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Chapter XIV

Lot. — The Spirit of Compromise.

And Lot lift up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated, themselves the one from the other. Abram dwell in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

But the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly. — Genesis xiii. 10 18.

And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground: And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? Son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it. ... And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. — Genesis xix. 1, 12, 13, 15.

Lot was a failure, and the secret of that failure seems to have been twofold. On the one hand, he never really separated himself from the world, and, on the other, he appears to have had had little personal reliance upon God. While of Abraham it is said that he walked with God, we are told again and again of Lot that he went with Abraham. Lot is an example of those 'who take right steps because others take them, who make sacrifices because others do so, rather than because God bids them.' They have no root in themselves, and their secondhand religion is therefore a feeble thing only lasting for a time. After a while, for one reason or another, the Lots always go away from the Abrahams. The form of godliness, no matter how attractive it seems,



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without the power is a wearisome business. And so it came about that 'Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, even like the garden of the Lord,' and he chose him all the plain of Jordan. Both he and his flocks forthwith went off to Sodom, the central city of the fertile plains. Abraham was consoled in this separation; and the ingratitude it implied by the promise that he received from God immediately after — 'for,' said the Lord, 'all the land — to THEE will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.' Thus, while Lot chose the present plenty and security, Abraham obtained the promise which was to last for ever. Lot, as we see, 'lifted up his eyes on the rich plain of Jordan,' but Abraham, thinking of higher things than crowded sheep-folds and fat pastures, thinking less of momentary gains and more of lasting blessings, 'looked on the heaven,' and telling the number of the stars, received from God the promise of a new nation which should influence the world, and give men the Messiah, the Sin-bearer of the Race.

Lot's history, in spite of the difference between then and now, appears to me to be a very instructive study for these days. Among other lessons, this story shows: (1) That no man can serve two masters; (2) That compromise is not the way to make the world better; and (3) That in the end, even though saved by 'the skin of the teeth,' half-and-half loses all.

1. Lot really tried to serve two masters and failed. Soon after he had settled down in Sodom, war broke out between its people and an adjoining tribe; and Lot, as a new comer, feeling that now his interests were largely theirs, felt it necessary to join with the army of Sodom. After its defeat, he and his goods were captured by the enemy. It is ever so. If you give the world an inch by way of approval or support it will soon take a mile. 'The friendship of the world is enmity with God.' Now, when Abraham heard of Lot's capture he gathered a considerable force of his own servants and marched to rescue him, though he might reasonably have said, 'Serve him right; what business had he to help the ungodly?' But there is no such word in the history - Lot's mistakes and backslidings have not altered Abraham, who values him, notwithstanding his personal unkindness, even more than he did before, now that he is in the hands of the foe. So should you thus value those who have wandered away from your care, even though there be something of self-will and unkindness in their leaving you.



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Abraham, after a fine pursuit and a hard battle recovered Lot and all he had, but Lot returned again to Sodom to try once more for the approval of the two masters. What a contrast is this to Abraham's spirit! When the King of Sodom, by way of a recompense for the great service he had rendered in delivering Lot, offered him some of the spoils, he answered, 'I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet.' This is the grand independence of faith - the fearless acknowledgment that one master's rewards are enough and more than enough, and that though he had saved Lot, Abraham would have nothing to do with either the world or its gifts. For even as Lot's failure flowed from his trying to mix God and Sodom, so Abraham's success came of his seeking God and seeking Him alone.

2. Compromise with the world will not make it any better. — Lot threw away his life, his family, and his fortune, all to no purpose, for he did no good in Sodom. He made no convert to Jehovah there. He lost his wife, ruined his daughters, vexed his own soul, only escaping destruction by a hair's-breadth, and yet Sodom was no better for it all. So it ever is — compromise with the world always fails. It pulls down the man who proposes it, and never raises up any one else. Beware! It often seems very reasonable to make concessions — for the sake of peace; it was Lot's wish to avoid the quarrelling of his servants with those of Abraham, that led him first to think of Sodom — 'I am not called,' Lot would say, 'for the sake of the flocks, to sacrifice everything for Abraham and his servants;' and you are not called, the devil will say, to do so for the sake of The Army. But concessions to the world are like the concessions of a lamb to the hungry lion, or the concessions made by a wounded soldier to the vulture hovering over the battlefield - they spell ruin and death. 'Who knows,' Lot could argue, 'but that I may, by kindness and a good example, win over some of the Sodomites to righteousness, and thus save a whole city from destruction.' But it all failed, and he only made them despise him at last. 'Stand back,' they said, when he would restrain their wickedness, 'are you a judge?' Indeed, so far from listening to his remonstrances, they would have killed him, had it not been for the angels who pulled him into the house, for 'he seemed to them as one that mocked.'

And, alas, how weak and pluckless Lot had become! Doubtless he did not see what he was doing — the spirit of compromise often makes its victims blind before their destruction comes upon them. Think of a man who feared God offering to sacrifice the purity of his two daughters, in



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order to secure a few hours' peace for the angels! Where is his faith in God? Where is his courage? Where his manhood? All are gone; sold to the world for the sake of a house and a living! Ah, do we not know some modern Lots? All their daring and faith gone — dwelling in the plains of business prosperity, within comfortable homes, or good situations, holding popular positions, or drawing big salaries; but who, with all these well-watered lands can give them, are poor, miserably poor, and lonely, ease-loving, unfruitful Lots all the same! For some doubtful gain, they forsook Abraham and the highway of faith, and compromised; and now they have become but shadows of their former selves; and, alas, alas, Sodom is Sodom still; and the fire is coming!

3. But you will remind me that Lot was saved! Yes, indeed, so he was, in a way, but only barely saved, 'by the skin of his teeth,' as Job puts it, and even then God had to work a miracle for his sake. Those angels had a tremendous struggle to get him out from Sodom at all, and, as it was, he lingered so that his wife actually looked back and was swiftly destroyed. And even, at the last moment, Lot pleaded for Zoar, one of the small but evil places associated in some way or other with Sodom and Gomorrah, which God had apparently purposed also to destroy. 'Let me escape thither,' he says, 'is it not a little one?' Oh, these cruel, curved, devilish, damning 'little things'! Oh, the power and the love of the world, when once it has laid hold of the human heart! Bore, when all but life is lost, when the very heavens are lurid with the flaming storm of coming ruin, Lot is clinging just to this little thing. He cannot have Sodom, that, at last, is clear, and so he pleads for Zoar. Perhaps it was for his children's sake if so, he soon proved that compromise curses the children. If he had only let Zoar go, and, escaping to the mountains, he might have been saved from that last crowning shame which befell him and them. Oh, my comrades, would to God that we would learn this lesson! Oh, have you anything to do with any Sodom? Escape for thy life, from it, and its treasures; look not back; tarry not in all the plain; lest thou be consumed, or be tempted, into some half-way house like Zoar, some accursed place, though it be a little one. Little sins have long stings.

Yes, Lot was saved, I admit; but what a wreck of a life was his! His flocks; his well-watered lands; his home (at Zoar he had to dwell in a cave!); his wealth; his servants; his sons-in-law; his wife; his



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wasted years, all perished! Failure is written above every chapter of his history, and all is explained by the fact that he was a poor, half-and-half, lingering, compromising soul.

Remember Lot!