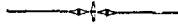


See of Exeter he had deprecated, but whom he gladly welcomed as the successor of Bishop Jackson. Dr. Temple said :

I can myself speak of unvarying kindness, from the time when he wrote to me on my nomination to the bishopric of Exeter, and when, soon afterwards, he was so good as to allow me to make use of his examining chaplain, as I was not able in the circumstances to get the use of my own. From that time I had much communication with him on various occasions, when his conduct was always characterized by the same wonderful gentleness and sweetness. But I think that his sweetness of character was even more conspicuous when there was anything like a strong difference of opinion. For he entered into controversy freely and boldly, but he never concealed the warmth of his affection for those with whom he was brought into contact, even though he might have had reason to contend earnestly with them on points which he thought of importance, but in which they considered he was mistaken. Such a man leaves behind him a treasure for all time.

G. D. BOYLE.



ART. IV.—JACOB AT PENIEL.

THE narrative of Jacob's wrestling at Peniel must have possessed an intense interest for the Jew, as revealing the origin and significance of the name *Israel* in which he gloried.

It was now twenty years since the memorable night when the lonely wanderer, as he lay sleeping on his pillow of stones, had seen in his dream the ladder which reached from heaven to earth, and upon which the angels of God continually went and came, and had received from God the promise that He would be with him and prosper him, would keep him in all places whither he should go, and bring him back again to the land which he was leaving.

The Divine promise had not failed, and the pilgrim, who had passed over Jordan with his staff and nothing more, was now, in obedience to God's command, returning, having become two bands, with "wives and children, and men-servants and women-servants, and much cattle." Naturally he would look forward with great anxiety to his meeting with his brother whom he had so deeply wronged, and who had determined in his heart to slay him as soon as his father died. Since that time the brothers had never met: and no message from his mother had reached the younger to say that Esau's wrath was turned away. Had those long years made him forget his wrongs and mitigated his anger, or was he still cherishing his thirst for vengeance, and only awaiting the opportunity to satisfy it? Hoping, yet fearful, Jacob had sent messengers before him to announce his approach, and to pray that he might find favour in his brother's sight. These had, however, brought back no friendly greeting in response; only the tidings that Esau was advancing to meet him at the head of four hundred men. This

intelligence greatly affrighted and distressed Jacob. Immediately he took every precaution with a view to secure the safety of his family, and having committed his cause to God, sent on in advance a present with a humble message, by which he hoped to appease his brother before they should meet.

It was now evening: and having sent his two wives and his eleven sons and all that he had over the brook Jabbok (a tributary of the Jordan) Jacob was left alone, full of anxious foreboding as to the morrow. Before him, dark as the night which surrounded him, was the issue of the coming day: and now the interval of time which separated him from that momentous crisis in his history was only as the narrow span of the stream which flowed between him and the rest of his company. None, save those who have known the painful suspense which attends the forecast of some impending calamity, especially when those whom we dearly love are concerned, combined with a sense of utter helplessness to avert it, can adequately conceive what must have been the thoughts which filled the breast of the patriarch on that night, while he anticipated even the possibility of his brother's coming against him in his former spirit of vindictive fury, and smiting him, and, terrible thought! "the mother upon the children." Doubtless also the bitter remembrance would be with him that it was his own sin in deceiving his father and robbing his brother which had brought this upon him. A guilty conscience would greatly add to his disquiet.

At such a time it is natural for a man to seek solitude. And Jacob sought it: chiefly, we may believe, in order that he might hold communion with God, and in the absence of his fellow-men draw near to Him. "And Jacob was left alone"—alone, yet, like our Lord, "not alone." Only alone with Him to Whom man's to-morrow is still to-day, and what to man is uncertain is known. For just as the eye of God surveys the whole universe while our limited vision takes in only a little space, so, as to time, while the present moment bounds our narrow view, the ages of eternity lie all unfolded before the Omniscient. Here, then, was the Helper for such a time of need. In casting his care upon God, Jacob had moreover much ground of encouragement, inasmuch as he was only following the leadings of God's providence, and obeying His command in taking this journey, and therefore, assured that he was in the path of duty, he might with confidence commit his way unto the Lord, and trust in Him that He would bring it to pass. He had, moreover, God's promise of safe-conduct in his returning, as during his exile, made at Bethel, to rely upon. He could, in addition to this, fall back upon his own past experience of God's faithfulness to that promise—the remembrance of the way in which

"unto this very day" (as he could testify upon his death-bed, when this and every other peril had been escaped) God had "fed him all his life long: the Angel had redeemed him from all evil."¹ Nor was this all. Probably on that very day there had been vouchsafed to him a remarkable intimation that he was attended by a supernatural escort. "As he went on his way, the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them he said: 'This is God's host' (Mahaneh). And he called the name of that place Mahanaim" (*i.e.*, two hosts, his own band and the celestial guard, like Elisha's protectors at Dothan,² or perhaps angels encamped on each side of him. "He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways."³)

With confidence then could Jacob repair to God for help in this trying hour. And the blessing of trouble and anxiety is when they bring us nearer to Him, and in their dark night He manifests His presence most clearly, if we seek it. It was even so that night beside the brook Jabbok. We are told, "there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day." The whole subject is involved in mystery: and we must beware of being wise above what is written. We may believe, however, that "the man," "the angel," was God appearing in the person of "the Angel of the Covenant" (as He had aforetime appeared to Abraham, and subsequently to Joshua, and at other times manifested Himself during the Old Testament Dispensation—appearances which may be regarded as foreshadowings of the Incarnation).⁴

This we infer from the language of the narrative, in which Jacob's antagonist says to him, "As a prince hast thou power *with God*;" while Jacob declares, "I have *seen God* face to face." In allusion to this incident, we read in Hosea, chap. xii., vv. 3 and 4, "By his" (Jacob's) "strength he had power *with God*: yea, he had power over the angel and prevailed."

There in the darkness and solitude Jacob became conscious of a Presence. An antagonist, closed and wrestled with him through the long hours of the night.⁵ "And when he saw that he pre-

¹ Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.

² 2 Kings vi. 17.

³ Ps. xci. 11. See also xxxiv. 7. The late lamented Charles George Gordon, in a letter written on his voyage out to Khartoum, in which he says that he hopes to reach Suakim on his birthday, adding, "I am quite restored to my peace, thank God; and in His hand He will hide me," writes in a postscript: "The hosts are with me." *Mahanaim*, an expression which Prebendary Barnes, to whom the letter was addressed, informs us he frequently employed.

So most of the Fathers, as Theodoret, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Augustine. See references in Speaker's Commentary.

Dr. Marcus Dods, in the "Expositor's Bible," following Kurtz, holds that it was God Who came and laid hold on Jacob to prevent him from entering the land in the temper he was in, and as Jacob, p. 298, etc.

vailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him." Nevertheless, though thus rendered physically helpless, he wrestled on, and held his antagonist fast in his embrace, until "he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And Jacob answered" (for he had now learned at least with whom he had to do), "I will not let thee go except thou bless me. And he (the angel) said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob." The old name, representing the old character, with all its past of shame, must be confessed before the new name, representing the new character, could be conferred upon him. "And he said, Thy name shall be no more Jacob" (*i.e.*, a supplanter, an overreacher of men—of Isaac, of Esau, of Laban) "but Israel" (a prince with God, or of God, or he who striveth with God, R.V.); "for as a prince hast thou power with God" ("thou hast striven with God," R.V.) "and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name?¹ And he blessed him there."

There can be no doubt that we have in this narrative the record of an actual bodily struggle. The physical result in the halting thigh forbids us to understand the account otherwise than literally. There was, however, as certainly a spiritual conflict, of which the bodily wrestling was the accompaniment and symbol, and in which the soul grappled with God in prayer. The passage already referred to in Hosea throws much light on the real character of the warfare, and proves that its weapons were not carnal but spiritual. There we are told "he wept and made supplication unto him."

Jacob's prayer doubtless especially sought deliverance from Esau, probably after the manner of that which is recorded in v. 9-13—a notable specimen of true prayer, in which the suppliant pleads no worthiness of his own, but casts himself upon the mercy of God; rests upon His promises, and draws his encouragement from the knowledge of what He is and what He has done in time past.

Even so, still in prayer the soul may lay hold on God's strength (as it is written, "Let him take hold of My strength that he may make peace with Me, and he shall make peace with Me"²), and, as it were, force a blessing from Him through the earnest perseverance of importunate supplication: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent taketh it by force."

¹ Compare Judges xiii. 18: "And the angel of the Lord said unto him," Manoah, "wherefore askest thou after my name seeing it is wonderful?" Marg. or *secret* (R.V.). The question here may mean that Jacob ought to have known.

² Isa. xxvii. 5.

Such was doubtless the twofold character of the wrestling on Jacob's part. What, however, are we to understand by the opposing force put forth by his antagonist, by his seeming anxiety to depart, and reluctance to be overcome?

This, we may believe, was designed to teach Jacob several most salutary lessons: and, first, to lead him to realize that his sin against his brother, which had brought him into this strait, was a sin against God; and that there was One greater than Esau with Whom his peace must first be made; he was to learn the true character and guilt of sin. Secondly, it seems to have been designed to convince him that, although in his struggles with men hitherto he had prevailed by fraud and skill and craftiness, through the exercise of his own strength and the use of human expedients, it must be in a far different way he must obtain power with God and win His blessing if he would really succeed. The touching of his thigh, which robbed him of all personal physical strength to maintain such a contest, would serve to convince him of his utter weakness and inability to prevail with God in his own strength; while, by his mighty faith and unwearied perseverance, he did obtain power with God and overcame. Not until emptied of all self-confidence he clings to the Divine strength, and in that strength, made perfect in his weakness, becomes strong, can he succeed in such a strife.

Not for one moment can we believe that the resistance arose from any real desire to withhold the blessing which the patriarch sought. Rather was it designed, through the trial of his faith, to give him a far higher and better blessing than the temporal one which he had asked, as was the case in our Lord's apparent unwillingness to grant the petition of the Syro-Phœnician woman.

The change which was wrought in Jacob through this experience—a change which we may recognise through his whole after-life, from which all traces of cunning and selfishness have disappeared,¹ manifested itself at once. The dread of Esau had passed from his mind. It was no longer deliverance that he was chiefly concerned about. It was to gain the knowledge of God and to be blessed of Him that he desired to improve his opportunity, even when the daybreak was calling him to his earthly duties, and to prepare for the approaching meeting.² Like Moses crying, "I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory," he asked, "Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name. Reveal Thyself to me." The actual request was not granted, any more than it was in the case of Moses. Nor could it be. Perhaps there was too

¹ See Gen. xxxiii. 11, etc.

² This point is brought out in Rev. F. W. Robertson's Sermon, iii., 1st series, p. 50, post 8vo edit.

much of curiosity mingled with it; and for this there was a gentle rebuke. Nevertheless, the desire of his heart, which that request expressed, was gratified: "and He blessed him there." And in that blessing, with all it conveyed of pardon, grace, and lovingkindness, he not only knew his prayer for deliverance granted, but also learned, in the best way it could be revealed, "the Name" which is the character of God.

Thus had he won a double blessing; and in token of his victory, he was "knighted on the field," and received from God the honourable name, significant of the new strength in which he went forth to meet Esau and to begin a new and higher life, *Israel*—"a prince of God." And he called the name of that place "Peniel," *i.e.*, the face of God, for (said he) I have seen the face of God and my life is preserved; or better, "My soul is healed or saved," as Luther translates it.

Sadly the night had fallen around him, but brightly dawned the morning. And as he passed over the river to rejoin his company, with God's blessing upon his head and God's peace within his heart, "the sun rose upon him," and the shadows of the night fled away.

Before that sun went down again, the two brothers had met, and "wept on each other's necks." He who had had power with God had prevailed against men (see verse 23, Sept. and Vulgate, in margin of Revised Version). He had overcome his brother's wrath by the power of love. That peace was made at Peniel. "I have seen thy face," Jacob says to Esau, "as though I had seen the face of God." Yes! because he had the night before seen the face of God, and that face was Love. And "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." "If He be for us, who can be against us?" "When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?"

But I suppose that after that night Jacob always bore about with him the traces of its mysterious transaction in his halting gait. This would serve, like St. Paul's "thorn in the flesh," to keep him from being exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations which were granted to him, and to remind him continually of his own weakness and helplessness, as well as of the strength, made perfect in weakness, through which he had become "a prince with God." In the after-years it would often recall that night of weeping, and the joy with which the morning broke upon it.

This narrative is rich in lessons for the believer and the Church at all times. "For this reason," says Luther, "let us learn that these things are written for our instruction; that if the like should happen to us we may know to hold God in such a way that we become Israel."

It teaches us how near is God to us in times of distress—"a

very present help in trouble." In the darkest night we may find Him, if we only feel after Him, near to help, to comfort, to bless; brought near in "the Angel of the Covenant" in Christ Jesus. It teaches us to seek Him in each hour of sorrow and anxiety. Our troubles should send us to Him. We should see His hand *in* them, and turn to Him who smiteth us. And while, like Jacob, we do not neglect *our duty* to take every precaution and employ every means, having done this, it is *our privilege* to cast our care upon Him. Nor should we seek merely help and deliverance, but also the sanctification of affliction, that it may be good for us, and that we may come forth out of it chastened and purified and strengthened, knowing more of our own selves and more of the mercy and love of God towards us.

Thus we may make each Jabbok of trial, beside which we weep and wrestle, a Peniel bright with the shining of the face of God. Thus shall each night of heaviness end in a morning of joy, until every scar which we bear of a past wound, every memory of sorrow—yea, even the crippling of some earthly hope, or the darkening of some earthly joy—shall be the remembrance of some season of special nearness to God and blessing received at His hand.

Again, this narrative teaches us how such blessing is to be won. It witnesses to the power, the omnipotence of prayer to prevail with the Almighty—the prayer which dares to say, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." It teaches us the *qualities* of prevailing prayer—how real and earnest a thing it is—a wrestling, a close hand-to-hand struggle; and what a patient and persevering thing it is. It teaches us the *character* of the prayer that wins the blessing—the voice of deep-felt need looking away from self and resting alone upon God, His mercy, His promises, His past dealings. With such prayer may we make also each season of retirement in our chamber, each return of the Lord's day, each visit to the house of God—each approach to the Lord's Table, if only our faith lays hold on God revealed in Christ Jesus, and will not let Him go except He bless us—a "Peniel," where we have seen the face of God.

Thus, too, when we must stand at the brink of the "dark river of death," and there be "left alone" even by the nearest of earthly friends, shall we find the Lord with us, supporting and blessing us through the valley of shadow, if we cling to Him, nor leaving us until the breaking of the day, when, all our mortal halting healed, the sun that never goeth down shall rise upon the heavenly Peniel, where we shall see God face to face for ever.¹

T. ALFRED STOWELL.

¹ Charles Wesley's fine hymn "Come, O thou traveller unknown," well teaches the application of the story.