

and the historical eternal and divine. Christianity has to be naturalized in the world—Loisy is right in emphasizing this aspect of the truth; but it is a supernatural thing which has to be naturalized, and Harnack may seem to have the acuter sense of that. But neither can be said to do justice to what is as essential as the presence of a divine life in Jesus when He walked the earth nineteen hundred years ago: the perpetuation of that same life, not by the vivid exercise of the historical imagination, and still less by the mere inheritance of Christian tradition, but by the action of the spirit of Jesus, exalted to the right hand of God.

JAMES DENNEY.

ISAAC, THE TYPE OF QUIETNESS.

ISAAC is one of those men who have never received justice from the readers of Bible history, not because anything very serious can be said against them, but because very little can be said about them, either good or bad. His fate is not to be criticized, it is to be ignored; it is not that people have a grudge against him, it is that they have no opinion about him. If one were required to write a sketch of Isaac and to subtract from it all that belonged to Abraham and all that must be assigned to Rebecca, there would be a very scanty balance. He appeared in various striking scenes, but in each he was only a secondary figure—a mere accessory to the play. Once only did he take the initiative, and that was a blunder; Isaac never took a line of his own, except on that ill-starred occasion, and even that may be left out of account, for he was completely helpless in other people's hands. Sum up his record according to the book of Genesis and it comes to this: at twenty-five Abraham would have sacrificed him; at forty Abraham

married him ; at sixty his sons were born ; at a hundred and thirty-seven Jacob deceived him ; and at a hundred and eighty Isaac died. Add for the sake of completeness that Isaac was born, and you have all the features of this drab-coloured and characterless life. It is interesting to discover with what a small capital of his own a man can carry on life, and even gain a historical name. It looks as if one might blot out Isaac and lose nothing except a name from the refrain of Hebrew history, "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

Life affords at least three opportunities for individuality, when the most modest and retiring man will assert his rights and put himself in evidence before the world. The first is his faith. One expects every religious man to make some contribution, however slight, to the experience of the race ; to illustrate some view of God, to verify some fact in the conflict of the soul, to pass on the torch with fuller light ; in short, to have seen something at first hand. But although Isaac was an engaging example of personal piety—meditating at eventide—he did not add anything to the legacy left by Abraham. He did not even lay out Abraham's hardly won riches to usury, he hid them in a napkin. Revelation comes to a standstill in Isaac ; he kept what he got, but he made no addition. We owe to Abraham the idea of One God, to Jacob the idea of the training of character ; to Isaac we owe no text, no incident, no achievement of active faith. During all his life he had only one revelation, and this is how it ran : "I am the God of Abraham, thy Father ; I will bless thee for my servant Abraham's sake." God was Abraham's God, therefore Isaac's ; Abraham was God's friend, therefore Isaac was blessed. His faith was hereditary, his blessing was second hand ; he was, so to say, included in Abraham, an annexe to the greater figure. Another opportunity for independent action in a man's life is marriage. The meekest, and one might

add, the meanest of men, show some spirit in this transaction, and the most timid and subservient demand some choice. If a man allows himself to be married out of hand, he must be nearly invertebrate. One is absolutely certain that Abraham chose Sarah, and that Sarah also chose him ; we know how Jacob wooed and won Rachel ; but Isaac is, as usual, simply passive, a pawn to be moved in this high game of life as may suit the player. He does not propose to marry, although long past the age of custom, till his father gives the order ; he allows his father's man of business, to go in search of a wife for him ; he accepts the woman the servant brings without question. It was filial piety carried to a fault. The last opportunity for being one's self is sinning, and people can usually strike out a sin for themselves, but even this disastrous originality was beyond the compass of Isaac. His chief lapse from correct conduct was declaring Rebecca to be his sister, because he was afraid to confess that she was his wife. One no sooner reads the story than he fancies that he has read it before. Of course he has. One may be sure that he has seen everything which Isaac did in some other person's life. Read Abraham for Isaac, and Sarah for Rebecca, and we have a replica of Abraham's falsehood at the Court of Pharaoh. Isaac's very sins were copies. He did what other people did ; he said what other people said ; he sinned as other people sinned. Little things reveal character, a trick of manner, a mode of signature, a carriage of the head, and the secondariness of Isaac comes out even in the digging of a well. He did not go to a new place and make wells of his own ; there was in him no spirit of adventure, and no capacity for discovery. He sought out the spots where his father had been. He did not invent new names for his wells. There was in him no freshness nor fancy ; he fell back on the names of Abraham. Here is Isaac drawn to the life. "He digged again the

wells of water which they had digged in the days of Abraham, his father, and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them."

When the mind is brought to a focus upon Isaac you recognize him as a person you are seeing every day, and whom you neither like nor dislike, because he leaves no impression. There are people whom we cannot pass by or leave out of account. They catch the eye like a rugged peak against the sky, they thrill our nerves like an electric current. We know that a new force is in action as soon as they enter a room. They leave a blank after they have gone; when they speak it is as if the light had been switched on. When they act it is as if the wind were filling out the sails. We remember what they said years afterwards, because it was so incisive, so luminous. We yield to what they propose because there is such a force of will in them, such a masterful individuality. Their vitality affects us, their personality coerces us. We may disagree with them; it will be violently. We may oppose them; it must be fiercely. They rouse us to the height of our strength; they make life strenuous round about them. It would have been impossible to forget Abraham; it would not have been safe to ignore Jacob; it might have been a comfort to escape from Abraham to the company of Isaac—just to rest as one wearied with the rapids appreciates the quiet pool below. There are people, again, who make no demand on us, whose words we could not possibly remember one hour after they were spoken. They have no views, no ideas, no preferences. They rise in the morning, they talk about the weather, they do their routine duty, they pay their taxes, they go to bed, they fill each one a place among the many thousand people which make up a city. Were one stretched upon a rack and compelled to describe that kind of person he could not, for there is nothing in the person to distinguish him from any other. He has no

more individuality than a housefly, and all flies are about the same size, and do the same things, and have the same expression of countenance. There are many respectable and well doing people of the Isaac type who are as hard to identify and to characterize. They have really nothing of their own, even their spiritual clothes are all on loan, and we could trace them if we took the trouble. This was from his father, that from his teacher, that other from his friend. We could undress him like a lay figure, and we would come at last on a mere framework, a skeleton covered with creeds and habits. None of them is owned, all of them are put on by other people's hands. There are men who can hardly be said to have an individual existence, who have hardly any right to say I.

Browning declares that God withdraws His overwhelming personality and holds each of us at arm's length from Him in order that the new-born creature may have room to breathe and live. Surely it is the Divine will that each of us, whether great or small, should be a real person—living not by the permission of another, but in his own right. It is a crime to suppress any one's individuality, and one from which the Isaac type largely, and perhaps inevitably, suffers. His life shows how a shrinking and gentle nature can be reduced to a non-entity by the very people who loved him most, and how they prevented a man with a real quality of his own from his just development. It was his fortune to be the favoured son of Abraham, to live from his early days in the presence of majestic virtue, and he had the drawback of his privileges. Abraham did so grandly that it was almost useless for Isaac to do at all; he was so able that Isaac was not expected to think; his faith was so comprehensive that it sheltered Isaac and smothered him. Abraham overshadowed Isaac; while the father lived there was no room for the son. Before Abraham died Isaac had fallen under

the power of another masterful personality. In his *Life of John Sterling*, Carlyle speaks of childhood as the inarticulate age; it is half pathetic and half ludicrous to notice that this meek and patient man seems to have been all his life inarticulate, and to have been passed from hand to hand like a labelled package. It was Isaac's lot to be married to a wife neither as good nor as great, but as able as his father, and from the day that enterprising woman alighted from her camel at his tent door, Rebecca took Isaac in hand, and did for him. Till he was forty years of age Isaac was under his father, from forty till Rebecca died he was under his wife's; he was first Abraham's son, then he was Rebecca's husband; he was never Isaac, master of his life or of his household. He was ordered, cared for, managed, cheated all his days, because, although he had a delightful quality of his own which neither his father nor his wife had, he happened to be the son of a famous father, and the husband of a clever woman. Like over-reaching trees those two shut out the light from this modest soul, blanching its leaves and impoverishing its strength, and now when one draws back the branches and peers in on Isaac, he can hardly find anything worth the trouble. Isaac was not to blame—at least less than the other people—Abraham and Rebecca are responsible. No doubt he should have asserted himself; certainly he ought not to have been obliterated. It is a perpetual injustice in life, this domination of clever, strong-willed, high-spirited people. One notices that distinguished fathers have often very inferior sons, and people looking about for an ingenious explanation say that nature is resting. Perhaps nature, like land, can be over-cropped, but is it not possible that a father may be so unconsciously aggressive, and so absolutely superior, that the son falls into quiet despair and accepts his rôle, to be his father's son. On every hand one sees husbands merged in their wives, and wives in their husbands, so that one hardly wastes

time in considering both; he deals with the dominant partner and knows that that is equivalent to the firm. It is an unintentional, but most practical wrong; it is crippling and reducing the resources of human life. As one wanders down some back street he comes upon a low-lying house with those mysterious words across the walls, "Ancient Lights." They mean that even this obscure cottage has its right to light, and that no one may build high houses on the right hand and the left to shut it up in darkness. With Isaac's life before us in the Scripture biography one affirms the principle that every person has a right to be himself, not an echo or a repetition; to develop his character along his own line, to do God's will in his own way, and that neither father nor mother, husband nor wife, master nor friend, nor society should filch this right away, or conspire to limit and impoverish a human soul.

If Abraham had given freer play to Isaac, and if Rebecca had been more like Rachel; if this much-enduring and uncomplaining man had only once had the freedom of himself, and enjoyed God's sunshine in the open, he might have grown not into a brilliant but into a beautiful character. As with many reticent unobtrusive natures there were rich possibilities in Isaac: he had the capacity for sacrifice. The glory of unquestioning faith and unreserved self-abnegation on Mount Moriah has as usual been assigned without rebate to Abraham, and no doubt it was a vast surrender when he bound his only son to the Altar. Were it not that Isaac is unanimously, and perhaps justly regarded as a mere cipher—a man of no account—some little heroism, and some little faith might have been put to his credit. Plainly, it was a sudden and terrible fate to die by the hands of his father, when life was still young in his veins, and when he had begun to realize his heritage as Abraham's son. A man of twenty-five need not be taken

to an altar by an old man unless he pleases, after full allowance has been made for the rights of a father over a son, on which Canon Mozley insists in his *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages*, it remains a remarkable instance of the capacity for uncomplaining sacrifice in quiet people that he should have yielded. One does not turn with confidence to brilliant and expansive people when he is asking for an act of painful service; the wise man seeks out some unnoticed dutiful soul because that kind of person will bare his breast to the blade without a murmur. Isaac believed that his death would in some way he did not understand further the good of his house and God's Kingdom, and so without more ado and without even striking an attitude, he offered himself. Few men have lived a more uneventful life, but none could have done more bravely. Here, if nowhere else in his modest career was manhood, and gentleness.

That gentleness

Which, when it weds with manhood, makes a man.

Isaac was capable also of real magnanimity of which the history gives a long illustration. Like many men who do not care about riches and have not exerted themselves, who have received a fortune, and allowed it to multiply, Isaac grew rich automatically, and became so great that his neighbour Abimelech ordered him to depart because there was not enough water for both. Was the Philistine jealous? If so, so be it; Isaac settled in the valley of Gerar and digged again the wells of his fathers. Whereupon the herdsmen of Gerar in their turn claimed the water after the fashion of grasping and unscrupulous people everywhere. Very good, said Isaac, let them have the wells, and he called the place Contention. His men dug another well, and the Philistines would have it also. They got it, for Isaac would not fight for a well, and he called the place Hatred. Another well was sunk, and this they

were allowed to keep, and Isaac with a sigh of relief called it Room, for now, said he, "the Lord has made room for us." What were wells, and water, and herds, and pastures, to a man in whose heart reigned the peace of God which passeth all understanding, and which came to him in the evening hours. Esau would have fought the Philistines, not so much for the wells as for the joy of fighting, and Jacob would have cheated them out of the wells for their money's worth, but quiet people have their own virtue. Dean Church, in one of his most admirable books, traces the beginnings of the distinctive Christian character in Old Testament history, and however Isaac may have weakened or been brow-beaten in his life, he illustrated the inoffensiveness and meekness of the beatitudes. He may not have been clever or conspicuous, but it cannot be denied that he was a selfless man, and his unselfishness had even at that early date its reward. This very Abimelech, for shame's sake, or for some other reason more potent with a Philistine's heart, sent an embassy of peace to Isaac, and they made a covenant together, so Isaac settled down in the land amid general good will, and anticipated the law of Jesus. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth; blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Isaac had also what may prove the chief talent of life; he had the capacity for love. When we see him in the fields at eventide he is a sad man, because he has lost his mother, and although he was forty years and more, his heart was in Sarah's grave. He had that tenacity of affection which is often wanting in the character of grander natures, and was not very conspicuous in that of Abraham, but which is the dower of quiet people. When Rebecca came as a gift from God he took her into his mother's tent and gave her his mother's place in his heart. Whether that acute woman dealt faithfully with Isaac is another question. He

at least was faithful to her. Abraham and Jacob might fall beneath themselves; in family life Isaac repaid the unique trust of Rebecca with an unswerving loyalty. For the love that does not speak and has no show is strong as death, and people who have never said a memorable word or done a brilliant action have often been first in love.

Isaac's life, with all its losses and its weaknesses, is an apotheosis of quietness and a life to be copied in modern times, for we are being debased by sensationalism, and have come to think life hardly worth living unless we stand daily in the eye of the public. Is he a statesman, or a millionaire, or a popular preacher, or a showman or a criminal? Then we talk about him, and his picture is in the papers, and people go to see him, and they ask for his autograph. If a person be not something striking, they cease to have any interest in him. Quietness and tameness are for us synonymous. We are too restless, too excited, too ambitious, too shallow. We work, but we do not think; we rest, but we do not meditate. Meditation, like the secret of Venetian glass and of letter writing and the making of liturgies, is a lost art. It requires time and humility, and we have neither.

We chatter, nod, and hurry by,
And never once possess our soul
Before we die.

Our generation needs beyond any one of the past to be delivered from garish ideals and to learn quietness. "What great peace and quietness would he possess who would cast off all vain anxiety, think only on divine things, and place his confidence in God," Who was "the fear of Isaac."

JOHN WATSON.