



CHAPTER II.
CHAPTER III.
CHAPTER IV.
CHAPTER V.
CHAPTER VI.
CHAPTER VII.
CHAPTER VIII.

THE ADVENTURES OF LOT, THE NEPHEW OF ABRAHAM

BY WM. A. ALCOTT

Author of the "First Foreign Mission," the "Second Foreign Mission," the "Happy Family," the "Story of Ruth the Moabitess," the "Life of Peter," and the "Story of the Prodigal."

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INTRODUCTION

Why is it that the Bible contains the lives of so many bad men? is a question which is often asked, and as often answered. And yet the inquiry continues to be made by every successive generation, with as much earnestness as if nobody had ever thought of it before.

The very Bible itself settles the question. Paul says, in the tenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, that all these things "are written for our admonition." Do we not require to be admonished, day by day, every one of us? Is it not useful to us to see, in the lives of such men as Cain, and Saul, and Ahab, and Judas, the dreadful sight, and only tell us of their excellences? Why, some of the very men just named, had many faults, as is now well known; probably all of them. But these are generally kept out of sight, and we are shown only the bright side of things.

Had Washington and Franklin, and other comparatively great and good men, lived at the time when the events recorded in the Bible took place; and had the inspired penmen found it necessary to mention their characters as particularly as they have those of Moses, and David, and Peter, do you think they would be found faultless? Oh no; far, very far from it.

The truth is, then, that the Holy Spirit has caused the lives of the good men of old to be recorded just as they were. And, to my mind, the circumstance that we find their bad content mentioned, as well as their good, is one of the strongest proofs that the Bible was written under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Were it not so, we should either find the historians frequently excusing, or trying to excuse, the faults of their Bible heroes, or else keeping them whilly out of sight, as profane historians do the faults of their heroes. But this they have not done. You cannot find, from Josephus, or any other ancient historian, that a single fault of any of the good men mentioned in the Old and New Testaments, was covered or concealed by the authors of those books.

No, the writers of the books of both the Old and New Testaments, were simple, honest men; and have recorded, in the fear of God, and under his eye, or his direction rather, the FACTS just as they were. They have given us light and shade, virtue and vice; and without apology.

I should not have said so much on this point, had I not known that many young people object to the character of some of those whom the Bible represents as good men, and seem to revolt at the idea of studying their biography. Now it seems to me this feeling is a wrong one. These things are truly written "for our admonition." Even the history of the worldly-minded Lot, whom we can hardly consider as one of the best of

the good men mentioned in the Bible, is highly instructive.

If you doubt the assertion I have just made, then be persuaded to read the following sketches of Lot's character, especially while he dwelt in Sodom. I know of very few biographies in the whole Bible which have interested -- I do not say pleased -- me so much as his. And I am greatly afraid we have many Lots in the world now-a-days, -- men who, when they can take their choice, select a rich country, though the people are bad; and not only select it, but continue to live in it, even after they have discovered the great wickedness of the people. How can they think of being willing to live, year after year, in a very vicious place -- whether city or country -- just because it is a good place to make money fast; and bring up a family of children there, who must certainly be injured by the surrounding example? But are there not such parents to be found? My dear young friend, I do not say that, if you, any of you, should chance to have such parents, you ought to run away from them. Oh, no; that would be, in general, a greater evil than to stay. You are bound to obey and honor your parents, in all ordinary circumstances, come what may.

But there are not a few of you who, if you could get away from your parents, or uncles, or master, would run right into a worse place than in which you now are. This you would do, not because it is a worse place, but because it seems to you more pleasant. Boys, especially, are fond of going into cities and towns, and getting into the company of other boys whom they scarcely know: they may be good, they may be bad. You wonder that Lot, when he had the whole country before him, should have gone into Sodom; and yet you would act very much like him if you had a good opportunity. I do not say that all of you are weary of home, and wish to be somewhere else; for I know that not a few of you are perfectly contented and happy. But I know, both from experience and observation, that it is so with a great many boys.

Let me say, then, to all such persons, "Read carefully the story of Lot." It is true, Lot escaped from Sodom with his life; but it does not hence follow that you will get off so well. No miracle will be wrought to save you, as there was to save him. You may escape; but remember, too, that you may not. And should you become wicked, in some wicked town or city, and should you live and die so, -- as you will be apt to do -- though you may not fall by fire and brimstone from heaven, you will at least be exposed to everlasting destruction from the presence of God, and from the joys reserved for the righteous in his most glorious presence.

ADVENTURES OF LOT.

CHAPTER I.

Where Lot was born - His Ancestors and Relatives - Their Removal to Haran - Journey to Canaan - To Egypt - Thence back to Canaan - Remarks.

Lot, the relative and friend of Abraham, was born in Ur of the Chaldees, as the Scriptures call it; but where Ur was situated, exactly, is not known. It was, however, several hundred miles eastward, or north-eastward of Canaan or Palestine, probably in what now constitutes a part of Persia, though at that time it was called Mesopotamia.

But I will tell you something about Lot's ancestors and early life. His grandfather's name was Terah. Terah had three sons, -- Nahor, Haran, and Abraham. Haran had three sons, Lot, Milcah, and Iscah; and dying early, these sons appear to have fallen into the care of their uncles, Nahor and Abraham, and to their grandfather Terah. Lot, at all events, fell to the care of Abraham.

Some time after the death of Haran, Terah and his son Abraham, with their families, and their brother Haran's children, removed from Ur to Haran, or as it is sometimes called in Scripture, Charran. I do not know what the name of the place was before Abraham's ancestors settled there, for it is believed that its name was given to it by Terah's son Nahor, in honor of his deceased brother.

Haran lay north-westward of Ur, in about 37 deg. north latitude, and 39 deg. east longitude; above four hundred miles north-east of Jerusalem, and three hundred north-east of Damascus. At present it is peopled by nobody but a few wandering Arabs. It was here that Crassus, a famous Roman general was defeated and killed.

It is supposed, and not without reason, that Terah, Abraham's father, was a worshipper of Idols; and some think his sons were, until they left Ur. This, however, is very uncertain. One can hardly believe that Abraham was ever an Idolater.

While they resided in Haran, Terah died. I forgot to tell you that the occasion of the removal of this family from Ur, was the call of God to Abraham to do so; and the rest of the family, as it appears, chose to follow him. Abraham was to be shown a land that was to be his won, for him and his posterity, viz., the land of Canaan.

There is reason to think that Nahor, Abraham's brother, whom he at first left in Ur, afterwards removed to Haran, and remained there. But be that as it may, it was not long after Terah's death, before Abraham, in obedience to the direction of God, set out, Lot with him, for the land of Canaan, the south-west.

Three hundred miles brought them to Damascus. From the fact that Abraham, some time afterward, had a servant in his family, named Eliezer, of Damascus, it may be supposed that he stopped there, and made it, for a time, his residence. But it could not have been very long. Abraham and Lot, when they arrived at Canaan, halted, with their troops and herds, at Shechem, or Sychem, as it was often called. This was forty miles north of Jerusalem.

I spoke of their herds; for it seems that Abraham had much property of this kind, as well as gold and silver; and it appears, too, that he had a very large number of servants, herdsman, and others.

After residing a little while at Shechem, a famine -- a very common thing in that country, befell them, and Abraham and Lot went to the south, into the borders of Egypt, and stayed for awhile; but when the famine had subsided they returned to the land of Canaan, stopped between Bethel and Ai, at a little place north of Jerusalem.

Up to this time there had been perfect harmony between Abraham and Lot, and their servants. Whether Abraham was the guardian of Lot, in our modern sense of the word guardian, it is difficult to say; but we cannot doubt that he was really his adviser, and of great service to him. It is impossible to tell what Lot's age was at this period; but he does not appear to have been married. I cannot help thinking that he was not only intimate with Abraham, but a member of his family; and that he had access to all the means of improvement which the house, and so excellent and experienced a friend afforded.

CHAPTER II.

Lot's Property - His Herdsmen and those of Abraham quarrel - Abraham proposes a Separation - Lot accedes to it, perhaps gladly - Reasons why - Reflections - Abraham gives Lot his Choice of the Country - Lot chooses the rich Valley of the River Jordan - Account of this Region - Chronology.

We now come to a very interesting period in the history of Lot; and not only interesting, but exceedingly instructive.

Hitherto, Abraham and Lot had dwelt on the hilly and mountainous parts of Palestine, between the Mediterranean sea on the west, and the valley of the river Jordan on the east. This was precisely the country that we should think so wise and good a man as Abraham would have selected, when he had the whole of Canaan before him - God having given it to him - and was allowed to live where he pleased in it. Flocks and herds always thrive best in mountainous and hilly countries; and, indeed, so do men. They, as well as other animals, are most healthy and happy there.

It is on this account, that nobody will wonder why Abraham and Lot, on arriving in Canaan, did not go at once, and settle near the Mediterranean sea, on the one hand, or the river Jordan, on the other. They might, it is true have enjoyed more of what are commonly called the privileges of civic life, by going to either place; but then it must be remembered that Abraham was a plain man, "dwelling in tents;" whereas it is probably that the people of both these regions had houses, and had adopted many of what now constitute the arts and manners of polished society. -- Besides, the vale of the Jordan, though it had a rich soil, was very poorly adapted to pasturage.

In process of time, however, Abraham and Lot became very rich, and had so many flocks and herds, that no very small tract of country would hold them. They were hence scattered over a large territory; and had so much to do in overseeing others, that it is probable they became less intimate than formerly.

And now it was, that, as they became more and more separated from each other, difficulties began to spring up. Perhaps you already know that such is apt to be the case with the rich -- I mean with the holders of vast landed estates. They are, of necessity, farther removed from each other than poor men, and if in no other way, it is because their business keeps them so.

But I spoke of "difficulties." The grand difficulty was that their herdsmen -- now become quite numerous -- quarreled.

It does not appear that the quarrels of these herdsmen affected the feelings of Abraham and Lot towards each other, in the least. But there was not telling where the matter might end, if permitted to go on. Neither Abraham nor Lot could know that it might not finally awaken unpleasant feeling of this kind. Such is the very frequent result when members of families quarrel. The truth is, their property had become so immensely large, and required such a multitude of servants and laborers, that it was next to impossible to keep things right. Difficulties springing up, where the servants or dependents are not so numerous, may be amicably settled.

But Abraham, who was very well skilled in the knowledge of human nature, proposed, in his own mind, to end the quarrel between his herdsmen and Lot's, by separating. So he took an early opportunity of conversing with Lot on the subject.

He observed that it would be a great pity that there should be a quarrel between friends and relatives; that the country was large enough for them both, with all their flocks and herds; and that, on the whole, he thought it would be best for them to separate. They were then nearly in the middle of Palestine. Fifty miles to the north, and fifty miles to the south, the country was still excellent for grazing. There was no need of their remaining together; especially as Lot was now at such an age, and had been so long at such a school,* that he ought to be

able, if ever, to take care of himself.

[Footnote: "every well ordered family - and such I cannot but think Abraham's must have been - is a school; and the best sort of school, too. A wise man will remain in such a school as long as he can; and only leave it when obliged to do so, as a matter of duty.] There is no proof that Abraham blamed Lot at all. His great object was to prevent any more evil from ensuing. Nor is there the least evidence that Lot received his suggestions, as if they were made in the spirit of fault finding. On the contrary, it appears as if every thing was conducted on the most friendly terms; and Lot probably heard the proposal with perfect calmness, and I am afraid with gladness.

I say that I am afraid that Lot heard Abraham's proposal to separate, with gladness; but this requires explanation. My belief is, that Lot did not value, as he ought to have done, the priviledges of Abraham's society; -- of hearing his advice and instruction, and living under the influence of his example. I believe this for two reasons.

1. There is no evidence that Lot hesitated, or expressed a word of regret. On the contrary, no sooner had Abraham made the proposal, and given him his choice, telling him that he might take just what part of the ocuntry he preferred, than Lot is represented as turning his thoughts at once, to the country that lay in the valley of the river Jordan; as if he was not only willing, but rather anxious to settle in that rich, but notoriously dissipated region.

2. The other reason for believing that Lot heard Abraham's proposal with gladness, is, that this would have been the case with young men generally. It is surprising how anxious they are to get out into the world. No matter how excellent their home is; they are apt to feel as though they were unreasonably confined or restrained, and that they would do better and be happier elsewhere.

Young men are exceedingly ambitious to get to doing business for themselves. As they have had no experience of the vexations that business brings with it, they seem to suppose that all is plain and easy; and that if they could only be their own masters, they should not only do better for themselves, but do more good to others. It is not obstinacy in young men; nor can it properly be said to be rashness. It is the deliberate conviction of their own minds; but then, as I said before, they are without experience.

Now it is necessary that young men should go into business for themselves at some time or other; but they ought to regard it as a duty, rather than as a pleasure. They ought to put it off as long as they can. The longer they put it off, the better for them, generally speaking; if they could only be made to believe so.

I have said that Abraham no sooner gave Lot the choice of living in just what part of the country he pleased, than he turned his eyes towards the valley of the river Jordan. It does not appear that he asked Abraham's advice, or consulted him in the least. Had he done so, I do not believe the good patriarch would have advised him to go where he did, and for various reasons. But before I give these reasons, I must describe the country.

The river Jordan, which runs along the eastern border of Canaan or Palestine, is a very considerable river. It rises to the north-eastward of Palestine, in the mountains of Lebanon or Libanus, and running southward through Lake Meron, and the sea of Tiberias or Galilee, empties into the Dead sea. The Dead sea is sixty or seventy miles long from north to south. Thence from the sound end of the Dead sea, to the eastern branch of the Red sea, is a little more than one hundred miles more. Now where the river Jordan ran quite through from Mount Lebanon to the Red sea, [footnote: 'I am not ignorant that the question whether the Jordan did really ever run through the valley of the Ghor is yet unsettled; but the evidence in favor of its having taken this course, appears to me so conclusive, that, after a long and tedious examination of the best authorities, I venture to speak in the manner above; not, however, without the caution afforded by this note.] its whole length could not have less than three hundred miles. At present it is scarcely two hundred, including the Dead sea, into which it enters; and which, ever since the destruction of Sodom, has stood there as a great basin, into

which the Jordan has emptied itself, instead of going on one hundred miles farther, to the Red sea, is now a vast desert; but the valley of the Jordan is more productive, though less so than it was in the time of Lot and Abraham.

But even in the days of Lot, it was not very good as a grazing country. At least it was not so good, unless it were a time of famine, as the hill country. Besides, it was already pretty thickly inhabited, especially about the place where the Dead sea now is. Here stood the rich and somewhat populous cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Bela or Zoar. Indeed, all the way from the sea of Galilee to what is now the southern end of the Dead sea, where Zoar then stood, was rich, populous and fertile. The Bible says that Lot "beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest into Zoar."

Whether Lot, in going to this section of country, had it in view to change his business, and from a pastoral employment to go into some mercantile pursuit, I cannot certainly tell; or even whether he had any definite notions on the subject. It seems to me that his great and paramount object was to get away from Abraham, thinking that by so doing, he should be more free, and at the same time more prosperous and happy. I think that his success--his abundance of wealth in "flocks, herds and tents,"--had greatly injured his character and made him devoted to money getting. There are very few men who can bear prosperity uninjured, as Abraham did; and I do not think that Lot could. It appears to me that the more he had, the more he wanted; and that this passion for getting more property was the great cause of his going and settling in Sodom, and of his ultimate ruin.

However, to Sodom he went, and he made it his permanent residence. How large a place it was at the time, it is impossible to tell; but there is reason to think it was a city of considerable size, and the capital of the rich and fertile region in which it lay, and which had long been settled by the enterprising but vicious posterity of Ham. This was about the year of the world 2100, or 1900 years before the birth of the Savior, or almost 3750 years ago.

CHAPTER III.

History and Condition of Sodom -- The five Kings in the Vale of Siddim defeated in Battle -- Sodom and Gomorrah plundered -- Lot taken Prisoner -- Rescued by Abraham near Damascus -- Remarks on Lot -- His character -- His treatment by Abraham -- His employment in Sodom -- Did he set up public Worship?

At the time of Lot's removal to Sodom, the region where the Dead Sea is situated, and which, instead of being overflowed, was then a rich interval, was called the vale of Siddim. In it, as I have already told you, stood the five cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Zoar; or as it was then called, Bela.

These five cities were ruled by as many kings; for in those days and in that country, the territory of a king, in many instances, was very small, sometimes consisting of only a single city, and that a very small one, too. Indeed, a king, then, was little more than a magistrate over a city or village.

In those days too, as it now often is, when one king was stronger than others, he overcame them, and made them pay tribute to him; and this yearly tribute sometimes amounted to an immense sum, in money, goods, cattle, &c.

Well, as I was going to tell you, the five kings in the vale of Siddim, at the time Lot removed into their country, were paying tribute to Chedorlaomer, a powerful king at the north-east; and had been doing so about four years. -- Eight years after Lot's arrival they rebelled, however, resolving to govern their own country in their own way.

The next year after their rebellion, King Chedorlaomer, and three other kings who were in alliance with him, having heard of the rebellion of the five kings in the vale of Siddim, and of their refusal, probably, to pay tribute, came to make war upon and reduce them again to their subjection. This was the first war of which we have any account in the Bible, or indeed in any other history. Nimrod indeed had already been a might hunter, and the founder of a great kingdom; and it is by no means improbable that he had been engaged in wars, but we have no particular account of them.

A great battle between the four eastern kings and the five kings, in the vale of Siddim, was now fought, and it ended in the total overthrow of the latter. Some of them were destroyed, but others fled to the mountains.

Then followed a scene at which all reflecting people must shudder. Houses were pillaged of everything valuable, and even, to some extent, of provisions; and scenes of cruelty and carnage took place, of which they have but a faint conception, who never witnessed the ravages of a victorious army; nor even they, since the rules of modern warfare do not allow the conquerors to lay their hands on private property, though it is sometimes done.

Nor did the victorious soldiers at the vale of Siddim content themselves with merely plundering the inhabitants: some of them were carried away as captives. Among the prisoners was Lot, the friend of Abraham, and his family.

The news of the capture of Lot and his family soon reached Abraham, who was living at this time near Hebron, a day's journey westward of the vale of Siddim. Abraham was at this time in an alliance with several distinguished chiefs of the country where he resided, and who appears to have been powerful. With their aid, and three hundred and eighteen servants of his own, he immediately set out in pursuit of the conquerors.

When he approached the victorious but retreating army, he had recourse to stratagem. The Bible does not mention all the particulars, however. It only says "he divided himself against them, he and his servants by night." But he was successful. He "smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah," which was not far from Damascus. The battle began at the city of Dan, near Mount Lebanon.

Abraham and his troops were not only victorious, but they succeeded in recovering the prisoners and the spoil which had been carried away, and among the rest, Lot and all his effects.

I have spoken of Lot's family, because it is said in speaking of Abraham's success, that he brought back "Lot and his goods, and the women, also, and the people;" which seems to me to imply -- though it does not prove it -- that some of them were members of his family. Besides, he certainly had a family a few years afterwards, and of such an age that it is highly probably he was married before his captivity. And if married at this time, it is probably that his wife was among the captives.

If you ask how they came to single out Lot and his family, and take them prisoners, I reply that it is not certain they did single them out. The language of the Bible, which I have just quoted, indeed, plainly shows that other "people" besides Lot and his family were taken; and the seizure of Lot among the rest might have been wholly accidental.

Lot's capture, I say, might have been accidental; but I do not think it was; and I will give my reasons. I suppose he was a man of considerable distinction in Sodom. Wealth is very apt to give a person distinction, though it ought not to; and Lot was wealthy when he went to Sodom, and probably still more so when he was taken captive. Besides, we are told that when the messenger of God, some years afterward, came to visit him, just before the destruction of Sodom, they found him sitting in the "gate" of the city. Now it sometimes happens, that, when a person is spoken of in the Bible as sitting in the gate of a king or a city, it implies that he possesses authority. Such authority I am inclined to think Lot possessed in Sodom, and that this was a reason why he was taken prisoner.

I am the more inclined to think that Lot was a magistrate, or some other officer in Sodom, from the fact that he was an ambitious man, seeking for distinction of some kind or other. And in general, when men of wealth and talents -- and Lot had talents, too, as well as wealth -- set their hearts on being great and distinguished, they succeed. As a general rule, too, people may become what they please. If they set their hearts on getting rich, they can become so; if, on getting office, they can obtain that, especially if they have wealth into the bargain; if they are desirous of being good, rather than great, this, too, is within their power. Oh, how few set goodness before them as the great object of pursuit; and how many, on the contrary, spend their lives in seeking wealth and distinction!

It is by no means improbable that Lot had married, too, with a reference to his main object, -- that of being distinguished. This is very often done. Men marry into wealthy and honorable families, in order to secure to themselves their wealth and influence. But when they do so, they usually reap the consequence of their folly; and we shall see, in the sequel, that Lot did.

It must not be denied that men may marry wives from wicked families, for much nobler objects than those which I have mentioned. They may have a strong desire of reforming the people over whom such a marriage will be likely to give them influence; and they may seek this as their grand aim in marriage. And such may, possibly, have been the intention of Lot; but I do not believe it was so. I believe that, though he was a good man, compared with the people of Sodom -- so good, indeed, that he is once called "just," possessing many excellent traits of character, and securing, wherever he went, the love and esteem of all those who knew him, yet he was by no means a reformer. On the contrary, he seems to me to have been a man of passive character; more solicitous to aggrandize himself, as I have already repeatedly said, than to benefit others.

The more I reflect on it, the more I am surprised that Lot should ever have so connected himself with this wicked and abominable people. In the first place, how could any body avoid preferring the healthy, pure air, and the delightful hill and dale, of middle Palestine, to the less healthy and less pure air of a low interval?

Secondly, how strange it is that he should have been willing not only to leave the worship of the true God, which Abraham kept up in his house -- for that were privation enough -- but to go and settle down among

gross idolaters, for such the Sodomites undoubtedly were!

In the third place, why is it that men, who are happy in pastoral and agricultural employments, will leave them for the cares and vexations of mercantile life, especially in a crowded city?

And, fourthly, why not seek an alliance, by marriage, with some of the families of Canaan -- the relatives or friends, I mean, of Abraham? It was but a little way from Sodom to the plain of Mamre, near Hebron, where Abraham, as I have already told you, now resided.

I am surprised at another thing,--the goodness and forbearance of Abraham. We have already seen that he gave Lot his choice, and allowed him to go to Sodom, if he chose, bad as the place was; though there can be no doubt that he greatly disapproved of his choice. But now that he had got into trouble, does Abraham reproach him with it? Not a word of reproach was uttered, that we can find. He does not so much as say, "I told you so." More than this, he helps him out of his difficulties. He arms his servants, and collects an army -- much as he hated war -- and goes off a hundred miles and attacks, with a small force, a powerful and triumphant enemy, and overcomes them, and brings back his erring, self aggrandizing nephew.

Whether he gave him any advice in regard to leaving the city, after his return, we do not know. But it is not surprising that his misfortunes had not cured him of his desire of remaining there? Is it not surprising that he did not sell his property -- what he could not remove -- and regarding his misfortunes as the righteous judgments of Heaven upon him for going there, quit the place and its inhabitants for ever?

By no means. Men of the spirit and temper of Lot are not so easily reclaimed. Who does not know how unhealthy a place New Orleans is, especially to northern people? And yet they continue to go there. Though thousands die around them every year, yet the love of property induces them to stay a little longer: till, at length, they are swept away with the rest. The danger seldom drives them away; neither does the sickness of themselves, their friends, or their neighbors, often reclaim them.

There is one difference between Abraham and Lot, which must have struck the minds of many Bible readers --and very properly -- with great force. Abraham, as we have already seen, at least in part, though a man of great wealth, was accustomed to wander from place to place, even after he arrived in Canaan. Sometimes he was at Shechem; sometimes between Bethel and Ai. Again we find him in Egypt; again in the land of the Philistines. Now he is in Gerar; now in Beersheba; now at Hebron or Jerusalem.

But wherever Abraham went, he always erected an altar to the true God, on his arrival in the place, and there worshipped with his family. This was drawing at once a broad line of demarcation between himself and the surrounding idolatrous nations. I say he always did this, though the Bible does not say quite so much. But it speaks so often of his doing so, that there is reason for believing that he did it uniformly.

But how was it with Lot, when he settled in Sodom? Did he erect an altar at once? Did he thus show the idolatrous and sensual inhabitants that, in spiritual concerns, he had "no part with them?" Abraham would have done this, most undoubtedly. Our modern missionaries would have done this.

I do not mean to say that our modern missionaries, with the light we now have under the gospel, would have set up alters, literally, and sacrificed animals on them. But I mean that they would have set up religious worship, in some form or other -- public worship, too. It is not sufficient that they pray in their families, and in their closets, and read the Bible and sermons* at home; there must be churches and public preaching and prayer in every attempt of good men to settle down among wicked or idolatrous nations, with the hope of reclaiming them.

[footnote: Many people in every country--and especially among us in New England--say it is of no use to go to church and hear sermons and prayers, on the Sabbath, when they can read the Bible and good sermons at

home, and pray there too. But Abraham did not reason so. Abraham could pray and read at home; and undoubtedly he kept up the worship of God in his family; and yet this did not prevent his attending to public worship.]

Not a word is said, however, about Lot's setting up any altar in Sodom; and I think we may fairly infer that he did not do it. But if he neglected it, situation as the world then was, and with Abraham's example before him, was he not exceedingly culpable?

Perhaps he reasoned as many do now. Perhaps he said to himself, "If I set up the worship of God here, the people will think I am superstitious. On the contrary, if I do nothing that gives them occasion to make any remarks of the kind, they will consider me liberal; not as saying, Stand by, for I am a little holier. I can worship God at home in my family, without any ridicule, and without any loss of reputation."

But alas! if he did indeed reason thus -- if, for the sake of gain, he was willing thus to temporize, how deserving was he of the woes that fell upon him! And when, at least, he was driven out, as it were by fire and brimstone with the loss of all or nearly all his property, and many of his friends, how little was he to be pitied!

Abraham lost not the respect even of the idolatrous people among whom he lived, by his open acknowledgment of a spiritual Diety, and by practically rejecting their idol worship. On the contrary, as every one may see, he everywhere won their esteem. He was truly liberal, and truly polite, and yet he did not hesitate boldly to declare his religious faith publically, and without much regard to consequences. Had Lot done this, we do not know but, instead of the Dead sea, we might perhaps now see in its stead the beautiful vale of Siddim, and instead of a large tract of country comparatively wasted, a delightful region thickly populated.

I have spoken of the folly of men, in leaving a pastoral and agricultural life, for the mercantile pursuits of a crowded city; and have intimated that Lot did so. Of this, however, we have no certain evidence. He may have continued his former employment, and no other. Though the vale of Siddim was not exactly the place for his flocks and herds, yet they might have been scattered under the care of his numerous herdsman over the adjacent hills. Or, perhaps he continued his former occupation, in the manner I have now mentioed, and added mercantile pursuits to it.

When he was taken prisoner, it is said that "they took all his goods;" and when he was retaken by Abraham, we are again told that "his goods" were brought back. Would there be so much said about his goods unless he had been a large dealer? This is a question that I cannot answer; though it is my own belief that he was a merchant; and for those days, a trader on a very extensive scale. If the river Jordan did, as I have elsewhere supposed, actually empty itself, at that time, into the Red sea, it might have been navigable as far as Sodom; and if so, I see no reason why the latter might not have been a place of considerable trade, and Lot one of the principle wholesale traders. Indeed, it is somewhat difficult to account for such a rapid sinking of the cities of the vale of Siddim into corruption, without supposing that they were greatly engaged in merchandizing.

CHAPTER IV.

Situation of Lot's Family -- Practical Reflections on his Situation -- What some of his Dangers were -- About giving up business -- A common Error -- Good men, even, in wicked Places, must grow better or worse -- Reasons for believing that Lot was made worse.

Twelve years had passed after Lot's rescue by Abraham, and twenty or more from the time he removed to Sodom; and yet, if we except the unfortunate circumstance of his being taken prisoner, and losing some of his property in the war, all things had probably gone on with him very prosperously. He had now a family of daughters, who were come to years of maturity, and some of them were already married or engaged to be married. He had probably by this time become so rich and so much at his ease, as people say, he thought all would go well with him as long as he lived.

How sad the mistake often made by those who think rich people are at their ease! If they do not quit business -- and the greater part do not -- their cares, and toils, and perplexities generally increase with their wealth, and instead of being more at ease, as the consequence, they are much less so. If, on the other hand, they do leave their business, they will certainly be miserable.

I have not forgotten the parable in the gospel, of the man who had become so rich that he concluded to give up his business, and said within himself; "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; now take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But did he obtain ease? Was not his soul called away to judgment that very night?

And had he lived, it would not have been to enjoy a life of exemption from cares. Men who are brought up to a life of action till they are thirty, forty, or fifty years of age, cannot safely leave off business. The very circumstance of their having always been active, creates a necessity of their continuing so. Those who spend the first half of their life in inaction, will not suffer quite so much, it is true, by remaining inactive during the remainder of it. The rich man in the gospel, is represented as having been an active, business-doing man; and therefore he must have suffered by "giving up his business," had he even been permitted to live.

It is very true that a considerable number of people try the plan of giving up their business. Probably most mercantile men intend to do so, when they commence. But having become very much engaged, and having acquired a little property, their desires to acquire more increase in proportion; and continue to do so, as long as they live; and death surprises them with their hearts much more anxiously set on money getting, than they were when they began in this world.

But suppose they go on to forty or fifty years of age, become exceedingly rich, lay aside their business, and undertake to live at their ease; what then? I will tell you what often happens; not in every case, I know; but in six cases out of ten.

They no sooner dismiss their business than they say to themselves -- or rather think it than say it -- Now, "take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." So they go to eating and drinking more, and usually of richer food, than before they left off their business; while at the same time they use less exercise. Whereas, if they diminish their exercise, they ought to diminish their food, either as respects quantity, or quality, or both.

Well, they increase the quality of their food, as I said before; and also use such kinds of food as are more stimulating. This creates a feverish state of body, and a great many unpleasant feelings. These, however, it is soon found, can be removed, for a little while, by stimulating drinks, such as tea, coffee, beer, cider, wine, or distilled spirits. Not but that those drinks allow the troubles to return again, after a little while, which they were intended to cure; for they do. And the troubles not only return, but return some what aggravated, and more difficult of cure.

But there is still one way of getting along, which is to increase the dose of stimulating drink. They soon learn this; and either drink more and more of their favorite kind, or take two or three kinds at a time, that is, on the same day.

Sometimes, in addition to large quantities of tea, or ale, or wine, or cider, they begin to take some medicinal drug, such as opium or camphor; or they chew or smoke medicine, such as tobacco. But all these things, whether they use little or much, only plant more and more firmly the seeds of disease, and they soon become bloated with gout or dropsy, or emaciated with dyspepsy or consumption; and, without living half way from forty to eighty years of age unless they have constitutions remarkably robust, they die a violent death, though it should be in a lingering manner; and the soul is hastened away from its wretched, defiled tenement, to the presence of the God who gave it -- and gave it not to be defiled, or to dwell in a defiled body -- but to be preserved in health and purity.

Some, who are called good men, by means of the sad mistake they run into, of giving up business, as they call it, get into this wretched condition; and I always think of Lot as one of this sort of men; though without knowing with certainty that this was the fact. It appears to me that he had already given up business, except, perhaps, a little judicial business, when Sodom was destroyed; and that, had it not been for the destruction of the place, and his consequent reduction to poverty, he might, in ten years more have died of some awful disease, brought on by intemperance, or gluttony, or some form of sensuality.

Men cannot very well live in such a place as Sodom, without either growing better or worse; and that very rapidly, too. Some think they can, but they are mistaken. I have no doubt that Lot thought he could, when he went to Sodom; but it is pretty evident to me that he found his mistake in the end: for we do not read of his making anybody better while he lived there -- certainly he had not much to boast of in regard to his own family; at least if we except his two daughters, and it is not probably that his example had a very favorable influence on others. Seven-eighths of the family of Noah appear to have been holy persons. How different with the family of Lot! But if he lived there twenty years, and made nobody any better by it, I am sure that he must have made many of his friends and neighbors worse.

You will call these remarks, my young readers, a digression. But they seemed to me quite called for, in the history of the adventures of Lot in Sodom. For, though he is commonly looked upon as having been situated entirely different from any body now-a-days, while he lived in Sodom, it seems to me far otherwise. I regard people who live in crowded cities, and other bad places, at the present time, as exposed to similar temptations and dangers, though not always the very same, as those Lot encountered, and which, without the interference of Divine Providence, will inevitably ruin the best people in the world.

CHAPTER V.

Wickedness of Sodom -- God determines to destroy it -- Angels sent to announce the Fact -- Lot endeavors to arouse his Sons-in-Law, and induce them to flee with him -- Is unsuccessful -- Probable Reasons.

We come now to a most important, but eventful part of our story. The wickedness of the posterity of Ham, in the vale of Siddim, had become so great, and their conduct so abominable, that a decree had gone out from the Creator, to destroy them and their cities by fire and brimstone, as it was called, from heaven.

The fate of these devoted cities had already been communicated to Abraham, who had interceded long and anxiously in their behalf; especially in behalf of Sodom, where Lot resided. He had not succeeded, however, in obtaining even a short respite of the sentence. The only hope he now had was founded on a promise of the Most High, that Sodom should be spared, if ten righteous persons were found in it; but unfortunately there were not five, as we see by the result.

A friend of mine, who is a profound biblical student, once observed, that he thought Abraham's extreme anxiety on account of Lot -- his prayers and intercessions -- most plainly implied doubts of his piety, and fears, even, that the contagion of evil example had produced its sad, but too common effects, on this young, and once comparatively inoffensive young man. Even his language, his expostulations and pleadings in behalf of the devoted city, -- his peradventures, -- seem to have had a deep meaning. These suggestions of my friend are valuable. There can be no doubt, it seems to me, of Abraham's fears. Nay, more, I think it not improbable that the good man knew, from Lot's luxurious manner of living, and his connivance at the vices of the people of Sodom, though they might not yet have sunk him to their own beastly level, had still become so offensive to Heaven, especially when his early religious education was duly considered, that he was in very great danger of being destroyed with the more wicked, though at the same time more ignorant Sodomites.

When the time was at hand in which the Lord had determined to inflict his judgments, two angels were sent, one evening, to Sodom, to apprise Lot of what was about to take place, that he might have time to escape. There is much reason for believing that his kindness towards Lot was out of regard to his friend Abraham, at least in part; and not on account of the goodness of Lot, though he was quite a good man, in comparison with the Sodomites, undoubtedly.

The angels who were sent to see Lot, found him sitting in the gate of the city. They approached him, on their approach, like men -- probably like young men. Lot, with that hospitality which then prevailed in many eastern countries, and for which Abraham was greatly distinguished, rose up, at their approach, to meet them and make his obeisance to them. He also invited them into the house, and offered them water with which to wash their feet, considered as one of the most common marks of politeness, and lodging for the night; but they declined accepting his kind offers, and insisted rather on remaining in the street all night.

But Lot was unwilling that they should stay out of doors, and he urged them to come in, till they at last consented. When he had received them into his house, he had some unleavened bread prepared for them, of which they partook, or seemed to partake; and the evening was taken up with the ceremonies which the rules of eastern politeness to strangers required, and with agreeable and profitable conversation.

The wicked conduct of the Sodomites soon became manifest, in their treatment of these strangers. They had heard of their arrival, and they soon began to throng around the house in great numbers, to see them. At length they grew insolent, and demanded of Lot that he should bring them out; openly declaring that they wished to abuse them.

Lot at first undertook to reason with them. They were his friends and neighbors -- perhaps some of them his very relatives, at least, by marriage. He spoke to them in a gentle manner, and begged them not to be so uncivil and unkind. The men, he said, were strangers, and came under his roof for protection. But all he could

say was of no avail. They even began to threaten him. But just as they began to press upon him, to execute their threats of violence, the strangers whom he had received as guests -- the angels, I mean -- reached forth their hands to Lot, and pulled him into the house, and shut the door.

And now followed a scene, which, distressing as it was, greatly magnified the might power of God. The crowd of Sodomites around the door, consisting of men and boys of almost every age, were every one of them smitten with blindness; so that they were even perplexed to find the door; and when they found it, they seemed not to be able to act in concert sufficiently to enable them to open it.

And now it was that the celestial messengers made known to Lot their character and their errand. They informed him that the cry of the wickedness of the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim, and Bela, had risen to heaven; that God had sent them to destroy them, and that they were about to execute their commission.

Then they inquired about his family; whether he had not sons and daughters, and other relatives who were not at home with him; urging him, if he had any such, to bring them out of Sodom, immediately, that they might not perish in the general destruction. Lot's family then with him at home, consisted of himself, and wife, and two daughters.

Indolent and inactive as Lot might have become by this this time, the information thus given to him of the terrible fate that awaited Sodom, at first aroused him, and he obeyed the injunctions of the angels. He went out into the city, late in the night as it had now become, and told his son-in-law what was to happen to Sodom, conjuring them to escape for their lives from the city. But he seems to have made no impression upon their minds. The Scriptures assure us that he seemed to them "as one that mocked."

"Had Lot been a holy and an exemplary man, could they have received his message in this manner? And does not the result here mentioned -- their mocking -- prove that they had very little respect for his character, and that there was little in it, in fact, desrving of respect?"

I do not think so. True, I regard him as a very worldly man; so much so, as to be scarcely entitled to the name of a good man, though it was sometimes applied to him. But then I derive my opinion from other considerations, a part of which have already been mentioned. Further reasons will also appear in the progress of the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

The Angels force Lot out of Sodom -- He entreats that Bela or Zoar may be spared, and that he may stop there -- His Request granted -- Disobedience of his Wife -- Her punishment -- Reflections.

The night, by this time, was considerably spent. The celestial messengers had perhaps retired; as if to rest. But I do not think there was much sleeping, with Lot, and his wife, and his two daughters. Such worldly minded people as they were, would be very likely to make what effort they could to collect together some of their property, such as they could carry with them, for what they could not carry, they knew would inevitably be destroyed. Besides, there would be too much fear in their minds to permit them to sleep.

The morning had no sooner dawned, than the angels pressed Lot to make all possible haste, or he would be consumed with the rest! They were even compelled to lay hold of him, and of his wife and daughters, and drag them forth from the city, as it were, by main strength; so reluctant and slow were they to leave their homes, their friends, and their neighbors, though they knew they were doomed to speedy destruction, with the rest, if they remained.

But the angels having led them out of the city as speedily as possible, and put them on the road that led to the mountains, they bade them make all possible haste to reach them, and not to stop or linger a moment by the way, or even look behind them, on penalty of being destroyed with the rest of the inhabitants of the plain. -- For we must not forget that not Sodom and the other cities alone, but the whole plain, was doomed to the ravages of the fire.

Lot, however, hesitated a moment, for he had one request to make, which was, that he need not be compelled to go so far as to the mountain, but might be permitted to stop in Bela. Bela was the smallest, and most southern of the five cities of the plain; and Lot, after much pleading that it might be spared, because it was a LITTLE city, at last obtained his request, and Bela was spared; and from henceforth obtained the name Zoar.

The angels having promised to spare Zoar, now hastened Lot on towards it, who as it appears, still lingered; assuring him that the destruction in the plain could not, or rather would not be commenced till he had arrived there. -- It was now broad day-light; and the rising sun was rapidly approaching from behind the Arabian hills.

But now a most painful circumstance took place. With all the efforts of the angelic messengers to hurry on this little family, and in spite of the threatenings of destruction, if they lingered, the wife of Lot looked back.

It was indeed a sad trial. She was undoubtedly a worldly woman. She probably had little faith in God. There, in Sodom, was her home; there her friends, there her property, there her all. Here she and her husband and daughters, on the strength of the statements of strangers, were fleeing their country in great haste, and leaving all they loved behind them.

But wherefore? Whence the danger? The morning was fine. Nothing in the sky appeared threatening. The inhabitants of Siddim's populous vale were generally sleeping quietly in their beds after late hours, no doubt, of dissipation and drunken revelry, not dreaming of harm. And was there any danger, after all? Every thing depended on the credibility of the strangers. True, they spoke with authority; but might they not have been impostors?

So Lot's wife might perhaps have reasoned; so probably she did reason. And reasoning thus, she looked back, as I have before said. Some think she began to meditate a return, or had actually commenced it.

But she paid dearly for her temerity. She became, say the sacred Scriptures, "a pillar of salt!" There she stood, a monument, to all after ages, of the danger of disobeying, or even lingering, when God, by the mouth of his celestial messengers, or in any other manner, has commanded us to go forward.

What is meant by the expression, "she became a pillar of salt," is not exactly known. Some suppose one thing; some another. "Some are of opinion," says Calmet, in his Dictionary, "that, being surprised and suffocated with fire and smoke, she continued in the same place as immovable as a rock of salt; others that a column or monument of salt stone was placed over her grave; others that she was stifled in the flame, and became a monument of salt to posterity; that is, a permanent and durable monument of her inprudence. The common opinion," he adds, "is, that she was suddenly petrified and changed into a statue of rock salt, which is hard as the hardest rocks."

In conformity with the last mentioned opinion, is the testimony of Josephus; who though he relates strange stories of things which he learned from tradition, or was told by others, is never the less generally deemed correct in regard to things which he witnessed himself. And yet he says expressly that Lot's wife "was changed into a pillar of salt;" and adds, "for I have seen it, and it remains at this day;" that is, at the time of his writing. Clement, of Rome, also says it was standing there to his time, which was about the time of Josephus; and Irenaeus says it was there a century still later. Some modern travelers even state that it remains there still; but of this I have very strong doubts.

Be this as it may, however, I am of opinion that the simple account given in the Bible, is true in the most literal sense; and that she was actually changed by the mighty power of God, into a pillar or column of rock salt. So tremendous are the consequences of disobeying God.

And yet, were this all the punishment of those who continue to sin till they die, how slight it would be! Lot's wife must have died at some time or other, had nothing happened. And why not now, as well as at any other future time? It is true that the idea of being held up to all ages as a monument of the Almighty's displeasure is not very agreeable; but this, I suppose, was not thought of, by the wife of Lot. She probably died instantly, and without a pang. -- Why, then, should the punishment of sin be regarded as so very severe?

Alas! there is a punishment to come. To those who go out of the world sinning and not repenting, there is something beyond this life to be dreaded. It is misery unending. It is torment for ever; -- yes, for ever and ever! It is this which should move us. But there is one thing more to move us, besides the infliction of punishment; there is the loss of happiness, -- of HEAVEN: there is eternal banishment from the presence of God and all the holy and happy.

CHAPTER VII.

Destruction of Sodom and the Cities of the Plain -- Bird's-eye View of the Scene -- Abraham beholds it -- His feelings, and those of Lot -- Reflections.

"The sun was risen upon the earth, when Lot entered into Zoar." How much is comprised in, or rather how much is indicated by this little verse!

Let us go, in imagination, to the spot, and stand there, as by the side of this poor bereaved man. For, though he was a man of the world, he had feelings. It had pained him deeply, no doubt, to be compelled to give up his property; but to lose his wife besides, and to lose her in so strange and awful a manner, could not but have cut him to the heart. We do not hear that he murmured, however. Perhaps he was submissive. Worldly men sometimes exercise a species of submission to what they cannot escape.

But there he stands in Zoar; and a brighter and more beautiful morning human eyes perhaps never beheld! The clearness and serenity of the sky is probably designed to heighten the contrast; and with Lot, if not others, to render the judgment of Heaven more striking. There stands Lot, I say, now looking back, no doubt; but from a point of comparative safety. What must be his feelings! Except these two weeping daughters, now clinging to his arms, yonder vale, wide spreading to the north, with all its beautiful cities and villages, contains all that is dear to him. There is his mansion; there his sons-in-law; there his neighbors, his goods, his everything. Between this spot and the vale, is the petrified body of his wife, it is true; but he derives no consolation from reflections on a subject so unutterably painful.

Conflicting sentiments now begin to distract his mind. Will the threatened judgments of Heaven be executed? Will Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah and Zeboim, and all that inhabit the beautiful vale, be destroyed? Can it be? Must there not be some mistake? Who can think it possible that such awful destruction should ensue, when the morning sun arises us as usual, and the day is so uniformly fair and beautiful?

If not, however, whence the terrible judgments that just now befell the partner of his bosom, in climbing yonder hill? Could men of such singular and such almost almighty power have been deceiving him? What motive could they have had for so doing?

With sentiments, conflicting like these, we can readily imagine Lot's mind and heart to be agitated, imagine Lot's mind and heart to be agitated, as we stand unobserved, and watch his motions and countenance. Now he almost ventures to think of going back. Now again he remembers he cannot go back, as before. One of the company will avoidably be missing. Now, once more, he thinks, of the judgments of God; and rejoices that he and his two daughters have escaped them.

But presently the scene changes. The clear sky begins to be overcast with clouds. The wind rises. A damp midnight chill comes on. The clouds thicken, and grow black and threatening. Soon, to add to the gloom, is heard the distant thunder, and ere long the forked lightnings begin to play. -- The thunder becomes heavier; the lightnings more vivid. The darkness and gloom increase, and the clouds seem concentrating over yonder devoted valley.

Where now is Sodom? Where her gay inhabitants? Roused from their chambers of dissipation, and their beds of drunkenness, by the terrific peals of thunder, and still more terrible flashes of lightning, they rub their wildly-staring eyes, and anxiously ask themselves whether they are not still dreaming.

But all doubts are soon -- alas too soon! -- removed. Such a continual blaze of lightning was never before seen, either in this or any other country. And the thunder -- was ever anything like it? It seems as if all the artillery in the world were discharging at once! And the fumes of sulphur, -- what mean these?

Alas! all that could have been predicted -- the very worst of temporal woes, a shower of fire and brimstone, is upon this abominable people. Pitiable indeed they are in the sight of man, who sees not as God sees, the turpitude of the human heart. But perish they must, whether worthy of our pity or not; and that without remedy.

Perhaps, to add to the terror, and accelerate the already swift destruction of a race of men accused by the Infinite Purity, the fiery flame, kindled among the combustible materials of both fields and dwellings by Heaven's electricity, has communicated itself to the pitchy substances so abundant in the vale of Siddim, and this may be one cause of the amazing smoke which, like a dense cloud, not only settles over the whole valley, but begins to envelope the mountains even as far as Zoar, where we now stand; and to hide entirely the prospect. -- Would that it could hid from us the reflection, that thousands are not only now suffocating or scorching in the awful conflagration, but are beginning already to reap the fruit of their doings, and to be filled with their own devices, in a region where hope can never enter: --a region "where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched."

Perhaps, to crown the whole and finish the desolation, the neighboring hills and mountains, like so many batteries of fire, burst forth volcanic, and pour their numerous floods of melted lava over Siddim's once beautiful vale, and whelm in one promiscuous, ruinous heap, every thing which has escaped the ravages of the lightning and the fire.

Abraham, too, the venerable patriarch -- the friend of God and man, -- from the high hills towards Hebron, beholds the dismal scene! What must be the sensations of this holy man! What pangs must rend his bosom! -- Does he not -- must he not -- conclude that Lot and his friends are engulfed among the dead? It is difficult to answer the latter question. Abraham had been fully warned of the impending destruction of Sodom; but it is not quite certain -- though it is very probably -- he knew that Lot would be spared. -- Many think that Lot was saved more in mercy to Abraham and on account of his prayers, than on his own behalf.

I have thus imagined, or attempted to present to the imagination, a bird's-eye view of the whole scene. But the picture must, of a certainty, fall far short of the reality. No tongue of man, had there been never so many witnesses of it, besides Lot and Abraham, could possibly have described it, with any thing like justice. It must, from the very nature of the case, have defied all description. This must be obvious to any individual who has only seen a city on fire, in a common way, and seen houses by scores and hundreds, dropping into the flames.

With what sentiments must Abraham have beheld the smoke of Sodom and Gomorrah, like the smoke of a burning fiery furnace, ascending to heaven? What anxiety must have filled his aching bosom, (even if he knew the end from the beginning), how and by what means Lot's escape was effected?

And Lot, too -- oh, what must have been his feelings! Was he susceptible to sympathy? No doubt he was. Then how must his whole soul have been moved in sorrow for the multitudes thus called out of time, in an instant, as it were, and hurried to the eternal bar!

Perhaps only six -- nay, only three -- hours before, the intemperate, lewd, beastly inhabitants of the vale had been engaged in their excessive debaucheries and abominations. Perhaps the sound of the harp, and the pipe, and the tabret, had been in their feasts, and they had only desisted from their mad course of revelry, at the approach of that light from the dawning east, which men, whose deeds are deeds of darkness, always hate, and, if possible, fly from. How dreadful the change in the condition of sould immortal, may a few hours sometimes produce!

Was Lot susceptible of gratitude, and above all, of gratitude to God? If he was, how must this sentiment have been enkindled in his heart! True, he had lost much; but he had still much remaining. His two daughters were spared him. Abraham -- still his friend -- was spared him. The world -- except one vale, was spared him. He was stil in a region of hope. He was not yet shut up unto "devouring fire." He was not yet an inhabitant of

"everlasting burnings." He was not yet banished, summarily, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glories of his kingdom. There was yet granted him a space for repentance; and the influences, would he but seek them, of the Holy Spirit.

I have spoken as if the destruction of Sodom, and the cities of the plain, was effected by means of lighting, communicated to brimstone or sulphur, and other combustible matter, and aided in accomplishing its fearful ravages by the pitchy or bituminous matter with which the soil of the vale is known to have abounded; and perhaps by volcanic eruptions. But much of this, though believed by many commentators to have actually taken place, is mere conjecture.

I might, indeed, have introduced, to a much greater extent, the opinions of learned men -- their speculations rather, on this curious topic. But it seemed to me wholly unnecessary to do so. I fear rather that I have already introduced more of mere fancy work than some of the more sober part of my readers will approve.

One thing is certain, -- Sodom was destroyed, and the cities about it; and they were never more rebuilt. To this day, a mass of waters, with great propriety, both from their nature and the history of the spot which they now overwhelm, called the Dead sea, occupies the once delightful vale of Siddim; and the Jordan, instead of passing onward through the valley of the Ghor, as it probably once did, loses itself in this sea.

Here I might stop, and describe, more particularly, this lake; and disabuse the reader in regard to the many wonderful stories which have been told about it, -- how birds drop down dead in flying over it, &c. &c. -- stories now well known to be wholly fabricated. But such a course would lead me so widely from the adventures of Lot, that I forbear; and I now return to finish, in the next chapter, his story.

CHAPTER VIII.

Why Lot left Zoar -- Thoughts on Fear -- Why he did not return to Abraham -- Close of this History -- Reasons for supposing that he finally became a good Man.

I have said that Lot was probably saved from the dreadful destruction in which the cities of the plain were involved, chiefly on account of Abraham. This seems to me very fairly inferred from the nature of the case, as well as from the general tenor of the story.

But this is not all. We are expressly told, in the Bible, that, "when God destroyed the cities of the plain, God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrown." Very remarkable language indeed, were we not to conclude that Lot was saved far less on account of any goodness of his own, than for other and more important reasons.

How long Lot and his daughters remained in Zoar, it is impossible to determine, but probably not long. There is little doubt that the city, if not as abandoned as Sodom, was yet grossly wicked. However I do not think Lot was so unreconciled to their wickedness as to the punishments which he feared might follow it. The Scriptures say "he feared to dwell in Zoar." And who can wonder?

But good men ought to be actuated by other motives than fear. Caligula was afraid when it thundered, and yet his fear made him no better; for he was one of the most wicked emperors the world ever saw. Tyrants, and cruel men of every grade, are very often cowards, afraid, almost, of the rustling of a leaf. Do we not hence see that, to be afraid of suffering a punishment, is no mark of goodness?

Many a child have I known, who would behave very well for fear of the rod; but who, if all danger of punishment was removed, would behave very ill indeed. Such children had no love for goodness. They only acted from fear; and this is a most unworthy motive. Love is far better. I will not deny, however, that it is better, both for children and men, that they should behave well from mere fear, than that they should not behave well at all.

Some suppose that Lot was afraid of a deluge. This is not improbably. For it must have greatly surprised him, to say the least, to behold, when the storm cleared up, a sea of waters accumulating in the vale, and rising and rising, and at the same time approaching the very borders of Zoar. How could he know where it would stop, and at what point the great Creator, in the new order of things which he was establishing in the vale, would say, "Hitherto thou shalt come, but no further?"

Another reason for supposing that Lot was afraid of the overflowing of the waters, is, that he fled to a mountain. Perhaps, indeed, he recollected that the angels at first commanded him to escape to the mountains, and this had some influence in urging him on. Is it not probable, however, that he was influenced more than all, by a desire to attain a point of elevation, which would secure him from any disturbance by the accumulated waters of the Jordan?

He retired to a cave. This was a humble place for a rich merchant -- late the resident of a splendid city mansion. To one possessed of the spirit of the Savior, who was sometimes destitute of a place where he could even lay his head comfortably, and especially after such a happy escape from destruction, this would have been a very pleasant and acceptable retreat; but we may doubt whether it was very acceptable to Lot or his daughters. But he had not a choice of circumstances. He was obliged to do as well as he could.

But "why did he not return to Abraham?" I shall perhaps be asked. "Would not the good patriarch have received him?" These are very appropriate questions, and they deserve an appropriate reply.

Viewing the character of Lot as I do, I cannot help thinking he was too proud to return to Abraham. He left him prosperous; but he must return, if he returned at all, poor and degraded, and an outcast. This was too much for such a spirit as Lot's. It would not be too much for the truly humbled child of God. But such, at the time of which I am speaking, it is not probably Lot was.

Yet did he not make a most sad mistake, in not returning at once to Abraham? Not because it would have rendered him more comfortable, in a pecuniary point of view, in his declining years, -- for this is comparatively of little consequence, -- but because it might have been the means of saving him and his family from other evils of much greater magnitude.

I have now finished my story of Lot's adventures in Sodom. Little more is known of him after his escape from destruction. Whether he continued to live in obscurity among the mountains, or finally became sufficiently humbled to return to Abraham, we can only conjecture. But even if he became penitent, and returned to the people of God, he did not by any means wholly escape the punishment of his transgression. His children, neglected as their early education no doubt was, in the hurry of the father to accumulate wealth, turned out miserably in the world. Even his two sons, Moab and Ammon, born to him after his escape from Sodom, appear to have been bad men. Such, at least, is a very natural inference, when we consider, with care, the history of their descendants, and especially the Moabites.

I have said that it is a mere matter of conjecture, whether or not Lot ever returned to Abraham. Still I think it is rather more than probable that he finally saw the great errors of his life, and became penitent. I have come to this conclusion, chiefly from what is said of him in the Bible afterwards; where, as every one knows, he is once called "just Lot," and once or twice "righteous."

Now, although he was a just man, compared with the abominable Sodomites; and though it cannot reasonably be doubted that he had many noble traits of character, derived from his early education in the family of Abraham, yet, destitute as he seems to have been, during the whole of his adventures in Sodom, of any hearty desire to obey or please God; and devoted as extensively, as he appears to me to have been, to make money, or otherwise aggrandize himself, I cannot think the inspired writers would ever, in a single instance, have called him a just man, had he not subsequently become converted to God.

Perhaps his case may not unaptly be compared with that of Solomon. Solomon is represented as a wise man, not only in the Old, but in the New Testament. Not merely as possessed of great knowledge, but of the "wisdom which cometh down from above." Yet Solomon, it is well known, sunk deeply in sin towards the latter part of his life. Yet has it often been doubted that he dies a good man? Do not the facts, that he was spoken of afterwards as being a good man, and that he probably wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, in very old age, after he repented, seem to justify the conclusion that he did?

Now, there is, in my opinion, quite as good evidence for believing that Lot repented, as that Solomon did. Their age, in both cases, was unfavorable. Old men seldom repent and reform. They may see their folly, and be sorry for it; but this is not conversion. The best part of repentance is reformation; and reformation, to old men, though not absolutely impossible, is very difficult.

But the force of Godly education, in bringing back to God those who, in the hurry and bustle of business -- of youth and manhood, have gone astray, is sometimes surprising. It is true, that the great majority perish in their sins, before the stormy or busy period of life is over. Still, there are a few of those who survive the storm, that return to the ways of virtue and religion, especially if they get through early, as Lot did. He could scarcely have begun to feel the infirmities of old age, unless from intemperance or excesses, when he was compelled to quit Sodom, and become a poor man; indeed it is probable he was still what was called in those days, a young man.

Happy are they, who, by reverses of fortune, or by any other means which merciful Heaven ordains, are so far

thrown out of business in early life, before their habits are all confirmed beyond the power, almost, of change, as to give them opportunity for reflection. But, with the cases of Solomon and Lot before us, we must not, at any age, wholly despair.

CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, I may be permitted to moralize a little more. Some persons are fond of moralizing, and even of spiritualizing upon every thing in the Bible, -- an error which, no doubt, is as far removed from the original intention of its author, as light is from darkness, or as the north is from the south. Still, there are as many parts of the Bible which not only permit this, but demand it.

We have seen how reluctant Lot was to quit Sodom, even after he had been told of the doom which awaited it, and had resolved to remove, and even counseled others to do the same. Vexed, as Peter says his righteous soul was, with the conduct of the Sodomites, he was probably more willing in the evening, after the labors of the day were ended, to believe that they merited, and would receive so dreadful a punishment, than when rest had composed his spirits.

Thus it often is now, with some mercantile men. They are wholly disgusted with what they call the fraudulent disposition of mankind, at evening, and think that, could they but get fairly rid of their business, they would rather sit down quietly on a little farm, with only a crust of bread to eat, and a bundle of straw to sleep on, than to continue their business in the enjoyment of every pleasure and every luxury. And yet, no sooner has rest in some measure wound up the run-down machine, than they forget their troubles, and, in their eagerness for gain, or at least for bustle, go forth with renewed -- often with increased energy -- to their shops and counting rooms.

Now, if Lot possessed that worldly spirit which I have, all along, presumed, it is no wonder that he had very different feelings in the morning from what he had the evening before. Nor is it at all surprising, that, when he saw the opening of the fine morning, and thought again of his flocks, his herds, and his other possessions, he should have still clung to Sodom. His understanding was convinced; perhaps he did not even doubt that the city would be destroyed; yet his attachment to it was so strong, and the power of habit so great, that, though convinced of the danger, he had not the moral power, or rather courage, to leave it. Nor would he have left it, finally, had not the celestial messengers forced him away. --Such was Lot; and such is human nature.

Now, do not suppose, young reader, that Lot was, in this respect, entirely different from every body else. How many a youth is destroyed by practices which he knew, beforehand, would destroy him, but from which he had not the resolution or the moral courage to break away! Thousands perish every year, in these United States, in this very way. Nay, it is not saying too much, when I affirm that hundreds of people, in our own State, Massachusetts, perish every year, from vices which they knew, while they were acquiring them, (or at least were told,) would prove their ruin. Some formed the habit while they were mere boys and girls; others at a later period. Do you ask me to explain, more fully, my meaning?

Many a young person has acquired the habit of frequenting the confectionary shop. Whenever he can get a little money, away he goes to the confectioner, and spends it. Well, the more he spends in his way, the more he wishes to. The cravings of his stomach for such things become stronger and stronger, and they soon begin to affect his appetite, and injure his powers of digestion. Nor is this all. He begins to be more fond that before, of other kinds of excitement.

But presently he reads in some book or paper, that confectionary usually leads a person on into bad habits, and ultimately injures his health. Again he reads or hears about it. He asks some friend if it is so; and is answered in the affirmative.

At length he believes it, and resolves to reform. But he has a little money in his pocket, and is passing by a confectionary shop, on his road to school; so he must venture in once more. Now he has broken his resolution. Now he feels guilt; and he resolves again. -- But again temptation comes, and he yields, and breaks his resolution. At last he becomes such a slave to his appetite, that, with money in his pocket, and a splendid assortment of confectionary before him, and no human eye on him but the eye of the confectioner, he would buy and eat, though he knew he should suffer for it the very next hour. -- And now, in what respects, is he better than Lot?

The young man, away from his parents at school, or apprenticed to some city mechanic, or clerk in some store, finds a leisure hour to associate him his fellow students, clerks, or apprentices; and so away he goes with them. They are going to the confectionary's or the restorator's, for a supper. It is true they have eaten just at dark, and need nothing more till the next day; and, indeed, ought now to be in bed. They know and believe that late and heavy suppers injure health, bring on diseases, and shorten life; but they will go and eat, in defiance of every thing. How much better are they than Lot was?

Multitudes of people -- the young as well as the old -- will drink a little spirit now and then, with their friends, although they fully believe it is poisonous. In other words, they rush on slow but certain destruction with their eyes wide open. Did Lot incline to do more?

Some will chew tobacco, and smoke, and take snuff, although they fully believe it will, if they continue the practice, destroy their health, if not their life. But why? Because they are the slaves of habit; and habit is tyrant which they have not the moral power to resist. They are just like Lot; or, at least, would be like him, were they in similar circumstances.

Many of the young, both males and females, when the evening comes, will go to theaters, although they admit, during the sober hours of day, that they will believe their tendency is to destroy the soul. But night comes, as I said before, and they cannot -- rather will not -- resist the temptation; and along they go, not withstanding the fire and brimstone; as Lot was disposed to do.

Some find their way to the gaming table, bad as they know it is. They will only go once, they say to themselves; for their consciences reproach them for it. But having gone once, they go again and again. They see their danger; and "resolve and re-resolve" to go no more; but at last, "die the same," and that very early, too, if they do not take heed. "The wicked" do not often "live out half their days."

There are, I am sorry to say it, a few young persons, who venture not only to some one of the bad places, which I have mentioned, but all of them; and not only to these but to places which are, if possible, still worse. -- But they seldom escape. No miraculous effort of Almighty power will pluck them away from from any of our modern Sodoms, and hurry them towards the mountains of safety. If they will not escape by exerting their own strength, they cannot expect to escape at all.

There is, indeed, but one way of escape from the dominion of bad habits; and that is, by breaking off entirely, and at once. He who says, "only once more, and then I will leave off," is likely to yield once more, and once more, till he is suddenly destroyed, and that without remedy. He who supposes that he can leave off a bad practice when he pleases, has yet to learn, his own weakness and folly. "I tremble for the man who does not tremble for himself;" said a certain minister, in regard to an individual who was intemperate. And the same might be said of every young person who is addicted to any bad habit, even it if is nothing but the habit of eating too much, and yet feels sure that he shall not become a slave, that is, a glutton. The boy or girl that goes daily to a confectionary shop, and fells as if he or she should not pass it, is in danger of destruction, either here or hereafter, or both, -- a destruction, whatever may be thought of it, no less terrible than Lot would have experienced, had not the angelic messengers rescued him.

All this may be true, some children will say, but we never go near the confectionary shops; so that we are safe.

But there are children who destroy themselves at their own homes. Not always by eating bad things; for it is almost as injurious to keep "nibbling" at even good things, every time they can get a chance, as some do, as to eat a small quantity of those things which are very bad. The fact is, that the stomach wants its seasons of perfect rest; and those children who are perpetually eating, between meals, at length disorder their stomachs; and many of the diseases which afflict children, or even carry them out of the world, are caused by this wretched habit of constantly eating things. The diseases which it causes may not indeed be perceived for a great number of years, after they begin the habit, if they happen to possess strong constitutions; but disease must and will, sooner or later, come. There is no escape from it.

I might mention in this place, had I room or time, the practice of eating things in church or school -- so common among us. But this is a part of the same evil of which I have just been speaking. I hope no young person who reads this book will ever again indulge in eating between meals. Very little children may sometimes, when the regular meal comes but three times a day, require a meal of bread, or an apple, for a single luncheon; but, after they are seven or eight years old, if they are allowed to eat anything except at their regular meals, they do it at their peril.

But, lastly, Lot's reluctance to leave the polluted city of Sodom, however it surprises us, is just what we see every day, in every person who does not make it the great business of his life, to love, and serve, and please God. He is in a condition not less dreadful than that of the Sodomites. He is hourly exposed to everlasting destruction from the presence of him, who created and redeemed him. And, strange to tell, though he knows and sometimes feels his danger, and admits it at all times, he will not try to escape. The flames of a worse than any temporal destruction are before him; he knows it; yet he will not stir a step to escape. He will, indeed, sometimes express his wishes; but he will do nothing.

Is it because he cannot? Then Lot could not escape from Sodom; and had not the angels seized his arm, and hastened him away, must have perished with the rest; and, by the way, must have perished because he could not help it. Does any one believe this? Does not every one who reads the story, feel sure that Lot might have escaped without being helped? Thousands and millions; --yes -- and tens of millions, -- have read the story, and yet you cannot find one, who supposes Lot could not have fled on that fine morning, when the angels were urging him away. And yet there is great reason to believe, as I have already said, that, without their aid, he never would have escaped.

Precisely so is it with those who go down to the grave, the slaves of intemperance, gluttony, gambling, theatre-going, or lust. Nay, similar is the case of those who live and die unreconciled to God, although they should be free from gross vices. They do not love God or holiness; and they sometimes appear to think they cannot. Well, they cannot, it is true; but it is only because they will not.

Not that I would here insinuate that we can bring ourselves, by our own unassisted efforts, to relish (if I may be permitted to use such an expression) holiness. Very far from it. But we are not likely ever to relish heavenly and divine things, until we make an effort to do so. And whenever such efforts are put forth, we have reason to expect aid from above. The apostle James says, "Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh to you." And the Holy Spirit, as the Scriptures themselves teach us throughout, is accustomed to help all such as help themselves; all such, rather, as, in trying to help themselves; begin to feel their own helplessness, and see for aid from on high. Nay, if we never stir a step in the way of everlasting life, until we are first moved from the Holy Ghost to do so, that only shows the more plainly our utter alienation from God, by nature; and that, if we perish in the end, we perish justly, and only reap the just reward of our impenitence.

Fly, then, my young friends, from the dominion of habits which are leading you -- yes, YOU -- to a worse destruction than that of ancient Sodom. Fly from the slavery of sin to the cross of that Savior whose service is perfect freedom; that when the floods of Divine wrath shall arise, and the winds blow, and beat upon your "naked souls," your building may be found resting on a "sure foundation," -- even the firm Rock of Eternal Ages.

END.

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