

F.B. Meyer:

"Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or, if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." --Genesis 13:9.

In our last, we saw something of the original stuff of which God makes His saints. By nature Abraham was not superior to the general run of Orientals, who do not hesitate to lie, in order to gain a point or to avert a disaster. Compared with an average Englishman, Abraham would have come off a bad second. The faith which one day was to do business in the ocean waves could not swim across a tiny creek. It is hard to imagine such a man would ever arrive at a stature of moral greatness so commanding as to overtop all his contemporaries, and look across the ages to see the day of Christ. Yet so it was. And from that thought we may take courage.

Our God does not need noble characters, as the ground-work of His masterpieces. He can raise up stones as children. He can turn thorns into fir trees, briars into myrtle trees. He can take fishermen from their nets, and publicans from their toll-booths, making them into evangelists, apostles, and martyrs. We are not much by nature -- wild, bad blood may be flowing in our veins; but God will be the more magnified, if from such stones He can raise up children unto Abraham. The miracle of His grace and power will bring more conspicuous glory to His holy Name, in proportion to the unpromising character of the materials on which He works.

"Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south."

Very marvelous this! Judging as men, we might have thought that he would never recover from that sad mistake, that disastrous failure and sin. Surely he will reap as he has sown! He will never see his faithful wife again, but must bear for ever on his conscience the brand of coward treachery! Or if, indeed, she be given again to him, he will never extricate himself from the meshes into which he has thrown himself! Irritated and deceived, Pharaoh will surely find some method of avenging the wrong with which the foreigner has repaid his generous hospitality!

But no. Contrary to all human anticipation, Jehovah appears on the behalf of his most unworthy servant. In after-years the Psalmist gives us the very words, which He uttered in the heart of the king: "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm" (Psalm 55:15). What a marvel of tenderness! God does not cast us away for one sin. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him" (Psalm 53:10-11). And thus, notwithstanding repeated falls and shortcomings, He lovingly pursues His Divine purpose with the soul in which the "root of the matter" is found, until He sets it free from its clinging evils, and lifts it into the life of faith, and power, and familiar friendship with Himself. "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, then the Lord shall be a light unto me" (Micah 7:8).

Warned by this Divine voice, and restrained by a power which suffered him not to do God's servant harm, Pharaoh had commanded his men concerning him: and they had "sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had." This is how it comes to pass that we find them again traversing the uplands of Southern Palestine on their way back to Bethel, unto the place where they had halted on their first entrance into Palestine. So complete was the delivering power of God, that the Egyptian monarch did not even take back the gifts which he had bestowed as a dowry for Sarah. The "sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and men-servants, and maidservants, and she-asses, and camels," still remained in Abraham's possession. And we are, therefore, prepared to learn, that "Abram was very rich, in cattle, in silver, and in gold." That visit to Egypt beyond doubt laid the foundation of the immense wealth of the family in after-time; and it was out of this that the next trouble sprang. A trouble it seemed at first; but God marvelously overruled it for drawing His child yet closer to Himself, and severing the metal to a further extent from the alloy which had clung to it too long. Hitherto, we have been told repeatedly, "and Lot went with him." This record will not be made again.

(1) WHO WAS LOT?

The son of Abraham's dead brother, Haran. He had probably succeeded to his father's inheritance. He may have come with his uncle across the desert in the secret hope of bettering his condition; but we will hope that he was prompted by worthier motives. He seems to have been one of those men who take right steps, not because they are prompted by obedience to God, but because their friends are taking them. Around him was the inspiration of an heroic faith, the fascination of the untried and unknown; the stir of a great religious movement: and Lot was swept into the current, and resolved to go too. He was the Pliable of the earliest Pilgrim's Progress. He may have thought that he was as much in earnest as Abraham; may have thought that he was as much in earnest as

Abraham; but it was a great mistake. He was simply an echo; a dim afterglow; a chip on the bosom of a mighty current.

In every great religious movement there always have been, and always will be a number of individuals who cast in their lot with it, without knowing the power which inspires it. Beware of them. They cannot stand the stress of the life of separation to God. The mere excitement will soon die away from them; and, having no principle to take its place, they will become hindrances and disturbers of the peace. As certainly as they are harbored in the camp, or their principles are allowed within the heart, they will lower the spiritual tone; allure to worldly policy; suggest methods which would not otherwise occur to us; and draw us towards the Egypt-world.

Nothing but supreme principle can carry any one through the real, separated, and surrendered life of the child of God. If you are prompted by anything less, such as excitement, enthusiasm, fashion, contagious example -- you will first be a hindrance, and end by being a failure. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith. Prove your own selves. And, if you are consciously acting from a low and selfish motive, ask God to breathe into you His own pure love. Better act from an inferior motive, if only it be in the right direction; but covet earnestly the best.

(2) THE NECESSITY OF SEPARATION

That recent failure in connection with Egypt may have been due, to a larger extent than we know, to the baneful influence of Lot. Had Abraham been left to himself, he might never have thought of going down to Egypt: and, in that case, there would have been another paragraph or passage in the Bible describing the exploits of a faith which dared to stand to God's promise, though threatened by disaster, and hemmed in by famine; waiting until God should bid it move, or make it possible to stay. There is something about that visit to Egypt which savors of the spirit of Lot's after-life. In any case, the time had come, in the providence of God, when this lower and more worldly spirit must go its way; leaving Abraham to stand alone, without prop, or adviser, or ally; thrown back on the counsel and help of God alone.

The outward separation of the body from the world of the ungodly is incomplete, unless accompanied and supplemented by the inner separation of the spirit. It is not enough to leave Ur, Haran, and Egypt. We must be rid of Lot also. Though we lived in a monastery, shut away from the homes and haunts of men, with no sound to break upon the ear but the summoning bell of worship, and the solemn chant; yet so long as there was an alien principle in our breast, a Lot in our heart-life, there could not be that separation to God which is the condition of the growth of faith, and of all those higher forms of the true life which make earth most like heaven. Lot must go. "Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself" (Psalms 4:3). No other foot then must intrude within the enclosure of the Divine proprietorship.

O souls that sigh for saintliness as harts pant for water-brooks, have ye counted the cost? Can ye bear the fiery ordeal? The manufacture of saints is no child's play. The block has to be entirely separated from the mountain bed, ere the Divine chisel can begin to fashion it. The gold must be plunged into the cleansing fire, ere it can be molded or hammered into an ornament of beauty for the King.

As Abraham was separated from one after another of nature's resources, so must it be with all aspirants for the inner chambers of the palace of God. We must be prepared to die to the world with its censure or praise; to the flesh, with its ambitions and schemes; to the delights of a friendship which is insidiously lowering the temperature of the spirit; to the self-life, in all its myriad subtle and overt manifestations; and even, if it be God's will, to the joys and consolations of religion.

All this is impossible to us of ourselves. But if we will surrender ourselves to God, willing that He should work in and for us that which we cannot do for ourselves, we shall find that He will gradually and effectually, and as tenderly as possible, begin to disentwine the clinging tendrils of the poisoning weed, and bring us into heart-union with Himself.

It may be that Abraham had already felt for himself the ill effect of association with Lot, and may have longed to be free from him, without knowing how the emancipation could be effected. In any case, somewhat akin to this may be the condition of some who shall read these words. Entangled in an alliance which you seem powerless to break off, your only hope is to bear it quietly till God sets you at liberty. Meanwhile guard your will, by God's grace, from swinging round, as a boat with the tide. Declare to God continually your eager desire to be emancipated. By prayer and faith get honey out of the lion's carcass. Wait patiently till God's hour strikes, and His hand opens the fast-locked door, and bids you be free. That time will come at length; for God has a destiny in store for you, so great that neither He nor you can allow it to be forfeited for any light or trivial obstacle.

(3) HOW THE SEPARATION WAS BROUGHT ABOUT

The valleys around Bethel, which had been quite adequate for their needs when first they came to Canaan, were now altogether insufficient. The herdsmen were always wrangling for the first use of the wells, and the first crop of the pastures. The cattle were continually getting mixed. "The land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together."

Quarrels between servants have a habit of travelling upwards, and embroiling their masters. And so Abraham and Lot would be told by their headmen of what was happening; and each would be tempted to feel irritated with the other.

Abraham saw at once that such a state of things must not be allowed to go on: especially as "the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land." For if those warlike neighbors heard of the dissensions in the camp, they would take an early opportunity of falling upon it. United they stood; divided, they must fall. Besides, there was the scandal of the thing, which might work prejudicially on the name and worship of that God to whom Abraham was known to bow the knee. Would that the near presence of the world might have the same wholesome effect of checking dissension and dispute among the children of the same Father!

And so Abraham called Lot to him, and said, "Let there be no strife between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen: for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left" (13:8-9).

The proposal was very WISE. He saw that there was a cause for the disturbance, which would lead to similar troubles continually. If he spoke sharply to Lot, Lot would answer in the same spirit, and a breach would be made at once. So he went to the root of the matter, and proposed their separation.

His line of action was very MAGNANIMOUS. As the elder and the leader of the expedition, he had the undoubted right to the first choice. But he waived his right in the interests of reconciliation.

But, above all, it was BASED ON FAITH. His faith was beginning to realize its true position; and, like a fledgling, to spread its wings for further and still further flights. Had not God pledged Himself to take care of him, and to give him an inheritance? There was no fear, therefore, that Lot could ever rob him of that which was guaranteed to him by the faithfulness of God. And he preferred, a thousand times over, that God should choose for him, than that he should choose for himself.

The man who is sure of God can afford to hold very lightly the things of this world. God Himself is his inalienable heritage; and, in having God, he has all. And, as we shall see, the man who "hedges" for himself does not do so well in the long run as the man who, having the right of choice, hands it back to God, saying: "Let others choose for themselves, if they please; but as for myself, Thou shalt choose mine inheritance for me."

"Not mine -- not mine the choice In things or great or small; Be Thou my Guide, my Guard, my Strength, My Wisdom and my 'All'."