

A SERMON TO MIDDLE-AGED PROS-
PEROUS MEN.

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"And Jacob was left alone."—Genesis xxxii. 24-32

I am not going to enter into the controversy as to whether this somewhat late-dated event in Jacob's history is really the date of his conversion. I do not see that there is any great profit in it. For myself, I rather think that at Bethel he got a sight of things that never left him—that at Bethel he saw the Unseen and the Eternal with his own eyes; and although afterwards he did not greatly grow in grace and greatly grow in knowledge of God, still his eyes never again altogether closed. But what I am sure that we are all agreed about is this, that if ever God's purposes for Jacob, and if ever God's purposes through Jacob's line were to be realized and carried forward with success, then this Jacob must be made a worthier channel through which these purposes were to work and flow.

I think, to bring this lesson home to myself and home to the people, that this is somewhat the angle of incidence. Look at that lonely man there. Just try to think of him. Now he is not altogether a bad man. Sometimes we fall foul of him grievously, and we have no milder word for him than "swindler," "hypocrite," "artful dodger," and so on. Well, so he was. There was a great deal of clay in him. He was to a great extent of the earth, earthy. And yet he was not all clay. There were gleams of gold among the dirt and rubbish. Why, see how he loved; and I have always a great hope of a man who can love. So has God. See the great, big, bursting heart that he had behind all his suppleness and craft and cunning! There burned in him that one pure, bright thing—he loved his Rachel with an intense love. See what it led to! See what he underwent to secure his heart's desire! See him, tough and wiry and weather-beaten, as with splendid indignation he lifts his face into Laban's and virtually says: "For all these years the draught consumed me by day, and the frost consumed me by night. Whatever was torn I dealt with you as though I had not been your servant—as though I was accountable for it. Whatever went astray I made myself responsible for, and you know how you used me: rather you know how you abused me." All through there was in him a mixture; but that mixed condition was not allowed to last. It must not be allowed any further to continue. He is very much like ourselves, is he not? Sometimes we advertise sermons to young:

sometimes we advertise sermons to children. I do not think that I ever saw a sermon advertised to old men. But I am sure I never saw a sermon advertised to middle-aged men—for those who have been some twenty or thirty years in the din and hurly-burly of life. For those who, like Jacob, have been, in the main, getting on. By fair means or foul you have got on. You have not denied the faith. You have not become an infidel. You have not wholly yielded yourself to the world; neither have you wholly yielded yourself up, body and soul and spirit, on the altar of entire consecration, any more than Jacob. Ah! it has a thrilling, personal interest, I say, especially to middle-aged, to elderly or to ageing, prosperous men.

Let us take a look at the lonely Jacob. See him there! All his company have gone. He has to meet his brother on the morrow; it has plunged him into a state of profound concern. He has sent forward a present to appease his brother's wrath. He expects that Esau is coming upon him: charging down upon him like the wolf on the fold; but he hopes that by the time he has broken through these presentations his wrath will be appeased. He hopes that he will have smothered Esau's wrath by flinging upon such an abundance of the things as will please him, for he knew Esau as well as if he lived with him. He had walked round about Esau, and took his measurement long ago; and he has a shrewd idea that these presents will tell upon Esau if anything will. Here we have him sitting quietly alone. They have all gone across the brook, and he is just going after them when he sits down quietly and thinks, as I wish you, my middle-aged friend, and myself, and as I wish us all to sit down quietly and think. Let memory bring out or past years all that past years contain. And is not this the state of the case with a good many of us? Let us talk to our soul; let us commune in the loneliness and the solitude of a time like this, with all London there, so to speak, across the brook on other side of Sunday, and ourselves upon this lonely, solitary side.

Let us commune with our own hearts and see how we stand in the sight of God. And is not this the case—that you and I are bound to say, "Well, now, undoubtedly I have got on, and I have kept up a character and credit and reputation among men. I am known as being sagacious and astute down in the city. I am not known as a thorough-paced blockhead, as some are down there. No; I have not flung away the faith; I have not made shipwreck of a good conscience. The most that men can say of me is that I am pretty near; and that you need to rise early to be up before me, and you need to