

THE PROPHET OF SORROW.



JEREMIAH,
FROM THE CELEBRATED FRESCO OF
MICHAEL ANGELO
IN THE SISTINE CHAPEL ROME

THE
PROPHET OF SORROW

OR

The Life and Times of Jeremiah.

BY THE

REV. THORNLEY SMITH,

AUTHOR OF "THE HISTORIES OF JOSEPH, MOSES, AND JOSHUA," ETC.

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“HE WAS SUSTAINED BY INWARD CONSOLATIONS, BY WONDERFUL DELIVERANCES, BY THE REMARKABLE FULFILMENT OF HIS PROPHECIES WHICH HE HIMSELF LIVED TO WITNESS; BUT ESPECIALLY BY THE CIRCUMSTANCE THAT THE LORD MOVED HIM TO BEHOLD HIS FUTURE SALVATION WITH THE SAME CLEARNESS AS HIS JUDGMENTS; SO THAT HE COULD CONSIDER THE LATTER ONLY AS TRANSIENT, AND, EVEN BY THE MOST GLARING CONTRAST BETWEEN THE APPEARANCE AND THE IDEA, NEVER LOST FIRM HOPE OF THE FINAL VICTORY OF THE FORMER.”

Hengstenberg.

TO
ALEXANDER M'ARTHUR, Esq.,
OF RALEIGH HALL,
BRIXTON RISE, LONDON,
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR THE BOROUGH OF LEICESTER,
AND A SINCERE FRIEND AND
PROMOTER OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND OTHER
BENEVOLENT ENTERPRISES,

This Volume

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED, WITH HIS KIND PERMISSION,

BY
THE AUTHOR.

O Thou, who through the wilderness of old
Thy people to their promised rest didst bring,
Hasten the days by prophet bards foretold,
When roses shall again be blossoming
In Sharon, and Siloa's cooling spring
Shall murmur freshly at the noontide hour,
And shepherds oft in Achor's vale shall sing
The mysteries of that redeeming power
Which hath their ashes changed for beautiest, sunniest bower.

T. C. NICHOLAS.

PREFACE.

THE life of Jeremiah is very closely interwoven with his prophecies. But those prophecies are not given in strictly chronological order, so that to follow the course of his history, and to understand the connection of its remarkable events, is a somewhat difficult task. The present is the first attempt which has been made to present the life of the prophet in a connected form; for whilst we have several commentaries on the book which bears his name, we have no work which professes to unfold the story of his sorrows in a continuous thread.

The name, Jeremiah, has been variously explained. Hengstenberg thinks that it means "the Lord throws," and that there is a reference to its signification in ch. i. 18. Others interpret it, "The appointed of the Lord," or "The exalted of the Lord." All these

meanings are applicable to the man, for he is the second of the three great prophets of the Jewish people, and his writings are more lengthy than those of the other two. His inspiration has seldom been denied either by Jews or Christians. It is true that he quoted largely from other prophets, and especially from Isaiah, whence some critics have attempted to prove that his writings are largely interpolated, and not all genuine ; but inspiration does not prevent the subjects of it from making use of the works of their predecessors, and the judicious and striking manner in which Jeremiah used them, itself implies that he was under the guidance of a superior hand. He spoke, or wrote, as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. The "word of the Lord" came to him, and that word he uttered ; and if his style is somewhat rugged, and not so lofty as that of Isaiah or of Ezekiel, it is because of his idiosyncrasy, with which inspiration in his case, as in others, interfered but little, if at all.

The structure of the book, as it has come down to us, is certainly remarkable. There is no doubt that it consists of two portions, namely, prophecies and facts relating to the prophet's own country (ch. i-xlv.), and prophecies relating to foreign nations (ch. xlvi.

li. 59-64). But to reconstruct the first portion, and to account for the fact that the prophecies are not given throughout in the proper order of time, many attempts have been made, none of which are altogether satisfactory. In the recent commentaries of Naëgelsbach and Keil, the reader will find several schemes referred to which it would be useless for me to discuss. I am disposed to assign chapters ii-xx. to the reign of Josiah ; we then pass to ch. xxii. 11, 12, which is the only prophecy relating to Jehoahaz ; under the reign of Jehoiakim were uttered the prophecies of ch. xxiv., xxv., xxxv., xxxvi., xlv., xlvi. Under that of Jehoiachin, we have the short fragment, ch. xxii. 24-30 ; under Zedekiah, ch. xxvii., xxviii., xxxii., xxxiii., xxxiv., xxxix., li. 58-64, and, after his deposition, ch. xl-xliv., and lii.

At the head of each chapter, I have given the approximate dates of the events and prophecies referred to.

I might present a long list of works, more or less made use of in the preparation of this volume, but I need only say, that the well-known commentators have been referred to, whilst I have been especially indebted to Calvin's Lectures, marked, as Dean Stanley

observes, "with so much good sense," and to the commentaries of Naëgelsbach and Keil, both valuable works, though differing from one another in very many important particulars. My object has been to give the story of Jeremiah's life, and a general view of his prophecies in a somewhat popular form, and as briefly as the elucidation of them would admit. The task has been a long-cherished one, and that I have been able to complete it, is to myself a cause of thankfulness to God, who, I trust, will render it in some way conducive to the interest of the Church. It has proved a more difficult undertaking than I at first anticipated, and it has been prosecuted at intervals, as ministerial and pastoral duties would admit; but the study of the subject has been highly pleasurable, so that I hope my readers will find in the work something both to gratify and interest.

Respecting the Septuagint version, and its divergencies from the Hebrew original, the student is referred to Naëgelsbach and Keil, and to the articles on Jeremiah in Kitto's "Biblical Cyclopædia," and Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible;" and respecting the seven quotations from Jeremiah in the New Testament, to a valuable book entitled "The Old

Testament in the New," by Turpie (Williams and Norgate). Brief allusions will be found in this work to some of these points, but, as a rule, I have avoided entering into minute criticism. My book is intended to supply a want felt, not by advanced students, but by general readers of the inspired Word; if it answers this design, and affords such readers help and guidance, I shall not have written it in vain.

A few notes are given at the end of the book, consisting of valuable extracts, which will tend to throw further light on some of the subjects briefly adverted to in the work itself.

I will only add, that no portion of this work has appeared in print before as coming from my pen; and further, it is not, as I think the reader will perceive, a volume of sermons, though some of the thoughts expressed in it have occasionally been advanced in the pulpit.

In a recent history of the Israelites, written by a Jewish lady, it is said of Jeremiah—"His whole existence was one great example of the noblest self-denial. He considered himself merely as the mouth-piece of a higher wisdom; he knew but one law—obedience to God; he expounded but one doc-

trine—unconditional adherence to the divine rule. To the one unselfish purpose of serving his Master and delivering His people, he devoted the great powers of his mind, the glow of his eloquence, and his long years of misery. None of the prophets reflect all the human struggles and emotions more faithfully than Jeremiah." This is well and truly said, and happy will it be for our country, or for any other, where this great example of the noblest self-denial is followed by her youthful sons. To them especially, in the name of Israel's God and ours, we commend this great example of noble self-denial. T. S.

3 CHURCH TERRACE, BONNER ROAD, E.,
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CONTENTS.



CHAPTER I.

HIS CALL.

	PAGE
The priesthood hereditary—Prophets chosen by God—Jeremiah's birth—Anathoth his birthplace—Special call—Youth—Objections overruled—Office of the Christian ministry—Schools of the prophets—Date of Jeremiah's call, B.C. 627—Character of his prophecies—The almond tree—The seething pot—Calvin's remarks—Broken cisterns—Goodness of God despised—Jeremiah's a life-long work—The Chozeh—The Nabhi . . .	1—15

CHAPTER II.

THE REIGN OF JOSIAH.

Josiah's piety—Reformation not deep—Two discourses of the prophet—Boasting of the people—Discovery of the book of the law—Hilkiah—Reading to the king—Huldah the prophetess—Gathering of the prophets—Destruction of idolatry—Description of the enemy's approach—Third discourse—Balm of Gilead—Poetry of suffering—Warning against idolatry—Quotation from Luther—Contending with horses—Family persecution—The marred girdle—Address to the Queen-mother, &c.—Free-will	16—32
--	-------

CHAPTER III.

THE PROPHECIES OF THE DROUGHT.

PAGE

Josiah on the throne—Condition of the country—Drought— Jeremiah's pity—A visitation from God—His prayer refused— The sin of Judah—Baal worshipped—Deceitfulness of the heart—The partridge's eggs—Ill-gotten wealth—The hope of Israel—The Sabbath—Law of the Sabbath—Promises—The Christian Sabbath—How far obligatory—Value of Sundays— State of the people—Modern nations—Words of warning	33—47
---	-------

CHAPTER IV.

THE POTTER'S HOUSE, ETC.

Symbols—The potter—Description of the pottery—The art learnt in Egypt—The wheel—The clay—The Great Potter—Lessons —God's sovereignty—St Paul's doctrine—Man not clay—His free agency—Burning incense to vanity—The snows of Leba- non—Fidelity of the prophet—The potter's house—Valley of Hinnom—Earthenware vessel—Pashur—Jeremiah in the stocks—Magor-missabib—The wanderer—The prophet's sorrow—Wishing to die—An infirmity—Lessons of submis- sion	48—62
---	-------

CHAPTER V.

THE DEATH OF JOSIAH.

Departure of a great monarch—Message of Huldah—Gracious promise—Pharaoh-Necho—Going to Carchemish—Josiah's opposition—Battle of Megiddo—The Egyptian archers— Josiah wounded—Hadadrimmon—His death—Deep sorrow— Jeremiah's elegy—Character of Josiah—Taken away from
--

coming evil—Victory of faith—Battle of Carchemish—Pharaoh conquered—His return—Taking of Gaza—Prophecy against Egypt—The sun-god—Further prophecies	PAGE 63—72
---	---------------

CHAPTER VI.

THE REIGNS OF JEHOAHAZ AND JEHOIAKIM.

Character of Jehoahaz—Short reign—Deposed by Pharaoh—In bonds at Riblah—Called Shallum—Death of, in Egypt—Elia- kim or Jehoiakim—Import of the name—A vassal of Pharaoh's —Tribute—The prophet Urijah—Jeremiah's prophecy—Shiloh and Jerusalem—The prophet condemned—Ahikam his friend —Nebuchadnezzar—Prophecy respecting—The seventy years' captivity—Doom of Jehoiakim—No burial—Refusing to hear —Punishment deserved	73—85
--	-------

CHAPTER VII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ROLL.

Warnings unheeded—A roll written—Jeremiah shut up—Baruch —The fasting-day—Reading of the roll—Micaiah—Chamber of Elishama—The king's winter-house—The roll of parch- ment—Cut with a knife—Thrown into the fire—Parallel in- stances—The roll re-written—Solemn predictions—How fulfilled—Fall of Jehoiakim—No funeral rites—The burial of an ass—Promise to Baruch—Seeking great things—The good alone great	86—97
--	-------

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECHABITES.

The Kenites—Rechab—A horseman—Jaazaniah—Jeremiah's pur- pose—Setting wine before them—A trial of their fidelity—

	PAGE
Jonadab their father—His injunction—Reason for it—Wine a mockery—Refusal of the Rechabites—The temperance move- ment—Contrasts—The lesson unheeded—Lot of the Rechabites —Promises to them—Seventy-first psalm—Their captivity— Probable existence to this day—Eusebius—Benjamin of Judah—Dr J. Wolf—Rabbi Joseph Schwartz—Lessons for us —The intemperance of England—The liquor traffic a great evil	98—110

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRIUMPHAL SONG.

Light beaming through the darkness—A song of praise—Coming trouble—State of Jerusalem—Rich promises—The prophet's ecstasy—Messianic times—"After those days"—The new covenant—A covenant of mercy—A covenant of renewal— A covenant widely known—A permanent covenant—Stability of creation—Jerusalem rebuilt—The Church of Christ estab- lished—Bright prospects before her	111—125
--	---------

CHAPTER X.

THE REIGN OF JEHOIACHIN.

A tottering throne—Jeoconiah, or Coniah—His mother Nehushta —Her influence—Character of Jehoiachin—Ezekiel's pro- phesy—Jeremiah's predictions—How fulfilled—Nebuchad- nezzar—Fall of Jehoiaxim in battle—Jehoiachin's revolt— Jerusalem taken—The temple plundered—Discipline of suf- fering—Jehoiachin in Babylon—Jehovah Tsidkenu—The righteous King—Righteousness through Him—A terrible reproof—Propheying falsely—Responsibilities of Great Britain—Posterity and their claims on us	126—137
--	---------

CHAPTER XI.

THE ACCESSION OF ZEDEKIAH.

PAGE

Mattaniah—Change of his name—Character of Zedekiah—Compared to Charles I.—The Elamites—Vision of the good and bad figs—Ambassadors of Nebuchadnezzar—Letter of Jeremiah to the captives—His exhortation to pray for Babylon—False prophets—Their doom predicted—Effects of the letter—Shemaiah—Zedekiah in Babylon—Jeremiah's roll—Seraiah the quiet prince—Mission—The roll cast into the Euphrates—Import of the sign—Bonds and yokes—Other false prophets—Hananiah—Falsehoods, and punishment of—State of the country—The city to be burned	138—154
--	---------

CHAPTER XII.

JEREMIAH'S IMPRISONMENT.

The cloud of witnesses—The Prophet of Sorrow now one of them—Zedekiah's revolt—Jerusalem's iniquity—Advice of Jeremiah—Messengers asking prayer—Pharaoh's army powerless—Jeremiah no time-server—Such prophets now needed—Gate of Benjamin—Irijah—False charges against the prophet—House of Jonathan—Jeremiah imprisoned there—Persecution—Zedekiah troubled—Message to him—Demand of the princes—True patriotism misunderstood—Jeremiah in the pit—Ebed-melech the Ethiopian—Deliverance of the prophet—In the court of the prison—Last interview with Zedekiah—His refusal to obey	155—169
---	---------

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PROPHET'S FAITH IN THE RETURN.

Message to Jeremiah—Hanameel—Buying the field—Price given—Subscribing the evidence—Promise of the return—The prophet	b
--	---

believed it—Omnipotence of God—Nothing too hard for Him —An answer to prayer—Precious promises—Jehovah Tsidkenu —Why the Church is so called—Christ our only priest—No righteousness through a succession of ministers—The new covenant—The prophet cheered in his sorrow—His confidence and hope—Omniscience of God—Prophecy true and real—Its gradual fulfilment—Reign of righteousness and peace—Pro- spects of Christ's people	170—183
---	---------

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

The crisis—Former sieges—The beginning of the last—Mode of attack—Weapons used—Defence—Famine within—The terrible scene—Tents of the Chaldeans—The hill Scopus— Ezekiel's prophecy—The writer with the ink-horn—Jeremiah in the prison—Breach in the wall—Zedekiah's attempt to escape—Taken at Riblah—Nergal-Sharezer—Zedekiah's sons slain—His eyes put out—Heathen cruelty—The besiegers— Horror of war—Pillage of the temple—The inhabitants of Jerusalem led captive—Jeremiah spared—Nebuzar-adan—The prophet a true patriot	184—197
--	---------

CHAPTER XV.

GEDALIAH AND ISHMAEL.

Mizpah—Gedaliah made governor—Flight of the people—Return to Mizpah—Ishmael—The summer season—Value of fruit— Plot—Discovered but not believed—Too true—Hypocrisy of Ishmael—Right of hospitality—Treachery—Gedaliah slain— Cast into a pit—Massacre at Cawnpore—Motives of Ishmael— The escape of ten—Treasures in the field—Dr Tristram quoted—Waters of Gibeon—Thomson's description—Johanan —Khan near Bethlehem—Help from Egypt—Appeal to Jere-

miah—The answer delayed—The ten days' waiting—Reply given—The people exhorted to remain—Jeremiah charged with falsehood—Baruch charged with perfidy—Innocence of both	198—213
---	---------

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PROPHET'S LAMENTATIONS.

The Hagiographa—Poetry of the Jews—The Lamentations—Authorship—Probable date—Hebrew title—Greek title—Five elegies—Alphabetical order—Strophes of three lines—Illustrations—Composing Hebrew poetry—Michael Angelo's fresco—Fixed attitude of grief—Analysis of the first elegy—George Herbert quoted—Bishop Andrewes—The second elegy—Destruction of the city—Human comfort impotent—Prayer in trouble—The third elegy—Three parts—The man who had seen affliction—Type of Christ—New mercies—Prayer for our enemies—The fourth elegy—Zion compared to Sodom—Mothers of Jerusalem—The last chapter not alphabetical—Importance of the Lamentations—Use of them in the Churches	214—232
---	---------

CHAPTER XVII.

FOREIGN NATIONS.

The Church and the world—Early and later foes of Israel—Prophecies against them— <i>Egypt</i> —Pharaoh-Necho—Tabor and Carmel—The gad-fly— <i>The Philistines</i> —Gaza—Ashdod—The Maccabean wars—The gods of heathenism famished— <i>Moab</i> —Character of Moab—Spoiled wine—Changes necessary—Kirheres the stronghold—Weeping and sorrow—Fulfilment of the prophecy— <i>Ammon</i> —Conduct of the Ammonites—Boasting of great things— <i>Edom</i> —Petra the rock city—Bozrah—The Dedanites—Fulfilment—Shorter prophecies— <i>Damascus</i> — <i>Kedar</i> — <i>Elam</i> —The Persians— <i>Babylon</i> —Three parts of the
--

	PAGE
prophecy—The standard—The archers—Babylon, God's hammer—Destruction of, by the Medes—Rome the spiritual Babylon—Her certain downfall	233—252

CHAPTER XVIII.

JEREMIAH IN EGYPT.

Woe pronounced—Johanan and his companions—Leaving Mizpah—Jeremiah not named—His only friend Baruch—The fugitives—Tahpanhes in Egypt—Prophecy against Pharaoh-Hophra—Heliopolis—Images of Beth-shemesh—Ezekiel's prophecy—Nebuchadnezzar—Conquest of Tyre—Conquest of Egypt—The last of the Pharaohs—The Jews in Egypt—Worship of the queen of heaven—Festival of Osiris—Denunciation of their sin—The women's argument—The men's consent to their conduct—Rome, and the worship of Mary—Jeremiah's reply—Baruch—Apocryphal book of—Character of Baruch—Friendship for Jeremiah—Death of both—Jeremiah probably stoned—Honoured after death—Legends respecting him—The prophet—His mission apparently a failure—Not really so—National calamities—The conflict of the ages—Promises of Christ—The right will win	253—270
---	---------

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LESSONS OF HIS LIFE.

The prophet for our times—Characteristics of our times—Smooth things wanted—Signs sought after—Men of special gifts needed—God can raise them up—Prophet of Sorrow—Tongues of fire—Miracles not to be expected—Persecution must be expected—No reformation effected without—Hours of consolation—Eating God's Word—The seventy-first psalm—The good man's reputation in the hands of God—The ultimate reward—The day of the unveiling—Concluding prayer	271—286
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THE PROPHET OF SORROW.



CHAPTER I.

HIS CALL TO THE OFFICE.

B.C. 627, 626.

AN office that descends from father to son by hereditary right is in danger of being occupied by unworthy persons. Piety does not necessarily flow from parents to children, and hence many a good man has had to weep over the waywardness of his offspring; and his best efforts to induce them to tread in his steps have proved so fruitless, that at length his grey hairs have been brought down with sorrow to the grave.

The *high*-priesthood of Aaron was hereditary through his eldest surviving son, Eleazar; and the *priesthood* was hereditary through his younger son, Ithamar.¹ The former continued in the line of Eleazar until the days of Eli, who, according to Josephus, belonged to the house of Ithamar. And from 1 Sam. ii. 30, it seems that God intended that it should remain in that line; but the two sons of Eli, Hophni and

¹ 1 Chron. xxiv. 5, 6.

Phinehas, became so vile that they were slain in battle, and though the office continued in Eli's house for a time, yet, in the days of Solomon, it was restored to the line of Eleazar; and thus, as some think, the prophecy addressed to Eli by the man of God was fulfilled: "Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said, indeed, that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." ¹

Nor was the case of Hophni and Phinehas by any means an exceptional one. The priesthood became generally corrupt, and both before and after the Captivity many who occupied the office were charged with covetousness, sensuality, and almost every other crime; and the demoralised condition of the people was to a great extent owing to the demoralised character of the priests.

The prophetic office was not hereditary. God chose for it whom He would—Samuel, Elijah, Amos, Jeremiah, and others—from different ranks and orders of the people; and those whom He thus called were generally faithful to the trust reposed in them. In the days of Samuel, a school was established for the instruction of young men intended to be prophets, and some who were trained in this school probably became as degenerate as many of the priests; but the prophets as a class were far more devoted to their

¹ 2 Sam. ii. 30.

work than the priests, and their influence on the people was of a far higher and more beneficial character.

Jeremiah belonged to the priestly order, for "he was the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin" (Jer. i. 1). Hilkiah was the name of the high-priest who, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Josiah, found the book of the law in the temple;¹ but the father of Jeremiah was probably another person, for had he been identical with the high-priest, that title would have been given him, whereas he is called a priest only.

Anathoth, the birth-place of the prophet, is now called Anata, and is situated about three miles north-east of Jerusalem. We owe its discovery to Dr Robinson, who says that it "seems to have been a walled town and a place of strength," and who tells us that his party "found the fragments of a column or two among the ruins."² Together with its suburbs it was given to the priests, in the days of Joshua (Josh. xxi. 18); and to it Abiathar was banished by Solomon, because he had attempted to put Adonijah on the throne.³

The special call of Jeremiah to the prophetic office came to him whilst he was yet a youth. We may suppose that he was from eighteen to twenty years of age; and, as he received the call with evident surprise, it is not probable that he had attended the

¹ 2 Kings xxii. 3.

² Researches, I. p. 437, 2d edit.

³ 1 Kings ii. 26-27.

college of the prophets, or that he had thought of entering upon such a work. But God said to him:—"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." God knows every man before he is born, and not only fore-ordains his life and being, but determines, prior to his birth, what is to be his future calling. This is true in particular of those who are to be special instruments of His grace for the carrying out of His merciful plans towards men; and such men He equips with the gifts and graces necessary for the functions they are afterwards to exercise. So was it with the prophet Jeremiah. He was not conceived without original sin, as Roman Catholic expositors represent;¹ nor was he actually sanctified, and made holy, in the womb; but he was set apart to be a prophet to the nations, as the word rendered *sanctified* often means.

Jeremiah was old enough to understand that the designation was one which involved great responsibility, and, full of anxiety and alarm, he said, "Ah, Lord God, behold I cannot speak, for I am a child." Moses objected to become God's messenger to Pharaoh because he was slow of speech; Jeremiah hesitated to undertake the work of a prophet because of his youth and inexperience. But whom God calls He qualifies; and the answer was, "Say not I am a child, for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee,

¹ Corn. A. Lapide, &c.

and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak it." Even a child becomes courageous when God is with him, and there have been children not a few, who, filled with the Holy Ghost, have confronted the boldest sceptics and put them to open shame. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast ordained strength," said the Psalmist; and as Samuel declared God's message to Eli whilst he was yet a child, so Jeremiah in his youth was to go forth, armed with a divine panoply, to root out, to pull down, and to destroy the nations which had trampled under foot God's law.

At this moment a visible symbol was granted, for the Lord put forth His hand and touched the youth's mouth, and said unto him, "Behold I have put my words in thy mouth" (Jer. i. 9, 10). When Isaiah was called to the prophetic office one of the seraphim touched his lips with a live coal from off the altar and said, "Lo! this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged."¹ Did a similar change now take place in the character of Jeremiah? This is not affirmed, yet it seems to be implied, for the words of God now put into his mouth would first renovate his own nature, and then qualify him with the gifts necessary for his prophetic work. A Divine afflatus came upon him, under the influence of which he was carried beyond himself, and became a power against which nothing earthly could stand,—a hammer which would break in pieces the rocks. The

¹ Isa. vi. 7.

touching of his mouth was a symbolical act indicative of a deep spiritual meaning ; and whether it took place in a vision or in the sphere of the physical life, it was the bestowment of that charism.in virtue of which "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."¹

The office of the Christian ministry is the counterpart not of the priestly, but of the prophetic office. And what are the emotions of a true minister of Christ? He does not push himself into the office, or dare to go before he is sent ; but is often disposed to shrink from the task, and only enters upon it when, baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire, he is unable to restrain himself, so that he must preach the gospel or be in danger of losing his own soul. But "if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." Let him utter God's words and not those of his own fancy, or those which man only can put into his lips. There is "a gift of preaching" now, as there "was a gift of prophesying" in former times, and to be endowed with that gift is a privilege which cannot be too highly valued. But the gift needs cultivation, and as there were schools of the prophets in the days of Samuel, so there must be colleges for students in theology now ; and no one, however highly gifted with genius or with talent, should deem himself above the need of careful preparation for a work so great as that of "prophesying," or of preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophets of old were under

¹ 2 Peter i. 21.

the plenary inspiration of the Holy Ghost, as also were the apostles of our Lord ; but the inspiration of the Christian minister, for an inspiration he may doubtless have, is not so full as to place him beyond the necessity of using all the helps he can obtain, whilst he rests at the same time on the constant aid of the Spirit to enlighten his judgment and to give power and unction to his words.

The date of Jeremiah's call was the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, and therefore B.C. 627. The times were most momentous. Josiah had ascended the throne at the early age of eight years, when Israel was suffering from the terrible effects of the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. Manasseh had reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem, and Amon two, so that, for fifty-seven years idolatry had been rampant, and the land was filled with its abominations.¹ But what could a child do to bring about a moral reformation? Josiah was pious ; he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord ; and as soon as practicable, he sought, under the direction and with the help of others, to repair the temple of the Lord ; but it was a far more difficult task to change the hearts of the people—to repair the spiritual temple which was in ruins, and therefore the appearance of Jeremiah would encourage the king, who would probably anticipate the most beneficial results from his prophesying.

But what was to be the character of Jeremiah's

¹ 2 Kings xxii.

prophecies? were they to be consolatory and reassuring? Was he to draw a picture of the people's return to their fidelity to the Lord Jehovah, and to paint in glowing colours the consequent prosperity of the land? Far from it; for immediately after his call he saw a double vision, which was indicative of the fact that judgments, terrible and mighty, were about to fall upon the people of the Jews. First he saw, in the spirit, the rod of an almond tree; which God tells him is a symbol of the swift fulfilment of this word. Some render the passage "the rod of a watcher," but the word *shaked* signifies to hasten, and was the Hebrew name given to the almond, because this tree begins to blossom in January, when other trees are still in their winter sleep. Of all the trees it is the most vigilant and awakes the soonest into life. "What seest thou, Jeremiah?" said the Lord; "I see," was the reply, "the staff of a *shaked*—almond-tree." "Thou hast well seen," said the Lord, "for I will hasten, *shaked*, my word to perform it" (ch. i. 11, 12).¹

Next the prophet saw a seething pot, or caldron, in which a large quantity of food could be cooked at once. Its face is towards the prophet, *i.e.*, towards the north; indicating that as its contents boil over they will pour disaster and ruin on the inhabitants of Judah. The explanation given was this, "Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants

¹ Calvin gives another interpretation of the words, and Keil yet another, but this is, I believe, the correct one. Comp. Tristram's Nat. Hist. of the Bible, p. 332.

of the land." The pot represented the nation of the Jews; out of the north should come the fire already enkindled by the Chaldeans; and so complete would be the destruction which would follow that the ministers of justice would come and set up their thrones at the entering in of the gates of Jerusalem (ch. i. 11-16). The idolatry of the land had become deep and radical, so that Josiah's attempts to uproot it would be merely temporary; now therefore God unfolded to Jeremiah the coming judgments on the nation, and he was to be as a defenced city, as an iron pillar, and as brazen walls, against the whole land. Fearless and undismayed, he was to go and proclaim the Divine message, and, until his work was done, his enemies would fight against him in vain.

"This passage," says Calvin, "contains a useful doctrine, from which we learn that strength shall never be wanting to God's servants, while they derive courage from the conviction that God Himself is the author of their calling, and become thus magnanimous; for God will then supply them with strength and courage invincible, so as to render them formidable to the whole world. But if they be unhinged and timid, and turn here and there, and be influenced by the fear of men, God will render them base and contemptible, and make them to tremble at the least breath of air, and they shall be wholly broken down. And why? because they are unworthy that God should help them, that He should stretch forth His hand and fortify them by His power, and supply them,

as it has been already said, with that fortitude by which they might terrify both the devil and the whole world."

This is a lesson for our own times. Men are wanted of fearless and undaunted spirits, who will dare to utter what is true, and to do what is right, whether the world smiles upon them or frowns. Both in the church and in the state invincible courage is essential to success, for many who lay down wise and noble plans fail to carry them out because they yield to timidity and fear. They are cowed by opposition, however unjust and unreasonable it may be.

Soon after his call Jeremiah was commanded to go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, and to expostulate with the people on their departure from God. They had lost their first love—the love of their espousals, and had forgotten God's gracious dealings with them in bringing them into a plentiful country—the land of Carmel; for they had defiled the land, and made it an abomination (ch. ii. 1-7).

It was a most solemn and impressive discourse, and ought to have produced an irresistible effect. How tender is the expostulation in which the people are addressed! and how touching is the appeal to the constancy of idolatrous nations in comparison with the unfaithfulness of the Jews! "For pass over the isles of Chittim,"—the islands of the far west,—“and see;” “and send unto Kedar,”—the representatives of the races of the east—“and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing: hath a nation changed their

gods which are yet no gods?" No ; neither in the west nor in the east had any nation done this ; for though the heathen will admit other gods into their pantheon they will not forsake their old ones ; but God's people had committed two evils ; they had forsaken Him the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that could hold no water. Jehovah is the fountain of life, from whose Spirit all life comes ;¹ and what folly can be greater than that of those who leave the fountain for the cistern, which being broken or leaky cannot retain the water collected from the clouds ? How is it that the Lord has to say they have forsaken Me the living spring ? " It arises from this that the hewn cisterns please us better. The creature attracts us so powerfully, ~~and~~ that is below has such an influence on the wavering heart, that it is drawn away from the living spring, and finds the cistern-water of this world more to its taste than the living water, the living God and His Word." ² Alas ! it is even so ; and well might the prophet say " Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this ! " " No comparison," ³ says Dr Thomson, " could more keenly rebuke the madness of a people who changed their glory for that which doth not profit. The best cisterns, even those in solid rock, are strangely liable to crack, and are a most unreliable source of supply of that absolutely indispensable article, water ; and if by constant care they are made to hold, yet the water, collected

¹ Comp. Ps. xxxvi. 10 ; Prov. x. 11 ; xiii. 14 ; xiv. 27.

² Hochstetter, quoted by Naëgelsbach. ³ Land and the Book, p. 287.

from clay roofs or from marly soil, has the colour of weak soap-suds, the taste of the earth or the stable, is full of worms, and in the hour of greatest need it utterly fails. Who but a fool positive, or one gone mad in love of filth, would exchange the sweet, wholesome stream of a living fountain for such an uncertain compound of nastiness and vermin ! I have never been able to tolerate this cistern-water except in Jerusalem, where they are kept with scrupulous care, and filled from roofs both clean and hard."

The discourse does not terminate at the end of the second chapter, but with the fifth verse of the following chapter. God had withheld from them the latter rain,—would they not then acknowledge the cause, and henceforth say, "My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth?" The people were asking—"Will He reserve His anger for ever? will He keep it to the end?" But if they wished Him to turn it aside they must be sincere, and must turn from their evil ways. Multitudes there are in all lands who when God is angry with them are ready to ask, *how long?* but let them turn to Him with a penitent and broken heart, and they will soon find how willing He is to relent. How great is the goodness of God which the sinner wilfully thrusts away from him, yet God receives him again into His favour when he truly repents; for "who," says another prophet, "is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?"

He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy." ¹

"He passes all our follies by,
And all our sins forgives ;
His wrath doth in a moment die,
His love for ever lives."

The effect produced by the utterance of this discourse is not described ; but we can imagine the consternation of the people as they heard the strange youth pouring forth such bold and withering words. God had indeed made him "a defenced city, an iron pillar, and brazen walls, against the whole land," and thus armed by an invincible power, he stood forth, for the first time, to fulfil his mission ; assured that though the people fought against him they would not prevail, because the Lord Jehovah was his sure defence (ch. i. 17-19). We may be certain, however, that he would be treated by some with scorn and with derision, and the probability is that many would proclaim him a wild fanatic.

Jeremiah's was to be a lifelong work. Not for a few days, or for a few months only, was he to prophesy ; but to the end of his career, or for nearly forty years. And during this period he was to see his country invaded by a foreign foe, his people led into captivity, and the terrible judgments he himself predicted, fall upon the land with fearful power. Can we wonder that he was the prophet of sorrow, and, in this respect,

¹ Mic. vii. 18.

especially, a type of Him who "when He beheld the city wept over it?"

There were three words used by the Hebrews to designate the prophet, all which occur in 1 Chron. xxix. 29. The Roëh, the Chozeh, and the Nabhi. The Roëh, rendered by our translators *seer*, was one who, like Samuel, had special revelations, and who saw, as with his eyes open, into the deep things of God. The Chozeh, also rendered *seer* in that passage and elsewhere, was one who saw visions, as did Isaiah, Ezekiel, and many others. And the Nabhi, rendered *prophet*, was one who bubbled up like a fountain, for such is the import of the word, and poured forth the messages he received from God with an overflowing fulness which nothing could restrain.

Jeremiah is never called a Roëh, and indeed the term itself does not occur after the days of Samuel; but Jeremiah is called both a Chozeh and a Nabhi; for he saw "visions of God," and he was so inspired that his words were often like a mighty torrent which swept everything before them with resistless power. He was, then, a true prophet, and instead of ministering in the temple, as he would have done had he become a priest like his father, his was the higher work of making known to the people the will of God, and of seeking to lead them to repentance and reformation. Dean Stanley says,¹ "He was one of the rare instances in which priest and prophet were combined;" but that he ever executed the priest's office, does not

¹ Lectures, vol. II. p. 519.

appear. He was a **PROPHET**; and how faithfully, nobly, and heroically he fulfilled the duties of his office will be evident as we proceed to the contemplation of his history.

CHAPTER II.

THE REIGN OF JOSIAH.

B.C. 639, 608.

THE reformation attempted by Josiah had already commenced when Jeremiah uttered his first prophecy, for "in the twelfth year of his reign Josiah began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images and the molten images;"¹ and doubtless the efforts of the king were promoted by the prophet to the utmost of his power. And what did Jeremiah see? He saw the altars of Baalim broken down, the groves and the images swept away, and the dust of them scattered on the graves of those who had sacrificed unto them,—the bones of some of the priests being burnt upon their altars. He saw the temple repaired, and he heard of the book of the law, found by Hilkiah in the house of the Lord, and of its being read before the king by Shaphan the scribe.² Yet he scarcely notices this reformation, except to intimate that it was not real and thorough. He delivered two discourses in Jerusalem contained in chapters iii. 6 to vi. 30 of his prophecies, and here, whilst he invites the people to

¹ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3.

² Ibid. ver. 8-22.

return to God, he affirms that they had not returned with their whole heart, but feignedly or in falsehood only (chap. iii. 10). And he declares that there was such a want of rectitude in public life, that it was difficult to find a man in the streets of Jerusalem who did what was right and sought to know the truth (chap. v. 1). The temple had been repaired, but what then? the people had a revolting and rebellious heart, and their burnt-offerings and sacrifices God could not endure (chap. v. 23, vi. 20). They trusted in the possession of the ark of the covenant, but neither that nor the temple could save them from the approaching doom; and the time would come when "the very loss of the ark itself might be considered a boon," and they would learn that no symbols were, in themselves, of any real worth. They had found the sacred books in the temple, and they considered this as a very grand discovery, and said, "We are wise, the law of the LORD is with us," but the prophet, in the next discourse, says that the scribes had made it a lie, and that the wise were put to shame (chap. viii. 8, 9). A merely external reformation is never of much avail. "Not the outward temple with its service secures the favour of Jehovah, but the service which is offered in His temple by sanctified hearts, and which manifests itself in works of righteousness." A reformation of manners is needed in Great Britain to-day; but if the country is to be saved from the judgments of the Most High, that reformation must be radical and sincere. Jeremiah is the prophet for our times, and

well would it be for us as a people if we would listen to his warnings and admonitions and apply them to ourselves. Our national sins are not unlike those which caused him to grieve, and the preachers of our day will find in his prophecies many texts on which they might discourse in burning words.

To the discovery of the book of the law we must, for a moment, return. For it has been supposed by certain critics that this book was the book of Deuteronomy; that it had been written but recently; and that Jeremiah himself was the author of it, pretending that it was a work of Moses, with a view to bring back the people from their deplorable idolatry.¹ The notion is a libel on the character of the prophet, who could not possibly be guilty of such a fraud. The book found was undoubtedly a copy of the Pentateuch which, according to Deuteronomy xxxi. 26, was deposited by the side of the ark of the covenant from the days of Moses. It is not necessary to suppose that it was the original autograph of the great lawgiver; but it was a transcript of it, which under the idolatrous reigns of Manasseh and Amon had been lost, but now came to light as the temple was

¹ Ewald affirms that it was written by a Jewish exile in Egypt, and that a copy of it had found its way to Jerusalem. History of Israel, vol. ii. 6, 220. On this subject,—the authorship of Deuteronomy,—see the able introduction to the book in the "New Commentary." It is there supposed that the book of the law now found was the original copy of the Pentateuch, but that passages from Deuteronomy affected the king most.

being repaired. But it was a book already known, and not one that had come to light for the first time. Other copies doubtless existed, and both the priests and the prophets were acquainted with their contents. But, now that *this copy* was found, Hilkiash, its discoverer, gave it to Shaphan the scribe, who, having read it, showed it to the king. Josiah requested him to read it, and he read such words as those of Lev. xxvi. 14-32, in which God declares that if at any time the nation walked contrary to His commands He would bring upon it the sword and the famine, and would make their sanctuaries a desolation and lay their cities waste.¹ The king trembled and rent his clothes, for he knew that the people deserved these judgments, and he was apprehensive that they were now near at hand. *His* conscience was tender, whatever that of his people was; and in his great alarm he sent Hilkiash the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Michaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah, a servant of the king, saying, "Go ye, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found."² He wanted to know what God had really determined respecting His people, and whether such curses as those of Deut. xxviii. 15-25 would be likely to fall upon them soon. His anxiety was intense, and he doubtless waited for the reply with the utmost concern and fear.

¹ Or the passages read may have been Deut. xxviii., xxix.

² 2 Kings xxii. 12, 13.

It is probable that Jeremiah was not in Jerusalem at this juncture, or, as he was already a prophet of some note, application would have been made to him. Some have supposed that he was still at Anathoth and was not yet known, but as this was the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah, and Jeremiah began to prophesy in the thirteenth year, this is by no means likely, and we should rather infer that he was merely absent from the city. But there was a prophetess named Huldah, the wife of Shallum, the keeper of the wardrobe, who dwelt in the second part of the city, that is, in the lower city, or the hill Akra, and to her the members of the commission came, asking her the import of the words of the book of the law. *Will God bring this evil upon the city?* they inquired; and her answer was, *He will*; but she saw further that on account of the repentance and humiliation of the king himself, he would not live to see these calamities, but would come to the grave in peace.¹

Jeremiah must soon have heard of these events, and perhaps they induced him to return to the city; for presently Josiah gathered to him the elders and the priests, and *all the prophets*, and, standing by a pillar of the temple, caused the book of the covenant to be read, and made a covenant with Jehovah, that he and his people would keep His commandments and His statutes with all their heart. Then followed the destruction of idolatry, and then was the solemn

¹ 2 Kings xxii. 14-20.

passover kept. But what said Jeremiah? His second discourse, already referred to, was now uttered, in which, whilst he does not express a doubt as to the sincerity of Josiah and of many of the people, and whilst he reiterates God's call to return and to repent, he intimates that idolatry is by no means rooted out of the land, that much of the sorrow professed is not genuine and sincere, and that the judgments of the Most High are impending on the land, and will certainly fall upon it ere long. Nay, in one instance he even hears and sees the enemy present, and pours forth a most pitiable strophe indicative of his deep distress. It is one of the finest passages in his writings, and must have been uttered under a burst of feeling:—

“ My bowels ! my bowels !
I am pained at my very heart ;
My heart maketh a noise in me :
I cannot hold my peace,
Because thou hast heard, O my soul,
The sound of the trumpet,
The alarm of war.
Destruction upon destruction is cried ;
For the whole land is spoiled :
Suddenly are my tents spoiled,
And my curtains in a moment.
How long shall I see the standard,
And hear the sound of the trumpet ?
For my people is foolish, they have not known me,
They are sottish children, they have none understanding,
They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no
knowledge.
I beheld the earth, and lo, it was without form, and
void ;

And the heavens, and they had no light.
I beheld the mountains, and lo, they trembled,
And all the hills moved lightly.
I beheld, and lo, there was no man,
And all the birds of the heavens were fled.
I beheld, and lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness,
And all the cities thereof were broken down
At the presence of the LORD, and His fierce anger.
For thus hath the Lord said,
The whole land shall be desolate :
Yet will I not make a full end (ch. iv. 19-27)."

This passage gives us an insight into the genius of the prophet, which, if not of so high an order as that of Isaiah, was not much inferior to it. Umbreit, indeed, says, "The most spiritual, and therefore the greatest, poet of the desert and of suffering is certainly Jeremiah," and "of all the prophets, his genius is the most poetical ;" whilst another writer says, "Assuredly universal sympathy and deep and pure emotion are the qualities of a poet, and we undoubtedly find these elements of poetic inspiration, in the highest degree, in the finely-strung nature of Jeremiah." One of the commission sent by Josiah to the prophetess, became a fast friend of Jeremiah ; Shallum, the husband of Huldah, was his uncle ; and their son, Hanameel, his cousin, proved also a faithful adherent (ch. xxxii. 7, etc.). And another of his contemporaries was the prophet Zephaniah, who, in the days of Josiah, uttered that prophecy of judgment from which was borrowed the Latin hymn,—*Dies Irae, Dies Illa*, an English version of which is given in "The Voice of Christian Life in Song," p.

185. Dean Stanley thinks that it refers to the Scythian hordes from the regions beyond the Caucasus and the Himalayas, mentioned by Herodotus, i. 105, one division of which, about the middle of Josiah's reign, broke into Syria, to which event, also, he supposes Jer. i. 13-15, and vi. 5, to allude.¹ But Keil affirms that there is no such reference, and that these prophecies point to the Chaldean invasion, which took place at a little later period.

A third discourse was uttered by Jeremiah (chap. vii.-ix.). Standing in the gate of the temple, with probably a large concourse of people before him, the prophet called upon them to amend their ways and their doings, and he asks very significantly, "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD" (chap. vii. 1-11). It was to this passage, together with Isa. lvi. 6, that our Lord referred when He drove out the buyers and sellers from the temple which existed in His day (Matt. xxi. 12, 13). Jeremiah asks, "Does my house seem a den of robbers?" Christ says "Ye have made it so." The buildings, then, were virtually identical, and alas! the spirit of the Jews in our Lord's times was no better than it was in the times of the prophet. The desecration of God's temple has ever been held by Him as one of the worst of sins; and the warning voice to Christian believers is, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy."

¹ See on this subject Ewald's History of the Israelites, vol. iv. p. 255.

The prophet then predicts that as God destroyed Shiloh, where He placed His name at first, so would He do to that house—a prophecy which was repeated in the days of Jchoiakim (chap. xxvi. 6).¹ He was forbidden to pray for the people, for they had gone so far in the practice of idolatry as to make cakes to the “queen of heaven,” and to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Moloch (chap. vii. 18–31).

It is in this discourse that Jeremiah thus bewails the sad condition of his people :—“Is there no balm in Gilead ? is there no physician there ? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered ? ” (chap. viii. 22). One of the early editions of the English Bible reads :—“Is there no *treacle* in Gilead ? ” And it is well known that treacle possesses valuable medicinal properties ; but this is not the meaning of the word *tsari* ; for the term was undoubtedly applied to the gum or resin which exudes from certain trees, and especially from the *Balsamodendron Gileadense*, or Balm of Gilead, now called Opobalsamum, and still cultivated in the neighbourhood of Mecca. It grew plentifully on the east of the Jordan, and in the plains of Jericho, and the Jews had a tradition that it was first planted there by Solomon, who received a root from the Queen of Sheba. The tree is a small evergreen, and the balsam, or resin, is obtained from the green nut, or by making incisions in the bark.² Its value was

¹ See chap. vi. of this volume.

² Tristram, p. 335, &c.

very great, and it was an important article of commerce from very early times. Jeremiah probably knew something of its use, but here he speaks of it metaphorically, and asks, is there no means at hand whereby the spiritual maladies of his people might be healed? And the answer implied is a negative one; hence the prophet exclaims, in the depth of his distress, "Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people" (chap. ix. 1). "The poetry of suffering," says one, "is presented most touchingly in these thrilling words. It is the wish of the prophet that the whole interior of his head might dissolve into water, so that his eyes might be inexhaustible fountains of tears." No one can weep beyond a certain length of time. The fountain of his tears dries up. But Jeremiah wanted to weep always;—a perfect contrast to many who, amidst all the sorrows that surround them, care not to weep at all.

Then follows, in chap. x., a warning against idolatry, but it appears to have been a later addition to what goes before, and when it was uttered is a matter of doubt. Part of it, indeed, ver. 1–16, is supposed by some critics to have been composed by another hand, as the style, they think, is somewhat different from that of Jeremiah; but who the author was, and by whom it was inserted here, they are quite unable to say. But, as Keil has proved, there is no sufficient reason for any such notion. The language is that of

Jeremiah, and he here draws a very striking contrast between the gods of the heathen and the true Jehovah. The idols are but wood covered with gold and silver, and they shall utterly vanish away, but Jehovah is the true God and an everlasting King, the Maker of all things and the LORD of hosts.¹

In the early part of the same reign another prophecy (chap. xi., xii.) was uttered, in which Jeremiah reminds the people of the recent renewal of the covenant under Josiah, and complains of a conspiracy against the LORD, and of a plot by the men of Anathoth to take away his life. That the inhabitants of his native town should conspire against him was doubtless a great grief to the prophet, but he appealed to the LORD of hosts and said, "Let me see Thy vengeance on them, for unto Thee have I revealed my cause;" and God threatened to visit them with sword and with famine. To be able in times of calamity to say, "I have ceased to concern myself about myself," will bring to a man far more peace of mind than he can otherwise obtain. Luther says:—

"Once I grasped too many things,
None staid; they all had wings.

¹ Ver. 11 of this chapter is in Chaldee, because it is a curse on the Chaldean idolatry. Compare Lightfoot's Works, vol. iii. p. 248. Vers. 12-16 occur again in chap. li. 15-19. Ver. 25 is evidently a reminiscence of Ps. lix. 24, and Ps. lxxix. 6, 7, on which see Perowne. It was the habit of Jeremiah to quote largely from other writers.

But since I've weary grown,
And all away have thrown,
Not one from me has flown.
And do you ask, How is it thus ?
Because I've cast my all on Jesus."

Learn this lesson, to place your cause in the hands of God, or, in other words, to cast your all on Christ; and then, let afflictions and persecutions come from whatever source they may, you will stand like an oak of the forest amidst the fury of the wildest storm.

But even a sorer trial came upon the prophet, for the members of his own family became his enemies; whence God said to him, "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, how wilt thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace wherein thou trustedst they wearied thee, how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" (ch. xii. 5). His trials hitherto had been comparatively light, but now his own kindred would rise up against him, so that he would be like one who was running a race with horses, or like one who was contending with the inundations of the Jordan.

Other interpretations have been put upon these words, some supposing that the comparison is between men and God,—“footmen have wearied thee, who walk the earth, but now thou hast to contend with horsemen,—that is, with me.” Others again think that the footmen were the citizens of Jerusalem, and the horsemen the Chaldeans who would lay waste the whole country. Calvin entertains this view, and supposes that the words were addressed, not to the prophet, but

to the people, on whom the most terrible visitations would alight. But the words which follow make the meaning of the passage clear. "For even thy brethren, and the house of thy father, even they have dealt treacherously with thee," etc. Jeremiah had complained of his sufferings, and to reprove his impatience God said to him, in effect—that much sorer trials awaited him, for that his nearest kin, and those dwelling under the same roof, would behave unfaithfully towards him.¹ He was not a married man, but he probably had brothers and sisters; and they too, in common with the men of Anathoth, were disposed to rise up against him, and to charge him with being a false prophet. Would not this be like contending with horses? would not this be like wandering in the haunt of lions,—the region where men's lives were specially in danger? Few trials are so hard to bear as that of persecution from members of one's own family, yet it is by no means an uncommon one even under the Christian economy; for indeed our Lord foreshowed that it would be the lot of many of His followers.²

The thirteenth chapter is an appendix to the preceding, and contains a reproof of the people's pride under the striking figure of a marred girdle. The prophet is commanded to obtain a linen girdle, and to put it upon his loins, and, farther, to take that girdle and to hide it in a hole of a rock near the Euphrates. But a difficulty has been suggested here. The

¹ Comp. Naëgelsbach and Keil.

² Comp. Matt. x. 35, 36.

Euphrates was 250 miles distant, and how then could the prophet take such a journey; or why was it necessary that he should, merely to prove that, if a linen girdle lie long in the damp, it would be spoilt? Some critics, including Henderson, have supposed that the word Phrath here is a contraction for Ephrath, the original name of Bethlehem, and that the prophet went thither and hid the girdle; but there is not the slightest reason to doubt that by the Phrath the Euphrates itself is meant (comp. chap. li. 63), the importance of which is indicated by its being mentioned four times. That river flowed through Babylon, the land in which the covenant people, already in a state of moral decay, would become physically decayed; and thus God Himself would mar the pride of Judah and Jerusalem, proving to themselves that they were fit for nothing. He had intended the nation to be as a girdle round Himself, but it would not cleave to Him, and now therefore He would cast it off as a garment that was spoiled.

The narrative, however, is not to be understood literally but symbolically. The prophet took this journey in the region of inward spiritual vision, and in the same manner went "after many days" to fetch the girdle back. He announced the fact as if it were a literal one; but the people would understand what he really meant, and the lesson he intended to convey would be equally as impressive as if he had actually travelled over the country. They heeded it not, however; and another symbol followed. As one fills the

wine-jar with wine, so would Jehovah fill the nation with the intoxication of sin and pride, so that in their drunken frenzy the people would dash against and destroy one another (ch. xiii. 12-15). And then the prophet imagines them to be wandering among dark mountains, and lifting up his voice calls on them to give glory to God, lest their feet stumble in the dark and, whilst they look for light, they are wrapped in the shadow of eternal death. But, knowing their obstinacy, he adds, "My soul shall weep;" for, as one observes, "When witnesses have sown God's Word, and can do no more, they must water it with a thousand tears." The prophet was, as Hengstenberg says, "no second Elijah. He had a soft nature; a susceptible temperament;—his tears flowed readily, yet he, ever so glad to live in peace and love with all men, must needs, because he was enlisted in the service of truth, become a second Ishmael, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him; he, whose love was so glowing, was doomed to see that love misconstrued, to see himself branded as a traitor by those who were themselves the traitors of the people."

He now received a message which he was to address to the king and to the queen-mother (for the word rendered *queen* (ch. xiii. 18) always means this). The mother of Josiah was named Jedidah, and was the daughter of Adaiah of Boscath near Lachish. If this discourse was uttered under the reign of Josiah, as there is reason to believe it was,

she must have been living now, and must, like many of the queen-mothers, have possessed some influence in the land. But from her the address passes on to the nation, and the burden of it is that the people should be led into captivity, and the city of Jerusalem utterly destroyed (ver. 19-27). To entertain any hopes of reformation now, was as vain as to expect that the Ethiopian—the Cushite—would change his skin, or the leopard his spots; for so long had the people been accustomed to do evil that it had become to them an inveterate habit, and nothing now remained but that they must be scattered like the stubble before the wind. But had the nation then lost its free-agency? and was repentance absolutely impossible? Even Calvin admits that this passage does not prove it.¹ The people were under no physical inability to turn to God; for had that been the case they would have been comparatively guiltless. Theirs was moral inability, originating in the obduracy of their will, which they had made obdurate themselves; and such is the inability of every impenitent man, who refuses to abandon sin at the solemn *command* of God. There is no excuse for impenitence founded on the plea of inability. If they will, men


¹ His words are, "Learned men in our age do not wisely refer to this passage, when they seek to prove that there is no freewill in man; for it is not simply the nature of man that is spoken of here, but the habit that is contracted by long practice. Aristotle, a strong advocate of freewill, confesses that it is not in man's power to do right, when he is so immersed in his own vices, as to have lost a free choice (Lib. vii. Ethicon), and this also is what experience proves." See also Henderson to the same effect.

may repent, and nations also, whenever the preacher of repentance stands before them ; for with the call to repent is given the power, as to the Ninevites in the days of Jonah, and as to the multitudes who flocked to hear the Baptist ; and when under such circumstances men say "We cannot repent," they mean "We will not," and therefore, whatever judgments fall upon them, they have no reason to complain.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROPHECIES OF THE DROUGHT.

B.C. 609, 608.

OSIAH was still upon the throne when a visitation took place which is mentioned nowhere else but in chapters xiv.-xvii. of Jeremiah's prophecies. These chapters contain a series of discourses which all move in the same region of thought as the preceding ones; but the prophet depicts in very lively colours the sad condition into which the country is now thrown. What is its condition? A fearful drought prevails. The great ones of the land send their servants to the cisterns to draw water, but they return with their vessels empty; the husbandmen are ashamed and cover their heads; the hind calves in the field and leaves her young to perish, and even the wild asses betake themselves to the heights hoping to find grass, but in vain. To such droughts Palestine has always been subject, and modern travellers tell us of their sad effects, reproducing the very picture which the pages of the prophet gives.¹ But this drought, like that which took place in the days of Elijah, was a visitation of

¹ See Van de Velde's *Syria and Palestine*, vol. i. p. 75.

chastisement for the sins and transgressions of the people. God was angry with them, and this was one of His weapons of punishment, yet used in mercy to bring them to repentance.

Jeremiah's pity for the land and for the people was deeply moved. He had been maligned and persecuted, but to resentment he was a stranger; and like Abraham who pleaded so earnestly for the cities of the plain, he poured out his supplication to God, the Hope of Israel, not to forsake them in this extremity (chap. xiv. 7-9). But the answer was "Pray not for this people for their good;" yet the prophet urged his suit; and when it was again rejected, cried piteously but in the deepest humiliation—"Do not abhor us, for Thy name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of Thy glory" (chap. xiv. 11, 21). It was as if he had said, I cannot but pray for this people. They are guilty, I confess, and they deserve Thy chastisements, but let not the Lord be angry, and I will still plead on their behalf. And inasmuch as none of the heathen deities could give rain, as probably they had professed to do, he besought God to give it, from whom alone it could come. Among many of the tribes of Southern Africa there are men who profess to be rain-makers, and in times of severe drought the people often resort to them with presents, entreating them to bring it, and perhaps asking them somewhat ironically why they do not. The words of the prophet have often been employed by Christian missionaries, and not in vain, to prove the vanity of such pretensions; and it is

unquestionable that confidence in them has to a great extent given way. In this country, to-day, we are in danger, not of supposing that man can bring down the showers from heaven, but of doubting whether God can do it. We are told that the laws of meteorology are so fixed and undeviating, that to pray for rain or for fine weather, under any circumstances, is to pray for a miracle which we have no right to expect. But our religious instincts will not listen to such reasonings, and, like the prophet, we cannot but pray, though we know not how we shall prevail.

But Jeremiah received a second refusal, for God said unto him, "Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people" (ch. xv. 1-9). How mysterious is the language of this paragraph, and to what solemn reflections does it give rise ! The intercessions of holy men for others are often acceptable to God, and not unfrequently, they avail much ; but man may have become so obstinate and rebellious that even the holiest of the saints may plead for them in vain. Even then, however, Christ may intercede, and though the prayers of saints may be rejected, His can never fail. Jeremiah now bewails his own sufferings (ch. xv. 10), but God promises to remember him, and to deliver him out of the hand of his enemies (v. 11-21) : "And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall ; and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee ; for I am with thee to save thee, and to deliver thee, saith the LORD." A

promise this which has been fulfilled in later times on behalf of many a bold Reformer of the Church. Was not Athanasius like a brazen wall when contending with the Arians of the fourth century? Was not Luther a brazen wall when he stood unmoved before the Diet at Worms? And there have been many such men both in our own and other lands. Oh that we had more of them! Oh that we had a host of men,—ay, and of women too (and how often are the weaker sex the bolder of the two), who would dare to resist the encroachments of error, and repel like brazen walls the attacks of unbelief and sin! I am not disposed to affirm that this age is worse than the ages which have preceded it; but that it is characterised by much pusillanimity and time-serving, who will deny? Let faithful men continue faithful; and not faithful only, but bold and fearless, and their resistance of what is wrong shall bear its fruit.

But Jeremiah needed instruction at this juncture, and in ch. xvi. he is commanded not to marry because fathers and children would perish in the coming judgments; neither was he to enter the house of mourning to commiserate the people's sorrows; and so universal would the visitation be that no attempt at concealment on the part of any would avail, for fishers should fish for them, and hunters hunt for them, so that none of them should escape the vengeance of the Most High (v. 16–18). In chap. xvi. 10, the people ask, "Wherefore hath the Lord pronounced all this evil against us?" and in ch. xvii.

the reply is given : " The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond : it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars." The iron stylus and the diamond point were used for engraving in very early times ; and they cut so deep that the letters were indelible. Thus indelible in their hearts was the sin of Judah ; for they had set up the images of Baal everywhere, and the corruption had become so profound that none but God Himself could know it. In ver. 5-9 a universal truth is uttered, and the words are partly quoted from the first psalm. On the man that trusts in man the curse of God rests ; on the man who trusts in God only, a blessing comes. The one is like the heath,¹ or as the word signifies " an evil plant," which grows in the desert parched by the heat of the sun, or in a salt land, which is not inhabited because it is barren. The other is like a tree planted by the water brook, where it spreads out its roots to gain more strength, and where it blooms as an evergreen and brings forth fruit even in the year of drought.

But the prophet pauses here and says, " The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." It was so in his days, and it is equally so in ours. A morass is deceitful, the mirage is deceitful, a serpent

¹ The word עֲרֵב is found only here, and in Ps. cii. 17, where it is rendered the destitute. In another form it occurs in Jer. xlviii. 6, where it is also rendered heath. It is derived from a root which signifies *naked* ; and it is rendered by the old interpreters by words which signify a useless shrub. Dr Tristram calls it a dwarf juniper, and says there is no true heath in Palestine south of the Lower Lebanon.

is deceitful, the apples of Sodom were deceitful, but more deceitful than any of these is the unregenerate heart of man. The prophet therefore asks who can know it? and God Himself gives the reply, "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (ver. 9, 10). "A smith," says an old writer, "that undertakes to make a key to open a lock that is out of order, must of necessity know all the wards, or else he may make a key that will not fit; he may endeavour, but he may not be able to turn the lock. Thus in the heart of man there are so many windings, so many turnings,—there is in it such a labyrinth and such a depth, that the eye of human reason never finds the bottom thereof. How then is it imagined that the most knowing quick-sighted man should be able fully to persuade the heart? He cannot. That is peculiar to God only."

But God does know it, for He searches it through and through; and one day every human heart will be laid bare to itself and to mankind, and all its pride, its vanity, and its wickedness, exposed to view. And of all terrible sights that will surely be one of the most terrible. Is there any way to escape it,—to escape, that is, the fearful exposure of our depravity, and the consequences which will follow that exposure? Yes: if we submit ourselves to the all-searching eye, and pray for the grace that can renovate the heart; for then will a new heart be

given to us, and a right spirit put within us ; and then shall we not come into condemnation ; for our sanctified nature will be found meet for the inheritance of the skies.

But the heart is not only deceitful ; it is avaricious, and is ever in pursuit of ill-gotten wealth. " In the east the partridge lays a very large number of eggs ; but she has many enemies—man not the least destructive—who hunt for her nest, and rob her of her eggs. The eggs of the partridge are sought for assiduously by the Arabs, and used for food. They are easily found, and the quantity dislodged annually is amazing. We had in one spring in Palestine about 800 eggs of the Greek partridge (*Caccabis saxatilis*) brought to our camp, and were in the habit of using those that were fresh for omelettes daily. They were doubtless collected for the same purpose ; and the meaning of the prophet is that the man who enriches himself by unjust means shall have as little enjoyment of his ill-gotten wealth, but shall leave it as prematurely as the partridge which commences to sit, but is speedily robbed of her hopes of a brood." Such is Dr Tristram's¹ interpretation of the passage—" As a partridge sitteth on eggs and hatcheth them not ; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and in the end shall be a fool." Neither Naëgelsbach nor Keil gives this meaning to the figure. The latter says it is founded on a proverb that a partridge hatches eggs

¹ Natural History of the Bible, p. 225.

which she has not laid ; but the proverb is not true ; and Jeremiah was better acquainted with natural history than some of his commentators are disposed to give him credit for. We accept Dr Tristram's view as the correct one, and the lesson taught is certainly an impressive one. Avaricious men gain wealth, but it is swept from under them, and they are disappointed of its enjoyment.

The prophet now breaks out into an address of praise to Jehovah as the Hope of Israel, which is followed by an earnest prayer for help against his persecutors. He stood before them a lone and powerless man, and his entire dependence was on God, the fountain of living waters. Others had forsaken him ; but He would not, and he entreated the Lord to destroy them with a double destruction, and thus to sweep them utterly away (ver. 12-18).

The exhortation which follows, to revere the Sabbath, stands apparently alone, and has been assigned to the times of Jehoiakim, or to those of Jeconiah ; but the language is not objurgatory, but rather that of warning and caution, with a promise of prosperity in case of obedience. It is probable, therefore, that it belongs to the reign of Josiah, and it is one of those passages in the writings of Jeremiah which deserves to be pondered in these God-dishonouring days.

The law of the Jewish Sabbath was that no secular work was to be done on that day ; but the people were now seen carrying burdens out of their houses,

and entering with them into the gates of Jerusalem, which, being the holy city, should of all places have been preserved from such desecration. This bearing of burdens was the market-trade of the citizens, and was only one of the occupations they carried on during the Sabbath.¹ Jeremiah doubtless witnessed them, and at God's command he went and stood first in "the gate of the common people," and then successively in the other gates of the city, that all who entered them might hear his words; there he spoke to them of the Sabbath-law, which, he said, their fathers had disobeyed; and there he urged them to the observance of that law, by representing to them the blessings which would follow if they obeyed it, and the curses which would light on them if they did not obey.

If they kept the Sabbath holy, the grandeur of Jerusalem would be maintained,—kings riding in chariots and on horses would enter into its gates, and from the cities of Judah would the people come bringing their burnt-offerings, their sacrifices, and their incense as heretofore. The monarchy of David would thus be permanent, and the public worship of the temple would continue; and instead of the ruin and desolation of which the prophet had already spoken, the city would still be inhabited by a glad and thriving population. On the other hand, if they continued to desecrate the Sabbath, Jerusalem would be burnt with fire, its palaces laid waste, and its glory tar-

¹ Comp. Neh. xiii. 15; Ex. xii. 16, xx. 19; Deut. v. 14.

nished by the hand of the invader from afar (ch. xvii. 19-27).

An ordinary regard for their city should have aroused the people to a sense of their sin and danger ; but they had lost the attachment for it which they once felt, and personal gratifications were deemed of greater moment than the national good. Whenever this is the case it is of little use appealing to the patriotism of men. Selfishness is inimical to patriotism. What cares the man, whose ruling passion is to gain wealth, what becomes of his country or of his fellow-men around him ? The thirst for gold which seizes upon some men, absorbs, or rather destroys, every noble and generous sentiment, and at the cost of the happiness of thousands, and the moral welfare of their country's population, they will pursue their schemes and carry out their plans. It was so in Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah ; it is so in Paris and in London, and indeed throughout the world, to-day.

But it will probably be said, as indeed it has been said by many, that the Jewish Sabbath has been entirely abrogated, and that therefore Christians have little or nothing to do with such a passage from the Old Testament as the above. I admit, that the Christian Sabbath is a different institution from the Jewish, in these respects : first, that it is observed not on the seventh day of the week, but on the first ; secondly, that it commemorates not so much the rest of God from the work of creation, as the rest of Christ

from the work of redemption and His glorious resurrection from the dead ; and thirdly, that it should be celebrated, not by cessation from all work, but only from such work as is unnecessary, and in acts of worship, charity, and love. But does it then follow that its observance is a matter of indifference ? does it follow that no day of the week should be held sacred, but every day be given up to secular and pleasurable pursuits ? If so, the retaining of the fourth commandment, and the reading of it in our churches, are mere formalities ; and if so, the closing of shops, and warehouses, and mills, and attendance on the ordinances of public worship, are matters of mere convenience or taste. But will any one affirm that a weekly rest from toil is unnecessary, or that men can do without a day for special religious exercises ? It has been proved that both physically and mentally men need such a rest ; and though we ought to be in the spirit of devotion every day of the week, yet we know how much the religious observance of the Sabbath tends to foster that spirit even in the holiest and best of the people of God. Shall we then say that the Sabbath is an old and worn-out institution, and that no one will be any better for observing it, and no one any worse for setting it aside ? Men of the world may say this, but no Christian will admit it for a moment. St Paul, it is true, said to the Colossians, " Let no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath-days ;" but it was the servile and formal

observance of the Jewish Sabbath that he condemned, not the free and joyous celebration of the first day of the week. For it is undoubted that at the time he wrote this epistle, namely, during his first imprisonment in Rome, that day was kept by Christians as a day of gladness and rejoicing, and so it continued to be kept by the churches after the apostles had entered on their reward.

How it was kept, and how it ought to be kept still, are questions on which there are diversities of opinion. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," was the declaration of our Lord, a declaration which applies to all positive institutions, and which means that they may be modified as men's necessities may require. Accordingly, the Sabbath-law *was* modified, for not only was the day of the week altered, but no rules were laid down by the apostles as to the manner in which the Christian Sabbath should be observed, and no penalties were attached to the non-observance of it. But does it follow that we are under no obligation to regard it at all? Would it be *right* for Christians to set it aside,—to make it a day of trade, and commerce, and pleasure like other days of the week,—to keep open their shops, their warehouses, and their mills without interruption from month to month? I do not ask, would it be *expedient*? or would it be *advantageous*, or would it *conduce* to their physical health?—I ask would it be *right*? and I am sure that none in whose breasts an elevated tone of religious feeling has been

awakened will hesitate to answer, No. Somehow or other, an instinctive desire to observe the Sabbath-law arises wherever the gospel of the grace of God is proclaimed, and men not only see how valuable an institution the Sabbath is, but they learn to call it a delight, and it becomes to them "the pearl of days," the brightest of the week, and the pledge and foretaste of the rest of heaven. George Herbert says truly—

"Sundays the pillars are
On which Heaven's palace archéd lies ;
The other days fill up the space
And hollow room with vanities :
They are the fruitful beds and borders
Of God's rich garden ; that is bare
Which parts their ranks and orders."

And the fact that his entire poem, together with many others on the same theme, continues to strike the chords of human hearts wherever it is known, furnishes a proof of the fact that the day is valued by tens of thousands of the human race, and that if there were no such day as the Sabbath they would be disposed to make one.

But if it would not be right for Christians to secularise the Sabbath, it is not right that others should do it ; and I maintain that a Christian government, such as ours professes to be, is bound, for the sake of those who would keep the day sacred, to prevent others, as much as possible, from the open violation of it. Legislation, it is true, cannot make men observers of the Sabbath ; but it can close public-houses for the sale of intoxicating liquors and

other places of business and of pleasure, and thus lessen the temptation to disregard it, and moreover, it can throw around it that air of quietness and decorum which is so refreshing to the weary mind.

I plead, then, for the *Sabbath*; and I prefer that name to *Sunday*, because it means *rest*; and rest from unnecessary toil, as well as from every thing else which tends to distract the mind, is one of its chief characteristics. I grant that in such a climate as ours the kindling of a fire on the Lord's day is not wrong; neither is the taking of a journey, even in a public conveyance, when the object is to do good to our fellow-men; and there are many other things which the Jewish law forbade on the Sabbath, which are not forbidden to us. "Let every man be fully persuaded," of what is right or wrong, "in his own mind;" for "happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth" (Rom. xiv. 22).

Yes, I plead for the Sabbath, for I believe that the national observance of it is conducive to the highest interests, physical, intellectual, moral, and religious, of all classes of the people; and that the blessing of God rests, and will rest, upon the land which, by keeping it sacred, recognises Him as the Ruler of the nations, and as the great Proprietor of time.

Returning from this digression, if such it must be called, I ask the reader to contemplate the sad picture which these chapters present of the state of Judea at this juncture. With the exception of the monarch on the throne, nearly all the people were

given up to the worship of Baal ; for the reformation partly effected by Josiah was already almost forgotten ; and, doubtless to his grief, the nation had returned to its former sins, with an eagerness which implied that its repentance was neither deep nor genuine. As in the days of the prophet Isaiah, so was it now :—"The whole head was sick, and the whole heart faint ; from the sole of the foot even to the head," of the body politic, "there was no soundness in it ; but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores."

What, then, must follow but more terrible judgments ? They came, as we shall hereafter see ; for when men or nations have become thoroughly corrupt, none but severe measures will be productive of any good results. We could point to modern nations which, when visited with pestilence, or famine, or the sword, have professed repentance and have been apparently disposed to amend their ways. But no sooner have the judgments which hung over them been turned aside, than they have gone back to their habits and perhaps plunged into even deeper crimes. What, then, has happened ? The arm of the Omnipotent has been made bare in vengeance, and still sorer punishments have swept over them like the blast of the simoom. "Stand in awe, and sin not," is God's word to the nations of to-day, and woe is unto them if they disregard it, however strong their fortresses, or numerous their armies, or invincible their ships of war.

CHAPTER IV.

THE POTTER'S HOUSE AND THE BROKEN VESSEL.

B.C. 609.

THE Hebrews, like most eastern nations, were very partial to symbols ; and hence their prophets, from the earliest times, made use of them to convey instruction. A highly imaginative people, they were fond of figures and illustrations drawn from all sources with which they were familiar, and a parable or a simile impressed them when a bare command would not. Hence the Bible is full of poetry. It does not always speak naked spiritual truth, but often sets truth before men under the guise of parable, or allegory, or sign, and thus it adapts itself to the eastern mind especially, and scarcely less so to the mind of the western world as well.

In the eighteenth chapter of Jeremiah's prophecies a very striking symbol is introduced. He is commanded by the Lord Jehovah to go down to "the potter's house," that there he might hear the words which would be spoken to him.

The date of this chapter is prior to the battle of Carchemish in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, as, after that event, but not before it,

there are frequent references to the Chaldeans who were to come and invade Judea. Before that year, then, the historical circumstances here narrated occurred.

It has been inferred from 1 Chron. iv. 23, that there was in Jerusalem a royal establishment of potters, from whose employment, and from the fragments cast away in the process, the potter's field perhaps received its name (Isa. xxx. 14). "It is impossible," says Sir Gardner Wilkinson, "to fix the period of the invention of the potter's wheel; and the assertion of Pliny, who attributes it to Corœbus the Athenian, is disproved by the evidence of the Egyptian monuments, which prove it was known previous to the arrival of Joseph, and consequently, long before the foundation of Athens."¹ All the processes of mixing the clay, and of burning, baking, and polishing the vases, are represented on the tombs of Thebes and Beni Hassan. "They frequently kneaded the clay with their feet, and after it had been properly worked up, they formed it into a mass of convenient size with the hand, and placed it on the wheel, which was of very simple construction, and generally turned by the hand. The various forms of the vases were made out by the finger, during the revolution; the handles, if they had any, were afterwards affixed to them; and the devices and other ornamental parts were traced with a wooden or metal instrument, previous to their being baked. They were then suffered to

¹ Ancient Egyptians, vol. ii. p. 109.

dry, and for this purpose were placed on planks of wood ; they were afterwards arranged with great care in trays, and, carried by means of the usual yoke, borne on men's shoulders to the oven."

The Hebrews doubtless learned this art in Egypt, and when in the wilderness they possessed earthenware vessels, which they must have carried with them from that country. And the art was perpetuated among them, for it was too valuable to be forgotten, and to this day the potter is found at his work in the neighbourhood of Jaffa, where, says Dr Thomson, "I have been out on the shore again examining a native manufactory of pottery, and was delighted to find the whole Biblical apparatus complete, and in full operation. There was the potter sitting at his 'frame,' and turning the 'wheel' with his feet. He had a heap of the prepared clay near him, and a pan of water by his side. Taking a lump in his hand, he placed it on the top of the wheel (which revolves horizontally), and smoothed it into a low cone, like the upper end of a sugar-loaf ; then thrusting his thumb into the top of it, he opened a hole down through the centre, and this he constantly widened by pressing the edges of the revolving cone between his hands. As it enlarged and became thinner, he gave it whatever shape he pleased, with the utmost ease and expedition."¹

Jeremiah went down to the potter's house, and there witnessed this process, for "behold a potter wrought a work on the wheels." But the vessel was marred

¹ The Land and the Book, p. 520.

in his hands. It did not take the form he intended it to take ; and "so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." "I had to wait a long time for that," says Dr Thomson, "but it happened at last. From some defect in the clay, or because he had taken too little, the potter suddenly changed his mind, crushed his growing jar instantly into a shapeless mass of mud, and beginning anew, fashioned it into a totally different vessel."

What does the prophet learn from the house of the potter, and what is now his message to the people? They were the clay in the hands of the Great Potter. God intended to mould them into a noble vessel fit for His own service and use ; but, from no fault of His, they would not take the form He wished to give them, and now therefore they must take another form,—they must be crushed down with calamity, they must be destroyed by the judgments of His hand. His promises were all conditional, but He could do what He chose with the people ; and inasmuch as they had not repented of their sins,—not proved plastic in His hands, not been found worthy of the form He wished to give them,—they must bear the consequences, and He must "frame evil against them," because of their evil ways.

Such, I believe, is the prophet's lesson. The symbol is a striking one, but it may be, and has been, misunderstood. We cannot doubt either the omnipotence or the sovereignty of God. He has undoubtedly both the power and the right to do what He will with

His own ; but man is not clay, though he is made of clay (Gen. ii. 7). Consequently, in ver 8-10, the moral conditions are mentioned which, by virtue of his personality and freedom, must be fulfilled on the part of man, in order that the divine transformation to good or bad may take place. Man is a free agent. He can choose or he can refuse. He can take the noble form which God would give him, or he can resist the operations of His grace and continue to rebel. But what then ? The Potter will give him another form, or, it may be, dash him to pieces as a vessel of dishonour.

But what, then, is the meaning of St Paul, when in reply to the self-righteous Jew, and in allusion to this passage, he says, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God ? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus ? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour ?"¹ It has been maintained that we have here the doctrine of irresistible grace, and that according to St Paul, God has a right to make man what He will for time and for eternity,—a vessel of honour or a vessel of wrath,—a vessel to be used, or a vessel to be dashed in pieces and destroyed. But does a potter ever make a vessel merely for the latter purpose ? Such is not the representation of the apocryphal Book of Wisdom. "For the potter, tempering soft earth, fashioneth every vessel with much labour for our service : yea of the same clay he

¹ Rom. ix. 20, 21.

maketh both vessels that serve him for clean uses, and likewise also such as serve to the contrary ; but what is the use of either sort, the potter himself is judge" (ch. xv. 7). And undoubtedly this writer, though not inspired, was right. God makes one vessel unto honour, as He did the Jews under their dispensation, and another to lesser honour, as He did the Gentiles ; but He had a right to reverse the order if He chose : and He did reverse it ; so that now the Gentiles have the higher honour and the Jew the less. Is there anything unjust in this ? God did not at the first, nor does He now, make either individuals or nations on purpose to destroy them ; but, endowed as they are with intelligence and free-will, the honour He confers upon them depends on their fidelity. As to individuals : " It is impossible," says Dr Tholuck, " to conceive a mightier conflict than that betwixt an impenitent human heart and its God. But the Divine Being gains the glory, whatever the issue be, whether blessing or perdition. Does the proud heart yield the victory ? it then gives thanks of itself to Him who conquered it. Does it persist in its obstinacy ? then the witnesses of the struggle bring the praise and adoration, which they have learned to be due, partly to the mercy of God, partly to the infinite power and wisdom, by which He knows how to prepare a triumph for His kingdom, even from vanquished foes."

But to return from this partial digression. Jeremiah delivered his message ; but the people said, " There is no hope," and they were resolved to walk

after their own devices, and to follow, every one, the imagination of his own evil heart. Again, therefore, they were contrasted with the heathen, who had never been guilty of such unfaithfulness (ch. xviii. 13). Nay: nature itself reproved them, for the snows of Lebanon did not fail, nor the cold flowing waters that ripple at its feet; but they had forgotten the Lord, and had burnt incense unto vanity (ver. 14, 15). For such is the proper meaning of these words, our translation of which is very incorrect.¹ "According to the connection, the prophet can only mean to adduce a fact in natural history which forms a parallel to the historical fact that a nation has never forsaken its gods." The passage, then, should be rendered: "Does the snow of Lebanon ever leave the rock of the field (that is Lebanon itself)? or do the strong flowing waters ever dry up." The heights of Lebanon are within the line of perpetual snow, whilst down to its feet copious streams are continually flowing both in summer and winter; for "on the summits of high mountains, even in tropical countries, the snow does not entirely melt, and therefore the mighty, cool springs at their feet never dry up." Now good men are like such lofty mountains, for the pure snow of their wisdom does not melt, and, like a perennial fountain, they are continually sending forth streams of living water (John vii. 38). But Israel could no longer be compared to Lebanon; for their goodness,

¹ The italics in the E. V. are redundant; and give a wrong sense. The marginal rendering is no better. Comp. Naëgelsbach.

like the morning cloud and the early dews, had passed away, and the people had fallen into gross idolatry, had left the ancient pathways, and had entered upon a way that was not good. God, therefore, threatened to scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; and instead of being able to meet Him boldly, they would turn their backs upon Him and attempt to fly (ch. xviii. 15-17).

The prophet was faithful to his trust, and uttered these threatenings in the ears of the people. But what then? His earnest admonitions were answered with words of personal enmity. "Come," they said, "let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet: come and let us smite him with the tongue, neither let us give heed to any of his words" (ver. 18). Thus they boasted that they had priests and prophets of their own, and that they did not need the advice of Jeremiah; whilst their purpose was to take away his life (ver. 23), and thus rid themselves of one whom they deemed their enemy. Such is often the gratitude of the world to faithful preachers of God's truth. When it can do nothing more, it can "smite with the tongue," can malign, and slander, and vilify; and what is worse than to injure a man's character? In many instances it were better to take away his life.

But his enemies sought the prophet's life, for he said, "Lord, Thou knowest all their counsel against me, to slay me." He therefore prayed most vehe-

mently against them, that God would deliver them up to the famine, that He would not forgive their iniquity, and that their young men should be slain in the battle. Was he right in uttering such a prayer? Calvin and others think he was, since the people had proved themselves reprobates from God; and it may be that this prayer is to be interpreted as we interpret the imprecatory psalms, not as the language of personal vindictiveness, but as expressive of indignation against sin, and zeal for the glory of the Lord of Hosts. "When men continue implacable in their malice, we may lawfully desire that God will plead our cause; and to pray against our enemies, nor for the satisfying our private resentments, but the setting forth of God's justice, is not contrary to the spirit of Christianity." But what a contrast do we meet with in Christ's prayer for His enemies;—"Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Luke xxiii. 34). The spirit of the New Testament dispensation is a spirit of forbearance, meekness, pity, and forgiveness (Matt. v. 43, 44).

Whether the succeeding prophecy (chap. xix.) was delivered now, or at a later period, it is so closely connected with the former one that, in the prophet's writings, it immediately follows. Now he is commanded to get a potter's earthen vessel, and to enter the valley of the son of Hinnom by the Harsuth gate of the city, and there to utter the words he should be told. This valley is situated to the south and west of Jerusalem, and is supposed by Dean Stanley

to have received its name "from some ancient hero, the son of Hinnom." It commences north-west of the Jaffa gate, above the upper pool of Gihon, and descending eastward to the vicinity of the gate, turns south, and the bed of it is occupied by the lower pool of Gihon. Below this it bends round to the east, having the cliffs of Zion on the north, and the hill of Evil Council on the south. Here the valley of Hinnom properly begins, and it terminates at Beer Ayub, where it joins the valley of Jehosaphat. Tophet was not identical with the valley of Hinnom, but was situated within it, somewhere to the east or south-east of Jerusalem, for the prophet went to it by the east, or sun-gate of the city.

To this spot, then, Jeremiah repaired with the earthenware vessel, followed probably by a number of the people, who wondered what he was about to do next. Observe the daring man whose life had already been threatened twice, as bold, as fearless, and as determined as ever. And there he takes his stand, and there he utters again words of condemnation and reproach. On that very spot Judah had erected altars to Baal; on that very spot they had burnt incense to idols; on that very spot they had shed the blood of innocent children by making them pass through the fire to go to Moloch:

"Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood
Of human sacrifice, and parents' tears."

And what was now directed concerning that spot?

It should no more be called Tophet, or the valley of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter, in which multitudes should fall by the sword, and their carcasses should lie as carrion for the fowls of heaven. According to some authorities, Tophet is derived from a word which signifies an altar-place, especially of the worship of Moloch ; but others from a word which means a tabret. Taking the latter view, it is supposed that the spot might be at first the tabret-grove, or "part of the royal garden, a spot of special beauty, with a royal villa in the midst."¹ If so, what a contrast it would now present with its former self ! The prophet broke the vessel by dashing it to the ground, and then declared that God would thus break in pieces the city and the people, and the dead should be buried in Tophet, until there was no more room to bury ! O terrible threatening ! And it was literally fulfilled. And now, not only does that valley contain the debris of the city, but the bones and the dust of thousands who were slain there ; and, as one has said, "perhaps the prophet's words are not yet exhausted."

On his return from Tophet, Jeremiah went into the court of the temple, where perhaps other persons were gathered together ; and there he repeated what he had already said : "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks, that they might not hear my words" (ver. 15).

¹ Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, *sub voce*.

But could all this be endured? Was the prophet permitted to utter such withering words as these with impunity? When a community or a nation has plunged into the depths of sin, reproof becomes irksome to it, and the reprover the object of their abhorrence and hate. The chief governor of the temple at this time was a man named Pashur, who is described as the son of Immer; who, according to 1 Chron. xxiv. 14, was the head of the sixteenth course of priests. This Pashur heard Jeremiah prophesy, that is, heard him himself, probably in the court; and, going up to him, struck him, and then committed him to prison for the night. (Chap. xx. 1, 2), "He put him in the stocks which were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord." This was a temple-gate, and not therefore the gate of Benjamin which led out of the city towards the territory of Benjamin, mentioned chap. xxxvii. 15, xxxviii. 7; and here there was some contrivance for shutting people up in a crooked position, as the word rendered *stocks* implies;¹ so that we conceive of the noble-minded prophet as enduring for a whole night the inconvenience of having to lie, perhaps with his feet fastened in a sort of groove, upon his back, like Paul and Silas, six hundred years after, in the jail at Philippi. That he sang songs as they did, however, we are not informed; for, prophet of sorrow as he was, it is probable that he was depressed and weighed down with grief. But Pashur liberated him in the morning, conscious possibly that he had

¹ Fuerst *sub voce*, and Keil *in loco*.

exceeded his authority. For what right had he to condemn the prophet for uttering faithfully the word of the Lord? There are men who, when they get a little power into their hands as magistrates or rulers, think that they can do as they like, and that they are amenable to no law. We have had, and still have, such men in our own country; but happily the people have a voice, and such men dare not exceed their authority far. But did Jeremiah cower before this imperious governor? On the contrary, he denounced his punishment. His name should not be called Pashur,—*i.e.*, *extension*, but Magor-missabib,—*i.e.*, *fear round about*, or *terror on every side*, for he should become a terror to himself and to all his friends, should see them fall by the sword, but should himself be carried captive into Babylon and there die. The Seventy render the word *Méroukos*, *the exile*, or *the wanderer*; and thus, as it has been observed, Pashur was the type of the Wandering Jew, who wished to die, but from whom death fled. It was doubtless a severe punishment, but he had prophesied lies of his friends, and thereby injured them, and God's anger fell upon him, but in justice, righteousness, and truth.

The remaining words of chap. xx., vers. 17, 18, display a singular commingling of different emotions. First, the prophet passes through sorrow to joy, for after complaining that he had become a scorn and a derision, he acknowledges that God is with him; and he pours forth a note of holy praise. Then, however his sorrow returns, and he curses both the day of his

birth and the man who announced it to his father ; and asks why he came forth from the womb to see labour and sorrow. Now was this right ? or is it right in any man to utter such complaints ? is it right in any man to wish that he had never been born, or that he might die at once ? We cannot think so ; and doubtless, through impatience Jeremiah erred, as did Job, Elijah, and Jonah, and as many other good men have erred in later times. Jeremiah's fault was inexcusable ; but it was a reflex of his human feeling, and men like him have frequently temptations to despondency to which men of more buoyant spirits are almost, if not entirely, strangers. Let no one, however, yield to despondency. There are times of spiritual depression. "There are hours," says Robertson, "in which physical derangement darkens the windows of the soul ; days in which shattered nerves make life simply an endurance ; months and years in which intellectual difficulties, pressing for a solution, shut out God." What, then, is to be done ? The only remedies are faith and hope ; faith which rests on the promise of the Most High, and hope which looks forward to the dawning of a brighter day. Such a day will dawn ; and on the unalterable I Am, who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, we may with confidence rely. "Certainly," says Keil, "this imprecation was not written for our imitation ; but it is doubtless an *infirmity*, as Seb. Schm. called it, an outbreak of the striving of the flesh against the Spirit. But it should be to us a source of instruction and comfort. From

it we should learn on the one hand, the full weight of the temptation, so that we may arm ourselves with prayer in faith as a weapon against the power of the tempter; on the other hand, we should see the greatness of God's grace, which raises again those that are stumbling to their fall, and does not let God's true servants succumb under the temptation, as we gather from the fact that the Lord does not cast off His servant, but gives him the needed strength for carrying on the heavy labour of his office." Even so ; and accordingly Jeremiah rose above the temptation, and, as we shall hereafter see, bore greater trials than these without uttering a word of complaint.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEATH OF JOSIAH.

B.C. 608.

THE departure of a great monarch is an event of the deepest interest to his people, for they cannot tell whether his successor will imitate his example, nor whether the measures he has adopted for the welfare of his country will be carried out or ignored. Josiah was undoubtedly one of the best kings that ever sat upon the throne of Judah, and had his subjects been like-minded with himself, many of the troubles that fell upon them would certainly have been averted. But his attempts to bring about a reformation were a comparative failure, and now more terrible judgments were about to alight upon the land, and ere long Jerusalem itself would be captured by a foreign foe. "Because they have forsaken me," said God through Huldah the prophetess, "and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands ; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched" (2 Kings xxii. 17).

Josiah doubtless received the message with deep

sorrow and with poignant grief. Jerusalem was very dear to him ; and in its temple services he had taken great delight. And was that beautiful city to be invaded by an enemy, and its far-famed temple, erected by Solomon at so great a cost, to be laid waste and destroyed ? Yes, such was to be its fate, and Josiah's only consolation was that he would not live to see the melancholy event. " But to the king," said the prophetess, " which sent you to enquire of the LORD, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel,—*As touching* the words which thou hast heard ; Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes and wept before me ; I also have heard thee, saith the LORD. Behold, therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace ; and thine eyes shall not see the evil I will bring upon this place " (2 Kings xxii. 20).

The heart of Josiah was tender, contrite, and deeply penitent. He had wept before God on account of the nation's sad degeneracy ; and it would seem that he had asked to be taken away from the evil to come ; and now he is assured that his prayer is heard. And was it not better that Josiah should die than that he should live to see so terrible a calamity ?¹ In the grave "the wicked cease from

¹ See Dr Thomas Jackson's Works, vol. xi. p. 121.

troubling, and the weary are at rest ;" whilst the spirit is gathered to the society of the fathers, where probably it knows nothing of the conflicts which agitate the world below. The Old Testament Scriptures contain many gleams of light respecting a future state, and the holy men of the former dispensation saw, though not so clearly as ourselves, that death would introduce them into a region of blessedness and joy. "The idea of annihilation and the cessation of all individual life, is quite foreign to the Old Testament." Even the patriarchs desired a better country, that is, a heavenly ; and the same desire dwelt in the heart of David, of Hezekiah, and no doubt of Josiah, all of whom sought a country which was far away out of their sight.

It may seem strange, however, that God should say to Josiah, "Thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace," when in fact he died in the field of battle ; but that was his own fault, and the providence of God mercifully determined to leave him to his own counsels, that, "by the weakness of His servant, He might take occasion to perfect His own glory."¹

His death took place under the following circumstances. Pharaoh-Necho now sat upon the throne of Egypt, whose name in hieroglyphics is written NEKU. He was the twenty-sixth king of the Saïte dynasty, and, according to Herodotus, reigned sixteen years, from 611 to 595 B.C. He had but recently entered on his reign when he determined to make

¹ Bp. Hall.

war with the king of Assyria, B.C. 610. According to several authorities he had built a fleet of ships, by means of which he landed a considerable army at Acco on the coast of Palestine, intending to proceed thence to Carchemish on the Euphrates, there to give battle either to Saracus, the last ruler of the Assyrian Empire, or, if he had already fallen, as some suppose he had, to Nabo-polassar, the first king of Babylon. Josiah resolved to dispute his passage through the land; and though Necho sent ambassadors assuring him that he did not intend to make war with him, "Josiah would not turn away his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo." According to Niebuhr his policy was perfectly correct, for he supposed that by frustrating the design of Necho he would avert trouble from his own land, "knowing that if once the Egyptians were lords of Coelo-Syria, his independence would be gone." But it is doubtful whether he inquired of the Lord in this matter, and to him the consequences were fatal. The two armies met in the valley or plain of Megiddo, identical with the Roman *Legio* and the present *Lejjun*, on the western border of the plain of Esdraelon. "To avoid the difficulty of passing the river Kishon, Pharaoh kept to the south of it, and must therefore have come past Megiddo. There, after having advanced along the great middle road from Jerusalem to Samaria, the army of Josiah pre-

sented itself. Pharaoh makes an ineffectual attempt to avoid it ; Josiah attacks him ; the Egyptian archers bend their bows, and, mortally wounded, the king of Judah is taken away in his second chariot." ¹ He was riding in his first chariot, but he said to his servants, " Have me away, for I am sore wounded," and they put him in the second, "and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died " (2 Chron. xxxv. 24). He did not, however, die at Jerusalem, but probably at Hadadrimmon, now Rummûn, a small village three miles and a half to the south of Megiddo ; whence the language of the prophet (Zech. xii. 11), " In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo." Deep was the sorrow occasioned by his death. " And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah : and all the singing-men and the singing-women spake of Josiah in their lamentations unto this day." They took up a funeral dirge, which probably commenced at Hadadrimmon, as soon as Josiah died, and perhaps they followed his body to Jerusalem, uttering their loud and piercing wails, as the Easterns often do still.

Jeremiah's elegy is not given in his writings, nor do we find there any reference to Josiah's death, for Lam. iv. 20 alludes to king Zedekiah. Yet we might almost infer that the prophet was with the king when he died, and it is probable that when he was buried in one of the sepulchres of his fathers, and all Judah

¹ Van de Velde's Syria and Palestine, vol. i. p. 355.

and Jerusalem mourned for him, Jeremiah took part in the general grief, and poured forth strains of deepest sorrow.

There is, however, one reference to Josiah which should not be forgotten. Addressing his son Jehoiakim, the prophet says, "Did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy: then was it well with him: was not this to know me? saith the LORD" (ch. xxii. 15).

Josiah enjoyed life, but he also administered justice rightly, having special regard to the poor and needy, whose cause he maintained against violence, oppression, and wrong. And Jeremiah, when he was gone, held up his conduct for his son's imitation; but Jehoiakim was the reverse of his father, and the remonstrances addressed to him by the prophet were disregarded, and the day of vengeance came.

Josiah saw it not. He was gathered to the grave in peace, even though he died a violent death. He was "taken out of the way, that the messengers of God's wrath, which could forbear no longer, might have a free passage through the land." Thus even God's judgments are sometimes merciful, and from the midst of a froward and rebellious people, the spirit of Josiah passed away to the society of saints and angels in a brighter world. True, there is nothing in the record of his hope in death; but that with all pious men of that dispensation he had a hope—the hope of "a better country, that is, a heavenly,"—who

can doubt? Nor can we doubt that his hope was realised, and that he is one of the great cloud of witnesses who by faith obtained the victory, and are now at rest.

But what was the result of Pharaoh's enterprise? The very first prophecy of Jeremiah against foreign nations has reference to it, and was probably uttered when the Egyptians had taken up their position on the Euphrates. Pharaoh was absent from his dominions for upwards of four years, and, Nineveh having fallen (B.C. 606), the army of Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, advanced to meet the enemy at Carchemish (Jer. xlv. 1-12). And what says the prophet? He draws a graphic picture, commencing with a call to the warriors to prepare buckler and shield, to harness the horses, and to mount the chariots in their helmets and coats of mail. But presently he sees them all dismayed. They turn back, their mighty ones are beaten down; and, near the margin of the river, they totter and fall (ver. 3-6). He draws another picture, in which he sees the Egyptians approaching like their own Nile, as a mighty flood; the Ethiopians and the Libyans, their neighbours, appearing as their shield-bearers and their archers; but their power is broken and their pomp is vain, for it is a day of vengeance, and they are made drunk with blood. The battle is lost, and Egypt is called ironically to fetch balm from Gilead that she may be healed of her wounds, which, however, are so deadly that no medicines will be of any avail. Moreover the

nations hear of her defeat, for the cry of the conquered fills the land and is echoed and re-echoed far and wide (ver. 8-12).

Necho himself survived the battle and returned to Egypt with the remainder of his army. Either then, or previously, he took Gaza, the last town S.W. of Palestine, on the frontiers of Egypt.¹ To this event Jeremiah refers in his prophecy against the Philistines (chap. xlvii. 1-7). The Egyptians approached the city from the north, whence the prophet says, "Waters rise up out of the north, and shall be an overflowing flood;" and such is the despair which seizes on the inhabitants, that the fathers' hands become too feeble to attempt the rescue of their children. The prophet himself is alarmed, and cries, "O thou sword of the LORD, how long will it be ere thou be quiet?" etc. But the Philistines too deserved chastisement, and it could not be quiet, as the Lord had given it a charge against Ashkelon, and it must execute His sovereign will. Whoever wields the sword, it is God's instrument of vengeance. It rises when He speaks; it is still when He commands. Among all the neighbouring nations of the Jews, none had displayed more bitter and more continuous hostility to them than the Philistines. From the days of Shamgar to those of Hezekiah, they were bent on mischief and full of enmity and spite. Even the victories of David had not humbled their pride; and in the days of Jeremiah

¹ Comp. Herodotus, xi. 159, who places this event after the battle of Megiddo.

they were the same relentless foes as ever. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was commissioned to utter this prophecy against them; and in all probability it was one of his earliest predictions against foreign nations. And very terrible the prediction is. The Phœnicians who dwelt in Tyre and Sidon, and were friendly with the Philistines, would feel the blow; and the remnant of Caphtor, a country supposed by some to have been to the south of Egypt, from which the Philistines originally came, would be swept away from the land (Jer. xlvii. 4, 5).

The capture of Gaza probably occurred soon after the battle of Carchemish, so that Jeremiah lived to see the fulfilment of his own prophecy. Another prophecy was uttered against Egypt itself, perhaps about the same time (chap. xlvi. 13-26). Pharaoh returned home, but he would be followed in due time by his mighty conqueror, who would be avenged for the attempt to invade his territories. Egypt is likened to a finely formed heifer; but the army of Nebuchadnezzar would come from the north like the gad-fly,¹ often so fearfully destructive of cattle; and Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, would visit both the kings of Egypt and its gods, and would give them into the hands of the king of Babylon. So sad would be the calamity that the daughter of Egypt would be humbled on the ground, making a noise like that of a serpent among leaves fleeing from the woodcutters,²

¹ So the word rendered "destruction" ver. 20, is said to mean.

² See Keil *in loco*.

(ver. 22-26). The chief idol of Egypt was Amon of No,¹ or Thebes, who was worshipped in that city as Amon-Ra, the sun-god. This and all the gods of Egypt Jehovah would punish, together with Pharaoh and all that trusted in them; but He would spare Jacob, His servant, and would not utterly cast him off.


The conquest of Egypt was again predicted by Jeremiah, a few years later (chap. xliii.), to which prophecy and its fulfilment reference will be made hereafter.

¹ Rendered, ver. 24, "the multitude of No."

CHAPTER VI.

THE REIGNS OF JEHOAHAZ AND JEHOIAKIM.

B.C. 608, 604.

N the death of Josiah the people took Jehoahaz, his younger son, and made him king, in preference to his elder brother. He was but twenty-three years of age, and perhaps they thought that he would be the more easily led; but his reign was brief, for in three months he was deposed by Pharaoh-Necho, who, probably on his way to Carchemish, put him in bonds in Riblah, in the land of Hamath.¹

Josephus says that Jehoahaz was an impious man and impure in the course of his life. That so good a father as Josiah should have such sons as he had, was indeed sad; but pious ancestors have often had degenerate children, by whose wickedness and folly their latter days have been made sorrowful and grievous.

Riblah, which is now represented by a miserable village called Rible, situated on the eastern bank of

¹ 2 Kings xxiii. 31-35.

the Orontes (the Asy), was the camping-ground of Pharaoh, on the great road which led from Egypt to Babylon. Here he was remaining for a time when he heard that Jehoahaz had ascended the throne of Judah; and, for some reason or other, he sent a division of his army under one of his generals to bring him into his presence. He was thus deposed and led, as a captive, a distance of two hundred miles, to Riblah, where doubtless he was treated with indignity, and whence he was sent into Egypt where he died.¹

By Jeremiah Jehoahaz is called Shallum, which was probably his original name; and thus he speaks of him: "Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep, weep for him that goeth away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country" (ch. xxii. 10-12). The prophet thought that there was greater cause to weep for Shallum, who would return no more to his native land, than for Josiah who was dead, for he would miserably perish. "Dying saints," says Matthew Henry, "may be justly envied, while living sinners are justly pitied. And so dismal, perhaps, the prospect of the times may be, that tears even for a Josiah, even for a Jesus, must be restrained, that they may be reserved for ourselves and for our children" (Luke xxiii. 28). Yes; it is possible to weep too much for the dead and too little for the living, and there are frequent occasions when a nation is plunged into incontrollable sorrow by the

¹ 2 Chron. xxxvi. 3; 2 Kings xxiii. 34.

death of some illustrious man, but when it would be better for it to weep on account of the calamities that befall those who survive.

Necho made Eliakim, the eldest son of Josiah, king; but changed his name to Jehoiakim, as a sign of his dependence. Or perhaps he permitted him to choose a new name for himself, and Eliakim simply changed El (God), into Jah; the former name signifying *established by God*; the latter *established by Jehovah, the covenant God*. Possibly, as Keil suggests, he did this "with an intentional opposition to the humiliation with which the royal house of David was threatened by Jeremiah and other prophets," as if to say, "Jehovah, the God of the covenant made with David, is my protector, and inasmuch as He promised that He would establish the throne of his kingdom for ever," (2 Sam. vii. 13), "I bid defiance to the prophets whose words are false and vain." But Jehoiakim misinterpreted the promise, and forgot the conditions on which it hung. God would indeed establish the throne of David for ever, but if any of his descendants committed iniquity, they would be chastised as some of them had already been; and as Jehoiakim himself would ere long discover.

Even now he was a vassal, for Necho imposed a tribute on the land of one talent of gold: £5,475, and one hundred talents of silver: £34,200; or according to the reading of the LXX, one hundred talents of gold and ten talents of silver. Jehoiakim paid the money, but he taxed the people to raise it,

who were compelled, however unwillingly, to submit.' He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; but he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, for his eyes and his heart were upon nothing but covetousness, and violence, and oppression, and the shedding of innocent blood (Jer. xxii. 17). There was a prophet named Urijah, who, like Jeremiah, uttered against Jerusalem the most solemn maledictions, and who, being threatened with death, was afraid, and fled into Egypt. What did Jehoiakim? He sent Elnathan and a number of men after him, who brought him back to the king, when he was slain by the sword, and his dead body cast into the grave of the common people (Jer. xxvi. 20-23).

Was it possible, under such circumstances, that Jeremiah should hold his peace? No; in the very beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim he was commanded to stand in the court of the Lord's house, and there proclaim the word of Jehovah, that he would make the temple of Jerusalem like Shiloh, and the city a curse to all the nations of the earth (Jer. xxvi. 1-7). This discourse repeats the prediction of chaps. vii., ix., x., in which the prophet denounced the hypocritical mingling of the worship of Jehovah with idolatry, the sensuous persistence of the people in sin, and the general absence of truth and faith; and here God says, "Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name wherein ye trust, and unto the

¹ 2 Kings xxiii.

place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh." Shiloh, which is now represented by a place called Scilun, identified by Dr Robinson, was one of the earliest cities of importance in the land. It was situated "on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Bethel to Shechem and on the south of Lebonah,"¹ and it was long celebrated as the place where God "set His name at the first;" for there the annual festivals were held, there Eli the priest ministered unto the Lord, and there the youthful Samuel was brought up. It existed in the times of Jeroboam I., but for its wickedness it was swept away, and, when Jeremiah spoke of it, it was known only as a mass of ruins. And would Jerusalem become like it? was that city also doomed to fall? When the people heard this from the lips of the prophet, they asked him why he had thus prophesied, and they said "Thou shalt surely die." And now the princes of Judah bring him to the new gate of the Lord's house, and, having taken their seats, proceed to listen to the accusations of the priest and the false prophet. "This man is worthy to die, for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears," is the charge they bring against him; and there he stands in the presence of his enemies, a type of Christ before the Sanhedrim under similar accusations. Is he afraid? does he tremble? On the contrary, with the most perfect calmness he affirms that the LORD had sent him thus to prophesy, and calls upon them to

¹ Judges xxi. 19.

make their ways and their doings good by a timely and sincere repentance. "But, behold, I am in your hands; do with me as seemeth good and meet to you." The prophet knew that he was under God's protection, but he knew also that God did sometimes permit the wicked to take away the lives of His servants, and therefore he said, "I am in your hands." At the same time he warned them of the consequences of shedding innocent blood, and his appeal to them was not in vain. "This man is not worthy to die, said the princes and all the people, for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God." Certain of the elders also rose up and confirmed the sentence of acquittal by referring to the case of the prophet Micah, who, in the days of Hezekiah, had said, "Zion for your sake shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."¹ Yet the king did not put him to death, but rather listened to his words and sought mercy of the Lord. No such incident is found in the history of Hezekiah; but probably, as Keil conjectures, the elders combined this fact with Micah's prophecy, and thus drew the conclusion that the godly king succeeded by his prayer in averting the mischief (Jer. xxvi. 10-19).

In contrast with the conduct of Hezekiah, that of Jehoiakim in putting Urijah to death is adduced, apparently by the same parties. It is possible, however, that the enemies of the prophet are the speakers

¹ Mic. iii. 12.

here, and that they urged this as a reason why Jeremiah should be put to death. But he escaped their hands, chiefly through the influence of Ahikam the son of Shaphan, of whom we shall hear again (ver. 20-24). How often has one man been the means of quelling the rage and malice of a multitude! Ahikam did himself honour in this case, and his name is recorded on the sacred page as a man who loved justice, and threw his shield over the innocent and the good.

And whilst Ahikam was the protector of Jeremiah, he was also the friend of Jeremiah's enemies. For did he not avert from them the severer punishment which would have fallen upon them had they put the prophet to death? We never screen the innocent without also benefiting their foes. They may not think of it, or even care for it, but so it is; and thus a kind action meant specially for one, proves of value to many others.

Soon after the battle of Carchemish, in which Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh-Necho, the conqueror heard of the death of his father Nabo-polassar, by which event he succeeded to the throne of Babylon, when he immediately commenced a career of ambition which almost made him master of the world.

The precise date of this event cannot be ascertained, but it was no doubt within the years B.C. 609 to 604;¹ and it coincides with the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim. In that year Jeremiah uttered the prophecy contained in chap. xxv., declaring that Nebuchadnezzar should invade Judea and make the

¹ Ewald fixes it in B.C. 605.

land utterly desolate, and compel the people to serve the king of Babylon seventy years (vers. 9, 10). It was a terrible threatening, and it must have produced a deep impression on the minds of many. But, for eighteen years;—*i.e.*, from the thirteenth year of Josiah to this period, the prophet had warned the nation of the consequences of its transgression, and it would not hear; other prophets too had spoken in the same manner, but to no purpose; now therefore the time of vengeance was at hand, for “he that being often reprovèd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy.” God is long-suffering and very pitiful. He gave to the people who lived before the flood a hundred and twenty years for repentance; He gave to Sodom and Gomorrah more than twenty-five years’ respite; and now He has given Jerusalem eighteen years of warning; but if His goodness is despised, what else can He do but allow the threatened stroke to fall? Fall, then, it would, ere long, and the city of David, and Solomon, and Hezekiah, sacred as it was as the place which God had chosen to put His name there, would become the prey of the destroyer,—a desolation and a curse.

But mercy would be mingled with judgment. God called Nebuchadnezzar His servant, for He makes use of all sorts of men for the accomplishment of His purposes; and then, if they rebel against Him, He sets them aside. The prophet said therefore, “And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that

nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolation. And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book which Jeremiah hath prophesied against the nations," etc. (ver. 12, 13).

Rationalists have objected to this prophecy of the seventy years as being too definite, and hence they regard the words as an interpolation; but do they intend to deny altogether God's foreknowledge of future events, or that He could, if He chose, reveal such events to His servants? If so, we can have no controversy with them; and it should be observed that the design of this prophecy of the seventy years was the consolation of Israel; for "thus a safeguard was provided against the dangers to which God's captive people Israel were exposed in Babylonia, from the seductions of Chaldean idolatry; and a hope of restoration to their own land was cherished in their hearts till the time of their chastisement was past."¹

But the captivity of the people would not yet commence, though, as is generally supposed, the seventy years began in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (B.C. 606). Meanwhile what would become of Jehoiakim himself? He was one of the worst of the kings of Judah, and deserved the severest chastisements of a just and holy God; which, as we shall see hereafter, fell upon him. The prophet was com-

¹ Bp. Wordsworth, *in loco*.

manded to go to the palace itself, and, in the presence of the king, to utter a prophecy indicative of his fate. This prophecy is contained in ch. xxii. 1-9 and 18, 19; and was probably delivered about the same time as the one just referred to; or, as some commentators suppose, a few years before. It was a bold undertaking for the man of God; but he was not disobedient to the Divine command. There he stands in the presence of the haughty monarch, and declares that if he will not execute judgment and righteousness in the land, the king's house should become a desolation, and the choice cedars of Lebanon should be cut down by the invader and cast into the fire. Woe to Jehoiakim! the prophet cries. He has built his palace in unrighteousness; he has oppressed the people in behalf of his splendid architecture; he has constructed a large house ceiled with cedar and painted with vermillion; but would all this splendour perpetuate his reign? His father Josiah knew better, and therefore it was well with him. But Jehoiakim practised violence and shed innocent blood; therefore he should die unlamented, and be "buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (ver. 12-19).¹ How this prediction was fulfilled we shall see hereafter; but, by the Jews especially, such a burial would be deemed a terrible disgrace; and the king, unless utterly indifferent to the prophet's words, must have trembled as he listened to them, and felt no little fear. "God," says Calvin,

¹ Comp. ch. xxxvi. 30.

"would have burial a proof to distinguish us from brute animals even after death, as we in life excel them, and as our condition is much nobler than that of the brute creation. Burial is also a pledge as it were of immortality; for when a man's body is laid hid in the earth, it is as it were a mirror of a future life. Since, then, burial is an evidence of God's grace and favour towards mankind, it is, on the other hand, a sign of a curse when burial is denied."

From the king the prophet turns to the people. From the summits of the highest mountains, Lebanon and Bashan, they should announce the fall of the kings, their lovers, for they would be carried into captivity, and the wind would eat up all their pastors. Proudly and securely the inhabitants of Jerusalem were now living as on Mount Lebanon, for they were dwelling in ceiled houses fragrant with its cedars; but their pride should be abased, and their anguish would be like that of a woman in her pangs (ch. xxii. 20-23). No worse things can come to a nation than over-refinement, a luxurious style of living and a proud defiance of the laws of heaven. They are the certain prelude of its downfall. Nineveh fell because of them; then Jerusalem; then Babylon; and in later times the cities of Greece and of Rome. Let modern cities and nations take warning; for God's judgments are still abroad in the earth, and will one day light with tenfold severity on the impenitent and the wicked.

It has, I know, been affirmed that, under the

Christian dispensation, national calamities are not to be viewed in the light of judgments, since oftentimes the most innocent persons are the greatest sufferers. But the same argument would apply to former times, and were not the calamities that frequently fell on the Jews spoken of as judgments by all their prophets? It is true that in times of war, and pestilence, and famine, thousands of comparatively unoffending persons,—especially women and children,—are swept away by the devourer's hand; but it could not be otherwise, save by miracles; and God deals with nations as real existences, distinct from the individuals composing them, though never separate from them; and, as such, He visits them with the punishments they deserve, sometimes to their utter and complete destruction. But shall not the judge of all the earth do right? Undoubtedly He shall, and if He destroys the righteous with the wicked, it is because the two cannot be always separated in this world, and because there is an hereafter in which all these things will be adjusted.

“I spake unto thee in thy prosperity,” says the prophet, “but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyedst not my voice” (ver. 21). The word is in the plural, and means rather *tranquillities*. Not in ignorance had they gone astray, for in quiet times and seasons, before calamity had come upon them, God had given them counsel and warning, but in vain. “Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked,” said Moses (Deut. xxxii. 15).

"So fatness and tranquillity have such effect as to render us more refractory. Yet this cannot avail for an excuse when God kindly invites us, and connects with His doctrine kind and paternal benevolence, and confirms it by the effects when we are tractable, and yield Him willing obedience. Thus the prophet closed the mouths of the Jews, for they would have sought probably to make this objection, that vengeance was too vehemently denounced on them, and that God suddenly assailed them ; but he shows that when in tranquillity and prosperity they might have acknowledged God's paternal kindness, they had yet been rebellious, and had abused the indulgence of God." ¹

Did they not then deserve the punishment here threatened—the sweeping away of their kings and pastors? Their impiety was no new thing. From their youth, as a nation, they had evinced the same obstinate and rebellious spirit, and still they persisted in the same course of disobedience. God's long-suffering with the Jews was wonderful, but He could bear with them no longer, and now the time of judgment was at hand, when He would execute the threatenings which He had delayed to execute, only because of His unwillingness to strike.

¹ Calvin.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ROLL.

B.C. 608.

WHEN men are bent upon an evil course, and are resolved to follow it, God gives them up to the delusions of their hearts. Both in sacred and in secular history there are instances not a few, of kings and princes being seized with an infatuation of mind which has made those around them stagger, and which has ultimately led to their utter and irremediable ruin. Whom God has resolved to destroy He blinds.

Jehoiakim had already heard the warnings of the prophet, but he gave no heed to them ; and now in the fourth year of his reign, Jeremiah was commanded to commit to writing in a roll all the prophecies he had uttered from the beginning of his ministry (ch. xxxvi.) This roll was a long slip, probably of parchment, as a knife was used to destroy it, and it would be written upon on one side only. There is no doubt that Jeremiah himself could write ; but, as was frequently the custom, both in earlier and later times, he employed an amanuensis,—Baruch the

son of Neriah, who wrote as the words were dictated to him by the prophet. It is impossible to say how much of the present book which bears Jeremiah's name this writing contained ; nor in what order the prophecies were given ; but it could not contain the whole, as some were delivered at a later period. It was to be read, however, in the ears of all the people ; but Jeremiah himself was in some way prevented from reading it, and he therefore requested Baruch to do it in his stead. " I am shut up ; I cannot go into the house of the LORD : therefore go thou, and read in the roll which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD, in the ears of the people in the LORD'S house upon the fasting day : and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities." The expression, " I am shut up," does not mean that Jeremiah was in prison, for at this time he certainly was not ; but that he was prevented, perhaps by sickness, from undertaking this task. The fasting day here mentioned was not the yearly fast of the seventh month (Lev. xvi. 29, xxiii. 27), but some ordinary fast-day, of which the Jews had many. But why was this roll to be read ? It was another proof of the Divine compassion, for said the Lord to Jeremiah, " It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them ; that they may return every man from his evil way ; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin " (ver. 3).

And was this possible after all that had occurred ?

Had it not been possible, God would certainly not have so spoken. He was willing to give the people another opportunity to repent, and would fain even now have turned aside the judgments that hung over their heads so unwillingly. But already Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege to Jerusalem and taken it. In the third year of Jehoiakim he had marched against it (Dan. i. 1, 2), and in the following year had entered it in triumph (Jer. xlvi. 2). Already then Jehoiakim was his vassal; for first Nebuchadnezzar had put him in chains to carry him to Babylon (2 Chron. xxxvi. 6), but on his submission and promise of allegiance, liberated him and left him in possession of his throne. And now, before the roll was actually read, a fast was proclaimed before the Lord in the ninth month, answering to our December, of the fifth year (ch. xxxvi. 9). For what reason? Was Jehoiakim beginning to relent? or were the people really penitent before God? No: this fast was, in all probability, designed to keep in remembrance the day that Nebuchadnezzar entered the city; but it was no sign of humility on the part either of the king or of the nation. On that very fast-day, then, Baruch read the words of Jeremiah. "Read them," said the prophet, "on a fasting-day;" and accordingly this fast-day having been appointed, and multitudes of people having come from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem, Baruch went to the temple, and from a window in the chamber of Gemariah which was in the higher court, at the entry of the new gate, and

therefore in an elevated position, fulfilled his difficult but important task.

It must have been an impressive scene. Many doubtless would treat the matter lightly, but Baruch himself knew, and others who were present knew, that a great crisis was at hand, which nothing could avert but a timely and genuine repentance. The reading of Jeremiah's prophecies collectively, might produce an impression which, separately heard, they had failed to do; yet of this there was but little hope, and the probability was, that the dense cloud which already hung over Jerusalem would, ere long, burst upon it with tenfold force.

Micaiah, the son of Gemariah, in whose temple-chamber Baruch read, was probably in the room, and, impressed with what he heard, he hastened to his father, whom he found in the scribes' chamber, or, as the word means, the chancellor's room, situated near the east gate, or gate Shushan, over the porter's lodge. Here he found several of the princes,—Elishama, the scribe, probably a prince of the royal family (ch. xli. 2, 2 Kings xxv. 15), Delaiah, a son of Shemaiah, with whom we shall meet again, Elnathan, the father of Nehusta, mother of king Jehoiakim (2 Kings xxiv. 8), and Zedekiah, the son of Hananiah, together with his father and many others. He told them what he had heard from the lips of Baruch, and they sent immediately Jehudi, supposed from the name of his ancestor, to have been a Cushite, to bring Baruch into their presence with the roll. They did not treat him

in an unfriendly manner, but requested him to sit down and read the roll to them. They listened, and impressed by the concentration of its threatenings, were filled with fear, and looked one at another, as we may well suppose, with considerable anxiety and concern. "We will surely tell the king all those words," they said, "but tell us, now, how didst thou write all these words at his mouth?" They did not suppose that Baruch wished to deceive, that he had not received these words from Jeremiah, or that he had written from memory or copied them from documents; but they were anxious to know in what way Jeremiah had uttered them,—whether consciously or in a state of ecstasy;¹ and Baruch told them the simple truth,—how that the prophet pronounced them with his lips, and *he* wrote them with ink in a book (ch. xxxvi. 9–18).

The prince took the roll, and laid it up in the chamber of Elishama. But, apprehensive for the safety of Baruch and Jeremiah, they requested them to hide themselves, so that whatever the king might say or do, their lives might not be placed in jeopardy. They then went to the king who was sitting in the winter house of his palace. This was the proper dwelling-house of the king which stood in a court of its own, "and when looked at from the entrance, formed the hinder court of the whole palace."² "In common parlance," says Dr Thomson, "the lower

¹ Nagäelsbach. ² Keil; 1 Kings vii. 8.

apartments (of a house in Palestine) are simply *el beit*—the house; the upper is the *ulliyeh*, which is the summer house. Every respectable dwelling has both, and they are familiarly called *beit shatawy*, and *beit salfy*—winter and summer house. If these are on the same story, then the external and airy apartment is the summer house, and that for the winter is the interior or more sheltered room.”¹ A charcoal fire was burning on the hearth, in an earthenware pot, such as the Orientals often use, for being the month of December it would be cold. The king was informed of the scroll, and he immediately sent Jehudi to fetch it. And now as the princes stood before the imperious monarch, Jehudi read it, but, ere he had read three or four columns,² the king’s patience was exhausted and he would hear no more. Seizing the parchment he took a knife, belonging probably to one of the scribes, and against the strong remonstrances of three of the princes, Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah, cut the document in pieces, and cast it into the fire, so that it was all consumed. It was a daring and a sacrilegious act, and not satisfied with this, he sent some of the parties present to take Baruch and Jeremiah, but the Lord had hid them, and their hiding-place could not be found.

And did the proud and haughty king suppose that he could thus set aside the purposes of God? Did he imagine that by burning the roll he had got rid of

¹ Land and the Book, p. 309; Keil, vol. ii. p. 101.

² The word means not *leaves*, but *divisions of the book*.

its contents, and that he would never hear of them again? We speak of the folly of the ostrich who, when she sees an enemy approaching, hides her head in the sand; but far greater is the infatuation of man when he imagines he can escape the judgments of the Most High by putting them out of sight. Yet there are many amongst us to-day who, because they do not like what the Bible says concerning them, cut it up with the knife of criticism and cast it into the fire of their indignation and contempt. No doubt many copies of the Scriptures have been destroyed for the very reason that Jehoiakim destroyed the roll; but what then? the Scriptures live, and will live to the end of time. A parallel to the conduct of the king is found in that of Antiochus Epiphanes, under whose reign and at whose command all the copies of the law that were found were burnt with fire (1 Mac. i. 56); and the same spirit was displayed in the days of Luther, whose books were publicly burnt by order of the Papal nuncio, Alexander. But what said the German princes? "Do you imagine," they said, "that Luther's doctrines are found only in those books that you are throwing into the fire? They are written where you cannot reach them, in the hearts of the nation."¹

Jeremiah and Baruch heard, in their hiding-place, of the conduct of Jehoiakim, and the word of the Lord came again to the former, bidding him re-write the roll. But how could he do this? He had kept no copy of it; and how was it possible for him to

¹ D'Aubigne's *History of the Reformation*, ch. xi.

recall the words which he had uttered? We have heard of valuable manuscripts being lost or destroyed, and of their authors trying to reproduce them; but the task has proved impracticable, and the second writing has differed from the first in many material points. Yes; but Jeremiah wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit; and, at the Divine command, he took another roll, gave it to Baruch the scribe, and dictated to him "all the words of the book which Jehoiakim, king of Judah, had burnt in the fire." "Here is a sublime specimen," says Bishop Wordsworth, "of the triumph of God's Word, when repressed by the power and burnt by the rage of this world, whether it be in the suppression of the Scriptures, or in preventing their circulation, or in casting copies of them into the fire, or in the imprisonment and martyrdom of God's preachers. That Word rises more gloriously out of all its persecutions."

But the roll was not merely reproduced. There were added to it "many like words;" the re-assertion that the king of Babylon should certainly come and destroy the land; and the predicted punishment of Jehoiakim, that he should leave none to sit upon the throne of David; and that his dead body should be cast out in the day to the heat and in the night to the frost (ch. xxxvi. 27-32, comp. xxii. 10). Second warnings are often more severe than the first, and indifference to the Divine threatenings is punished by a repetition of them with greater terror.

That these predictions were fulfilled there cannot be a moment's doubt. After three years, Jehoiakim

rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who therefore sent such troops against him as were near Jerusalem at the time. They consisted of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites (1 Kings xxiv. 1, 2), and though it is said that Jehoiakim "slept with his fathers," yet he doubtless fell in a battle fought with these bands, and his body met with the treatment which the prophet Jeremiah describes. "There were no funeral dirges over him, as there had been over his father and brother; but his corpse was thrown out, like that of a dead ass, outside the walls of Jerusalem, exposed to the burning sun by day, and the wasting frost by night."¹

Thus fell Jehoiakim in the eleventh year of his reign, B.C. 589. The son of one of the best of the kings of Judah, he himself was one of the worst, for "he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord," filling Jerusalem with "abominations," and setting up the idols of the heathen in every part of the land. Six years later, Ezekiel describes the idolatry which was practised in the metropolis with the sanction of the king, and from Jer. xix. there is every reason to believe that such rites were already observed. Within the very precincts of the temple incense was offered to unclean beasts, women sat weeping for Tammuz; and in the inner court of the temple men were seen worshipping the sun with their backs towards the temple of the Lord (Ezek. viii). Was it surprising that such a man should meet with such a fate? It

¹ Comp. Keil, vol. I. p. 341.

was intended doubtless as a warning to his successors ; whilst it testified to the truth of Jeremiah's words, and led some, perhaps, to place greater confidence in him than before.

Bad men, not a few, have had splendid funerals ; but such funerals, like that of Herod the Great, have meant nothing, and have been followed by rejoicings rather than by tears. But others have met with a similar fate to that of Jehoiakim,—“ buried with the burial of an ass.” It may be said what matters it that honour should be done to a lifeless corpse ? but such was not the feeling of the Jew. To be gathered to his fathers,—to be laid in the sepulchre of his ancestors with respect and honour,—was his intense desire, and therefore to be told that his remains would be thus maltreated would have embittered his declining days. And *we* cherish a similar feeling, so that the great and good generally meet with respect on the day of their interment, and many a tear is shed over their graves, whilst flowers and laurel leaves are placed upon their bier. No such honours had the king who burnt the roll ; no such honours did he deserve.

We return for a moment to Baruch the scribe. Whilst he was writing out the prophecies of Jeremiah which spoke of the disturbed condition of the land, he was full of anguish, and said, “ Woe is me now ! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow ; I fainted in my sighing, and I found no rest ” (Jer. xlv. 3). It was a burst of patriotic feeling, for not on his

own account only was Baruch concerned, but for his country at large, whose future prospects were so dark.¹ The prophet, however, assured him that he should escape with his life wherever he went,—a promise given him, as the reward of his fidelity, from the Lord Jehovah ; but with this he must be content, and not seek great things for himself. The country was doomed ; individuals only could be saved. For the Lord said this, "Behold that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted will I pluck up, even this whole land" (ver. 4, 5). There are those who imagine that God cannot destroy His own work. But He has destroyed it often. He has built cities, but He has broken them down ; He has planted communities, but He has plucked them up ; He has founded Churches, but He has swept them away ; He has created this earth, but He will destroy it by fire. What folly then is it in men to seek great things for themselves here,—lands, estates, houses, names, titles, or wealth of any kind when the tenure on which they hold them is so uncertain and insecure ! Having food and raiment let us be therewith content ; "for he that increaseth riches increaseth sorrow," and whatever greatness a man may gain of a merely external nature, he must one day leave it. True greatness—the greatness which abides—is the

¹ Calvin is very severe on Baruch, and charges him with being too anxious for his own safety. This certainly does not appear. The notion entertained by some, that Baruch sought the prophetic office, Calvin rightly rejects.

greatness of the mind consisting in a living faith in God and a holy obedience to His will.

" Ye proud, ye selfish, ye severe,
How vain your mask of state,
The good alone have joy sincere,
The good alone are great !
Great, when amid the vale of peace,
They bid the plaint of sorrow cease,
And hear the voice of artless praise,
As when along the trophied plain
Sublime they lead the victor train,
While shouting nations gaze."

We shall meet with Baruch again, and we shall find that he did not forget the lesson, and that he continued faithful to the interests of his friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECHABITES.

B.C. 600.



LOSELY connected with the interests of God's chosen people were the interests of certain tribes whose origin is somewhat obscure. Among these were the Kenites who were probably a branch of the larger tribe of the Midianites, who, according to Gen. xxv. 2, were descendants of Abraham by his wife Keturah ; for Jethro, the priest of Midian, and who dwelt in the land of the Midianites not far from Mount Horeb,¹ is called in Judges i. 16 a Kenite.

This tribe was urged by Moses to accompany the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness (Num. x. 29-32) ; and it is evident that they did so ; for Balaam looked upon the Kenites and said, " Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock " (Num. xxiv. 21) ; and accordingly we meet with them in the days of Saul (1 Sam. xv. 6), and in the days of David (xxvii. 10 ; xxx. 29) ; in both which instances they are treated as a friendly people.

¹ Exod. ii. 15, 16 ; iv. 19.

From the Kenites sprang the Rechabites,¹ but of Rechab himself we know nothing. His name signifies *a horseman, or rider*, and probably implies that he led a wild Bedouin life. He was the father, or, it may be, an earlier ancestor of Jonadab, with whom Jehu met after he had slain the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and to whom he said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings x. 15, 16).

In the days of Jeremiah the Rechabites were a somewhat considerable tribe dwelling within the territory of Judah, not in houses, but in tents, and living in a very primitive and humble style. But when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land, they were afraid of the armies of the Chaldeans and the Syrians, so that they fled to Jerusalem and dwelt there (Jer. xxxv. 1-12). They were probably well known to the prophet, and in the latter part of the reign of Jehoiakim, as far as we can gather, he was instructed of God to go and speak to them and to bring them into the house of the Lord. It is remarkable that their leader, Jaazaniah, was the son of a man who bore the same name as the prophet; and, together with the brethren, and all his sons and the whole house of the Rechabites, he was conducted into a forecourt of the temple which must have been a spacious hall, and was named after "the sons of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah, the man of God," by whom it was probably used as a place of assemblage for his pupils and adherents. It is further described as being over or above the chamber of Maaseiah, the

¹ 1 Chron. ii. 25.

keeper of the door, or the threshold keeper, an office which was also held by two other persons, Seraiah and Zephaniah (Jer. lii. 24; 2 Kings xxv. 18).

Now Jeremiah acted under Divine authority. But for what purpose did he bring these Rechabites into the hall? That he might set wine before them and invite them to drink. But was not this tempting them to do wrong, since they were under a promise to their father Jonadab that they would not drink wine? Yet God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man; so that a difficulty arises here which needs to be explained. And I think the explanation is, that it was not properly a temptation, but a trial of their fidelity, to which they were put because God foreknew that they would bear it, and intended to bring their conduct into contrast with that of the disobedient Israelites. It was a parallel case to that of Abraham whom God tempted to offer up his son Isaac. He knew that he would obey the "harsh command," but He did not intend that the sacrifice should be actually made. Nor is it unfrequently the case now that good men's trials seem like temptations. They are placed in circumstances of difficulty by the providence of God, in which their faith and their obedience are tested to the uttermost; but they come out of the ordeal, and by it their piety is strengthened and matured.

The sons of Jonadab were faithful to the injunction of their father. "We will drink no wine," they said; "for he commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no

wine, neither ye nor your sons for ever." But his prohibition went further. They were not to build houses, nor to sow seed, nor to plant vineyards, nor to possess any ; but to dwell in tents all their days. And was such a prohibition reasonable or right ? On this question the narrative pronounces no opinion, and on Jonadab's motives it utters not a word. His object was that his posterity should pursue a nomadic life, and feel themselves strangers wherever they might roam ; and doubtless their habits would render them brave and hardy ; for whatever advantages a city life possesses of another kind, it tends to make men soft and effeminate, and thus unfits them for the sterner duties to which many of them, at least, must necessarily be called. And drinking wine or other intoxicating liquors is certainly injurious to the human system in the great majority of instances. Jonadab may have seen in others the sad effects of intemperate habits, or he may have heard of Solomon's words, "Wine is a mocker and strong drink is raging ;" and thus, perhaps, he was led to utter the command—"Drink no wine ;" and we cannot but admire his prudence and his wisdom.

Cardinal Bellarmine deduced an argument from this chapter in favour of monasticism ; and many in our own day have, in like manner, used it in favour of the cause of total abstinence from intoxicating liquors. It is obvious, however, that it is inapplicable to either case. The one reason why the conduct of the Rechabites is held up to admiration is not

that they dwelt in tents or that they abstained from wine, but that they were obedient to their father's command. "All families," as it has been truly said, "could not pursue Rechab's mode of life, nor should they. God gives to many, different callings; happy they who can feel content in the most simple, and who constantly preserve the feeling of being pilgrims in this world. It is also not contrary to God's ordering that distinct families, ranks, and callings, are formed, or that special plans are adopted for the exercise of partnerships in certain times and circumstances, just as the Church at Jerusalem introduced a community of goods. We are only not to perceive any special sanctity in such arrangements; they are only practices, and all depends on the mind in which they are undertaken."

These remarks are perfectly applicable to the great temperance movement of the present day. Men have a right to devise plans and to form associations for putting down the gigantic evil which is stalking through the land, and it is both expedient and necessary that they should; but let them not appeal to the conduct of Jonadab as a scriptural argument against the use of wine. The Holy Spirit never intended it to be so used, for in other parts of scripture the use of wine is allowed. It was allowed to the priests and Levites, and is condemned only when taken to excess. I am myself an abstainer from all intoxicating liquors, but not because the descendants of Jonadab abstained, nor because the Bible con-

demns the drinking of wine as a sin, for it does nothing of the kind; but because I believe it to be expedient to abstain, as a protest against the intemperance which floods our country, and which is the cause of so many of its miseries and woes. Let the principles of total abstinence be advocated on proper grounds, for to do otherwise will tend to weaken the cause, and thereby to prevent its success. It is, I believe, a grand and noble one, for it seeks to sweep away one of the most gigantic evils of modern times; but it does not need to be supported by arguments drawn from the conduct of the Rechabites, and logically such arguments are certainly unsound.

The obedience of the sons of Jonadab was in accordance with the fifth commandment, the importance of which in the estimation of the Jews may be inferred from the language of an apocryphal writer. "Honour thy father and mother both in word and deed, that a blessing may come upon thee from them: for the blessing of the father establisheth the houses of children; but the curse of the mother rooteth out foundations" (Ecclus. iii. 8, 9). These words were probably written at a much later period,—about 300 years B.C.; but there is no doubt that the injunction was observed by the Jews most religiously for many centuries, as it is by their descendants to this day. But it is one thing to obey man; it is another thing to obey God. Whether the Rechabites were equally conscientious in their observance of the

Divine commands we know not; but sometimes children will obey their parents from a family or a national feeling, and the clanship of early times bound many sons to their fathers who were actuated by no higher principle. This, however, was the design of the prophet's interview with this people—to bring their conduct into contrast with the conduct of the Israelites. "Go and tell the house of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the Lord." Centuries after his death the sons of Jonadab were obeying their father's commandment; but, though God had sent to His people Israel many faithful prophets who called upon them to return from their evil ways, they had not inclined their ear or hearkened unto Him. Had they done so their city and their polity might have been preserved; but now God would bring upon Jerusalem and upon its inhabitants all that He threatened:—the destruction of the temple reared by Solomon was inevitable, and the captivity of the people in Babylon would certainly come to pass.

It is probable that this appeal produced no effect upon the minds of these refractory people. They had become indurated by transgression,—hardened by unbelief and sin. To the voices of the true prophets who were among them they turned a deaf ear, whilst they listened with satisfaction to the prophets who prophesied falsely, and to the priests who bore rule by their means. The worship of idols,

and especially of such idols as Baal and Ashtoreth, Moloch and Tammuz, renders the mind incapable of reasoning aright, and as modern systems of idolatry in India, in China, and in the South Sea Islands prove, robs the understanding of its noblest powers. In vain, then, did Jeremiah appeal to the Israelites;—they were past feeling, and nothing but the furnace of affliction, nothing but a seventy years' captivity in Babylon, could eradicate the poison which they had so greedily imbibed.

But would not the Rechabites themselves suffer? There they were in the doomed city so soon to become a further prey to the destroyer; was it possible that they would escape? would not they also fall into his hands? It is one of the mysteries of providence, that the comparatively innocent should suffer with the most guilty. In times of war, especially, thousands of families who have had nothing to do with the quarrels of the nations, are swept away by fire and by sword—their homesteads burnt, their property destroyed, and they themselves either put to death, or left in utter penury and want. How many of the simple-minded peasantry of France and of Germany were thus ruined in the late conflict! how many wives became widows, how many children orphans, who were ignorant of the very cause of the hostilities which arose! It must be so, however, constituted as society is, and closely allied to one another as the inhabitants of a country are. The law of solidarity everywhere obtains to a greater or a less extent, and

no community can suffer but the individual members of it must suffer with it, however blameless and moral they may be.

Doubtless, then, the sons of Jonadab had to share in the calamities of their times. But the prophet was instructed to assure them that their fidelity to their father would not be forgotten. For Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites : " Thus saith the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he hath commanded you : therefore, thus saith the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel; Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before me for ever."

The expression "to stand before me," involved the idea of service, and especially, of worship or priestly service. None could stand before the Lord but the priests and the Levites who were separated for the work ; or the prophets who were specially called to be His servants. The former stood before Him when they ministered in the temple ; the latter stood before Him to receive instruction from His lips. This honour was now conferred upon the Rechabites. The family was not merely to continue in existence, but it was to continue to worship the Lord Jehovah, if not literally to the end of time, yet for a long series of years. Like the Nazarites, they were deemed a pure and faithful people, and some have supposed that a trace of them is found in Lam. iv. 7, so conspicuous were they among the tribes of Israel at this sad period of their history.

What more do we know about them? The seventy-first psalm is entitled by the LXX. "by David, of the sons of Jonadab, and the first that was taken captive;" the first part of which title is erroneous, as the psalm was probably written by Jeremiah; but "the second part of it is so explicit that it must be based upon a tradition that the psalm was a favourite song of the Rechabites and of the first exiles."¹ And what more probable than that Jeremiah should write, or the Rechabites in their exile should sing, "I am a wonder unto many, but Thou art my strong refuge" (ver. 7). Or—"Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth" (ver. 20).

They went, then, into captivity; but did any of them return? This we infer from Neh. iii. 14, where we learn that Malchiah, a descendant of Rechab, built one of the gates of the city of Jerusalem.

Next, there is a remarkable reference to the Rechabites in the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius, who gives an account from Hegesippus of the martyrdom of James the just; and says, "Going up therefore, they cast down the just man, saying to one another, 'Let us stone James the just.' Thus they were stoning him when one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, a son of the Rechabites, spoken of by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out saying, 'Cease, what are you doing? Justus is praying for you.'" If, then,

¹ Delitzsch.

Hegesippus, who was born at the beginning of the second century and wrote on Church History, is to be relied on, there were Rechabites in Jerusalem up to the time of the destruction of the second temple; and the two brothers of our Lord, so called, James and Simeon, were the highest representatives of that austere life which Jonadab commanded his descendants to pursue.¹

At a much later period, Benjamin of Tudela, a traveller in the East, says:—"After twenty-one days' journey through the desert of Sheba, or Al Gemen, from which Mesopotamia lies in a northerly direction, are the abodes of Jews who call themselves Beni Rechab, men of Thema. The seat of their government is at Thema, or Tehama, where their prince and governor rabbi resides. This city is large, and the extent of this country is sixteen days' journey towards the northern mountain range. They possess large and strong cities, and are not subject to any of the Gentiles, but undertake warlike expeditions into distant provinces with the Arabians, their neighbours and allies, to take the spoil and the prey."²

But we have a still more remarkable account of this people in the travels of Dr Joseph Wolff, a converted Jew, who, at Julocka, in Mesopotamia, saw a man on horseback, dressed like a wild Arab, to whom he showed a Bible in Hebrew and Arabic, both which languages the man could read. Turning to

¹ Comp. Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, art., Rechabites.

² Early Travels in Palestine, p. 103.

Jer. xxxv., Mousa, for such was his name, read several verses, and affirmed that he was a Rechabite, and that his people lived at Hadoram, Usal, and Mesha, or Mecca, and in the deserts around those places. "We drink no wine," said he, "and plant no vineyard, and sow no seed, and live in tents, as Jonadab our father commanded us. Hobab was our father too. Come to us; you will find 60,000 in number; and you see thus the prophecy has been fulfilled." This remarkable testimony is confirmed by Wolff, who says, "All the Jews of this country believe that the Beni Khaibr, near Mecca and Medinah, are the descendants of the ancient Rechabites."

Still more recently another Jew, Rabbi Joseph Schwartz, in a work entitled, "A Descriptive Geography, and Brief Historical Sketch of Palestine," Philadelphia 1850, produces evidence from the rabbinical writings that the Rechabites were descendants of Heber the Kenite, and more remotely of Jether, and that they settled in Yemen, where many traces of them now exist. Signor Pierotte also met with a tribe calling themselves Rechabites, residing two miles S.E. of the Dead Sea. They had a Hebrew Bible, and said their prayers at the tomb of a Jewish rabbi.


It is not improbable, then, that the Rechabites still exist as a separate people, and thus all the more impressively does their history speak to us. God promised to them a blessing because they obeyed the voice of Jonadab their father, but He promises to

those who obey *His* voice—the voice of their Father who is in heaven—a far richer blessing ; whilst, on the other hand, to those who disobey Him, as did the Jews, there will come the day of vengeance and retribution, as certainly as it came on them. Might not God say to us, as He did to His ancient people, “ I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings . . . but ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me ” (ver. 15). To tens of thousands in this land is the charge applicable, and specially on the ground of their continued intemperance, a vice which, if not directly denounced in this chapter, is elsewhere condemned in unmeasured terms. If there is a god to which the English nation bows down to-day, it is the god Bacchus ; and it would seem as if the British Parliament, by a want of prudent legislation, were willing to keep up the worship of it as long as possible. It might, and it ought, for the sake of thousands of families whom the liquor traffic is ruining every year, firmly to deal with it ; but for the sake of maintaining the revenue, or for fear of offending the manufacturers of strong drink, it makes feeble attempts to repress the evil. Let God's servants lift up their voices more loudly still, and it may be that ere long wiser counsels will prevail.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRIUMPHAL SONG.

B.C. 600, 598.

E have sometimes seen a bright beam of light shooting through dense clouds which covered the whole heavens, and which seemed like the silent voice of the sun saying, "I am still here, and ere long these clouds shall roll away, and my beams shall again illumine the face of the earth."

And thus it is in the history of nations and of men. Their moral atmosphere seems laden with storm-clouds and mists, when suddenly, as it were, a beam of light shines through the midst of them all, promising the return of brighter days, and cheering them with the assurance that an era of blessing is at hand.

It is probable that Jehoiakim was still upon the throne, when the prophet of sorrow, though ideally present amid the desolation of Jerusalem, not yet actually seen, poured forth a song of praise and gladness contained in chapters xxx. and xxxi, which was simply composed in writing, and laid up for future use. The precise date of this prophecy cannot be determined, but whilst some attribute it to the days

of Josiah, and others to those of Zedckiah, Keil seems in favour of the middle period, which I have thus indicated, when Jeremiah himself specially needed some such assurances as these.

The address is one, but after the introduction (ch. xxx. 1-3), which speaks of the return of the captivity of Israel and Judah, it consists of two parts,—first, the deliverance of Judah in general (xxx. 4-22) ; and secondly, that of Israel and Judah, described more particularly (xxx. 23 ; xxxi).

A great day of trouble was to come upon Judah—it had, indeed, come already ; but Judah would be saved out of it, for the Lord of hosts would take off the yoke that was upon her neck, and burst her bonds. She was in a sad condition, for her wound was incurable by human art, and she had no healing medicines ;—all her lovers had forgotten her, and her sorrow was deep and overwhelming. But God Himself would interfere on her behalf,—she should no longer be called an outcast, for on her own hill should the city of Jerusalem be rebuilt, and the palace be inhabited after its own fashion. Very rich are these promises, but they were to be followed by others yet richer and more ample. How must Jeremiah himself have been cheered by such assurances, that the nobles and governors of the people should draw near to God ? That was a privilege reserved only for the priests, for whoever else drew nigh to the Divine Presence would be put to death. But the day would arrive, when, in Messianic times especially, all the people would be

kings and priests unto God, and when God would acknowledge them as specially His own.

The words "their governor shall proceed from the midst of them" (ch. xxx. 21), have been supposed to refer to the Messiah ; but "the idea," says Keil, "is to be taken in a more general way. As Israel was ruled by princes of the house of David, whom God had chosen, so will it again in the future have its own rulers, whom God will raise out of their midst and exalt gloriously." In the Messiah, however, the prophecy would culminate, and under His reign the people would indeed draw near to God.

But what then shall become of the wicked? Behold a sweeping whirlwind of the Lord shall fall upon their head ; and the fierce anger of the Lord shall sweep them utterly away (ver. 23, 24). This must take place that all the tribes of Israel may return to Him and become His people ; and thus we are led to the second part of the discourse in which both Israel and Judah are the subjects of the most gracious promises (ch. xxxi.) I must refer the reader to the entire chapter, but there are passages in it of peculiar interest, and predictions which have yet to receive their full accomplishment. The prophet here stood upon an elevated mountain, whence he beheld the ten tribes of Israel returning to Samaria, thence proceeding to Mount Zion with songs of gladness, mingled with tears of penitence and contrition, and there received back like a lost son to the arms of a loving and gracious father.

And now the prophet hears the voice of one who is in sorrow. It is that of Rachel, the mother of Joseph, and the ancestress of Ephraim, weeping for her children because they are carried away captive. The voice comes as it were from Ramah, the birth-place and official residence of Samuel, not because Rachel's tomb was there, as some have supposed, for she died and was buried near Bethlehem; but because "it was the most loftily situated border-town of the two kingdoms, whence the wailing that had arisen sounded far and near, and could be heard in Judah."¹ According to Cicero personification is one of the most effective figures of speech which the orator can use; and here Jeremiah uses it, not however as an orator, but as a man of sanctified genius, writing under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. For it is Jehovah who speaks here,—Jehovah who says "a voice was heard in Ramah," and it is Jehovah who speaks to the troubled Rachel and bids her refrain from weeping and from tears. And why? Because her work should be rewarded, and her children would be rescued from the land of the enemy, and would come again to their own border (ver. 15-18). Moreover Jehovah hears Ephraim, the child of Rachel, pouring forth strains of genuine repentance, and turning unto God with an acknowledgment of his sin. And Jehovah listens and says, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a 'pleasant child?' for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remem-

¹ Keil, *in loco*.

ber him still," etc. (ver. 18-20). How tender is the heart of God! how infinite are the compassions of the Lord Jehovah! We have here, as it seems to me, the parable of the prodigal son beforehand, and here especially is the father hastening to meet him, and to welcome him to his fond embrace.¹

It was in a kind of dream or ecstasy that the prophet beheld all this, and now he awoke, and his sleep was sweet unto him (ver. 26). Very pleasant was it to him, the prophet of sorrow, to hear of better times, and to learn that both Israel and Judah would return to their own land; for it was a dream which would certainly come true, and the reality of which would far exceed the conception he had formed of it. "The prophet," says Hengstenberg, "has lost sight of the Present;—like a sleeping man he is not sensible of its impressions. Then he awakes for a moment from his sweet dream, which however is not, like ordinary dreams, without foundation. He looks round; everything is dark, dreary, and cold; nowhere is there consolation for the weary soul. 'Ah!' he exclaims, 'I have sweetly dreamed,'—and immediately the hand of the LORD again seizes him, and carries him away from the scenes of the Present."²

¹ The meaning of the new thing, ver. 22,—“a woman shall compass a man,” is much disputed, some referring it to the miraculous conception of our Lord, others rendering—“a woman shall encompass the man,” referring the woman to the daughter of Israel, who instead of going after other lovers will seek her Divine Lord, and find her joy in Him. But the true meaning is, I think, that given by Keil,—“the woman that is the weaker nature that needs help, will lovingly and solicitously surround the man, the stronger.”

² Christology, vol. ii. p. 425.

But now comes the hallelujah of the song. Jeremiah is carried into the midst of Messianic times. He not only sees Israel and Judah restored to Mount Zion, but he sees them taken again into covenant relationship with God ; and the covenant is not that of Sinai, —a covenant of grace by works, but a new covenant, a covenant of grace by faith, the laws of which are written not on tables of stone, but on fleshy tables of the heart. "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel : after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts ; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (ch. xxxi. 31-40).

"After *those* days,"—not *these*, that is, not after the days in which the prophet lived, but after the times when the people should return to Zion, would God make a new covenant. The old one would decay and vanish, not because it was evil in itself,¹ but because man was not able to fulfil its terms,² and under the more glorious dispensation of the Messiah provision would be made for the forgiveness of sin, and for such a renovation of the heart of men as would lead them to love the Lord their God and to serve Him, not as bondslaves but as sons—to delight in His will, and to seek only His glory. It is only when the law is written upon the heart that it is truly kept. It may be written upon stone and be broken ; it may be written upon parchment and be torn ; it may be written on the memory and be forgotten ; it may be written on the

¹ Comp. Heb. viii. 8-13.

² Rom. viii. 2.

conscience and be unheeded ; but when it is written upon the heart it is observed, for it is proved to be a blessed law,— a law of liberty, a law of love. This, indeed, God's people knew under the old covenant ;¹ but it is one thing to know it and another thing to experience it. David prayed—" Create in me a clean heart, O LORD, and renew a right spirit within me ;" and doubtless there were many individual Jews who were made partakers of a new nature ; but Jeremiah saw, in the future, multitudes turning to the Lord, obtaining the remission of their sins and having the law written upon their hearts ; and doubtless it was a joyous thought, and a prospect which he loved to contemplate. The law was written in his own heart, and he would anticipate the consummation of the kingdom of God, which the visions he beheld unfolded to him, with the highest satisfaction and delight.

For here he was, equally with Isaiah, the evangelical prophet. Here he reached the highest elevation he attained. Higher indeed he could scarcely rise ; and therefore his horizon extended far into the times of the Christian dispensation. For when were these prophecies fulfilled ? and when was this new covenant written on men's hearts ? Not certainly when the captives returned from Babylon, but only when the Son of God was manifested, when the cross of Calvary was reared, when the great atoning sacrifice was offered ; when the veil of the temple was rent, in twain, and

¹ Comp. Deut. xxx. 6 ; Ps. xl. 9 ; Prov. iii. 1.

the way of access to the mercy-seat was actually opened. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives us the true meaning of this passage, and tells us that of this new covenant Jesus is the Mediator, that it was established on better promises, and that those promises are fulfilled to all who believe in Him as their High-Priest and Representative before the *throne of God*.¹ It is now therefore that the new covenant is made; and it is made not with the Jew only, but also with the Gentile, for Christ is alike the Redeemer of both, and has obtained for both the gift of that Spirit whose prerogative it is to write the law upon the heart.

But I wish more explicitly to point out the features of this new covenant, for it reveals to us the true character of God, of whom we want to know much more than we do, and the knowledge of whom is eternal life.

It is, then, a covenant of mercy,—“for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” But the pardon it offers is pardon for a reason, pardon founded on the redeeming work of Christ, pardon granted for His sake only, and on the simple condition of faith in Him as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. There could have been no such covenant without redemption, nor, indeed, any covenant between God and man at all. This, foreseen, was the basis of the old covenant, and of all

¹ Heb. viii. For an exposition of this remarkable chapter the reader is referred to the Commentary of Delitzsch.

its blessings ; this, accomplished, is the basis of the new covenant, and of all its rich and invaluable privileges.

It is further a covenant of renewal—"I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts," which implies that it is not a theoretical but a practical thing. The first inquiry of man, says a modern writer, should be, What is duty? and the answer which Christianity gives to the question is contained in one word—Love. "To have faith in God and love of Him, to desire to co-operate always with His will ; to trust Him, though He seem to slay us, in the conviction of ultimate good ;—to have a consciousness of Christ as our Almighty Mediator, and the Holy Spirit as our Indwelling Comforter—this is the Christian's truest wisdom, and to educate himself in this, and to teach his brother to do so too, this is his greatest need, this his highest duty." And this is just to have the law written on the inward parts ; but there are some who have it there, but who have it there imperfectly. They love God, but not supremely: they love their fellow-men, but not as they love themselves. But it may be so written there, that every affection of the heart, every desire of the mind, every aspiration of the soul, shall be pure and holy ; it may be so written there that the tablet shall be not like a palimpsest, showing the mark of the old writing underneath, but like a new inscription on new materials, in which nothing but the new writing shall appear. This is the higher Christian life, which is

seldom realised, because it is so seldom sought, but which might become the normal experience of every believer, who would thus testify to the fact that "the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanses from all sin."

It is a covenant to be widely known. "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD." But what can this mean? Will there ever come a time when teaching will be no more necessary? when every one will be acquainted with the truths of religion? Doubtless it will be so in a future state, but the prophet is not speaking of that, but of such a development of the Spirit's illumination as will lead each one here, in this life, to an essentially correct knowledge of the Most High. He does not mean, however, that each one's knowledge will be equal in measure; but "that those who are the least or the lowest among God's people shall be endued with so much light of knowledge that they will be almost like teachers" (Calvin). And if we have not arrived at such a state of things, are we not approximating to it? Is not the Christian schoolmaster abroad? and are not the elements of religious truth already widely diffused? We may anticipate then the dawn of a brighter era, when both Jews and Gentiles shall know the Lord to such an extent as that they will leave the rudiments of the faith, and advance to the conception of its loftiest

principles. One of the most gratifying features of the present age in our country and in some others, is the spread of religious education ; and God forbid that a merely secular system should ever become general, or that the Bible should ever be excluded from our national schools. That this would be a retrograde step in social and in Christian science, there cannot be a doubt, for it would pave the way for the spread of scepticism and infidelity on the one hand, and of superstition and popery on the other. No : we must say to every one, "Know the LORD," until every one does indeed know the Lord ; and the extension of such knowledge will be the stability of our times and the conservation of our highest good.

With the Church, as a whole, this covenant is to be permanent. God appeals to the everlasting duration of the arrangements of nature,—to the ordinances of the sun, moon, and stars ; and to the boundaries of the sea, which, roar as it will, it cannot pass, and He says, "If these ordinances depart from before me, then the seed of Israel shall cease from being a nation before me for ever." And then He appeals to the measurement of the heavens above, and to the depths of the earth beneath, and says, If these can be measured and searched out, then "will I cast off all the seed of Israel" (ver. 35-37). Is the universe, the great Cosmos, then, eternal ? will created nature with its vast suns and systems never fail nor decay ? No : "The heavens,"—that is the aerial heavens—"shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements

shall melt with fervent heat ; the earth also, and all the works that are therein, shall be burned up ;"¹ but this does not imply their annihilation, nor does it refer to anything more than our own globe. Changes there shall be, but not destruction ; and within our own times it has been proved, that provision is made in the vast scheme of nature for its permanence and stability ; for the disturbances of the planetary system, which it was thought at one time indicated its future disorganisation, were only the swing of the great pendulum which would certainly return again, and thus keep the system in order.

"Yonder starry sphere
Of planets, and of fixed, in all her wheels
Resembles nearest mazes intricate,
Eccentric, intervolved, yet regular,
There most, where most irregular they seem."²

Of all this the prophet was ignorant, but God was not ; and as these ordinances of the heavens and of the earth are to endure, so His covenant will endure with His faithful people. The promise occurs especially with reference to the covenant made with David and the Levites (ch. xxxiii. 25, 26), to silence those who said, "The LORD has cast us off." And thus we learn, that that covenant by which the seed of David should ever rule over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, should never be annulled ; a promise which is fulfilled in Christ, who is and ever shall be the ruler

¹ 2 Peter iii. 10 ; comp. Ps. cii. 26-28.

² See Mrs Somerville's "Connection of the Physical Sciences," p. 28. The stability of *our* system was established by La Grange.

of His people Israel. But also shall all the blessings of the covenant made with the true Israel of God be permanent ; for it is "a covenant ordered in all things and sure," the benefits of which shall be experienced not in time only, but through all eternity.

According to the second figure here employed, just as it is impossible to measure the heavens, or to find the depths of earth, an impossibility which remains after all the discoveries of modern science, so it is impossible for the covenant of God to fail. Dead members of His people may be rejected, but with His people collectively, whether Jews or Gentiles, His covenant of grace will stand.

One other feature of this covenant is unfolded. Under it, the kingdom of God shall be completed, for there follows a description of Jerusalem restored, enlarged, and purified, a prophecy which "does not refer to the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the exile, but, under the figure of Jerusalem, as the centre of the kingdom of God, under the Old Testament, announces the erection of a more spiritual kingdom of God in the Messianic age"¹ (ver. 38-40). In the prophecies of Zechariah (ch. xiv.) we have a substantial parallel ; to which no literal interpretation can be given without the greatest inconsistency, since it is impossible to carry it out in all its details and particulars. "Jerusalem," says Diedrich, "will one day be much greater than it has ever been. This is not to be understood literally, but spiritually. Jerusalem

¹ Keil.

will be wherever there are believing souls, its circle will be without end and comprise all that has hitherto been impure and lost. This it is which the prophet is teaching, and which he presents in figures which were intelligible to the people of his time. The hill Goreb, probably the residence of the lepers, the emblem of the sinner unmasked and smitten by God, and the cursed valley of Ben-Hinnom, will be taken up into the holy city. God's grace will one day effect all this, and Israel will thus be manifested as much more glorious than before."¹

Very blessed, then, and far-reaching in its results, is the establishment of this new covenant between God and His people. Already we are partakers of its privileges. Even now our guilt is cancelled, and the law written upon our hearts; and already there are multitudes who know the Lord and are spreading His knowledge far and wide; but brighter and yet brighter days will dawn. Jerusalem, the Church of the living Saviour, will extend her borders, multiply her converts, see her sons washed and purified; and, in the new heavens and the new earth which God has promised to create, will the Son of David reign for ever, over millions of men renewed and sanctified by His grace. All this, whether Jeremiah knew it or not, is wrapt up in the great prophecy, and there are other prophecies which point to the same grand issue, on which we have yet to dwell.

¹ Quoted by Naëgelsbach; comp. Hengstenberg, "Christology," vol. ii. p. 455.

Let not, then, the Church of the present day, in the midst of her conflicts and her trials, despond. Let her be patient, hopeful, confident; let her look upward to the throne of God, and forward to the conquests of her Lord; and let her rest assured that every promise involved in the new covenant He has made with her, shall in His own time be accomplished and fulfilled.

CHAPTER X.

THE REIGN OF JEHOIACHIN.

B.C. 597.

WHEN ANY a king has ascended a tottering throne, vainly imagining that he would be able to render it secure. The throne of David, once so stable, was now undermined, and nothing could prevent its being swept away for awhile, save the accession to it of some wise, just, and pious monarch. But such an one was not to be found. The heir to it was Jehoiachin, a son of Jehoiakim and Nehushta, and, though only eighteen years of age¹ when the sceptre was put into his hands, his character was already formed, and was a sad imitation of the character of his father.

His name signifies "appointed by Jehovah," or "he whom Jehovah establishes." But his original name was Jeconiah, or Jeconjah,² which he changed on his accession to the throne, to make it more like the name of his father. By Jeremiah he is called Coniah, or Conjahu (ch. xxii. 24), but whether for any

¹ 2 Kings xxiv. 8, the reading eight in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9, is undoubtedly an error.

² 1 Chron. iii. 16.

particular reason is doubtful. His mother, *Nehushta*, was a daughter of Elnathan, a prince of Jerusalem, and since she partook of his punishment, as we shall see hereafter, it is highly probable that she was like-minded with his father. A mother's influence over a son, especially in the earlier years of his life, is often more powerful than that of any other person; and had Nehushta trained her son in the admonition of the Lord, he would perhaps have become a very different character.

But "he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done."¹ He is portrayed by Ezekiel (xix. 5-9) as "a young lion who learned to catch the prey, and to devour men," where the ignoble side of the lion-nature is brought to view,—its arrogance and barbarity; but the heathen spread their nets over him, and he was taken in their pit. And what says Jeremiah respecting him? He solemnly declares that though the young king were as precious as a jewel, or as a signet-ring in the eyes of the Lord, yet He would cast him away.² And addressing the king himself, the prophet says, "I Jehovah will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans" (ver. 25-27). Together with his mother, he should be cast out into a strange land, should no more be permitted to return to his own country,

¹ 2 Kings xxiv. 9.

² Jer. xxii. 24.

but, like a despised broken idol, should be as a vessel in which there is no pleasure. Nay, his very seed should be struck out of the family register, and none of his posterity should sit upon the throne of David. Deeply does the prophet lament his fate, and cries, "O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD!" but God's decree was fixed and inexorable, and to His will the whole nation must submit (ver. 28-30).

How this prophecy was fulfilled will presently appear. Nebuchadnezzar had intended to take Jehoiakim captive into Babylon, but he perhaps relented, and instead of this, made him his vassal and permitted him to remain in possession of the throne. Ere long Jehoiakim revolted, and Nebuchadnezzar sent troops into the land, when, as we have already seen, Jehoiakim fell in battle. His son, Jehoiachin,—wild, reckless, and unchaste, even at eighteen years of age,—imagined that he could resist the conqueror's power; but Nebuchadnezzar came in person, to command his forces, and, in the spring of the year, when campaigns were usually opened, laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. Jehoiachin, seeing that resistance was useless, went to meet him, doubtless with the hope that he would secure his favour. But Nebuchadnezzar would listen to no promises. Jerusalem was taken, its temple plundered, the gold broken off the vessels which Solomon had made, and the treasures both of the temple and the palace carried into Babylon and placed in the temple of the god Baal. Jehoiachin had probably

laughed at the prophecies of Jeremiah, but now they were fulfilled ; for he, and his mother, and his wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, together with the greater part of the population of the city, fell into the hands of the potent conqueror. "Ten thousand of its inhabitants were led captive into Babylon, and none were left save the poorest sort of the people of the land."¹ What a picture of fallen greatness ! And the prophet Jeremiah witnessed these calamities, and often, doubtless, repeated the language he had previously uttered, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears !" Yet these events were but the prelude of others yet more terrible and dire.

Jehoiachin left no son to sit upon his throne, and that part of Jeremiah's prophecy was also fulfilled—"Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days ; for no man of his seed shall prosper sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah " (ch. xxii. 30). But this does not mean that he had no children at all, but only that none of his posterity should attain the honour. Neither did they. He had two sons, Zedekiah and Assir, but the former died childless, and the latter had but one daughter, who was married to Nathan, and became the mother of Shealtiel, or, as he is called in Matt. i. 12, Salathiel.² Jehoiachin was followed on the throne by his uncle Mattaniah, whom Nebuchad-

¹ 2 Kings xxiv. 11-16 ; comp. Lam. iv. 20.

² See 1 Chron. iii. 17.

nezzar called Zedekiah, and of whose reign we have yet to speak.

And what became of the captured monarch? For thirty-seven years he remained a prisoner in Babylon, clad in prison garments, and subsisting on prison fare, when, on the accession of Evil-merodach, he was liberated, and placed in a position of honour above other captive kings in Babylon. Perhaps his misfortunes brought him to repentance, and we may hope that in him the promise of 2 Sam. vii. 14, 15, was fulfilled, that though severely chastised for his apostasy from the Lord, he was not utterly rejected.¹ Evil-merodach ascended the throne in the year B.C. 561. He was the son of Nebuchadnezzar, and probably a somewhat kind and tender-hearted man. His reign was one of two years only, but in showing kindness to the unfortunate Jehoiachin, whom, according to Josephus, he admitted into the number of his most intimate friends, he left his name upon the pages of sacred history as having, on coming to the throne, performed an act of grace. He was murdered by Neriglissar, his brother-in-law; but if Jehoiachin survived him, as is highly probable, his successor, assassin though he was, treated the captured monarch in the same manner, for Jehoiachin ate at the king's table "all the days of his life."

The elevation of Jehoiachin "was a prelude and pledge," says Bishop Wordsworth, "of the liberation and exaltation of the Jewish nation when it had been

¹ 2 Kings xxv. 27-30. Jer. lii. 31-34.

humbled and purified by the discipline of suffering ; and of its return to its own land ; and a joyful pre-announcement of that far more glorious future restoration which the prophets in the Old Testament, and the apostles in the New, foretell of Israel to God in Christ." ¹ No one should despair in misfortune, for the right hand of the Highest can change all, and Christ rules even in the midst of His enemies.

But did Jeremiah live to hear of this event ? It is narrated in the last chapter of his prophecies (ver. 31-34), so that if he did not hear of it, these verses must have been written by another hand. It is not impossible, however, that he received the intelligence when in Egypt ; for, supposing that he entered on his ministry at eighteen years of age, he would then be about eighty-two ; and that he lived to such an age is not improbable, but rather the reverse. And would not the news cheer him in his old age ? He cherished no resentment or anger against Jehoiachin, but pitied him in his fall, and would rejoice in his exaltation.²

It is not certain that any prophecies were uttered by Jeremiah during the reign of Jehoiachin ; but immediately after the prediction of his fate (ch. xxii.

¹ See also Keil to the same effect.

² Ewald thinks that Lam. iv. 20, refers to Jehoiachin, and says that he remained the object of the deepest love and yearning of all the faithful. Keil, on the other hand, applies that passage not to any one person, but to the Theocratic king, as the anointed of the Lord. Josephus, in his speech addressed to the Jews during the siege of Jerusalem, spoke of Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) as celebrated among all the Jews in their sacred memorials, and his memory as immortal, to be conveyed fresh down to their posterity through all ages. (Wars, vi. 25.)

24-30), we find one of the grandest of the prophet's discourses, which may have been delivered at this period, though some connect it with the reign of Jehoiakim.

It commences with a woe to the unfaithful shepherds (ch. xxiii. 1, 2), by whom are meant the ungodly monarchs, the false prophets, and the wicked priests, all of whom ought to have taken care of the flock, but had scattered it; and now God would scatter them, but His flock He would re-gather under other shepherds, the chief of whom would be the righteous branch or sprout from the house of David who as a King should reign and prosper, and whose name should be called "JEHOVAH TSIDKENU,—THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (ver. 3-6).

And who is this righteous branch? Undoubtedly the Messiah who *sprang from* the seed of David, who was indeed righteous as none else ever was, and who reigns gloriously and will flourish in His pristine dignity for ever. In His days, says the prophet, Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely, "for in a happy life," says Calvin, "the first thing is that we possess tranquil and quiet minds." And He will give them righteousness, for this is the name by which He shall be called—Jehovah Tsidkenu, that is, "He by whom Jehovah gives righteousness." That this is the import of the words is evident from ch. xxxiii. 16, where the same name is given to Jerusalem, to convey the thought that by the Messiah the Lord will make it a city of righteousness.

Many Christian commentators have supposed that the Messiah is here called Jehovah, and implicitly He is, but only in so far as His Godhead is involved in His kingly character. "All the three offices of Christ, the royal, no less than the prophetic and the priestly, imply His divinity;"¹ and, as He is here designated *the righteous King*, which no one before Him truly^{*} was, His divinity is implied though not expressed. But what is the righteousness which He bestows, or of which He is the channel to the Church? It is not, as some have represented, the forgiveness of sins only, but with that, righteousness of life. "Righteousness stands here in parallelism with salvation, and the order and progress is this: righteousness of the King, righteousness of the subjects, then salvation and righteousness as a reward from God."²

The King was righteous, for He obeyed and suffered the will of God even unto the ignominious death of the cross.

The subjects become righteous, for by faith in Him they receive remission of sins and a new nature, and thus they are able to serve God with loving and grateful hearts.

Salvation in its fulness here and hereafter will be their great reward, and God will be their God, —Jehovah their portion and their end, for ever.

This prophecy of Jeremiah's has already been accomplished in part, and will be more fully so in the

¹ Hengstenberg, "Christology," ii. 421; comp. Keil.

² Hengstenberg, who compares Ezek. xxxiv. 25-31.

ages yet to come. This King became incarnate. He accomplished His redeeming work. He ascended up on high. He now sits upon the throne judging right. The sceptre of His kingdom is a right sceptre. Out of the discord and confusion that now exist upon the earth He will bring order, harmony, and peace. He must reign until His enemies be made His footstool. Even now Jerusalem, the true Church, which He has redeemed with His precious blood, is the abode of righteousness, and from her righteousness is going forth to bless the nations and to scatter the darkness by which they are enthralled. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel,—the three great prophets of the Jewish world,—all spoke of these things, and beheld in prophetic vision the setting up of the throne of this righteous King; but we live under His benignant reign, and wait in hope until that reign shall be established in every portion of the earth.

The following verses (Jer. xxiii. 7, 8), are transferred by the LXX. to the close of the chapter, but incorrectly. They follow naturally, and contain a promise that in the days of this righteous King there shall be such a return of Israel from all countries wherein they have been scattered, that their deliverance from Egypt shall scarcely be remembered. The prediction, partly accomplished when they returned from Babylon, has yet to receive a more glorious fulfilment. Scattered as the descendants of Jacob are over the whole earth,—for the Jew is found in almost all lands,—they are to return not to the literal Jerusalem, but to the Church

of which it was but the type ; and when that day comes there shall be joy and gladness, songs of salvation and psalms of praise, and over the one flock, composed of Gentiles and of Jews, Christ shall be the Shepherd-King for ever.

The second part of this chapter contains a reproof—a severe and terrible reproof—of the false prophets of Israel ; God had not sent them, but they ran. Propheying by Baal they caused the people to err. Profane themselves, they filled the land with profanity, until its inhabitants became like those of Sodom. They pretended to be favoured with dreams, but their dreams were false ; and in comparison with the true prophetic dream were as the chaff is to the wheat. Could they hide themselves in secret places from the eyes of God ? Nay. He is a God afar off as well as nigh, filling with His presence the heavens and the earth. He then would search them out. He would feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall ; and when they said, “ The burden of the LORD,” having no authority thus to speak, He would bring upon them reproach and a perpetual shame (9–40).

In an earlier chapter (v. 31), Jeremiah had said,—“ The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means ; and my people love to have it ; and what will ye do in the end thereof ? ” The end was now at hand. The doom of the false prophets and of the unfaithful kings and priests would presently be sealed, and the faithful one amid the faithless, said, “ Mine heart within me is broken, all

my bones shake" (xxiii. 9). His was overwhelming grief,—grief which made him like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine had overcome. How strange a metaphor! But he meant by it that "he was completely shamed, and that all his senses were taken from him." For a sensitive mind, jealous for the honour of the Lord of Hosts, the sight of abounding wickedness in a land favoured with the light of revelation is heartrending indeed; and how professedly Christian men can witness the abominations of society in this nineteenth century and be unmoved, is another source of grief to God's true people; whilst the most lamentable thing of all is the rising up on every hand of false prophets and teachers,—prophets of rationalism, prophets of science, falsely so called, prophets of ritualism, and prophets of false doctrine, heresy, and schism; and it is to be feared, that the reason why these false prophets are so eagerly listened to, is because "the people love to have it so."

But will Great Britain, at their bidding, forsake, indeed, the altar of her fathers,—the one altar of the cross on which thousands of them laid themselves and died? The responsibilities of the present generation of true Christians can be estimated by no arithmetic. On their fidelity to the truth of God hangs the weal of thousands yet unborn. Should they prove faithless, the candlestick will certainly be removed from the Churches of this land, and there will come a flood-tide of superstition on the one hand, and a flood-tide of infidelity on the other. Let them be

faithful, resisting unto blood the inroads of error and of lax morality, and God will defend them, and their posterity after them.

Their posterity! It was asked some time ago in the British House of Commons—what has posterity done for us? and under the question lay the insinuation that we have no need to care for them. It is a selfish and narrow-minded principle. The question ought to be—what did *our Christian ancestors* do for us? and how shall we best follow their example? Are parents under no obligation to their children? Is this age under no obligation to the next? Had our noble-minded forefathers thought so, they would not have died for the principles they maintained. They fought, they suffered, they bled,—not for their own sakes only, but for the sake of their country, of their offspring, and of future generations. Let us catch their mantle; let us imbibe their spirit; and for the principles of truth let us contend for the sake of those who shall come after us, and for the sake of Christ our Lord.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ACCESSION OF ZEDEKIAH.

B.C. 597, 594.

ONCE more the throne of Judah was occupied, ere it fell with a mighty crash, to rise no more for more than 400 years. For the monarchy was not restored at the close of the captivity in Babylon, nor outwardly has it ever yet been, but only in a spiritual sense by the exaltation of the Righteous Branch.

Mattaniah, whose name signifies *gift of the LORD*, was the brother of Jehoahaz, and therefore another son of Josiah, by his wife Hamutal, the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah (2 Kings xxiii. 31; xxiv. 18). Nebuchadnezzar changed his name to Zedekiah, which signifies *justice of the LORD*, but without any reference to the import of the name. He was but twenty-one years of age when he came to the tottering throne, and he was allowed to occupy it only as the vassal of the king of Babylon. His reign extended through eleven years, but, like his predecessors, he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and the cup of Judah's iniquity was thus filled up. He was probably, however, more vacillating in his will than bad

in heart. He has been compared to our Charles I., in this respect, that he had not the courage to do what he knew to be right, nor the resolution to oppose what he knew to be wrong. He was under the influence of the princes of the court, against whom he dared do nothing, and in constant fear of the Jews that they would deliver him into the hands of the Chaldeans (Jer. xxxviii). Thus he was not the man for so great a crisis, and by his pusillanimity he only made matters worse than they were before.

During his reign Jeremiah was most actively engaged in his prophetic work. In the very first year of it he uttered an oracle against Elam, as the representative of the heathen world, predicting its utter overthrow, not by Nebuchadnezzar, for he is not named, but by the Lord of Hosts himself (ch. xlix. 34). The Elamites were a Shemitic people residing in the Persian province of Susiana, now called Husistan.¹ Their principal weapon was the bow, and accordingly God says, "I will break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might;" thus their martial power would be destroyed, and their people scattered to the winds. When and how the prophecy was fulfilled cannot be inferred from sacred history, nor, according to Keil, from secular history either; but that the catastrophe occurred there can be no doubt, for Elam became subject to the kings of Media and, as a separate power, fell into the dust. If Zedekiah heard of this prophecy against the Elamites it would interest him

¹ Gen. xiv. 1; Isa. xxi. 2; Ezek. xxxii. 24.

but little. Very soon, however, he would probably be made acquainted with a remarkable vision seen by the prophet Jeremiah having reference to himself (ch. xxiv). Soon after the deportation of Jeconiah, the prophet beheld two baskets of figs standing before the temple of the Lord. "One basket had very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe; and the other basket had very naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad." The figs here referred to are not those of the sycamore tree, as some have represented, but the true figs, the earlier ones of which begin to redden in March and are ripe in June, when they fall off the tree with a slight shake (Neh. iii. 12), and are exceedingly pleasant and refreshing to eat (Isa. xxviii. 4); but bad figs are very nauseous, as they soon breed insects and rot. What did these figs represent? The good figs were an emblem of the people who had gone into captivity; for, as one looks with pleasure on good figs, takes them and keeps them, so the Lord would look favourably on His people, would bring them again to their own land, and would plant them and not pluck them up. This could not be, however, until He gave them a heart to know Him, and until they returned to Him in true sincerity. And such a heart He would give them, and, instead of casting them off for ever, would accomplish in them the purposes of His grace and love. The prophecy has been fulfilled but very partially as yet; but the day will come when the scattered tribes of Israel and Judah will return to

the Lord Jehovah, and when, under the benignant reign of the Messiah, they will be planted in His Church and will bring forth abundant fruit.

The uneatable figs, which one throws away, represented on the other hand Zedekiah and the people who remained in Judah, and those who had fled to Egypt for protection. They were becoming worse and worse, and nothing remained for them but that they should become a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse wherever they were driven by the hand of the Lord. Would not the ears of Zedekiah tingle as he heard of this vision? We know not, for he probably cared little for the predictions of Jeremiah; but there is a lesson here for us which is well put by Calvin. "Though God spares us for a time, there is no reason for us to indulge ourselves, for He will at length make up for the delay by the heaviness of His punishment: the more indulgently He deals with us, the more grievous and dreadful will be His vengeance when He sees that we have abused His forbearance."

Soon after his accession to the throne, Zedekiah sent as ambassadors to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, but for what purpose does not appear. Doubtless, however, he wished to obtain some favour of the king, whilst, at the same time, he would pay him homage, and thus court his smile and approbation. He had been placed in his present position by the nod of the potent monarch, and he

must needs cringe to him in order to retain it (ch. xxix. 3).

Jeremiah availed himself of this opportunity, to send a letter to the captives in Babylon,—namely, to the residue of the elders (by whom are meant, not the members of the Sanhedrim, but the elders of the people), to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people ; who, when Jeconiah was deposed, were compelled to leave the land of their nativity. Zedekiah permitted the embassy to take the letter, supposing that it would be to his advantage, as he did not wish the Jews to return until after the death of Jeconiah. And what were its contents ? Kindly but firmly the prophet told the people that their captivity would not soon terminate, as the false prophets among them would have them believe ; and therefore they were to settle down in Babylon, to build houses and to dwell in them, to plant gardens, and to eat the fruit of them, to propagate families, and thus increase in numbers, and to seek the peace or safety of the city, praying for it to the Lord, for its peace would be their peace, its safety their safety (ch. xxix. 4-7).

It was, no doubt, a difficult thing to pray for their enemies,—to pray for the welfare of a city like Babylon,—but this did not imply that they should wish success to the ambitious and sanguinary schemes of Nebuchadnezzar. We may pray for a foreign country in which are living for a short time, even though it be that of an inveterate foe ; and God's design was, that

His people should be the salt of the earth, even when captives in a far-off land.

But there were false prophets and diviners among the exiles, against whom the letter warned the people, for they predicted a speedy return to the land of Judah, whereas God's determination was that the captivity should last seventy years. At the end of that period, however, He would visit them, for, even in their distress, His thoughts towards them were thoughts not of evil but of peace, to give them an end and expectation; and if they would return to Him with all their heart, He would be found of them and would turn again their captivity, even as He had promised (ver. 8-14).

How full of tenderness and compassion were those words! And they are applicable to ourselves to-day. God's thoughts to us are not, as the false teachers around us frequently affirm, thoughts of evil but of good; and however He may chastise men for their sins, He would fain turn His chastisements aside, and fulfil their highest expectations and hopes. He will not fail to do this on behalf of all who in penitence and faith earnestly seek Him. He will blot out their transgressions. He will receive them into His favour. He will bring them into a peaceful land, and under His shadow they shall dwell secure for ever.

It is difficult to understand the connection of verses 15-19, and hence they were omitted by the LXX., whilst some critics suppose that they are not in their right place. But the train of thought is this—"As it

respects your saying that the LORD hath raised you up prophets in Babylon, 'Thus saith the LORD of the king that sitteth on the throne of David, and of all the people that dwell in this city, where I now write, and of your brethren that are not gone forth into captivity with you; Behold, I will send upon them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that cannot be eaten, they are so vile.' " The kingdom with its capital and its temple did indeed continue to exist, but the false prophets in Babylon were wrong when they inferred from this that the city would never be destroyed. The people who were left in it were as bad as those who were in exile, and the sword, the famine, and the pestilence would alight on all.

In conclusion (ver. 20-22), Jeremiah predicts the punishment of two of the false prophets—Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, for their presumption in uttering a lie in the name of the LORD. Nebuchadnezzar would put them to death by roasting them in the fire, as he attempted to do with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; and it would become a kind of saying that others might be punished in like manner. Nothing further is known of these two men, but it is highly probable that Nebuchadnezzar was afraid of the excitement caused by their preaching; and, to terrify others, inflicted on them this most fearful death.

The letter caused great excitement among the exiles, and one of the false prophets, Shemaiah the

Nehelamite, sent a letter to Zephaniah the second priest (ch. xxix. 24), and to the rest of the priests, complaining that he did not interfere with Jeremiah and put him in the stocks. The LORD had made him overseer of the temple in the place of Jehoiada the priest ; and what was Jeremiah but a madman whom he ought to have shut up in prison long ago? Zephaniah read this letter to Jeremiah, and immediately the word of the LORD came to him, bidding him declare that Shemaiah had uttered falsehood and taught rebellion, and that God would punish him in such a way that he should not live to see the good that God would do for His people, and that his seed should also be cut off so that he would not have a man to dwell among his people (ver. 24-32).

Whether the embassy of Zedekiah failed in its object we are not informed, but, as we learn from ch. li. 59, he went himself to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign, doubtless to express still more obsequiously his dependence on the mighty conqueror of the East. He was accompanied by Seraiah, who is called a "quiet prince," or as the words should be rendered, the quarter-master general (Keil); and Jeremiah availed himself of this opportunity of sending thither his prophecies against Babylon. He wrote them in a roll, and gave it to Seraiah, telling him when he arrived to read it publicly, and then, having bound a stone to it, to cast it into the Euphrates, saying, "Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I shall bring upon her." The con-

tents of the roll are contained in ch. l. li., and form some of the grandest portions of Jeremiah's writings. The substance of these chapters is given in the words which Seraiah was to utter, and the symbolical meaning of the act he was to perform was clear. "The sending of the prophecy through Seraiah, with the command to read it there, at the same time looking up to God, and then to sink it in the Euphrates, was not intended as a testimony to the inhabitants of Babylon of the certainty of their destruction, but was meant to be a substantial proof for Israel that God the Lord would, without fail, fulfil His word regarding the seventy years' duration of Babylon's supremacy, and the fall of this great kingdom which was to ensue. This testimony received still greater significance from the circumstances under which it was given. The journey of king Zedekiah to Babylon was, at least in regard to its official purpose, an act of homage shown by Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar, as the vassal of the king of Babylon. This fact, which was deeply humiliating for Judah, was made use of by Jeremiah, in the name of the Lord, for the purpose of announcing and transmitting to Babylon, the city that ruled the world, the decree which Jehovah, the God of Israel, as king of heaven and earth, had formed concerning the proud city, and which He would execute in His own time, that He might confirm the hope of the godly ones among His people in the deliverance of Israel from Babylon." ¹

¹ Keil, vol. ii.

That Seraiah fulfilled his mission there can be little doubt. But what must have been the consternation of the inhabitants of the city when they saw this Jew standing in some great thoroughfare, as probably he did, with a roll in his hand from which to read. Would not many gather round him to hear? and would they not, when they heard such words as the prophecy it contained, be disposed to lay upon him violent hands? Babylon was now in the height of her pride and glory. She boasted of her broad walls, her splendid palaces, her hanging gardens, and her graven images; but the time was not far distant when her pride would be humbled, her power broken, her inhabitants "fall in battle," and her cities burnt with fire. She, "the hammer of the whole earth," with which the Lord had beaten the nations, should herself be beaten to pieces; and her loftiest towers should fall into the dust and be no more. How would such words as these fall upon the ears of those who heard them? "Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling-place for dragons, an astonishment and a hissing without an inhabitant." "Her cities are a desolation, a dry land, and a wilderness, a land where no man dwelleth, neither doth any son of man pass thereby" (li. 37, 43). Did Nebuchadnezzar himself hear of these prophecies? It is not improbable; and he was already prepared for them by the vision he had seen and its interpretation by Daniel;¹ and perhaps this

¹ Daniel was among the captives taken to Babylon in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, B.C. 606; the vision took place

circumstance prevented him from laying hands on Seraiah, or he may have been too busy in warlike preparations to deem him worthy of any notice.

But now Seraiah goes to the river Euphrates which flowed through the very heart of the city, and in the presence of a number of his own people and of the Chaldeans, he bound a stone to the roll, in order that it might sink, and cast it into the water, not for the purpose of destroying the roll, but to symbolise the fulfilment of the prophecy against this mistress of the world.¹

Zedekiah returned from Babylon in the same year, when Jeremiah was commanded to make "bonds and yokes," which mean one yoke, consisting of two wooden beams fastened together by ropes. This yoke the prophet first put upon his own neck, and, appearing with it in the midst of the people, gave them a sign that they were to submit to the government of the king of Babylon. (Ch. xxvii. 1, xxviii. 1).²

about three years later; and this prophecy of Jeremiah's was sent about three years later still.

¹ This prophecy has been deemed spurious by Ewald and others, but its genuineness is unquestionable, as Keil has sufficiently proved. The section (ch. li. 15-19) is repeated from ch. x. 11-16, with the exception that in ver. 19 the word Israel is left out. But Jeremiah had reasons for thus quoting from himself, his object here being to destroy the confidence of the Chaldeans in their gods. Comp. Keil. The fulfilment of the prophecy is matter of history too certain to be called in question.

² From a comparison of these two passages it is evident that the reading "Jehoiakim" in the first of them is an error, and that the true reading is "Zedekiah." This is the reading of the Syriac and Arabic versions. The Septuagint omits the verse.

How singular he must have looked! and yet how significant was the symbol! And he also made other yokes, and sent them by their respective envoys, to the neighbouring kings of Edom and Moab, etc.; telling them that God had given all their lands into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, and that therefore opposition to his government would be vain. Their diviners might pretend to prophesy, as heathen soothsayers often did; and, using all the means in their power for forecasting the future, they might fascinate the people with the notion that they should not serve the king of Babylon; but they prophesied lies, and to regard them would only tend to make the yoke more heavy and oppressive. These kings doubtless imagined that in their combined strength they would be able to cope with Nebuchadnezzar and to drive him from the field; but Jehovah had determined otherwise, and to resist His will was utterly foolish and vain.

To Zedekiah also the prophet gave the same advice, warning him against the false prophets of the land, who told him that the vessels of the LORD'S house, which had been taken to Babylon, should speedily be restored. It was false. Nebuchadnezzar would certainly enter the city, and, instead of those vessels being restored, the residue would be carried into Babylon, and there remain until the LORD Himself should bring them back (ch. xxvii. 12-22). What, then, was Zedekiah recommended to do? "Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and

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serve him and his people, and live." But what an indignity! How could they brook it? Submit, not only to the king of Babylon, but to his subjects! How exasperating to their foolish pride! But, as Calvin observes, "the best remedy for alleviating evils is to acknowledge that we are justly smitten, and to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God; for thus it happens, that evils are turned into medicines, and thus become salutary to us." If they submitted to the king of Babylon they would live; if they rebelled against him they would die. But alas! they wished to be deceived, and therefore were deceived. This warning voice against the false prophets was clear, faithful, and decided; but the people heeded it not, but believed the ministers of Satan rather than the servant of the living God.

We have false prophets not a few in our day. There are many who run, though they have not been sent; and who utter words in the name of the LORD, to whom the LORD has never spoken. How can we detect them? There is one test which may be applied,—*Are they men of prayer?* "If they be prophets, and if the word of the LORD be with them," was the language of Jeremiah, "let them now make intercession to the LORD of hosts" (ver. 18). So let those, in our day, who profess to be enlighteners of the people, ask God's blessing on their work. But do they? and does He really hear them? Is it their practice to appeal to heaven in proof of their sincerity? and do they speak as if they had authority from God? Teaching

and praying should ever be united, and no teacher who is negligent of prayer can be one who is sent of heaven, be he eloquent, or learned, or even be episcopally ordained.

On the proclamation of Jeremiah's words it would seem that one Hananiah, the son of Azur the prophet of whom we know nothing more than that he belonged to Gibeon, a city of the priests,¹ confronted him, and using the language of a true prophet, said, "Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon" (ch. xxviii. 1, etc.) How daring was this assertion! But false teachers often speak with greater boldness than true ones. Was Hananiah conscious that he was wrong? or did he believe a lie? Was he led by ambition to act a part, or was he a conscientious bigot, under the delusive influence of the evil spirit? It is difficult to judge of the motives of such a man; but that he was an emissary of Satan none can doubt. He proclaimed his falsehoods even in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of the covenant was,—the symbol of the Divine presence,—thus having the audacity to make his appeal to God Himself, and affirming, in direct contradiction of Jeremiah's prophecy, that within two years of days, or two-fold years, the vessels of God's house should be restored, and that Jeconiah the king, with all the captives of Judah, should return.

What said Jeremiah? In the presence of all the

¹ Josh. xxi. 17. The place is now called Jib, and is situated about six miles west of Jerusalem.

people who stood in the temple of the Lord, he said "Amen;" that is, May it so be! or "The LORD do so." For he would have been glad if his own prophecies should prove false, even though in consequence he would be disgraced. But he knew it would be otherwise; and, referring to former prophets who had predicted evil, he said, if a prophet prophesies of peace and it come to pass, then shall it be known that the Lord hath sent him: but this implied the converse which Moses gave—"When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken; but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously" (Deut. xviii. 28). And thus had Hananiah spoken. He had dared to utter what was not true, and was thus either a conscious deceiver of the people, or was himself the subject of strong delusion.

To persist in falsehood when it has been exposed, evinces a most perverted state of mind. But Hananiah did this. There stood the true prophet of the Lord with the yoke upon his neck, when the false prophet boldly went up to him, took off the yoke, as he must have done, by violence, and brake it, declaring that Jehovah had said that thus He would break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar from off the neck of all nations within the space of two full years. Without answering a word, but "entrusting to the LORD the vindication of the truth of His own word," Jeremiah went his way. But, apparently soon after, the word of the Lord

came to him, saying—"Go and tell Hananiah, Thus saith the LORD, Thou hast broken the yokes of wood, but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron." Men often try to get rid of a heavy cross, and a still heavier is laid upon them. The breaking of the yoke of wood was of no avail, for Nebuchadnezzar would put the people under his yoke, and that yoke would prove an iron one which they could not break. "Hananiah," said the prophet, "the LORD hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to believe a lie." And what was Hananiah's punishment? He had taught rebellion against the Lord, and therefore had forfeited his life. In the seventh month of that same year, or but two months after his controversy with Jeremiah, he died as the prophet had said. "No surer confirmation could have been expected by the Jews, had they a particle of understanding, than to see the impostor slain by the word of Jeremiah alone; for he never touched him with a finger, nor caused him to be led to punishment, though he deserved this; but he drove him out of the world by the mere sound of his tongue" (Calvin).

But they were not moved. Some of the rabbins say that the disciples of Hananiah took away his body secretly so that his death was not known; but this attempt to conceal the folly of the people is a mere evasion. They knew the fact; but they gave no heed to it.

I have presented these facts in their chronological order, thus furnishing, as far as I could, a picture of

the state of the country and of the people at this juncture. It is a sad one to contemplate, for, though here and there gleams of light break through the clouds, dense gloom begins to settle on the land, foreboding events still more terrible and disastrous. Babylon would fall, but not yet. The Chaldean hordes were yet to be the instruments of God's vengeance on Jerusalem, and that fair city was first to be laid waste by the hand of the ruthless foe.

To the period when the siege commenced belongs the prophecy of chapter xxxiv. In it Jeremiah declared that the city should be burnt with fire; that the king of Babylon would speak to Zedekiah; and that he would carry him captive to Babylon. At the same time he assured him that he should not die by the sword, but in peace, and be buried with royal honours (ver. 1-7). It was customary to burn aromatic spices in honour of the dead, but not to burn their corpses;¹ and Zedekiah would be thus deposited in the sepulchre of his fathers. But was he there deposited? We have no record of the fact, yet, though he died in Babylon, it is by no means improbable that, when Jehoiachin was raised to royal honours, Zedekiah also was treated with compassion, and that when he died the Jews were permitted to bury him after their national customs.

¹ 2 Chron. xiii. 14; xxi. 19.

CHAPTER XII.

JEREMIAH'S IMPRISONMENT.

B.C. 587.

OF the great cloud of witnesses whose triumphs of faith are recorded in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is said that some "had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments."

The prophet of sorrow was one of these. We have already seen him put into the stocks by Pashur the son of Immer the priest (ch. xx.), and now again he is subject to even greater indignities and dangers, of which we must trace the cause and the results.

In the eighth or ninth year of his reign, Zedekiah had doubtless made attempts to throw off the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar; and now the Chaldean army approached the city of Jerusalem intending to lay siege against it, when Zedekiah sent a message to the prophet by Pashur the son of Melchiah¹ and Sephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, saying, "Inquire, I pray thee, of the LORD for us" (ch. xxi. 1, 2). The king knew that Jeremiah was the LORD'S servant, and that there was no one else in the country who

¹ Therefore a different person from the Pashur of ch. xx.

could intercede for him successfully. How often are good men resorted to, even by those who hate them, for help in times of calamity and distress! And what did Zedekiah ask?—that the Lord would deal with him and with the people according to His wondrous works, and send Nebuchadnezzar back to his own land. But no: it was too late. The cup of Jerusalem's iniquity was now full, and resistance to the conqueror would be utterly useless. He would certainly come and take possession of the city, and the only way of escape from death would be to submit at once to his authority, for whoever did this his life would be given him as a prey (ver. 4-11). The inhabitants of Jerusalem are here personified, and called the inhabitants of "the valley"—the lower city in the ravine between Moriah and Zion; and the "rock of the plain," Mount Zion itself, which was regarded as on a level with the plains around. Boasting of the impregnableness of its situation, the people said, "Who shall come down against us? or who shall enter into our habitations?" And they are answered by the prophet. God would visit upon them the fruit of their doings; and would kindle a fire in the forest of houses which should "devour all things round about" (ver. 13, 14). "I sit as a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow," has been the language of many a fair and beautiful city, yet it has been brought down to the dust, and its glory has passed away.

Zedekiah and his people had no disposition to take the advice of the prophet. They could not brook

submission to the Chaldeans, and the consequences of their folly came upon them. How often do men ask counsel of the Lord when they never intend to take it ! How often do they dissemble in their hearts, pretending to be penitent and submissive, when, in fact, they are as rebellious and self-willed as ever ! But, probably, Zedekiah thought that God would be induced to change His purposes ; and a little later, it would seem, he sent Zephaniah a second time, and with him Jehucal, who was one of the princes, asking him to intercede with the Lord for them (ch. xxxvii. 1-3). Jeremiah was not yet cast into prison, but came in and went out among the people, having no need to hide himself as in the days of Jehoiakim, after the destruction of the roll (ch. xxxvi. 26).

"Pray now unto the LORD our God for us," said these very respectable messengers. But why ? Was there some cause of hope that matters might yet take a more satisfactory turn ? Yes : the army of Pharaoh-Hophra, the successor of Psammuthis, who ascended the throne B.C. 588, had come up against Nebuchadnezzar, probably in consequence of the embassy sent to him by Zedekiah (Ezek. xvii. 15). "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, that stay on horses and trust in chariots," said the prophet Isaiah more than a century before ; but Zedekiah heeded not the word, and now he was to prove its truth. Here, however, for the moment, was a gleam of hope, for when the Chaldeans heard of the approach of the Egyptian army they were afraid, and presently began to retreat

(ver. 5-11). Would Jerusalem then be spared? would the Chaldeans be permanently beaten? The answer was, No: "Behold Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt, into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire." With the idea that the Chaldeans would depart, Zedekiah and his people were deceiving themselves, for they would not depart; nay, the destruction of Jerusalem was so certain, that even were the Chaldeans to be defeated, and only a few wounded men remain in their tents, they would rise up and burn the city with fire.

"Nothing," says Naëgelsbach, "is more bitter than in time of greatest need to see apparent help again disappear. Raised from the depths, one is then cast back into a still profounder deep. The Jews had invoked the aid of the Egyptians on their own responsibility. It was a triumph of worldly policy. The Lord disappoints their calculation. He is not to be so easily put out. The Chaldeans withdraw, but only to defeat the Egyptians and to return. And Jeremiah must be the prophet of these disappointed hopes. A few mortally wounded men, he must proclaim, would suffice to execute the Lord's decree on Jerusalem."

Jeremiah might doubtless have insinuated himself into the favour of the king and of the princes, had he kept back these facts and spoken smooth things wherewith to please them; but he dared not to

utter any other word than that which God had put into his mouth. He was no time-server; no sycophant; no coward. Fearlessly did he declare the message with which he was entrusted, whatever the consequences might be, and never did he attempt to tone down God's words, but proclaimed them all with unswerving fidelity.

Do we not need such prophets in our day? It is to be feared that our age is becoming soft and effeminate, and that amid the abundance of our wealth, the luxuriance of our modes of living, and our comparative freedom from the troubles which many of our fathers suffered, we are sinking into indifference and ease relative to the high claims of God upon our allegiance and our service. And where are the preachers who warn us of the consequences? Where are the prophets of sorrow who weep over our national sins? Where are the sons of thunder who seek to awaken us from our guilty sleep? I do think that both the pulpit and the press in this nineteenth century are far too tame in denouncing sin, and far too timid in standing up for truth. "Yes," says a living preacher, "amid the perplexed hypocrisies of civilisation, amid the hollow insincerities which permeate our very forms of speech,—it seems as though we never dared that intensity of purpose, that burning moral indignation, that splendid passion of scorn and hatred against all that is corrupt and base, which lends to the words of Psalmist and Prophet their eternal significance." Oh for a Jeremiah,

a John Baptist, a Paul, a Luther, to lift up their voices against the crying sins of the day,—against intemperance, against State provision for the worst of vices, against scepticism and ungodliness in every form! But alas, they are few and far between, and our country is comparatively unwarned of her danger.

Sad and sorrowful, Jeremiah left the city by the Benjamin gate or north gate of the city, “to separate himself thence in the midst of the people” (ver. 12). The meaning of this expression according to Naëgelsbach is, “to raise an inheritance there,” or as Keil explains it, “to bring thence his portion among the people.”¹ Perhaps he had some property at Anathoth which he was wishful to secure, but some have thought that he was anxious for his personal safety, and left Jerusalem because he could no longer remain there in peace. If so, he doubtless erred, as he was under the Divine protection everywhere; but would “such a man as he flee?” I cannot attribute to him so mean a motive; rather was it, as Calvin says, that he was tired of the city because he saw that he spent his labour in vain.

At the gate of Benjamin sat Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, as commander of the watch, who, recognising the prophet, seized him, and charged him with falling away to the Chaldeans. They had raised the siege, but were probably not far distant, and as Jeremiah

¹ Comp. Blayney; who thinks that he went to obtain a share in the produce of the land with the rest of his neighbours.

had said that those who went over to them should live (ch. xxi. 9), Irijah pretended to believe that such was Jeremiah's intention and design. He repelled the insinuation and said, "It is false," or literally, "A falsehood. I fall not away to the Chaldeans;" but he was brought before the princes, who were a different set of men from those who espoused his cause under Jehoiakim (ch. xxvi., xxxvi), and they smote him, or caused him to be smitten, and put him in prison, in the house of Jonathan the scribe (ver. 13-15).

The house of Jonathan had been made into a prison, because underneath it were dark vaults and cells, and in this dreary dungeon was the noble-minded patriot cast, and there he remained many days. It has been the lot of many of God's faithful servants to endure imprisonment of this kind. John the Baptist at Machaerus, St Paul in the Mamertine prison at Rome, Bonnivard in the Castle of Chillon, and Bunyan in the jail at Bedford, might be referred to as instances out of many thousands; but, as many such have testified, God can make the prison brighter than a palace, and bonds more joyous than the wildest liberty. After Paul and Silas had been beaten and thrust into the inner prison at Philippi, they sang praises to God. We are not told that Jeremiah did this, and his temperament would perhaps forbid it, but he knew that he was in God's hands, and he had learned, like Moses before him, to endure as seeing Him who is invisible.

Persecution, in some form or other, has been the lot of many of the saints from the earliest times, and through a baptism of blood have some of the noblest spirits that ever lived on earth been called to pass. It exists to this day; for there are captives sighing in dungeons in this nineteenth century, and had Rome the power she once possessed, her Inquisitions would be as full of victims as they ever were, and the cruelties inflicted on them just as great. But the days of tyranny and oppression are numbered; and though the saints under the altar still cry, "Lord, how long?" we know that every system, political or religious, that attempts to crush the liberty of God's people, shall in the end be crushed itself.

Was Zedekiah satisfied? On the contrary, restless and full of fear, he sent for Jeremiah, and in secret, lest his ministers should hear it, said to him, "Is there any word from the LORD?" He had not then wholly cast off the fear of God, nor was he angry with the prophet, or disposed to treat him with contempt. Like many a man of the world, he had some good traits in his character, but he was vacillating and unstable, and lacked the courage to do what he knew to be right. The answer of Jeremiah was, "There is; thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon" (ch. xxxvii. 17; comp. xxxii. 4, xxxiv. 3). God's determination was a fixed one, and escape from the consequence of his folly Zedekiah would not. But, said the prophet, "What have I done that I should be put in prison? and where are the prophets that pre-

dicted smooth things?" Had his prophecies or theirs proved true? Was he then deserving of the treatment he had received? Thus appealing to his innocence, Jeremiah besought the king not to send him back to the subterranean cell in the house of Jonathan, lest he should die there. "He shunned death, for this was natural; and yet he was prepared to die, whenever necessary, rather than turn aside in the least from discharging the duty imposed on him by God" (Calvin).

The king, in justice, should have given him his liberty, but his words were so distasteful to him, that though he granted his request in not sending him back to his cell, he put him into the court of the royal prison, or the fore-court of the royal palace; where a loaf of bread was given to him daily out of the bakers' street (ver. 20, 21).

This was in the tenth year of the reign of Zedekiah, and the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar (comp. ch. xxxii. 1-5). The army of the Chaldeans had returned, and were now besieging the city again; and here we learn that Zedekiah asked the prophet why he continued to predict its downfall. But what else could he predict? It was not his own but God's word, and that word only would he utter, whatever might become of himself. For his fidelity, then, he suffered, and because he would not falsify the truth.

The princes were dissatisfied. The number of fighting men in the city was very much reduced, and many were deserting to the Chaldean army. She-

phatiah then, and his companions, who had heard the words of Jeremiah, appealed to the king, and demanded that he should be put to death, attributing the state of things to his predictions, and affirming that he sought not the welfare of the people, but their hurt (ch. xxxviii. 1-4). "The allegation which the princes made against Jeremiah was probably correct. The constancy with which Jeremiah declared that resistance was useless, since, in accordance with the Divine decree, Jerusalem was to be taken and burnt by the Chaldeans, could not but make the soldiers and the people unwilling any longer to sacrifice their lives. Nevertheless, the complaint was unjust, because Jeremiah was not pressing his own personal opinion, but declaring the word of the Lord, and that too, not from any want of patriotism, or through personal cowardice, but in the conviction, derived from the Divine revelation, that it was only by voluntary submission that the fate of the besieged could be mitigated; hence he acted from a deep feeling of love to the people, and in order to avert complete destruction from them."¹

How often is true patriotism misunderstood and false patriotism rewarded in its stead! The real friend of the people was the prophet, and Zedekiah must have known it; yet he cared not if he was put to death, and said to the princes, "Behold he is in your hand, for the king can do nothing against you" (ver. 5). And now the princes cast Jeremiah into the pit of

¹ Keil, vol. ii. p. 110.; comp. Calvin, vol. iv. p. 389.

Malchiah, the king's son,¹ which was in the court of the prison. This must have been some well-known pit, and it was very deep, for they let Jeremiah down into it with cords. Moreover, though it contained no water, at the bottom of it was mire into which the prophet sank, so that he must have died had he remained there long. That he *should die* was the intention of his enemies, but as the king had not pronounced sentence of death against him, they took this course, hoping that he would perish in the pit, but that they would be free from the charge of taking away his life. It was an artifice by which to get rid of their guilt, which nevertheless clung to them, for it culminated in this act, as did that of their posterity in rejecting Christ ; and now the cup of their iniquity was full.

But was there no one to interfere on the prophet's behalf? Yes; God can raise up a deliverer for His servant from among an alien race. There was a Cushite, or Ethiopian eunuch, in the service of Zedekiah, named Ebedmelech, a Hebrew name, which means *servant of the king*, probably given to him by Zedekiah himself. By some means he heard of what had occurred ; or perhaps he heard the prophet himself from the bottom of the pit pouring out his complaint to God, in some such language as that of Ps. lxix. 1, 2, "Save me, O God ; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing : I am come into deep waters, where the

¹ Ver. 6—marginal reading.

floods overflow me." The king was sitting at the gate of Benjamin, probably watching the besiegers, when Ebedmelech rushed forth to him and saith, "My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon ; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is ; for there is no more bread in the city " (ver 9). Who will say that this dark, if not black-skinned, man was not a friend and a brother ? How tender is the compassion for the prophet he displays ! and how indignant he is at the cruelty and injustice of the princes ! Zedekiah listened to him. He might have asked him what right he had to interfere ; but his better feelings gained the mastery, and he gave the earnest Cushite a command to take thirty men with him, and to bring up Jeremiah out of the pit before he should die.

Thirty men ! but could all these be spared at this moment ? Yes, for they would be taken not from among the soldiers but from among the populace of the city ; and they were necessary, as Keil suggests, to prevent any interference on the part of the princes, and to make the work more sure.

Ebedmelech hastens to the spot, provided with the men ; and, with a bundle of rags, or worn-out garments, which he got out of the king's house, he stands at the top of the deep pit. Mark the thoughtfulness of the man ! Hard ropes, such as must be used to get the prophet up, would cut his arm-pits, and therefore the eunuch first lets these old rags down by cords, and tells

the prophet how to place them ; and then gently, as we may be sure, they draw him up by means of the ropes into the light and air of heaven. It was nobly done ; and God Himself registered the act, and a short time after told Jeremiah to assure Ebedmelech that when the city was taken he should escape with his life (ch. xxxix. 15-18). "This pious courtier," says Cramer, "had interceded for the prophet with the king ; but the prophet had again interceded for him with God. Ebedmelech had drawn him out of the pit, but Jeremiah draws him by his prayer from the jaws of all Chaldean war-vortices. Those who receive a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. (Matt. x. 41.) Preachers do their patrons more good than they get from them."¹

Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison where he was before (ch. xxxviii. 13 ; xxxvii. 21), and it was probably a few days afterwards when Zedekiah sent for him again. It was their last and final interview, like that of Moses with Pharaoh prior to the last plague of Egypt (Ex. x. 24-29), and it took place in the third entry of the temple, possibly an enclosed space leading to the king's palace, in which the conversation could be entirely private. And what said the king ? "I will ask thee a thing ; hide nothing from me ;" meaning what was to become of the city. But was he in earnest ? would he listen to counsel if it was given ? would he not, if the prophet told him the

¹ Quoted by Naëgelsbach ; comp. the beautiful remarks of Calvin vol. iv. p. 439.

truth, instantly put him to death? Zedekiah solemnly declared that the latter at least he would not do, and on this the prophet assured him that he might yet save his own life by submitting to the king of Babylon, and that then the city would not be destroyed by fire. If he refused to do this, it was his last chance, and the city would be consumed, nor would he be able to escape (ch. xxxviii. 14-18).

"I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hands, and they mock me," answered Zedekiah. Many of the Jews had gone over to the Chaldeans, and the king imagined that if he followed their example now, they would laugh at him and maltreat him. Jeremiah replies, "They will not give thee up," and urges him to obey the voice of the Lord, for otherwise he would become the laughing-stock of the women of his own harem, who would sing over him a kind of satire, to this effect, that his friends the false prophets, in whom he had trusted, had misled him and brought him into a bog, where his feet had stuck fast and there they had left him. Would not this be worse than the fate he had anticipated? Could a greater disgrace befall him than to be received by his own wives with insulting songs? (ch. xxxviii. 19-23).

But these appeals utterly failed. The king had not the firmness to obey the Divine command, but was the slave of the princes; to avoid whose reproaches he dismissed Jeremiah, saying, "Let no man know of these words, and thou shalt not die;" telling him

what to say to them if they made any inquiry into the matter (ver. 24-28). They did inquire, and the prophet told them, answering them as the king had said—that he presented his supplication to the king not to cause him to return to Jonathan's house to die there. This was not the whole truth, but it was not an untruth, and the princes had no right to demand more of him. We are not bound to tell all we know to every one; and to refrain from doing so, is a duty we sometimes owe both to ourselves and to society at large.

Jeremiah remained in the court of the prison until Jerusalem was taken; when another circumstance occurred so strikingly illustrative of his faith in God, and so full of beautiful and impressive lessons, that it may well form the subject of our next chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PROPHET'S FAITH IN THE RETURN.

B.C. 596.

SHUT up in the court of the prison, Jeremiah received another word from the Lord, assuring him of brighter days, and bidding him purchase a field in Anathoth which either he or his family should one day enjoy. Hanameel, the son of Shallum his uncle, would come to him, and say, "Buy my field that is in Anathoth; for the right of redemption is thine to buy it" (ch. xxxii. 6, 7), and the prophet was to comply with the request. When God gave the land of Canaan to the Israelites it was divided among the tribes and families by lot, and the portion of each family was to be an hereditary possession, not to be sold into the hands of strangers. Sometimes, however, a man became poor, and sold *part* of his possessions, but the sale was only temporary, for in the Jubilee or fiftieth year it returned to him, or to his heirs, without any payment (Lev. xxv. 24-26). If he were able to redeem it before the Jubilee year came he might, and the price would be less in proportion to the nearness of that year. The next of kin had, however, the right to redeem, and indeed

was under obligation to do so. Hence he was called the Gocl, or deliverer, from a root signifying to loose or to set free that which was bound (Fuerst). In reference to the order observed respecting it, a son took the precedence, then a daughter, after that a brother, and then the father's brother.'

The visit of Hanameel, announced to the prophet by revelation, took place, and by this he knew that it was the word of the Lord (ver. 8), "Buy my field, I pray thee, that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin; for the right of inheritance is thine to buy it," said Hanameel; and Jeremiah immediately complied. And what did he give for it? Seventeen shekels of silver; but this price seems very small, for it amounted to about forty shillings only. Some, therefore, read seven shekels of gold, and ten of silver; but, though the form of the expression is seven shekels and ten, this interpretation is not satisfactory. Was the seller then compelled to part with his property, on account of his poverty, for a smaller price than it was worth? or had the value of the land depreciated in consequence of the war? We cannot entertain the first of these views, for the prophet would certainly not have taken advantage of the circumstances of his relative and bought the land merely as a speculator. Nor was the value of such property deteriorated by war; a fact of which an illustration occurs in Livy, who relates that the very path on which Hannibal stood before the gates of Rome was

sold without any abatement of the price. The sum of seventeen shekels was, then, probably but a nominal price ; and perhaps the Jubilee year was near at hand.

But whence did Jeremiah obtain the money ? Perhaps his friend Baruch obtained it for him ; and it is probable that just then money was more plentiful in Jerusalem than bread. The purchase was concluded in the legal form. " I subscribed the evidence," says the prophet, or more correctly, " I wrote in the letter " (the usual terms of the sale), " and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances " (ver. 10). And there were two copies of the document, one which was sealed, and another which was left open, that if either of them was torn or injured, the second might be produced when wanted. There were present in the court of the prison a considerable number of Jews to take notice of the transaction ; there were the prophet himself and his cousin Hanameel, and there was his faithful and attached friend Baruch. What did Jeremiah do ? He gave both the copies of the bill of sale into the hand of Baruch, charging him to put them into an earthen vessel, in which they would be safe from damp and decay, and thus to take care of them, as they would one day be required (ver. 11, 12).

But was this at all probable ? The land was now desolated by war ; the invader's foot was upon every part of it ; Anathoth, as well as Jerusalem, was in possession of the Chaldeans, who could do with it what they chose. Yes ; but God had said, " Houses

and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land" (ver. 13), and, improbable as it might appear, the prophet did not doubt the promise, but, like Abraham of old, was "strong in faith, giving glory to God." The field would probably never be of any value to Jeremiah, for seventy years were to elapse ere the captivity would come to an end; but for the benefit of others he purchased it, being fully assured that the time would come when some members of the family would need the plot, and would be glad to find that it had been legally secured to them.¹

But now the prophet betakes himself to the Lord in prayer (ver. 16-25), "asking," says Keil, "for further disclosures regarding the future of the people and the land, less for his own sake than for that of the people, who could with difficulty rise to such confidence of faith." The omnipotence, justice, and mercy of God are here acknowledged in very striking terms, —His omnipotence, as displayed in the creation of the heavens and the earth; His justice, in recompensing the iniquity of the fathers upon the children; His mercy, in delivering them from the land of Egypt, and giving them Canaan as their possession. But now the Chaldeans were besieging the city, and

¹ According to the law, Num. xviii. 20, Deut. x. 9, etc., the Levites were prohibited from holding landed property; yet here we see such property in the hands of a family of that tribe, Jeremiah being a priest, and therefore a Levite. The explanation is, that the law had probably been somewhat relaxed, and that, owing perhaps to the peculiarities of the times, this tribe also obtained certain lands as a reward for the services they rendered to the people.

would take it, and yet God had told him to buy this field for money, and to take witnesses! would it indeed be of any avail?

The answer comes (ver. 26-44). The prophet had said, "There is nothing too hard for Thee;" and now God repeats the words—"Is there anything too hard for me?" And the reply in effect is, "No: I will give this city into the hands of the Chaldeans, and yet I will deliver it out of their hands again, and I will bring back my people to this place, and will make with them an everlasting covenant; and, desolate though the land will become, in consequence of the invasion, it shall flourish yet again, and men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidences, and seal them, and take witnesses in the land of Benjamin, and in the places round about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the mountains, and in the cities of the valley, and in the cities of the south: for I will cause their captivity to return, saith the LORD."

What a precious answer to the prayer was this. "It is the Lord's declaration to His obedient servant. My dear child, He says, thou hast acted according to my will, without knowing why. Thou hast done well. But I will make it clear to thee, so that thou wilt wonder no more: I will tell thee that, and yet more, so that thou wilt say, Yes, let it be so" (Zinzendorf).

Jeremiah did not pray until he had obeyed; nor ask for further light until he acted upon the instructions given. This is the secret of success in prayer.

We have no right to go to the throne of grace in a murmuring or disobedient spirit ; and the reason why so many prayers remain unanswered lies in the fact, that they are presented before we have done what God requires. If our hands are clean and our hearts pure, we may then go to Him in our perplexities and trials, and He will certainly give us relief ; if they are not, no answer will be given.

The prophet was still in the court of the prison, when, not long after the circumstances we have referred to, the word of the Lord came to him a second time, and said, "Thus saith Jehovah, the maker thereof, Jehovah that formed it, to establish it ; Jehovah is His name" (ch. xxxiii. 1, 2). And again the declaration is repeated, that after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, God would show great and mighty things to His people. The captive should return, the city should be rebuilt ; it should be restored to health, and should possess abundance of peace and truth. In it should be heard again the voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride ; the voice of them that should say, Praise the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good ; for His mercy endureth for ever. And the promise of the Righteous Branch who in those days should grow up unto David, and of whom the prophet had previously spoken (xxiii. 5), occurs again ; with this remarkable addition, that in those days "Judah shall be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely ; and this is the name wherewith

she shall be called "Jehovah our Righteousness" (ver. 4-16). In the former prophecy this title is given to the Branch Himself; here it is given to the restored city. And why? Because Jerusalem was to partake of the righteousness of her King, and to be the source of untold blessings to mankind. Jehovah Tsidkenu was strictly the title of her Lord only as the meritorious Saviour of the world; but Jehovah Tsidkenu would be her title also, as receiving from Him, and then communicating to others, the salvation needed by the world. To a very limited extent, however, did this title ever belong to the literal Jerusalem, and though the time may come when that celebrated city shall become a centre of spiritual light, and a great source of spiritual blessings, yet it is to the Church of Christ that the title properly belongs; and in the earlier prophecy of Micah,¹ quoted by Isaiah² a few years later, the same thought is expressed, when it is said that "out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Of righteousness, the righteousness which includes the forgiveness of sins, the renovation of the heart, and the sanctification of the entire man, Christ the Branch is the one original source; but He is pleased to make His Church, through her ministers, her ordinances, and her sacraments, the principal though not the only channel through which they are imparted to mankind; and therefore communion with the Church is to be sought and maintained wherever practicable.

¹ Mic. iv. 1, 2.

² Isaiah ii. 2, 3.

It is not, however, any one section of the Church that can claim this privilege exclusively. In the prophecy now before us, the perpetuity of David's government is affirmed, and in the person of Christ, David still sits upon the throne. But it is also affirmed that the priests and the Levites shall be perpetuated, and high ritualists have inferred from this that the priestly order of ministers should continue in the Church of Christ, and that such an order is essential to the very constitution of the Church. Grace, they say, flows through the Church, but only where an apostolic succession of bishops, priests, and deacons has been maintained. But the priestly office is continued in Christ, as the prophet Zechariah, whom Hengstenberg rightly calls the most ancient and authentic interpreter of Jeremiah, affirmed;¹ and long prior to this, Isaiah had declared that all Israel should be named the priests of the Lord,² a prophecy to which St Peter alludes, when addressing all Christian believers he says, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. ii. 9).

We repudiate, then, the notion that righteousness flows only through Churches boasting of what is called the apostolic succession. There is no such succession, and to appeal to this passage in support of it, as Bishop Wordsworth does, is only a proof of the weakness of

¹ Zech. iii. and xiii.

² Isa. lxi. 6; lxvi. 21.

his cause. It is the New Testament that lays down the platform of the government of the Christian Church ; and certainly it is not after the model of the temple-service of the Jews that its worship and service are established, but rather after that of the synagogue-service ; and accordingly the New Testament recognises no priesthood but that of Christ, and no sacrifice except that of the cross, in any other sense than that all Christians are priests who offer up spiritual sacrifices, and the living sacrifice of themselves.

To the prophet another word came, respecting the ordinances of heaven and earth to which he had previously referred (ch. xxxi. 35-37). The covenant made with David, which was founded upon that made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and which promised to him a vast posterity, equal in number to the stars of heaven, and to the sand upon the sea-shore, and a perpetual reign over the house of Israel, was as firm and stable as the covenant of day and night. As the latter cannot be broken, so neither can the former ; and therefore whatever changes might take place, or whatever calamities might come, it was not true that the two families which the LORD had chosen—Israel and Judah—would ever be cast off, for God would cause their captivity to return, and would have mercy on them (ver. 20-26).

But were these promises fulfilled by the return of the people from their captivity in Babylon ? No one who reads the history of that return can imagine it for a moment. That event was but a very partial

fulfilment of this prophecy, nor has any other event yet occurred to meet it, much less to exhaust it ; and therefore it remains to be fulfilled in the, perhaps distant, future, when the scattered tribes of Israel, preserved among the nations as a distinct people unto this day, will be re-gathered ; and, with the fulness of the Gentiles, who will then also be brought in, form one vast fold under one Shepherd, even David their king, or David's son, whose reign will be perpetuated as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations.

Though Jeremiah knew not the full meaning of these prophecies, yet coming to him as the word of the LORD did again and again, in his imprisonment in the court, he was no doubt greatly cheered, for he would see that whatever man did to him, he was not forgotten by the Lord Jehovah ; and prophet of sorrow though he was, he was still enabled to rely on the words on which he often fed, and which were frequently the joy and the rejoicing of his heart (ch. xv. 16). Had it not been for this, his sorrow would have overwhelmed him,—his grief would have been more than he could have borne. The noblest spirits are apt to chafe under bonds and imprisonment, even when borne for the sake of God and of His truth. Even Christians like Savanarola and Luther, who possessed the blessed hope of a glorious immortality, were greatly depressed when deprived of liberty ; and that Jeremiah, who lived under an inferior dispensation, and whose prospects for the future were not so clear,

should feel the load of grief which he was thus called to bear, is not surprising. Occasionally, as we have already seen, the language of complaint burst from his lips, and he once even cursed the day that he was born; but the assurances given to him by Jehovah that his people would, after all, be set free from the yoke of Babylon, whilst Babylon itself would one day fall, were a source of consolation to him of so rich a character, that even in the Lamentations, as we shall observe hereafter, his spirit rose into a transport of thanksgiving (Lam. iii. 22-27).

But perhaps the words he uttered just after the purchase of the land were still more expressive of his confidence and hope, and to them we will return for a moment, because they are so full of encouragement for the Church to-day. "Is anything too hard for Thee?" he asked. Literally the words are, Is anything hid from Thee? but they are doubtless an acknowledgment both of the Omnipotence and the Omniscience of the Most High, whose name is the Great, the Mighty God, Jehovah Sabaoth, who is great in counsel and mighty in work. As long as the prophet reposed on this great truth nothing could daunt him or rob him of his peace; and as long as we can realise it, we stand upon a rock which the proudest surges of the ocean cannot move.

We live in an age of wide-spread scepticism, in which many, who profess to believe in the existence of God, call in question and even deny His Omnipotence. Because He does not all things which they think

He ought to do, they infer that His power is limited and that He cannot do all things. But His power is limited only by His will, and He Himself asks, Is there anything too hard for the Lord? whilst His mighty works in creation and in providence give the answer to the question and say, "There is nothing too hard for Thee." True, the will of man opposes His will, and in many instances, as it would appear, effectually; but even the human will He can bend or break, or overrule. And never is His Omnipotence more manifest than when He takes that mysterious power into His hands, and, without destroying it, so manages it as to bring about His own purposes and to accomplish His own designs. Even the haughty monarch of Babylon was compelled to say, "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou;"¹ history bears testimony to the fact.

Equally certain is the Omniscience of God—nothing can be hid from Him. "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord" (Jer. xxiii. 24). But if God is present everywhere, He must know everything. His Omniscience is consequent on His Omnipresence. Do our modern sceptics deny Him this attribute? How vain is their denial! how foolish! how absurd! Can they disprove that God is everywhere? can they disprove

¹ Dan. iv. 35.

that God knows all things? No more than they can disprove the Divine existence. But if God is Omniscient, He must know not only all that was and all that is, but also all that will be; and therefore prophecy, which is a miracle of knowledge, is possible, and moreover true. God was able to reveal to His servants the things which should be hereafter, and He revealed to Jeremiah these wondrous events—the seventy years' captivity and the cessation of it, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the restoration of it; and then, in the more distant future the sprouting of the Righteous Branch, the dawn of a brighter dispensation, the establishment of a new covenant, the laws of which should be written on the heart, and the increase of David's seed by the ingathering of the Gentiles, until it became as the stars in heaven for multitude.

And history bears witness to the truth of prophecy. To deny that these things have come to pass is folly the most foolish, and unbelief the most incredulous. The fact is palpable; and the attempts of modern rationalists to get rid of prophecy are just as impossible as are their attempts to get rid of miracles. The two stand together, and are the immovable pillars on which Divine revelation rests.

And the fulfilment of prophecy in part,—of these prophecies of Jeremiah, to include no other,—is a pledge of their fulfilment to the uttermost. They are wide, ample, and most encouraging, extending into ages yet far distant, but they will as certainly be realised


in all their grandeur as that the dawn of them has already appeared. JEHOVAH TSIDKENU has already been manifested among men, and His reign of righteousness and peace has already commenced. Nay, it has been established for eighteen centuries, and is more stable to-day than that of any monarchy in the world. What do we infer but its universal spread? What do we infer but its everlasting duration? Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end! and though it may seem unlikely that Jeremiah's words, to the effect that all shall know the Lord, will ever come to pass, yet is there even now such a wide diffusion of the truth, such a general spread of the everlasting gospel, that it would seem as if the time were not far distant when, in theory at least, men everywhere will so far know the Lord as to be inexcusable if they reject and trample on the truth.

Almost unconsciously have I been led into this digression, if such it must be called. But I scarcely deem it a digression, and therefore I let it stand. I am hopeful of the future because I believe in the sure word of prophecy; and if prophecy, yet unfulfilled, opens to us the terrible prospect of national commotions and deadly wars, it rests not there, but opens to us also the prospect of Christ's glorious reign on earth, and the still brighter prospect of His people's reign with Him in heaven.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM.

B.C. 586.

 HE crisis was now at hand, and the doomed city was about to fall.

Already had the Chaldeans besieged Jerusalem twice before. In the fourth year of Jehoiakim (B.C. 606), Nebuchadnezzar, then commanding the army of his father Nabopolassar, came up, took possession of some of the vessels of the Lord's house, and carried them to Babylon, and Jehoiakim became his vassal and served him three years. Then it was that Daniel and his three friends went into captivity, there to become faithful witnesses for the truth, and there to exert an influence on the heathens around them of the most powerful and beneficial nature.¹ On the accession of Jehoiachin to the throne, Nebuchadnezzar, in the eighth year of his reign (B.C. 598), besieged Jerusalem a second time, and carried thence all the treasures of the Lord's house and of the king's house, taking captive, as we have already seen, the king, his family, and his princes, and several thou-

¹ 2 Kings xxiv. 26 ; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 6 ; Dan. i. 1 ; Jer. xxv. 1.

sands of the people, among whom was Ezekiel, whose prophecies were uttered by the river Chebar.¹

But hitherto the city had been spared. Its walls still stood ; its temple still remained ; its palaces were still comparatively intact. Now, however, it had filled up the cup of its iniquities, and whilst Jeremiah predicted its downfall in the midst of it, and Ezekiel in Babylon cried, "Woe to the bloody city,"² Nebuchadnezzar's army encamped against it for the third time, and at length it fell into his hands (B.C. 586).

The attack began on the tenth day of the tenth month (*Tebeth*), of the ninth year of the reign of Zedekiah, and the city was taken on the ninth day of the fourth month (*Tammuz*) of the eleventh year, so that the siege lasted eighteen months.³ The city was surrounded by a wall which was only approachable on the northern side, and on that side the Chaldeans formed their camp, rearing gigantic mounds, to make room for which the houses of the kings of Judah were thrown down and destroyed (Jer. xxxiii. 4). The wall must have been a strong one to resist the attacks of the besiegers so long. The weapons used by the besiegers were probably the crowbar, with which they attacked the foundations of the wall ; the battering-ram, which they drew up as close to the wall as possible ; and the *balista*, an engine resembling the cata-

¹ 2 Kings xxiv. 10 ; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 9, 10 ; Ezek. i. 1-3.

² Ezek. xxiv. 1-6.

³ 2 Kings xxv. 1-4 ; Jer. lii. 4-7, xxxix. 1-3.

pult, which was drawn to the top of the mounds and from which stones were thrown with very considerable force.¹ Fire was the principal weapon used by the besieged, who sent from the walls torches, burning tow, and other inflammable substances ; to prevent the effects of which the besiegers had to watch with the utmost care.

But a far more powerful foe than the Chaldeans outside the walls of the city, was *death on the pale horse*, rushing to and fro, within. Gaunt famine, the direst of all evils, seized upon the inhabitants to a fearful extent, for there was no more bread in the city, and the children swarmed in the midst of the streets, asking nourishment of their mothers, but in vain. Nay, the women were reduced to such extreme necessity, that, forgetting their humanity, they even ate their infant children, and a long wail of sorrow went up to heaven from every part of the city, calling for tears which should run down like a river, day and night. Pestilence too, the sure consequence of famine, began to rage on every side, and the sword of the enemy as he entered within the gates, would be welcomed by many, as a relief from the sufferings they sustained.

Let us picture to ourselves the terrible scene. We are within the city, looking towards the north. Around us are multitudes of famine-stricken women and children swooning on the ground ; before us, on

¹ Comp. Rawlinson's *Ancient Monarchies*, vol. ii. p. 80-82 ; and Layard's *Monuments*, 2d series.

the walls, are the brave and courageous Jews, doing their best to cheer one another in their all but hopeless task; and at the gate of Benjamin is the king himself, watching the progress of the contest, and doubtless trembling at the recollection of the words of Jeremiah, that the enemy would certainly prevail. Outside the city, but close upon the walls, are the lofty mounds of the foe; and stretching far away towards the hill Scopus, are the tents of the Chaldeans, where thousands of cruel and bloodthirsty men are only waiting until a breach is made in the wall, to enter the city and to set its palaces on fire. It is a fearful scene; and another thing is seen at this moment, in the vision of a prophet, which we do not see. Ezekiel, though in person with the exiles on the river Chebar, is in prophetic vision near Jerusalem. Already he has described its abominable sins (ch. viii.), and now he sees six men with weapons of destruction in their hands, and one man with a writer's ink-horn by his side. To the latter the command is given to go and set a mark upon the men that sighed and wept for the unfaithfulness of the people; to the former a command to go after him and slay, sparing neither old nor young, neither women nor children, but only those upon whom is the mark (ch. ix). And now he beholds the cherubim which he had previously described, and they lift up their wings and bear away from the temple the glory of the Lord: the Schechinah which had hitherto dwelt there, rises up from the midst of the city, rests on the Mount of

Olives on the east, and then leaves the edifice to its fate (ch. xi. 21-28).

And where is Jeremiah at this moment? Still shut up in the court of the prison, where, however, he learns what is going on, hears, perhaps, the wail of the women and the children, and catches now and then the shouts of the besiegers, as they gain one advantage after another over the besieged. Well does he know what the result will be, and already, perhaps, he is meditating those fearful lamentations which, but a short time after, he wrote in a roll. The people were now reaping the sad and bitter fruits of their transgressions. He had warned them of the consequences, and besought them to repent in vain, and now nothing awaited them but the sword or captivity, and their beautiful city, the joy of the whole earth, as it was called, would presently be wrapped in fire.

At length there is a breach in the wall, and, despite all the resistance of the besieged, the invading army enter in vast numbers, and the princes of the king of Babylon take up their position in the middle gate, between the lower city and the upper, or city of Zion. Night draws on, and Zedekiah, availing himself of the gloom, flies with his men of war, by the king's garden, between two walls which run along the eastern border of Zion, and the western border of Ophel; and, passing through the south gate, hastens towards the plain of the Jordan, purposing to go into the land of Gilead. But he is pursued by the Chaldean soldiers,

who overtake him in the steppes of Jericho, and carry him to Riblah, in the land of Hamath.

These events are narrated both by Jeremiah (ch. xxxix., lii.), and in the 2nd book of Kings (ch. xxv.) The apparent discrepancies are easily reconciled, and need not detain us here. The commander-in-chief of the besieging army was Nergal-Sharezzer,¹ who, according to some authorities, is Shamgar, or the cup-bearer; and who is distinguished from another prince of that name, by the latter being called Rabmag, or the chief magician. The second of these princes is called Nebo-Sarsechim-Rabsaris, the latter word signifying the chief eunuch (ch. xxxix. 8). This person is called in ver. 13, Nebushasban-Rabsaris.²

Nebuchadnezzar himself was at Riblah on the Orestes, now called Ribleh, a wretched village situated on a large fertile plain, on the great caravan track which passes from Palestine, through Damascus to Carchemish on the Euphrates.³ It was formerly the head-quarters of Pharaoh-Necho (2 Kings xxiii. 33), now the king of Babylon awaited there the result of the siege. And perhaps the first intimation he had of it was the arrival of the captives, Zedekiah, his sons, and the nobles of Judah. Full of fury at the revolt of Zedekiah, he first ordered his sons and the nobles to be slain before his sight, and then he put

¹ This person was identical with Neriglissar, the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar; Rawlinson, *An. Mor.* ii. p. 232, 528.

² Comp. Naëgelsbach, and also Keil.

³ Robinson, *Res.* iii. 545.

out *his* eyes, and bound him with brazen fetters to carry him away to Babylon (ch. xxxix. 8-10). It was a cruel punishment; for ever after, as perhaps the intention was, would Zedekiah see before his mind's eye the slaying of his sons as the last object on which he had gazed; and for the remainder of his days he was shut up in darkness, without even a ray of light. Partly in reference to his fate as the theocratic king, Jeremiah says, "The breath of our nostrils"—our very life's breath—"was taken in their pits," as a wild animal is captured; "of whom we said," in hope, "Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen" (Lam. iv. 20); in a remarkable sermon on which passage Dr Donne says of Zedekiah, that he was "irreligious to God," and "treacherous to man," and that "they lamented the calamities of the kingdom in the loss of an evil king."

Nebuchadnezzar had not yet passed through the mental disease described in the book of Daniel; for that visitation of God's hand upon him did not take place until a later period. Had he now known what he confessed on his recovery, that all the inhabitants of the earth are as nothing to the Most High (Dan. iv. 35), he would probably have dealt more mercifully with his victims: but he was now in the height of his unchecked pride, and, like the despots who had preceded him, took pleasure in crushing under his feet his fallen foes. What a contrast was the behaviour of the Emperor of Prussia towards Napoleon on the taking of Sedan! Christianity has not yet made

wars to cease, as it will one day do : but it has taught the conquerer compassion toward the conquered ; and no sooner is a victory gained on the field of battle now, than the victors seek to mitigate the sufferings of their enemies, and often treat them as if they were their friends. No heathen nation, either of ancient or of modern times, has ever treated its captives taken in war with generous magnanimity ; and had it not been for the influence of the gospel, direct and indirect, upon the minds of men, the same cruelties would have been practised in our own times as were practised by Babylon and Persia, by Greece and Rome.

Returning to the besiegers in the city we find them at work in the destruction of the walls, the burning of the palace and the houses of the people, and the indiscriminate slaughter of men, women, and children (Jer. xxxix. 8 ; Lam. ii. 21). It was doubtless a scene of carnage such as Jerusalem had never before witnessed, and such as was exceeded only in the later fall of it before the army of Titus. O war ! what havoc it has made. Men call it glorious ; but it is indeed as Shakespeare calls it a son of hell, whom angry heavens do make their minister.

“ O heaven ! when will the spiritual Sun arise,
And, with His beams effulgent, drive away
The mists of error that so long have hung
Their dark, unnatural drapery o'er the mind
That broods o'er human carnage ! when will men
Turn from the path of Cain, and learn to see
A brother without hating ? ”

We may well ask when ? And the answer is, *Not yet, not yet !* not until the reign of the Messiah is universally established, and all men bow before Him as their king.

The Chaldeans did not at first destroy the temple, but a month after the occupation of the city, Nebuchadnezzar sent Nebuzar-adan, the captain of the guard, or the chief of the body-guards, to complete the work of destruction, who set on fire all the houses of the great men, the king's house, and the house of the Lord (ch. lii. 12, 13). Thus the sacred fane, for which David had collected many materials, and which was built by Solomon at immense pains and cost ; which, moreover, had been the abode of the Shechinah for many years, and the place of solemn sacrifice and worship, became a heap of charred ruins. The glory had departed, and what was this structure after that more than any other building ? Part of the vessels of the temple had been carried away previously (2 Kings xxiv. 12, 13) ; now the rest were seized, including the two beautiful pillars, the brazen sea, and the twelve brazen bulls, which were under it, all made by king Solomon, together with many other articles of brass and gold and silver, all which were taken to Babylon, the brazen articles in particular being first broken to pieces (ch. lii. 16-23). War spares no works of art, and for the most sacred edifices it has no respect. In modern times, and even within a few years past, museums, picture-galleries, and grand cathedrals have been entered by wild and ruthless soldiers, who have

first despoiled them of their beauty, and then turned them into barrack-rooms or common stables.

What became of the inhabitants of the city? With the exception of some of the poor of the land, who had nothing, and who were scarcely worth carrying away, Nebuchadnezzar led into captivity seven hundred and forty-five people (ch. xxxix. 10, lii. 15, 16, 30). This was in the twenty-third year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (B.C. 586). But prior to this there had been several deportations. Ten thousand were carried away when the city was first besieged, B.C. 599 (2 Kings xxiv. 14). Three thousand and twenty-three were taken captive in the seventeenth year¹ of Nebuchadnezzar; and eight hundred and thirty-two the year following (Jer. lii. 28, 29), which, with the seven hundred and forty-five in the twenty-third year, make a total of fourteen thousand six hundred. But this number appears disproportionate to the number who returned under Zerubbabel, which, exclusive of men-servants and maid-servants, is given in Ezra ii. 64, as 42,630; so that some are of opinion that later deportations took place of which no mention is made anywhere. This assumption, says Keil, has little probability; and he accounts for the discrepancy on other grounds. In the number spoken of as carried away, women and children are not included; it is probable that others,

¹ The text of Jer. lii. 28 reads the seventh year, which Ewald conjectures is an error, supposing that the passage refers to a distinct deportation out of the districts of Judah, and not from Jerusalem, which took place in the reign of Zedekiah. With this conjecture Keil agrees.

hearing that they were prospering in Babylon, followed them of their own free-will ; and there is little doubt that in the sixty-three years which elapsed from the capture of Jehoiakim, B.C. 599, to the return under Zerubbabel, B.C. 536, the exiles greatly increased in numbers. The difficulty respecting the numbers who were led captive, as given above, is thus removed.

At first, the sufferings of these 14,600 people must have been intense. Under a burning sun they were compelled to journey on foot, a distance of, at least, 700 miles, chiefly over a desolate tract of country ; and probably their captors would care little about their wants, so that many of the women, and children, in particular, would faint and die on the road. There were no ambulances to convey the sick and wounded on their way, and perhaps many of them would be left behind to take their chance for life, or to perish for want of water and of food. And of those who reached Babylon many were made slaves ; whilst others, at a later period at least, were more favourably treated, and in the end became too satisfied with the land of their captivity to leave it when the opportunity was given them.

We return to Jeremiah. He was one of those on whom the mark was set, and none therefore could take away his life. He was liberated from prison, but, together with several of his countrymen who had not taken up arms, he was carried to Ramah bound in chains, where, probably, he was presented to the

king Nebuchadnezzar (ch. xl. 1). The conqueror had perhaps heard of him before, and he gave to Nebuzar-adan a strict charge to look well to him, and do him no harm (ch. xxxix. 12); so that now the prophet was taken back to Jerusalem, and committed to the care of Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, whose father had been his friend in former troubles' (ch. xxvi. 24). So, on the taking of Syracuse, Marcellus, the Roman general, was very anxious to save the life of Archimedes the celebrated mathematician, and gave strict orders that his life should be spared. But the philosopher was so deeply engaged in solving a problem, that whilst drawing circles on the ground, he was killed by a soldier who did not know him. Marcellus raised a monument over him, on which he placed a cylinder and a sphere.

Jeremiah *was* spared; but Nebuchadnezzar probably regarded only his own advantage: "yet he was ruled," says Calvin, "by the secret power of God, who thus designed to rescue His servant from death: for God is wont thus to work even by the ungodly, who have another thing in view. It is not always by a voluntary act that men serve God, for many execute what God has decreed when they have no intention of doing so: and He so turns and drives them here and there, that they are constrained, willing or unwilling, to obey His authority."

"Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm," was God's word of old (1 Chron. xvi. 22), and, in effect, it was the word addressed to the proud king

of Babylon. Jeremiah knew that it was God who had preserved him; and to God the glory was ascribed. On his liberation Nebuzar-adan said to him, "The LORD thy God hath pronounced evil on this place. Now the LORD hath brought it, and done according as He hath said; because ye have not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing is come upon you" (ch. xl. 2, 3). Well did the prophet know this, nor were these words spoken to him reproachfully, but probably in the presence of many of the people, and as an indirect reproof of their wickedness and ingratitude. Heathen as he was, this courtier knew something of Jehovah the God of the Jews; but perhaps his notions were only such as the heathen generally entertained of their gods, whom they frequently represented as angry and revengeful. Jehovah was indeed angry, but justly so; and had only brought evil on the city after having warned it repeatedly, but in vain.

Very generously Nebuzar-adan gave Jeremiah the choice of going with him to Babylon, or of remaining in the land. If he went to Babylon, he would look well to him there; if he remained in the land, he might go wherever he thought best. He preferred remaining, and, as he was about to leave, the captain of the guard gave him victuals and a reward, recommending him to go to Gedaliah, whom the king of Babylon had made governor over Judah (ch. xl. 4-7). The food given to him he doubtless needed; but Nebuzar-adan gave him also a present (for such is the meaning of the word), which Calvin thinks he ought

not to have received. Yet he admits that the prophet was deserving of it, and received it not as a reward for the doctrines he had taught, but as a confirmation of them offered by God.¹ Not for a moment can we suppose that he sought favour from any man. He was no sycophant. He accepted Nebuzar-adan's gift, whatever it might be, with the purest motives, and perhaps to meet the present necessities of his case.

Jeremiah was a true patriot, and "by remaining in Judea he showed that the import of his prophecies, apparently friendly to the Chaldeans and hostile to the Jews, had proceeded from the purest love to his people and his fatherland. Thus he imitated Moses, of whom it is written in Heb. xi. 25, that he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. The holy ground of the fatherland bound him to it; and in addition, if he went, who was to take spiritual oversight of the poor forsaken remnant, to proclaim the word of God and bestow on them consolation and admonition? Those who were in Babylon had Ezekiel. And could not the Lord raise up other prophets for them? So he remained with the sheep who had no shepherd. Jeremiah had not sought his own through his whole life, nor did he here" (Naëgelsbach).

¹ Jeremiah never went to Babylon, so that the notion entertained by some that he wrote the 137th Psalm cannot be entertained.

CHAPTER XV.

GEDALIAH AND ISHMAEL.

B.C. 586.

OVER the cities of Judah, and the people who remained in them, Nebuchadnezzar appointed as governor Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam (Jer. xl. 7). He was the grandson of Shaphan, the secretary of king Josiah, and, as we have already seen, his father was the friend and protector of Jeremiah under a former reign. Josephus says that he was "of a gentle and righteous disposition;"¹ and, whilst he was highly esteemed by the king of Babylon, he was eminently popular with the Jewish people.

He repaired to Mizpah in the tribe of Benjamin, where Samuel judged the people, and set up Saul to be king.² This place is now represented by a small town called Neby Samwil, which is situated five miles north-west of Jerusalem, and a short distance north-west of Ramah.³ It stands on a ridge five hundred feet above the plain, and contains a Mohammedan

¹ Antiq. x. 9, sec. i. 3.

² 1 Sam. vii. 15, x. 17.

³ Comp. Keil on Josh. xviii. 25.

mosque, which is supposed to cover the tomb of the prophet Samuel.¹

It was in every way a suitable place for the seat of government, being central, lofty, and in many respects attractive. On a clear day a large number of villages are here in sight, and Yafa, on the coast of the Mediterranean, is distinctly visible.

Here, then, Gedaliah took up his abode, and here the Prophet of Sorrow found temporary repose. To the oversight and care of the governor had been committed a number of infirm old men ; of women and children, whose husbands and fathers had perished in the siege ; and of the poor of the land who had not been carried captive into Babylon (ch. xl. 7). These sheep needed a kind shepherd, and Jeremiah went to dwell among them, that he might sympathise with them in their sorrow, and help them in their deep distress.

On the invasion of the land by the Chaldeans, many of the people fled for refuge into regions difficult of access, whilst others went even into the territories of Moab, Ammon, and the Edomites. Here they were comparatively safe ; and when they heard that Gedaliah had been made governor over the people, they left their hiding-places and came to Mizpah. Among others who came were Ishmael, the son of Nethaniah, and grandson of Elishama, of the seed royal, Johanan and Jonathan, the sons of Kareah ; Seraiah, the son of Tanhumeth ; the sons of Ephai the

¹ Robinson, vol. I. p. 457, 2nd edit.

Netophathite,¹ and Jezaniah the son of a Maachathite,¹ who had borne arms against the Chaldeans. They were all received with great kindness, and Gedaliah assured them, on oath, that they had nothing to fear from the Chaldeans, if they would remain in the land, and be subject to the king of Babylon (ch. xl. 7-12; 2 Kings xxv. 23, 24). It was the summer season of the year—the end of July, or beginning of August, when grapes, figs, and olives became ripe, and they were very plentiful in that neighbourhood, for it was a rich and beautiful country. The refugees gathered, therefore, as much as they required, and dwelt in the cities which they had taken, and were, no doubt, glad of the respite they enjoyed. Next to corn, fruit is the most valuable gift of providence, and Canaan was celebrated for its fruit, as, to some extent, it is to this day. But for these rich vintages and harvests of fruit, these poor people would have fared badly, but in Mizpah and its neighbourhood they found the luscious grape, and the cool fig, and the luxuriant olive, and they partook of them to their heart's content.

But further troubles were at hand; and a sad history follows, "from which we may conclude," says Calvin, "that God's wrath against the people had not been appeased by the destruction of the city, and the burning of the temple." A vile plot had been formed to murder Gedaliah. Baalis, the king of the Ammo-

¹ Netophah was a village near Bethlehem, 1 Chron. ii. 54; Ezra. ii. 22. Maachah was a district in Syria, near Hermon, Deut. iii. 14; Josh. xii. 5.

mites, either wished to destroy the last hope and refuge of the Jews, or he had some personal hatred of the newly-appointed governor. What does he then? He induces Ishmael to undertake to kill him, and Ishmael, being of the royal family, is probably envious of Gedaliah's position, and therefore but too ready to act the traitor's part (ch. xl. 13, 14).

The plot became known, and Johanan and all the captains of the forces came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, and told him of the peril he was in. "Ishmael," said Johanan, "has been sent to slay thee; let me go and I will slay him—wherefore should he take away thy life, and all the remnant of the Jews be scattered?" But Gedaliah would not believe him, and said, "Thou speakest a lie against Ishmael," and Johanan could do nothing but retire, which he no doubt did with an anxious and troubled mind. He probably remonstrated with Gedaliah and re-asserted the fact; but Gedaliah possessed an unsuspecting mind, for "goodness thinks no ill where no ill seems." He was one of those noble-minded men who never harbour a suspicion of others, and to whom it is difficult to think evil of any one. "But we must not trust too much," says one, "for the world is full of falseness. He who believes too easily will be often deceived." Calvin says, "It was a praiseworthy simplicity that Gedaliah did not suspect that Ishmael would be so perfidious and so wicked: but, as in this instance he showed no regard for himself nor for the public safety, he was to be blamed."

Alas! the report was too true. From the days of Cain there have been men, not a few, capable of any vile and murderous deed, and such a man was Ishmael the son of Nethaniah. There is no reason to dispute the statement that he was of *the seed royal*; but, though a Jew, he possessed the spirit of the first Ishmael, of whom it was said that his hand should be against every man, and every man's hand against him. He was, as one calls him, "a perfect marvel of craft and villany;" and the manner in which he committed his crime rendered it all the more diabolical and wicked. Thirty days after, according to Josephus, in the seventh month, and, as tradition says, on the third day of the month, he came to Mizpah with ten men, princes of the king; and Gedaliah, still free from all suspicion, received him into his house and set before him a splendid feast. So says the Jewish historian, adding further that Gedaliah drank freely and was very merry with the party;¹ but this is probably an exaggeration of his own. The entertainment was however a private one, and, watching his opportunity, the base pretender to friendship rose up and slew Gedaliah and all his attendants with the sword (ch. xli. 1, 2). "Every friend saith," observes an Apocryphal writer, "I am his friend also, but there is a friend which is only a friend in name. Is it not a grief unto death when a companion and friend is turned to an enemy?"² He might have had this man Ishmael, in his mind, when he wrote these words; for never

¹ Antiq. x. 9, sec. 4.

² Eccles. xxxvii. 1, 2.

was a more treacherous deed committed under the guise of friendship, never was hypocrisy known or heard of more consummate and vile.

In the East the rights of hospitality are ever held sacred, so that any violation of them is stamped with peculiar hatred. David said of one, "He which did eat bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me,"¹ words which were quoted by our Lord as applicable to the treacherous conduct of Judas.² The name of Ishmael is thus associated with the names of some of the worst of men ; and has come down to posterity with infamy and disgrace. Yet he has had his imitators, and the pages of history are stained with narratives of intrigues and murders, in the midst of high festivities, which disgrace humanity.

Ishmael had executed his designs so secretly that two days after no one knew of it ; and there came from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria, eighty men of the kingdom of Israel who still retained their piety, though they dwelt among the heathen colonists who had settled in the country since the days of Ezerhaddon.³ They had continued to attend the feasts in Jerusalem,⁴ and now that the city was in ruins they were coming to the sacred spot with all the signs of deep sorrow for the destruction of the temple, to offer meat-offerings and incense to the Lord Jehovah, sacrificial worship having entirely ceased (Keil). The murderer of Gedaliah went to meet them, "weeping

¹ Ps xli. 9.

² John xiii. 18.

³ 2 Kings xvii. 24.

⁴ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 9.

all along as he went." ¹ How base the hypocrisy of the man! "He saw these good men in torn garments and in tears on account of the temple being destroyed, and therefore pretended that he had the same feeling" (Calvin). His tears were like those of the crocodile; for he cared neither for the temple nor for God; and he assumed this air of sanctity only for the more effectual accomplishment of his designs (ch. xli. 5-7).

The men had no intention to go to Mizpah, but Ishmael allured them to the spot, and had no sooner induced them to enter the town, than he slew all of them but ten, and cast their bodies into the midst of a pit. They were unarmed and defenceless, and thus became an easy prey to the assassin and his comrades, whom, notwithstanding their superior numbers, they were quite unable to resist.

The pit into which Ishmael cast the bodies of these seventy men was that "which Asa had made for fear of Baasha, king of Israel" (ver. 9). No mention is made of the pit in the history of these two kings, but they were at war one with another, and Mizpah was one of the towns which Asa fortified, so that probably the pit was in some way connected with the works.² It is supposed by Graf that it was a moat which would contain a considerable quantity of water, and which belonged to the fortifications that surrounded the city. Into the same pit, as we learn incidentally, Ishmael had cast the body of Gedaliah;

¹ The words are literally "walking and weeping."

² 1 Kings xv. 22; 2 Chron. xvi. 1-6.

the expression, "because of Gedaliah" (ver. 9), signifying, no doubt, by the side of Gedaliah.¹

This sad story reminds us of the tragedy of Cawnpore, where that miscreant, the Nana Sahib, slew upwards of two hundred ladies and children, and cast their bodies into a well. He first commanded the sepoys to slay them, but, to their honour be it said, they firmly refused. Five men, some of whom were butchers by profession, then undertook the task for him, rushed into the rooms where the ladies were confined, and in an hour and a half executed the deed. We rejoice to add that "over that well a weeping country has erected a graceful shrine, and has turned the ground around it into a fair garden, and made the whole for ever sacred to their memory."²

What induced Ishmael to commit this double massacre has been matter of conjecture, but he was probably actuated by several motives,—partly by envy of Gedaliah's position; partly by the expectation of a reward from the king of the Ammonites, who wanted to break up the government of Gedaliah with the hope perhaps of getting the country into his own hands; and partly by the desire of plunder, or of getting possession of some of the property of his victims.

Ten of the men escaped by representing to Ishmael that they had treasures hid in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey (ver. 8). This

¹ Margin, and comp. Keil.

² See "The Land of the Veda," by Dr Butler. New York: Carlton and Porter.

might be true as, in times of war especially, it was customary to store grain in cisterns, or subterranean pits, the openings of which were carefully concealed from the eyes of strangers. Such cisterns are found in Palestine to-day, some of which Dr Robinson describes as long arched rooms, with the walls in general cut smooth. Dr Tristram's description of one he found near Acre, is strikingly illustrative of the incident before us. "Hard by we found a large deep cistern hewn in the rock, and little converging channels about four inches wide, cut above it to drain the water from the upper part of the vineyard. The cistern had been wrought with a natural roof, and a square opening in the centre. A few yards below this was a circular opening in the ground, about a yard in diameter, like the mouth of a well, but really the mouth of an ancient granary or 'silo,' for keeping and concealing corn. It swelled into a round chamber below, about eight feet deep and more than nine in diameter, carefully plastered wherever it was not hewn out of the native rock, and having very much the shape of a large flask or demijohn. Such 'silos' are still universally used by the nomad Bedouin for storing their grain, and exist in great numbers in and around their favourite camping-grounds. More than once I have had a fall, through my horse, when galloping over a plain, setting his feet on the treacherous roof of one of these empty granaries. It was to such hidden stores as these that the ten men referred who appealed to the treacherous Ishinael, 'Slay us not, for

we have treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey'" (Jer. xli. 8). Ishmael, then, spared the ten men on the condition that they would lead him to these treasures; but whether they did so we are not informed. It is highly probable, however, that they did, for all that a man hath will he give for his life, and the ten would be glad to escape on these terms; and Ishmael would thus obtain a supply of provisions for himself and his men.

Having committed these wholesale murders, Ishmael fled from Mizpah, carrying away captive all the residue of the people, including the daughters of king Zedekiah, and other female members of the royal house. His intention was to go over to the Ammonites, whose king Baalis had sent him on this errand (ch. xl. 14). But Johanan, having heard of these atrocities, marched forward with the captains of the forces and all the men they could muster, and followed Ishmael, whom they found by the great waters at Gibeon. This spot, now called El Jib, was about two miles north of Mizpah, and was celebrated for a large receptacle of water. Robinson found here "a cave excavated in and under the high rock, so as to form a subterranean reservoir;"² and Thomson says, "We of course drank of the famous fountain, deep under the perpendicular rock, in the vale to the south-east of the village."³ Here, probably, Ishmael was resting, to give the people time to quench their thirst, when

¹ The Land of Israel, pp. 107, 8.

² Researches, vol. i. p. 454.

³ Land and the Book, p. 669.

the brave pursuers overtook him, to the great joy of his captives, who at once went over to Johanan. A battle ensued, in which Ishmael lost two of his men ; but he himself and the remaining eight escaped and went to the Ammonites (ver. 10-15). What became of him we are not informed. "He passes thenceforth into the obscurity from which it had been well if he had never emerged ;" but from that obscurity he, and all who have been like him, will emerge one day, to stand before the bar of the Most High, when He will make inquisition for blood, and when every impenitent murderer will receive his just reward.

Johanan now took charge of the people whom he recovered from the hands of Ishmael ; but instead of returning to Mizpah he marched with them and stopped, as ver. 17 means, at the caravanserai, which was near Bethlehem. It appears that he was afraid that the Chaldeans would avenge the murder of Gedaliah on those who had suffered the murderer to escape, and he resolved therefore to go into Egypt, and halted outside Bethlehem until other refugees should join them (ver. 16-18). But what is meant by the inn of Chimham ? The person so named was a son of Barzillai the rich Gileadite, of the times of David, who probably built a khan or hospice here for the benefit of travellers. But it is supposed that David, who loved Chimham, gave him a house near Bethlehem, and that by the possession of it he became the sheikh of the town, and therefore a man of great

importance.¹ That, in after years, it was "the inn" in which our Lord was born, is the conjecture of a modern traveller, which may possibly be true.

But Johanan and the people did not intend to settle here. Their object was to take refuge in Egypt for fear of the anger of the king of Babylon. Not without reason were they afraid, but was there no other remedy at hand? Could they not have sent to Nebuchadnezzar and informed him of all the facts? and would not the blessing of God have rested upon their conduct, had they placed their confidence in Him? The prophet Isaiah had said, "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help,"—would not that woe apply to them? Jeremiah had either joined them or was not far distant, and to him Johanan and Jezaiah,² as the leaders of the people, came with all the rest, and besought him to pray to the Lord Jehovah, "that the Lord thy God may show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do" (ch. xlii. 1, 3). By the expression, "the Lord thy God," they did not intend that He was not their God also, but addressed the prophet as the Divine oracle, to whom they believed God would listen, and through whom He would communicate to them His will. Their number they said was small, but "a few of many;" would Jehovah permit them to perish? or

¹ 2 Sam. xix. 38-41.

² The LXX. insert here the name of Azariah, who is mentioned in ch. xliii. 2, as the son of Hoshaiah, but Keil supposes that in the latter passage there is an error, and that Jezaiah is the true reading there, in which case there was no such person as Azariah.

would He guide them into a land where they would be at rest.

The prophet heard them, and promised that he would comply with their request: but with the understanding that whatever the reply might be they would acquiesce in it. In the most solemn manner they promised to obey. "The Lord be a true and faithful witness between us; if we do not even according to all things for the which the Lord thy God shall send thee to us" (ver. 5, 6). Were they honest? were they sincere? It is difficult to suppose that they would thus have appealed to the Searcher of Hearts had they been hypocrites; yet in verse 20, according to our version, Jeremiah calls them dissemblers, but the true meaning of his words is not, "ye dissembled in your hearts," nor as the Vulgate, "ye deceived your own souls," but "ye erred at the risk of your souls when ye sent me to the Lord your God." Their fixed desire was to go down into Egypt, and they entertained a hope that the answer the prophet would receive would be favourable to their wishes. They were in error here. No such thought should have been entertained for a moment. They already knew, or might have known, that it was not the Divine will that they should leave the country; and placing themselves under God's protection, they should have remained with perfect confidence and hope.

When already God has intimated to us His will, given us express commands, or laid down vital principles for the guidance of our life and conduct, we

have no right to ask Him to reverse His decision, or to pray for permission to take any other course. But not unfrequently do men wish to take a certain path, and therefore pray that it may be opened to them, though they know beforehand, by the still small voice within, that it is not the will of God. It is a fearful thing, for it is an attempt to make God change His mind. Oh, never pray for what you know God cannot grant! Do not dare to contravene His will or to entertain the wish that His will were otherwise. If He has told you what to do, do it without asking more respecting it, save that you may do it cheerfully and well.

Ten days elapsed ere the answer was returned (ver. 7). It was not the prophet who kept it back, but Jehovah Himself, perhaps to try his faith, or as Calvin says, "that the prophecy might have more weight. The people, by the delay, had more time for reflection over the state of their affairs, and ought to have been the better prepared for the reply. God could always answer the prayers of His servants immediately, but for the wisest reasons He sometimes waits, thus teaching them to be patient and submissive, and calling into exercise their strongest faith."

When the reply came it was decidedly adverse. The people wanted to go down into Egypt;—they were commanded to remain where they were, and not to be afraid of the king of Babylon, for God would deliver them from his hand, and would moreover build them and not pull them down, and plant them and not

pluck them up (ver. 7-12). But if they were determined to go into Egypt, where they imagined they would see no war, the very evils they dreaded would follow them there, and they would die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, so that none would remain or escape (ver. 13-22). How earnest and how faithful was this expostulation! But it was of no avail. These proud men that stood before the prophet had already made up their minds what course to take, and they answered him with the greatest insolence, affirming that God had not spoken to him, but that Baruch had set him against them with a view to deliver them into the hands of the Chaldeans. Thus they charged Jeremiah with falsehood, and Baruch with treachery and wrong. Poor Baruch! what ground had they to accuse him of such perfidy? He was one of the last men to betray his people or to wish for their destruction, for he was a true patriot, and sought only the welfare of his country. Who does not feel indignant at the conduct of these men? They did not wish to be regarded as setting themselves in opposition to the word of God, and therefore, with the basest hypocrisy, they affirmed that He had not spoken, and that it was only against Jeremiah and Baruch that they spoke. "Observe," says Cramer, "the old diabolical trick. When preachers practise God's word and their office with zeal, the world understands how to baptize it with another name and call it *personal interest*, as even here Baruch must bear the blame, as if he only wished to vent his anger on

them and the country." But the witness of God's servants is in heaven, and their record is on high, and they can afford to wait until He vindicates their cause, and comes forth out of His place to silence their accusers.

The result was that the people went into Egypt, where all the words of the prophet were fulfilled. We shall follow them to that country in the last chapter of this work.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE PROPHET'S LAMENTATIONS.

B.C. 586, 585.

WHEN we follow Jeremiah into Egypt, we must pause to consider a portion of his writings, which in the Hebrew Scriptures stand separate from his prophecies as belonging to the Hagiographa and to the poetry of the nation, the peculiarities of which it exhibits in a striking form.

No author's name is affixed to the Lamentations, but tradition affirms that they were written by Jeremiah, and this tradition is accepted by the writers of the Talmud, by the early Church-fathers, and with few exceptions by all later theologians. It was rejected by Ewald, who ascribes the work to Baruch; and we regret to say that Naëgelsbach, in Lange's Series, labours to disprove it.¹ The principal objection to it is founded on diversity of style from that of Jeremiah's prophecies, and from the use of many words not found therein. But, as Keil has shown, the argument is insufficient, nor is it true, as some affirm, that the writer made use of the prophecies

¹ Happily his translators furnish a most valuable antidote, fully maintaining Jeremiah's authorship.

of Ezekiel ; for, though he uses words and expressions found in that prophet, they are only such as were naturally common to both. On the other hand, there is much in the spirit, tone and language of the Lamentations in affinity with his prophecies, and thence we need not hesitate to admit that the work proceeded from his pen.¹

The probable date of the production of these elegies is just after the destruction of Jerusalem. They were not all composed at once, but at brief intervals, and in the order in which they have come down to us. At Mizpah, whilst the horrors of the siege were still fresh upon his mind, and his grief was such as he could scarcely bear, the devoted patriot may well have given his time and his thoughts to the writing of such strains, and may have found some measure of relief therein. His object, doubtless, was "to rouse his fellow-countrymen to an acknowledgment of God's justice in this visitation, to keep them from despair under the burden of unutterable woe, and by teaching them how to give due submission to the judgment that had befallen them, to lead once more to God, those who would not let themselves be brought to Him through His precious testimony regarding that judgment while it was yet pending" (Keil).

The Hebrew title of the book is *Echah*,—Alas!—how!—the word with which the first, second, and

¹ The student is directed to Keil's Introduction ; to Horne, vol. ii. Ayre's edit. : and to the Art. "Lamentations" in Smith's Dict. of the Bible, by Mr Plumptre.

fourth chapters begin. By the LXX. it is called *Threnoi*, a word from which we derive *threnody*,—a lamentation. The Vulgate, and other versions, give it a similar title, as also do the Jewish rabbis, who call it *Kinoth*.

It consists of five distinct elegies, after the style of David's over Jonathan and Saul, but having respect, not to persons, but to the country and its metropolis. They were composed for a time which was to be spent in penitence and sorrow. Jerusalem was in ashes; the majority of her inhabitants were captives in a foreign country, and a long deep wail of national distress had been heard throughout the land. The prophet would therefore lead the sorrowing ones to a proper knowledge of their guilt, and then to confidence and hope in Him who alone could raise them from their fall. In the most touching strains, he describes the afflictions of his people, and pours forth the pleadings of his soul for the Divine mercy and compassion.

The form in which the work is composed is very remarkable. The first four of these five songs are arranged alphabetically, after the manner of several of the psalms. Ewald affirms that this style of composition was now adopted for the first time; but Psalms xxv. and xxxiv., both which are acrostical, are ascribed to David, nor is there sufficient reason to doubt that they were his.¹ It was, however, a

¹ Psalms ix., x., xxxvii., cxii., cxix., and cxlv., are also alphabetical, though the arrangement is not carried out perfectly in every instance.

peculiar form of the Hebrew poetry, which lasted for some time, and is said to have been found among the later Samaritans.¹

The first, second, and fourth chapters of the Lamentations are written in strophes of three lines each, the first two lines being sapphics, and the third in heroic metre; whilst every such strophe or verse begins with the letters of the alphabet in their order. Attempts have been made to translate these chapters into our own and other languages in this form, the alphabeticism being reproduced, but they have failed, as it is impossible to do this, and to give a faithful version at the same time. We may, however, venture to give the first three strophes as follows:—

- ⌘ Alas ! how solitary doth the city sit that was full of people.
How is she become as a widow that was great among the
nations !
How is she become tributary that was princess among the
provinces !
- ⌚ Bitterly she weepeth in the night, and her tears are on her
cheeks.
Among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her.
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her ; they are
become her enemies.
- ⌚ Gone into captivity is Judah, because of affliction, and
because of her servitude ;
She dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest.
All her persecutors overtook her between the straits.

In the third chapter, which is the kernel of the whole work, this alphabetic verse system is carried

¹ Ewald, see Etheridge's Hebrew Literature, p. 368.

out in another form; each letter occurring three times in succession, so that the entire chapter consists of sixty-six verses. The following version of the first nine verses, taken from Keil's Commentary, will be sufficient as a specimen of the whole chapter:—

- נ 1 I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His
 wrath.
 נ 2 Me hath He led, and brought through darkness, and not
 light.
 נ 3 Only against me He repeatedly turneth His hand all the day.
 ד 4 He hath wasted away my flesh and my skin; He hath
 broken my bones.
 ד 5 He hath builded up round about me poison and toil.
 ד 6 He hath made me sit down in darkness, like those for
 ever dead.
 ד 7 He hath edged me about, so that I cannot get out; He
 hath made my chain heavy.
 ד 8 Moreover, when I cry and shout, He obstructeth my
 prayer.
 ד 9 He hath walled round my ways with hewn stone, He hath
 subverted my paths.

It is remarkable that in the second, third, and fourth chapters there is a deviation from the order in which the letters stand in the Hebrew alphabet, the verses beginning with ד, standing before those beginning with נ. By some this has been attributed to forgetfulness, by others to an oversight on the part of the copyist; but the fact is that the poet, in these instances, broke away from the restraints he had imposed upon himself, as did the writers of some of the alphabetical psalms. It was an exceedingly diffi-

cult thing to write poetry in this form ; and sometimes required, it may be, hours of thought, to find the word wanted with which to begin the line. Why, then, was it adopted? one will be disposed to ask. Partly to assist the memory in the chanting of such songs ; but chiefly as a discipline for the mind of the writer, who found pleasure in carrying out the rules he had laid down for himself, as did Milton in writing his beautiful sonnets, and Tennyson in composing "In Memoriam."

Of these five poems themselves it is impossible to speak too highly. They are full of impassioned emotion. The Prophet of Sorrow appears here in his true character as one of the greatest patriots of his age ; and, as we listen to his mournful strains, we can scarcely refrain from weeping with him, whilst the notes of confidence and joy in God, which he introduces in the midst of his grief, seem to lift us out of the valley on to the hill of blessing upon which the rays of the morning sun already fall.

"In that fixed attitude of grief which Michael Angelo has immortalised,"¹ says Dean Stanley, "we may well suppose the prophet to have mourned the fall of his country." Tradition says that he sat in a grotto in the face of a rocky hill on the western side of Jerusalem ; but it is far more probable that he had retired to Mizpah, whence he would look toward the city, as Daniel did from the open window of his house in Babylon ; but with deeper sadness though with

¹ See the Frontispiece.

equal hopes. An exposition of these elegies we shall not attempt; an analysis, with an extended observation here and there, will be in harmony with our general plan, as it will lead us to dwell on the different phases of Jeremiah's grief.

I. The speaker is not the prophet himself, but the daughter of Zion, who bewails the destruction of the city, the nation, and the temple. The song is divided into two equal parts: ver. 1-11, describing the wretched condition of the city, and ver. 12-22, the lamentation over it. Jerusalem has fallen; she sits like a solitary widow; she pines in sadness, for her children have forsaken her, and her friends have become her foes. Her inhabitants and those of the whole country have gone into captivity, but there they find no rest; and now the highways leading to Zion mourn, and all her gates are desolate, for none go up to her solemn feasts; her priests therefore sigh, and her virgins, who were wont to sing and dance at her national festivals, are now full of bitter grief and sorrow. She now thinks of former times, but the remembrance of them only increases her distress; and the bitterest ingredient in her cup is that she suffers for her sins, and is brought low because of her transgressions. Such is the strain of the first part of this elegy; and we have no sympathy with the man who is unaffected by so mournful a calamity. Stoicism is no sign of wisdom or of greatness. Jeremiah sets us an example of the commiseration we should feel for the woes of others, and teaches us to weep with those who weep. Nor are

occasions 'wanting in our day for such emotions. Cities are falling still ; war is desolating the nations still ; and still the cry of sorrow and distress rises from thousands of the human race.

Ver. 12-22. Jerusalem still speaks, and as Keil renders the words, calls aloud and says—"Do ye not observe what has befallen me?" etc. etc. Our version reads, "*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?*" the words in italics being supplied.¹ It is a summons to all who are passing to look upon and consider Zion's sorrow. She justly demands a share in the pity and compassion of spectators. (M. Henry). George Herbert in "The Sacrifice" thus applies these words to the sufferings of our Lord :—

"Oh all ye who pass by, whose eyes and mind
To worldly things are sharp, but to Me blind,
To Me who took eyes that you might find :
Was ever grief like Mine?"

And Bishop Andrewes has a remarkable Passion sermon on the text, in which he justifies this application of it on "the ground of that correspondence which is between Christ and the patriarchs, prophets, and people before Christ, of whom the apostle's rule is *omnia in figura contingebant illis* ; "that they were themselves types," and their sufferings "forerunning figures of the great sufferings of the Son of God."² Doubtless Zion's sorrow exceeded all other sorrow, and

¹ It is doubtful whether anything can be better than this rendering. Numerous criticisms on the passage will be found in Keil and Naëgelbach.

² Sermons, vol. ii. p. 139, Parker, 1841.

was fully realised in Christ when He hung upon the cross of shame. The poet proceeds to speak (ver. 13-24) of the cause of Zion's grief,—even her own transgressions, and then he represents her as lifting up her hands as if to implore help; but there is none to comfort her; and she confesses that the LORD is righteous, and then makes her appeal to Him, and entreats that all the wickedness of her enemies—the Chaldeans—may come before Him. It is said of Mauricius Tiberius that after seeing his five sons massacred, and as he himself was about to be beheaded, he was heard to exclaim, "Thou art just, O LORD, and Thy judgments are without partiality." Happy they who, when their sighs are many and their hearts faint, can say "Thou hast done it, and Thou art righteous, O LORD!" Directly or indirectly all calamities come from God, and He is holy in all His ways, and righteous in all His works.

II. In the second elegy the destruction of the city is described, and is specially attributed to the Lord Jehovah. The chapter is divided into two equal parts, and the wail becomes louder and sadder towards the close.

Vcr. 1-10. Alas, the LORD in His anger hath covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud! Then follows a description of the judgment, in which all secondary causes are almost lost sight of in the recognition of the avenging hand of God. "The Lord hath done it," is the key-note of the strain; and the elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground and

keep silence, whilst the virgins have laid aside all their gaiety, and hang down their heads in the dust.

Is there evil in the city and the Lord hath not done it? To attribute the calamities of life to chance, or fate, or human instrumentality, and thus to deny that God's hand is in them, is part of the scepticism of the age we live in; but it is repudiated by every Christian mind, whose language in reference to every calamity is, "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth because Thou didst it." And the recognition of this fact brings far more consolation than its denial can. Not in complete despondency did the prophet utter, in the name of Jerusalem, these doleful lamentations, just because he acknowledged God in his afflictions. There was hope even in the night of gloom, because Jehovah Himself had visited His people with the rod.

Ver. 11-22. In the second part of this poem the prophet laments the impotency of human comfort, and is grieved on account of the scoffing of the enemies of Jerusalem, over her misfortunes. "All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that wore all the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?" The wicked always triumph over the fall of their enemies, and the deeper the fall the louder is the triumph. Under such circumstances it is to God only that we can turn. The LORD had sent this judgment on Jerusalem, and He alone could give comfort and relief. To Him therefore "their heart cried." It is the heart that God

hears, not the voice ; and, O how piteously it cries here ! It appeals for mercy on behalf of the poor women, who under dire necessity were compelled to eat their infant children, and on behalf of the priests and the prophets, who were slain in the temple of the LORD. All the terrible powers of Jehovah had come upon Judah—sword, pestilence, and famine, in the midst of one of their solemn festivals ; and no one could escape the terrors of that fearful day. "Here," says one, "we have a lesson, when, to whom, and how we ought to pray." Prayer must not cease even in the direst trouble, but rather increase in importunacy as our sorrows multiply. But not to saints, or martyrs, or angels must we turn. He who visits us with chastisements can alone remove them ; and with tears and sighs must we appeal to Him, laying open before Him, as if He knew them not, all the causes of our grief, that thus we may excite His pity and compassion. That heaven can look upon the miseries of mankind, occasioned though they are by sin and transgression, and not relieve them, is a mystery we cannot solve ; and specially do we stagger at the fact that in times of war the least guilty suffer the most ; but the end is not yet ; and by and by—that is, in a future state of being—God will adjust all things and make them right. The doctrine of a life beyond the present is the only solution of the problems which arise respecting this.

III. The third poem is the culminating point of the whole book. The prophet himself speaks, but in the

name of the godly, over whose grievous sufferings he laments. The following remarks of Ewald, quoted by Keil, contain, says the latter, both the deepest truth and the key to the proper understanding of this poem, and its position in the middle of the Lamentations:—"In consequence of experiences most peculiarly his own, the individual may indeed at first make complaint, in such a way that, as here, still deeper despair for the third time begins (ver. 1-18); but, by the deepest meditation for himself on the eternal relation of God to men, he may also very readily come to the due acknowledgment of his own sins and the necessity for repentance, and thereby also to believing prayer. Who is this individual that complains, and thinks, and entreats in this fashion, whose *I* passes unobserved, but quite appropriately, into *we*? O man, it is the very image of thyself! Every one must now speak and think as he does. Thus it is just by this address, which commences in the most doleful tones, that sorrow for the first time, and imperceptibly, has passed into true prayer."

This song consists of three parts, in the first of which, ver. 1-18, the poet, or the person whom he represents, describes his own personal sufferings which he attributes to Jehovah, who, however, is only named at the close. He is the man who "saw affliction," who had experienced misery; and that the prophet himself was conspicuously that man the whole of his history declares. He was not, however, the only one. Others shared these calamities with him, and, though they

were not the less trying on that account, yet he doubtless admitted the fact, and was not one of those who are disposed to think that their trials are greater than those of their fellow-men around them. It is not well to indulge the thought. "Every heart knoweth its own bitterness;" and to individualise one's sufferings and say, "I am the man," has a tendency to make one indifferent to those of others. There was one, and only one who could say, "I am the man;" and of Him, the Great Sufferer, Jeremiah may here also be considered as the type.

In the second part of the poem, ver. 19-42, the prophet can again pray. Our version is at fault here, and the marginal reading is correct. "Remember mine affliction and my misery," etc. The morning dawns, and the day of hope in the Divine mercy gradually rises on the poet's mind. How beautiful is this language! "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness" (ver. 22, 23). Another of Bishop Andrewes' remarkable discourses is founded on these words, and Keble had them in his mind when he wrote:

"New mercies each returning day
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven."

And now the prophet rises into a moment's rapture, acknowledges Jehovah as the portion of his soul, and declares that He is good to them that seek Him. It

is therefore "good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD." How lofty is this strain, and how full of consolation to the believer in all ages. Nothing higher is to be found even in the psalms, and if the poet could have kept his foot upon this elevated mount he would soon have forgotten the calamities of the times. Quoting, as it were, the ninety-fourth psalm, he says, "for the LORD will not cast off for ever;" "but," he adds, "though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion, . . . for He doth not from His heart afflict or grieve the children of men" (ver. 31-33). What a joy is it to be assured of this! The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to these words (ch. xii. 10), and tells us that chastisements do not arise from the arbitrary will and pleasure of God; but are designed for our profit, "that we might be partakers of His holiness." But what of the sorrows inflicted upon us by the malice of our fellow-men? The Lord does not approve of them, says the poet; yet who is he that speaks and it is done, if the Lord commands it not? "The evils enumerated in ver. 34-36 had not, then, befallen those who suffered them without God's consent." Evil and good,—that is, physical evil and good,—both proceed out of the mouth of God, and no man has any right to complain for the punishment of his sins, whatever form that punishment may take, or from whatever source it may seem to spring. "Let us search and try our ways," says the prophet, "and turn again to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God" in prayer.

(ver. 40, 41). "Hardened sinners," says Augustine, "mock God ; they do not pray to Him." That only is true prayer which is presented from the heart and with hands unstained and pure. The words of verse 42 are transitional and the pronouns are emphatic ; "*We* have transgressed ; *we* have rebelled ; *Thou* hast not pardoned," and the prayer then passes on to the third part of the elegy.

Verses 43-66. God had not pardoned. He had covered Himself as with impenetrable clouds which no prayer could pass through. Such is the meaning of ver. 42-44 ; and then follows a strain of lamentation and sorrow, for "as the evening twilight deepens into night, so the discourse of the poet passes over from the bright daylight of consolation, which irradiates the noble central section of the book, back again into the gloomy description of those sufferings with which Israel and the prophet of the Lord were punished."¹ Very piteous are some of the expressions used in this section ; but it is not to his personal sufferings that Jeremiah refers even in ver. 52, 53 ; but to those of his people also ; and he closes with a prayer for deliverance from their enemies, and for their utter extermination from under the heavens of Jehovah. But may we then pray for the destruction of our enemies ? We should doubtless pray for their conversion first ; but if they continue to rage against God and His people, we may then entreat Him to cut them off, and thus to fulfil His own purposes of

¹ Naëgelsbach ; comp. Keil.

righteousness, even as did the Psalmist when he said, "Surely Thou wilt slay the wicked, O God" (Ps. cxxxix. 19).

IV. In this chapter, or elegy, the fate of the several classes of the population is described ; but the guilt of Zion was greater than that of Sodom, and therefore her punishment was richly deserved. The song begins with the same word, *Echah*, Alas-how ! The inhabitants of Zion (ver. 1, 2) are compared to gold, to fine gold, to the best gold ; three different words being here used for gold ; but the gold has become dim—has lost its lustre and appears tarnished. They were like the sacred stones of the temple, but they are scattered at the top of every street, and are treated as earthenware pots, the work of the potter, not of God. How have the mothers of Jerusalem behaved towards their children ? With less affection than the *jackals* treat their young, for such is the meaning of the word rendered in our version *sea-monsters* ; and like the female ostrich which lays her eggs in the sand and leaves them to be hatched by the sun (comp. Job xxxix. 13–18), they have become cruel enough to forget their infants, so that they perish in the streets for thirst and hunger (ver. 3, 4). In the second strophe (ver. 7–11) the poet describes the misery that has come upon the princes, who were purer than snow, whiter than milk, more ruddy than coral, and brilliant like the sapphire ; but now are blacker than a coal, so that they are not recognised in the streets. The misery of the women was still

more horrible, for, dying of hunger, they boiled their own children for food ; and thus had the Lord poured out His fury to the utmost upon the devoted city. In ver. 13-20, this judgment is described as a consequence of the sins of the prophets and the priests, who vainly trusted in the help of man ; yet it is not all over with Israel, and with "a Messianic hope," as Ewald calls it, the elegy concludes. The daughter of Edom (ver. 21) is addressed as the representative of the enemies of God's people, and to her the prophet says, "Rejoice as much as thou pleasest, yet thou shalt not escape, for the cup of suffering shall pass over to thee also, and thou shalt drink it" (comp. Jer. xxv. 15). But what of Zion ? Her punishment has come to an end, and she will no more be led into captivity (ver. 22). In the times of the Messiah, as the Chaldee paraphrase points out, will Israel's guilt be fully atoned for, and the daughter of Zion gathered into the fold of her tender Shepherd, to be scattered no more among the nations of the earth.¹ Those times have come, and the prophecy is being fulfilled ; but far brighter days are yet to dawn upon God's ancient people, for, together with the fulness of the Gentiles they shall be gathered into the fold, and shall make one flock under one Shepherd (John x. 16).

V. In the last chapter the alphabetical form is not adopted ; but, free from all trammels of such a nature, the prophet pleads with God in prayer, describing

¹ See Keil, Naëgelsbach, and also Calvin.

the condition of the people, acknowledging their guilt and sin, and entreating the mercy of Him who remains for ever, and whose throne will stand from generation to generation. For a long time He had forsaken them; but would He utterly reject them? "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old" (ver. 21, 22). The marginal reading of ver. 22 is, "Wilt Thou utterly reject us?" and this must be the meaning of the prophet; or "we must regard these closing words as one last plaintive cry for mercy—*unless Thou hast utterly rejected us*, who are now in misery, and hast become exceedingly angry with us, so that Thy wrath cannot be appeased."¹ This, however, He had not done; and if He would turn them they would be turned; but all depended upon this. Of ourselves we have fallen, but of God we rise again. Never does the sinner take a step towards his recovery until the Spirit of God influences his mind, reveals to him his true condition, and enkindles in his breast a desire for the holiness he has lost.

I have but briefly glanced at these remarkable elegies, than which nothing more pathetic is to be found in the literature of any country. Their importance, as part of the canon of Holy Scripture, has been admitted in all ages. The Jewish synagogue appointed that the book should be read on the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem; and we learn from Keil and others that the United Evangelical

¹ Dr Hornblower, in Naëgelsbach's Commentary.

Church of Germany has received a portion of them into its ritual for Passion-week, concluding each of the lessons read with the words *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum*. Our English literature abounds with discourses founded on some verse or other in these chapters; and many of our most plaintive hymns echo the strains that pervade these wondrous songs. Nor need we be surprised at this, for the book is full of solemn warnings for all ages, while it expresses in very significant language the deplorable consequences of transgression against the God of heaven. Its more hopeful notes, however, are those we love to dwell upon, and especially cheering are the rays that burst from the midst of it, as from behind a cloud, which shed light upon the Divine procedure, and teach us that the compassions of Jehovah never fail. There are but three references to the book in the New Testament, and those only indirect. Rev. xiv. 19, 20, and xix. 15, are both apparently allusions to Lam. i. 15; and Heb. xii. 10, an allusion, if nothing more, to Lam. iii. 33. But it is not surprising that we find no quotations from it by New Testament writers, when we consider that its tone is altogether sad, with the single exception to which reference has been made. It belongs to a period of intense sorrow, and has therefore little in common with the glory of the New Testament economy.

CHAPTER XVII.

FOREIGN NATIONS.

B.C. 600, 588.

FROM the earliest times the nations of the earth were more or less in direct antagonism with the chosen race. That race grew up under the thralldom of Egypt, and Egypt was its enemy in later years. In the wilderness it encountered the hostility of the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites; and it had no sooner conquered the land of Canaan, than the Philistines, whom it failed to drive out, were frequently at war with it; whilst, in course of time, the Assyrians led captive the ten tribes of Israel, and then the Babylonians invaded Judea, and ultimately razed its capital and its temple to the ground. It was the struggle between the Church and the world,—a struggle which in other forms is going on to-day; and alas! then, as now, the corruption of the Church often made it an easier prey to its foes, and in numerous instances God gave it up to their malignity and power, using them as His instruments of vengeance, and then setting them aside. That they were His instruments they neither knew nor

cared to know, their only object being to carry out their ambitious projects and to enrich themselves. The Most High often uses bad men to bring about His grand designs, whilst, at the same time *their* motives are the most selfish, and they are only filling up the measure of their guilt. On them, therefore, His ire at length falls, and having accomplished His purposes, they are utterly swept away.

That the great prophets of the Jewish nation—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, with several others—should denounce the crimes of foreign nations and predict their downfall is, then, by no means surprising; and how Jeremiah does this we have already seen in part, and must now further explain as far as our limits will permit. His prophecies, ch. xlv.–li., appear to have been uttered at different times, and were probably committed to writing by Baruch. To the Christian student they are full of interest, and they contain passages of real poetry often tragic in its character and overwhelming in its power. Let it not be thought that such portions of the Inspired Word are destitute of interest to ourselves. Superficial readers of the Bible will pass them by, keeping only to what has been called the beaten track of favourite chapters and verses; but students will turn to them with the expectation of finding precious gems of truth even here, and will not be disappointed in their search. As in nature there are regions seldom trodden by the feet of man,—the beauties of which

he seldom sees, and the melodies of which he seldom hears,—so there are portions of inspired truth, which, if not wholly, are comparatively unknown, but which yield to those who study them rich lessons of instruction, and valuable material for reflection and for thought. Such, I believe, are these wonderful prophecies against the old foes of the people of God; and though some of them have been briefly adverted to already, yet we may look at them here in their collective form with advantage in more respects than one.

These prophecies open with a general title to the whole,—“against the Gentiles” (ch. xlii. 1); and the first judgment pronounced is against EGYPT, the earliest of the enemies of the chosen race. The chapter contains two prophecies, the first of which (ver. 2–12) relates to the battle of Carchemish, in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, when the army of Pharaoh-Necho was defeated, to which reference has been already made. It is not, as some have affirmed, a picture of an event which had already occurred, but a prophecy revealed to Jeremiah and uttered by him prior to its occurrence. The second of these prophecies (ver. 13–28) was uttered subsequently, and depicts in striking colours the invasion of Egypt by the king of Babylon, to which we shall refer in the next chapter. A very remarkable figure is here used. Nebuchadnezzar is compared to Tabor among the mountains, and to Carmel by the sea;—Tabor rising from the plain of Esdraelon, 1805 feet above

the level of the sea, and Carmel looking out over the Mediterranean as a watch-tower in loftiness and strength. Thus would the king of Babylon appear from the north flinging before him a mighty shadow, and presenting an appearance of such majesty and power as would make Egypt tremble with dismay. Then Egypt is compared (ver. 20) to a beautiful young heifer, fed in a fair and fertile country, but the gad-fly comes from the north, for such is the meaning of the word rendered "destruction," and the mercenaries of Egypt betake themselves to flight. What is the result? Egypt lies on the ground, making a noise like a serpent among fallen leaves, and fleeing before the wood-cutters who come to hew down her forests,—her multitudes of people whose numbers cannot be told. But there is a promise for Israel here. Jehovah is their deliverer, and, whatever becomes of the nations of the earth, they shall be preserved though not left wholly unpunished (ver. 27, 28).¹ "That which is in Israel as in other nations," says one, "passes away, and only that which it has above other nations remains eternal. Jeremiah prophesies most against Egypt, Moab, and Babylon, in which the wealth, the jealous, scoffing manner of the mean world and the cavalier spirit of great States is rebuked. He who rightly understands this, sees here, not sermons addressed to generations long since passed away, but to the natural humanity streaming through this world, as it is continually presented with

¹ Compare ch. xxx. 10, 11.

new names, and yet, always with the same carnal impulses and based on the same unreason. To him who thus understands Jeremiah, he is again alive, and the Jewish legend is fulfilled that Jeremiah must come again before the Messianic kingdom can bloom up again in glory."

THE PHILISTINES, who occupied the coast of Palestine, and whose capital was Gaza, are the next people against whom Jeremiah lifts up his voice (ch. xlvii.), but to this prophecy I have already referred, as one of the earliest against foreign nations.¹ Keil maintains that the Pharaoh here mentioned was Pharaoh-Hophra, who sought to avenge the defeat of Necho, his predecessor, on the Chaldeans, and to extend the power of Egypt in Asia. But that the victory over Gaza was one gained by Pharaoh-Necho himself is the generally received opinion; and the Philistines deserved the chastisement they received, if only for their hostility to the people of God.² But they were an idolatrous people—worshippers of Dagon the fish-god, who had the face and hands of a man, and the tail of a fish.³ One of the temples of this god was at Gaza, and another at Ashdod, or Azotes, the latter of which was destroyed by Jonathan in the times of the Maccabees, who set fire to it and to the city.⁴ "Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation," said the contemporary prophet

¹ See p. 70 of this volume.

² Comp. Ezek. xxv. 15.

³ 1 Sam. v. 4.

⁴ 1 Mac. x. 33; xi. 4.

Zephaniah; "they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon-day, and Ekron shall be rooted up" (ch. ii. 4); and again "The LORD will be terrible unto them; He will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship Him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen" (ver. 11). Has not this prediction been fulfilled? Where are the gods of the Canaanites and the Philistines? Where are the gods of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon? nay, where are the gods of Greece and Rome, once so mighty in their pride? Have they not been literally "famished"? Are not their places and their name unknown? And in like manner will God famish the gods of modern heathenism—of India, China, and the Islands of the sea, and the day is hastening on when men shall indeed worship Him, and Him alone. Let the heralds of the Cross take courage. These ancient prophecies belong to us, and we are beholding their wider accomplishment in the spread of Christian truth, and in the desolation of the once famous temples of Vishnu, Siva, and Brahma. The missionary enterprise of the nineteenth century is being crowned with victory almost everywhere, and Hindooism, in its proudest forms, is beginning to yield to the power of that Gospel which is destined to flood the world with its light.

Against MOAB is the next prophecy (ch. xlviii.)¹ The Moabites who occupied the territory east of the

¹ Comp. also Ezek. xxv. 8, 9.

Dead Sea were in hostility to the Israelites from the earliest times, and continued to be so, a few brief intervals excepted, to the times in which the prophet lived. The story of this people is full of interest, but it would require a chapter to give it even in a very brief form; and my object is rather to dwell on this prophecy. Already the prophets Amos (ii. 1-3), and Isaiah (xv. xvi.), had predicted the destruction of this race, and it is supposed by some critics that an earlier prophecy formed the basis of the prophecies both of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The ancient prophecies were now about to be fulfilled by the invasion of Palestine by the Chaldeans, and Jeremiah therefore takes them up anew, and "reproduces them in his own peculiar manner," as Keil observes, pouring forth a torrent of overwhelming words indicative of strong emotions both of anger and of grief. The chief cities whose names are given are laid waste (ver. 1-5); the inhabitants are summoned to flee for their lives, but in vain, for their god Chemosh shall go into captivity, and all their cities shall be a desolation (ver. 6-10). Here occurs a warning for all men in every country and in every age. "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD unwisely, or deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood." The work of the Lord primarily referred to was the devastation of Moab, and it was to be done thoroughly; and thus must every work of the Lord be done. Woe to him who does the work of the Lord, whatever its specific nature may be, negligently,

from pride, cowardice, or worldly interests.¹ God must be served with all the energies we possess both of body and of mind, for "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. xv. 22).

The character of Moab is depicted in a striking figure (ver. 11-13). He has been at ease from his youth. He is like spoiled wine that has not been drawn off from vessel to vessel, so that the lees have not settled down, and it has undergone no change of taste or of fragrance. Such wine would be utterly worthless; but the days were coming when the stagnation of Moab should be broken, and he should be put to shame by the very god Chemosh in which he trusted. It is not good either for nations or for individual men to settle on their lees, to be subject to no changes,—to experience no conflicts, troubles, or afflictions. A contrast has been drawn between China and England,—the former "standing motionless for ages," the latter "emptied from vessel to vessel," and thereby reformed and re-reformed, until it has become "the foremost and the mightiest of all the nations of the earth." It is by the struggles and sorrows of human life that men and nations are made truly great; and therefore ought we to be glad when we are visited with changes that disturb our rest. There is rest for us, but it is only in God through Christ. Look, too, at the vanity of all human glory (ver.

¹ See on this passage (Jer. xlviii. 10) a remarkable discourse by Bishop Jer. Taylor.

14-17). It is turned to shame, and "the strong staff" of Moab, "the beautiful rod" of which he had made his boast, was broken; and now the fugitives fly to Arnon, for judgment falls on all the cities of the land (ver. 18-25).¹ And why? Because of his pride, his loftiness, and his arrogance (ver. 26-30). He must therefore leave his cities, and take refuge in the rocks, becoming like a dove that builds its nest on the sides of a deep ravine. Pride is sure to fall; arrogance will certainly be put down. God seems to bear long, oftentimes, with such sins; but in the end He visits them, and the boaster of his greatness is laid low in the dust.²

Moab is utterly destroyed, and even over it the prophet weeps (ver. 31-35). Not for the northern part of the country only, but for "all Moab" he cries out and mourns. Kir-heres was the stronghold of Moab (Isa. xvi. 11), and is supposed to be represented by the modern Kerek-Sibmah, which was doubtless celebrated for its vines, and was near to Heshbon, fifteen miles from which was also the Sea of Jazer, probably a pond so-called, for no inland lake has been discovered. There would be weeping here, but that of the prophet would even exceed it. In the expression—"Thy plants are gone over the sea," etc., the extensive cultivation of the grape is set forth

¹ The names of many of the cities here mentioned are confirmed by the Moabite stone recently discovered in the neighbourhood of Dibon. It contains an inscription giving an account of a victory obtained by king Mesha over Omri king of Israel. See 2 Kings iii.

² Comp. Dan. iv. 30, 31.

under the figure of a vine whose tendrils stretch out on all sides, but now it is at an end, and the joy, and gladness, and shouting of those who tread the wine-press, should cease, and instead of it a wailing should be heard from Heshbon to Elealeh, towns which were built on hills two miles distant from each other. Nay, it would reach even unto Jahaz far to the south-west of Heshbon. Several travellers speak of a place called Morit Numere, situated at the south end of the Dead Sea, where there is a stream fed by a spring. This is probably identical with the waters of Nimrim here mentioned, which would become a desolation because the enemy would fill up the spring with earth. Thus Moab would suffer to such an extent that its idolaters would cease, and incense be offered to its gods no more.

The prophet further laments over its downfall (ver. 36-38). Isaiah had said, "My bowels shall sound like a harp for Moab" (xvi. 11); Jeremiah says, "Mine heart shall sound for Moab like pipes," instruments which were used in funeral dirges, for Moab would become like a vessel in which there is no more pleasure. And from this destruction there shall be no escape (ver. 39-47). The enemy rushes down upon Kerioth like an eagle, and the hearts of its heroes tremble, and he that flees falls into a pit or spring-trap from which no deliverance will come.¹ The words of ver. 46, "Woe unto thee, Moab," etc, are the words of Balaam against Moab,² whose predictions so ancient

¹ Comp. Isa. xxiv. 17, 18.

² Num. xxi. 29.

and so-long forgotten are now about to be fulfilled. And when were these prophecies against Moab fulfilled? Josephus says¹ that Nebuchadnezzar made war upon the Moabites five years after the destruction of Jerusalem; and we have no reason to doubt the general accuracy of his statement. Moab perished of national pride, producing contempt of God and of the great principles of morality; and many nations far mightier have perished in like manner even in the times in which we live.

AMMON, the brother-nation of the Moabites (Gen. xix. 37), is to share their fate (chap. xlix. 1-6). They, too, oppressed Israel in the period of the Judges; and in the days of Samuel besieged Jabesh-Gilead, but were defeated by Saul (1 Sam. ii.) At a later period, when the ten tribes were carried captive into Assyria, the Ammonites had taken possession of the country formerly inhabited by Gad and Reuben, and now the war-shout was to be heard against its chief city Rabbah;² and Ai, another of its cities, would be utterly spoiled, whilst Melcom, or the king, for such is the meaning of the word, would be led into captivity together with the priests and princes.³ Ammon gloried in

¹ Antiq. x. 7, 9.

² This Rabbah, called the city of waters, was taken by Joab after a long siege (2 Sam. xii. 27, 1 Chron. xx. 1, 2). It is now represented by some ruins called Ammon, twenty-two miles east of the Jordan. Ai has not been identified.

³ Comp. the earlier prophecies against Ammon, Amos i. 13-15, Zeph. ii. 9, 10, and also the later one, Ezek. xxv. 1-10.

her flowery valley, which, being well-watered, produced large crops of corn ; and, trusting in her treasures, said, Who will come near to do me any harm ? But the Lord of hosts would bring a fear upon her ; and her inhabitants would wander forth, and no one would gather them up. Nations and communities often boast of their possessions, and think themselves impregnable against the tide of war, but it comes notwithstanding, and they are swept away as with an overwhelming flood.

EDOM is next threatened (ver. 7-22.) This prophecy is partly a reproduction of that of Obadiah, ver. 1-9, whilst it also looks back on the words of Balaam, "Edom also shall be a possession" (Num. xxiv. 18). The descendants of Esau were a proud people, boasting of their wisdom, and of their rocky fastnesses, in which, like the eagle, they built their nests. But in Teman, the home of the wise Eliphaz, wisdom should cease ; and from the height of their hill Jehovah would bring them down. The rock-city Petra in the Wady-Musa has been described by modern travellers, and probably there is an allusion to it here. It was originally called Sela, and was the great stronghold of the Edomites, whilst Bozrah, now marked by the village of Buseirah, twenty-five miles south of Kerak, was their ancient capital. But in vain would they try to hide themselves from the approaching foe. Edom would become a desolation, and every one would be astonished at its mighty overthrow. The Deda-

rites, a neighbouring tribe, who were accustomed to pass through her territories on their trading expeditions, would be compelled to return, and the widows and orphans of the men who fell in battle would be left dependent on the LORD'S care, who would not fail to sustain and keep them. The overthrow of Edom would be like that of Sodom and Gomorrah; for the foe would come up like a lion from the thicket of the Jordan, against whom no shepherd would be able to stand; and like an eagle would spread his wings over Bozrah and presently light upon his prey. In the day of Jerusalem the children of Edom had said, "Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof" (Ps. cxxxvii. 7, Ezek. xxv. 12); now the Lord was about to remember their words, as indeed He had done before. "He had spared them," says Calvin, "from the time the children of Israel came up from Egypt; and when they denied a passage to them, the children of Israel made a long circuit with great inconvenience that they might not touch their land;" but they had never acknowledged their kindness, and, though Esau and Jacob were brethren, the ancient feud was still cherished: now therefore God's patience was exhausted, and Edom would be ruined without future hope. The prophecy was fulfilled first by the invasion of the land by the Chaldeans (Mal. i. 3), whilst at a later period the Maccabeans conquered it,¹ and later still the Romans, about the time of the

¹ 1 Mac. v. 65, 66. Josephus, Antiq. xii. 8, &c. Comp. also the prophecies of Ezek. ch. xxxv.

Jewish war, who completed its devastation, so that Idumea as a people ceased to exist.

Shorter prophecies now follow in this chapter against DAMASCUS, the far-famed city of the north, or rather against the territory of which it was the capital; against Hamath, the Epiphaneia of the Greeks, now called Hamah, north of Emesa on the Orontes; and against Arpad, now Arfad, fifteen miles north of Aleppo (ver. 23-27). As there is sorrow on the sea, so there should be no quietness here; for terror should seize Damascus, her warriors should fall in the streets, and a fire should break out upon her walls which should consume the palaces of Benhadad, or the Syrian kings.

Next KEDAR is threatened (ver. 28-33), a region situated between Arabia-Petræa and Babylonia, occupied by a nomadic tribe descended from Ishmael.¹ The kingdoms of Hazor are supposed to refer to those Arab tribes who lived a more settled life, and were governed by their own sheikhs. These Nebuchadnezzar smote, but at what particular time there is no correct evidence to show.

Concerning ELAM (ch. xlix. 34-39), the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah. To this prophecy I have already referred;² and have only to observe further that if

¹ Gen. xxv. 13; Ezek. xxvii. 21.

² See p. 139.

closes with the words: "But it shall come to pass in the latter days that I will bring again the captivity of Elam, saith the LORD." By "the latter days" we are to understand the days of the Messiah, and some have thought that the prediction was fulfilled, in part, by the visit of the Magi, who were no doubt Persians, to the birth-place of our LORD, there to present to Him their homage and their gifts (Matt. ii. 1, 2). And on the day of Pentecost there were present at Jerusalem Parthians, and Medes, and *Elamites* who had already become Jewish proselytes, and were now received into the Christian Church. Were they the first-fruits of a still larger ingathering of this people to the fold of Christ? He is to sway His sceptre over all nations, and the modern Persians, who are probably the representatives of the Elamites, will one day hear and receive the truth. The Shah of that country has visited England, and the far-reaching results of that visit, even in relation to Christianity, may be of vast benefit to his people.

We now come to the great prophecy against BABYLON (ch. 1, li.), the genuineness of which has been denied, but on grounds utterly untenable. A brief reference to it was made before, when I observed that it is the grandest of Jeremiah's invectives on the enemies of God's people, and it is full of wondrous images depicting the deliverance of Israel, after a period of seventy years, from the

Chaldean yoke, on the one hand ; and on the other, the fall of Babylon itself by the Lord Jehovah as the avenger of the chosen race. Ewald divides it into three main parts, each of which begins with a spirited call to engage in battle.

(1.) *Ver.* 2-28. "Lift up a standard" is the first great summons, and the prophet describes Babylon as taken, Bel-Merodach, the principal deity of the Babylonians, as confounded, and the captives as set free, asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherward. Babylon had been the hammer of the whole earth in the hands of God, but now He has done with her, and she herself would be broken ;—she had desolated nations not a few, now she would become a desolation in their midst, for the vengeance of the Lord would fall upon her. Though she had accomplished God's purposes her motives had not been pure, and she must therefore fall before His righteous indignation.

(2.) *Ver.* 29 to li. 26. "Call together the archers" is the second summons ; and they camp against Babylon round about. She was not only proud, but pride itself ;¹ but now she totters and falls, for a sword is upon all her princes, and a drought upon her waters, and she shall become so desolate that wild beasts of the desert shall prowl about her ruins, and owls shall make their abode therein. Babylon had been a golden cup in the hands of the Lord, which had made drunken the nations of the earth,

¹ *Ver.* 31, marg. reading.

but now the golden cup has fallen,' and the fall is so terrible that her neighbours try in vain to heal her. The spiritual Babylon is Rome (Rev. xvii. 9), and has not she been a golden cup full of poisoned wine of which the nations have drunk, and by which they have been made mad? But the time is coming when Rome too will be dashed to the ground, and when the cry will be heard, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great (Rev. xviii. 21). Vers. 15-19 of ch. li. are a quotation from ch. x. 12-16; and in vers. 20-24 the figure of the hammer is again introduced; and, though another word is here used,—*a battle-hammer*—yet there is no reason to doubt, as some have done, that Babylon is meant by it, for God was still breaking other nations in pieces by its means, and only when His purposes were accomplished would He recompense Babylon itself. (Keil.)

Such was also the view entertained by Calvin, who says, "The prophet here shows that the power and wealth of Babylon were no hindrances that God should destroy it whenever He pleased." In its poetic form the passage is peculiar, striking, and significant:—

"A hammer art thou to me, weapons of war,
And with thee I break nations in pieces, .
And with thee I overthrow kingdoms.
And with thee I break in pieces the horse and his rider,
And with thee I break in pieces the chariot and its driver.
And with thee I break in pieces man and woman,
And with thee I break in pieces old man and boy,
And with thee I break in pieces young man and maiden,

¹ Ch. li. 7.

And with thee I break in pieces the shepherd and his flock,
And with thee I break in pieces the husbandman and his team,
And with thee I break in pieces magistrates and rulers."

Babylon, then, was God's battle-hammer; but having used it as He chose, He would recompense upon it all the evil which it did to Zion.

Babylon is further compared to a destroying mountain, but God would roll her down into the valley, and she would become like a mountain burnt up with fire, the stones of which are no longer fit for the foundations of a building.

(3.) *Ver.* 27-57. "Set ye up the standard in the land," is the summons to the nations to fight against Babylon, and they come like caterpillars, especially the Medes, and no resistance is offered them; for the mighty men of Babylon have become like feeble women, and the Euphrates, the sea of Babylon, and her principal means of defence, now fails her, so that she becomes an easy prey to her foes.

On the accomplishment of these prophecies we need not dwell. It is a matter of history that in the reign of Belshazzar Babylon was taken by the Medes, when her glory departed to return no more. How significant was the parallel prophecy of Isaiah (ch. xiii.) A banner should be lifted on the high mountain; the heavens should be shaken, and the earth should remove out of its place; the Medes, who cared not for gold or silver, should be stirred up against her inhabitants; and Babylon, the glory of

kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, should be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah :

" Her halls shall be still, and their pavement be gory,
Not a sound heard of mirth or of revelling there ;
But the pride of the Chaldees, the boast of their glory,
Extinguished like Sodom, be blasted and bare.

" On the spot where thou raisedst thy front, mighty nation,
Shall the owl have his nest, and the wild beast his den ;
Thy courts shall be desert, thy name Desolation,
Now the tyrant of cities, the jest of them then ! "

All this came to pass, and in like manner shall every great world-power that rises in opposition to the government of the Most High fall and perish, for He has said, " I will overturn, overturn, overturn it ; and it shall be no more, until He come whose right it is, and I will give it Him " (Ezek. xxi. 27).¹ The right to reign over all nations belongs to neither kings, nor priests, nor popes, but to the Son of God ; and that right He will one day claim, when Rome also, now even in her humiliation the most boastful of all the powers of the earth, and the most antichristian too, because laying claim to a jurisdiction which is Christ's only, will sink like a stone into the depths, and be found no more at all (Rev. xviii. 21-24). The glory of that mystic Babylon is already passing away, and although, to use the language of an eminent statesman, " she has furnished, and paraded anew every rusty tool she was

¹ Comp. Dan. v. and Herodotus, i. 191.

fondly thought to have disused,"—has declared the personal infallibility of her head, the Pope, and has affirmed again his right to depose kings, and to put down governments, nay, to open or to shut the gates of paradise at his will,—she is tottering to her final overthrow, and her final overthrow will be the triumph of liberty and of truth.

In the last two chapters I have almost unavoidably broken through the thread of Jeremiah's history; but if the reader will refer back to chapter fourteen, he will be able from that point to resume it in the chapter which follows, in which we shall accompany the prophet to Egypt, and reach the close of his eventful life.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JEREMIAH IN EGYPT.

B.C. 588-580.

TOE to them that go down to Egypt for help ;
and stay on horses and trust in chariots
because they are many ; and in horsemen
because they are very strong : but they look not unto
the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD !”
Such was the language addressed by Isaiah to the
Jewish nation in his day (ch. xxxi. 1), and in the most
impressive manner did he reprove their confidence in
that country, for “the Egyptians were men and not
God, and their horses flesh and not spirit” (ver. 3) ;
and “the strength of Pharaoh would be their shame,
and the trust in the shadow of Egypt their confusion”
(ch. xxx. 3).

From such predictions, as well as from those of
Jeremiah, Johanan and his companions might have
seen the folly of the course they now proposed to
adopt ; but they were resolved to pursue it, believing
that in Egypt only would they be safe from the hands
of the Chaldeans, and that there they would find a
refuge and a home (Jer. xliii. 5, 6).

They left Mizpah, therefore, taking with them every person whom Nebuzar-adan had committed to the care of Gedaliah, including the king's daughters, and all the men, women, and children ; and they went into the land of Egypt.

Jeremiah was never married. He was forbidden to take a wife and to beget sons and daughters (ch. xvi. 1-3), for the times were unfavourable to domestic happiness. It was no doubt well, inasmuch as distress and sorrow came upon so many families in the land. Yet if now he had had children to solace him in his trials, he might have experienced some measure of relief. But no : he was a lone man, and, with the exception of his friend Baruch, he had no human arm on which to lean. Together the two friends, though very reluctantly, accompanied the fugitives to Egypt, for to remain at Mizpah was impracticable ; and not to them therefore, but to their opponents only, did the words apply, "They obeyed not the voice of the LORD." Doubtless the prophet and his friend bade farewell to the land of their fathers with many and with bitter tears. It was another ingredient in Jeremiah's cup of sorrow, now filled almost to the brim, but he utters no word of complaint at this time ; for he has become habituated to grief, and can scarcely hope for anything else until he has finished his career.

The number of the fugitives is not stated, but it probably amounted to several hundreds, and a very remarkable sight it must have been. They took the nearest route, and came to Tahpanhes, a frontier

town on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile. It is called by Herodotus *Daphnæ* of Pelusium, and was no doubt a town of considerable importance, as elsewhere it is named in connection with Noph or Memphis (Jer. ii. 16, xlv. 14). Here was a palace of Pharaoh-Hophra, who now occupied the throne, and near the entrance of it was a brick-kiln, a term which includes both the clay of which the bricks were made, and the furnace in which they were dried or baked. The palace was probably unfinished, and this brick-kiln a temporary one used only during the progress of the works. What, then, was told Jeremiah? He was commanded to take large stones in his hand, and to hide them in the clay, in the sight of the men of Judah, and to declare that God would send Nebuchadnezzar into the land, who should spread his royal pavilion over the very spot where these stones were hid (ch. xliii. 8-13). The clay represented Egypt in its weakness, the stones Babylon in its power; and thus did Jeremiah lay the foundation of the future ideal palace of the king of Babylon to the subversion of the palace of the king of Egypt. His palace was built of tiles or bricks; that of the king of Babylon would be of large and durable stones.

The symbol is developed further in what follows:—Nebuchadnezzar would come down and smite the land of Egypt, when every man would receive his appointed lot, that is, "death by pestilence, imprisonment, or the sword." The king of Babylon would be God's servant in this work, and therefore, what-

ever he did would be done by God himself, whence the expression, "I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them, and carry them captive" (ver. 12). The temples he would burn, the idols he would carry away as trophies of his power and of his might. Nor would the conquest of the land be difficult. "As easy as any shepherd in the open field wraps himself in his cloak, so will he take the whole of Egypt in his hand, and be able to throw it round him like a light garment, that he may then, thus dressed as it were with booty, leave the land in peace, without a foe—a complete victor."¹

At On, or Heliopolis, the city of the sun, which was near the modern village of Matarieh, north-east of Cairo, was a magnificent temple dedicated to the sun-god, RA, at the entrance of which stood several obelisks, one of which remains to this day. These obelisks are called here "the images of Beth-shemesh" (ver. 13), the latter word being the Hebrew rendering of the Egyptian PE-RA, *i.e.*, house of the sun. These images the king of Babylon would break, and this temple he would consume with fire, and thus would the very pride of Egypt be put to shame, and her glory trampled in the dust. There would, then, be no safety for the fugitives here. They had fled from their own country for fear of the Chaldeans, but the Chaldeans would follow them into their fancied retreat, and there they would fall with

¹ Ewald ; quoted with approval by Keil.

those upon whose arm they were intending to lean.

A parallel prophecy to this was uttered by Ezekiel (ch. xxix., xxx.), who calls Pharaoh "the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers," boasting of his might and saying, "My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself." Nebuchadnezzar had besieged Tyre for several years, and God would give him the land of Egypt for his reward, the arm of Pharaoh would be broken, and the Egyptians scattered among all nations. But were these predictions ever fulfilled? This has been frequently denied, but Berosus, as quoted by Josephus, positively affirms that Nebuchadnezzar took Egypt, and the circumstances of the case appear to have been these:—

Pharaoh-Hophra, who belonged to the twenty-sixth dynasty of Manetho, and was probably the son of Psammetichus II., came to the throne about B.C. 589, and reigned nineteen years. It was he who sent an army to assist Zedekiah when Jerusalem was besieged by the Chaldeans, and from Herodotus (ii. 161), we learn that he led an army to Sidon, and fought a naval battle with the Tyrians; and, from other sources, that, having defeated the Phœnicians and Cyprians in a naval engagement, he returned to Egypt laden with immense spoil. It was scarcely probable then that Nebuchadnezzar would let such an enemy alone. He had conquered Syria, but as long as Pharaoh-Hophra held sway in Egypt, he knew not how soon it might be wrested from his

grasp. There is every probability, therefore, that having conquered Tyre, as he did in B.C. 573, he came to Egypt, and obtained over Pharaoh-Hophra a decided victory, thus fulfilling the repeated prophecies of Jeremiah—"I will give Pharaoh-Hophra into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of them that seek his life, as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy, who sought his life" (ch. xlv. 30). No later Pharaoh is mentioned in the Bible, and thus was the last of the mighty dynasties of Egypt swept away, and Persia soon after swayed the sceptre over that once renowned and powerful country.

But to return to the narrative: The Jews were probably received with kindness in Egypt; and, ere long, they settled down in different towns, extending from Migdol, the most northerly one in the country, to the land of Pathros, the Thebais of the Greeks and Romans, in Upper Egypt. Noph or Memphis, one of the most celebrated cities of Egypt, situated on the western bank of the Nile, had attractions for some of them, whilst others remained at Tahpanhes, the town in which they first arrived (Jer. xlv. 1). Here they speedily plunged into the idolatry of the Egyptians. The magnificent temples of Memphis, together with the imposing rites and ceremonies which were there observed, attracted the attention and won the regards of these numerous refugees, and they joined especially in the worship of the moon-goddess Thoth, to whom they offered incense, and baked

cakes (ver. 17-19). In reference to this ceremony Wilkinson observes, "Another festival in honour of Osiris was held on the new moon of the month Phamenoth, which fell in the beginning of spring, called the entrance of Osiris into the moon, and on the 11th of Tybi (or the beginning of January), was celebrated the fête of Isis's return from Phœnicia, when cakes, having a hippopotamus stamped upon them, were offered in her honour, to commemorate the victory over Typho."¹ This worship of the queen of heaven had been practised, in some form or other, whilst the people were in their own land (ch. vii. 18), and now they returned to it again, and probably went into the temples, in company with the Egyptians, and thus defiled themselves with the abominations of idolatry.

Under these circumstances Jeremiah, bold in his denunciations of sin as heretofore, gathered together in Pathros a large number of his countrymen, to whom he addressed a solemn warning and a most faithful admonition, in which he reminded them of the evil they had brought upon Jerusalem, remonstrated with them on their shameful idolatry, and predicted such a punishment that none of them should escape to return to the land of Judah, with the exception of a small number of individual fugitives. By sword and by famine they would die, and would thus become "an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse and a reproach" (ver. 2-14). In the con-

¹ Ancient Egyptians, Popular Account, vol. i. p. 288.

duct of the Jewish people, we have, says one, "a mirror of the stubborn heart of man. For centuries unceasingly warned by the prophets—and how warned? not by sentimental talk, but by words of thunder and strokes of power,—think only of Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, Isaiah, etc.,—yet Judah bowed not his stubborn neck. Then at last when long-suffering love was exhausted, the judgment of just love was executed. And yet in the wretched remnant the old root of unbelief and disobedience remains still unbroken."

Considerable numbers both of men and women listened to this address, and it would appear that the latter had been the leaders in this idolatrous worship, but with the knowledge and consent of the former. Their reply was a most insolent one, for they told the prophet that they would not hearken to him, but would pursue their own course, be the consequences what they might. "Thus, as a mirror," says Calvin, "the Holy Spirit of God sets before us how great the madness of men is when Satan once takes possession of their minds." Ungodliness continually extends, and even goes beyond itself. Previously these men withstood Jeremiah only as a private person; now they resist him even as a prophet of the LORD. And on what ground did they resist him? They pretended that the worship of the queen of heaven had brought them comfort and prosperity, whilst the neglect of it had plunged them into trouble and misfortune. "They inferred this," says Keil, "from the fact that

after idolatry had been rooted out by Josiah, adversity had befallen the land of Judah; while, up to that time, the kingdom of Judah had been independent, and, for more than a century before, had been spared the suffering of misfortune." But was it so? Had not calamities fallen on the country long before? God had indeed been long-suffering towards His people, but it was their very idolatry itself that at length brought down upon them His avenging hand.

To the arguments of the men, the women added another. "When we burned incense to the queen of heaven,¹ did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink-offerings to her without our men?" (ver. 19.) According to the law of Moses (Num. xxx. 9), a vow made by a wife without the knowledge and consent of her husband was invalid, and could be at once annulled. In self-vindication, then, these women affirmed that they had performed these rites with the approval of their husbands, so that the personal responsibility was not theirs. Did their consciences then accuse them after all? And were they disquieted with a conviction that they had done wrong? This is usually the case when people try to find excuses for

¹ The words, "queen of heaven," are rendered in the margin "frame," or "frame-work of heaven," such being the reading of several MS. collected by Kennicott, followed by the LXX. and the Peshito. But the received text is adopted by the Vulgate, and is no doubt the correct one. The words referred neither to the stars generally nor to any constellation, but to the moon, called by Horace "the queen of the stars," *sidereum regina*, and worshipped in different countries under different names.

their conduct, or to lay the blame of it on some one else.

This ancient worship of "the queen of heaven" has its modern representation in the *cultus* of the Virgin by the Church of Rome, which has recently culminated in the belief that she is almost a goddess, immaculate in her conception, as Pius IX. declared in December 1854, and, according to some authorities, though it is not yet proclaimed as a matter of faith, carried to heaven without seeing corruption, and now seated on the throne where she is the Mediatrix between man and her Son. "The *sacred heart of Mary*" is exhibited as pierced through with a sword, *in token*, as the apostate Church' teaches, that her anguish at the crucifixion was as true an atonement as the death of Christ ;—for we read in the Devotional Office or Service-book, adopted by the "Sodality of the Sacred Heart," such blasphemous words as these—"Go then, devout client, go to the heart of Jesus, but let your way be through the heart of Mary ; the sword of grief which pierced her soul opens you a passage ; enter by the wound which love has made."¹ Who can doubt that the Romish Mariolatry of to-day is a development of the heathen worship of the queen of heaven ? And there are millions of misguided Papists on the Continent and elsewhere, who are thus as ignorant of

¹ See "The Two Babylons," by Hislop, p. 436, where this subject is fully discussed.

the truth as were these Jewish refugees in the days of the prophet Jeremiah.

But let us listen to his reply: Nothing daunted by the insolence of the people, though he stood before them alone (unless his friend Baruch was by his side), he fearlessly declared that it was their idolatry that had proved their ruin (ver 20-25). But more terrible punishments were at hand. They had resolved to keep their vows and they should keep them, for no longer would they take God's great name into their mouths and say "the LORD liveth," for they would be given up to the perversity of their will, and God would watch over them, but not for good. A small remnant excepted, none of them should return to the land of Judah; and, as a sign that His words should stand and not theirs, Jehovah would give Pharaoh-Hophra into the hands of his enemies, as already the prophet had foretold (ver. 26-30). That is, as certainly as this event comes to pass, so certainly shall the Jews who are now in Egypt be exterminated by war and famine. And it did come to pass. Conquered by Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh-Hophra was taken prisoner by Amasis, who gave him up into the hands of his former subjects, by whom he was strangled B.C. 570. "It is said," observes Herodotus, "that it was the presumptuous boast of Apries (Hophra) that not a god could cast him down from his eminence, so firmly did he think that he had established himself in his kingdom."¹

¹ Herod. ii. 162-169.

It is probable that with these sad words the Prophet of Sorrow closed his predictions, for, as we have already seen, those against foreign nations were uttered previously, and perhaps committed to writing by his friend Baruch. Of that friend we know nothing more, except that one tradition says that he returned to Babylon, where he died twelve years after the fall of Jerusalem, whilst another states that both he and Jeremiah died in Egypt. The Apocryphal book which bears his name, though pronounced canonical by the Council of Trent, was never recognised as such by the Jews, nor is there any other evidence in its favour worthy of a moment's consideration. The confession and the prayer, ch. ii., iii., doubtless contain some very noble thoughts, and the lament of Jerusalem over her children (iv. 9-30) is most pathetic; but the style is that of an imitator of the ancient prophet, and the probability is that it was written not much earlier than B.C. 160.

Forming the sixth chapter of this book in the English version, is a letter purporting to have been sent by Jeremiah to the captives in Babylon. It depicts the cause of their captivity, and describes the vanity of idols and the sin and consequences of idolatry; but in language which betrays itself, and proves that it is a forgery. That it should ever have been supposed genuine, as it was by Whiston, and is by the Church of Rome, is surprising. It was probably a later production than the book of Baruch itself.

Baruch was a noble character. His attachment to

Jeremiah was sincere and constant, and, as the amanuensis of the prophet, he wrote from his lips with the greatest accuracy and care the words he uttered. Unjustly charged by his countrymen with seeking their destruction, he doubtless committed his cause to Him who judgeth righteously, and, though it cost him no little obloquy and scorn, he was the fast friend of the prophet to the last. I can well imagine that their friendship was something like that of Jonathan and David; and it is highly probable that they remained together in Egypt until separated, though only for a short period, by the hand of death. It is generally believed that Jeremiah lived to an extreme old age, and a Christian tradition says that his life ended in martyrdom, and that the Jews at Tahpanhes, irritated by his repeated warnings, at length stoned him to death. Of some of the Old Testament saints it is said in Heb. xi. 37, that "they were stoned," and the reference may include this noble-minded patriot. But whether he died a martyr's death or not, a martyr he truly was,—to his country, to the cause of righteousness and truth, and to the principle of the pure worship of the one and only God. He "stood alone in the midst of that great catastrophe which forms the lowest point in the history of the Old Testament theocracy, and resisted the attacks of ungodly power, not in the strength of natural ability, but wholly in the strength of Him who had chosen him, against his will, to the prophetic office." He has been called a type of John the Baptist, but he

was rather a type of Christ Himself, specially as "a faithful and true witness," in one of the great epochs of history, to the justice and holiness of the Lord Jehovah.

After his death he became greatly honoured. His prophecies and their fulfilment are mentioned by Daniel, ch. ix. 2, in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21, and Ezra i. 1. Numerous legends are related of him, and among others that he hid the tabernacle, and the ark of the covenant, and the altar of incense, in a cave, predicting that they should not be found until the appearance of the glory of the Lord ;¹ that he appeared to Onias in a vision like a man with gray hairs, and exceeding glorious ; and that he gave to Judas a sword of gold, telling him to take it as a gift from God with which he should be able to wound his adversaries.² By the Jews he was called THE PROPHET, *par excellence*, and, as such, references are made to him in the New Testament,³ there being a general expectation that he would re-appear at the coming of the Messiah. It has often been the case that men who were greatly dishonoured in life, have afterwards been deemed worthy of the highest renown. Many a noble character has been maligned and persecuted whilst witnessing for the truth, but, after his death, has been extolled, even by his enemies, as if he had been an angel of God. How little need good men care for their reputation in this world ! The great Disposer of events will take

¹ Mac. ii. 4, 6.

² Ibid. xv. 13-16.

³ Mat. xvi. 14 ; John i. 21 ; vi. 14 ; vii. 40.

care of it for them, and hereafter they will shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.

Viewed in one aspect, the mission of Jeremiah was not successful. Failure and disappointment marked his career almost throughout. His exhortations were unheeded, his predictions disbelieved, his warnings treated with contempt. "Possessed," says Ewald, "of the most perfect prophetic spirit, unstained by any perverse tendency, his noblest utterances, nevertheless, fell fruitless from his lips; his worst forebodings, his severest threats were vain. Unwearied by any disappointment or catastrophe, he ever collected his energies afresh for simple labour in Jehovah's work; and yet, at times, bowed down by the overwhelming burden of the age, and the bitter anticipation of the inevitable end of Israel's evil course, he almost lost the iron power and confident composure of an ancient prophet, and sank into the energy of despair, even of malediction." Do we wonder at this? We must remember that he saw only the immediate future, and the dawn of a brighter day only in the far-off distance. Yet Jeremiah "fulfilled his course" equally with Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, for he accomplished the purposes of the Lord Jehovah, and doubtless entered on a rich reward. He presents to us an example of ardent patriotism,—yet not the patriotism of the warrior or of the statesman, but of a man who wept over his country's woes, sought to assuage them, though in vain, and felt

the weight of them as if they rolled over his own head.

National calamities are not altogether things of the past. They have occurred in our day, and will occur again. Men are therefore needed now, imbued with the spirit of Jeremiah, and ready both to stand up for the truth, for righteousness, and for God, and, if called upon, even to suffer for the great principles which often seem to be at stake. It is only God who can raise up such men ; for it is only He who can inspire them with those unselfish motives which have always characterised the greatest teachers and benefactors of mankind. And such men He will raise up from time to time, until the day approaches for the second coming of our Lord, when He will send His heralds in the spirit and power of an Elijah, a Jeremiah, and a John, to prepare His way before Him.

The conflict of the ages between truth and error, between light and darkness, between sin and holiness, which the prophets waged, which the apostles carried on, and which was continued by the martyrs and confessors of later times, is not yet over. Christians of the nineteenth century are called to engage in it, and it waxes fiercer as the crisis draws near to the beginning of the end. And apparently there is much to discourage and depress. As in the days of Jeremiah, God seems to hide Himself from us in the battlefield, and to leave us to ourselves when most we need His help. But it is not really so. God was

with His servant, when the prophet thought that He had utterly forsaken him ; and He is equally with His faithful servants now, even when their foes appear to be gaining ground. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," was the promise of Him who under this dispensation, especially, is the captain and the guide of Israel's hosts. Had Jeremiah known Christ as we may know Him, he perhaps, nay, doubtless, would, have been less desponding and far more hopeful than he was ; and shall we be downcast ? shall we be fearful ? shall we be disposed to quit the field, or wish to die before our work is done ? No, let us dare to fight, and we shall be sure to conquer. Oh, it is blessed to know that we are on the side of right, when the world would tell us that we are on the side of wrong ! Be not disheartened, Christian reader, for the battle is not yours, but God's :—

"Then learn to scorn the praise of men,
And learn to lose with God ;
For Jesus won the world through shame,
And beckons thee His road.

"Muse on His justice, downcast soul !
Muse and take better heart ;
Back with thine angel to the field,
And bravely do thy part.


"God's justice is a bed where we
Our anxious hearts may lay,
And, weary with ourselves, may sleep
Our discontent away.

“For right is right, since God is God :
And right the day must win ;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.”

Yes; the right will win. It won in the days of Jeremiah, though in the midst of the battle of the warrior, and of garments rolled in blood. It won in the times of the apostles, and that despite the dreadful persecutions it sustained. It won in the age of the Reformation, though hundreds of God's servants perished in the dungeon and at the stake. And it is winning now, and will still win, until every hostile power is crushed, and every mighty arm is broken, and every proud spirit is subdued ; for of the Son of God it is said that “He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LESSONS OF HIS LIFE.

Y task is nearly, though not quite, done. I have said that Jeremiah is the prophet for our times ; and it remains that we attempt to gather up some of the lessons which our survey of his history presents. One of the greatest of the Hebrew prophets, he speaks not to the Jews only, but also to the Gentiles, and not only to the age in which he lived, but to each succeeding age, and specially, as it would appear, to ours. For ours is a restless age. Men are dissatisfied, and are longing for something, though they know not what, which shall tranquillise their spirits and give them quietness and repose. As in the days of Jeremiah, they are asking, Is there any message from the Lord ? and yet many of them are indisposed to listen to the answer when it is given, and some even doubt whether there is any answer, or can be any. Others are saying, "Speak unto us smooth things ; prophesy deceits ;" and they are glad to be soothed by the facts of science, and the arguments of those who speak of evolution, and would repel as contrary to reason the truths of re-

velation,—and especially the prophecies and miracles of the Bible. Is it not a fact that thousands try to believe that Christianity is untrue because they wish it to be untrue?—a characteristic this of the Jewish people in the days of Jeremiah, who believed the false prophets and the doctrines which they taught, *because they loved to have it so*. Equally true is it that another class of persons are being led away by pompous ceremonials, and who, thinking themselves the temple of the Lord, or calling by this name their edifices of stone, are putting their trust in outward rites, which, in their estimation, are the more valuable and efficacious the more they are characterised by display and pomp. In what does this naturally culminate but in Romanism? and in what does Romanism culminate but in the worship of the Virgin—"the queen of heaven," and thus in an idolatry which places the creature on an equality with the Son of God?

There is also another phase of religious opinion in our day. There are those who are asking for, and expecting signs and wonders, and who, not satisfied with the evidences of the truth of Christianity already furnished, want to see miracles, and believe that nothing short of them will convert the world. The blessings of the new covenant (Jer. xxxi. 31-34; xxxii. 37-41) are too spiritual for them,—they must have something more tangible, something which appeals to the outer senses,—something which will satisfy the eye and the ear. Hence they hold that

the millennium will not come until Christ appears in person on the Mount of Olives, and they are looking for a literal restoration of Jerusalem to its former glory, and to the re-establishment of the worship of the temple on Mount Zion.

Does not all this show that there are to-day elements at work similar to those which existed in the days of Jeremiah? and is it not from his writings, therefore, that we may learn some great practical lessons if only we are disposed to listen to him? I would ask men, therefore, and especially Christian men, to ponder some of the great truths that present themselves in the pages of "the Prophet of Sorrow." Doubtless by different minds different lessons will be drawn from those pages. I will mention some that affect my own.

It seems to me that *men are wanted* for the times we live in, of special gifts, qualifications, and powers, boldly and fearlessly to proclaim the truth, and to deliver to the world the message of the Lord. *God can raise up such men*, as He raised up Jeremiah, and before him, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah, with others who were less prominent; and that He may do it, should be the prayer of the universal Church. I look upon the prophet's history as specially indicative of the Divine sovereignty, and the Divine wisdom, in laying hold upon *the man* who was so eminently qualified to deal with the Jews at this momentous period of their history. They needed one who would be firm and fearless, yet sympathising and tender,—

a champion for the truth, yet a patriot who could weep over his country's woes, and Jeremiah was that man,—stern, inflexible, and bold in his maintenance of Jehovah's rights, yet pitiful as a woman and loving as a child over those who were the victims of the people's crimes. Many of the qualifications he possessed were doubtless natural; and "sanctified," or set apart, from "the womb," he received the gift of the Spirit, by whose agency other qualifications were superinduced, and he was thus made a prophet of the Lord,—“a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls” (ch. i. 18) against all the people of the land. He was thus in the true succession of the prophets, but that succession was not an hereditary one, neither was it one received by man from man. God called to the prophetic office whom He would, and He called not always from the schools of the prophets, but from any sphere of life He chose. He did this from the beginning; and He does this still. The apostles of our Lord, the martyrs and confessors of the early Church, the guides of human thought in later times, the great reformers of succeeding centuries were called of God from among all ranks and classes of society; and it is not therefore for the Church to dictate to its Head as to where He shall go for the agents He requires, or to reject the agents, when they appear, because they have not come from this condition or from that. Men are wanted to-day—of learning it may be, but certainly of natural gifts and of supernatural endowments,—bold men, fearless

men, men who know what they have to do and will do it or will die,—independent men who will scorn the praise of the world, and will be above all mercenary aims, who will never take a bribe and never cringe for a vote or suffrage,—men, in a word, who will dare to do the thing that is right, and leave the consequences to God. It is certain that such men, wherever they arise, will have to teach some unpalatable truths, as all genuine reformers have had from the beginning. They will not prophesy “smooth things ;” they will not daub men over with untempered mortar ; they will not tell them that no judgments will ever await them whatever sins or transgressions they commit. They will receive their message from God’s lips, and whatever He puts into their mouths they will proclaim. JEHOVAH TSIDKENU,—the Lord our righteousness,—will be the central theme of their ministrations, and to unfold the new covenant with its rich enjoyments and its elevated piety will be their great delight.

God can raise up such men ; and He is raising them up even now. Some such are among us, and in the midst of us, and there are others already born who ere long will make their appearance, armed, it may be, not with Saul’s armour, but with David’s sling and stone, to achieve great victories over sin and hell. Whether we have *prophets of sorrow* or not, we have and shall have *tongues of fire* ; and to such the age must listen, nay, will be compelled to listen, as were the Jews to the faithful Jeremiah. True they burnt his roll, but

they could not burn his words,—they were re-written, and others added ; and even so may some among us discard the truths which God's servants utter, but those truths will be reiterated in trumpet tones, and the sound of them will go forth and will shake the nations. O the consummate folly of the world that shuts its ears against the message sent to it from heaven ! What but such a message does it need ? Will any other words soothe its sorrows, heal its maladies, or remove its woes ? Can the prophets of science speak to its throbbing heart and give it rest ? Is there any other balm in Gilead than the gospel ? any other physician than Christ Jesus ? Most emphatically, No ; and we therefore reiterate Jeremiah's call, " O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord."

Jeremiah wrought no miracles as did the prophets Elijah and Elisha, nor were any wrought on his behalf as on the behalf of Daniel and his three young friends. Neither, though of a priestly family, did he ever minister in the temple or take any part in sacerdotal functions. He was a prophet, a preacher of righteousness, and nothing higher than this did he seek after or desire. He could, in fact, gain nothing higher. The office of the prophet was a loftier one than that of a priest, as it is to this day ; and great was the honour conferred on Jeremiah when he was entrusted with its momentous duties.

The apostles of our Lord wrought miracles, as did some of their successors,—it may be ; but no minister

of Christ can now work miracles, and whoever professes to do it is either a fanatic or a deceiver, or both. Neither are Christ's ministers priests, but evangelists and pastors, and the claim which some are setting up to sacerdotal rights and obligations is unscriptural and false. Let the people remember this, and neither look for signs and wonders, nor yet for any magic influence from the holy sacraments when administered by priestly hands. God has given prophets to His Churches, He has not given them priests or workers of miracles ; for now the one and only priest is the High-Priest within the veil, even Christ, the Son of God ; and the one great miracle is that of His death and resurrection, the preaching of which is ever followed by spiritual signs sufficiently clear and significant to all who will observe them. O that men had confidence in the preaching of the truth ! O that the Church believed that the simple proclamation of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation ! To this we must come back if we would renovate society and save the nations of the earth.

Some of God's servants will almost necessarily be prophets of sorrow, and themselves the objects of persecution and scorn. A tinge of melancholy appears in the writings of all the prophets ; it cannot be said that it *pervades* them. Isaiah is often jubilant in tone, Ezekiel confident, and Daniel full of hope ; but Jeremiah is for the most part sad at heart, and but occasionally, as we have seen, ascends the mount of joy. This was partly owing to the times in which he lived, but chiefly

to his natural temperament and disposition. God would have it so. He intended this prophet to utter lamentations, and He made him a prophet with this very end in view. And was it not well for the Jewish people? Is it not well also for us? Yes; and it is well that there should be prophets of sorrow now. All are not such, for that would *not* be well; but now and then some one arises to utter doleful cries, and to weep over the sins and sufferings of humanity. All thoughtful minds are melancholy at times, and looking at the condition of mankind, at the ignorance, the vice, the crime, the godlessness that so extensively prevail, it would be strange if they were not. It behoves them to be so. Christian men and women must take part in the sorrows of humanity; and on those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David; that drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph, God has pronounced a solemn woe. (Amos vi. 1-6.) Shall that woe fall on any of the ministers of Christ? They of all men ought to weep in secret places if not in public ones; and I have little doubt that many of them do. With the prophet they could wish that their head were waters and their eyes a fountain of tears, and with the Apostle of the Gentiles they could wish themselves accursed for

their brethren, their kinsmen according to the flesh : but, for the most part perhaps, they keep their sorrows to themselves, as it is best they should. In the presence of others they refrain themselves as did Joseph ; when alone with God, they pour out their cries and tears for the slain of the daughter of their people. There are more prophets of sorrow in the land than it is perhaps aware of. Yet the prophets of sorrow may be joyous also. Theirs is not a message of wrath but of mercy ; and if they know the terrors of the Lord, they know also His loving kindness and compassion. It is not well for Christians, and especially for Christian ministers, to wear sackcloth always, and to be always lamenting over the state of human society. They must commend their religion, and they can do it by their cheerfulness and hope. Let them tell the world of the "new covenant," and that in tones which indicate that its precepts have been written upon their hearts, and that they themselves know that it is a covenant of grace and truth. Were all Christian teachers prophets of sorrow and nothing else, the Church would sink into despondency, and would drag all men after her.

But they must expect persecution and the scorn of men. Jeremiah drew down upon himself the ire of his countrymen, and even of his own family, and this added to his grief and nearly crushed him to the dust. A man cast in a different mould would have borne his troubles in a different manner, but it was God's intention that His servant should feel deeply the

calamities of the times, and by means of them be trained for nobler service. There are men to-day, as there ever have been,—faithful men, earnest men, devoted men,—who for their very fidelity to the truth, and their regard for the interests of society, are assailed, if not with open, yet with petty persecutions, which sometimes come from quarters least to be expected; and their nerves are so finely strung, and their sense of wrong is so keen and tender, that they are sometimes staggered by the blows they thus receive, so that their faith like that of Jeremiah's is ready to fail. But they are true men, and fail it does not. Their shield is always within their reach, and they know where to find it too, and no sooner is it lifted up than the shafts of their enemies fall powerless at their feet. Let all God's servants be of good courage, even though called into the heat of the battle. No reformation was ever attempted but the agents of it were abused, their motives called in question, and their plans treated with contempt; and the true prophets of our own day must expect that it will be so again, and must be prepared for the struggle however severe it may prove. Let them sorrow, but, for themselves, as little as possible, reserving their tears for those who need them. Let them not yield to grief and sadness, but like the martyrs of the early Church endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Prophets of sorrow they may be; but not prophets of despondency and gloom. Even if their natural disposition is to look at the dark side of

things, as that of Jeremiah was, they must not forget that there is a bright side also, but, doing violence to themselves and having faith in God, must contemplate the silver lining of the overhanging cloud. Take courage, downcast soul, for gleams of light are breaking o'er thy path, and the great enigmas of thy life shall one day be explained to thee, when thou shalt learn that never has thy Maker left thee for a moment, and that by the darkest of His dispensations He has been educating thee for a glorious future.

For even the Prophet of Sorrow *had his hours of consolation, and his seasons of gladness and of joy.* The gloomiest soul is not all gloom, the saddest heart is not all sadness. There are times in the history of the most persecuted, the most tried, the most afflicted of God's people, when they are borne upward as in a chariot of fire above the storms of earth,—above the noise and din of men, where they breathe an atmosphere so pure that it seems like the air of heaven. As we have seen from the triumphal song of Jeremiah, and from those notes of joy which vibrate in the very midst of his plaintive lamentations, he was not left utterly hopeless in his tears. He could say, "Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies; for He doth not afflict willingly or grieve the children of men" (Lam. iii. 32, 33); and perhaps the secret of his happier moments may be found in the saying—"Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and the rejoicing of my heart" (ch. xv. 16).

Did he refer here to the finding of the book in the temple ; and did he read in it such words as these—“Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days so shall thy strength be” (Deut. xxxiii. 25) ? Certain it is that these and many other promises found in the Pentateuch were calculated to produce the effect described, and when he says—“Thy words were found and *I did eat them*,” he meant that he received them eagerly by faith, so that they became his spiritual food, strengthened by which he forgot his sorrows and was filled with holy joy. The Christian reader knows well what a source of consolation the Bible is, and will endorse the following sentiments of Zinzendorf without a moment’s hesitation. “The sovereign sign of a little flock depending on Christ is such a hearty, spiritual, tender disposition towards the Holy Scriptures, that they find no greater pleasure than in their simple but heart-searching truths. I, poor child, if I but look into the Bible, am happy for several hours after. I know not what misery I could not alleviate at once with a little scripture.” Let us then repair to this treasure-house of joy. It is larger and more ample now than it was in the days of the Prophet of Sorrow ; and from its inexhaustible stores may the poorest be enriched, the most distressed be comforted, and the most feeble strengthened and sustained. There is nothing that this age wants more than to find God’s words and to eat them. Found they are in a certain sense, inasmuch as we have them before our eyes ; but what we really need is to learn their mean-

ing, and to feed upon and digest them, so that, entering into our intellectual and moral being, they shall become part of that being, and shall transform it into something heavenly and divine.

If, as we have already observed, the seventy-first psalm¹ was written by Jeremiah as is generally supposed, we have another source to which he repaired for consolation, namely, prayer, presented with firm faith and confidence in God. "In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust, let me never be put to confusion," is the key-note of the psalm, and the prophet pleads for deliverance from his foes, and acknowledges God as his strong habitation. His enemies spoke against him, and said that he was forsaken of God, and that there was none to deliver him; but he knew it was otherwise, and he would hope continually. The psalm was written when he was old and grey-headed, and he said, "Thou who hast shown me great and sore troubles shall quicken me again, and shalt bring me

¹ The reasons which are advanced by Delitzsch in favour of this view are very strong; and among others this, "That the style closely resembles Jeremiah; also to him corresponds the situation of the poet as one who is persecuted; to him the retrospect of a life rich in experience and full of miraculous guidings; to him, whose term of active service extended over a period of more than thirty years under Zedekiah, the transition to hoary age in which the poet finds himself; to him the reference implied in ver. 21 to some high office; and to him the soft plaintive strain that pervades the psalm, from which it is at the same time clearly seen that the poet has attained a degree of age and experience, in which he is accustomed to self-control and is not discomposed by personal misfortune." This commentator attributes Psalm lxi. also to Jeremiah but with far less satisfactory grounds. Comp. Perowne and Hengstenberg.

up again from the depths of the earth." The whole strain is one of joyful confidence, and is quite in keeping with the cheerful notes of Lamentations iii. 22-33. How blessed a thing it is when men *can* pray,—when they can commit their way unto God, and make their appeal to Him who searches and knows the heart. Let persecutions come, or trials, or afflictions, to the man who has a conscience void of offence: they may crush him for a moment, but he will rise above them, for the elasticity of his nature will cause them to rebound; and, the weight removed, his soul will be filled with joy and praise.

Another thought arises. *No truly good man need be anxious about his reputation.* Jeremiah was assailed in every possible way, and he was charged with falsehood, with duplicity, with treachery to his country, and with the betrayal of its cause, but though sometimes anxious to clear himself of these imputations, he learnt to wait until God Himself should vindicate his character; and the Lord said unto him, "Fear not" (Lam. iii. 57). Doubtless he might have won the favour of the people at the sacrifice of principle and of truth; but who would have popularity on any such terms? At best it is but a bubble floating for a moment on the air; and men of faith and prayer will scorn to seek it at any price, knowing that the people may idolise them to-day, and to-morrow treat them with contempt. Enough for such men as Jeremiah that they have God and truth upon their side. They have no selfish ends to gratify; they

have no sinister designs to carry out. A singleness of purpose runs through the prophet's life, and though he was misunderstood, as the best and noblest men of all ages and of all countries have been, he could say, "O LORD, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life" (Lam. iii. 58).

But was his fidelity rewarded? Not in this life, certainly. His seasons of inward consolation were apparently temporary and brief; and after he had arisen above one wave, another came and rolled over him with impetuous force. But can we doubt that he had glimpses of the future? Did he not know that the blessings of the new and everlasting covenant of which he spoke, stretched far beyond the grave and death, and that when gathered to his fathers he would enter on unfading joys? Yes: this was to be, and now is, the reward of the faithful prophets of the Most High; and in a state of unutterable bliss are they now in the presence of the Holy One, waiting for the final consummation when the Lord our righteousness shall again appear.

The good man's name is not always vindicated in this world. Not often, perhaps, but sometimes, a man of great integrity of character may be charged by some malignant lips, with a heinous fault, and he may die under the imputation, and posterity may never be able to defend him; but God will defend him, and the day of the unveiling will present him before the throne pure as the light and glorious as the sun. O wait, ye prophets, ye apostles, ye martyrs, ye reformers,

—wait, for the hour is coming when your Redeemer, —your God,—your Vindicator, shall appear, and when in the presence of angels and of men,—a vast assembly which no arithmetic can compute,—“the manifestation of the sons of God” shall be clear and full. And for that manifestation let *us also wait* who still linger in the vale below ;—wait with holy anticipation of the time when we shall join the company of the blest, and hold converse with them, and hear from their own lips how God led, sustained, and delivered them ; for I have not the slightest doubt that I shall one day hold communion with the prophet whose history I have been attempting to unfold, and I would not therefore write a line respecting him of which I shall be ashamed when we meet face to face before the throne.

O THOU THAT DWELLEST IN THE HEAVENS, STABLISH WITH US THE NEW AND EVERLASTING COVENANT. PUT THY LAW IN OUR INWARD PARTS, AND WRITE IT ON OUR HEART. BE THOU OUR GOD, AND MAY WE BE THY PEOPLE. PREPARE US FOR THE SOCIETY AND FELLOWSHIP OF THE REDEEMED ABOVE, AND IN THINE OWN TIME ADMIT US INTO THAT KINGDOM WHICH SHALL NEVER PASS AWAY ; WHERE WE SHALL BEHOLD THY GLORY, WHERE THE SORROWS OF THIS LIFE WILL BE UNKNOWN, WHERE THE MYSTERIES OF TIME WILL BE SOLVED AND NEW MYSTERIES WILL APPEAR ; WHERE THE LATENT POWERS OF OUR IMMORTAL NATURE WILL EXPAND, AND WHERE, THROUGH THE CYCLES OF ETERNITY, PROPHETS AND APOSTLES AND THE WHOLE MULTITUDE OF THE SAVED SHALL LEARN MORE AND MORE OF THEE, AND OF THY SON, AND LEARNING MORE SHALL LOVE MORE, AND LOVING MORE SHALL BE THE MORE BLESSED AND GLORIOUS FOR EVER !

NOTES AND INDEX.

NOTES.



I SUBJOIN the following extracts, &c., which will be of service both to the student and the general reader.

A. *Anathoth* (page 3).

Dr Robinson, in reference to this place, observes :—" Our course thus far had been N. 25° E. The way now became winding, but in the general direction north-east. We lost sight of Jerusalem, and descending rather steeply, came in twenty minutes to the bottom of Wady es-Suleim, here running east by south to join Wady Sidr further down, and afterwards the Fârah. In the same direction, we were told of the ruins of a convent, called Deir es-Sidd. We thus left el-Isâwîyeh on the right behind a ridge ; and crossing the valley obliquely, ascended another ridge skirting it on the north ; beyond which runs also a deep parallel valley, called Wady es-Selâm. We kept along upon this ridge, which becomes gradually wider ; and at 8.45 reached Anâta, situated on the same broad ridge, at the distance of one hour and a quarter from Jerusalem. There can be no question that this is the ancient Anathoth, the birthplace

of the prophet Jeremiah; which Josephus describes as twenty *stadia* distant from Jerusalem, and which Eusebius and Jerome also place in the tribe of Benjamin, about three miles from the same city towards the north. Ecclesiastical tradition, as is well known, has selected for Anathoth another site, at the village of Kuryet el-Enab on the road to Ramleh, a distance of three hours from Jerusalem.

"Anâta seems to have been once a walled town and a place of strength; but I do not find it directly mentioned by any writer since the days of Jerome. Portions of the wall remain, built of large hewn stones, and apparently ancient; as are also the foundations of some of the houses. One of our party found the fragments of a column or two among the ruins. The houses are few, and the people seemed poor and miserable, amounting only to a few scores. The village lies where the broad ridge slopes off gradually towards the south-east. On this side are tilled fields, and we had passed several others on our way. The grain was still standing; the time of harvest not having yet come. Fig-trees and olive-trees are also scattered around. From the vicinity of Anâta a favourite species of building-stone is carried to Jerusalem, and we met several troops of donkeys loaded in this manner with the materials of future dwellings; a hewn stone being slung upon each side of the poor animal. Larger stones are transported on camels" ("Researches," vol. i. p. 437).

B. *Carchemish* (pages 65-79).

Carchemish, which was besieged by Pharaoh-Necho, has been identified with Circesium (still called Carkesea by the Bedouins), which is situated on the banks of the Khabour where that river joins the Euphrates (Layard, "Nineveh and

Babylon," p. 334). It was a strong city and guarded the passes of the river, so that the occupation of it was of great advantage. Necho held undisturbed possession of it for three years. "Then, however, the Babylonians, who had received these provinces at the division of the Assyrian Empire, began to bestir themselves. Nebuchadnezzar marched to Carchemish, defeated the army of Necho, recovered all the territory to the border of Egypt, and even ravaged a portion of the country. It is probable that in this expedition he was assisted by the Medes. At any rate, seven or eight years afterwards, when the intrigues of Egypt had created disturbances in this quarter, and Jehoiakim, the Jewish king, broke into open insurrection, the Median monarch sent a contingent which accompanied Nebuchadnezzar into Judea, and assisted him to establish his power firmly in south-western Asia" (Rawlinson's "Ancient Monarchies," vol. iii. p. 214).

C. *The Moabite Stone* (page 241).

Respecting this valuable relic, a monograph has been published by Dr Ginsburg, containing a facsimile of the inscription, an English translation, and a Historical and Biblical Commentary. (Reeves and Turner, London.) The stone was first discovered by the Rev. J. Klein, of the Church Missionary Society, in August 1868, when he was travelling near Dibon on the east of the Dead Sea. It consisted of a piece of black basalt 3 ft. 10 in. high, 2 ft. broad, and 14½ in. thick, with an inscription of thirty-four straight lines running across the stone. In this inscription the name Jehovah occurs; and also the names Kiriathaim, Dibon, Beth-gamul, Beth-deblathaim, and Horonam, &c.,

(comp. Jer. xlviii.) Mesha, the king of Moab, here states that he erected this stone to Chemosh who had saved him from Omri king of Israel, and all his enemies ! The entire inscription is illustrative of "the pride of Moab" in that day, and its pride had not been humbled in the days of Jeremiah. "I built Korcha," says the haughty king, and "I built Aroer ;" and "I built Beth-Bamoth," and a great many other things he boasts of having done ; and such, no doubt, was the character of his successors, up to the period when Jeremiah wrote his prophecies. Hence the woe he pronounced on Moab, and hence the judgments which ultimately befell her.

D. *Petra* (page 244).

The origin and early history of Petra, and its rock-hewn temples, &c., are unknown, but there was a large city here three centuries before Christ, against which two military expeditions were sent by Antigonus, one of the generals of Alexander the Great. It is not improbable that the Edomites themselves began to construct dwellings in the rocks (Jer. xlix. 16) ; but how far they went, and what the character of those dwellings were, it is impossible to tell. The most beautiful description of Petra I have met with is that of Dr Olin, of the American Methodist Episcopal Church, who visited the locality in April 1840. His travels have not been published in this country, and the following extract will, therefore, be the more acceptable :—After describing the splendid colours of the stone in the Wady Syke, and the façade of a temple and a tomb, he says, "The treasury of Pharaoh" (so called by the Bedouins), "the most chaste and perfect of the splendid monuments of Petra, is situated in this gorge, in the bosom of the

mountain, at a point where the receding cliffs form a deep dark glen of only a few rods in diameter. A broad incision was made in the face of the mountain, ten or twelve feet in depth, apparently for the purpose of reaching the more solid parts of the rock. This preparatory excavation left an immense projecting mass, which overhangs the edifice, and protects it against the rains. To this circumstance, we are probably indebted for the good preservation and perfect freshness of this exquisite piece of architecture. Six columns of no distinct order, but most resembling the Corinthian, supported and adorned the front. One has disappeared, and five remain in their places. A graceful pediment is ornamented with some good sculpture. Another row of six beautiful columns rises above the first, forming a second and peculiarly elegant stage of this incomparable façade. Each pair of columns supports the pediment and other rich ornaments of a porch or miniature temple, in the style I have already described in speaking of the Corinthian tomb. The middle one, which is exquisitely beautiful, resembles in form the Lantern of Demosthenes at Athens. It is separated from the other two by deep niches, which seem to have contained statues. Two statues which occupied niches in the lower part of the façade are still seen, in a mutilated condition. The pinnacle of the temple, perhaps one hundred feet in height, is surmounted by a beautiful urn. The principal apartment of the interior, which is perfectly plain, is fifteen paces in length by fourteen in width, and has small narrow recesses in three of its sides. There are two other lateral chambers, nearly as large, on the right and left of the vestibule.

“Just to the right of the temple, a sort of ladder is formed from the base of the summit of the perpendicular cliff. It consists of small holes cut in the face of the rock, just suffi-

cient to receive the hand or foot ; and this seems to have been the only means by which the workmen ascended and descended. It is enough to make one's head turn to look at it. Stairs of the same kind were employed in scaling the immense heights in the quarries of Jebel Silsily" ("Travels in the East," vol. ii. p. 36. New York, 1843.)

I N D E X.



	PAGE
AARON, priesthood of.....	1
Affatus, divine.....	5
Ahab, son of Kolial.....	144
Ahikam.....	195
Akra, the hill.....	20
Almond tree.....	8
Alphabetical poems.....	223
Ammon.....	199, 243
Amon, of No.....	72
Anathoth.....	3, 172, 287
Andrewes, Bishop, quoted, 221,	245
Apocrypha quoted.....	103, 202
Archimides.....	195
Arnon, the river.....	241

BAALIM, altar of.....	16
Baalis, hatred of.....	201
Babylon...81, 130, 145, 196, 246	
Balaam.....	98
Balm of Gilead.....	24
Baruch88, 92, 95, 212, 214	
— Book of.....	261, 264
Battering rams.....	187
Belshazzar.....	250
Benjamin, gate of.....	160
Bonds and yokes.....	145
Burial of an ass.....	82
Butler, Dr, quoted.....	205

	PAGE
CALVIN quoted.....	9, 31, 82, 85 153, 262
Canaan, fruits of.....	200
Captivity, seventy years'.....	81
Carchemish.....	66, 71, 79, 288
Cedars of Lebanon.....	82
Chaldean army.....	163, 186
Chebar river.....	187
Chemosh.....	239
Chimham.....	208
Chittim, isles of.....	10
Chozeh.....	14
Christian ministry.....	6
Cicero referred to.....	114

DAMASCUS.....	246
Daniel, captivity of.....	147
David's prayer.....	117
Delaiah.....	91
Delitzsch on psalm lxxi.....	283
Devices.....	53
Diviners.....	149
EBEDMELECH.....	165
Edom.....	244
Edomites.....	199
Egypt.....	208, 213, 253
Egyptians.....	49

	PAGE
Elamites.....	139, 246
Eleazar.....	1
Elegy for Josiah.....	67
Eliakim.....	75
Elirathan.....	89, 91
Elishama.....	90
Euphrates, the.....	28
Eusebius quoted.....	107
Ewald quoted.....	148, 225, 256, 267
 FALSE PROPHETS.....	143
Fanner.....	186
Fasting-day.....	88
Figs good and bad.....	140
Free-will of man.....	31, 53
 GAZA.....	29
Gedaliah.....	195, 196, 199
— governor of Judah.....	198
—'s oath.....	200
— plot to murder.....	201
— death of.....	202
Gemariah.....	91
Gibeon, battle of.....	208
Girdle, the prophet's.....	29
Grain stores.....	206
Greatness, true.....	97
 HADADRIMMON.....	67
Hammer, God's.....	147, 249
Hanameel.....	171
Hananiah.....	151, 153
Heart, deceitfulness of the.....	38
Heavens, stability of the.....	122
Heliopolis.....	257
Hengstenberg quoted.....	30, 115
Herbert, George, quoted.....	45
Heshbon.....	242
Hezekiah.....	78
Hilkiah.....	3

	PAGE
Hinnom, valley of.....	56
Hophni.....	1
House of consolation.....	281
Huldah.....	20, 63
 IDOLATRY.....	25
Irijah.....	160
Isaiah, call of.....	5
— referred to.....	117
Ishmael.....	199
— character of.....	202
— the traitor.....	201
— the murderer.....	202, 204
— the hypocrite.....	203
— leaves Mizpah.....	207
— pursued by Johanan.....	207
 JAZANIAH.....	209
Jehoahaz.....	73
Jehoiachin.....	126
— taken captive.....	128
Jehoiakim.....	75, 88, 94, 194
Jehovah Tsidkenu.....	132
Jehovah.....	196
Jeremiah, birth of.....	3
— call.....	4, 7
— work life long.....	13
— a prophet.....	15
— in the stocks.....	59
— letters of.....	142
— in prison.....	155
— in the pit.....	164
— life preserved.....	195
— lives in Mizpah.....	199
— charged with falsehood.....	212
— in Egypt.....	254
— unsuccessful.....	267
— death of.....	265
Jerusalem threatened.....	77
— restored.....	123
— fall of.....	184, &c.

	PAGE
Johanan.....	199, 207
— goes to Bethlehem.....	208
Jonadab, sons of.....	100
Jonathan, honour of.....	161, 199
Josephus quoted.....	202
Josiah, pity of.....	19
— death of.....	65
Jubilee year.....	171
 KEDAR	246
Keil quoted.....	26, 61, 75, 147, 164, 173
Kenites.....	98
Kerek-Sibmah.....	241
Kir-heres	241
 LAMENTATIONS, Book of.....	214
— date when written.....	215
— Hebrew title.....	215
— exposition of.....	216, 224
Lamentations of Josiah.....	67
Lebanon, sorrow of	54, 83
Levitical priesthood.....	177
Luther referred to.....	92, 179
 MACCABEES	237
Marcellus.....	195
Megiddo, valley of.....	67
Men wanted for the times	273
Mercy and judgment.....	80
Messiah, the.....	133
Messianic times.....	116
Micaiah.....	89
Miracles not wrought by Jeremiah.....	276
Mizpah or Neby Samwil.....	196, 215
Moab.....	199, 239, 241, 242
Moabite stone.....	289
Moloch.....	57
Moses imitated.....	197
Mount Zion.....	156

	PAGE
NABIII.....	14
Nabo-pollassar.....	66, 184
Naëgelsbach quoted.....	188, 167
Natural calamities.....	268
Nebo-Sarsechim.....	189
Nebuchadnezzar.....	71, 80, 128, 146, 190, 257
Nebuzar-adan.....	192, 195, 196
Nehushta	127
Noph or Memphis	258
 PASHUR, son of Immer.....	59
—, son of Melchiah.....	155
Partridge eggs.....	39
Persecution, to be objects of.....	277
Persians.....	139
Petra	290
Pharaoh-Necho.....	65
— Hophra.....	255, 257, 263
Philistines, the.....	237
Phinehas.....	2
Pit, description of Ishmael's.....	204
Poetry of suffering.....	22, 25
Posterity, our duty to.....	137
Potter's house.....	49
Prayer, concluding	286
Prayer of Jeremiah.....	34
— for enemies.....	142
Preaching, gift of.....	6
Princes, the.....	163
Prosperity, false.....	84
Psalm lxxi.....	107
Purchase of the field.....	173
 QUEEN of heaven.....	261
Quotation from Faber.....	269
 RABBAH, city of.....	243
Rachael weeping	114
Ramah.....	194
Rawlinson quoted.....	272
Riblah.....	73

	PAGE
Rechabites	99
Reformation, Josiah's	17
Reputation, needless anxiety for	284
Robinson quoted	3, 207
Roll, destruction of the	91
Roll of the book	14
Rome, papal	262
SABBATH, law of	40
Schwartz quoted	109
Scopus	187
Seething pot	8
Septuagint referred to	134
Seraiah	145, 199
Shallum	74
Shepherds, unfaithful	13
Shemaiah	143
Shiloh	76
St Paul	52, 161
Stocks, the	59
Subscribing evidence	172
Sufferings of the captives	194
Syracuse	195
TAHPANHES	254
Tammuz	185
Tebeth, the month	185
Temperance, value of	100
Temple repaired	17

	PAGE
Temple, gate of	59
Tholuck, Dr, quoted	53
Thomson, Dr, quoted	11, 50, 207
Tophet	58
Tristram, Dr, quoted	8, 39, 206
Triumphal song	111
UMBREIT quoted	22
Urijah	76
VULGATE referred to	210
WAR, terrors of	191
Waters of Zimrim	242
Wilkinson, Sir G., quoted	49
Wine, use of	101, 110
Winter-house	91
Woe on the thoughtless	278
Wolf, Dr, Joseph	108
Wordsworth, Bishop	93, 130
Worship of the Virgin	262
Writer's ink-horn	187
ZEDEKIAH	89, 129, 138
Zephaniah	22, 143, 157, 257
Zerubbabel	193, 194
Zinzendorf quoted	174, 282