

trim your sails well, if you are to get to windward of me. But the trouble with me is this. I often wonder—you say, as I think Jacob would be wondering that night—I wonder now *how I look before God*; how do I stand before Him? This near approach of my brother Esau brings vividly before me the last twenty years, which certainly have been a strange twenty years. I believe I know God. I hope—I hope there is a *something* working in me, and that all this ship-herding, and all this love, and all this lust,—for the bottom of all polygamy is lust,—I hope that all these things have not drowned, and have not quenched the something in me that throbs and pulses and trembles away up to the God of my fathers. I do believe—and yet with it all there is such an amount of dirt about the mainspring—I am so clogged and hampered that I wonder how I look before God. I know how to pray, and I have prayed—yes; and God has heard me in spite of all my badness and slipperiness, and I am as slippery as an eel, and I can go round about most men. There are not many men in Padu-aram who can beat Laban, but I have beaten him at his own game every time. I wonder how I look before God? And, maybe, Jacob was getting to be in danger, the danger of ourselves; and to think that God was something like him. You remember how God broke out, “Thou thoughtest that My notions of morality worked as easy a sliding scale as your own, now stringent when it pays to be stringent; and again loose, and soft, and buttery and slack, when it pays to be slack! and to ride, so to speak, with a long, long length of cable between you and the anchor. Thou thoughtest that I was very much like you, for the fact remains, that you have got on at this kind of double game, half for me and half for the world, and all the time for yourself, and all the time conscious that, in the main, the weapons of your warfare are not spiritual but carnal.” Now, to-day, middle-aged and elderly brothers look clearly with daylight sincerity at yourselves, as I set you alone, before you dare to steam into the Monday. You and I are, like Jacob, I believe, on the verge of eternal destruction; but God, in His great love and mercy, has gently brought us away to the quiet time of solitude on the Sabbath day, before we cross the stream and go back into the world, where perhaps we shall fatally give the loose to the worst side that is in us. God has met us to-day, and *now brother is the crisis of your soul*. Out of these doors, if God can help it, you are not to go, the shifty, tricky, subtle, half-and-half, almost contemptible creature you came in, and because He loves you, and because He knows you through and through, and be-

cause He has set His love upon you, and wants to redeem you, and the time is short, therefore He comes upon us to-day as He came upon Jacob, with a noiseless tread, and with a long stride, and He has us in His grip before we know it. You did not think, some of you, that you were to be gripped after this fashion this morning. You came into the church praying for comfort. You came in praying for comfort, and praying for something. It is not comfort you need, it is not soothing you need. It is the most awful through putting that ever a man got in his life that you need. You need simply to be turned upside down and outside in, for at this rate of it you will never be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light—never in all time—never.

I have no doubt that sitting there by the brook, sitting there with the brawling Jacob wrestling its way through the gully on to the river, and the night winds moaning round about him and the fear of his brother still nearer to him than the winds, surrounding his soul with its chill, Jacob was inclined to pray to God for comfort: “O, God! comfort me. O, God! help me. O, God! be good to me. O, my Father! kiss me, and put Thy arms round about me.” And God did, but not to kiss, at least not at first—not to kiss him, but to crush him, to take the Jacob in him, and simply paralyze it once for all.

I do not know how it stands with you, but I dare to say that for you, brother, this is a word in season. This is a word for most of us. Again I say, I speak in God's name to ageing, successful men who make, and have made for years, an open Christian profession. “Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled with him a man until break of day.” I can see him in the gloom sitting there, and he is thinking and fearing; he is just rising between hope and fear—rising to go over the brook and into the land of Canaan—“when suddenly one rises before him, and before he knows where he is, he is wrestling in the darkness as though for life.” It is Jacob in the crises of his life—Jacob met along his own line, Jacob being compelled at last, singly and alone, to come face to face with that unseen, invisible One, who all through has been with him, sometimes checking him, sometimes forwarding him, sometimes taking the cup of his love, as when he thought that he was going to get Rachel, and dashing it down when he finds that he gets Leah, and yet never leaving him alone—never just making him say, “God is against me,” but always rather making him inclined to say, “Bad and worthless as I am, God is still for me. Well, am I not good enough? And yet I know in my conscience that I am indeed very