from the Most High, and delivered to the people, the great gift of the Ten Commandments. These he again repeats to them, dwelling on the duties they enjoin towards our God, our parents and our country; and reminds them how earnestly they had responded, saying, "we will hear and we will do it." "The Lord heard your reply," he says, and thought it "well said." "But, oh," he continues, "Oh that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me and keep my commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children for ever!" a divine hope doomed to frequent disappointment.

In the next chapter follow the grand words on which Judaism, as a system of religion, rests—"Hear, oh Israel! the Lord our God is One Lord." Who, reading this short, simple declaration, can doubt the Unity, the absolute Oneness of the God we worship. So short, so simple, as if purposely framed to be its own answer to future forms of religious belief—the Israel to whom it is addressed *must* hear and believe, can *never* doubt. Our God is one, and the worship He requires is worthy of the belief. Thou shalt love Me, He says, "with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might." No gloomy, fearful, cowardly rites are demanded, only the instinctive affection for something better and more divine than ourselves, which we call love, and which elevates and purifies the hearts it fills. Our souls also must render this loving, intelligent worship: mind and heart, as it were, reason and sentiment, uniting in one solemn

hymn of praise, which, loving God also "with all our might," which means doing His will, as well as feeling His Goodness and singing his praises, would make our lives, in the best sense, one long prayer. Heart, mind and will, so occupied, form a grand conception of religion, and we Jews should be proud of such an heritage, and very scrupulous to prove worthy possessors of it.

With a sad prevision of human failings, the wise legislator warns them against forgetting the Lord when the time of ease and prosperity should come. In trouble and distress we naturally turn to God, our only certain Help; but, like our ancestors of old, when "we have eaten and are full," when our "houses are full of all good things," *then* we must beware lest we "forget the Lord our God." Wisely Moses desires that the Law should be taught diligently to children, keeping the Holy Records not for high-days and holidays, nor as a set lesson to be got through at a set season, but that it should be talked of at all times, that its divine lessons should be present with us always, around every day common-place surroundings, "When thou sittest in the house," says the command, "When thou walkest by the way, when thou sittest down and when thou risest up." In this way, and in this way only, can the thousand sweet suggestive stories of the Good Book become "familiar in our ears as household words," and doing God's will, loving Him "with our heart, our soul and might" come easy and natural to us.

XLII.

עקב.—The Exhortations of Moses

Deuteronomy vii—xi.

Next Moses rehearses to the people the gracious promise, that if they will listen to and obey the Commandments given so impressively from Mount Sinai, then "the Lord will love thee," and "thou shalt be blessed above all people." But if fear took the place of trust, if doubt of God's power took possession of the hearts that should have been filled with a sense of His marvellous mercy, then the Lord bids them remember what He did unto "Pharaoh and unto all Egypt; the great temptations which thine eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm wherewith the Lord thy God brought thee out." Thus from memory were they to gain hope; from the records of the past to acquire courage for the future. Not all at once was victory to be gained. With a beautiful, wise prudence, which over and over again recurs in our law, making it

real and not vague and sentimental, Moses explains, "the Lord will put out these nations by little and little;" they were not to be destroyed at once, lest in the large tracts of fertile country left desolate "the beasts of the field increase upon thee." He reminds them too of the troubles they had passed through; of the hunger and thirst they had suffered; and how, dying in the very moment their desire was granted, they learnt the lesson that "man liveth not by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Lest the thought of these trials should harden the easily impressed natures, he hastens to add that they should "consider in their hearts" that "as a man chastiseth his son, so the Lord thy God chastiseth thee." Not in anger, nor revenge, nor impatience, but in wisdom and justice, had punishment been sent, to show that our God acts towards us in the same spirit as a good father to his children, not angry over failings or shortcomings, nor indulgently blind, but wisely and tenderly punishing the fault, and grieving for and with the wrong-doer. Weeds must be plucked out, to give the little blossoms room to grow; and if the spade hurts sometimes, we must remember the beautiful effects of wise training and the ugliness of careless selfish neglect. He goes on to draw a beautiful word-picture of the land they were to inhabit, and we can imagine how easily the quick Eastern imaginations travelled from the bare desert, where foot-sore and weary they stood encamped, and tasted in anticipation the delights their leader described. "The Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land," says this patient hero, with never a murmur or a longing for the pleasant

pastures he pictured and should never see—"a land of brooks of waters, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills . . . a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness and shall not lack anything."

We can fancy the listening groups with eager intent faces, almost feeling the cool breath of those far-away mountains, almost tasting the pleasant trickling water and luscious fruits, the very names of which had a refreshing sound in that hot dusty desert. It would seem that Moses must have caught some such expression in the crowd, for he hastens to add the injunction, "When thou hast eaten and art satisfied, then shalt thou bless the Lord thy God for the good land which He has given thee."

In the prosperous time, when, secure and safe, they had "built goodly houses and dwelt therein," they were to recognise the presence of God, they were to feel Him as near as when He was their only refuge against all the dangers of the desert. With a wonderful knowledge of human nature, and of the special phase of human nature which the Israelites evinced, he cautions them against the pride of prosperity, the unexpressed arrogance, the "saying in the heart," "My power and the might of my hand has given me all this wealth"—wise words, which, if only heeded, would make us value wealth at its true worth and use it worthily. Not as a means of showing off the "power and might" which had been thus rewarded, but as stewards of the gift which God "gave thee power to get." Wealth, like all other blessings, is a trust as much as a gift, for to whom "much is given much is required," and whether God endows us with

intellect or beauty or money above our fellows, He expects us, each "according to his might," to use His gifts as well as we possibly can, and always in His service.

Moses warns them against committing another possible evil: there was a fear that these repeated victories might lead to conceit—they might forget the object of this change of possession in Canaan, and think it was for their righteousness, God drove out nations from before them. Not so, says Moses; it was because of the wickedness of the heathen inhabitants; and you remember, so long ago as the time of the patriarchs, God had prophesied to one of them (you remember which, I hope) that all the land of Canaan should be given to his descendants for an "everlasting possession, but that the "cup of their iniquity was not yet full." Now it was, and the time was nearly ripe for Israel to enter on their occupation of the fair land so sadly defiled, and to preach and practise the beautiful religion with which Moses tried so hard to impress them.

XLIII.

רְאֵה—The Right and Wrong.

Deuteronomy xii—xvi.

"I SET before you this day a blessing and a curse." So commences the Sedrah of this week; and the choice offered that day by Moses to the Israelites is a choice open to us this day, and every day of our lives. "A blessing if ye obey . . . a curse if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord." No words could be plainer —no words more solemn and suggestive. The path is clearly pointed out, the pitfalls and snares marked for avoidance, and then the choice is given. Foremost among the injunctions is the advice to "utterly destroy" all the places of heathen worship, to "break the pillars," to destroy the very "name" of idols "from their place." This utter rooting out of an evil is a useful lesson to us. The only safe plan is to be thorough in our efforts. It is not the slightest good to palter with temptation, to potter at reform, or to temporize with sin. "Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it and pass away," writes

Solomon on this subject, and he, in his wisdom, knew that if one wants to be good, no half-and-half measures would do; we can't choose *both*; we must make up our minds either to the curse or the blessing—the easy, downward, smooth slopes of sin, or the toilsome, uphill struggle for right and conscience sake. The "blessing" and the "curse," in either case is sure, if delayed. God has promised, and "He is not a man that He should lie." So, however, it may seem, we may be quite sure that sooner or later, either here or hereafter, those who obey will enjoy the blessing, and those who disobey must suffer the curse.

Moses proceeds to give instructions for the serving of God when they shall have come into a land where they could "dwell in safety." They were to have a set place for the worship of their Maker. God knew that love and gratitude spring instinctively to men's minds, and prayer, which is but the audible expression of these, would not need to be commanded. Yet in a religion which was to be a practical moral law, and not a vague moral sentiment, it would be necessary to have outward observances, and set forms, and appointed places for worship, in order that the religion might become identified, as it were, with the national life. So the command was given, that when they entered into their inheritance, they were to set apart a place where they might bring their offerings and "rejoice before the Lord their God." No sad austere rites were required, you see; no gloomy faces, or unnatural repression, would be welcome to our God. "Ye shall rejoice before the Lord," says Moses; "Enter His courts with gladness," writes David, and

we may generally take cheerfulness and content as the outward signs of a truly religious spirit. But, not in worship only, nor in sacrifices, were we to express our religious feelings. "In all that thou puttest thy hand unto," it is emphatically said, "thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God." The idea of God was to be intimately associated with *all* our actions; our religion was not to be a thing set apart for highdays and holidays —a thing to be put on with our "fringes" and to be left off with them—but to be present, unseen, and almost unconsciously felt, in every part of our every day life. It is only by examining closely, like this, the injunctions which Moses gave that, we can see what a thoroughly beautiful perfect religion ours is.

Then come strict commands against the "serving of other gods"—the utter refusal which must be given to any suggestion even, of conversion, from the neighbouring religions. "If thy brother," writes Moses, "or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods which thou hast not yet known, thou nor thy fathers, . . Thou shalt not consent to him nor hearken to him.'" We must remember this always. Not from our most intimate friend must we "hearken" even to persuasions which would endeavour to entice us secretly (for our own sakes and our own souls, as they would tell us) from the God of our fathers. To Him who gave us our souls we commit their keeping; we guard their purity, and we trust to Him to receive them in futurity. We repeat this daily in our prayers, and we must be careful to repeat it in our daily practice.

To let no motives of self-interest, whether presented to us in the form of bodily or spiritual advancement, tempt us from the religion confided to our keeping from Mount Sinai. There would be less excuse for us now than for those ancestors of ours. There *could* be only one excuse for either—ignorance of the beauty of the religion they forsook; and we, with the Bible before us, and all the wisdom of centuries supplying a commentary, should never let an enemy enter *that* gate. Once knowing what it is to be an Israelite, we could never conscientiously resign the privilege; and for those who would change except from conviction, contempt is the only feeling.

Further laws follow: the subject of what may, and may not, be eaten, and the proportions to be set apart for the poor and the Levite; all with the same primary motive running through them, the great and small subjects alike, "that ye are a holy people unto the Lord your God, whom He hath chosen to be a peculiar people unto Himself." To this end the kindest, justest rules are given, the truest charity enforced—charity which must not stop at the literal fulfilment of the command to give, to "open the hand wide to the poor"—but must guard against even the grudging thought, "grieving in the heart" as we give with the hand. The whole of this chapter (the 15th) is so beautiful, so truly typical of what our religion teaches, that I would like you to turn to this chapter and read it for yourselves. It really does not need any explanation, and any commentary on it seems superfluous.

XLIV.

שׁוֹפְטִים—Certain Laws and Injunctions.

Deuteronomy xvi—xxi.

A repetition and enforcement of sundry laws are given in this Sedrah. First, as relating to that primary principle of the Jewish moral code—the justice which was to influence every action—instructions were again given for the appointment of officers whose duty it should be to hear and settle disputes, taking heed "neither to respect persons nor accept a gift." "That which is altogether just shalt thou follow," Moses tells his congregation; we are not to be altogether generous nor altogether charitable, which, perhaps, would sound better: but "just," which includes both—includes duties and claims to oneself, as well as duties and claims to those around us—includes right dealing towards enemies and strangers where justice is difficult, as much as towards our friends, where duty often takes the disguise of pleasure and requires no effort to practise.

No grove was to be planted, no image set up—the worship was to be kept absolutely pure, and the homage paid to the One True God was to differ, as widely in expression as in spirit, from the debased forms of heathen idolatry they saw around them. To this day, you know no pictures or statues adorn the walls of our synagogues, "no likeness of anything in Heaven above, or the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth!" nothing to distract our thoughts from the contemplation of the Great Merciful Presence, Whom we must be content on earth to recognize in every good thought we think, in every noble aspiration we form, and to wait for the time when at "His right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore," we may, standing in that visible "Presence," see all things plainly in that promised "fullness of light."

The sacrifices, which were at that time permitted to form part of the worship, were to be always of animals without spot or blemish. We were to give of our best to the Giver of it all. So the spirit of sacrifice, you see, can be kept up among us now, though the actual observance has passed away. Obedience to the law, and to those who interpreted and administered it, was again enjoined; and it bears a rather suggestive meaning to us, to read that the sentence of death was passed on those who presumptuously and conceitedly took the law into their own hands, putting aside the decision of those whom, by right of position and wisdom, they were bound to obey. Glancing at the future, and speaking prophetically of the time when they should be governed by kings, Moses gave advice and warning, which, had his words been remem-

bered, would have saved many of the troubles that befell. "When thou shalt get a king over thee," he says, "let him write a copy of this Law in a book; it shall be with him all the days of his life." A wise and unfailing guide to enable him to fulfil the duties of his position. It is very sadly we recall a long list of our kings who did not make the Law a daily lesson of their lives. "He shall not greatly multiply to himself silver and gold," Moses adds, knowing how soon the pursuit of wealth hurries men past good actions, which they persuade themselves they have not leisure to perform now; putting off to some dim future time, an unselfish charitable act perhaps, for which, in that remote "bye and bye" they may sadly find the inclination, from long disuse, fails them, though the long leisure remains. Then the Lawgiver pronounces a solemn warning against believing in false prophets, which, perhaps, of all the injunctions, produced the most lasting effects on his hearers The command concerning the cities of refuge was repeated, and for what class of offences they were designed was clearly explained. Special care was taken lest a man might be unjustly accused by a malicious witness; so no punishment was to follow except on such evidences, from *two* witnesses, as should satisfy the officer of justice; and in case of perjury being proved, the false witness was to suffer the penalty which would have been inflicted on the person accused. "So shalt thou put away evil from among you," Moses comments; and "so," in the ages that have followed, have other nations endeavoured in the like manner, "to put away evil."

Our Law has been the text on which all moral and

legal codes have since been framed. Differences of climate and circumstances have induced changes and modifications; but the Law of Sinai has been, and always will be, the original God-given model, on which our faith rests as on a rock, and against which the waves of time beat, powerless to shake it.

Thoughtful considerate injunctions follow, which had a special application at the time they were given. In the wars, which were then so frequent, certain classes were to be held exempt from serving in the army. He who had "built a new house" or planted a new vineyard," and had not dedicated the one nor tasted the fruit of the other, was to return, if so minded, from the camp, lest he "should die in battle, and another man eat of it." The man also who was happily betrothed, was free to remain at home and marry, lest, perhaps, after long years of waiting and hoping, he should be killed, with hopes and wishes never realised. In a siege no wanton destruction of the enemy's trees was to be permitted—fruit trees, those good for food, were to be spared—an indirect way of showing how revolting in God's sight was any unnecessary harshness or mischief of any sort. One can hardly understand how they could revolt against a God so wonderfully considerate and just. The often repeated "Thou shalt serve Me," "Thou shalt not turn aside after other gods," one can scarcely imagine needful.

XLV.

כי תצא—The Moral Code Continued.

Deuteronomy xxi—xxvi.

This Portion commences with directions for acting justly and considerately towards the inhabitants of the land which they were to enter as conquerors. Then, returning to the laws for their own self-government, Moses directs what is to be done in the case of stubborn and rebellious children.

Next comes a law which goes far to show that our religion was the first to teach, as a practical mode of action, the humanity which another religion claims by right of pretty sounding phrases. Moses does *not* say, "If a man takes thy cloak, give thy coat also;" or, "If thy right cheek is smitten, present the left also;" which would offer a premium to dishonesty and aggression, at the exercise of a very questionable humility:—but he says, protesting against the spirit of passive revenge, which, under various disguises, exists in most of us, "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down

by the way and hide thyself from them; thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again." Human nature, except in story books, rarely exists in strong extremes. The man who would "turn his other cheek to the enemy" is happily as rare as the man who nurses a life-long revenge and neglects all other duties and pleasures to gratify it. It is not for such exceptions that Moses legislates. He speaks to the many who would not go actively out of their way to do a neighbour an ill turn, but who would "hide themselves" if the opportunity offered of doing a good one, and cautions against such ill-nature. No pettiness of feeling was encouraged, and no excess was commanded. Right and justice—so much safer than mere sentiment—lies at the root of these commands. "An ox or an ass stumbling," is only used as a type to express any difficulty or trouble in which a companion may be, and in all such the command is simple and plain. "Thou shalt surely help," "Thou shalt not hide thyself."

Usury is again forbidden in this Sedrah; and so we see how unjust is the prejudice which associates the practice with Judaism. It has been always, at all times, in direct opposition to our religious teaching, and it is not too much to say, would never have been an especially Jewish branch of commerce, had not persecution and intolerance closed other and more honourable occupations to us, and made our money our only means of preserving the life which our enemies made mean and burdensome to us. But usury, for the sake of usury, was never a Jewish principle, and could never be a Jewish practice. Money getting, as an aim and ambition in itself, was

forced upon us; and for the ills it could save us from, rather than, for the luxuries it could purchase, it became unhappily in some ages, and in some cases, an absorbing pursuit. You see, however, from this chapter in Deuteronomy that our religion actually forbids it, and the excuse and justification for an undue value of wealth have now both happily passed away.

Next we read of a kind, thoughtful law, which provided that any man who was just married should be held free for a year from serving in the army, or undertaking any troublesome business, in order that he and his wife might be happy together, and in the pleasant home-life get strong, through love, to encounter the troubles which the future might bring. No servant was to wait for his wages—the "sun was not to go down" on the unpaid debt; he was to be justly treated, and, whether an Israelite or a stranger, the command is stern: "Thou shalt not oppress, lest he cry against thee unto the Lord"—the great, just, loving God, Whose ears were open to "cries" from the lowliest of His creatures. The Jewish doctrine of each bearing the burden of his own sin, and none claiming the reward, or suffering the penalty, of another's deeds, is again enforced in the 16th verse of this 24th chapter. Kindness to the "poor," the "fatherless," and the "widow" is again enjoined, and various ways in which assistance could be kindly and delicately given was pointed out. When the grapes were gathered from a vineyard, some bunches were to be left for such as these, to "go over the bough again." When the ripe corn was garnered in a goodly harvest of sheaves and a stray sheaf or two lay forgotten, the owner was enjoined

"not to go again to fetch it;" those who needed it were to be made welcome to the gleaning. Even cattle were not forgotten in this most perfect code. "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn," is only a type of a hundred other such injunctions, where gentleness and love and charity shine out like bright rays from the justice which is the corner-stone.

XLVI.

כי תבא—The Ordinances.—The Curses.

Deuteronomy xxvi—xxix

To enable the Jews to express gratitude, and to check greediness and arrogance, Moses directs that when they entered into possession of that fertile land, whose wonders should soon become every-day realities to them, they should put aside the fairest fruits and lay them in a basket, as they rested from the pleasant labour of gathering in the goodly harvest. This they were to bring to the altar of God, and give it into the hands of the officiating priest, with a beautiful humble acknowledgment, "Behold, I have brought to Thee, Oh Lord, the first fruits of the Land which Thou hast given to me." They were to preface the offering with a few words concerning past troubles, that they might show that they, the successful prosperous husbandmen, did not forget, and did not want to forget, that they were of the same kith and kin as the "bondmen in Egypt;" and that numerous and feared as their nation had become, "a

Syrian ready to perish," the slave Joseph, was "the father" of this long line of ancestry.

"It is good that a nation should commemorate its defeats," a modern writer has said in speaking of this custom of ours; and one does see a very beautiful fitness in thus recalling old times, and not being afraid or ashamed to speak, and to think, of past servitude and sorrow. It is a pretty picture to dwell on; when we had our own fair fields and vineyards, and piled up the rich ripe fruit in soft beds of green leaves, and brought these sweet gifts to the Great Giver, "rejoicing before the Lord." In an ungrudging, cheerful spirit it was to be brought—in the spirit which is the natural outcome of all true religious feeling—not the prayer that *must* be said, or the ceremony that *must* be observed out of deference to custom or appearances, but the loving instinctive worship which brings of its best is happy in the giving, and "rejoices in every good thing which the Lord God has given."

Having fed the poor and fatherless, and brought grateful acknowledgments to God from their stores, they were to ask for the blessing which they had honestly and humbly striven to earn. "Thou hast promised the Lord this day," says Moses, "to be thy God, to walk in His ways . . . And the Lord hath promised thee this day to be His peculiar people" To impress the law, so fully given, on their memories, Moses next commands, that when they shall have crossed the Jordan, their first act shall be to build an altar to the Lord, and set up with their own hands a monument of remembrance. It was to be built of stones, not fashioned nor cut with iron

tools, but large, natural "whole-stones," as the Bible calls them; and on them was to be written "very plainly" all the words of the Law which Moses had proclaimed. Was it not a beautifully designed memorial? So simple and so much more effective in its simplicity than the grandest work of art. A heap of stones piled by the hands of Israelites, and bearing on them for sole ornament the laws and lessons which direct the lives of those Israelites. I don't think we could find anywhere a more truly national monument than this "altar of stones" of ours. It is so beautifuly to see religion and history perfecting each other, the memorial stones sanctified by having the sacrifice offered upon them. Our history is bound up in our religion, and how careful we should be, whose daily lives are making history for the future, that we should always be worthy of our "inheritance."

Then a solemn ceremony was ordained to take place on the summit of Mount Ebul and Mount Gerizim; selected elders were to stand and proclaim in a loud voice the blessings and cursings which were to fall on those who should incur them. I must tell you of some of the things which the people were thus impressively warned against. "Cursed be he that perverteth judgment for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow." And as all the people joined the "Amen," we may believe that resolutions to be just and charitable were strengthened. So again came the emphatic "Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way;" and we may be sure there were not wanting, in those days, wise teachers to explain the wide circles this "curse" might make in falling—how "causing the blind

to wander" might include the placing of any obstacle maliciously, or even carelessly, in the path of advancement which a companion was trying to tread; how aggravated the fault would be if our unkindness should cause him further to wander; how "blindness," would mean natural ignorance, or circumstances, or incapacity, which would make the path darker and drearier to his steps than ours. Idolaters also were cursed, and then the nature of the curse was explained. Troubles of all kinds were to come—troubles in the city and troubles in the field; sickness at home and persecution abroad; disappointment in the family and humiliation from strangers—all the sorrows, indeed, that the long ages have held for us, were depicted in this 28th chapter of Deuteronomy. "The Lord shall scatter thee among all people, "Thy life shall hang in doubt." "In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even; and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning!" Reading these sentences in vile squalid ghettos, or now and again by the lurid light of the martyr's pile, we can imagine how fully our ancestors felt the force and strength of God's words, finding little comfort in the knowledge, that the curses prophesied, had fallen on them through disregard of the equally emphatic warnings.

I must tell you of the blessings in another place.

XLVII.

נצבים וילך—The Farewell Exhortations of Moses

Deuteronomy xxix—xxxii.

"Ye stand this day, all of you, before the Lord," Moses says to the people, as the echo of the blessings and curses died away on their ears. All of them, even the "little ones," had listened to the suggestive story of the Wanderings and the solemn lessons of the Law. Now, he reminds them that "not only with him who standeth here this day," but "also with him who is not here," through all generations and for all time, this "covenant" had been made—the blessing "if you will obey," the curse "if ye will not hearken." He speaks of the dim future, when men should ask, "Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this people?" how the reply would be "Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers." And we know by the deep shadows which the light of history casts on our lives, as a nation, how truly this prophecy has been fulfilled. Not less

true we hope, and believe, will the subsequent words prove —when "thou shalt return unto the Lord thy God and obey His voice . . . . Then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee."

A beautiful hope for us! For though we are happy and safe now, and take an honoured position, if we deserve it; and though we love this adopted country of ours, and repay with faithfulness the toleration, and something more, which we have at last earned; yet, I think, we should not forget that to us Jews it is, and never can be more than, an adopted country; that some day, sooner or later, we have God's promise that He will "again rejoice over us for good," and "bring us into the land which our fathers possessed." You know the one condition—"to hearken and obey." We cannot plead ignorance or even inability, for, as God says, "the commandment is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us that we may hear it and do it." Perhaps, if it were so, pilgrimages would become fashionable, and parties would be organised, and great fuss and efforts made, to fetch some religion. But because "the word is nigh to thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart," lying close to us in every small daily duty or daily care, we are too often heedless and pass it by. It is the old story of Naaman and the river Jordan.

Some great thing he would have done to be cured, but simply "to wash and be clean" was not worth while! We must try not to let it be so with us. We must not delude ourselves by thinking we would, if required, go long journeys "beyond the sea," and in the meanwhile neglect the teachings that are "nigh" to us—the pages of the Bible that lie so often unopened—and the voice in the "heart," which in the form of conscience, can speak so well.

The God-inspired teacher rises to eloquence. "See I have set before thee this day," he exclaims, "life and good, death and evil." He had shown them both—had preached the beauties and blessings of the one; had warned them against the temptations and "curses" of the other. One can fancy the grey-haired Patriarch, grown grey and bent in that life-long service: one can fancy him in this farewell address looking to the congregation he loved so well, and yearning over them in the appeal, "Therefore choose life, that thou and thy seed may live." *His* life, now drawing to a close, had been far from being an untroubled one; so, the life to which he bid them look forward, and for which he exhorted them to strive, must have been the surer better life in Heaven. It is an indirect evidence for belief in the immortality of the soul, which superficial readers of the Bible cannot discover in its teachings. "Love the Lord thy God, for He is thy life and thy length of days," says the venerable Lawgiver, to whom "length of days" on earth could hardly have been a boon he would have wished prolonged. He goes on to tell them, touchingly, that he is now a hundred and twenty

years old, and "can no more go out or come in." He reminds them that he must not lead them across the Jordan. "Joshua shall go over before thee"—and one reads a volume of self-abnegation, of wishes conquered, and of resignation of a life's longing, in that simple line. One cannot help feeling sorry for Moses whenever one thinks of his dying on the wilderness side of the river. Perhaps old age made it come easier to him; in youth it is so very hard to give up a longing or an ambition. Years and religion together "teach us to hold all mortal joys with a loose hand." He desires them to be obedient to Joshua; and to the young leader himself he gives the simple injunction, "Be strong and of good courage;" strong to resist temptation, courageous to meet and conquer troubles—the two best qualities with which to go through life, if only they are the right sort of strength and courage. The strength of Gideon rather than that of Samson—the modest bravery of David rather than the vain-glorious defiance of Goliath; in a word, the moral strength and honest courage which Joshua had already shewn under trying circumstances, and which can be exercised by those, but by those only, who lead pure, self-reliant lives, and who gain courage and confidence in the same spirit, and from the same source, as David—"Thou comest to me with sword and spear; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord."

XLVIII.

האזינו—Moses' Last Words.

Deuteronomy xxxii

The Elders of the Tribes, and all the chief men, drew their ranks together that all the congregation might listen to the last words of him who had so long and faithfully laboured for their good. "Give ear, oh ye Heavens," the venerable and inspired leader exclaims, "and Earth hearken to the words of my mouth." He compares the words which he will utter to "dew" and "rain" which fertilize and enrich the ground they fall upon. Not because of their eloquence—for of old, we know he had spoken of himself as "slow of speech,"—did he claim this power for his words, but because he would "publish the name of our God," the aged voice grew firm and strong, and the beauty and grandeur of the subject became fitly clothed in his most impressive language. His great desire was for them to obey the Law of which God had permitted him to be the giver in the long years coming, he wanted them to prove more

worthy of the gift, and to this end, he tries by every force of argument and persuasion to impress them at this solemn crisis in their history. First, he tells them something of the nature of the Divine Being, Whom they honour and elevate themselves in worshipping. "He is the Rock," he says, a wise simile of steadfastness and safety to present to a people, standing on the shifting sands of the desert—"His work is perfect: all His ways are judgment; a God of Truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." A grand pure standard of morality to put before this generation whose fathers could tell them of the base forms of so-called Gods, to which the nation they had served, had paid a debasing grovelling homage. Here was a God worthy of all honour—a God of "justice and truth." "Oh, foolish people and unwise!" he interrupts himself to exclaim, recalling their frequent lapses into idolatry. "Why do ye thus requite the Lord, is He not thy Father? . . . Hath He not made thee, and established thee?" And because it was grand for them to think of the Lord in this light—as a loving father, only chastening His children in love—he appeals to their gratitude rather than their dread; their memories rather than their fears. "Remember," he says, "the days of old; consider the years of many generations. Ask thy father, and he will show thee—thy elders, and they will tell thee." We can imagine the little ones turning to their parents, and being "shewn" the manna, and "told" the story of men being fed with "angels' food," or we can picture the elders gathering the youthful members of the congregation around them, and relating

how the good and true, in all times, had been under the kind, just God's protection. They were not tales of so long ago as now, but the stories of the good man saved in a drowning world, of the young shepherd lad who became a mighty prince, of the boy who conquered his faults, and grew up great and generous; and many others with a like meaning and moral in them were, we may feel sure, made familar to all, through these means. Moses dwells for a moment on the ingratitude that had followed all these proofs of a never tiring, never failing love—"of the Rock that begat thee, thou art unmindful," he says, "children in whom is no faith." He tells them how God, in just anger would hide His face from them. When, without that light to guide and direct their steps, groping in the blindness which only God's Presence can make light—then, if they would turn again to Him, He would be, for the hundredth time, "merciful to His land and to His people." "Oh, that they were wise; that they would understand this; that they would consider their latter end!" Moses cries out in a sort of agony at the indifference and disobedience. "It is not a vain thing for you," he adds in his great earnestness, "it is your life." Their life then, our life now, for truly, religion is the one thing which makes life worth living for or death undreaded. It is the whole meaning and beauty of life—it is what makes sorrows endurable, ambitions worthy, loves safe. It is, as Moses so grandly said—to us Jews—"our life." If we would only "consider" and see that it is worth living for and worth dying for! Even in this exalted strain, Moses does not forget a merciful practical injunction

which was well for them to recall in times of victorious temptation; "To me belongeth vengeance and recompense" they were to remember were God's words, when "the day of calamity which was at hand" should fall on those nations whose lands they were to possess. Incidentally too, and in reference to quite another subject, and so of greater value—if indirect, or indeed any evidence were needed—the fact of God's unity is commented upon. "I, even I, am He, there is no God with me. I kill, I make alive, I wound and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of My Hand." Absolutely One, with absolute Power, with infinite mercy, and with a judgment which, once pronounced, can be set aside by no "Mediator." Then Moses having with Joshua repeated this last exhortation, which took the form of a song, in the ears of all the people, received God's command to ascend one of His mountains, and there in uninterrupted view of His Heaven, on heights, to which no earthly sounds of discord could arise to distract him, to quietly lie down to sleep.

I must tell you in the next chapter of the very last remaining scene in his life.

XLIX.

וזאת הברכה—The Last Blessings.

Deuteronomy xxxiii—xxxiv.

There are some who consider that the remaining two chapters of Deuteronomy, which form to-day's portion and conclude the Pentateuch, were added by one of the scribes of the time—possibly Joshua—who lovingly gathered up all the last words of the inspired leader, and, together with the last incidents of his life, united them to the already written records of his career. His last utterances to the people he had guided and tended so faithfully were, as you may fancy, a blessing; and the glory and mystery of that world which he was so soon to enter, seems to have rested on him for the brief space in which he lingeringly bade adieu to his life's mission; and his words took the form of poetry and prophecy. We can well believe how carefully each syllable that fell from those aged lips was cherished and preserved; and with all this long lapse of years, we,

his descendants, must feel something of the pride and happiness that thrilled through his hearers then, as, before rising into his strain of impassioned inspiration, he muses for a moment on that grand scene when "the Lord came down from Sinai;" and adds, as if he were thinking aloud, with the quietness which is the outcome of sure conviction only, "Yea, He loved the people." How well, the long ages confirm! In all sorrow, suffering and exile, God's love for His chosen people has remained an undoubted fact; and such love is a sure anchor to lay hold on—by nation or individual—in times of trouble.

"Moses commanded us a law," the record continues, before recounting the prophetic blessing, "an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. That fitly describes what the Law is to us—an "inheritance," a sacred charge, the gift of God, bequeathed from father to child, "throughout all generations," which it behoves each one of us to preserve intact, to guard, if necessary, with our lives, and to guide by it, each action of our lives; to jealously resist all inroads, whether they come in either the prohibited form of "adding" to, or "diminishing" from, its pure precepts; to endeavour to be worthy of such an "inheritance;" and to use it in such a way that the Great Giver may be satisfied with our stewardship, when He shall bring "every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."

That we may never have an excuse for forgetting this law, which is "our life," our attention must be constantly called to its injunctions; for in our synagogues the sacred records are never closed. To-day, when Deuteronomy is

finished, Genesis will be begun; and all throughout next year, and all succeeding years, the portions we have examined together will be read and listened to in all our places of worship. In all ages this custom has been studiously observed; and in the sad times of our history when cruel men have ordered our holy books to be burnt, good men have been found to dare death in the hope of keeping the religion alive in the minds of the people; and the Law has often been read in muffled tones in dim vaults. At one time even, of which I have told you, when the Law was absolutely excluded, wise men selected passages from other parts of the Scriptures, bearing as near a resemblance as they could find, and, calling them Haphtorahs, read them instead. In many synagogues these have been permanently added to the service, and are read after the Law at the present time. Now, that it is thus, in truth "very nigh to us," there is the less excuse for failing, and the more obligation "to observe and to do all the words of this Law."

When our great Lawgiver had finished his special prophetic blessing to each tribe, he rose once more into a strain of exalted earnest feeling, and his very last words to the people he had so loved and borne with were, "Happy art thou, oh Israel! Oh people saved by the Lord!" Then the great patriarch rose up in the beauty of his age, which was free from the weaknesses which generally accompany it, and went slowly up the Mount to die, even as his brother had died on Mount Hor. There, on the heights of Pisgah, God "showed him all the land," the fertile plains of the south and "the city of the palm trees," all that fair land of promise "unto

the utmost sea." As his eyes, which had not "grown dim," took in all the fair view, and heard the voice of his God repeat, "thine eyes may see, but thou shalt not go thither," we may believe that the Presence in which he stood, which was so very near to him, in its Glory and Goodness, made that great sorrow of an unfulfilled mission pass unfelt. Of these last solemn moments we have no further record. "Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there." "And no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day." These two sentences are all we know. But a man's life, and not his death, makes history; and of our leader any monument or memorial, save his own deeds, would have been superfluous. It might even in those times have done harm; for the Israelites, so susceptible to idolatrous influences, might have worshipped a stone more than they had done the living man. In this manner some commentators explain the silence of Holy Writ on the subject of his tomb.

And with the mourning of Israel, which lasted thirty days, the Book of Deuteronomy ends; and our weekly glimpses into the Pentateuch, which I hope have been as profitable for you to read as pleasant for me to write, must also come to a close.

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