

beginning of the second century B.C. marriage between first cousins had become legal, and in 49 A.D. marriage between an uncle and his niece (if she were his brother's daughter) was legalized in order to admit the marriage of Claudius and Agrippina.¹ Again, marriage with a step-parent or stepchild or parent-in-law, etc., was never allowed in Roman custom or law; affinity, in the direct line, always was a bar to marriage. Stepbrother and step-sister could never marry. This Corinthian marriage was, and always remained, illegal in Roman law.

The Corinthians, in practice, stood on the Greek level of moral feeling in regard to marriage; but Paul could count on the knowledge of Roman custom, which was to be expected in a *Colonia*, even an eastern *Colonia*.

W. M. RAMSAY.

JOSEPH: AN ETHICAL AND BIBLICAL STUDY.

LECTURE II.

DURING the seventeen years of his boyhood and youth, Joseph's life was being equipped and fitted. He was, in those childhood's days of shelter and seclusion, like a ship that is being rigged and manned within its harbour. Shape was being given to his life by outward circumstances, and the spirit was being developed in the lad which would make headway or leeway or no way at all whenever the time came for him to be launched on the world. The sea, with its tumult of voice and motion, was awaiting him; but, whilst his father's house was his home, he knew only the safe seclusion within the gates.

So it is with every youth in every home. With some quiet years, shut off from stress and strife, the lives of all

¹ But marriage between an uncle and his sister's daughter was never allowed by Roman law nor between a nephew and aunt.

of us begin. There the waters around us are at rest ; they heed not the loud winds when they call and the storms outside the harbour do not vex them. Yet even in calm childhood there grows within us a consciousness of the busy world awaiting us ; its great breath now and again is felt on our brow, and sometimes even within the gates a heave will come like an underwave of the moving sea. These signs are like an inarticulate call to the ship to go down and do business in the great waters. And, sooner or later, with its balance or its list, with its sufficiency of character or without, every life must launch out into the deep.

Far in the vale of Hebron, at dead of night, when all the land was still, there had come to Joseph the voice of the world. From beyond the gates of the hills of his home it came to him like the broken noise of battle, and it called to him while others slept. He heard it only through his dreams ; but his heart rose at the call and roused like a heart of war. He heard it and responded to it before the time, and his instinct and desire were knocking at the gates long before they were opened. With that strong soul of his heaving in its sense of power, he was unconsciously calling, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates !" But opened to thee now the gates shall be, O Joseph, the son of Israel !

The picture of the old wanderer Jacob, as given here (*vv.* 13, 14), is natural and touching. The sons grow up, and their lives have a wide circuit far from home ; but the father's life ages and slows, and summer by summer his rounds are nearer the doors, until he is so feeble and frail that he cannot go afield at all and is always at home. But his thoughts wander afar, and his interests are with his sons and their flocks, and he wearies to know where they are and how things are going with them ; and so he sends Joseph to see. The much hangs on the little in this world, the little wheels in life turn the big ones : "he sent him out of the vale of Hebron and he came to Shechem" ; that does

not seem much, but that was all, and it was enough. The gates are already open, and the floods are now lifting up their voice. Thus simply Joseph went out of his father's house one day; and, as fathers do, Jacob would stand watching as long as he could see him. There is pathos in it, and it is happening every day. You too may look at the lad going away; it will be a long time before he is back; I hope he has taken enough with him, and that he has his loins girded, and a sure staff in hand, for he has long wandering and perilous fords before him.

The next glimpse we get of Joseph (*vv.* 15, 16) he is off his way a little and wandering in the field. Dreamers are a little apt to wander. Perhaps he was feeling the spell of circumstances, and opening his eyes to the surprise of the world of which he had had a dream-vision before. Perhaps he was dreaming a new dream, a day-dream with strength and substance in it. We are safe to say that he had his breathless, eerie moments; with the feeling of dim things impending as he tacked and veered with swift steps in the unknown fields. He would in after memory say of that day, "The sky seemed not a sky of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds."

The road that a man of genius would take might be a long way about for most of us to take; and if we be sent to seek the brethren, we need not follow Joseph as he drifts in the field. We had better do our business and not dream—had better keep the straight road and not wander in the field. Every genius has his satellites—an ill-trimmed set of rushlights they usually are, and of eccentric orbit. When we imitate a man, let us imitate him in his greatness and not in his wanderings in the field!

A word by the way (*v.* 17) set Joseph right, and sent him on his swift, unsuspecting way. Never did a lamb of their flocks gambol more thoughtlessly into peril than Joseph into the hands of his cruel brethren. Think of the open-

eyed, child-like joy in which, with a rush at the last, he made for his brothers! And think of the chill all through his soul, as if of death, when he saw their stare and felt it like the curse of their eye upon his life! His would be then an earlier and more bitter cry than Prince Arthur's to Hubert:

My eyes are out,
Even with the fierce looks of these bloody men.

The reference to the dreams (*v.* 18) shows what it was that rankled deepest in their breast. Jealousy had rusted in their heart, and when it now stirred there it made nasty records of itself. They could have borne merely a flippant favourite of their father's dotage; but they feel that Joseph is to be feared because he was both great and good, and because he seemed to both contradict and counterwork them in their meaner life schemes. So the sooner he is clean out of the way the better it will be for them! And so there, under an open sky, and in a lonely world, and under the eye of God alone, as with Abel's nearer the beginning, hatred devoted a brother to death.

We may mark how the passions of the brethren rose to their power! "They hated him"; that was all at first; then "they could not speak peaceably unto him"; and "they hated him yet the more"; but now they are ready for open outrage on his life! The passion has worked to madness, like a venom in the blood, and now they resolve on murder; they name it out to one another—a word which would have startled them if they had heard it but in a whisper not long before. But they now make up their mind to do it: "Let us slay him and cast him into some pit"; and they resolve to cover their retreat with lies: "We will say, some evil beast hath devoured him"; while they whip up their passion to fury with a laugh and a sneer: "And we shall see what will become of his dreams."

Now you must allow me to enter your own hearts with you ; it is not nice work we have to do, but we cannot help it. Every envious, unkind thought or feeling in your breast is a young disguised murder. The men of old time said, "Thou shalt not kill"; but Jesus said, "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause is in danger of the same judgment. Therefore we must deal with our passions. Look often round your hearts; be suspicious about any lurking feeling that you find there; put your foot on the viper's egg if you can. "A snake's small eye blinks dull and shy," but we are responsible for every passion in our breasts. They grow to their size, coiled up; they grow to their strength, sleeping; they always startle by the way they can spring. "Even before Joseph was come near, when the brethren saw him afar off," their passions had fastened on him, and his life was doomed. This, then, is the lesson which we must read to *ourselves* out of these verses; we must not be content to let a thought of ill-will to any one occur to our mind and then vanish away forgotten. Not so, by any means! An evil thought, no matter how momentary, must be faced round upon. It is a foe. It must be seized, struggled with, and strangled; it has the fangs of death. Less will not do; it slips out of sight only to live and feed within you; the tender feeling that you had yesterday and that is gone to-day has been broken by it; the good purposes that are not to be found where they once were have been eaten up by it. Your passion is growing stronger, more subtle, more dangerous, more impatient of restraint. You must not allow yourself to hate Joseph, for "he that hateth his brother is a murderer."

Reuben (*v.* 21) had a tenderer heart than the rest, or a more quick conscience; for he interfered and saved Joseph's life. But he had not the courage of his convictions, and dared not brook the scorn of his comrades by

standing up for the innocent. He tried by a roundabout process to save Joseph while he saved himself. He knew the right, but dared not resist the wrong. He had not the makings of a martyr, of a *man* in him. He had not learned to say the monosyllables of conduct—the “yes” and “no” of morality; and in learning them, and in taking short steps on the path of duty, there is more difficulty, perhaps, than in doing heroic deeds. The daring to say “no,” the taking of the first few steps because the right is right, are harder than the climbing of the scaffold stair at the end. The longest and most heroic march is made up of single steps from humble duty to humble duty, the heroic being just the next step at some point after humble ones. One courageous word from Reuben might have saved Joseph; but the word was not spoken, and Joseph must suffer (*v.* 23). And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him. And they took him and cast him into a pit . . . and they sat down to eat bread!

The cruelty becomes somewhat exquisite. It wréaks itself on the old man’s gift—as heartlessly as if they had hidden a blind man’s staff—more heartless than the soldiers who cast lots on the coat beside the cross—the coat woven without seam, the work of some patient believer—a work of love, a gift of kindness. One coarse stroke would have been kinder than the slow torture of the stripping hands and the dry pit. “The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.”

There is in this simple incident almost an epitome of all the tyranny of the world. On the side of the oppressors there is power, and uneasy kings have thought to curb a human spirit and silence the complainings of an oppressed heart by letting men down into their dungeons. The Chillon ballroom and the Doge’s banquet-hall were built

alike, hard by the dungeon stairs. The Baptist, when the feast was merry overhead, heard the executioner at his door; and, like Herod with the Baptist, the brethren sat down to eat while Joseph lay in the pit; and they thought the dreamer was silenced, and his dreams dreamed out. They had meanwhile shut the dreamer's mouth; but they had not erased his visions. They could not cancel the past; and there the dreams were. They might close his eyes, but thus they would only draw a curtain on which over against themselves the fulfilment would be written in letters of fire. They were on the wrong track altogether. They had after all but got the lad a few feet down out of sight into a fast-whirling earth; but already the sentinels of God were in charge of their ready dungeon. God's universe is on the side of truth and freedom; and, while the brethren eat their bread, the wheels of Earth and Time are grinding against them.

But what an experience for the boy who but yesterday was his father's child at home! How must he have felt when he struggled in the strong grip of his brothers, and saw their angry eyes and heard the fierce words over him! How must he have read vengeance as they stripped him of his father's coat, and revenged themselves on *it*! How must he have been moved when he found himself in the narrow well, with all the summer shut out and only a spot of blue sky to look up to! Ah! I said that I hoped, when Joseph left his home, he had enough with him. We may look at these circumstances and this fate from Joseph's point of view, as well as from that of the brethren. Is our own life strange to such experiences as these? Are we not often suddenly dropped from sunshine and summer into a narrow place—as if unfriendly hands had seized us—where the only point to which we can look is the far-away soft blue of another world? Then it is that we seem to have been robbed of the Father's love—to have

been stripped of the Father's gift — for likely enough Joseph never realized till then how much he had been loved at home—and we feel bare and cold and outcast—lost and left, and in all the wide world “our occupation gone.”

The only thing for Joseph to do then and there was simply to wait. To struggle was of no avail, to resist was hopeless. He might weep, and he must have wondered. He would feel round the dull dumb earth walls of his extemporized prison, but his heart would be always going back to his home, and back on the remembrance of his father; and then always his eye would wander away back to the point of quiet blue sky, and he would look at it till his tears were dry. If encouraged he was, he must there and then have encouraged himself only in God; and if dream he had there, it would be a grander dream—a Bethel dream, that comes when the sun is set and the pillow is hard, and which makes of the steepest, flintiest foreground a path of golden stairs for a descending God. If Joseph had to learn that, with all his sense of power and all his genius for administration, he could not get on without the help of God, surely the gates were not long open, and he was not far gone from home till this truth was taught him sternly, “Without Me ye can do nothing.

Verse 25: “And the brethren lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead, with their spices, and balm, and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.” And they bartered their brother away for a few shillings, “and the Ishmaelites brought Joseph into Egypt.”

The second thoughts were better than the first in this case, and Judah's thoughts afterwards were perhaps slightly kinder. At any rate, the first wild impulse of the heartless brothers grew subdued in *caution*. They calculated more exactly the profit. “What *profit* is it if we slay our brother

and conceal his blood? Come and let us sell him; . . . and his brethren were content." And so the Hebrew stripling passed into new hands; and little wist the Ishmaelites what they did when they took him away! But the dreamer's life has passed into new conditions, and for such a dreamer new conditions are only new possibilities.

Surely, since the world began and man upon it, so slender and tender a slip of human life was never subjected to coarser gardening! Is it a governed or a misgoverned world, where such things as these are possible? Or is it a haphazard life that each man lives—a game of chance on a scale gigantic? Or shall we ask,—

How God can dumbness keep,
While sin keeps grinning through His house of time,
Stabbing His saintliest children in their sleep,
And staining holy walls with clots of crime?

God was thus, and thus early, giving elementary lessons in life and its laws. He was letting this light break lightly on the awakening eyes of His infant church, which in the fulness of the time was to see greater things than this. For was not the best, and the best-loved, life of earth not bartered away one night in Jerusalem to coarser men for as much silver as Judas could get for it? And in the breast of Him whom Judas sold, was there not the knowledge of His Father's love and acquiescence in His will? And was there not also the assurance that out of such hours of agony and wrong are born the higher good of the larger life, when He said, "I go to prepare a place for you"? In such hours—"dumb hours, clothed in black"—when the Infinite Love seems to turn His back upon His own, He is only going before and opening the gates—opening up an outlet for our life upon the farther away and the better—and He Himself is leading forward.

It is life's universal law because it is God's universal way: all life is born in travail, and born again in travail and

sorrow continually ; the more light, the darker shadow ; the more love, the sharper possibility of pain ; gates of life and gates of death opening over against each other, and the great transitions made when the Great Love looks away from us, leads forward and says to us, "Follow."

This Scripture seems to compel me with a willing compulsion to address some word of point and purpose to parents in this matter. And could I do so with a more significant object-lesson in our eyes than of this lad of well-nigh forty centuries ago leaving his father's house and getting his first shock and surprise of the world? That is the way, more or less, that lads have gone from home ever since, are going out every day, and will go out whilst the world lasts. That boy of yours, who is all the world to you, whom day and night your love has been sheltering, and whose going out has been day by day just the beginning of your wearying till he returned, will have to go forth and face the rebuff, and the laugh, and the peril of life for himself. We pad and soften nowadays the rough edge and bare walls of the wide house of life ; but every one must feel the cut and the keenness of life for himself. Every youth must buy his own experience, and pay a long price for it ; the best often is paid for with blood and tears. Surely for the love you bear your own, you should anticipate while you may the opening of the gates to them, and out of the stores of your own memory and the sanctified record of other lives seek to supply them with such principles as have been proved to be sufficient—and alone sufficient—to steady and sustain lives, however the winds blow or the currents run ! Think of the wise and great who, like Joseph, have been more than conquerors against a thousand odds ; think of the great God who is in Christ the way—the one way—the way through all the difficulty to a perfect end ; and think—think of those who have made shipwreck :

The wind is from the sunny south,
The tide is full and free,
The fleet is near the harbour mouth,
The wives are on the quay;
But there are some red, tawny sails,
That never come from sea.

To young men—the covenant sons of our Christian homes, the covenant sons of our Church's holy baptism—my word even from this transcript in God's Book of Joseph's strange experiences, is one of good cheer. Take yourselves at your best, and believe in yourselves there! Good always pays better than bad, and the best within you (if you will only give it a fair chance) will pay you a thousand times over. We cannot always be about our fathers' doors. We must get the comfortable coat of home love and home care stripped off our back, and we cannot expect the consideration to be shown us that we knew at home. Within a coat of many colours we may develop our tenderer, finer possibilities, but it is rather a coat of mail in which we need to be girt when we have to enter the fray of life. And no matter how rudely you are driven of circumstance and seeming chance, no man anywhere can do us real wrong—no man can wrong the lad who does not wrong himself. Never lose heart! All things are working together for good to those who love God; who are the called (and who yield to His call) according to the highest purpose. Even your foes are furthering your best interests: the traitor completed the Divine purpose in Christ; the traitor brothers the Divine purpose in Joseph. Things are not—they are *better*—than they seem. This let us learn to-night, as we see even such harsh circumstance in the life of this sweet young life, and read what is written of it as God's own word about Joseph and about ourselves.

ARMSTRONG BLACK.