

SOME NAMES IN GENESIS.

“WHAT’S in a name?” In spite of this often-repeated question, everybody knows that sometimes there is a great deal in a name. It may serve to sum up a man’s history or character, or fix his position. In a highly civilized state of society, where names are given in infancy, it is true that as a general rule the fitness of the name chosen or the reverse is a mere accident. “Octavia” perhaps is, in most cases, the eighth child, and names such as “Dorothy” or “Theodore” often have a very real meaning, and tell of the gratitude of the parents for the treasure committed to their keeping. But “Rose” may grow up pale and sickly, and utterly unlike the flower whose name she bears; while “Lily,” as often as not, turns out singularly inappropriate and belongs to a plump, well-favoured maiden, whose healthy hues irresistibly remind one of Coleridge’s description of the bride: “Red as a rose is she.” So also culture and civilization and the use of double names (Christian and surname), tending as they do to define the person meant, and thus to avoid confusion, lead to a great extent to the disuse of nicknames and soubriquets so common in former days. “The Red Prince” and “the Iron Duke” may remind us that they are not altogether extinct, but they will probably never again be so largely employed as was the case in past ages, when (just as among schoolboys now-a-days) almost every man who made his mark in any line was dubbed by a title which hit off some trait in his character or peculiarity in his personal appearance, or preserved the memory of some great achievement. The Conqueror, Rufus, Beauclerk, Longshanks, Hotspur, the Black Prince—names such as these will occur to every reader at once, and the list might be extended *ad libitum*. But the following from Italian history may be new to some, and

affords a good illustration of the manner in which a random speech may give rise to a lasting name. The famous Condottiere, General Sforza, originally joined the army in the humble position of follower to one of the soldiers. He afterwards joined himself to the company of Alberigo da Barbiano. In the lawless life of a camp he was the most lawless, and one day a quarrel in which he was engaged about the division of plunder attracted the attention of Alberigo, who interposed to settle the dispute. But the fiery peasant did not lay aside his threatening attitude even at his captain's presence. "You look," said Alberigo, "as if you would *use violence* (*sforzare*) to me also. Have then the name of *Violent*." From this time the peasant was known among his comrades as Sforza, a name which was to descend to a princely house. (Creighton's *History of the Papacy*, vol. i. p. 243.) It is not, however, the object of the present writer to gossip or moralize upon names and their meaning in general. His purpose is a more definite one, and one which makes his Paper more suitable for such a periodical as the EXPOSITOR. It is to draw attention to the wonderful significance of the names given to most of the prominent persons in the Book of Genesis. In reading this, the more deeply one studies the book, the more one feels that the names given were not the result of private fancy or accident, but have a definite purpose and meaning, not always religious, but clearly marked; and that they refer to some definite characteristic or incident in the life of the parent or child, while occasionally by a happy phrase or expression, they preserve what might almost be called a photograph of some memorable scene or event.

In all probability, the custom of giving personal names to every individual in childhood only grew up gradually. In the Hebrew race it was fixed by the institution of the religious rite of circumcision, with which it was inseparably

connected, as on the occasion of making the covenant, of which this outward rite was the sign, God Himself had given a new name both to the father of the faithful and to his wife. But in many cases it is likely that a man had to *make himself a name* in the literal meaning of the words, and that the title by which he became known to his contemporaries and to after generations is simply the flower of his own achievements. It is believed that we have a large number of such names in Genesis; and, if this view be correct, it will at once be manifest how much *history* may be preserved even by the mere record of *names*. It will not, then, be labour lost if we collect the most important names in the Book of Genesis, and, by an examination of them, endeavour to discover their meaning and origin.

At the outset it will be convenient to draw a distinction, and point out that there are different classes of names, which must be discussed separately. They will fall easily into three divisions:—(1) Names given by God Himself. (2) Names given in the infancy of the child. (3) Names descriptive of a person's position or character, given in some cases, perhaps, by contemporaries, but certainly sometimes by after generations.

I. Of the first class we need not say very much. It contains only five names; and these, together with their meanings, are for the most part well known. Isaac (*Laughter*) and Ishmael (*God hears*) are both given by God Himself before the birth of the children, and both allude to circumstances occurring on the occasion on which the promise was made. Isaac preserves the memory of the *laughter* of both parents (see Genesis xvii. 17, xviii. 12), when the announcement was made that Sarah should have a son,¹ and is evidently glanced at in the curious rhythmical utterances of Sarah after the child is born: "Laughter hath God prepared for me: all who hear shall

¹ See the EXPOSITOR. *First Series*, vol. xii. pp. 351-3.

laugh with me" (Chapter xxi. 6). Ishmael is explained by the angel when it is first revealed to Hagar: "Thou shalt call his name Ishmael, because *the Lord hath heard thy affliction*" (Chapter xvi. 11). The remaining names, Abraham, Sarah, and Israel, were all given to supersede those by which their possessors were formerly known. Abram (*high father*) was to become Abraham (*father of a multitude*), "for a *father of many nations* have I made thee" (Chapter xvii. 5); while Sarai¹ (*the contentious?*) becomes Sarah (*a princess*). So also Jacob becomes, by Divine command, Israel (*one who strives with God*), "for *thou hast striven with God* and men, and hast prevailed" (Chapter xxxii. 28). The ordinary explanation, "Prince of God," is due to Jerome, who suggests it in preference to the explanation then commonly adopted, "the man seeing God," as if the word came from אֵל, רָאָה, and אִשָּׂרָאֵל (compare Chapter xxxii. 30, "for I have seen God face to face"). But the interpretation given above is more naturally suggested by the text of Genesis, and the allusion to the incident in which the name originated, in Hosea xii. 4.

II. The second class is somewhat larger. It contains a few names given in a serious and religious spirit, sometimes in gratitude for blessings granted, sometimes half prophetic and full of hope for the future: but in many of them the religious element is wholly or partially wanting, and they appear to be almost "playful titles given in the women's tents by quick-witted nurses who caught up any chance words of the mother."²

In the history of the antediluvian world there is a very

¹ The significance of this name is not certain. It is generally taken as an adjective, "*Princely*." But if this be its meaning, the change is so slight that it is hard to see the reason for it; and on the whole it is better to give it the meaning of *contentious* from the idea of *striving*, which belongs to the verb from which it is derived, in Chapter xxxii. 28, and Hosea xii. 4.

² The Dean of Canterbury, in Bishop Ellicott's "Commentary for English Readers."

small proportion of names belonging to this class. Two only have a certain right to be admitted to it—Seth and Noah. The first is easy enough (Chapter iv. 25): “And she bare a son and called his name Seth (*substitution*), for God, saith she, hath *appointed* (or *substituted*—Heb. *shâth*) me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.” The second is not quite so simple (Chapter v. 28, 29): “And Lamech . . . begat a son, and he called his name Noah (Heb. *Noach*), saying, This same *shall comfort us* (Heb. *y'nachamênû*) concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.” From the form of the sentence, we should expect the latter part to explain the origin of the name, as in the examples previously quoted. But it is scarcely possible to derive *Noach* from the verb *nacham*. It must come from a cognate root, *nuach*, and signify *Rest* rather than *Comfort*. The two ideas are connected. Rest is a cause of comfort; and Lamech plays upon the words, and, in alluding to the name of his son, catches at the kindred word and explains one by the other. Thus he undoubtedly gives us the key to the meaning of the name, and fixes its significance; and there can be no question that the meaning is wrong, although etymologically possible, which was given to it in later times by some among the Jews. This, connecting it with the secondary meaning of the verb *nuach*, to *remain*, took the name as prophetic of Noah's position as alone *left* alive by the flood. This curious interpretation is found in the Jewish Book of Enoch (Chapter cvi.): “And now announce to thy son Lamech that he who was born to him is in truth his son, and call his name Noah, for he will be a *remnant* of you: and he and his children will be saved from the destruction which will come over the earth.” There is also a hint of this explanation of the name in the Book of Ecclesiasticus (xliv. 17): “Noah was found perfect and righteous; in the time of wrath he was taken in exchange

[for the world;] therefore was he left as a *remnant* (κατάλειμμα) unto the earth, when the flood came."

Two more names should perhaps be placed in this class, though not without hesitation. The first of them is that of Cain. There is the same kind of difficulty connected with this as with the name of Noah. We read (Chapter iv. 1) that Eve "bare Cain (Heb. *Qayin*) and said, I have gotten (*Qânithi*) a man from the Lord." If Eve's remark is to be taken as explaining the name of Cain, the word must be derived from the verb *Qânâh*, and signify *acquisition*. The derivation is accepted by Ewald (although he goes out of his way to alter the meaning), and is allowed to be possible by Gesenius; and on the whole it appears to be the probable one, although, if the word stood alone, it would be natural to derive it from a slightly different root which might give the meaning of *a spear* (compare 2 Samuel xxi. 16, where the word for spear is *qayin*), or *a smith* (see on Tubal-Cain, to be discussed in the next Paper). If either of these explanations were adopted, we should be compelled to take the name as a later designation referring either to the violence used by Cain and Lamech, or to the arts introduced by the Cainites. But then there would obviously be a difficulty about the saying of Eve, and thus the former view, if etymologically possible, is to be preferred.

From the name of Cain we pass to that of his son Enoch. Cain's wife, we read (Chapter iv. 17), bare "Enoch, and he [*i.e.* Cain] builded a city, and called the name of his city after the name of his son, Enoch" (Heb. *Chanôch*). The narrator, by this statement, draws our attention to the name, and prepares us to look for some special meaning in it. It is derived from a verb, *Chânakh*, which means (1) to train, and (2) to dedicate. In this latter sense both the verb and the kindred substantive are used of the *dedication of houses*, while the verb occurs once in Proverbs xxii. 6, of *training up* a child, and the adjective derived from it is

found in Genesis xiv. 14, of Abraham's *trained servants*. It is through this double meaning of the word that we are able to explain the name as given both to Cain's son and to Cain's city. The city was *dedicated* after the birth of the child, after whom it was called; while it is possible that the selection of this name for the child points to the fact that Cain was not utterly reckless and reprobate. It *may* mean, as Kalisch thinks (and he is followed by the Dean of Canterbury), that Cain had himself felt bitterly the need of *training*, and wished that his son should reap the benefits of his experience. "He intended to instruct him from his early years in the duties of virtue, and he called him by a name which involuntarily reminds us of the maxim, '*Train a child in the way he should go: even when he is old he will not depart from it.*'"¹

The same name reappears in the line of Seth, in Enoch, the seventh from Adam. But there it is not stated that the name was given by Jared, the father of its bearer, and its significance will be more fitly considered later on in our next Paper. For the present it will be best to pass on to the discussion of other birth-names which come before us in the later chapters of Genesis. After the narrative is confined to the history of a single race these become more frequent, and the list is swelled to larger dimensions by containing the names of the twelve sons of Jacob, and the two sons of Joseph, besides those of Jacob and Esau.

The origin of the last two names is given in Chapter xxv. 24-26: "And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold there were twins in her womb. And the

¹ Kalisch, "Commentary on Genesis," p. 146, and compare Bishop Ellicott's "Commentary," p. 31, where the Dean of Canterbury actually says: "In old time the ideas of training and dedication were closely allied, because teaching generally took the form of initiation into sacred rites, and one so initiated was regarded as a consecrated person. Though, then, his wife may have had most to do with giving the name, yet we see in it a purpose that the child should be a trained and consecrated man; and Cain must now have put off those fierce and violent habits which had led him to so terrible a crime."

first came out red (*admóni*) all over like a hairy (*sêar*) garment; and they called his name Esau (Heb. *Esav*). And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel (*âqêbh*), and his name was called Jacob" (Heb. *Yaaqôbh*). Esau, judging from a similar Arabic word, simply means *the hairy*, and Mount Esau is actually used as a synonym for Mount Seir (=the hairy) in the prophecy of Obadiah (Verses 8, 9, 19, 21). This name, therefore, was given from the personal appearance of the child, and it is possible that the narrator's remark that he "came out red" contains a glance at another name by which he may also have been called in his early years, Edom (=Rufus, the Red), but which was given a new prominence by his clamorous request that Jacob would feed him "with that same red pottage," words which literally rendered are: "Let me swallow, I pray thee, of the red, this red." "The verb expresses extreme eagerness, and he adds no noun whatever, but points to the steaming dish."¹ "Therefore," adds the narrator, "was his name called Edom": upon which I may once more quote the Dean of Canterbury, who says that "Esau may have been called Edom, that is Rufus, the red one, before, but after this act it ceased to be a mere allusive by-name and became his ordinary appellation."

Jacob in itself means *one who follows on another's heels*, and was given because the birth of the one child followed hard on the other, with no interval between the two. This is expressed by the figurative expression that "his hand was holding on to Esau's heel." There is no doubt that this is the original meaning of the name, and as such it is alluded to in Hosea xii. 3, "*He took his brother by the heel*" (Heb. *Aqabh*). But the name was capable of another and a worse signification, which was brought into prominence by Jacob's after conduct. To tread on a

¹ The Dean of Canterbury.

person's heels often leads to supplanting him ; and hence the verb (âqabh) has a secondary sense of *overreaching* and *defrauding*, and the noun (Yaaqôbh) may mean *defrauder* or *supplanter*. Esau is accordingly quite justified in his play upon the words when he exclaims that his brother is Jacob by name and Jacob by nature (Chapter xxvii. 36) : " Is he not rightly termed Jacob, for *he hath supplanted me* (or overreached, *yaqebhêni*) these two times ; he took away my birthright, and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing."

The account of the naming of Jacob's sons is related in Chapters xxix. xxx. ; a very curious section, and one which well repays close study, as giving an insight into the manners and customs of the times, and shewing the kind of way in which names were anciently selected for children.

(1) *Reuben*. " And Leah conceived and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, Surely the Lord *hath looked upon my affliction* ; now therefore my husband will love me." Here there is a play upon the words, and a sort of double explanation of the name which it is extremely difficult to represent in English. The child was called Reuben, which signifies *Behold a son*, and the reason given is that Jehovah *hath looked upon my affliction* (*raah beonyi*, as if the name signified *provided for my affliction*). The natural explanation of the word " Behold a son " is universally allowed to be the true one, and in Leah's speech she is simply playing with the sound, and (though one is shy of using the expression) *punning* upon it. Josephus, oddly enough, gives yet a third meaning to the name which he writes 'Ρούβηλος (so the Syriac) " because God had mercy upon her in giving her a son, for that is the signification of this name " (as if it were from Râûy beël, regarded of God). But this is manifestly wrong and there is no need to waste time in discussing it.

(2) *Simeon*. " And she conceived again, and bare a son ;

and said, Because the Lord *hath heard* (*Shâma'*) that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon" (Heb. *Shim on*=*hearing*). "Which name," says Josephus rightly enough, "signifies that God hearkened to her prayer."

(3) *Levi*. "And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband *be joined* (*yillâveh*) unto me, because I have borne him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi" (*adhesion*), a name which designates the child as the tie of love, *joining* together husband and wife. A new and higher significance was given to this name by the after history of the tribe, the Levites being *joined* with the priesthood in the special service of the sanctuary; and to this God Himself makes an allusion in Numbers xviii. 2, in words addressed to Aaron: "Thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee that *they may be joined* (*yillâvu*) unto thee": as if to say that thus they shall really answer to their name, which is to be ennobled by this new meaning attached to it.

(4) *Judah*. "And she conceived again, and bare a son; and she said, Now *will I praise* (*Odeh*) the Lord: therefore she called his name Judah" (Heb. *Yehûdah*=*praise*). Here the religious element appears most distinctly: and the name was certainly given in gratitude to God, whom Leah would praise for his mercies. A somewhat lower meaning is put upon the name by Jacob in his blessing of his sons before his death in Chapter xlix. 8: "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall *praise*," as if Judah himself, and not Jehovah, were the subject of the praise. This, however, is only one of those allusive glances at the meaning of words which are so common in the Old Testament, and is not in the least incompatible with the higher thought in the mind of Leah when the name was first given.

(5) *Dan*. Rachel, in her distress at being childless, has given to her husband her handmaid Bilhah, and when the latter has borne to Jacob a son, "Rachel said, God hath *judged me* (*dânanni*), and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son; therefore she called his name Dan" (=a judge). The name is alluded to, with a different turn given to its meaning, in the blessing of Jacob: "Dan shall *judge* (*yadîn*) his people, as one of the tribes of Israel."

(6) *Naphtali*. "And Bilhah Rachel's maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son. And Rachel said, With great *wrestlings* (Heb. *naphtûley Elohim*, wrestlings of God) have I *wrestled* (*naphtalti*) with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali" (=my *wrestling*).

(7) *Gad*. Rachel's example is now followed by Leah, who gives her handmaiden Zilpah to Jacob. "And Zilpah, Leah's maid, bare Jacob a son. And Leah said, *In luck!* and she called his name Gad" (=luck). There is little doubt that this interpretation of the passage is the true one. The marginal reading of the Jews has גַּד נְסֵךְ, in two words, "Luck cometh"; whence our English version, "a troop cometh." This rendering is certainly wrong, and though the marginal reading has the support of the Syriac and of the ancient Targum of Onkelos, yet the text is probably correct. So the LXX. ἐν τύχη, and Vulgate, *Feliciter*. The English version would require a different although somewhat similar word, *Gedûd*, which is employed by Jacob in his blessing, when, as in other cases, he plays with the name, and makes allusion to it in his dying words: "Gad, a troop shall overcome him, but he shall overcome at the last." It is impossible to render this play on words in English, but in the Original the alliteration is most remarkable: *Gad gedûd yegûdennu, vehû yâgûd aqebh*. Out of the six words which the verse contains, no less than four are from the same root.

(8) *Asher*. “And Zilpah, Leah’s maid, bare Jacob a second son. And Leah said, Happy am I (literally, *in my happiness, beoshri*), for the daughters *will call me blessed (ishsherûni)*: and she called his name Asher” (=happy).

(9) *Issachar*. Leah’s fifth son bears a name which recalls the rivalry between the two sisters and the episode of the mandrakes; a story which evidences in a striking and not altogether pleasant manner the evils of polygamy. Issachar (יששכר to be read according to a Kri perpetuum ישכר = יש שכר), meaning *there is hire*, and referring to the manner in which Leah had *hired* (Heb. *sakhar*) her husband with her son’s mandrakes. A higher shade of meaning is also contained in the name, which is brought out by Leah’s saying in Verse 18, “God hath given me *my hire* (sechâri), because I have given my maiden to my husband.”

(10) *Zebulun*. “And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son. And Leah said, God *hath dowered me (zebâdeni)* with a good *dowry (zebed)*: now will my husband *dwell with me (yizbelêni)*, because I have borne him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun.” Once more there is a kind of double signification of the name, which contains an allusion to the dower and the dwelling. What is the actual meaning of Zebulun is disputed; but the view for which there is most to be urged takes it as formed from *zebed*, the *d* being changed into *l* for the sake of euphony.¹ But the mention of the rich *dower (zebed)* with which God has endowed her, suggests to Leah the similar word *zebûl* (=dwelling), which she turns into a verb² for the sake of introducing one of those plays upon words in which she delighted, and of giving a double meaning to the name of her child.

¹ For other instances of *d* and *l* being interchanged, see Gesenius' *Thesaurus*, p. 727.

² The verb occurs nowhere else, the substantive only five times in the whole of the Old Testament.

(11) *Joseph*. "And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened unto her, and opened her womb. And she conceived and bare a son; and said, God *has taken away* (*âsaph*) my reproach: and she called his name Joseph, and said the Lord *shall add* (*yôseph*) to me another son." At last a child is born to Rachel, who emulates her sister in her exclamations, and gives her son a name which would at the same time recal the fact that God had *taken away* her reproach and suggest the hope that He might yet *add* to her another son: it being possible to take the word Joseph (Heb. *Yôseph*) not merely as the future of *yasaph* (=may he add), but also as the same part of the verb *asaph*, to take away.

(12) *Benjamin*. About this name there is no sort of difficulty. Its origin is given in Genesis xxxv. 16-18: "And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath; and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-oni (=son of my sorrow): but his father called him Benjamin (=son of my right hand)."

Having thus considered each of the names separately and examined their import, the reader will now be in a position to appreciate the following passage from a commentator, from whom it is always possible to learn a great deal, however seriously one may differ from him on subjects of the utmost importance: "[The names] of the four eldest sons of Leah belong to the most remarkable appellations, expressing in the strongest and precisest manner Leah's affection and piety. The other names also are interesting; but their connexion with the individuals is not equally clear, and they were partly suggested by a transitory thought or an accidental event. Though Dan and Naph-

tali still point to the relation between Rachel and Leah, Gad and Asher describe quite generally joy or happiness; and though in the names of Issachar and Zebulun the fond attachment of Leah remains faintly transparent, Joseph comprises the past and the future in almost undefined outlines. Yet all these names are much more appropriately chosen than many of those generally given to children in the East, and frequently derived from the most trifling incidents—from the words uttered by some person present at the time of the birth; from some animal which happened to pass or to be near; from the facility and speed of delivery; from the locality where it took place; and even from the weather and the temperature.”¹

Two more names remain to be considered in this section, those of the two sons of Joseph. In the case of each the explanation is furnished by Joseph himself in giving the name. Chapter xli. 51, 52: “And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh (*i.e. causing to forget*): For God, said he, *hath made me forget (nashshani)* all my toil, and all my father’s house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim (*i.e. fruitfulness*): For God *hath caused me to be fruitful (hiphrani)* in the land of my affliction.” To this last mentioned name and its significance there is perhaps a distant allusion in Jacob’s blessing, where he speaks of Joseph as “a *fruitful bough*” (literally, son of a fruitful tree: *ben pôrath*), but it is too distant for any stress to be laid upon it.

This completes the list of important names in our second division. The third and last is too large to be treated of in a few words at the close of a paper, and must stand over till another number.

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¹ Kalisch on Genesis, p. 540.