

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF GENESIS.

GENESIS xiii. 10-12.

'And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the Plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou goest unto Zoar. So Lot chose him all the Plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the Plain, and moved his tent as far as Sodom' (R.V.).

EXPOSITION.

'The Plain of Jordan.'—This word, *Ciccar*, literally means the *circuit*, or, as it is translated in Mt 3^b, 'the region round about Jordan,' and, according to Col. Conder (*Tent Work*, ii. p. 14), is the proper name of the Jordan valley, and especially of the plain of Jericho. It is now called the Ghor, or *depression*, and is one of the most remarkable districts in the world, being a deep crack or fissure, with chalk rocks upon the western and sandstone on the eastern side, over which lies limestone, geologically of the age of our greensand formation. It is thus what is technically called by miners a fault, the formations on the two sides having been displaced by some tremendous convulsion of nature. Most of the valley lies below the level of the Mediterranean, the Sea of Galilee being, by Col. Conder's observations, about 682 feet below it, and the Dead Sea no less than 1292 feet. As the watershed to the south rises to a level of 200 feet above the Mediterranean, all egress for the waters is thereby cut off, and there are numerous proofs that at some distant period the whole valley, about 150 miles in length, was a succession of large lakes. But even in Abram's days the Jordan poured down a far larger volume of water than at present; for by the loss of its forests the climate of Palestine has become much more dry than of old, and regions once fertile are now barren. And as the supply of water has become less than that lost by evaporation, the Dead Sea has gradually receded, and left around it arid wastes covered over with incrustations of salt.—PAYNE SMITH.

'Like the land of Egypt.'—The irrigation of Egypt was effected by a most laborious process, and often by the application of machines trod with the foot. But if the soil has thus been carefully *watered*, it assumes in a short time the rich aspect of a garden, and generally rewards the husbandman with the most abundant harvest.—KALISCH.

'As thou goest unto Zoar.'—*In the direction of S'ar*, on the south-east shore of the Dead Sea. This determines the southern extremity of the region so resplendent in the beauty and wealth of its plant life, and therefore belongs to the whole sentence and not to the land of Egypt alone.—DILLMANN.

'Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan.'—Strictly so

called; in its larger sense Canaan included the circle of the Jordan.—WHITELAW.

'Lot dwelled in the cities of the Plain.'—Not as yet within their walls, but in their neighbourhood, and evidently with a longing 'towards Sodom,' where in chap. 19 we find him sitting in the gate as a citizen, and with his tent changed to a house. While, then, Abram continued to lead a hardy life on the bracing hills, Lot sighed for the less self-denying habits of the city; and probably, when he had descended into the Ghor, the enervating climate, which so developed the sensual vices of the people as to make them 'sinners before Jehovah,' disposed Lot also to quit his tent, and yield himself to a luxurious and easy manner of living.—PAYNE SMITH.

METHODS OF TREATMENT.

I.

A Worldly Choice and its Consequences.

By the Rev. John Ker, D.D.

THAT Lot was a good man in the ground of his character there is no reason to doubt. But good men have their besetting sins. Lot's was worldliness, and it cost him dear. Consider some features of Lot's choice.

1. Worldly advantage was the chief element in it. Asceticism is no feature of the Bible, but to make outward advantage the main object in choosing our path in life is not the guidance of God's Word. Wealth is not the one thing needful. The acquisition of money is one of the first things men think of in choosing a profession, but a man cannot with impunity disregard his natural capacities and his duty in order to be rich. Lot clung to Sodom till he had to be driven forth by God's destroying angel.

2. It showed want of generosity. Lot took advantage of Abraham's offer to take the richest side, possibly congratulating himself on his own shrewdness. Too many so-called Christians snatch at every favour and take advantage of men of generous nature. They are the most unsatisfactory of all friends, paining us constantly by their selfishness, and failing us in the hour of need.

3. It showed disregard of religious privileges. He knew the wickedness of Sodom, and if his religion had been bright and warm, he would not

have ventured there. He may have soothed his conscience by saying he would do good there, but he who enters a den of wickedness merely for worldly profit is not likely to make a good missionary, and when Lot left Sodom he had not made a single convert.

The Consequences of Lot's Choice—

1. As he aimed at worldly advantage, he failed in gaining it. A man may do so and succeed, but if he is a child of God and in danger of losing his soul from worldly temptations, his salvation may lie in failure, and that failure may arise from the compromise he is attempting. Twice Lot lost all his possessions, and as he would not leave Sodom of his own free will, God drove him out. God will burn away the cherished sins of His people by the fire of trial.

2. As he failed in generosity to Abraham, he was repeatedly brought under obligations to him. In a few years he owed all he had—family, property, liberty—to Abraham. Again, when Sodom was destroyed, he was rescued at Abraham's intercession. The friend with whom he had dealt so ungenerously fought with men and wrestled with God for him, and in both conflicts, like a prince, he prevailed.

3. His disregard of spiritual privileges brought him sin and shame. His own character and that of his family suffered from evil associations. His life is a warning against worldliness, the most insinuating of sins. One great reason why Christianity makes so little progress is that those who profess to regard religion as all-important, subordinate it to worldly advantage in considering education, friendships, and alliances. Both worlds frequently slip from the grasp in the attempt to gain the false glitter of the present.

II.

Lot's Choice.

By the late Archbishop Trench, D.D.

WHEN Abraham began his pilgrimage to the land of promise he took Lot as his companion. It was a great honour and privilege for Lot, as it always is for us to live in close familiarity with one nobler than ourselves. What use did Lot make of this opportunity?

The first occasion for a display of Lot's character was that of the strife between the herdsmen.

They must part to find room for their cattle. Abraham gives Lot his choice of the land, and without reluctance he chooses the best he can see. It was a selfish choice.

There were other blemishes in the choice. He pitched his tent *towards Sodom*. For the sake of gain he planted himself and his family among a people sunk in sin. But in his haste to be rich the riches escape him. He is carried away with all that he has along with the people of Sodom, and is only rescued by Abraham.

Still this is not enough. He persists in his choice and establishes himself again in Sodom, where all seems prosperous once more, though the cup of its iniquity is full. There are righteous men whose presence is a restraint on the wicked, but Lot is not one of these. He has no influence with the people. When he warns them of danger he seems to his sons-in-law to mock, and even his wife does not believe him. He himself can scarcely be torn away from the material things to which his soul clings. He escapes with his life only. All is gone which he got by preferring himself to Abraham, and by taking up his abode with the wicked. With the brand of dishonour on his brow he disappears from sacred story.

We see in his life the faithfulness of God, which will not leave us in our sins to the saddest of dooms—the unpunished prosperity of the wicked. But God's chastisement does not always accomplish its work. If Lot were saved, it was as by fire. Would we wish to be saved like this, with graces stunted as his, no service done for others, no glory to God, cast naked and shivering like shipwrecked mariners on the shores of everlasting life? Let us choose the better part in another sense than Lot's, and turn our backs betimes on the doomed and guilty city of this world.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

THE story of Lot may be described as an epitome of life. Just as evolution asserts that in the structure of man every type of created life is represented, so it may be said that every man epitomizes in himself all the moral forces that make the tragedy or the triumph of life. The passing of thousands of years makes absolutely no difference to the problem: the story of Lot is as human, as real, as vital, as though it happened yesterday, and, indeed, there is no day when it is not being reacted in human lives. Lot was offered a choice in life, and he chose wrongly—with what a harvest of disastrous consequences we all know. To us also come solemn hours of choice, when a destiny depends upon

the decision of an instant. Lot obeyed an inclination rather than a principle; we also are under the constant temptation to guide our course by the lower rather than the higher dictates of our nature. It is only in such terrible hours of choice that the true bias of our nature is apt to reveal itself, just as no one suspects the bias in the ball until it is set rolling. And the bias does not count for much when the ball begins to move; it is not until the distance grows that we perceive what the goal will be.—W. J. DAWSON.

HIGH up amid the mountain ranges of the Black Forest, in Germany, you may see a number of tiny streams trickling down over the rough rocks and through the dark woods; small at first—so small that the broken branch of a tree or small fragment of stone, fallen from the overhanging crag, may divert it to the right hand or the left. It seems a little matter indeed which course the stream follows, as it sings its happy way down the mountain side, rippling and sparkling in the summer sunshine; but just that turn decides whether it is to flow with the streams below which unite to form the Danube, or with those which make the Rhine—whether, in fact, it is to pass on and on through the warmer climes to a southern sea, or to empty itself at last into the cold waters of the north.—J. T. SHORE.

PERHAPS I speak to some who are just about to choose for themselves a business or profession. Take care lest you fall into the same pit as Lot. Before you turn your face to Sodom and Gomorrah—to the promising situation in London or Glasgow—learn about something more than the well-watered plain. There may be a good wage and better prospects, but if they are only to be had at the price Lot paid for them, you had better break stones on the roadside. There are professions in life in themselves honourable enough, yet for some so beset with dangers, that they will do well to think not twice only, but twenty times before they embark in them.—G. JACKSON.

THE tempter will never propose that you should go by a single journey from Bethel to Sodom. He will ask you at first only to look upon the well-watered plain, then to choose it, then to go down into it, and he will be quite satisfied for the present if you only pitch your tent *toward* Sodom.—M. NICHOLSON.

ON the moors of Yorkshire there is a stream of water which goes by the name of the 'Ochre Spring.' It rises high up in the hills, and runs on bright and sparkling for a short distance, when it suddenly becomes a dark and muddy yellow. What is the reason of this? It has been passing through a bed of ochre, and so it flows on for miles, useless and unpleasant. The world is full of such beds of ochre. Enter not in the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.—*Church of England Teachers' Magazine.*

ST. BERNARD, the son of a Knight of Burgundy, having devoted himself to a monastic life, persuaded four brothers, of whom the two elder were, like their father, stout fighting men, to follow his example. Only the youngest remained for a secular life, and he was but a child. As they were finally leaving the paternal castle, one of them said to the boy, 'Nivard, you are now owner of all our property.' 'What?' replied the boy, 'you have heaven and I the earth; that is no fair division.'

Sermons for Reference.

- Dawson (W. J.), *The Comrade Christ*, 243.
 Jackson (G.), *First Things First*, 63.
 Ker (J.), *Sermons*, i. 70.
 Mills (B. F.), *God's World*, 171.
 Newman (J. H.), *Parochial Sermons*, iii. 1.
 Nicholson (M.), *Communion with Heaven*, 171.
 Trench (R. C.), *Sermons New and Old*, 258.

The Temptation of Christ.

BY THE REV. ALFRED E. GARVIE, B.A., B.D., MONTROSE.

II.

THE conclusion of our first inquiry into the value and the source of the records of the temptation of Jesus may be summed up in Weiss' words: 'This account must have stood in the apostolic source. If we are not to regard such an account as a myth, or a pure fiction, we can trace it back only to a communication made by Jesus Himself, seeing that it treats of events that befell Him in the loneliness of the desert' (*Life of Christ*, i. 339). How are we to interpret this communication? must we take the narratives literally, or may we understand them symbolically? (1) In the

first place, let it be noted that the purpose of Jesus in reporting this personal experience to His disciples must have been didactic. We do not find in the Gospels a trace of the conceit and vanity in Jesus, which leads some men, otherwise great, to make known to the world all they think, feel, do. Whatever He told others about Himself was for their enlightenment. The disciples were beset by certain moral dangers; they were prone to indulge some false hopes; they were sometimes doubtful about the wisdom and the rightness of the plan of work adopted and followed by Jesus. It