

JOSEPH'S FORGETTING.

THE narrative has followed Joseph through thirteen years of trial and anxiety. Now we find him in a position of much power, splendour, and prosperity. He was at the head of a nation which was perhaps the greatest, and no doubt the most civilized then existing. And king and people alike owned Joseph to be not only wise and trustworthy, but commended by Divine approval—"a man in whom the spirit of God is."

In this position he could not, indeed, be exempt from the cares that wait on greatness. His life must have been busy, and his burdens heavy. The prospect of carrying the nation through the coming years of famine could not be lightly regarded. Moreover, amid all the cares inevitably attendant on his task, there could not fail to be experiences of a more irritating and wearing kind: I mean the difficulties and annoyances introduced by human perversity—by the prejudices and the failings, by the sluggishness, the selfishness, the narrowness, and the jealousies which always withstand the execution of comprehensive plans. His position might be too strong to be seriously attacked—especially when each year's abundance confirmed his prediction of seven years' plenty, and gave weight to the warning as to coming years of famine. His fidelity and wisdom might authenticate his claims afresh, with each fresh experience of them. And in the new position, as in those he filled before, God might give him favour in the eyes of those with whom he had to do. Yet who could occupy for years together the highest station under an Oriental monarchy

without finding that courts are the native home of envy and intrigue, that jealous eyes watched for his halting, and that swift and subtle tongues were ever ready to misrepresent and to defame him? It proved to be so in the case of Daniel, it could hardly fail to be so in the case of Joseph.

But none of these things are mentioned. If they existed they did not prevail so as to give character to the period of Joseph's history now before us. If they existed, they did not take a very important place. God kept His servant in power, as He had kept him in weakness and depression; Joseph was still a prosperous man, and the Lord was with him. We need not doubt that he was enabled to rest the cares of the present and the solitudes of the future in God.—God, who had given him hitherto all the wisdom he needed—God, who had never failed to care for him when wisdom of his own could do little for him. We may reasonably think so; for this period of Joseph's life is represented to us as a happy one. Happy it was, because the Lord was with him; and also because the Lord gave him rest, and surrounded him with the elements of a bright and prosperous life.

True, there is not in this world any absolute or unmixed happiness, nor is anything earthly in itself able to bestow that boon. But many things can minister to comfort and enjoyment, some of which may give rise to pleasure of a very pure and elevated kind. These naturally desirable things, which promote the enjoyment of life, are not to be rated too high; but it is a mistake, or a hypocrisy, to assign to them no importance at all. And Joseph felt, no doubt, the gladness imparted by the sunshine of a prosperous life, just as he had felt, though he had nobly sustained the depressing influence of slavery, of wrong, of imprisonment. Deliverance from these, with the honour, power, and wealth that came in their room, certainly ministered to his happiness. But in his case the grand security for his happiness,

the foundation of it, was that favour of the Lord which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow. That had been with him all along, and was with him still. It not only formed the security of his happiness, but imparted to that happiness its peculiar character. Surely the tenor of Joseph's life warrants us to believe that the sense of divine kindness in all outward benefits, the assurance that they came from the hand and heart of that God who had been his trust in all his afflictions, gave to Joseph's prosperity a special charm, a peculiar power to make his heart glad.

In contemplating the prosperous years of Joseph's life we not only are to think of what I may call its more vulgar elements, such as rank, honour and riches. Much more weight than can belong to these must be attached to the field of exercise now opened for the capacities with which God had endowed him. Undoubtedly one of the highest pleasures of men of great capacity is found in the management of great affairs. It is found in the forthputting of all their energy and all their wisdom on some noble work, which tries all their resources, and at the same time rewards all their toil. To such work Joseph was called—administering for many years the affairs of Egypt, and having it for his task so to develop and apply the resources of the land as to carry the people through a great crisis. The qualities which enabled Joseph to accomplish this with success were, no doubt, the natural and acquired endowments of his character, under that guidance from God which every believer may expect. His call to the work had something supernatural in it; but nothing is said to lead us to suppose that in discharging his task he wielded any supernatural endowment. Prayerfully and diligently he used the faculties he possessed. They must have been of a very high order. And in the use of them—in framing and executing his plans, in watching and guiding the progress of far-reaching designs, in helping a great people through years

of intoxicating plenty and crushing want, in seeing his work grow under his hand until the danger had passed and Egypt was saved—no doubt Joseph experienced all the pleasure which great leaders are wont to enjoy when they subject the rough and stubborn current of affairs to the rhythm of their thought, and cause the secret workings of their own minds to become, under God, a prophecy of the destinies of men.

Now those capacities which proved equal to Joseph's task had been concealed and confined during all his earlier life in Egypt; they had been held in bondage to wrong and to wrongful men; they had been kept in contact with mean and petty cares. So then, when, from this period of Joseph's glory, we go back to the time of his oppression, we are taught a lesson of great moment. The powers that were so faithfully applied to the current duties of his master's house, and to the monotonous occupation of the slow days of imprisonment, were the same which proved adequate afterwards to the government of Egypt. Yet we hear of no murmuring on Joseph's part, no fastidious contempt for those lowly offices. They were discharged faithfully, diligently, kindly. And no doubt in the self-control and the readiness to obey, thus practised, was found the best preparation for coming to reign. The lesson is significant for those to whom it seems that their lot condemns them to a round of duties not worthy of their powers. Nor let the lesson be mistaken so as to lead them to say, "I accept these tasks for the present, on the understanding that by and by I shall be advanced to some nobler office." There shall be no such understanding. Set yourself to present duty as to the work of your life. God has no need of you, and He alone shall judge what in your case shall be reckoned fit and worthy employment.

We have reckoned this among the elements of Joseph's happy and prosperous state, that a great work was set for

him to do, giving full scope for all his faculties. But one thing must be added. His welfare was enhanced by the special nature of that work. It was not like so many efforts of statesmanship, merely selfish or ambitious; it was a work of beneficence; he was sent to save life and to preserve with a great deliverance. Kindliness and fidelity had marked his conduct in all the positions in which successively he had been placed; and now also he was to labour not for himself but for others. As his thoughts and his anxieties took hold of the case of those entrusted to him—the great people throughout all their communities and families; as he warmed to the work of setting them in safety; as he toiled and journeyed, as he planned and superintended, doubtless God gave him to taste the luxury of doing good, the pleasure of toiling for unselfish ends, of spending and being spent to make others happy.

This was his work. Thus God not only made his happiness to be pure, moral and godlike, but did much to secure him against the selfish isolation which is the besetting danger of high station. And thus Joseph's education for eternity was as truly and effectually carried on amid his glory and his wealth, as in the days when sorrow and bondage were moulding his spirit and exercising his faith. Thus also he was conformed the more to the likeness of our blessed Lord, of whom he became a more eminent and perfect type. For surely when we see this Son of Promise watchfully providing bread for the people of the land of his affliction, we cannot but think of Him who came into the world to give us bread, indeed, but better bread; not gathered from our soil, but such as came down from heaven; the true bread, the living bread—even His flesh, which He gave for the life of the world.

Placed in such circumstances, we find Joseph giving expression to his feelings when his sons were born. One he called Manasseh, Forgetting: "For," said he, "God hath

made me forget all my toil and all my father's house ;" and the second Ephraim, saying, " God hath made me fruitful in the land of my affliction."

" God hath made me forget all my toil." The prosperous years were doing their office in Joseph's life. They were making changes in the man. They were working off the depression, the anxiety, the wistfulness of that sorrowful past ; they were filling his soul with more ample conceptions of God's goodness ; they were causing him to forget all his toil.

As the houses of living men are often raised on the unsuspected remains of those of forgotten generations, so the scenes of our life, as they succeed one another, rest upon, and as it were bury and replace those that went before. The facts may be remembered, but the impressions are replaced by the living impressions of later years and of to-day. But sometimes, in old towns, a stroke of a pickaxe brings men unexpectedly into a chamber, or into a temple, under the foundations of their house, which they had never suspected to be there—a chamber that was the scene of life and work in days long gone by ; and there may still be traced, by the dim light, the painting and the carving, once rich in associations, and the arrangements that bring back the manner of life which men used of old. Just so when some event sets us unawares in an unwonted mood of thought, striking a note that brings old recollections, like a strain of forgotten music, through the mind, then our past rises up for us again. It rises, not in bare recollection of facts and dates, but re-embodied ; with something of the old spirit, the old environment, the old impression, if also with something of a twilight faintness. Then, standing for a little in our past again, reimpresed for some precarious moments with its old impressions, aware again how its views and interests once seized and chained us, we become conscious of the change which time and life have made. We realise how our life is

mixed of remembering and forgetting ; the present resting on the past indeed, but on a sunken and faded past.

Joseph's toil, in which God had trained and tried him, had been long and hard. Though, as a man of faith, he did not sink under it, yet, as a man of faith, he would not fail to realise its full significance. It is not the manner of such a man to bear trial with dull resignation, but rather to face, and measure, and watch the trial, wrestling with its temptations, looking out for God's grace, and hearkening for His voice. And so Joseph may well have felt, for many in like case have felt, as though the years of depression and sorrow had fixed their mark upon the soul too deep to be ever effaced. As he found year coming after year, day slowly following upon day, wave coming after wave, he might think that the springs of life must always show the effect of the pressure laid upon them so early and so long. He might feel as though, through all his future fortunes, there could never leave him the consciousness and impression of that dark sky, of those long conflicts of faith, of that bowing of the shoulders to bear, and of the heart to be patient.

But Joseph was in a new world now. God had brought forth his righteousness as the light, his judgment as the noonday. He had brought him to honour as His own servant and special friend ; had given Egypt into his hand, therein to do great works, glorious to God and merciful to men ; had compassed him with all good gifts, and still was near him to guide and keep him. Amid the scenes of this new, busy, animated life, amid its comforts and its hopeful activities, its thankfulness and its zealous service, there could be little time to mark how much of change passed on the moods and impressions of the man. Each day did its work, burying the past with the gathering strata of the present, until the very completeness of that present made irresistibly vivid the contrast in which it stood with the

past. So one day, when his cup ran over in the joy of his first son's birth, and his heart filled with the thought how God was building up his house for him, suddenly the weary struggling past rose up before him with its depressions and its fears. How completely, how swiftly it had passed away ! What a dead and buried past it seemed. How thoroughly he was *out* of it, so that the remembrance came strange to him, as of another world, of another life. And Joseph's heart was glad, as he called his son's name Forgetting, for God had made him forget all his toil. "Thou turnest the shadow of death into the morning."

Thus God made him forget ; for it was no ungrateful forgetting of the greatness of the deliverance, nor of the mercies of the years of conflict, as some have strangely supposed. And if the toil was in this sense forgotten, yet was it not lost. The results of it were all present and operative. No faith, no patience which it had been given to him to evince, were lost. Though the vivid impressions of that older day must needs be vanishing, the growth of the soul, the exercise and moulding of the man, which those trials had effected, remained, fitting him for the due use of honours and enjoyments. The ploughing and harrowing of the brown soil in spring are not counted to be lost when summer sees the land triumphant with such wealth of corn that the earth can no more be anywhere seen. So the life of Joseph's soul in its exaltation was prepared and had its strength from the trials of his day of toil.

And so we must remark that the main thing now about that past was, How it had been used. For it was gone now, wholly gone, except as the use of it had left results behind. It was because Joseph had been enabled to use it well, that it had left for him a capacity of joining, to a large extent, enjoyment with usefulness and growth. But for that, they had left him, most likely, with a soured and broken temper, with pride exasperated as much as it had been

mortified. I do not deny that trials have their present pathetic importance for flesh and blood ; but I say that the main question about them is revealed afterwards. When they are all gone ; when the past to which they belonged rises before us like a picture, at once old and new in strange contrast, then the question is, How have we dealt with them and used them ? What have they left behind ?

“ All my toil, *and all my father's house.*” For in those times of sorrow, had not this been the cherished employment of the captive's mind, to recall his father's house ? To keep fresh and clear every remembered scene ; to reimprint the fading outlines and freshen the colours in his memory ; to dwell on every dear remembrance of his home ? Had not this been the object of many a longing, the burden of many a wistful conjecture, how to get back, how he might come again in peace to that father's house ? We may be sure that all his dreams of well-being and deliverance took shape, found the manner of their clothing in images drawn from that one source ; and often it had been hard to forbear dwelling on them rebelliously. But now God had made him feel that the career of deliverance and comfort might, did, take another shape. He filled the present for him with other scenes, and the future with other expectations ; and He enriched all with a great sense of enjoyment, of peace and welfare, given and blessed by God. Now, therefore, his father's house, loved as it still must be, could not rise in his mind as the sole form of welfare, the sole image of good, nor could his expectations of home happiness take that form now. That too had gone from the present to the past. God had in this wise made him forget, even all his father's house.

Doubtless it shall be even so in that strangely glorious state which awaits the redeemed of God. It is not that oblivion shall swallow up the past, or that there shall be no power to recall the varied and chequered scenery of mortal

life. What is so much to us now, so interesting and important, surely shall not have become mere nothing to us then. But how altered shall be the setting and the surroundings of the vision, how new the point of view, in what a changed light shall it be seen! From what another land shall we look back on the conflicts with temptation and weariness and burdens! With what a sense of rest, of security, of victory, of power! Ah, and even on that which endeared life most to us, what we clung to, what we were most loath to let go or most yearned to attain, what most eminently seemed to surround us here with the plenty and the love of a father's house! That was good, very good, so far as God gave it and blessed it. But what shall be the peace and fulness of the time when the soul's own inheritance is come, and the heart is full at last of the present love of God. The temptation and the toil, how completely passed away! The earthly good, how superseded and replaced by the richer fruit of a better country! This shall be one of the sayings of heaven: God hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house. But it is a Joseph that says it. Fidelity and faith led him by the way, till he reached the point where such sayings came fitly from his mind and lips.

Finally, whatever might be the sense in which God made Joseph to forget, it was not in such a sense as cut the links between him and the past, nor such as should disable him from taking the tenderest concern in the welfare of his father's house. In due time this appeared. And so there is one clothed with honour in the Father's house on high, who is gone from prison and from judgment to a throne of glory. He dieth no more. For Him all suffering is gone away into the past, and with Him evermore is His own holy and perfect peace. Yet this does not disable Him from fellowship with our want and sorrow. He is *touched* with the feeling of our infirmity. And in that He hath *suffered*

being tempted, He is able also to succour them that are tempted.

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THE WESTCOTT-HORT "GENEALOGICAL
METHOD."¹

THE connexion of the Revised Version of the New Testament with the Greek text of Canon Westcott and Professor Hort may be said to be organic, whilst that text finds its scientific basis in the "method" on which I here venture a few criticisms. With the merits of the Revised Version itself I am not now concerned; nor, save as embodying in a concrete form the theory of the "method" aforesaid, and therefore furnishing its fullest illustration, with the Greek text which these distinguished scholars have edited. It may be useful, however, to extend my remarks to a few other collateral portions of the "Introduction" to that text; since there that method is propounded. Whilst the world has been torn with contention as to the "version" which is indirectly connected with the "method," I have seen no attempt to analyse and test the method itself.

But, although the even indirect connexion thus existing between the revision and the method has given the latter its greatest interest, as it has furnished its most important application, the method asserts its perfectly general scope as regards families of MSS. wherever they exist.

On this behalf, indeed, Professor Hort claims (Introduction, p. 73, Part III. § 96) that his—

"Principles of criticism hold good for all ancient texts preserved in a plurality of documents. In dealing with the text of the New Testament no new principle is needed or legitimate; but no other ancient

¹ *The Introduction and Appendix to the Westcott-Hort edition of the New Testament.* Cambridge and London: Macmillan & Co.