

gracious. It asserts that all which the sinner needs is to be found in Christ, and that all which Christ is can be obtained by the sinner, and then it lays down the one reasonable and necessary condition, that the sinner shall trust in Jesus with all his heart. No gospel could be more gracious, because on this condition of faith alone the sinner will be transported from his environment of sin and the entail of his sinful heredity broken, and he will be placed in a new environment of holiness, and be made one of a new creation. And no gospel could be more hopeful because it unites the fortunes of the sinner for time and eternity with those of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God, and in Whom dwells the whole fulness of the Godhead.

JOHN WATSON.

*JOSEPH: AN ETHICAL AND BIBLICAL STUDY.*

LECTURE I.

“THE YOUTH AND HIS DREAMS.”

GENESIS XXXVII. 1-11.

IN any walk among the hills on a summer's day we might here and there step across many little rills and take no heed; or we might come at any time to a well-head that was the beginning of a brook. But we should pause and look down the course of any slenderest stream with a thrill, if we were told that in those gentle overflowings of nature there began a river which swelled to so vast a flood that it divided kingdoms and carried fleets that determined the destinies of the world.

When we read the Book of Genesis, we have the feeling of being on the uplands of human life. There is a pleasant loneliness and leisureliness in it, and something of the peace that there is among the hills. A pathos also seems to creep along the Book, or something akin to pathos; a “pastoral

melancholy"; the feeling not so much of being alone as of being alone with God. There is the interest, too, which attaches to beginnings and simple universal influences; the green earth and the blue sky are in this book near one another—so near that they can touch and speak; and nations grow out of the names that we find among these hills. Yet severe lines are drawn there as well as those that soothe and please; the rock is beneath the turf of the grass, and the moral law parts lives as inevitably as a watershed. So there are streams on the one hand that break in torrent or stagnate in the tarn, just as on the other there are those that run far and are beneficent.

In this Book, next to the interest of the world itself beginning to be, is that of the beginnings of man's life upon it. For while, in one sense, there is an ever-renewed beginning in each man's personal history, and a fresh experiment is made in every life, yet there is a unique interest in our being shown here man after man stepping into the unproved arena of human life and attempting without precedent to find out the right way to live. And scarcely less interesting is it to see how young men were sent forth from home and from under the lee of a father's life to go afield and possess the new world. At the door of the father's tent sons were parted like streams, and "became into" many "heads," the seclusion and spell of home giving not only direction to their course, but tingeing and impregnating their character. For every lad who leaves home carries thence a record not only nor so much in outward aspect and name as in the grain and fibre of his being; yet not so, either at first or now, that a son bears the burden of his father, or a father the son's. Though life has not in this Book thickened to press and strain, the incalculable element in every human action is made plain; and though the scenery is undulating and soft, God's word is as strict on these hills as it was on Sinai's splintered

peaks. No book in the world is more distinct and definite, in spite of its gentle half-tones and glide-notes (as sweet almost at times as the voices of the forsaken garden), in declaring that God made man, and also that every man makes or mars himself.

As we read Genesis at this point, we seem to be called by the narrative to transfer our interest. There is a note of farewell in the words, "These are the generations of Jacob." His life has run rough and far, but it now loses current and will henceforward merely eddy round or quietly swell and fall to the pulse of the morning and the evening. He can make no more history, but history must be made. He will stay at home, but his sons must go out and abroad. So he stands at the tent door, and his sons are around him, and, like Jesse's before Samuel at Bethlehem, they pass before us. Which of these twelve is the greatest? Which of them will leave his mark on his age and the world? In which is the hiding of power? Among them there is a king—one wisest, strongest, best; one of invincible heart! Him we must find and follow; and the Bible here gives us the lead when, turning from the veteran to a stripling, and making an almost pathetic transition from father to son, it says quite simply, "Joseph being seventeen years old."

The truth which we wish to keep clear and full beyond the facts of this and every life of which we read in Scripture is the truth of life as given in Jesus Christ. That life is the centre and glory of the Bible as it is the victory and crown of human life in the world. As if along vast echoing halls of history, human life, whenever nobly moved, advanced and converged towards one Master Light; and the Bible arranges its biography so that we are shown in remotest ages this central Light of life falling from afar on the faces of all seekers after truth. And what is more suggestive than even this light on their face is the likeness

in their outward life to the life of the Man who was God. For the truth of human life was being sought and found in action sooner than in speculation and theory. Before psalmists or prophets or preacher-kings in Jerusalem had sought or found that thought which they felt so corresponded to the thought of God that they called it *the truth*, men of like passions with ourselves were trying to prove the truth in their lives. They were making their life a noble strife with circumstances. They were refusing to be defeated of time and chance. They faced the world's temptations and trials, and stood up to its storm; and in their own life strained and bruised, they purchased with pain a larger life and nobler rights for others. All this that we now say is conspicuously proved and plain in the life of Joseph. Not only is the reflection of Christ's light bright on his face, as we see it across the ages still, shining along his life's splendid moral adventure to victory; but his outward life, in much of its feature and fate, suggestively resembles that of the God-man. We wish, therefore, to do something more and better than read this life with you as an interesting excerpt from human history. We do not want to bring the story of this life home to ourselves by detaching the leaves on which it is written, but rather to turn round upon its central truth the great circle of revelation, of which this forms a part, until these far-away facts of Genesis are brought nigh unto us and are at the same time seen in line with the life of Christ.

The life of Joseph is especially suited for consideration in the present day. This is not the age of chivalry and romance; it is eminently a practical age—the day of the man with a long, level head. A man like Joseph is the man to get on to-day. He is not a man of sentiment or sensation, but a steady, vigorous, well-balanced man of the world. His religion is a quiet, persistent motive, rather than a noticeable and arresting emotion. We read neither

of his understandings nor misunderstandings with his best nature ; he had no quarrel with God, and his life seemed to need no repentance. Indeed, but for the occasional flash of sudden fire when any one tampered with his soul, one could not guess how the Divine was constantly and silently feeding his life. And so we feel that his nature, though so full of the pain of the higher life, possessed its power rather than its passion ; and we see in him, on the ordinary paths and at the common levels of life, a shrewd, resolute, matter-of-fact man, pursuing the opportunity of his daily life with the steady, swift speed of an instinct, and at every turn making the path of duty a path of success. He is not even in the direct line of blessing, and thus, in a sense he was not responsible to the high calling of God for far futures of the world's history and heavens yet to be. He has heard only the high call of God to duty immediate and personal in the world as it was before him. So he does not revel in contemplations and visions of God—communings high apart on the brow and breeze of the hills ; but when he dreams, it is of getting on in the world ; and when he sees God, it is when He is serving Him neither by tent nor altar, but trying to do his duty in palace-prison and prison-palace.

This is the kind of man we need in the present day. We do not need new revelations nor better theologians to interpret the old ones ; we could not well, take them as a whole, have better preachers, nor could we possibly have keener church courts or church congresses more wide-awake and wary. We are in need of none of these ; we have them all. What we want is better men and women, a higher percentage of those who will neither do wrong, nor suffer wrong to be done ; true to their trust as citizens in a self-governing community ; truer when they have their pens in their hand, or are ringing the gold upon their counters ; truer when they are on their honour in their master's house

and nobody is suspecting them ; truer when they are in the family circle at home and nobody sees ; and able to look themselves fair in the face as men and women when the Spirit of God holds up its mirror before them. As we see it, the life of Joseph is luminous with light and lessons for the present day. It comes very nigh us : it may come home to us. It does not tower like a mountain high above the plain, till it is vast and grand, but dim of mist, enfolded like Abraham's ; nor is it sweet and willing like Isaac's, pliant as willows by a watercourse on a hillside ; nor is it like Jacob's life, a shapely result at the last, but made beautiful out of poor materials, an ideal realized in clay. The life of Joseph rises with verve and spring of polished marble like a statue in the street, dusty with the stir of the market place, and steady with its composure and strength—not too high to be seen, nor too ethereal to arrest the average man—a memorial and a model with a silent message to all.

And what an old, old story this story of Joseph is ! It is told at the end of the book which tells how things began. Men have read it from long ago ; how they read it, our fathers have told us ; and men are reading it still. Jesus Christ would know it when He was a boy, and must have thrilled with a strange consciousness as He read of a well-beloved son being sent among unkind brethren. Shakespeare—mightiest in thought of all men—makes it the *motif* of *The Tempest* in which he breathed out the deepest thought of his vast soul, the last he said before he said no more. Goethe tells us how the story moved him, when, in his youth, that intellect was stirring which mastered earth but never submitted to Heaven, and which has left us great results that, after all, are only like pictures without horizon, or frescoes upon a dungeon wall. What a story it has been and is for all ! A child's story and yet a man's ! A tale not more for the nursery, fireside, and

children in their early bed, than for the legislator in his halls, and for every young man ere he goes through crowded streets to desk and drawer in his counting-house in the morning. Alone and apart this story of Joseph is clear and luminous; and, if taken into the hand and held before the life, it might be as a lamp unto the feet of any young man of aspiration, but, because of its vital relation to the Bible—the great instrument of light—any one can make for himself the attachment which will bring into this simple tale of his childhood a power with which he can search his own life's far horizons, and also draw into his soul from his life's larger relations the motive and thrill of Divine inspiration. To this highest service may the Holy Spirit now employ through us the Word which of old He gave to the world in this wonderful *life*, and which He is continually giving to the world still in this *Scripture*! May we together so search, that these chapters, while they testify of Joseph, shall, in their deepest intent and motive, testify of Jesus Christ!

“Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren, and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives.” In these olden times, when the world went slowly round and life was driven with a slack rein, a lad of seventeen was young. The growth of the mind was leisurely and easy, and the nerve and muscle of manhood came slowly. It was not then as now when growth is forced, and when most men are all the men they are to be before they are twenty. Joseph at seventeen would be a sweet, simple child, and some of his brethren in that mixed household were twice his age. All the lad's life was yet to be shaped and made. The most precious thing in all the world was there in raw material, and a fabric is to be made of worth beyond any price of earth. A human life is the only thing in all the world that is immortal, and they who give

it its character and set are doing work for eternity. Take care, old man in the tent, doating and fond! and take care, you rough brothers in the field! lest you spoil the boy!

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children because he was the son of his old age, and he made him a coat of many colours; and when his brethren saw that his father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.” Every young life, let it be lived where you will, is lived more or less between the two mighty powers of love and hatred. Between that which would hurt and that which protects; as between two poles, every life is in a sense poised. Like a plant, a life grows up with a summer and a winter in its year, a day and a night in its twenty-four hours. In a sharp, accentuated way, as if to give the lad a regimental training for a hard life at the very first, Joseph knew at home the influences which harass and hurt; and, on the other hand, he had there a retreat of selectest shelter. His father loved him: his brethren hated him. It was love that clothed his life as the sun clothes the flowers, in a coat of many colours; it was the hatred that, like the darkness, took the coat of many colours away. His father’s love drew out the finer characteristics of the boy, as sunlight opens out a flower; but his brothers’ unkindness made him shrink and closed up the leaves again as a touch of frost or the darkness of night does. So the life grew up and took shape, with its own instinctive response and recoil amongst its circumstances, hardening here to the repeated shock of the hate, and softly awakening there to the continual surprise of the love. It was well that there was this double influence on the lad’s life—antipathy as well as sympathy; if he had had only the shelter of the tent, and always the old man’s bosom to fly to, he might have grown to a shy sweetness, and been facile and feminine; and if he had known only the hatred and the coarse jest of his brethren in the fields, his nature

might have been soured or crushed. But, between the two, if there be any makings in the fellow at all, the man will be made; and there will be both deep tap-root and rough bark to his life, as well as a continual power to grow in love and light.

But are there any makings in him at all? Is there any sign given at this critical and formative period in the youth's life that make us watch him with interest or follow him with hope? Is this weed or flower that here begins to show and grow? Is this a hardy oak seedling or only a soft spruce sapling that thus hears the voice of spring? For the inherent spirit in the man makes all the difference. Each tree has its own dialogue with the wind, and soon says in its own tones how it will face the weather and fare in the changing seasons. It is not the way in which circumstances face a man, but the way in which he faces them that fixes his fate. We must search into the under-life of Joseph himself if we are to get any hint beforehand of his future; we must get a glimpse of his soul, if that shows itself at either door or lattice.

The suggestions here are slender and fugitive, and difficult to capture and question; but, in this spiritually inerrant Book, the slightest sign in pausing light or passing shadow betokens spirit. That is not a talebearer who comes from the fields, and brings from the big men there an evil report. There is neither in his face nor in his step a suggestion of meanness or stealth. There is not a shred of evidence that Joseph took part with the rest in evil, and then went home to tell; and there is evidence, of fine quality, if there be little of it, that the youth recoiled with all his soul from what he heard his brothers say and saw them do. His soul said in his face, "How can I do this great wickedness," all the way home, as he went to his confidant and companion there. Telling tales! peaching! Why, in one sense there was no relationship between the mere boy and these wild,

grown men with their wives and their herds! But there was a closeness of companionship between him and his father. He had his father's company and his father's confidence; he was "the son of his old age." Jacob had loved Rachel, and was that love an idle abstraction now? Had it not both place and play in his life still? Had it not a continual rejuvenescence and satisfaction in Joseph? He, perhaps, had his mother's face or his mother's ways; and though Jacob's heart was now too old and slow to send the love out into all the movements of his life as it had done when years were as a day in Syria for the love he bore her, yet it pressed along the old channels towards her boy; and, like an old mossy tree at the budding time, his life, hollow and broken though it was, felt from Joseph a breath as of dead summers, and knew again the passion of the spring, and "he loved Joseph more than all his brethren." It was a sort of lover's love between that father and this son, and it would have things to say in silence; there would be whisperings in it, and youth and age meeting in this fine affinity would have secrets and confidences. And could any instinct have been more just or more justifiable than when this secluded boy relieved his soul of a burden by speaking to his father? Detain the spirit which in these verses tells how Joseph sheered off from those brethren, and betook himself to fidelity with his father, and question it as to what it would suggest by telling us so! and we think the answer will be, "A soul of goodness in the lad."

The greatness which was latent in Joseph is more clearly shown. Its evidence is plainly writ; we have it here in large letters. Joseph's soul foresees and foreshadows its own power in his dreams. A daring painter, when his inspiration is on him, will make a canvas of anything that lies to his hand, and borrow anywhere for pigment—so only may he say in his own language what has come to him! And this child must speak, and in words of one kind or

another must promise to be "father of the man." The jibe and scorn of his brethren drove the lad's soul in upon itself all the day long, whether they kept the sheep or reaped the fields. They spoiled the boy's bit of life every day, and made havoc of the present; but his irrepressible soul projected itself on the future, and in splendid fantasy handled there the sad materials of his daily experience at home. The memory of wrong and insult both in the harvest field when they were cutting and binding sheaves, and on the hillside under the stars when they watched their flocks by night, supplied the imagery of his dreams when he slept. His soul told him that things were not as they ought to be, and foretold that they must be other and better than they were; and so deep and sure was his soul in this conviction that it said so twice. A strong man's muscles will stretch and tighten in his sleep as he dreams of a difficulty; and a great man's soul can show its strength by the way it wakes and rises and goes forth while deep sleep is on him. Something said to Joseph that he was a better man than his brethren, and that, given time and chance, they would bow down to him one and all; he felt and knew that his day was coming; and he showed how strong he was in the way he handled the future in dream-vision. The man, who thus imagines, prophesies; he cannot choose but be great; he may be backed to win at any odds; his dreams will all translate into facts.

Another suggestion is given here as to the kind of man Joseph was to be. But it is not quite another and separate characteristic that we find and now indicate. The suggestion is of atmosphere around the life, which not only was the breath of his being, but which tinted rather than shaded his goodness and his greatness into harmony. There was an open frankness about the boy; it amounted almost to simplicity—unsuspicious because unconscious of evil. In spite of all the enmity and malice of his brothers,

Joseph seems not to have had even the caution to conceal anything, but to have run to them in his own mild surprise and told his dreams straight out to them. This is a fine quality in a human soul; it gives it fragrance and flavour. It makes the child's face sunny, and it exalts the way and word of a child out of prose into rhyme. This artlessness in the boy betokens genuineness in the man. The look of self-consciousness in a lad's face is an unhappy sign for any heart of love to detect there; it almost suggests that in his child-garden of life he has heard the Tempter. But proportionately joyful is it to see a face that is open and fearless and trustful; for, as long as there is nothing to conceal, our nature has neither the instinct to conceal nor even a place in which to conceal things; and as long as we are simple-hearted we shall be single-eyed. So the whole possibilities of Joseph's future seem to enlarge before our eyes when we see him not only free from any need of protective cunning, but so "one-fold" and sincere that he will not hide his dream, even from the men who may jest and ridicule when his own soul is full. This immediate and child-like veracity will be like a protective fibre around both his goodness and his power; it is a token of the special presence of God; and the men who have it are they on whom the flame does not kindle when they walk through fire.

Thus Holy Scripture delicately outlines for us here the features of Joseph's youth, showing us at the earliest stages of development one of the most sane and capable of its heroes, and permitting us to feel the first heavings of a soul that cannot choose but be great. There is no lack of force in the character; and on the moral side it is sensitive in its shrinking from evil, and at its spiritual centre it is finely poised. We may predict that its orbit will be wide and not eccentric, and its goings will be steady, if only it be true to itself. Both father and brothers felt that Joseph was great

and somehow carried the keys of the future. The brothers would have made less ado about him and his dreams if they had seen no more in what he said than the arrogance of a spoiled child; and the father observed his sayings. The only fear is of the lad himself, as he begins to feel his power; and is there not a suggestion of his risk given when we hear his father's word after the youth has told his second dream? The second was only the first flung on a screen of larger scale; but did he tell it in quite the same simple, naïve way in which he had told the first? Could there have been a slight touch of conceit, a little vapouring, in his look or tone, when his father needed to say with some smartness, "What is this dream that thou hast dreamed?" or was the old man only shielding the child in a subtle way from the jealousy of the rest? However, this was the first result of the contact of this fresh young soul with its circumstances: his brethren envied him; but his father kept the saying in mind. Yet neither his brethren's envy nor his father's fondness can fix his fate; nor will this be done even by rougher circumstances and finer compensations than those at home. There is metal in him to make a man, and there will be strain enough put on him to try the strongest as he stands in life with his hand on the tiller and his face to the storm. But it will rest with the little dreamer himself to make or mar his life; and to the end it will be his relation to his dream-vision and his ideal rather than to his real and actual circumstances that will count the most.

The Bible is a plain and practical book. It here has a plain lesson for *Brethren*. We are each responsible only for our own powers and our own use of them; we have no right to envy the fellow by our side who is better endowed than we are. Most of us have to be content in the family circle with second or third place, and in the world with a private's place in the ranks. It is a poor business to bury

our one talent, because others have two and some have ten.

Life is too short to waste  
In critic peep or cynic bark,  
Quarrel or reprimand.  
'Twill soon be dark!  
Up! mind thine own aim, and  
God speed the mark!

A plain lesson also for *Parents!* There is no duty in all the world that ranks prior to a parent's duty to his children. He should observe them all and deal wisely with them each. There is no wrong in loving one best; a parent cannot love all alike though he try. But the best-loved one is always a parent's danger; and while his heart swells with pride or hope as word or deed of a promising child pleases him, a wise love will never fail in the rebuke of fault or folly. Israel's rebuke to Joseph cut at a weed which might easily have sown itself broadcast, till the rich nature of the lad and all his powers were wasted in egotism and vanity.

A plain lesson also to *Young Men!* You have your life work to do, and you have to do it against hardship and hazard. You have each your varying dream, your vision, your hope. Your start in life is at best a venture; you have to guess and then to make the best you can of your choice. You may fumble in your bosom for a parchment on which you fain would find written what you are destined to do in the world; but you will search for one in vain—there is none there; you must take the responsibility of choice on yourself, and dumb destiny is standing by and she will strike you if you make a mistake. Yet no! Search your bosom deeper, and you will find your life work written in subtler hieroglyphic! Your earliest interests, your first enthusiasms, your two-fold dream, are the first order of the Great Taskmaster for you; these indicate the direction in which your power lies, and your work is there. The young

painter scratches his nursery walls, and is deciphering his own instincts; the orator makes a pulpit of his father's chairs, preaches to an impatient audience, and proclaims his own future; Joseph dreams of obeisant sheaf and obeisant star, and predicts his genius for administration. Perhaps the nineteenth century equivalent of the dreams of long ago, when life was simpler and its signs were plainer, is the young man's vision of an ideal. For every ideal is a prophecy of its own fulfilment. It is his Merlin Gleam! and

Not of the sunlight,  
Not of the moonlight,  
Not of the starlight,  
    O young Mariner!  
Down to the haven,  
Call your companions,  
Launch your vessel  
And crowd your canvas;  
And ere it vanishes  
    Over the margin,  
After it, follow it,  
    Follow the Gleam!

These are dreams and ideals of earth, important enough! But there are better dreams than these, and we all have had them. We have all had them—some of the brightest of them, alas! long ago!—dreams of things not seen as yet. We have had our dream-visions of heaven and God. These dreams were our soul-muttering within us, telling us to live with a God-like purpose and our face towards heaven. Where are these dreams now? Has heaven and its higher life become a nearer reality to us?—a more glorious vision and a fuller hope? Or, as we wander through a more homeless world, has our dream of better things vanished? and is the far horizon—once so fair—now only cold and grey? Ah! I wish we all might meet that Man—the Man of sympathy and of sorrows—the Man with the winning face and the eyes of pity that forget their own sorrows for ours—

the Man who points to heaven, and who says, "In My Father's house are many mansions"; and who, if the vision of long ago begins to dawn again on our life and we shrink back from it so far and so fair because we feel unworthy, can take us by the hand and lead us onward, upward, towards it all, saying, "I am the Way."

ARMSTRONG BLACK.

#### NOTE ON ACTS IX. 19-25.

IN Acts ix. 19-25, the passage which relates St. Paul's stay in Damascus after his conversion, there are two notes of time, viz., "certain days" (*ἡμέρας τινάς*, v. 19), and "many days" (*ἡμέραι ἱκαναί*, v. 23). These two expressions are commonly understood of two successive periods of time, as if the writer meant that after recovering his strength Saul was "certain days" with the disciples at Damascus, and that immediately after the end of those days he began to preach, and that then "many days were fulfilled"—that is, a second period of "many days" elapsed—before the Jews took counsel to kill him, and caused his departure from the city. This way of interpreting the passage will have attractions for those who try to find a place in it where they can fit in St. Paul's journey to Arabia (Gal. i. 17).

But Prof. Ramsay calls attention to the fact that "it is characteristic of Luke to define the entire stay before relating some incidents that occurred in it" (see his references to Acts xiv. 28, xviii. 11, xix. 10, xx. 6, 7, at pages 153, 256, and 289 of *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*). This being so, it seems probable that the correct interpretation of the passage Acts ix. 19-25 is to take the "certain days" of verse 19 as describing the whole period of Saul's stay in Damascus, during which period all the incidents which follow in the narrative took place.