

## Messenger and Visitor

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### Jabbok and Peniel.

Good men and learned in the sphere of Biblical interpretation differ somewhat widely in their views as to the historicity of the stories of the lives of the patriarchs presented in Genesis, some holding that they are throughout veritable history, and others being inclined to admit more or less of a poetical or prophetic element woven in with the historical thread of the narrative. But whatever may be the character of Genesis as literature—whether purely historical or otherwise—it would seem quite impossible that any earnest student who comes to the study of this portion of the Bible with a sincere mind and a devout heart, can fail to find matter of the most valuable character for the instruction and inspiration of the religious life. This is especially true in the light of the other Old Testament and of the New Testament Scriptures.

Take, for example, that incident in the life of Jacob which affords the theme for study next Sunday in connection with the International Series of Sunday School lessons. It is a passage which arrests the thought of the devout student with a compelling power, and present in a most impressive and authoritative manner lessons of the highest importance to the life of faith. That story of Jacob's all night wrestling with the Nameless One, with the change of "Jacob" to "Israel" and of "Jabbok" to "Peniel," is one of the most significant and wonderful things in the whole course of the Old Testament Scriptures. No wonder that every earnest Bible student finds his thought powerfully drawn to this passage, and every devout worshipper feels that here he comes upon holy ground.

The great lesson taught here is the lesson of faith—the necessity of dependence upon God for any success or triumph which can be justly recognized as real and final. In the light of the narrative which precedes this incident, Jacob is the representative of a type of man not unfamiliar to us in these modern days. He is not an irreligious man. The element of faith lives in him. He recognizes God in the affairs of his life. He prays, and prays sincerely, for his prayers are answered; but he is far from perfect, and some of his imperfections take on a very uncomely character in the light of the law of love. He is a strong man,—astute, subtle, resourceful. If he believes in God he believes also very firmly in himself and in his destiny, and it does not trouble him if what spells gain for him spells loss for his neighbor. His temptations are to avarice and selfishness and to consequent guile and fraud in dealing with his fellowmen. We are not however to look upon Jacob as the type of a mere selfish worldling who wants wealth merely for its own sake or for the sake of the luxury or the power which it will purchase. As we have seen, Jacob is a religious man. It is his desire—his ambition—to be the heir of Abraham and the servant of the Lord, to stand in the theocratic line and inherit the promises. He believes himself chosen of God to that high destiny, and, as the narrative shows, he has grounds for such belief. But he is not able to rest in the purpose of God and wait His time. His desire outruns the providential march of events, and so Jacob undertakes in his own way to hasten the divine programme, and Jacob's way, as it is easy to see, is a very bad one indeed. It is the way of doing evil that good may come. He thinks that he can materially hasten the maturing of God's purposes and the fulfilment of His promises by human finesse and fraud. He believes in God and supplicates the divine favor, but he believes rather more heartily in Jacob and his astuteness and resourcefulness.

We are no doubt inclined to look upon Jacob as a very fallible saint, if saint at all, criticise him severely for his sharp-dealing and deceit, and give ourselves airs of superior virtue as children of the fuller light and larger blessings of the Christian dispensation. But before we pass our final judgment on Jacob, it might be well to submit our conduct as individuals to a careful test by the standards of the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount, and also to bring our church life to the test of the principles and general teachings of the New Testament. It is very much to be apprehended that we should find ourselves open to the charge of seeking to help the Lord fulfil his purpose by human methods little more likely to obtain the divine approval than were Jacob's.

It has been said by a distinguished commentator, in reference to the incident of Jacob's wrestling at Jabbok; "All along Jacob's life had been the struggle of a clever and strong, a pertinacious and enduring, a self-confident and self-sufficient person who was sure of the result only when he helped himself—a contest with God who wished to break his strength and wisdom in order to bestow upon him real strength in divine weakness, and real wisdom in divine folly." Hence the need that Jacob should have his Jabbok in order that he might also have his Peniel. Therefore

"From out the sleeve of the darkness  
Was thrust an arm of strength,"

and the power of the Nameless One grips and thwarts the strong man, turns his strength into weakness, baffles all his subtlety and resource, converts the sturdy wrestler into a suppliant, then grants to the humble cry of faith what has been denied to the challenge of strength. It is through faith that Jacob becomes Israel. And through faith, not to Jacob only but to all believers, the doors are opened to the lands of promise, for "Faith is the victory that overcomes the world."

This is the great lesson always true,—it is not Esau, but the Nameless One, who guards the entrance to Canaan. It is not with Esau and his four hundred men that the account has to be settled, but with God. And shall a man seek by strength or craft or subtlety to win a prize from God. There is no land of promise of which He does not hold the key. And when He has said "Yea" to us, then who shall say us "Nay"? It is not by virtue of our astuteness, by force or finesse exercised against our fellowmen, but by the good favor and the loving kindness of our God that the real prizes and the enduring triumphs of life are won. It is a great thing for a man to reach his Peniel—to come face to face with God and to feel himself in the grasp of that Omnipotent Arm of grace, which is the death of all human conceit and self-sufficiency.

### The King's Health.

The condition of the King's health is one of those subjects always available for exploitation by the news mongers in a time of dearth, and it is therefore difficult to know how much credence to place in the reports which frequently find their way into despatches that the state of King Edward's health is such as to cause anxiety. That His Majesty has suffered more or less with some affection of the throat and that two members of the late Queen's family have, within little more than a year, died of a cancerous disease of the throat, are facts which naturally give point to these rumors. Mr. I. N. Ford, cabling from London under date of September 5 to the New York Tribune, says: "The most trustworthy account which I have received from those in touch with the court leaves little ground for doubt that the King has been nervous about the condition of his throat, and suspicious that his sister's fate might be in store for him. Specialists have examined his throat, while he has been in Homburg, and they have confirmed the previous diagnosis that there is no evidence of cancer. There is, however, some disease of the throat, which requires constant watching and treatment. My informants state that the King has been warned against mental excitement, and that his medical advisers objected strongly to his going to his sister's death bed, on the ground that the emotion and intensity of grief would be dangerous. There is a court theory that while the throat is not now in a cancerous state it may become so under the influence of mental depression and excitement. This foreboding was doubtless reflected in the pessimism pervading England. No alarmist at court suggests that the coronation will be interrupted by the decline of the King's health.

### Editorial Notes.

—On our third page this week will be found in full the report of the Committee on Temperance adopted by the Convention at its recent annual session in Moncton, also the names of the brethren composing the Convention's Boards and Standing Committees for the year.

—Our obituary column this week contains notice of the death of Rev. William McGregor, late of Digby Co., N. S. Mr. McGregor had been in poor health for some time past and we believe had not had a regular charge for some years. As a preacher and a writer he was possessed of considerable ability. We hope that some sketch of his life and work will be furnished by some one who is in possession of the facts. To the afflicted family we tender our sincere sympathy.

—The late Bishop Westcott is quoted as saying: The experience which I have gained by life-long work on the Bible, chiefly on the New Testament, assures me that if we read it with perfect frankness, giving to every word its true and full meaning, we shall find for ourselves that its words are living words, filled with an unique spiritual power. But we must not presume to determine beforehand what the character or the form of the revelation shall be; we must humbly consider it as it is.

—An interesting note from the Brussels Street church will be found in our "News from the Churches" department this week. It is gratifying to note that the work carried on for several years past in the Chinese department of the Brussels street Sunday-school is finding its reward. We trust that the baptism of Sunday evening may prove a first fruits to be followed by the coming of many others of Mrs. Golding's Chinese class into the light of the Gospel. The event is interesting also as being probably, as Pastor Waring says, the first baptism of a Chinese convert within the limits of our Convention.

—We share in the deep and general regret among our brethren in the motherland at the serious illness of the J. H. Shakespeare, secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, a man of distinguished ability and a zealous and efficient servant of his denomination. The Baptist Times of August 16, alluding to Mr. Shakespeare's condition, says: "During the last day or two serious symptoms have reappeared. Last week there was such a distinct improvement that the doctors hoped that he would be able to leave home at the end of the month. It now seems very doubtful whether he will be able to do so." A later report is somewhat more encouraging, but it still seems likely that it will be some time before Mr. Shakespeare is able to resume his work.

—Dr. Austen K. DeBlois, formerly Principal of St. Martin's Seminary in this Province, afterwards President of Shurtleff College at Alton, Ill., and now pastor at Elgin, Ill., is among the many American ministers visiting the old countries this summer. Dr. DeBlois has recently supplied for a time the pulpit at Heath Street, Hampstead in the absence of the pastor, and 'The London Baptist Times' contains a very appreciative reference to his preaching. "As we listened to him on Sunday," says an editorial writer in 'The Times,' "we thought his church acted wisely as well as generously in sending him on his travels. He is an acute observer and has the faculty of turning all his experiences to account in his great work as a preacher. In both his sermons on Sunday he drew many an apt illustration from what he had seen in his own and other lands."

—Remarking upon the more generous treatment in respect to social status which men of color receive in England and on the Continent as compared with the United States, the Watchman of Boston says: "The other day the proprietor of a leading London hotel refused to eject from his house, at the request of some American guests, several negro delegates to a religious convention who were also his guests. He said that he did not see why he should send them away as long as they behaved themselves." The Watchman adds that "such are the associations in America that even the most conscientious cannot treat white and black alike except with some effort and it will be long before in social matters all will be treated according to their personal merits without distinction of race, color or previous condition of servitude." A few weeks ago statements were published in some of the St. John papers, given as the result of interviews with a number of the managers of the leading hotels in the city, to the effect that a highly respectable colored man, Bishop of the African Episcopal Methodist church, could not be received by them as a guest on account of the prejudice of other guests. Most thinking persons, we suppose, will admit that a social color line must be recognized. Just where it should be drawn is not easy to determine. But when it is so drawn as to prevent a gentleman obtaining hotel accommodation simply on account of his color, it seems evident that it is being drawn in the wrong place.