

# **STORIES OF THE PATRIARCHS**

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Stories of the Patriarchs by O. B. Frothingham

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**O. B. FROTHINGHAM**

**STORIES OF  
THE PATRIARCHS**



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OF  
THE PATRIARCHS.

BY  
O. B. FROTHINGHAM,  
AUTHOR OF "STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF THE TEACHER, RETOLD  
BY A DISCIPLE."



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## PREFACE.

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**A**N old arrangement of the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament divided the books into two general classes, the prosaic and the poetical. We are fast allowing this distinction to fade away, and are coming to view the whole collection as a collection of poetry, produced out of the imagination, and addressed to the imagination; the literary form being narrative, historical, philosophical, fanciful, the interior substance being spiritual. We are no longer shocked or irritated or grieved by the statement that the Bible is a book of symbols, in which the truths of life are not literally stated, but are figuratively suggested; and in which the outward experiences of men and women, of tribes and nations, are made representative of the inward experiences of the soul. We are familiar with attempts at discovering an inner sense beneath the fantastic phraseology, and are reconciled even to the rejec-

tion of the apparent, in the interest of the real meaning. Once we shuddered at the bare idea that anything that was told in the Bible was not literally true; now a very large class of believers, and those too reckoned peculiarly "spiritual," rejoice in believing that the greater portion is not literally true, and was not meant to be taken as true. This change of view has come about gradually, as the Bible has been better understood and more wisely appreciated; and as a rational use of it has taken place of a dogmatic or controversial use of it. But it cannot be denied, rather it should be gratefully confessed, that this wholesome change is due largely to the influence of Swedenborg, and his doctrine of correspondences as applied to the Word.

An eminent Swedenborgian writer says, in effect, that children especially should be grateful to the Swedish seer, because he has made the dark and dim old book a picture-book for them. A charming idea; and one which the children, if they knew it was shaped, would clamor loudly to have produced. It is hard that such a fair promise as that should be held out, and then left, not only unfulfilled, but unremembered. Why has not some believer in that most imaginative of faiths, his poetic faculty aroused, or even created in him by his



religious system, taken Wilkinson's fine hint, and introduced the young people to the treasures of Divine wisdom through these crystal gates of imagery? Is it that the science of correspondences has eclipsed their beauty, or that the work of justifying the doctrine to the understanding has left no leisure yet for its pleasing exhibition to the taste? If so, we hope the time will soon come when the science shall be established beyond question, and the children, young and old, shall have the attractive side presented to them.

The writer of this little book is not a Swedenborgian; he is not familiar with the Swedenborgian vocabulary or rules of interpretation. He is not prepared to assent to the doctrine that the Hebrew Scriptures contain one or more hidden senses, or that, if they do, the sense is the same, and designedly, systematically, by inspiration, the same throughout. He loses, therefore, the immense advantage that a member of the New Jerusalem Church would have. But he did think it wrong that the children should miss wholly the wealth of the old Bible teaching, as it lay concealed under the fanciful symbols. Thinking so, he considered that even a little of it, faintly apprehended and feebly presented, might be better than none, and he undertook, in a series of Sunday-

school lessons, to tell the Old Testament stories in a way to interest his young hearers, and to give them at the same time a glimpse of the noble thoughts they hid behind their veils. A few of these have been written out, and are here printed. It will be seen at a glance that they are connected by no thread of ideas, and are grouped with no view to the systematic unfolding of truth. The hidden sense has been drawn out in accordance with no consistent principles of interpretation, and has been presented in a practical, not at all in a doctrinal form. The moral rather than the spiritual meaning has been sought for, this being the meaning which his little auditors could best, if not alone, apprehend.

At the same time, it will be seen, that even when he seems to be telling the story for entertainment, in the most vivid style of fancy, he is doing something more. He is conveying a thought, pressing a precept, urging a principle, illustrating a fact in the heart's experience, unveiling a truth of Providence or of life. He thinks the little book will harm nobody; he hopes it may teach a few. If it will not, it may provoke a more gifted person to make a better one, that will.

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