Character of Esau and Jacob

THE character of Esau has many attractive features; but he ... was without any lofty spiritual aspirations. His generous, warmhearted spirit attracts sympathy at first sight, when contrasted with the wiles of the cold, calculating Jacob. But judged by a higher standard Esau appears plainly as a worldly, irreligious man, indifferent to his parents' wishes, uninterested in the divine covenant, and unmindful of the privileges and responsibilities which were to distinguish his race. His character is summed up in Hebrews, where he is called a "profane," i.e., unconsecrated or common person. The character of Jacob is in marked contrast to that of Esau. Craftiness and subtilty, even meanness and deceit, mark many of his actions; but, on the other hand, his patient endurance, strength of character, and warmth of affection call forth admiration. Long years of suffering and discipline were needed to purify his character from its baser elements, and make him worthier of the divine blessing. And certainly he was worthier than his brother, for he believed in and sought after his father's God, held spiritual things in reverence, and in the chief turning points of his life, at Bethel, Haran, and Penuel, showed a conviction that God was with him to bless and guide. He stood out at last as one who has conquered himself, and proved himself to be worthy of the divine favor and patience, Israel, a prince with God. These considerations help us to understand why Jacob rather than Esau was selected as heir to the promises.

—From "A Commentary on the Holy Bible" by the Rev. J. R. Dummelow, M. A.