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WOMAN IN SACRED HISTORY

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Содержание

Woman in Sacred History A Series of Sketches Drawn from Scriptural, Historical, and Legendary Sources

INTRODUCTION

The object of the following pages will be to show, in a series of biographical sketches, a history of Womanhood under Divine culture, tending toward the development of that high ideal of woman which we find in modern Christian countries.

All the characters comprised in these sketches belong to one nationality. They are of that mysterious and ancient race whose records begin with the dawn of history; who, for centuries, have been sifted like seed through all the nations of the earth, without losing either their national spirit or their wonderful physical and mental vigor.

By this nation the Scriptures, which we reverence, were written and preserved. From it came all the precepts and teachings by which our lives are guided in things highest and holiest; from it came He who is at once the highest Ideal of human perfection and the clearest revelation of the Divine.

We are taught that the Creator revealed himself to man, not at once, but by a *system* progressively developing from age to age. Selecting one man, he made of his posterity a sacerdotal nation, through which should gradually unfold a religious literature, and from which should come a succession of religious teachers, and the final development, through Jesus, of a religion whose ultimate triumphs should bring complete blessedness to the race.

In tracing the Bible narrative from the beginning, it is interesting to mark the effect of this great movement in its relation to women. The characters we have selected will be arranged for this purpose in a series, under the following divisions: —

I. Women of the Patriarchal Ages

II. Women of the National Period

III. Women of the Christian Period

We understand by the patriarchal period the interval between the calling of Abraham and the public mission of Moses. The pictures of life at this time are interesting, because they give the clearest idea of what we may call the raw material on which the educational system of the Divine Being began to work. We find here a state of society the elements of which are in some respects peculiarly simple and healthful, and in others exhibiting the imperfections of the earth's childhood. Family affection appears to be the strongest force in it, yet it is family affection with the defects of an untaught, untrained morality. Polygamy, with its well-known evils, was universal in the world. Society was broken into roving tribes, and life was a constant battle, in which artifice and deception were the only refuge of the quiet and peace-loving spirit. Even within the bounds of the family, we continually find fraud, artifice, and deception. Men and women, in that age of the world, seem to have practiced deceit

and spoken lies, as children do, from immaturity and want of deep reflection. A certain childhood of nature, however, is the redeeming charm in all these pictures. There is an honest simplicity in the narrative, which refreshes us like the talk of children.

We have been so long in the habit of hearing the Bible read in solemn, measured tones, in the hush of churches, that we are apt to forget that these men and women were really flesh and blood, of the same human nature with ourselves. A factitious solemnity invests a Bible name, and some good people seem to feel embarassed by the obligation to justify all the proceedings of patriarchs and prophets by the advanced rules of Christian morality. In this respect, the modern fashion of treating the personages of sacred story with the same freedom of inquiry as the characters of any other history has its advantages. It takes them out of a false, unnatural light, where they lose all hold on our sympathies, and brings them before us as real human beings. Read in this way, the ancient sacred history is the purest naturalism, under the benevolent guidance of the watchful Father of Nations.

Pascal very wisely says, "The whole succession of men during the long course of ages ought to be considered as a single man, who exists and learns from age to age." Considered in this light, it is no more difficult to conceive of an infinite Father tolerating an imperfect childhood of morals in the whole human race, than in each individual of that race. The patriarchs are to be viewed as the first pupils in the great training-school whence the world's teachers in morals were to come, and they are shown to us in all the crudity of early pupilage. The great virtue of which they are presented as the pattern is the virtue of the child and the scholar – FAITH.

Faith, the only true reason for weak and undeveloped natures, was theirs, and as the apostle says, "it was counted to them for righteousness." However imperfect and uncultured one may be, if he has implicit trust in an infallible teacher, he is in the way of all attainment.

The faith of which Abraham is presented as the example is not the blind, ignorant superstition of the savage. Not a fetish, not a selfish trust in a Patron Deity for securing personal advantages, but an enlightened, boundless trust in the Supreme power, wisdom, and rectitude. "The Judge of all the earth will *do right*." In this belief, Abraham trusts him absolutely. To him he is willing to surrender the deepest and dearest hopes of his life, and sacrifice even the son in whom center all the nerves of joy and hope, "accounting," as the Apostle tells us, "that God was able to raise him from the dead."

Nor was this faith bounded by the horizon of this life. We are informed by the Apostle Paul, who certainly well understood the traditions of his nation, that Abraham looked forward to the same heavenly home which cheers the heart of the Christian. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: *for he looked for a city that hath foundations*, whose builder and maker is God. They – the patriarchs – desired a better country, even an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." (Heb. xi. 8-10, 16.)

We are further told that this faith passed as a legacy through the patriarchal families to the time of Moses, and that the inspiring motive of his life was the invisible God and the future world beyond the grave. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the great king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible." (Heb. xi. 24-27.) It has been blindly asserted that the hope of a future life was no part of the working force in the lives of these ancient patriarchs. Certainly, no one ever sacrificed more brilliant prospects of things seen and temporal, for the sake of things unseen and eternal, than Moses.

Finally, one remarkable characteristic of all these old patriarchs was the warmth of their affections. Differing in degree as to moral worth, they were all *affectionate* men. So, after all that Christianity has done for us, after all the world's growth and progress, we find no pictures of love in

family life more delicate and tender than are given in these patriarchal stories. No husband could be more loyally devoted to a wife than Abraham; no lover exhibit less of the eagerness of selfish passion and more of enduring devotion than Jacob, who counted seven years of servitude as nothing, for the love he bare his Rachael; and, for a picture of parental tenderness, the story of Joseph stands alone and unequalled in human literature.

In the patriarchal families, as here given, women seem to have reigned as queens of the interior. Even when polygamy was practiced, the monogamic affection was still predominant. In the case of Abraham and Jacob, it appears to have been from no wandering of the affections, but from a desire of offspring, or the tyranny of custom, that a second wife was imposed.

Female chastity was jealously guarded. When a young prince seduced Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, although offering honorable marriage, with any amount of dowry, the vengeance of the brothers could only be appeased by blood; and the history of Joseph shows that purity was regarded as a virtue in man as well as in woman. Such, then, was the patriarchal stock, – the seed-form of the great and chosen nation. Let us now glance at the influences which nourished it through the grand growth of the prophetic or national period, up to the time of its consummate blossom and fruit in the Christian era.

Moses was the great lawgiver to mold this people into a nation. His institutes formed a race of men whose vital force has outlived conquest, persecution, dispersion, and every possible cause which could operate to destroy a nationality; so that, even to our time, talent and genius spring forth from the unwasted vigor of these sons and daughters of Abraham. The remarkable vigor and vitality of the Jewish race, their power of adaptation to every climate, and of bearing up under the most oppressive and disadvantageous circumstances, have attracted the attention of the French government, and two successive commissions of inquiry, with intervals of three or four years between, have been instituted, "on the causes of the health and longevity of the Jewish race."

In the "Israelite" of February 9, 1866, we have, on this subject, the report of M. Legoyt, chief of a division of the ministry of commerce and public works, one of the first statisticians of France. He says: "We have seen that all the documents put together are affirmative of an exceptional vitality of the Jews. How can this phenomenon be explained? Dietrici, after having demonstrated its existence in Prussia, thinks it is to be attributed to greater temperance, a better regulated life, and purer morals. This is likewise the opinion of Drs. Neufville, Glatter, and Meyer. Cases of drunkenness, says Dietrici, frequent among the Christians, occur very rarely among the Jews. This regularity and discipline, and greater self-control, of Jewish life is confirmed by the criminal statistics of Prussia, which show fewer Jews condemned for crime."

M. Legoyt goes on to account for this longevity and exceptional vitality of the Jews by the facts of their family life: that early marriages are more common; that great care is taken to provide for the exigencies of marriage; that there are fewer children born, and thus they are better cared for; that family feeling is more strongly developed than in other races; that the Jewish mother is the nurse of her own infant, and that great care and tenderness are bestowed on young children.

It is evident that the sanitary prescriptions of the Mosaic law have an important bearing on the health. If we examine these laws of Moses, we shall find that they consist largely in dietetic and sanitary regulations, in directions for detecting those diseases which vitiate the blood, and removing the subjects of them from contact with their fellows.

But the greatest peculiarity of the institutes of Moses is their care of family life. They differed from the laws of all other ancient nations by making the family the central point of the state. In Rome and Greece, and in antiquity generally, the ruling purpose was war and conquest. War was the normal condition of the ancient world. The state was for the most part a camp under martial law, and the interests of the family fared hardly. The laws of Moses, on the contrary, contemplated a peaceful community of land-holders, devoted to agriculture and domestic life. The land of Canaan was divided into homesteads; the homestead was inalienable in families, and could be sold only for

fifty years, when it reverted again to the original heirs. All these regulations gave a quality of stability and perpetuity to the family. We have also some striking laws which show how, when brought into immediate comparison, family life is always considered the first; for instance, see Deuteronomy xxiv. 5: "When a man hath taken a new wife he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business; but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken." What can more strongly show the delicate care of woman, and the high regard paid to the family, than this? It was more important to be a good husband and make his wife happy than to win military glory or perform public service of any kind.

The same regard for family life is shown, in placing the father and the mother as joint objects of honor and veneration, in the Ten Commandments: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee." Among the Greeks, the wife was a nonentity, living in the seclusion of the women's apartments, and never associated publicly with her husband as an equal. In Rome, the father was all in all in the family, and held the sole power of life and death over his wife and children. Among the Jews, the wife was the co-equal queen of the home, and was equally honored and obeyed with her husband. Lest there should be any doubt as to the position of the mother, the command is solemnly reiterated, and the mother placed first in order: "And the Lord spake to Moses, speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. Ye shall fear every man his MOTHER and his father. I am the Lord." (Lev. xix. 3.) How solemn is the halo of exaltation around the mother in this passage, opened with all the authority of God, – calling to highest holiness, and then exalting the mother and the father as, next to God, objects of reverence!

Family government was backed by all the authority of the state, but the power of life and death was not left in the parents' hands. If a son proved stubborn and rebellious, utterly refusing domestic discipline, then the father and the mother were to unite in bringing him before the civil magistrates, who condemned him to death. But the *mother* must appear and testify, before the legal act was accomplished, and thus the power of restraining the stronger passions of the man was left with her.

The laws of Moses also teach a degree of delicacy and consideration, in the treatment of women taken captives in war, that was unparalleled in those ages. With one consent, in all other ancient nations, the captive woman was a slave, with no protection for chastity. Compare with this the spirit of the law of Moses: "If thou seest among thy captives a beautiful woman, and hast a desire unto her that thou wouldst have her to wife, then thou shalt bring her to thy house, and she shall remain in thy house and bewail her father and mother a full month; and after that thou shalt go in unto her and be her husband, and she shall be thy wife." Here is consideration, regard to womanly feeling, and an opportunity for seeking the affection of the captive by kindness. The law adds, furthermore, that if the man change his mind, and do not wish to marry her after this time for closer acquaintance, then he shall give her her liberty, and allow her to go where she pleases: "Thou shalt not sell her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her."

The laws of Moses did not forbid polygamy, but they secured to the secondary wives such respect and attention as made the maintenance of many of them a matter of serious difficulty. Everywhere we find Moses interposing some guard to the helplessness of the woman, softening and moderating the harsh customs of ancient society in her favor. Men were not allowed to hold women-servants merely for the gratification of a temporary passion, without assuming the obligations of a husband. Thus we find the following restraint on the custom of buying a handmaid or concubine: "If a man sell his daughter to be a maid-servant, she shall not go out to work as the men-servants do, and, if she please not her master which hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed; he shall have no power to sell her unto a stranger, seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her. And if he have betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her as a daughter. And if he take another wife, her food and her raiment, and her duty of marriage shall he not diminish. And if he do

not these three things unto her, then shall she go out free without money." (Ex. xxi. 7.) This law, in fact, gave to every concubine the rights and immunities of a legal wife, and in default of its provisions she recovered her liberty. Thus, also, we find a man is forbidden to take two sisters to wife, and the feelings of the first wife are expressly mentioned as the reason: "Thou shalt not take unto thy wife her sister to vex her during her lifetime."

In the same manner it was forbidden to allow personal favoritism to influence the legal rights of succession belonging to children of different wives. (Deut. xxi. 15.) "If a man have two wives, one beloved and the other hated, and they have both borne him children, and if the firstborn son be hers that is hated, then, when he maketh his sons to inherit, he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn, but he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn."

If a man slandered the chastity of his wife before marriage, she or her relations had a right to bring him before a tribunal of the elders, and, failing to substantiate his accusations, he was heavily fined and the right of divorce taken from him.

By thus hedging in polygamy with the restraints of serious obligations and duties, and making every concubine a wife, entitled to claim all the privileges of a wife, Moses prepared the way for its gradual extinction. For since it could not be a mere temporary connection involving no duty on the man's part, since he could not sell or make merchandise of the slave when he was tired of her, since the children had a legal claim to support, – it became a serious matter to increase the number of wives. The kings of Israel were expressly forbidden to multiply wives; and the disobedience of Solomon, who followed the custom of Oriental sovereigns, is mentioned with special reprobation, as calling down the judgments of God upon his house.

The result of all this was, that in the course of time polygamy fell into disuse among the Jews; and, after the Babylonian captivity, when a more strenuous observance of the laws of Moses was enforced, it almost entirely ceased.[1] In the time of Christ and the Apostles, the Jews had become substantially a monogamic nation.

Another peculiarity in the laws of Moses is the equality of the treatment of man and woman. Among other nations, adultery was punished severely in the wife, and lightly, if at all, in the husband. According to the Jewish law, it was punished by the death of both parties. If a man seduced a girl, he was obliged to marry her; and forcible violation was punished by death.

While in many other nations, prostitution, in one form or other, formed part of the services of the temple and the revenues of the state, it was enacted that the wages of such iniquity should not be received into the treasury of the Lord; and, finally, it was enjoined that there should be no prostitute among the daughters of Israel. (Deut. xxiii. 17, 18.)

In all that relates to the details of family life, the laws of Moses required great temperance and government of the passions; and, undoubtedly, these various restraints and religious barriers raised by the ceremonial law around the wife and mother are one great reason of the vigor of the Jewish women and the uncorrupted vitality of the race.

The law of Moses on divorce, though expressly spoken of by Christ as only a concession or adaptation to a low state of society, still was, in its day, on the side of protection to women. A man could not put his wife out of doors at any caprice of changing passion: a legal formality was required, which would, in those times, require the intervention of a Levite to secure the correctness of the instrument. This would bring the matter under the cognizance of legal authority, and tend to check the rash exercise of the right by the husband. The final result of all this legislation, enforced from age to age by Divine judgments, and by the warning voices of successive prophets, was, that the Jewish race, instead of sinking into licentiousness, and losing stamina and vigor, as all the other ancient nations did, became essentially a chaste and vigorous people, and is so to this day.

[1] Michaelis, Laws of Moses, III. 5, § 95.

The comparison of the literature of any ancient nation with that of the Jews strikingly demonstrates this. The uncleanness and obscenity of much of the Greek and Roman literature is in wonderful contrast to the Jewish writings in the Bible and Apocrypha, where vice is never made either ludicrous or attractive, but mentioned only with horror and reprobation.

If we consider now the variety, the elevation, and the number of female characters in sacred history, and look to the corresponding records of other nations, we shall see the results of this culture of women. The nobler, the heroic elements were developed among the Jewish women by the sacredness and respect which attached to family life. The veneration which surrounded motherhood, and the mystic tradition coming down through the ages that some Judæan mother should give birth to the great Saviour and Regenerator of mankind, consecrated family life with a devout poetry of emotion. Every cradle was hallowed by the thought of that blessed child who should be the hope of the world.

Another cause of elevation of character among Jewish women was their equal liability to receive the prophetic impulse. A prophet was, by virtue of his inspiration, a public teacher, and the leader of the nation, – kings and magistrates listened to his voice; and this crowning glory was from time to time bestowed on women.

We are informed in 2 Kings xxii. 14, that in the reign of King Josiah, when a crisis of great importance arose with respect to the destiny of the nation, the king sent a deputation of the chief priests and scribes to inquire of the word of the Lord from Huldah the prophetess, and that they received her word as the highest authority. This was while the prophet Jeremiah was yet a young man.

The prophetess was always a poetess, and some of the earliest records of female poetry in the world are of this kind. A lofty enthusiasm of patriotism also distinguishes the Jewish women, and in more than one case in the following sketches we shall see them the deliverers of their country. Corresponding to these noble women of sacred history, what examples have we in polished Greece? The only women who were allowed mental culture – who studied, wrote, and enjoyed the society of philosophers and of learned men – were the courtesans. For chaste wives and mothers there was no career and no record.

In the Roman state we see the influence upon woman of a graver style of manhood and a more equal liberty in the customs of society. In Rome there were sacred women, devoted to religion, and venerated accordingly. They differed, however, from the inspired women of Jewish history in being entirely removed from the experiences of family life. The vestal virgins were bound by cruel penalties to a life of celibacy. So far as we know, there is not a Jewish prophetess who is not also a wife, and the motherly character is put forward as constituting a claim to fitness in public life. "I, Deborah, arose a mother in Israel." That pure ideal of a sacred woman springing from the bosom of the family, at once wife, mother, poetess, leader, inspirer, prophetess, is peculiar to sacred history.

WOMEN OF THE PATRIARCHAL AGES

SARAH THE PRINCESS

One woman in the Christian dispensation has received a special crown of honor. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, mother of the Jewish nation, is to this day an object of traditional respect and homage in the Christian Church. Her name occurs in the marriage service as an example for the Christian wife, who is exhorted to meekness and obedience by St. Peter, "Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are, so long as ye do well, and are not subject to a slavish fear."

In turning to the narrative of the Old Testament, however, we are led to feel that in setting Sarah before wives as a model of conjugal behavior, no very alarming amount of subjection or submission is implied.

The name Sarah means "princess"; and from the Bible story we infer that, crowned with the power of eminent beauty, and fully understanding the sovereignty it gave her over man, Sarah was virtually empress and mistress of the man she called "lord." She was a woman who understood herself and him, and was too wise to dispute the title when she possessed the reality of sway; and while she called Abraham "lord," it is quite apparent from certain little dramatic incidents that she expected him to use his authority in the line of her wishes.

In going back to these Old Testament stories, one feels a ceaseless admiration of the artless simplicity of the primitive period of which they are the only memorial. The dew of earth's early morning lies on it, sparkling and undried; and the men and women speak out their hearts with the simplicity of little children.

In Abraham we see the man whom God designed to be the father of a great sacerdotal nation; through whom, in the fullness of time, should come the most perfect revelation of himself to man, by Jesus Christ. In choosing the man to found such a nation, the Divine Being rejected the stormy and forcible characters which command the admiration of rude men in early ages, and chose one of gentler elements.

Abraham was distinguished for a loving heart, a tender domestic nature, great reverence, patience, and fidelity, a childlike simplicity of faith, and a dignified self-possession. Yet he was not deficient in energy or courage when the event called for them. When the warring tribes of the neighborhood had swept his kinsman, Lot, into captivity, Abraham came promptly to the rescue, and, with his three hundred trained servants, pursued, vanquished, and rescued. Though he loved not battle, when roused for a good cause he fought to some purpose.

Over the heart of such a man, a beautiful, queenly woman held despotic sway. Traveling with her into the dominions of foreign princes, he is possessed by one harassing fear. The beauty of this woman, – will it not draw the admiration of marauding powers? And shall I not be murdered, or have her torn from me? And so, twice, Abraham resorts to the stratagem of concealing their real relation, and speaking of her as his sister. The Rabbinic traditions elaborate this story with much splendor of imagery. According to them, Abraham being obliged by famine to sojourn in Egypt, rested some days by the river Nile; and as he and Sarah walked by the banks of the river, and he beheld her wonderful beauty reflected in the water, he was overwhelmed with fear lest she should be taken from him, or that he should be slain for her sake. So he persuaded her to pass as his sister; for, as he says, "she was the daughter of my father, but not of my mother." The legend goes on to say, that, as a further precaution, he had her placed in a chest to cross the frontier; and when the custom-house officers met them, he offered to pay for the box whatever they might ask, to pass it free.

"Does it contain silks?" asked the officers.

"I will pay the tenth as of silk," he replied.

"Does it contain silver?" they inquired.

"I will pay for it as silver," answered Abraham.

"Nay, then, it must contain gold."

"I will pay for it as gold."

"May be it contains most costly gems."

"I will pay for it as gems," he persisted.

In the struggle the box was broken open, and in it was seated a beautiful woman whose countenance illumined all Egypt. The news reached the ears of Pharaoh, and he sent and took her.

In comparing these Rabinnic traditions with the Bible, one is immediately struck with the difference in quality, – the dignified simplicity of the sacred narrative contrasts forcibly with the fantastic elaborations of tradition.

The Rabbinic and Alcoranic stories are valuable, however, as showing how profound an impression the personality of these characters had left on mankind. The great characters of the Biblical story, though in themselves simple, seemed, like the sun, to raise around them many-colored and vaporous clouds of myth and story. The warmth of their humanity kept them enwreathed in a changing mist of human sympathies.

The falsehoods which Abraham tells are to be estimated not by the modern, but by the ancient standard. In the earlier days of the world, when physical force ruled, when the earth was covered with warring tribes, skill in deception was counted as one of the forms of wisdom. "The crafty Ulysses" is spoken of with honor through the "Odyssey" for his skill in dissembling; and the Lacedemonian youth were punished, not for stealing or lying, but for performing these necessary operations in a bungling, unskillful manner.

In a day when it was rather a matter of course for a prince to help himself to a handsome woman wherever he could find her, and kill her husband if he made any objections, a weaker party entering the dominions of a powerful prince was under the laws of war.

In our nineteenth century we have not yet grown to such maturity as not to consider false statements and stratagem as legitimate war policy in dealing with an enemy. Abraham's *ruse* is not, therefore, so very far behind even the practice of modern Christians. That he should have employed the same fruitless stratagem twice, seems to show that species of infatuation on the one subject of a beloved woman, which has been the "last infirmity" of some otherwise strong and noble men, – wise everywhere else, but weak there.

The Rabbinic legends represent Sarah as being an object of ardent admiration to Pharaoh, who pressed his suit with such vehemence that she cried to God for deliverance, and told the king that she was a married woman. Then – according to this representation – he sent her away with gifts, and even extended his complacency so far as to present her with his daughter Hagar as a handmaid, – a legend savoring more of national pride than of probability.

In the few incidents related of Sarah she does not impress us as anything more than the beautiful princess of a nomadic tribe, with many virtues and the failings that usually attend beauty and power.

With all her advantages of person and station, Sarah still wanted what every woman of antiquity considered the crowning glory of womanhood. She was childless. By an expedient common in those early days, she gives her slave as second wife to her husband, whose child shall be her own. The Rabbinic tradition says that up to this time Hagar had been tenderly beloved by Sarah. The prospect, however, of being mother to the heir of the family seems to have turned the head of the handmaid, and broken the bonds of friendship between them.

In its usual naïve way, the Bible narrative represents Sarah as scolding her patient husband for the results which came from following her own advice. Thus she complains, in view of Hagar's insolence: "My wrong be upon thee. I have given my maid unto thy bosom, and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes. The Lord judge between thee and me."

We see here the eager, impulsive, hot-hearted woman, accustomed to indulgence, impatient of trouble, and perfectly certain that she is in the right, and that the Lord himself must think so. Abraham, as a well-bred husband, answers pacifically: "Behold, thy maid is in thy hand, to do as pleaseth thee." And so it pleased Sarah to deal so hardly with her maid that she fled to the wilderness.

Finally, the domestic broil adjusts itself. The Divine Father, who watches alike over all his creatures, sends back the impetuous slave from the wilderness, exhorted to patience, and comforted with a promise of a future for her son.

Then comes the beautiful idyl of the three angels, who announce the future birth of the long-desired heir. We could wish all our readers, who may have fallen out of the way of reading the Old Testament, to turn again to the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, and see the simple picture of those olden days. Notice the beautiful hospitality of reception. The Emir rushes himself to his herd to choose the fatted calf, and commands the princess to make ready the meal, and knead the cakes. Then comes the repast. The announcement of the promised blessing, at which Sarah laughs in incredulous surprise; the grave rebuke of the angels, and Sarah's white lie, with the angel's steady answer, – are all so many characteristic points of the story. Sarah, in all these incidents, is, with a few touches, made as real flesh and blood as any woman in the pages of Shakespeare, – not a saint, but an average mortal, with all the foibles, weaknesses, and variabilities that pertain to womanhood, and to womanhood in an early age of imperfectly developed morals.

We infer from the general drift of the story, that Sarah, like most warm-hearted and passionate women, was, in the main, a kindly, motherly creature, and that, when her maid returned and submitted, she was reconciled to her. At all events, we find that the son of the bondwoman was born and nurtured under her roof, along with her own son Isaac. It is in keeping with our conception of Sarah, that she should at times have overwhelmed Hagar with kindness, and helped her through the trials of motherhood, and petted the little Ishmael till he grew too saucy to be endured.

The Jewish mother nursed her child three years. The weaning was made a great *fête*, and Sarah's maternal exultation at this crisis of her life, displayed itself in festal preparations. We hear her saying: "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. Who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have borne him a son in his old age."

In the height of this triumph, she saw the son of the Egyptian woman mocking, and all the hot blood of the woman, mother, and princess flushed up, and she said to her husband: "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

We are told "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son." But a higher power confirms the hasty, instinctive impulse of the mother. The God of nations saw in each of these infant boys the seed-forms of a race with a history and destiny apart from each other, and Abraham is comforted with the thought that a fatherly watch will be kept over both.

Last of all we come to the simple and touching announcement of the death of this woman, so truly loved to the last. "And Sarah was a hundred and seven and twenty years old: these were the years of the life of Sarah. And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her." It is a significant token of the magnificent physical vigor with which that early age was endowed, that now, for the first time, the stroke of death has fallen on the family of Abraham, and he is forced to seek a burial-place. Sarah, the beautiful princess, the crowned mother of a great nation, the beloved wife, is dead; and Abraham, constant lover in age as youth, lays her away with tears. To him she is ever young; for love confers on its object eternal youth.

A beautiful and peculiar passage in the history describes the particulars of the purchase of this burial-place. All that love can give to the fairest, most beautiful, and dearest is a tomb; and Abraham refuses to take as a gift from the nobles of the land so sacred a spot. It must be wholly his own, bought with his own money. The sepulchre of Machpelah, from the hour it was consecrated by the last sleep

of the mother of the tribe, became the calm and sacred resting-place to which the eyes of children's children turned. So Jacob, her grandson, in his dying hour, remembered it: —

"Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah."

Two powerful and peculiar nations still regard this sepulchre with veneration, and cherish with reverence the memory of Sarah the Princess.

HAGAR THE SLAVE

A striking pendant to the picture of Sarah the Princess is that of Hagar the Slave.

In the Bible narrative she is called simply Hagar the Egyptian; and as Abraham sojourned some time in the land of Egypt, we are to suppose that this acquisition to the family was then made. Slavery, in the early patriarchal period, had few of the horrors which beset it in more modern days. The condition of a slave more nearly resembled that of the child of the house than that of a modern servant. The slave was looked upon, in default of children, as his master's heir, as was the case with Eliezer of Damascus, the confidential servant of Abraham; the latter, when speaking to God of his childless condition says: "Lo! one born in my house is mine heir." In like manner there is a strong probability in the legend which represents Hagar as having been the confidential handmaid of Sarah, and treated by her with peculiar tenderness.

When the fear of being childless seized upon her, Sarah was willing to exalt one, who was as a second self to her, to the rank of an inferior wife, according to the customs of those early days; intending to adopt and treat as her own the child of her handmaid. But when the bondwoman found herself thus exalted, and when the crowning honor of prospective motherhood was conferred upon her, her ardent tropical blood boiled over in unseemly exultation, – "her mistress was despised in her eyes."

Probably under the flapping curtains of the pastoral tent, as under the silken hangings of palaces, there were to be found flatterers and mischief-makers ready to fill the weak, credulous ear with their suggestions. Hagar was about to become mother of the prince and heir of the tribe; her son one day should be their chief and ruler, while Sarah, childless and uncrowned, should sink to a secondary rank. Why should she obey the commands of Sarah?

Our idea of Sarah is that of a warm-hearted, generous, bountiful woman, with an intense sense of personal dignity and personal rights, – just the woman to feel herself beyond measure outraged by this unexpected result of what she must have looked upon as unexampled favor. In place of a grateful, devoted creature, identified with her interests, whose child should be to her as her own child, she finds herself confronted with an imperious rival, who lays claim to her place and position.

The struggle was one that has been witnessed many a time since in families so constituted, and with such false elements. Abraham, peace-loving and quiet, stands neutral; confident, as many men are, of the general ability of the female sex, by inscrutable ways and methods of their own, to find their way out of the troubles they bring themselves into. Probably he saw wrong on both sides; yet Hagar, as the dependent, who owed all the elevation on which she prided herself to the good-will of her mistress, was certainly the more in fault of the two; and so he dismisses the subject with: "Thy maid is in thy hand; do with her as pleaseth thee."

The next we hear of the proud, hot-hearted, ungoverned slave-girl, is her flight to the wilderness in a tumult of indignation and grief, doubtless after bitter words and hard usage from the once indulgent mistress. But now comes into the history the presence of the Father God, in whose eye all human beings are equal, and who looks down on the boiling strifes and hot passions of us all below, as a mother on the quarrels of little children in the nursery. For this was the world's infancy, and each character in the drama represented a future nation for whom the All-Father was caring.

So when the violent, desolate creature had sobbed herself weary in the lonesome desert, the story says: "And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water, in the way to Shur. And he said, Hagar, Sarah's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress, Sarah."

In this calm question there is a reminder of duty violated, and in the submissive answer is an acknowledgment of that duty. The angel calls her "Sarah's maid," and she replies, "my mistress, Sarah."

"And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." Then, as with awe and submission she rises to go, she is comforted with promises of gracious tenderness. The All-Father does not take part with her in her rebellious pride, nor in her haughty desire to usurp the station and honors of her mistress, and yet he has sympathy for that strong, awakening feeling of motherhood which makes the wild girl of the desert begin at once to crave station and place on earth for the son she is to bring into it. So the story goes on: "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael, because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren. And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?"

This little story is so universally and beautifully significant of our every-day human experience, that it has almost the force of an allegory.

Who of us has not yielded to despairing grief, while flowing by us were unnoticed sources of consolation? The angel did not *create* the spring in the desert: it was there all the while, but Hagar was blinded by her tears. She was not seeking God, but he was seeking her. How often may we, all of us, in the upliftings and deliverances of our life, say as she did, "Have I here looked after him that seeth me?"

The narrative adds, "Wherefore the spring was called *The Well of Him that Liveth and Seeth Me*."

That spring is still flowing by our daily path.

So, quieted and subdued and comforted, Hagar returns to her mistress and her home, and we infer from the story, that, with submission on her part, kindness and bounty returned on the part of her mistress. She again becomes a member of the family. Her son is born, and grows up for twelve years under the shadow of Abraham's tent, and evidently, from the narrative, is fondly beloved by his father, and indulgently treated by his foster-mother.

In an hour of confidential nearness the Divine Father announces to Abraham that a son shall be given him by the wife of his heart.

"As for Sarah, thy wife, I will bless her, and give thee a son of her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face and laughed, and said in his heart: Shall a child be born to him that is an hundred years old, and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" Yet, in this moment of triumphant joy, his heart yearns after Ishmael; "And Abraham said unto God: O that Ishmael might live before thee!" And the Divine answer is: "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation."

But now comes the hour long waited for, of Sarah's triumph, – the fulfillment of the desires of her life. A generous heart would have sympathized in her triumph. A mother who had known the blessedness of motherhood would have rejoiced when the mistress who had done so much for her was made so joyful. If her own son be not the heir in succession, yet an assured future is promised to him. But the dark woman and her wild son are of untamable elements. They can no more become one in spirit with the patriarchal family, than oil can mix with water. When the weaning feast is made, and all surround the little Isaac, when the mother's heart overflows with joy, she sees the graceless Ishmael mocking; and instantly, with a woman's lightning prescience, she perceives the dangers, the impossibilities of longer keeping these aliens under the same roof, – the feuds, the jealousies, the fierce quarrels of the future.

"Cast out this bondwoman and her son," she says, with the air of one accustomed to command and decide; "for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

It appears that Abraham had set his heart on the boy, and had hoped to be able to keep both in one family, and divide his inheritance between them; but it was otherwise decreed. "And God said to Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight, because of the lad and because of thy bondwoman: in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed. And Abraham arose up early, and took bread and a bottle of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and sent her away with the child; and she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba." Probably she was on the road towards Egypt. "And the water was all spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs; and she went away and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bow-shot, for she said, Let me not see the death of the child; and she lifted up her voice and wept."

Poor, fiery, impatient creature! – moaning like a wounded leopardess, – apparently with no heart to remember the kindly Power that once before helped her in her sorrows; but the story goes on: "And God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of the Lord called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thy hand; for I will make of him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad, and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness and became an archer. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt."

In all this story, nothing impresses us so much as the absence of all modern technical or theological ideas respecting the God who is represented here as sowing the seed of nations with a wise foresight of the future. As a skillful husbandman, bent on perfecting a certain seed, separates it from all others, and grows it by itself, so the Bible tells us that God selected a certain stock to be trained and cultivated into the sacerdotal race, through which should come his choicest revelations to man. Of this race in its final outcome and perfected flowering was to spring forth Jesus, spoken of as the Branch of this sacred tree. For the formation of this race, we see a constant choice of the gentler and quieter elements of blood and character, and the persistent rejection of that which is wild, fierce, and ungovernable. Yet it is with no fond partiality for the one, or antipathy to the other, that the Father of both thus decides. The thoughtful, patient, meditative Isaac is chosen; the wild, hot-blooded, impetuous Ishmael is rejected, – not as in themselves better or worse, but as in relation to their adaptation to a great purpose of future good to mankind. The ear of the All-Father is as near to the cry of the passionate, hot-tempered slave, and the moans of the wild, untamable boy, as to those of the patriarch. We are told that God was with Ishmael in his wild growth as a hunter in the desert, – his protector from harm, the guardian of his growing family, according to the promise made to Abraham.

When the aged patriarch is gathered to his fathers at the age of a hundred and seventy-five years, it is recorded: "And Abraham gave up the ghost in a good old age, an old man and full of years; and his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field that Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth; there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife."

The subsequent history of the nation which Ishmael founded, shows that the promises of God were faithfully kept.

The Arab race has ever been a strongly marked people. They have been worshipers of the one God, and, at one time, under the califs, rose to a superiority in art, science, and literature beyond that of so-called Christian nations.

The race of Ishmael is yet as vigorous and as peculiar, and as likely to perpetuate itself, as the race of Isaac and Jacob; and as God was near to the cries and needs of the wild mother of the race and her wild offspring, so, doubtless, he has heard the prayer that has gone up from many an Arab tent in the desert.

The besetting sin of a select people is the growth of a spirit of haughty self-sufficiency among them. In time the Jews came to look upon themselves as God's only favorites, and upon all other

nations as outcasts. It is this spirit that is rebuked by the prophet Amos (ix.) when, denouncing the recreant children of Israel, he says, in the name of the Lord: "Are ye not as children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the Lord. Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt? and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?"

There is a deep comfort in this record of God's goodness to a poor, blinded, darkened, passionate slave-woman, nowise a model for imitation, yet tenderly watched over and succored and cared for in her needs. The Father unsought is ever seeking. He who said, "What aileth thee, Hagar?" is he who, in later times, said that he came to seek and to save the lost. Not to the saintly and the righteous only, or mostly, but to the wayward, the sinful, the desperate, the despairing, to those whose troubles come of their own folly and their own sin, is the angel sent to console, to promise, to open the blind eyes upon the fountain which is ever near us in life's desert, though we cannot perceive it.

REBEKAH THE BRIDE

I n the pictures which the Bible opens to us of the domestic life of the patriarchal ages, we have one perfectly characteristic and beautiful idyl of a wooing and wedding, according to the customs of those days. In its sweetness and sacred simplicity, it is a marvelous contrast to the wedding of our modern fashionable life.

Sarah, the beautiful and beloved, has been laid away in the dust, and Isaac, the cherished son, is now forty years old. Forty years is yet early youth, by the slow old clock of the golden ages, when the thread of mortal life ran out to a hundred and seventy-five or eighty years. Abraham has nearly reached that far period, and his sun of life is dipping downwards toward the evening horizon. He has but one care remaining, – to settle his son Isaac in life before he is gathered to his fathers.

The scene in which Abraham discusses the subject with his head servant sheds a peculiar light on the domestic and family relations of those days. "And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: and I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware that thou bring not my son thither again. The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again."

Here it is remarkable that the servant is addressed as the legal guardian of the son. Abraham does not caution Isaac as to whom he should marry, but cautions the old servant of the house concerning the woman to whom he should marry Isaac. It is apparently understood that, in case of Abraham's death, the regency in the family falls into the hands of this servant.

The picture of the preparations made for this embassy denotes a princely station and great wealth. "And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master were in his hand; and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor."

Now comes a quaint and beautiful picture of the manners of those pastoral days. "And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water, at the time of the evening, even the time that women go out to draw water."

Next, we have a specimen of the kind of prayer which obtained in those simple times, when men felt as near to God as a child does to its mother. Kneeling, uncovered, in the evening light, the gray old serving-man thus talks to the invisible Protector: – "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast showed kindness unto my master."

This is prayer. Not a formal, ceremonious state address to a monarch, but the talk of the child with his father, asking simply and directly for what is wanted here and now. And the request was speedily granted, for thus the story goes on: "And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother." It is noticeable, how strong is the sensibility to womanly beauty in this narrative. This young

Rebekah is thus announced: "And the damsel was very fair to look upon, and a virgin, and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up." Drawn by the bright eyes and fair face, the old servant hastens to apply the test, doubtless hoping that this lovely creature is the one appointed for his young master. "And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink." She gave with a will, with a grace and readiness that overflowed the request; and then it is added: "And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hasted and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels." Let us fancy ten camels, all on their knees in a row, at the trough, with their long necks, and patient, careworn faces, while the pretty young Jewess, with cheerful alacrity, is dashing down the water from her pitcher, filling and emptying in quick succession, apparently making nothing of the toil; the gray-haired old servant looking on in devout recognition of the answer to his prayer, for the story says: "And the man wondering at her, held his peace, to wit [know] whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not."

There was wise penetration into life and the essentials of wedded happiness in this prayer of the old servant. What he asked for his young master was not beauty or talent, but a ready and unfailing outflow of sympathy and kindness. He sought not merely for a gentle nature, a kind heart, but for a heart so rich in kindness that it should run even beyond what was asked, and be ready to anticipate the request with new devices of helpfulness. The lively, light-hearted kindness that could not be content with waiting on the thirsty old man, but with cheerful alacrity took upon herself the care of all the ten camels, this was a gift beyond that of beauty; yet when it came in the person of a maiden exceedingly fair to look upon, no marvel that the old man wondered joyously at his success.

When the camels had done drinking, he produced from his treasury a golden earring and bracelets, with which he adorned the maiden. "And he said to her, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee; is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare to Nahor. She said, moreover, unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in. And the man bowed down his head, and worshiped the Lord. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren."

We may imagine the gay delight with which the pretty maiden ran to exhibit the gifts of jewelry that had thus unexpectedly descended upon her. Laban, her brother, does not prove either a generous or hospitable person in the outcome of the story; but the ambassador of a princely relative, traveling with a caravan of ten camels, and showering gold and jewels, makes his own welcome. The narrative proceeds: – "And it came to pass when he saw the earring, and the bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well. And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels. And the man came into the house: and he ungirded the camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that were with him. And there was set meat before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, till I have told my errand. And he said, Speak on. And he said, I am Abraham's servant, and the Lord hath blessed my master greatly, and he is become great: and he hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and camels, and asses."

After this exordium he goes on to tell the whole story of his oath to his master, and the purport of his journey; of the prayer that he had uttered at the well, and of its fulfillment in a generous-minded and beautiful young maiden; and thus he ends his story: "And I bowed down my head, and worshiped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham, which hath led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son. And now, if ye will deal kindly and

truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand or to the left. Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee; take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken. And it came to pass, that when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshiped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth."

And now comes a scene most captivating to female curiosity. Even in patriarchal times the bridegroom, it seems, provided a *corbeille de mariage*; for we are told: "And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave them to Rebekah; he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things." The scene of examining jewelry and garments and rich stuffs in the family party would have made no mean subject for a painter. No wonder such a suitor, sending such gifts, found welcome entertainment. So the story goes on: "And they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning; and he said, Send me away unto my master. And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten, and after that she shall go. And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away, that I may go to my master. And they said, We will call the damsel and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go. And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou art our sister; be thou the mother of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them." The idea of being a mother of nations gives a sort of dignity to the married life of these patriarchal women, – it was the motherly instinct made sublime.

Thus far, this wooing seems to have been conceived and conducted in that simple religious spirit recognized in the words of the old prayer: "Grant that all our works may be begun, continued, and ended in thee." The Father of Nations has been a never-failing presence in every scene.

The expectant bridegroom seems to have been a youth of a pensive, dreamy, meditative nature. Brought up with the strictest notions of filial submission, he waits to receive his wife dutifully from his father's hand. Yet, as the caravan nears the encampment, he walks forth to meet them. "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a veil, and covered herself."

In the little that is said of Rebekah, we see always that alert readiness, prompt to see and do what is to be done at the moment. No dreamer is she, but a lively and wide-awake young woman, who knows her own mind exactly, and has the fit word and fit action ready for each short turn in life. She was quick, cheerful, and energetic in hospitality. She was prompt and unhesitating in her resolve; and yet, at the moment of meeting, she knew the value and the propriety of the *veil*. She covered herself, that she might not unsought be won.

With a little touch of pathos, the story ends: "And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." We see here one of those delicate and tender natures that find repose first in the love of a mother, and, when that stay is withdrawn, lean upon a beloved wife.

So ideally pure, and sweet, and tenderly religious has been the whole inception and carrying on and termination of this wedding, that Isaac and Rebekah have been remembered in the wedding ritual of the catholic Christian churches as models of a holy marriage according to the Divine will. "Send thy blessing upon these thy servants, this man and this woman, whom we bless in thy name; that as Isaac and Rebekah lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant between them."

In the subsequent history of the family, the dramatic individuality of the characters is kept up: Isaac is the gentle, thoughtful, misty dreamer, lost in sentiment and contemplation; and Rebekah the

forward, cheerful, self-confident manager of external things. We can fancy it as one of the households where all went as the mother said. In fact, in mature life, we see these prompt and managing traits, leading the matron to domestic artifices which could only be justified to herself by her firm belief that the end pursued was good enough to sanctify the means. Energetic, lively, self-trustful young women do sometimes form just such managing and diplomatic matrons.

Isaac, the husband, always dreamy and meditative, becomes old and doting; conceives an inordinate partiality for the turbulent son Esau, whose skill in hunting supplies his table with the meat he loves. Rebekah has heard the prophetic legend, that Jacob, the younger son, is the chosen one to perpetuate the sacred race; and Jacob, the tender, the care-taking, the domestic, is the idol of her heart.

Now, there are some sorts of women that, if convinced there was such a Divine oracle or purpose in relation to a favorite son, would have rested upon it in quiet faith, and left Providence to work out its ends in its own way and time. Not so Rebekah. The same restless activity of helpfulness that led her to offer water to all the camels, when asked to give drink for the servant, now led her to come to the assistance of Providence. She proposes to Jacob to make the oracle sure, and obtain the patriarchal blessing by stratagem. When Jacob expresses a humble doubt whether such an artifice may not defeat itself and bring on him the curse rather than the blessing of his father, the mother characteristically answers: "Upon me be the curse, my son: only obey my voice." Pages of description could not set a character before us more sharply and distinctly than this one incident, and nothing can show more dramatically in whose hands was the ruling power in that family.

The managing, self-reliant Rebekah, ready to do her full share in every emergency, and to run before every occasion with her busy plannings, is not a character of patriarchal ages merely. Every age has repeated it, and our own is no exception. There are not wanting among us cheerful, self-confident, domestic managers, who might take a lesson from the troubles that befell the good-hearted, but too busy and officious Rebekah, in consequence of the success of her own schemes. The account of this belongs to our next chapter.

LEAH AND RACHEL

I n the earlier portions of the Old Testament we have, very curiously, the history of the deliberate formation of an influential race, to which was given a most important mission in the world's history. The principle of *selection*, much talked of now in science, is the principle which is represented in the patriarchal history as operating under a direct Divine guidance. From the calling of Abraham, there seems to have been this continued watchfulness in selecting the party through whom the chosen race was to be continued. Every marriage thus far is divinely appointed and guided. While the Fatherly providence and nurture is not withdrawn from the rejected ones, still the greatest care is exercised to separate from them the chosen. The latter are selected apparently not so much for moral excellence in itself considered, as for excellence in relation to stock. The peaceable, domestic, prudent, and conservative elements are uniformly chosen, in preference to the warlike and violent characteristics of the age.

The marriage of Isaac and Rebekah was more like the type of a Christian marriage than any other on record. No other wife shared a place in his heart and home; and, even to old age, Isaac knew no other than the bride of his youth. From this union sprang twin boys; between whom, as is often the case, there was a remarkable difference. The physical energy and fire all seemed to go to one, the gentler and more quiet traits to the other. Esau was the wild huntsman, the ranger of the mountains, delighting in force, – precisely adapted to become the chief of a predatory tribe. Jacob, the patient, the prudent, the submissive, was the home child, the darling of his mother. Now, with every constitutional excellency and virtue is inevitably connected, in our imperfect humanity, the liability to a fault. The peace-loving and prudent, averse to strife, are liable to sins of artifice and deception, as stronger natures are to those of force and violence. Probably, in the calm eye of Him who sees things just as they are, the one kind of fault is no worse than the other. At all events, the sacred narrative is a daguerreotype of character; it reflects every trait and every imperfection without comment. The mild and dreamy Isaac, to save his wife from a rapacious king, undertakes to practice the same artifice that his father used before him, saying, "She is my sister"; and the same evil consequence ensues. The lesson of artifice once taught in the family, the evil spreads. Rebekah, when Isaac is old and doting, commands Jacob to personate his older brother, and thus gain the patriarchal blessing, which in those days had the force of a last will and testament in our times. Yet, through all the faults and errors of the mere human actors runs the thread of a Divine guidance. Before the birth of Jacob it was predicted that he should be the chosen head of the forming nation; and by his mother's artifice, and his own participation in it, that prediction is fulfilled. Yet the natural punishment of the action follows. Esau is alienated, and meditates murder in his heart; and Jacob, though the mother's darling, is driven out from his home a hunted fugitive, parted from her for life. He starts on foot to find his way to Padan-Aram, to his father's kindred, there to seek and meet and woo the wife appointed for him.

It is here that the history of the patriarch Jacob becomes immediately helpful to all men in all ages. And its usefulness consists in just this, – that Jacob, at this time in his life, was no saint or hero. He was not a person distinguished either by intellect or by high moral attainment, but simply such a raw, unformed lad as life is constantly casting adrift from the shelter of homes. He is no better and no worse than the multitude of boys, partly good and partly bad, who, for one reason or another, are forced to leave their mothers and their fathers; to take staff in hand and start out on the great life-journey alone. He had been religiously brought up; he knew that his father and his mother had a God, – the Invisible God of Abraham and Isaac; but then, other gods and lords many were worshiped in the tribes around him, and how did he know, after all, which was the right one? He wanders on over the wide, lonesome Syrian plains, till dark night comes on, and he finds himself all alone, an atom in the great silent creation, – alone, as many a sailor-boy has found himself on the deck of his ship, or hunter, in the deep recesses of the forest. The desolate lad gathers a heap of stones for

a pillow and lies down to sleep. Nothing could be more sorrowfully helpless than this picture; the representative portrait of many a mother's boy to-day, and in all days. We cannot suppose that he prayed or commended his soul to God. We are told distinctly that he did not even remember that God was in that place. He lies down, helpless and forlorn, on his cold stone pillow, and sinks, overcome with fatigue, to prayerless slumber. And now, in his dreams, a glorious light appears; a luminous path opens upward to the skies, – angels are passing to and fro upon it, and above, in bright benignity, stands a visible form, and says: "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again unto this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob arose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

In one night how much is born in that soul! The sentiment of reverence, awe of the Divine, – a conviction of the reality of God and an invisible world, – and the beginning of that great experiment by which man learns practically that God is his father. For, in the outset, every human being's consciousness of God must be just of this sort. Have I a Father in heaven? Does he care for me? Will he help me? Questions that each man can only answer as Jacob did, by casting himself upon God in a matter-of-fact, practical way in the exigencies of this present life. And this history is the more valuable because it takes man in his earlier stages of imperfection. We are apt to feel that it might be safe for Paul, or Isaiah, or other great saints, to expect God to befriend them; but here a poor, untaught shepherd boy, who is not religious, avows that, up to this time, he has had no sense of God; and yet between him and heaven there is a pathway, and about him in his loneliness are ministering spirits; and the God of Abraham and of Isaac is ready to become his friend. In an important sense, this night dream, this gracious promise of God to Jacob, are not merely for him, but for all erring, helpless, suffering sons of men. In the fatherly God thus revealed to the patriarch, we see the first fruits of the promise that through him all nations should be blessed.

The next step of the drama shows us a scene of sylvan simplicity. About the old well in Haran, shepherds are waiting with their flocks, when the stripling approaches: "And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence be ye? And they said, Of Haran are we. And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him. And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep. And he said, Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together. Water ye the sheep, and go and feed them. And they said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep. And while he yet spake with them Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept; and Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father. And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob, his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house."

In the story of Isaac, we have the bridegroom who is simply the submissive recipient of a wife at his father's hands; in that of Jacob, we have the story of love at first sight. The wanderer, exiled from home, gives up his heart at once to the keeping of his beautiful shepherdess cousin, and so, when the terms of service are fixed with the uncle, the narrative says: "And Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah was tender-eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well-favored. And Jacob loved Rachel, and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel, thy younger daughter. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."

But when the wedding comes, in the darkness and secrecy of the night a false bride is imposed on the lover. And Jacob awoke, and behold it was Leah. Not the last man was he who has awakened, after the bridal, to find his wife was not the woman he had taken her to be. But the beloved one is given as a second choice, and seven years more of service are imposed as her price.

The characteristics of these two sisters, Leah and Rachel, are less vividly given than those of any of the patriarchal women. Sarah, Hagar, and Rebekah are all sharply defined characters, in and of themselves; but of Leah and Rachel almost all that can be said is that they were Jacob's wives, and mothers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The character of their father Laban was narrow, shrewd, and hard, devoid of any generous or interesting trait, and the daughters appear to have grown up under a narrowing and repressing influence. What we learn of them in the story shows the envies, the jealousies, the bickerings and heart-burnings of poorly developed natures. Leah, the less beloved one, exults over her handsomer and more favored sister because she has been made a fruitful mother, while to Rachel the gift of children is denied. Rachel murmurs and pines, and says to her husband, "Give me children, or I die." The desire for offspring in those days seemed to be an agony. To be childless, was disgrace and misery unspeakable. At last, however, Rachel becomes a mother and gives birth to Joseph, the best-beloved of his father. The narrative somehow suggests that charm of personal beauty and manner which makes Rachel the beloved one, and her child dearer than all the rest. How many such women there are, pretty and charming, and holding men's hearts like a fortress, of whom a biographer could say nothing only that they were much beloved!

When Jacob flees from Laban with his family, we find Rachel secretly taking away the images which her father had kept as household gods. The art by which she takes them, the effrontery with which she denies the possession of them, when her father comes to search for them, shows that she had little moral elevation. The belief in the God of her husband probably was mixed up confusedly in her childish mind with the gods of her father. Not unfrequently in those dim ages, people seemed to alternate from one to the other, as occasions varied. Yet she seems to have held her husband's affections to the last; and when, in giving birth to her last son, she died, this son became the darling of his father's old age. The sacred poet has made the name of this beloved wife a proverb, to express the strength of the motherly instinct, and "Rachel weeping for her children" is a line that immortalizes her name to all time.

Whatever be the faults of these patriarchal women, it must be confessed that the ardent desire of motherhood which inspired them is far nobler than the selfish, unwomanly spirit of modern times, which regards children only as an encumbrance and a burden. The motherly yearning and motherly spirit give a certain dignity to these women of primitive ages, which atones for many faults of imperfect development.

Twenty-one years elapse, and Jacob, a man of substance, father of a family of twelve children, with flocks and herds to form a numerous caravan, leaves the service of his hard master to go back to his father. The story shows the same traits in the man as in the lad. He is the gentle, affectionate, prudent, kindly, care-taking family-man, faithful in duty, and evading oppression by quiet skill rather than meeting it with active opposition. He has become rich, in spite of every effort of an aggressive master to prevent it.

When leaving Laban's service, he thus appeals to him: "These twenty years have I been with thee: thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it. Thus was I: in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house. I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle; and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight."

To the last of the history of Jacob, we see the same man, – careful, patient, faithful, somewhat despondent, wrapped up in family ties and cares, and needing at every step to lean on a superior power. And the Father on whom he seeks to lean is never wanting to him, as he will never be to any of us, however weak, or faulty, or blind. As the caravan nears home, news is brought that Esau, with an army of horsemen, is galloping to meet him. Then says the record: "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, the God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant: for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude." The prayer is not in vain. That night a mysterious stranger meets Jacob in the twilight shadows of morning. He seeks to detain him; but, as afterwards, when the disciples met an unknown Friend on the way to Emmaus, he made as though he would go farther. So now this stranger struggles in the embrace of the patriarch. Who, then, is this? – is it the Divine One? The thought thrills through the soul as Jacob strives to detain him. There is something wildly poetic in the legend. "And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him: Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore dost thou ask after my name? And he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for he said, I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." God's love to man, the power of man's weakness and sorrow over the Father-heart, were never more beautifully shown than in this sacred idyl. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of the weak, the sinful, the despondent, the defenceless; the helper of the helpless, – He is the God of this sacred story; and so long as man is erring, and consciously frail, so long as he needs an ever-present and ever-loving Friend and Helper, so long will this story of Jacob be dear to the human heart.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.