

Israel: A Prince with God

The Story of Jacob Retold

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CHAPTER SIX

THE EDUCATION OF HOME

Genesis 29

“Life is only bright when it proceedeth
Towards a truer, deeper Life above;
Human Love is sweetest when it leadeth
To a more Divine and perfect Love.”

- A. A. Proctor

NEXT to the love of God comes the love of man or woman, as a factor in the education of a human spirit. Each one of us is capable of giving out a vast wealth of love; we must love and be loved: and almost everything depends on the twin-spirit whom we choose as the object of our affection; and as the hearth at whose fires we may warm ourselves, when chilled and repelled by an unfriendly world. That love may make or mar us; may transfigure or degrade us and which it shall be is settled by the objects whom we choose, and the way in which we treat them.

Jacob's encounter with Rachel at the first well he came to, reminds us that though there is nothing more important than the union of heart with heart, there is nothing into which people drift more heedlessly. A fancy, a look, a smile, a touch, a moment's talk in a crowded room, amid the excitement of an evening's gaiety any of these is deemed sufficient to justify a choice, which may affect the destiny of the spirit for evermore.

Of course we do not deny that Jacob may find his other self in the beautiful girl at the well, under the Eastern noon; and that she may prove to be the one without whom his life would be incomplete. It may so happen, through the kind providence of God, which shields us from dangers we do not perceive, and loads us with benefits we do not deserve.

Nevertheless, it is the highest folly to leave so momentous a matter to be decided by a transient passion, or by the charms of a fascinating manner and a pretty face.

- Do not carry your heart on your sleeve.
- Do not let your affections trail loosely on the ground, to catch in every thorn-brake.
- Gird up the loins of your mind; test the spirits whether they be of God.
- Do not take an irrevocable step without earnest prayer that He would still the voices of self-choice; keep you from making a mistake; and reveal to you His will.

It is not enough to think and pray thus when a new affection has already flung its spell over you. At such a time, the soul is thrilling beneath its new-found rapture; and it is much harder for the judgment to discover the voice of God, because the heart deflects it as the mass of iron in a modern steamboat deflects the needle from the pole. And therefore, it is of the highest importance that these subjects be made a matter of prayer and thought in the earlier stages of life, when a supreme affection is, as yet, an ideal and a dream. Let mothers speak of them to their daughters; and fathers to their sons as Isaac did to Jacob (ch. 28:1, 2).

Let young men, whenever they think of these matters, turn their thoughts into prayers that God would guide them as He did Abraham's servant to the woman whom He has chosen to be their helpmeet. And let Christian women lay aside all idea of attracting men to themselves. Let them quiet their hearts as weaned babes. Let them constitute themselves the wards of God: leaving Him to choose for them the one who shall give them strength for sweetness; defence for weakness; protection for helplessness; and love for love.

There is no training of such value to man or woman as the training of the home to which the deep instincts of our nature, and the most solemn sanctions of the Bible, point us. Jacob found it so. Rachel and Leah had a very powerful influence upon his character and life; and we need to take warning by his mistakes, and reap his rewards.

I. THE FOUR CONDITIONS OF A TRUE HOME

(1) *There must be a supreme affection.*

This was clearly a love-match. "**Jacob loved Rachel**" (verse 18), is a sufficient explanation. And no marriage is Heaven-made, Heaven-sent, or Heaven-sanctioned, which does not spring from a supreme love. Alas, how many marry from some less worthy motive! Some for a home; others to escape from uncongenial surroundings; others for position; others for baser reasons still. All these sin against God's purpose; they sin against one another; and, not least, they sin against themselves.

No two should marry unless each feels that life without the other would be incomplete. Less than this will never suffice. If one loves, and not the other, there cannot be true happiness for there is no reciprocity; no mutual satisfaction.

- To give without receiving is to run to waste;
- To take without giving is to harden the heart, till it becomes ice.

If neither loves, what is it less than the crime which cries myriad-tongued to Heaven on every night breeze? But if there be true love, then, though one has been taken from the other by death before they stand together at the marriage altar, yet in the sight of God's high angels those twain are one forever. It is needless to show how the necessity of the presence of a supreme love is the ground and justification of monogamy, the union of two. This has been the pride and glory of the German peoples, as even Tacitus discerned; and this has been the cradle of all those higher ministries which distinguish our people, and assign us the leading position among the nations of the earth.

“Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.”

- You have no right to excite that love, or play with it, unless you are prepared to satisfy it, as far as you may.
- You have no right to give that love away, till you discover that all other conditions are assured.
- You have no right to marry if this love be absent.
- You have no right to treat either man or woman as you would not like your brother or sister to be treated, or as you would not like to be treated yourself.

*(2) Marriage must be “**only in the Lord**” - Jacob’s was so.*

He might have taken a wife of the daughters of Heth, as Esau did, steeped in the idolatries and impurities which cursed the land. But, guided by his parents’ counsels, he crossed the desert to obtain a wife who had been reared in a home in which there lingered still the memory of the worship of the God of Abraham, of Nahor, and of their father Terah (31:53).

The Bible rings from end to end with warnings against mixed marriages. **“Thou shalt not give thy daughter unto his son; nor take his daughter unto thy son: for they will turn away thy son from following Me, to serve other gods”** (Deuteronomy 7:3). **“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness; light with darkness; Christ with Belial?”** (II Corinthians vi. 14, 15). **“She is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord”** (I Corinthians 7:39).

We need not be surprised at these strong and repeated prohibitions. A mixed marriage is a prolific source of misery. In the course of a considerable pastoral experience, I have never known one to result in perfect happiness. Believers, in such unions, do not level their unbelieving partners up to Christ; but are themselves dragged down to infinite misery and self-reproach.

“Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like unto him, who was beloved of his God: and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, even him did outlandish women cause to sin” (Neh. 13:26).

How can there be sympathy in the deepest matters? Each feels that there is one subject on which they are not agreed; and this is a fatal barrier to perfect union. The ungodly partner despises the Christian for marrying in the teeth of principle. The Christian is disappointed because the apparent influence gained before marriage is dissipated soon after the knot is irrevocably tied. Well might Rebekah be weary of her life through those daughters of Heth!

Many a Christian girl has married an unbeliever, in the hope of saving him, and has bitterly rued her choice: she has seen her influence wane; and has learnt, though too late, that the Holy Spirit will not co-operate with our efforts, if they are based on distinct disobedience to one of the clearest commands of the Bible. If a man threatens that if you deny yourself to him, he will take violent or fatal steps, let him! He has no right to put you in that position; he simply wants to get you into his power: and he will be much too great a coward to carry out his threats.

Do right in the sight of God; and leave him to settle the matter with his Maker.

(3) *A true home should be based on the good-will of parents and friends.*

This is not necessary where sanction is withheld from caprice. But where it can possibly be obtained, there is the halo of a brighter promise encircling the union of two young hearts, when it is ratified amid the congratulations of rejoicing friends.

So it was with Jacob: **“Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and sent him away”** (Genesis 28:1-5). It is wise and right, where practicable, for children to consult, in such matters, those whose love has made them the eager guardians of their opening life; and to do so by courtesy, even when mature years have given them the right to choose and act for themselves.

If parents would have such confidences when their children are old, they must make themselves their confidants whilst they are young: they must give as well as receive; they must exercise their authority by love and reasoning, rather than by constraint; and they have no right to let their decision be warped, through any personal whim, from the straight line of what would best serve the highest interest of a beloved child.

(4) *There should be some prospect of suitable livelihood.*

In the broad wealthy land where Jacob found himself, there was not much difficulty about that. It is a much more complicated matter amid the conditions of our crowded modern life. Yet there ought to be some security of a competence.

Young people have no need to begin where their parents are leaving off; to do so would avoid much wholesome difficulty and the opportunities for mutual help: but it is equally absurd to run the risk of a late repentance for a rash marriage. Young man, select as your partner one who, with refinement and culture, is not above turning her hands to the practical details of household management, and who knows what to do and how to do it. Young women, give your hearts to men who love you well enough to earn you through years of faithful and steadfast courtship, if so it must be. Anyone could do one deed of gallantry; it took a true man to serve for seven long years. If these four conditions are fulfilled, there will be the strongest reasons for anticipating a union which shall be a miniature picture, of that sublime event for which the whole creation groans: when the midnight air shall be startled by the tidings of the Bridegroom's advent; and the Church shall pass as the Bride into the wedding feast.

II. THE EXPULSIVE POWER OF SUPREME AFFECTION

“Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her” (ver. 20).

That sentence always charms us for its beauty and its truth. Love has the power of making a rough road easy, and a weary waiting time short. It makes us oblivious to many things, which, for lack of it, would be insupportable.

- The three mighty men break through the armed host of the Philistines, to get one draught of water from the well for their beloved chieftain, oblivious of personal risk - for the love they bare to him.
- The trembling women, on the resurrection morning, ventured out into the perils of the crowded city, whilst it was yet dark, that they might embalm the body of their Lord; nor do they appear to have considered the perils amid which they threaded their way to His grave for the love they bare to Him.
- The martyrs died amid bitter torture, with a smile on their faces and a song on their lips, not counting their lives dear; but reckoning it an honour to spill their heart's blood - for the love they bare to Him.
- Many a woman has nursed her children through loathsome disorders, doing for them what no money would hire a servant to do; but she has not considered the cost - for the love she bare to them.
- Yea, Jesus Christ Himself endured the cross, and despised the shame; stooped to a felon's death; bore the base treatment of coarse and brutal soldiery; and rejoiced to lay down His life - for the love He bare to us.

Do you find it hard to deny yourself, to make the required sacrifices for doing His will, and to confess Him? There is one cure, a short and easy one. Go to the Holy Ghost, and ask Him to shed the love of Christ abroad in your heart, and so teach you to love Him who first loved you. Then, as the tides of that love rise within your heart, they will constrain you to live, not for yourself, but for Him; then burdens will be light that once crushed; roads will be pleasant that once strained and tired; hours will fly that were once leaden-footed; years will seem as a day. Love's labour is always light.

III. SOME CLOSING WORDS

Are you unmarried? Do not bewail yourself, as if your life must be incomplete. Yours is not a higher state, as the priest has falsely taught; but it is neither a failure nor a shame. It will attain to finished beauty, if only you walk in the path which your Heavenly Father has prepared for you. Cease to measure yourself by human standards. Find rest in being just what your Heavenly Father wills you to be. Break the alabaster box of your affection on Him, and His, for His sake. It may be that you have been kept free from the limited circle of a home, in order to pour your love on those who have no one else to love them. But remember, it is possible for all such to live in perfect self-restraint and purity, through the power of the Holy Ghost **"which is in us."**

Are you disappointed? Jacob was disappointed in poor Leah; and she spent many a bitter hour of anguish. Her father had forced her on a man who did not love her, and who wanted to be rid of her. She had a woman's heart, and pined for love that never came. There are few stories more touching than the secret history of Leah, as revealed in the names she gave her boys, and her reasons in giving them.

Yet remember, she had her compensations in the love of those strong, healthy lads, who greeted her with the title, "Mother," so dear to a woman's heart. And there are, doubtless, compensations in your lot, if you are not too bitter to see them. And this is the best of all:

“The Lord will look upon your affliction” (ver. 32).

Meanwhile, do not flinch from doing your duty as in His sight.

Are you happily married? Then beware lest you make an idol of your happiness; or suppose that there is no further need to watch. Is it not remarkable that Jacob’s dearest wife was the source of his defeat and disgrace, in after years, because she hid in her baggage the household idols of her father? That was a remarkable command that Moses gave to Israel: **“If the wife of thy bosom entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, thou shalt not consent unto her; neither shalt thou spare, but thine hand shall be first upon her to put her to death.”**

Does it not teach us that we are not to receive, without question, the suggestions of even our dearest? We must ever put God first. **“If any come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”**

Have you become a Christian since you were married to an unbeliever? Then do not seek, in any wise, to alter your relations (I Corinthians 7:13, 14); but expect, in all assurance, that you will be the happy means of winning that beloved one to Christ. And seek this, not so much by frequent speech there is a time to speak, but also a time to be silent; but rather seek it by the admirable beauty and consistency of your life: **“That if any obey not the word, they may without the word be gained by your manner of life beholding your behavior”** (I Peter 3:1).

Above all, withhold not your love from the dear Master, Christ. Hold all human love in Him. You may love to the uttermost of your power, if only you make Him first; and take your love as His gift; and enjoy it in Him; and thank Him for it So human love will teach you to understand Divine love; and from your thoughts you may understand His thoughts: **“Every one that loveth . . . knoweth God.” “That being rooted and grounded in love, we may be able to comprehend the love of Christ.”**

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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