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THE MINOR PROPHETS
UNFOLDED

THE MINOR PROPHETS UNFOLDED

BY

A. LUKYN WILLIAMS, D.D.

VICAR OF GUILDEN MORDEN AND HON. CANON OF ELY CATHEDRAL
AND LATE EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF DURHAM

VOL. III.

OBADIAH, JONAH, AND
MICAH

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PREFACE

THE object of this series of little commentaries on the Minor Prophets has not always been understood.

They are the result of study of the books in the original language and in the state in which they have come down to us, the desire being, first, to give to English readers in cheap and simple form the real thoughts of the authors, and then (as all truths have their teaching for far other times and places than those in which they were first expressed) to bring out the lessons for our own day.

But the Christian commentator has always to avoid two dangers. He dares not read into a passage of Scripture truths which in reality are not there, falling into the mistake of the saintly Robert Hawker, who, as Spurgeon said, "occasionally sees Jesus where Jesus is not legitimately to be seen," and, on the other hand, he may not shut his eyes to the fact that the Holy Spirit was often so guiding the words of the sacred writers as to enable them to speak of things which were finally revealed only in Christ.

Each of the three books included in this volume is very different from the other two. *Obadiah*, starting from the thought of vengeance on Israel's ancestral foe, embraces in its ecstatic vision the destruction of the great enemy of all the people of God. *Jonah* is the LORD's call to a wider interest in His work than that which sees in it His care for only a select few. *Micah* is

the cry of a patriot who is anxious for his country because conscious of its offences against social rights, and convinced that only in a return to God and His commands lies its safety. *Micah* is the only book of the three which presents serious difficulties of text, and these, it is hoped, have at least been considered honestly, if with a leaning to mercy. Into questions of the Higher Criticism, as contrasted with the Lower, I have not often entered, chiefly because I believe that in this book, as in *Obadiah*, the conservative position is uniformly right, and I have preferred to present positive teaching without the admixture of controversy.

OBADIAH

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OBADIAH *vv.* 1-4.

The vision of Obadiah . . . saith the LORD.

"THE vision of him that serveth the LORD"—for such is the meaning of the writer's name. He appears to have lived about 500 B.C. when the Arabian tribes were beginning to threaten the kingdom of Edom (Mal. i. 3 note). He sees God's hand in this, and foretells the downfall of that haughty nation, boastful of its superior "wisdom." But his book is more than a diatribe against Edom. It unfolds the purpose of God against every power that exalts itself against Him and His people. Hence the Jewish teachers, century after century, identified "Edom" with Rome, Rome pagan and Rome Christian, and so bade their followers look to the end of all things, and the final triumph of the LORD'S cause. For boastfulness and disregard of moral duties shall not triumph for ever; the vision of "him that serveth the LORD" shall be fulfilled.

In these four verses we see, first, the preparation that is being made among Edom's foes. A messenger is sent round to summon them to the attack (*v.* 1*b*). Then follows God's verdict. Edom is to be made small and greatly despised. For a conceited people such as the Edomites were no threat could have been worse. They had the reputation of intellectual supremacy, and claimed it continually. But mere cleverness and learning weigh very light before God,

who "taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (Job v. 13). Another thing gave them confidence—the difficulty of access to their citadel. Sela, or Petra, is in the middle of rocky passes, easily defended by a few resolute men. Edom, therefore, felt secure among its high cliffs, as an eagle on its eyrie. But the LORD said, that He would bring her down from thence, and History tells us that His threat was accomplished. For nearly two thousand years uncivilized Arab tribes have been its only inhabitants. Even the judgments of the Lord deserve the praise of His servants (Rev. xviii. 20).

NOTES.

Central thought, ver. 15.

Divisions. A. Vers. 1-9. Edom to be punished. B. Vers. 10-14. For her violence to Jacob, especially for helping in the sack of Jerusalem. C. Vers. 15-21. The Day of the LORD is near for all nations, including Edom, when the captives from North Israel and from Judah shall again possess the whole land, and the rule of the LORD be acknowledged.

Much of the book (*vv.* 1-9) is earlier than Jer. xlix. 7-22, where different verses of Obadiah are quoted out of their connexion. This, if taken alone, would point to the whole book having been written before the time of Jeremiah (about 626-580 B.C.), yet the disaster to Jerusalem (*vv.* 11-14) can hardly be any other than that of 587 B.C., and this is confirmed by the existence of two "captivities," of Israel and of Judah (v. 20). It is probable, therefore, that both writers have used an earlier prophecy, dating perhaps from the time of Uzziah (789-740 B.C.), Obadiah following it more closely. The present position of the book may be due to the fact that it seems to be an expansion of Amos ix. 12.

Ver. 1, *the Lord GOD*. Here the "Lord" stands for the Hebrew *Adonai* ("lord" or "master"), and "God" for the Hebrew *YHWH*, which we call "Jehovah," as in "the LORD" of the next clause. Cf. Hosea i. 2, note.

we have heard a rumour (tidings, R.V.). "we," *i.e.* I and my contemporaries, have heard tidings which in fact represent God's purpose.

Ver. 3, *the clefts of the rock*. The R.V. margin has "or Sela. See 2 Kings xiv. 7," the name of the capital of Edom being Sela (rock), which is rendered in Greek by *Petra*. But as a translation of our passage the text is preferable to the margin.

OBADIAH *vv.* 5-9.

If thieves came to thee . . . by slaughter.

THESE verses describe the approaching destruction of Edom in greater detail. It is not to be partial, but complete. Thieves and robbers carry off what they want, but leave something behind; after the gatherers of grapes, there are still gleanings left. But it shall not be so with Edom! The whole tribe is searched, its treasures that were hidden away (perhaps in the countless caves), sought out and plundered. The population is sent off—the phrase suggests a woman sent away by her husband—to the extreme border of the land, and that by all the very men who had made treaties with Edom; they who ate his bread and were at peace with him tricked him and overcame him, setting a snare to catch him—this Edom that had no intelligence! How Obadiah scourges Edom's conceit! For, as the LORD then solemnly reaffirms, He will in that day of judgment cause the wise to perish out of Edom, and intelligence out of Mt. Esau. And the warriors of Teman ("the South," properly a district in Edom, but here representing Edom as a whole) shall be terrified, that thus every one may be cut off from Mt. Esau because of the slaughter.

The ruin, that is to say, shall be complete. Neither their boasted skill, nor their inaccessible situation, shall save them. Root and branch shall they be extirpated, and the remnant hurried off to the border of their land for slavery in foreign countries. Neither brain-power nor advantageous circumstances avail

when the LORD brings forward the instruments of His punishment. Would that we always remembered this elementary fact in our own Empire and in our own lives !

NOTES.

Ver. 7, they that eat *thy bread*. This difficult phrase is probably to be joined with the preceding. It will be observed that the words "they that eat" are not in the Hebrew. Perhaps the original was "the men of thy bread," and the phrase "at peace" has been inserted by way of explanation. *a wound* (A.V.), *a snare* (R.V.). The latter is preferable here, though not in the only other two places where the Hebrew word occurs.

Ver. 9, *by slaughter*. Some commentators join this phrase to *v.* 10, and by slight emendations read : "For the slaughter of thy brother, for the violence done to Jacob," etc.

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OBADIAH *vs.* 10-14.

For thy (the, R.V.) violence . . . in the day of distress

THE blood-relationship that existed between the Edomites and the Israelites made the actions of the former seem the more cruel. It was "thy brother Jacob" to whom thou didst show violence; and it is because of this that shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. Edom had never behaved properly to Israel since the first escape from Egypt, and now, after seven or eight hundred years, God will take the vengeance into His own hand. Nor was it only positive ill-action; there was also the callousness of selfish disregard for suffering. When strangers carried away the wealth of Jerusalem, Edom stood over against it, looking on. When foreigners entered its gates and cast lots for this or that part of the city, Edom, even Edom, was like them.

Then the Prophet adds details, expressed indeed in the form of negative exhortations, but meaning, no doubt, that the Edomites had acted in such ways. They should not gaze on their brother in the day of his disaster, or rejoice over the children of Judah in the day that they perished, or laugh contemptuously at them in the day of their distress. They should not come into the entrance of the land of the LORD's own people in the day of its calamity, nor should Edom, even Edom, gaze on its evil state that day, nor lay hands on their property that same sad day. Nor should they stand at the parting of the ways to cut off the Jewish fugitives, nor hand over the survivors in that day of distress.

Can we fail to catch already the undertone of warning which speaks plainly in the next verses? Thou shouldst not do these things, as thou hast done them—for so shall it be done to thee! God pays back in the coin He receives. A civilization without God

and His ethics cannot stand. A mere *Kulturvolk* must perish, however impregnable it may suppose itself to be.

NOTES.

Ver. 10, *Jacob*. Thy twin-brother! Contrast God's command in Deut. xxiii. 7.

Ver. 11, *forces* (A.V.), *substance* (R.V.). The latter is preferable.

Ver. 12, *in the day that he became a stranger* (A.V., cf. R.V. margin), *in the day of his disaster* (R.V.). The R.V. text is preferable; cf. Job xxxi. 3.

Ver. 13, *the gate of my people*. Hardly the same as the gate, or gates, of v. 11, i.e. of Jerusalem, but rather the entrances to the land.

R. Hawker (on these verses) may be right in attributing Edom's hatred of Israel solely to the blessings possessed by the latter, and in finding therein an image of the hatred that the world bears to Christ and His people for the same reason, the blessings of redemption.

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OBADIAH *v.* 15-21.

For the day of the LORD . . . shall be the LORD'S.

As Edom did, so shall it be done to her! The day of the LORD's judgment is at hand, when He will punish all the Gentiles for their sins, and Edom will not escape. For observe that the Prophet's hope passes far beyond his immediate subject of the overthrow of Edom. The judgment about to fall on her is but part of God's greater judgment on all who oppose Him. To us to-day, as to the Jews of old, the prophecy brings the assurance that God will, in due time, avenge His own. Yes, says the Prophet in the name of the LORD, as you Edomites drank upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, shall drink and jabber, but they too shall be as though they had never been. What a contrast to my people! For in Mt. Zion shall be a remnant, and it (my mountain) shall be inviolable, and the house of Jacob shall possess the possessions of its foes. Then the figure changes. The Jews shall be a fire, Northern Israel a flame, and Esau stubble—they burn throughout it and devour it, so that Esau has no survivor left, for the LORD has so spoken.

At this point Obadiah seems to have come to the end of his message. But not quite; for he adds three verses (19-21) to develop his summary statement in *v.* 17. The Jews shall possess the South country which the Edomites have taken (*cf.* Edom's boast, Ezek. xxxv. 10), and also the Lowlands which the Philistines have seized (Zech. ix. 6); and Northern Israel shall possess the country of Ephraim and Samaria, and the Ammonites Gilead. Or, putting it otherwise, Northern Israel, now a captive host like other Canaanites, shall possess as far north as Zarephath (1 Kings xvii. 9), and the Jews now captive in Sardis shall possess the cities of the South.

And in Mt. Zion shall men come up as deliverers (*cf.* Judges iii. 9), to judge the mountain of Esau, and the LORD shall reign supreme.

Although many of the details in these verses are extremely obscure, the teaching as a whole is clear—that the LORD is King, and that the day is coming when His people shall prove victorious over their foes, and He be acknowledged by all, for His Kingdom shall have come. “Zion and Edom retire from sight; both are comprehended in that one kingdom, and God is *all in all* (I Cor. xv. 28)” (Pusey).

NOTES.

Ver. 15, *near*. “When God says it will be, it is fitting that men should reckon it as near” (Kimchi).

Ver. 16, *as ye have drunk*. The Edomites are addressed, hardly godless Jews.

upon. Perhaps *over* the destruction of the temple.

swallow down, better, “jabber”; see the R.V. marg. and Job vi. 3; Prov. xx. 25.

Ver. 17, *deliverance* (A.V.), *those that escape* (R.V.). The latter is preferable, see Joel ii. 32.

possessions. Perhaps read: “their dispossessors.”

Ver. 18, *for the LORD hath spoken it*, *i.e.* now, by me, although the verse recalls Num. xxiv. 18 *sq.*

Ver. 19, *And they of the south shall possess*. Better, “and they (the Jews) shall possess the South, even the mountain of Esau.” The construction of the next clause is similar.

Benjamin. We should probably alter this to *bene Ammon*, and translate “and the Ammonites (possess) Gilad.”

Ver. 20, shall possess *that of the Canaanites*, even *unto Zarephath* (A.V.). Better as the R.V.: *which are among the Canaanites*, shall possess *even unto Zarephath*. But “among” is an insertion. The word “Canaanites” may be corrupt. One expects a phrase parallel to “that are in the Sepharad.”

Sepharad. The identification with Sardis was confirmed in 1916 by the discovery of a bilingual inscription in Lydian and Aramaic of *c.* 400 B.C., where “Sepharad the city” in the Aramaic represents “Sardis” in the Lydian.

JONAH

JONAH I. 1.

Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying.

WHAT an attractive little book this is, with its wealth of human interest and spiritual teaching! No book of the Old Testament, with the exception of the Psalms, touches in so many ways our modern thought and our Christian outlook on life. For it tells us of missionary effort; of the "natural" religion of the heathen; of the opposition of the human heart, "yea in them that are regenerated"; of the only means by which others can be won to God, self-sacrifice even to the death; of God's power to raise His servant up from death to a new life, for He is supreme over all nature, animate and inanimate; lastly, of God's love, extending to Gentiles as well as to Jews (Acts xi. 18), and even to the brute creation.

The writer is quite unknown, for he does not give a single hint of his name, or even of the date at which he lived. His book reads like a fragment of a large treatise illustrating God's dealing with His people, but, if so, the fragment is complete in itself, and (judged by human writings) is arranged with great care and skill. We Englishmen, of course, always understand tales told in a historical form to be strictly historical, unless we have plain reasons to believe the contrary. But whether this book was ever intended to be understood literally is very doubtful. It may have been, but we cannot say so with any certainty in view of the Eastern love of parable. And in this case the parabolic teaching is so near the surface that we ought to hesitate before insisting that the "facts" (as we say) actually took place in the form related. In any case the "facts" are less important than the lessons they teach, and

to make these our own requires thoughtful and prayerful search, depending on the Spirit of God, who caused the book to be written for our instruction.

NOTES.

Central thought, iv. 10, 11.

Divisions. A. Chs. i., ii. The first command to preach at Nineveh. Ch. i. 1-3. Jonah disobeys and takes ship for Tarshish. 4-16. The storm; the sailors saved by Jonah's self-sacrifice. 17. His own deliverance by a great fish. Ch. ii. His thanksgiving. B. Chs. iii., iv. The second command. Ch. iii. 1-4. He preaches at Nineveh. 5-10. The Ninevites pray, and God "repents." Ch. iv. Jonah's vexation that Nineveh is spared, and the LORD's reply to him.

Jonah the son of Amittai. 2 Kings xiv. 25 only, where we are told that he prophesied to Jeroboam ii. (782-741 B.C.) that he should restore to the kingdom of North Israel its ancient boundary in the north, and the East of Jordan as far south as the Dead Sea. Here the work entrusted to him is very different; to lead a nation that was already becoming the typical enemy of Israel to repent of its sins. If the book is a parable the name may have been chosen because the Prophet's name means the "Dove, son of him who is true," and may even suggest "The Dove, son of the truth of the LORD." And in later Jewish literature at least (if not in the title of Ps. lvi.) "the Dove" is a name for Israel. This falls in with the suggestion that the primary meaning of the parable is the call of Israel to win the heathen to the knowledge of the true God, in spite of its natural disinclination to try to do so, for, as the Rabbis say, "Jonah sought the glory of the son (Israel), not that of the Father." From this it is but an easy step for the Christian to see in Jonah not Israel only, but also Christ, who brings salvation to the world by the sacrifice of Himself, even to the death, through and out of which He is preserved.

The date of the book is very uncertain, but its language shows an Aramaic tendency. This may indicate that it was written in North Israel about 750 B.C., but in our present knowledge of the influence of Aramaic on Hebrew it is safer to place it much later, after the return from Babylon. It may, therefore, represent a reaction from the exclusive teaching of Ezra and Nehemiah, and have been written with the express aim of defending the duty of missions to the heathen. In any case, as Theodoret points out, it foreshadows the preaching of the Gospel far and wide over the whole earth. See further i. 17, note.

JONAH I. 2, 3.

Arise, go to Nineveh . . . the presence of the LORD.

AWAY from the presence of the LORD, and away from His service! Can it be that one who had stood before Him in His service as a prophet acts thus? But there is no limit to the ingratitude of the human heart, or to the ease with which a true servant of God can fall back into sin.

Jonah heard the command: Arise, go to Nineveh, and proclaim over it (*cf.* iii. 2) that its wickedness has come up into the very presence of God in heaven, so loud is the cry for vengeance. For indeed Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital, was perhaps the most cruel of all the nations of antiquity, with barbarities calculated and authorized by its government.

But Jonah refused his task, his reason being, as he tells us in iv. 2, that he knew that, after all, Nineveh would not be punished. A strange reason to us Christian people—as strange as if Englishmen could be vexed that Germany should be threatened by God with destruction and then be forgiven—for true Christians must and do desire the welfare even of their enemies. But Jonah had not our advantages. He was intensely patriotic, and had he confidently expected the overthrow of Nineveh as the result of his mission he would have gone upon it gladly. But he had learned as yet but little either of God's claim on him, or of God's love in general.

So he went down from the highland to Jaffa on the coast, where he found a ship on the point of going

home to Seville, paid the passage demanded for it, and went down on the sea to go home with its heathen sailors to Seville, away (as we are told again) from the presence of the LORD.

How terrible ! But the proper result of selfishness and weakness and spiritual short-sightedness.

NOTES.

Ver. 2, *that great city*. See iii. 2, note.

their wickedness. For the cruelty (iii. 8) and immorality of Nineveh, see Nahum ii. 11, 12 ; iii. 1-4.

Ver. 3, *Tarshish*. Tartessos, the name of the ancient city of Seville in Spain, a settlement of the Phœnicians.

the presence of the LORD. The phrase (*v.* 10 also) does not suggest that he thought the LORD was only in Palestine, for in that case he would have been equally distant from Him in Nineveh, but implies absence from conscious service and personal communion. So of Cain, Gen. iv. 16. See also 1 Kings viii. 25 ; Jer. xxxiii. 18. Cf. Jer. xxxv. 19.

JONAH 1. 4-9.

But the LORD . . . the sea and the dry land.

JONAH might flee, but the LORD before whom he had ministered is supreme over nature, and uses the powers of nature to convict him of his sin. How vivid the picture is! The LORD takes up, as it were, a great wind in His hands, and hurls it into the sea, and there is a great storm in the sea, and the ship "is minded" to be broken. Then the ship's crew are described, religious in their own way, and, though heathen, more consistent than Jonah. They were afraid at the storm, and they cried out each to his own god (perhaps they were from different lands, or perhaps all from Tarshish or Phœnicia, but each having his own favourite deity), and, working as well as praying, they hurled the various portions of the cargo into the sea to make matters easier for them—with Jonah all the time down in the inner part of the lower deck, where he lay fast asleep. Then the sailors remembered that one in the boat was doing nothing, and yet perhaps it was his god that required prayer. So the captain came close to him, and said to him: "How comes it that thou art sleeping? Rise, call to thy god; perchance that god will think of something for us, that we perish not!" They left him, as it seems, and things were no better. Is there any reason, they asked each other; is there any among us whose fault this tempest is? Let us throw lots. And the lot fell on Jonah. For, as the wise man says: "the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Prov. xvi. 33).

We can see Jonah now, the centre of the group, as they say to him, Tell us, we pray—for this evil is clearly due to thee—thy work, where thou hast lately been, the country where thou livest, the people

to which thou dost belong. Jonah takes the last question first, and confesses his faith boldly: I am a Hebrew, and the LORD, the God of heaven, do I fear, who made both sea and land. Observe Jonah's claim for the LORD—far greater than any which they would have made for one of their own gods. The LORD is supreme in heaven, and also on earth—over this sea with its tempests, and the dry land to which we would go. For if the sailors were religious, so also was Jonah, with a fuller knowledge, and with personal courage in confessing his faith. Happy is he who in danger acknowledges God, and that in front of unbelievers!

NOTES.

Ver. 4, *sent out*. The same word as "cast forth" in *vv.* 5, 12, 15.

Ver. 5, *wares*. Manufactured articles, "vessels," perhaps from Asia Minor, shipped in exchange for raw produce from Tarshish (Ezek. xxvii. 12 sq.).

sides (A.V.), *innermost parts* (R.V.). The latter is right.

the ship (2nd). A different word in the Hebrew, found here only in the O.T. Perhaps specially the lower deck, as in Aramaic.

and was fast asleep. As sound as Sisera (Judges iv. 21), or even Adam ("a deep sleep," Gen. ii. 21). "Jonah, at ease because he thought he was far from the hand of God, Jesus (Mark iv. 35-41), assured because He knew that He was hidden there" (Marti).

Ver. 6, *the shipmaster*. Literally, the chief of the sailors. Cf. Ezek. xxvii. 8, 27, 28, 29.

Ver. 8, *for whose cause this evil is upon us*. Probably a parenthesis.

what is thine occupation? Strange that this should be mentioned first! Perhaps they thought that the trade or business he followed was especially inimical to the god who ruled the sea.

JONAH I. 10-16.

Then were the men . . . and made vows.

A NOBLE description of self-sacrifice, and its effect, both for others and upon them.

Jonah had answered the sailors' questions more fully than is directly recorded in v. 9, for he had also confessed his disobedience to the command of the LORD (v. 10). At this the sailors were terrified for themselves, and horror-stricken at him, and asked (as God had asked Eve, Gen. iii. 13): "What is this that thou hast done!" They added: "What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may cease its roar upon us and be calm?" For it was becoming more and more tempestuous.

Now there is often only one way by which we can avert disasters that threaten others, the sacrifice of ourselves. God forgive us that we are all so slow to learn it, and delay so long in practising it. But Jonah did not hesitate. He had already, it will be observed, put himself right with God by the confession of his sin, and now he did not shrink from giving himself up to certain death, in order that his comrades might be saved. "Take me up, and hurl me into the sea"; and with firm faith he assured them that the sea would then be calm. They believed him, but were not selfish, and so they rowed their utmost to get back to land. But in vain, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous. Then they prayed; this time not to their own gods, but to the LORD, whom Jonah worshipped, asking Him to pardon their action. For they were now convinced of His supreme power in ordering the voyage as He chose, and in determining the lot. So they took up Jonah, hurled him into the sea, and the sea was still and ceased to rage.

The self-sacrifice of Jonah, even to death, was

effectual; his comrades were saved. And yet more; they feared the LORD greatly, and offered sacrifices to Him; and vowed to Him vows of thanksgiving when they should be safe on land. In body and in soul they were saved through the utter self-devotion of the servant of the LORD.

A wonderful picture of the supreme sacrifice of the death of Christ! An earnest summons to every believer who would do his utmost for the salvation of the world.

NOTES.

Ver. 11, *What shall we do unto thee?* " Shall we slay thee? But thou art a worshipper of the LORD. Shall we keep thee? But thou art fleeing from God " (Jerome).

Ver. 13, *to bring it to the land* (A.V.), *to get them back to the land* (R.V.). The phrase means "to bring the ship back." Kimchi says they started from land and they strove to bring the ship back to land, not necessarily to the same place.

A fragment of a Latin sermon on Jonah, included in the works of Philo, says: " An awful tribunal was there on the sea. The ship was the court of justice, the sailors the judges, the winds the torturers, the prophet he who was summoned to judgment, the whale the cage and prison, the sea the adversary, the waves and foam his attacks and open accusations " (Mangey, ii. 612).

Ver. 16, *offered a sacrifice*. Of animals which were to serve as food during the long voyage. Naturally the heathen sailors were not bound by Jewish regulations.

JONAH I. 17—II. 10.

Now the LORD had prepared (A.V.) } . . . upon the dry
And the LORD prepared (R.V.) } land.

JONAH'S self-sacrifice for the sailors was completed; his own deliverance had begun. For just as Christ's victory over death began by His being in Paradise (Luke xxiii. 43), and preaching to the spirits that were in prison (1 Peter iii. 19), so here Jonah's deliverance begins when the fish saves him from the angry seas, and he praises God within it.

But what a strange picture it is, surpassing the limits of human experience, in its description of the continued omnipotence of God over the very monsters of the sea, and of the grace that Jonah showed in his thanksgiving to the LORD. For observe that his psalm is all praise, not prayer, even though there underlies some of its clauses the sense of his awful position. He is depicted as a man who had drunk in the words of the hymns he had been wont to sing, and was therefore able to repeat verses from them, and to combine them together in consecutive argument.

He begins with a general statement, that because of his affliction he called to the LORD (Ps. xviii. 6; cxx. 1), who heard him. From the very maw of Hades did he cry, and He heard his voice (v. 2). But He cast him into the depth, the heart of the sea, so that the great sea-river surrounded him, all God's breakers and billows passing over him (v. 3; see Ps. xlii. 7). His conscience indeed told him that he had been driven out from God's sight (Ps. xxxi. 22)—yet once more would he look in heart to His holy temple, the scene of revelation and of grace (v. 4). Then Jonah describes the awful experience of being in the sea—the waters, and the abyss, with the seaweed clinging round his head (v. 5). Down he went to the very bottoms of the mountains, to the land

whose barriers were closing him in for ever—but (as he says): Thou, O LORD my God, didst bring my life up from the very pit (v. 6; cf. Ps. xxx. 3). I was swooning (Lam. ii. 12; cf. Ps. cxlii. 3; cxliii. 4), but I remembered the LORD; and my prayer came to Him into His holy temple (v. 7). Idol-worshippers (Ps. xxxi. 6), he adds, really forsake Him who would show them mercy (v. 8; cf. Ps. cxliv. 2, "my loving-kindness," R.V.), but, as for me, with loud confession will I offer sacrifices to Thee; I will pay my vows (Ps. l. 14). The power of deliverance is the LORD'S alone (v. 9; cf. Ps. iii. 8). "And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

NOTES.

Ver. 17, *prepared*. Rather "appointed," and so in iv. 6, 7, 8. The fish, the gourd, the worm and the scirocco are regarded as being already in existence, and being given each its task.

a great fish. No hint is given of the kind of fish that was in the writer's mind. The cachalot whale, which can easily swallow a man, is unknown in the Mediterranean. But the difficulty of belief in the literalness of the event described is not that Jonah was swallowed, but that he remained alive when swallowed, and there is no known parallel to this in history. For the tale in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, ii. 750, has been proved to be a *canard*. No one indeed doubts that God *can* perform such a miracle; the question is whether it is at all akin to the miracles which He has performed at other times, and this is not the case. Our Lord's reference in Matt. xii. 40 holds good whether it was "fact" or parable. It was, we may note, the more easy for Him to refer to Jonah as a type of Himself, if, as is probable, Jonah was connected with the Messiah in Jewish homilies. Certain Messianic functions are attributed to him in the Midrash *Pirke d'R. Eliezer*, § 10, which belongs in its present form to the beginning of the ninth century A.D., but includes material dating from the first (cf. G. Friedlander's edition, 1916, pp. 70, 73). The fact that the Book of Jonah has been read at the afternoon service of the Day of Atonement since Talmudic times (Megillah, 31a, see Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst*, p. 182), and was the subject of a discourse on fast days (cf. Mishna, *Taanith*, ii. 1), may have something to do with this. See I. Abraham's *Studies in Pharisaism*, 1917, p. 149.

JONAH III. 1-4.

And the word of the LORD . . . overthrown.

THE Prophet has died (as it were) and been restored to life, and now he cannot but do what he is told. At the words, "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city and preach unto it," he obeys at once. Observe that God's words are not quite identical with those of i. 2. In particular notice that the reason is not given ("for their wickedness is come up before me"), but (instead) further guidance is promised: "the preaching that I bid thee." This was, as stated in v. 4, "yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Jonah now is not only to exhort, but to proclaim God's decree. But although he has learned the primary lesson of obedience—and it is a great lesson for every one who would work the work of the LORD—yet (as we shall see) he is very far from perfect, either in knowledge or in love. He is still, as it seems, the slave of a narrow patriotism, which hinders him from rejoicing in the welfare of an hereditary foe, even though the improvement be wrought by his own agency.

After telling us yet again (v. 3) that Jonah went to Nineveh in accordance with the word of the LORD—to emphasize the Divine character of his task, strange though it must have seemed to many a devout Israelite—the writer insists on the size of Nineveh. For later (iv. 11) that is an important element in the lesson taught to Jonah. The form of the words in the original is rather unusual, and lays stress both on the word "Nineveh," and on the long existence of the city. It, whatever other cities were, was and had long been a great city even in God's judgment. Three days must be allowed for walking through it—though whether this means in a straight line, or in going up and down its principal streets, or visiting its principal parts, we are not told. So Jonah made a beginning of entering the city, as far as one day's walk

would take him, and he cried aloud and said: Yet forty days and, lo, Nineveh lies overthrown! The phrase suggests the same fate that befell Sodom and Gomorrah, and probably the use of the same means.

An awful cry, made by one who was a foreigner indeed, but known by dress and manner to claim to be a prophet, and destruction, according to him, was close at hand, and was to be warded off on one condition only! For conscience when awakened needed no words of explanation or direction. Ruin was certain, if matters remained with the Ninevites as they then were.

NOTES.

Ver. 2, *Nineveh, that great city . . . (v. 3), an exceeding great city of three days' journey. (v. 4) And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey.* Excavations and the Assyrian monuments have shown that Nineveh was a long, rather narrow, and walled city, about seven and a half miles in circumference, and that although the four places, Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir (probably suburbs of Nineveh), Calah, and Resen, seem to be called "the great city" in Gen. x. 12, they were never continuous (see Johns, *Enc. Bibl.*, col. 3420). These expressions in the Book of Jonah must therefore be understood of Nineveh alone. The very vague phrase, "three days' journey," therefore cannot refer to circumference, much less to a street running straight through the city even in its longest direction, but to the time necessary for preaching at its principal parts. Our Lord's argument in Matt. xii. 41 requires the literal truth of the repentance at Nineveh; for, if there are no Ninevites who have repented and will arise, His argument is worthless. We have, it may be noted, no more right to expect to find in the cuneiform tablets any mention of the repentance of the Ninevites than that of the emigration of Abraham. Politicians and their chroniclers do not usually take much notice of religious revivals. There is no reason why Jonah should not have gone there.

Ver. 3, *was.* The Hebrew lays stress on what the city was in the time of Jonah's visit, and probably also implies that things were very different in the time of the writer.

an exceeding great city. The R.V. margin, "Heb. a city great unto God," is a literal translation. The phrase means that it was great in the sight of God. "It is on no mean errand of mercy, nor to save only a few from destruction," that Jonah is sent (Perowne, on v. 2).

Ver. 4, *a day's journey.* It is said that the Assyrian inscriptions reckon this as fourteen English miles.

JONAH III. 5-10.

So (And, R.V.) the people of Nineveh . . . he did it not.

JONAH'S preaching found a ready response. The people of Nineveh put their trust in God—not "the LORD," for there is no hint that Jonah had used the name which would have suggested God's covenant mercies with Israel—and therefore they believed His message, and acted upon it. They proclaimed a fast, and made public mourning, all of them, high and low.

Then the writer expands this summary statement, saying how it was that such universal action was brought about. The news of Jonah's preaching had come to the king of Nineveh, and he rose up from his throne, put off his ample cloak (the sign of his authority), put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes—expressing thus the depth of his sorrow and the humiliation of his soul. And at his command, seconded by that of his nobles, proclamation was made in Nineveh that man and beast, whether cattle or sheep, should taste nothing, nor feed, nor have water to drink; but clothe themselves with sackcloth, both man and beast, and call earnestly to God, and turn each man from his evil way, and from any violence that they were about to do. For who could say whether God might not, even now, turn and change His mind, and turn from the fury of His wrath, so that they should not perish!

And, in fact, this national repentance did bring national deliverance, as perhaps it always does. For when God saw their actions, how they turned from their evil way, God changed His mind concerning the evil which He had said He would do to them, and He did it not.

"Yet must I speak. For is there not reigning in London as much pride, as much covetousness, as

much cruelty, as much oppression, and as much superstition, as was in Nebo? Yes, I think, and much more too. Therefore I say, repent, O London; repent, repent. Thou hearest thy faults told thee, amend them, amend them. . . . Oh, London, London! repent, repent; for I think God is more displeased with London than ever he was with the city of Nebo. Repent, therefore, repent, London, and remember that the same God liveth now that punished Nebo, even the same God, and none other; and he will punish sin as well now as he did then: and he will punish the iniquity of London, as well as he did then of Nebo. Amend therefore." Latimer, *Sermon of the Plough*, Jan. 18, 1548 (Parker Society Edition, *Sermons*, pp. 63-65).

NOTES.

Ver. 5, *believed God*. The form of the phrase suggests more than believing the message; and implies some personal dependence on God Himself.

a fast . . . sackcloth. "Fasting and sackcloth are the weapons of repentance, the allies of sinners. First fasting, and then sackcloth; first, what is hidden, and afterwards what is open" (Jerome).

Ver. 6, *the king of Nineveh*. Presumably the prefect of the city, for the King of Assyria is never so called. Observe that "the king of Assyria" would have been an error here, for it appears that in the time of Jonah (c. 770 B.C.) Nineveh was not the capital of the empire. It was Sennacherib (705-682 B.C.) who "made" Nineveh (cf. Johns, *Enc. Bibl.*, coll. 3420, 3423, 4367).

Ver. 7, *and he*. The verb is probably quite general: "and one," which, as often, is best rendered in English by the passive voice.

Ver. 8, *and beast*. The hunger, the bleating, the lowing of beasts would tend to increase the emotions of the people. For beasts wearing a sign of mourning, see Judith iv. 10. The custom of putting black material on bee-skeps after the death of their owner doubtless still exists in the British Isles.

Ver. 10, *God repented*. Scripture, as the Rabbis say, speaks in human tongue. God's words, whether of threats or of promises, are always conditional.

JONAH IV. 1-3.

But it displeased . . . than to live.

WHY was Jonah so vexed? Only because he felt discredited in the eyes of the men of Nineveh, and because his self-esteem suffered? Nay, we may surely allow him more unselfishness than that. A false patriotism is more probable. Nineveh was the typical foe of Israel, and he hoped against hope that his mission would be the signal for her destruction, and, instead of being so, it had become the means of giving her a fresh length of life, for she had repented. So would Jonah's own people continue to be threatened by her, and still would suffer at her hands.

We can sympathize with him, though as Christian people we feel surprised. Yet even in his fault he serves us as a model, for he brought the matter to God. He tells God, calling Him by His covenant name of "the LORD," that it was from fear of this result of his preaching that he had forestalled it by fleeing towards Tarshish, for he knew that God's character was altogether too kind and merciful for the hard facts of this world. It would be better, he implies, to let the Ninevites fill up the cup of their sins, and be destroyed without remedy. For so his own nation Israel will be at peace. But now he feels that he has done no good, and he may as well die.

A very plausible argument, not unknown in our own day, though expressed in different words. "Deutschland über Alles"—"Germany first"—was originally a noble cry, summoning the individual German to deny himself for the sake of his country, but when patriotism claimed to be superior to morality and to ordinary justice it became a curse. All nature, human and animal, has its claim also, as God's reply will show. "Let *him* cast the first stone (at Jonah)," says Dr. Pusey, "who never rejoiced

in any overthrow of the enemies of his country, nor was glad, in a common warfare, that they had lost as many soldiers as we."

NOTES.

Ver. 2, *I fled before* (A.V.), *I hastened to flee* (R.V.). The latter is preferable. The phrase is literally, "I was beforehand with fleeing" (*cf.* R.V. marg.). Jonah means that he fled to Tarshish before he could preach at Nineveh, so as to avoid doing so. The Hebrew word for "hasted" is translated by our Anglo-Latin word "prevent" in Ps. cxix. 147, 148. *a gracious God*, etc. See Exod. xxxiv. 6; Joel ii. 13.

JONAH iv. 4-11.

*Then said the LORD (A.V.), And the LORD said (R.V.)
 . . . and also much cattle?*

Is patriotism our highest duty, ranking above the love of men in general? Jonah thought so, but wrongly. Yet what strange means the LORD used to bring his mistake home to him! Jonah, who had doubtless entered Nineveh from the west, had passed through its narrow width (iii. 1, note) to the eastern side, and had waited (probably till the end of the forty days) to see what would happen. But the shelter he there made for himself failed—perhaps the branches withered—and he bore the heat the less easily as his mind was not at rest.

Then "the LORD God"—the name suggests the Source of all growth in the first of gardens (Gen. ii. 4-iii. 24)—by plant, and worm, and wind, tried to convince him of his selfishness. God wanted to bring home to him the enormity of the fact that although the Prophet's compassion was readily moved if the death of a mere plant (for which he had done nothing!) injured his own ease (he was angry because Nineveh was *not* destroyed, and now angry because the plant *was*), yet he had no feeling of pity for the helpless people of a large city, long the objects of God's care! The lesson is not laboured, but left, and the result of it upon Jonah we are not told.

But the mind of God is clearly revealed, that no inconvenience to one's self, or to one's own country, may outweigh the primary duty of kindness to others upon their open confession of sin—however injurious these may have been in the past, and may possibly become again.

It is a great lesson, a good deal above that of ordinary worldly policy, or even the popular religion of so-called Christians, but closely akin to Christ's

command to forgive our brother "until seventy times seven," and to the general teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

And yet there are people who think they have made such progress in the Divine life that they have no need to study the Old Testament!

NOTES.

Ver. 4, *Doest thou well to be angry?* This is preferable to the marginal reading: "Art thou greatly angry?" but hardly gives the meaning. The phrase really suggests neither right nor strength, but care. Is thine anger the result of full consideration? Cf. Deut. xiii. 14 ("diligently"). For our Lord's teaching, see Luke ix. 51-56.

Ver. 5, *on the east side of the city.* This is mentioned because Jonah would there be less sheltered from the full effect of the Scirocco, which generally comes from the east. The city ran nearly north and south, so that Jonah would have only a short way to go (iii. 1, note). There are low hills on both the north-east and the south-east of the city.

a booth. Doubtless a very rough affair of branches.

Ver. 6, *a gourd.* Hebrew, *kikayon*. Some understand the castor-oil-plant (*Ricinus communis*), *kiki* in Egyptian and Rabbinic ("palm-crist," A.V. marg.; "Palma Christi," R.V. marg.). "But no one who knows the *Ricinus* can conceive it affording any shelter over an existing arbour, nor has it the qualities of rapid growth and sudden decay so characteristic of the Gourd" (Tristram, *Natural History of the Bible*, 1889, p. 450).

from his grief (A.V.), *from his evil case* (R.V.). The word translated "evil case" is one of the characteristics of the book: i. 2, 7 sq.; iii. 8, 10; iv. 1 sq.

Ver. 8, *vehement* (A.V.), *sultry* (R.V.). The meaning of the Hebrew word is quite unknown, but may be connected with a rare word for the sun.

Ver. 11, *that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand.* Like mere infants. Perhaps the words mean children literally (innocent as well as helpless), and if so the total population of the city would be about 600,000, not at all an impossible number for an Oriental town of Nineveh's size (iii. 1, note), rather less than the population of Cairo in 1907.

For vv. 10, 11 compare Wisdom xi. 24, 26 (Oesterley's translation): "Thou lovest all things that exist, and abhorrest nothing that Thou didst make. . . . Thou sparest all things, for they are Thine, O Sovereign Lord, that lovest souls."

MICAH

MICAH I. 1-4.

The word of the LORD . . . down a steep place.

THIS is a very difficult book, partly in its details, partly as a connected whole. For threatening and promises are so interwoven that it is often hard to trace the connexion of thought. Probably in some places the original text has not come down to us. It is interesting to note that this is the one book in the Prophets which is quoted by name in the Old Testament. For in Jeremiah xxvi. 18, 19, we find the nobles defending Jeremiah by the example of Micah the Morasthite, who prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, saying that Jerusalem shall be destroyed (iii. 12). Micah was thus a contemporary of Isaiah (as our v. 1 implies), the latter being, as it seems, of high birth, living in Jerusalem, and taking an active part in politics, the former a countryman (like Amos) who dwelt presumably at Moresheth-gath on the western hills of Judah (i. 14). The object of this "prophet of the poor, with Amos' passion for justice, and Hosea's heart of love" is to warn his nation, chiefly Judah, against the effect of its present sins (notwithstanding its punctiliousness in ritual), and to arouse it to a more vivid hope of the coming of the Messiah and of the happiness of His reign.

After the title (v. 1) Micah bids all the peoples hear him, even the whole earth, for He who is the supreme LORD will testify against them by His judgment upon them, out of His heavenly temple where He dwells apart. Yea, He is coming out as a warrior from His home, to tread on the heights of earth, and the mountains shall melt at the touch of His feet, and the valleys be cloven asunder, like wax at fire, or like water in torrents rushing down a steep. The Prophet, that is to say, would tell us that the judgment of Samaria and Jerusalem forms part of the universal

judgment of Him who is supreme Lord as well as the covenant LORD of His people, for the solid earth itself melts away before Him—and how much more we frail men !

NOTES.

Central thought, v. 3.

Divisions. A. Chs. i.-iii. Threatening against Samaria and against Jerusalem. B. Chs. iv., v. Prophecies of the Restoration and of the Messianic time. C. Chs. vi., vii. A restatement of the LORD'S requirements, and a lamentation at the punishment ; with promises and prayers.

Ver. 1, *Micah*. A short form of Micaiah, " who is like the LORD." An inspiring name for one who brings a message from Him.

Jotham (? 739-734 B.C.). Micah may have used materials delivered orally by him during this reign, but they cannot now be distinguished.

Ahaz (733-721 B.C.), especially i. 6, 7.

Hezekiah (720-693 B.C.). Not only iii. 12, but the greater part of the book (*cf.* vi. 1, note).

saw. Not the common word (*ra'ah*), but the technical word (*chazah*), the " seer " of 1 Sam. ix. 9. While " prophet " (*nabi'*) marks only the fact that God uses a man as His intermediary, " seer " states one of the chief means by which He informs him. It implies a vision when he is awake rather than a dream. So also Amos i. 1. False claimants to such visions are condemned in iii. 6, 7.

Ver. 2, *Hear, all ye people* (A.V.), *Hear, ye peoples, all of you* (R.V.). The latter is right. At the end of the speech by Micaiah the son of Imlah (? 853 B.C. ; 1 Kings xxii. 28) the same words refer to the tribes of North Israel, but hardly here. For the wide scope of a prophet's mission, see Jer. i. 5.

be witness—that I have warned you.

temple. The word (*heykal*) seems to mean hall or basilica, whether for king or god. It is frequently used of the temple at Jerusalem ; in Ps. xxix. 9 perhaps of the whole universe ; here, as is evident from v. 3, of that invisible part of it which we call " heaven " ; and so Ps. xi. 4 ; Hab. ii. 20.

Ver. 3, *high places*. Though the hills are used as seats of worship, consecrated of old to divinities, they cannot resist the LORD.

MICAH I. 5-9.

For the transgression . . . even to Jerusalem.

ALTHOUGH God's judgment shall be upon the whole earth (*vv.* 2-4), Samaria and Jerusalem are singled out for special mention, the Prophet's interest lying chiefly with them. The cause of the judgment is "transgression" against God's command, and "sins" of failure to accomplish His will. But the concise vividness of the words that follow is hardly to be reproduced in English, for, strictly speaking, the Prophet brings the sin of Northern Israel before us as personified in Samaria, and that of Southern (described as "high places") as personified in Jerusalem. North and South alike deserve the punishment that God will bring upon them.

For the moment (*vv.* 6, 7), God speaks of the former only. I will make Samaria, He says, into ruins spread over a field, into mere slips of vines planted over a vineyard—for vineyards are often on the sides of hills. Yea, more! I will pour her very stones down the hillside into the valley, and strip her foundations bare for all to see. Her sculptured stones shall be smashed, and the votive offerings, with which, as it were, her foreign lovers hired her to strange cults, shall be burned with fire, and all her images will I make a desolation. For she gathered them, and their adornments, as pay for her immoral traffic with foreigners, and they shall go back to be used for the same purpose. The Prophet means that Israel was intended by God to be alone, uninfluenced by the sins of the nations round, but, alas, she willingly gave herself up to foreign ways and heathen religions, gaining riches and luxuries at the expense of holiness—but He would punish, and send back the wealth to those who had brought it, and would use it in the same way again. For the LORD'S people must

ever live alone ; worldliness and superstition corrupt ; present gains from such source swiftly perish.

For this reason, sin and its awful consequences, adds the Prophet (*vv.* 8, 9), will I lament and wail aloud ; I will go barefoot and stripped, I will howl like the jackals and mourn like the ostriches. For her strokes are incurable, yea, they have come even to Judah, have touched the very gate of my people, even Jerusalem. For however much Micah might grieve over the fate of Samaria, as part of Israel, it did not affect him so much as that which he saw was threatening Judah, his own home, and Jerusalem, the centre of the worship of God.

NOTES.

Ver. 5, *what*. Really "who." Many therefore interpret : "who causes the sin of Jacob ?" etc.

the high places of Judah. A plausible correction is : "the sin of the house of Judah," and so the Septuagint and the Targum.

Ver. 6, *an heap of the field*. Although taken by Sargon in 721 B.C. it existed until Hyrcanus "demolished it entirely" in 120 B.C. (Josephus, *Ant.*, XIII. x. 3, § 281). It was rebuilt by Herod, but has been treated in the same way since. "The place where the buildings of the city stood has been tilled, sown, and reaped ; and the buildings themselves rolled down over the brow of the hill" (*Scotch Narrative of a Mission of Inquiry to the Jews*, 1849, p. 221).

Ver. 7, *hires*. "The gold and the silver on the images shall return to the idols of Assyria" (Aben Ezra), or perhaps "the votive images placed in the temples by the grateful people or by individuals, for favours believed to have been received from the Baals" (Margolis). Cf. also Hos. ii. 12. But as the word comes in awkwardly between "graven images" and "idols" Micah may have originally written "groves," *i.e.* sacred trees ; cf. v. 14.

Ver. 8, *dragons* (A.V.), *jackals* (R.V.) ; *owls* (A.V.), *ostriches* (R.V.). In both cases the R.V. is right. "The cry of the ostrich . . . is a loud, dolorous, and stridulous sound, and in the stillness of the desert plains may be heard at a great distance. . . . To my ear it sounded like the hoarse lowing of an ox in pain" (Tristram, *Natural History of the Bible*, 1889, p. 234). See also Job xxx. 29.

MICAHA I. 10-16.

*Declare ye (Tell, R.V.) it not at (in, R.V.) Gath
 . . . into captivity from thee.*

THE general drift of the passage is clear—Judah is on the point of being overrun by the foe—but the separate clauses are often hard in themselves, and the continual play upon the names of the towns (which are on the coast and in the west of Judah) can hardly be reproduced in English. Tell it not in Gath, as David said on a similar disaster (2 Sam. i. 29); display not thy grief in Acco; in Beth-le-Aphra ("dust-town") roll thyself in dust! Be ye wayfarers, thou population of Shaphir ("Fair"-ford), in nakedness and degradation! The inhabitants of Zanaan (see Josh. xv. 37) came not forth (*yāts'a*) to fight! There is lamentation at Beth-Ezel! He taketh away from you its standing. For the inhabitants of Maroth have waited in vain for good, for evil hath come down from the LORD to the very gates of Jerusalem! Bind the chariots to the steeds (*rechesk*), ye inhabitants of Lachish, head and front of sin to the daughter of Zion; for in thee were Israel's transgressions brought to light. Therefore (because of the sin that requires these punishments) shalt thou (Lachish) pay money as dowry for Moresheth-Gath ("Betrothed" town), when she is handed over to another master, and the houses of Achzib (? "treacherous," apparently not far from Lachish) shall be as a treacherous watercourse (*achzab*, Jer. xv. 18) to the kings of Israel.

Yet again will I bring on thee, thou inhabitant of Mareshah, him who shall take thee as his inheritance (Heb. *yorēsh*), and again shall the glory of Israel take refuge in the cave of Adullam, as did David of old (1 Sam. xxii. 1).

Can we wonder that v. 16 bids the nation show all

outward signs of the deepest mourning—for the children in whom it delights are gone away from her into captivity?

The lesson of the verses is obvious. Not only the land in general, but each part of it, shall share the punishment, for it has already been partaker in the sin. God overlooks neither town nor village, but repays each in accordance with its doings.

NOTES.

Ver. 10. The play on the names in this verse resembles: "In Dover tell it not over; in Rye do not cry; in Ashford roll in ashes."

at all. The word *bako* should be corrected to *b'akko*, "in Accho," the modern Acre.

Beth-le-Aphra. Perhaps connected with the ravine *el-Ghufy*, some fifteen miles east of Lachish, but "roll thyself" (*hithpalashli*) sounds almost like "Philistine thyself," which suggests greater proximity to Philistia.

Ver. 13, *the beginning of (the, A.V.) sin.* Lachish as a frontier fortress between Egypt and Judah would receive the horses from Egypt which the Israelite kings were forbidden to multiply (Deut. xvii. 16; see also Isa. ii. 7; xxxi. 1; Hos. xiv. 3). It may also have been one of the chariot cities (2 Chron. ix. 25) as being on fairly level ground. Hence the sin which it encouraged was perhaps that of self-importance in both its commercial and its military significance. "Israel," it may be noted, in this book never refers to North Israel, except perhaps in vi. 2.

Ver. 15, *an heir (A.V.), him that shall possess thee (R.V.), i.e. the Assyrian foe, presumably Sargon or Sennacherib.*

Ver. 16, *eagle.* The griffon—"vulture" (R.V. margin), "which has the neck and head bald and covered with down" (Tristram, *Natural History of the Bible*, p. 173).

MICAH II. 1-7.

Woe to them . . . walketh uprightly.

It seems to be part of God's government of the world that, wherever possible, sin be paid back in its own coin, the punishment correspond to the offence. So here; for to the sin described in *vv.* 1, 2, the punishment of *vv.* 3-7 is the fitting sequel. People are planning iniquity, and carrying it out almost before they leave their beds; in the earliest morning they do it, as soon as they can accomplish it. Yea, they break the tenth commandment in coveting their neighbour's fields, robbing them of them; coveting their houses and carrying these off for their own buildings; yea, they oppress house and master too, a man and the property he has inherited. Land-greed has always been a prominent sin of the well-to-do, and for a nation like Israel which had but little commerce, and depended almost entirely on home-production, it was even more serious than in countries of more complex civilization.

"Therefore" (*v.* 3) the LORD will punish. If they "plan," so will He—even evil upon this His family, a yoke from under which they shall not be able to remove their necks nor walk straight up—because it is an evil time. How evil the dirge sung tauntingly round them by their foes will show: "We be utterly laid waste! My people's portion God exchanges for nought! How He removes it from me! To him that rebels against Him does He portion out our fields! Therefore thou shalt have none to cast a measuring line by lot in the congregation of the LORD"! In other words: you were greedy for the land of others, now both that and your own is all gone, apportioned out to the ungodly foe, with none of it left to be marked out in the whole of Israel.

No wonder that the rich protest against such threats, and use their false and sycophant prophets to prevent them. "Prophesy not," these keep on prophesying. But God's stern answer is: My true prophets shall not prophesy to these rich men any more; yet reproaches for their sins shall never cease. Are you surprised? Do I change, O House of Jacob? Is the LORD's spirit impatient? Are these judgments His doings (as in fact they are)? Yes, vengeance is His! Do not my words deal well with him who is upright in his walk? God does discriminate, as always, so now; He punishes the ungodly, but prospers those who serve Him. But the service must be real. Conventional religion is useless; it is as unpatriotic as social sins.

NOTES.

Ver. 5, *thou shalt have none*. In particular, no son. *cast a cord (the line, R.V.) by lot*. Another translation is "cast a line on an allotment." There may be a reference to measuring the piece of ground allotted for a year, or term of years, by the elders of a village.

Ver. 6. The R.V. margin reads all this verse as the words of the false prophets who reject the continual harping on reproaches, but it is better to limit their words to the first clause.

say they to them that *prophesy* (A.V.), thus *they prophesy* (R.V.). The R.V. is preferable. This seems to be the beginning of Micah's invectives on the mercenary prophets; see v. II; iii. 5-8.

that *they shall not take shame* (A.V.), *reproaches shall not depart* (R.V.). The latter is probably right. The godless and greedy shall suffer continual reproach.

Ver. 7, *O thou that art named the house of Jacob* (A.V.), *shall it be said, O house of Jacob* (R.V.). The alteration of one small letter gives: "Do I change" (*heamir* for *heamur*; cf. Ps. xlvi. 2).

MICAHA II. 8-13.

Even (But, R.V.) of late . . . the head of them.

THE reader will have noticed that there are two very different subjects in this section. First, in *vv.* 8-11 the LORD continues His invective. "But as for you, you rise up against My people as an enemy" (see note); you strip the long, warm, outer robe from off the garment below, from men who are returning home from the perils of war, as they pass by your gates! The widows that belong to My own people you drive out, as though they were adulteresses (*Hos.* ix. 15, exposition), each from her home with its charms; and her children you deprive for ever of knowing and forwarding My glory, as you sell them into slavery among the heathen. Up and be off! For this shall be your resting-place no more; because of pollution that ruins, with a ruin irremediable!

Then (*v.* 11) He speaks of the false prophets. A man has only to spend his time in mere wind and falsehood, and, appealing to men's passions, tell a lie, saying: "I will prophesy to thee of wine and strong drink"—and he is a prophet of this people!

Secondly (*vv.* 12, 13), the invective ceases, for the LORD will comfort His own. He has seen His people scattered far and wide, but He will collect Jacob quite close, yea, all of it; will gather the remnant of Israel in a body; He will set them together like sheep in the pen, like a flock in the midst of its pasture—it shall hum for its multitude of men. So far the assembling of the nation back into its own fold—safe and populous. But to the Prophet is vouchsafed a greater vision still. The flock bursts out from its enclosure in triumphant success. Up goes the bell-wether, and, in front of them all, breaks through the fence; the rest follow, break through, and have passed on to the very gate, and they have

gone out through it! And, in solemn interpretation of his parable, the Prophet adds: "Yea, their King has passed on in front of them, even the LORD at their head."

A wonderful picture, surely, of Christ the leader, breaking through the fence that separated Israel and leading His flock triumphant out into the world. And more, if any reader prefers to think that this prophecy in its fulness refers to the flock of Jewish believers in days yet to come, let him not lightly part with his supposition, for this may well be included in the Prophet's words.

NOTES.

Ver. 8, *Even (But, R.V.) of late*. In contrast to early days (Ps. xc. 4, "yesterday"). But it is better to accept the slight alteration ('*attem 'a'* for '*ethmul*') and translate as above.

Ye pull off the robe with the garment (A.V.), ye strip the robe from off the garment (R.V.). Both the *garment (salmah, Exod. xxii. 26)* and the *robe ('eder for 'addereth, Zech. xiii. 4)* are outer cloaks, but the latter is presumably more like our "great coat."

Ver. 10, *Arise ye, and depart*. Said to the nation as a whole, because the oppressors in it were its representatives.

not your rest. Though it was intended to be (Deut. xii. 9).

Ver. 12, *remnant*. iv. 7, note.

Bozrah. Amos i. 12, note. But it is better to read, "in the pen" (*battsira* or *battira*).

Ver. 13, *The breaker (ha-porets)*. Probably the common Rabbinic designation of Messiah as Pharez (Gen. xxxviii. 29) is connected with this verse.

MICAH III. 1-8.

And I said . . . and to Israel his sin.

ONCE more the Prophet returns to his main theme, accusing, first, the princes (*vv.* 1-4), and secondly the false prophets (*vv.* 5-8). For it is very terrible when the leaders in State and Church connive at, yes, themselves practise, the sins that are ruining the nation. He bids the heads of Jacob, and the rulers of the house of Israel, hear his words—in both cases he seems to be thinking of Judah, see *vv.* 9, 10—for though they ought to know justice and administer it, they in reality hate good, and love evil, rob men's very skin from off them, and men's flesh from off their bones! Yea, who have eaten the flesh of My own people, says the LORD, and have stripped their skin from off them, and their bones have they broken in pieces, and chopped them like flesh (see note) in a kettle, and like meat into a caldron! So strong a metaphor does Micah use of the inhumanity of Judah's leaders towards the poor! No wonder that he adds: a day shall come when they in their turn shall cry out to the LORD, and He will not answer them, but He shall hide His face from them at that awful time, even as they have made all their actions evil.

If the princes oppressed, the false prophets (*v.* 5) were equally to blame, who were leading the LORD's people astray. The message which they professed to give from God depended on their food! Give them a bite—and they preach peace! But if a man does not put something into their mouth—they proclaim a holy war against him! Micah's words remind us of the lampoons on the godless friars of the fifteenth century. But their punishment shall answer to their crime. They claim to see more than other men; they shall have nothing but night, without vision,

and darkness, without divination; the sun shall set on them, and the very day itself be black upon them. And so the seers shall be ashamed, and the diviners abashed, and all shall wrap their faces like mourners (Ezek. xxiv. 17), for they can get no answer from God. Spiritual gifts profaned are withdrawn.

Then, in contrast, Micah speaks of himself (*v.* 8). But I, he says, I am filled with power given by the Spirit of the LORD, and justice (contrast *vv.* 1, 9), and strength—to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. For the Spirit of God alone can give power, and insight, and mental vigour, to distinguish wrong from right, and to reprove it fittingly, with effective words. It needs much grace to rebuke.

NOTES.

Ver. 3, *as for the pot.* The Greek version reads "as flesh for the pot," probably rightly (*ksh'er* for *ka'asher*). We dare not say that the terrible indictment of this verse is wholly pointless for our own time, in as far as people, even in England, have lived in luxury derived from trades the wages of which are not sufficient to maintain the labourers in decent comfort.

Ver. 5, *prepare war.* See Joel iii. 9, note. The war is one threatened by a foreign state, which the false prophets announce if they are refused food.

Ver. 8, *by the spirit.* The R.V. margin, "even the spirit," can hardly be right. In Gen. iv. 1 the same Hebrew particle is translated in the R.V. "with the help of." But the thought is that the Spirit is the source (not the medium) of power, etc. In Heb. v. 13, 14, such discernment is regarded as the result of perceptions trained in spiritual things because of practice in them. Both statements are true. Contrast the words of Micaiah the son of Imlah about the "lying spirit" (1 Kings xxii. 21, 22). Wellhausen remarks on this verse: "The true prophet swims against the stream, and tells people things they do not like."

MICAH III. 9-12.

Hear this, . . . the high places of the (a, R.V.) forest.

THE Prophet sums up chs. i.-iii. in this final, awful threat. The leaders have taken no notice of his previous words. He cites them once more. "Hear, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and ye princes of Israel, who abhor justice—and all that is upright do they twist awry." No worse charge can be brought against the leaders of any nation. For if justice becomes a farce life is a tragedy. And so the Prophet shows, when he adds: "building Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wrong!"

He then particularizes. The heads of the nation determine suits between man and man according to the bribes they receive; its priests state the requirements of the religious law according to the price that they get for their decision; its prophets make money by their divination. And with all this love of money they lean upon the LORD, saying: Is not the LORD in the midst of us? Evil shall not come upon us. In fact, they were so full of the thought that the temple was in Jerusalem, and that the LORD dwelt in it, that they could not conceive of the city and nation being overthrown (Jer. vii. 4). It is the old story of that trust in forms and externals which is still so seductive in our own day. Because God does use means whereby to come to His people in blessing, men are apt to forget the conditions on which the blessing is given. There is no sacrament of any degree or kind that has not been so abused, no external privilege that has not become a mere

fetish. Yet it is the personal relation to God that determines all.

"Therefore," comes the crushing verdict of the Prophet, "because of you shall Zion be ploughed into a field, and Jerusalem be mere heaps, and the Temple-mountain be high places forsaken and overgrown with bush."

NOTES.

Ver. 10. This verse is reproduced by Habakkuk (ii. 12).

They build up Zion. This translation may be accepted, though the Hebrew as it stands reads: "one building up."

with blood. They stick at nothing, even personal violence (Isa. i. 15). Yet the Prophet may be thinking only of the lives lost by hunger due to the rich men's greed. Some translate "at the price of blood."

Ver. 11, *divine for money.* The prophets do not appear to be blamed for "divining," though this was generally associated with heathenism, but for gaining money by doing so, and (judging by the context) for making their verdicts depend on the amount of money they receive. Cf. v. 5.

Ver. 12. This verse is expressly quoted in Jer. xxvi. 18, the only formal citation in the Old Testament of a verse found in another part of it.

the high places of the (a, R.V.) forest. There must have been several such high-places in Palestine, once thronged, and then neglected and covered with scrub. Observe the plural; the very unity of the Temple-mountain shall be lost. If we may distinguish the nuance of "Zion," "Jerusalem," "the mountain of the house" (i.e. the Temple), we may see in the first the home of the LORD as the theocratic king, in the second the centre of the social and political life of the nation, in the third the focus of its religious activity.

MICAHA IV. 1-5.

But in the last (latter, R.V.) days . . . for ever and ever.

CHAPTERS iv. and v. are a welcome change, for they describe the restoration of Israel and the happiness of the Messianic time, this second theme being the immediate subject of our present verses. In the after-time, *i.e.* in days a good while after those in which the Prophet was speaking, but not otherwise defined, the Temple-mountain, whose desolation had been foretold (iii. 12), shall (figuratively speaking) be raised above other mountains, and different peoples shall stream over it. And many nations shall walk towards it, and invite others to join them in going up to the temple of the LORD, the God whom Jacob has served. For so He will give them authoritative decisions about part at least of the ways He loves, and they will gladly walk in the paths He sets before them, for Zion and Jerusalem are the centre whence proceed the knowledge of His will and the revelation of Himself. A very beautiful description of the turning of the hearts of the heathen to the true God, and of their desire to learn of Him. This portion of the prophesy has already received a great deal of its fulfilment in the acceptance of Christianity, and even, to some degree, in the spread of Mohammadanism. But when the Jewish nation is restored to its own land, and itself receives the true faith it will be fulfilled even more gloriously.

Further, He will act as supreme arbiter of right and wrong in questions of national dispute; He shall judge between great peoples and convict mighty nations even though they be far off. And in consequence of their acceptance of His decisions there shall be no need of weapons of war, which shall be turned into implements for men's farms and vineyards, for there shall be no war, and no need to study how

to wage it. This promise, alas, is still for the future, and perhaps, even probably, connected with the personal Return of the Messiah. But it is a wonderful picture of the time when men's energy and thought shall be devoted to the practice and pursuit of developing the powers of the material world, with no danger from others.

And more than that. Each household shall enjoy the produce of its own work (the image is that of the small owner, as was but natural on the lips of Micah the countryman), without any fear of robbers, for the LORD gives assurance to that effect!

The passage closes (*v.* 5) with the reason for the hope that this blessed consummation is bound up with Israel. Israel alone knows the LORD. All other peoples are walking in the name of their own gods, but we Israelites will walk now and for ever and ever in the name of the LORD—an appeal as well as a statement that in His service alone is bound up true prosperity, in Him alone all real success. Happy the nation, happy the individual, who has learned this secret of life!

NOTES.

Vers. 1-3 are found almost verbally in Isa. ii. 2-4. Probably both writers incorporated an earlier prophecy. It seems that no heathen writer foretells the universal acceptance of his own religion.

Ver. 1, *exalted*. It is strange that many scholars, some on the rationalistic and some on the narrowly orthodox side, interpret this and kindred passages literally. Western minds find it difficult to think in terms of Eastern imagery. But Prophets are poets as well as preachers.

Ver. 2, *he will teach*. Probably the LORD, but the Rabbis say the Messiah. And so with "he shall judge" (*v.* 3); Messiah shall arbitrate.

MICAH IV. 6-10.

In that day . . . thine enemies.

IF *vv.* 1-5 dwelt upon the blessedness of the Messianic time in general, these verses foretell the restoration of the people to their own land. For the sight of the deportation of Northern Israel must have brought the possibility of such a fate vividly before the more thoughtful of the inhabitants of Judah, and to Micah (as to his greater contemporary Isaiah) it was certain. But the LORD ever encourages His servants, and He promises that though the nation was like a woman so lame by injury that she could hardly walk, and also was driven far off, and even afflicted by the LORD's decree, yet He would gather her home and assemble her; He would not indeed restore all, but would make her into a Remnant (*v.* 7, note), and her that was removed afar into a strong nation—and the LORD should be king over them in Mount Sion, henceforth and for ever. Whatever, that is to say, the distresses, whatever the losses, God shall bring back a remnant, which shall form a new and ideal kingdom, ruled over by Himself, and that for ever.

The promise is clear and decided, and though the language goes beyond any fulfilment that has yet been seen, we ourselves may have gazed on mountains, some of which we knew were near and others far, yet they all appeared to be at equal distance. So was it, as it seems, in the Prophet's vision. The days which are still future even to us were so foreshortened to him that they seemed to be adjacent to those that are now long past.

The Prophet then (*v.* 8) compares the hill of Sion to one of the towers which shepherds build for their own protection while guarding their flocks. Thither, he says, even to thee, O keep of the daughter of Sion, shall the dominion again come in its former

undivided glory, the kingdom (he emphasizes) that belongs by right to Jerusalem!

But first (*vr.* 9, 10)—and the vision seems almost present to the Prophet's anxious eye—is a time of sore trouble, so disheartened is the nation! Why keep crying out aloud? Dost thou forget thy true King (*Jer.* viii. 19) and Counsellor, that thy pangs are now so grievous? Alas, thou mayest well be in pain, for thou must leave thy city, and dwell in the country-side—and come as far as Babylon—but there shalt thou experience the LORD'S deliverance, and His redemption of thee from the hand of thine enemies. The words are more than a prophecy; humiliation (by God's grace) produces humility, and then, only then, can He restore.

NOTES.

Ver. 6. This verse is used by Zephaniah (*iii.* 19).

Ver. 7, *a remnant*. This has almost the force of a technical term, calling up associations of ultimate blessing (*cf.* *ii.* 12; *v.* 7). Isaiah preached the same truth in his image of the stock of the tree (*Isa.* vi. 13), and, in his confidence in the truth of the LORD'S promise, named his son Shear-jashub, "a remnant shall return" (*vii.* 3). The Jews still pray: "O Guardian of Israel, guard the remnant of Israel, and let not Israel perish, who say: Hear, O Israel [the LORD our God, the LORD is One]" (see Singer, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, p. 64).

Ver. 8, *O tower of the flock*. *Cf.* the "peel-houses" of the north of England, though these were perhaps more permanent dwellings. Buildings large enough to hold the flocks themselves can hardly have been intended. The Targum applies the phrase to Messiah.

the strong hold (A.V.), *the hill* (R.V.). The former is preferable, for the Hebrew word (*'ophel*) is used of a natural hill or fastness artificially strengthened, and either within, or in close proximity to, a town. See in particular 2 Chron. xxvii. 3; *Isa.* xxxii. 14; and the Moabite Stone, line 22.

Ver. 10, *Babylon*. Perhaps a later copyist modified the original words of Micah, as St. Stephen modified those of Amos (*Acts* vii. 43; *Amos* v. 27), for Nineveh was the capital of the great enemy when Micah wrote. But Isaiah named Babylon about the same time (*xxxix.* 6), in a passage where "Nineveh" would have been worse than pointless. Sargon had brought captives from Babylon to Samaria (2 Kings xvii. 24)

MICAH IV. 11-V. 1.

Now also (And now, R.V.) many nations . . . upon the cheek.

ONCE more (*cf. v. 9*) the vision of Jerusalem's distress presents itself to the Prophet, but this time she is being besieged. Probably it is a fresh vision altogether, referring to a different event in history, for whereas in *vv. 9, 10* the sorrow was not to cease until the lessons of the Captivity had been learned, here Jerusalem is to be victorious at once. The passage refers to days still future, in the Messianic kingdom.

The city is besieged. Many nations are assembled against her, which say: Let her be profaned, and let our eye gaze on Sion, *i.e.* in her misery, as we long to see her! For the ungodly often desire to see God's servants humiliated. This actually would give them pleasure, so corrupt are human hearts! But they (always, and especially in this typical example) are ignorant of the LORD's thoughts, and do not understand His purpose. How should they? "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him," not with others. So they think that Jerusalem will fall into their hands—but He has gathered them like swaths of corn into a threshing-floor! Arise and thresh, He says, thou daughter of Sion! The picture is vivid. She, the young heifer used for treading out the corn, shall have her horns made iron and her hoofs made brass, and she shall crush many nations, and shall consecrate their gain to the LORD, and their substance to Him who is her Lord and theirs! So completely shall the enemies of God's people be overcome by those whom God fits out, and nerves for the battle.

One final assurance (*v. 1*) for a time of great crisis. Thou, O Jerusalem, shalt gather thyself as a troop

on foray—for this is now (as it were) thy very nature—though the enemy has set his siege against us, and though men smite the ruler of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. The Prophet seems to mean that even when there seems to be no hope, either from without, or from within, the city, yet let Jerusalem gather up her forces for a final, and successful, attack! He would bid the LORD'S people not despair; let them make one more supreme effort—it shall not fail.

NOTES.

Ver. 13. For the simile of the heifer treading out the corn, see Hosea x. 11, note.

I will consecrate (A.V.), *thou shalt devote* (R.V.). The R.V. text is right, in spite of the margin.

consecrate (A.V.), *devote* (R.V.). This is the word used of the devotion of anything to God, either for preservation in His service or for solemn destruction (Lev. xxvii. 28; Josh. vi. 17, 18).

Ver. 1, *O daughter of troops*. Cf. 2 Chron. xxv. 13, R.V. marg. The opening words are obscure, and have been interpreted in a very different way from that which has been followed above. Some give the same translation, but regard the words as addressed to the enemy; others translate: "cut thyself in mourning," regarding them as addressed to Jerusalem. In both these cases the verse is explained of the miserable state of Jerusalem, without any hint of the coming deliverance. A slight correction of the Hebrew, partly supported by the Septuagint, gives the plausible reading: "Fence thyself about (*tilhgadderi*), Beth-Gader" (cf. 1 Chron. ii. 51), the play on sounds recalling i. 10 *sqq.*

the judge. Amos ii. 3, note. The word (*shôphêt*) is used here for its assonance with *rod* (*shêbêt*).

MICAH v. 2-6.

But thou, Beth-lehem . . . within our borders (border, R.V.).

THUS far in these two chapters (iv. and v.) the pre-eminence of Zion, the conversion of the nations, the happiness of the LORD'S people, the restoration of the nation and of the kingdom, the great siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the foe, have been described, in fact all the glories of the Messianic age, yet not a word has been spoken about the Messiah Himself. But here He stands before us. He shall come from Beth-lehem, the ancient home of David's line, but now (as always) very small to be reckoned among the clans (Num. i. 16; Judges vi. 15) of Judah. He shall come thence for the LORD'S service, to be ruler in Israel, with His origin reaching back to ancient time, the days of old. Possibly Micah understood the phrase to refer only as far back as the time of David, but the words strictly mean very much more than the short three hundred years before Micah wrote, and may not unfairly be pressed to suggest age-long existence.

But His coming, says the Prophet, is not yet. God, because He can wait, and will have the value of His work appreciated, shall give His people up into the hands of their enemies until the fixed time that "she which travaileth" hath borne—the Virgin recently foretold by Isaiah (vii. 14). And then the rest of his brethren of the house of Judah shall return with the Ten Tribes. And what shall Messiah Himself do? He shall stand, strong and independent, and shall feed the flock of His people in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the LORD His God, and they then shall dwell in safety, for now He shall be great as far as the very ends of earth. What a glorious picture of the promised Ruler, ruling

supreme with His people at rest, and His sway acknowledged far and wide!

But first there must be conquest. And at this point (*v.* 5) the Prophet speaks in language natural to his own age, when men lived in dread of the Assyrian empire. This promised Ruler, he says, shall be Peace (*cf.* Isa. ix. 6)—and, strictly speaking, the phrase identifies Him with peace in a way that Christian doctrine alone satisfies—when the Assyrian shall come against our land and tread on our palaces, so triumphant seems the foe! But then we (no doubt under Messiah's orders) shall raise against the enemy a complete, and more than complete (*Eccles.* xi. 2; *cf.* Amos i. 3, note), number of generals, and they shall give the land of Assyria to be pasture to the sword, even the land of Nimrod to "her own bare blades" (G. A. Smith). Yea, he shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he cometh against our land, and when he treadeth only on our borders! So magnificent, so thorough, is the deliverance wrought for the LORD's people, by His Christ!

NOTES.

Ver. 2. This verse is discussed at length in the present writer's *Manual of Christian Evidences for Jewish People*, 1911, parr. 237-244.

Ver. 3, *she which travaileth*. Some refer this to the Nation in general (*iv.* 10).

Ver. 6, *Nimrod*. Gen. x. 8-12 only. He seems to have been founder of the ancient Babylonian and Assyrian kingdom. If he hunted (Gen. x. 9) men as well as wild beasts Micah perhaps suggests that the tables shall be turned.

in the entrances thereof. A slight alteration of the Hebrew word (*pethacheyka*) to *pethichotheyha* makes "drawn swords" (*cf.* A.V. margin).

MICAH v. 7-15.

And the remnant . . . not heard (A.V.), hearkened not (R.V.).

THE Prophet has told us of the Messiah and His work ; now he returns to the Remnant which has been restored (iv. 7). It shall have a twofold effect upon the many peoples round. First (v. 7), it shall be like the evening mist sent by the LORD, like myriad drops upon the herbage, a mist which does not wait upon man's time or approval. It is the LORD that sends it, and makes it effective. Israel's power for good lies in the LORD alone. Secondly (v. 8), the Remnant is like a lion among the lesser wild beasts, as a young lion among the flocks, all powerful, all destructive. A strange figure, presumably indicating the supreme might of the renovated people, and their triumph over all foes. We cannot be surprised that the Prophet, identifying himself with the cause of God, adds in prayer (v. 9): "Let Thine hand (O LORD) be exalted above Thine adversaries, and as for all Thine enemies, let them be exterminated."

Having shown the twofold relation of the Remnant to the Gentiles, Micah now says that it itself is to be purified. First (vv. 10, 11), its worldly supports shall be removed. The LORD will Himself exterminate its horses, destroy its chariots (for on these heathen means of attack Israel had been wont to lean), and will exterminate also the walled cities throughout its land, and pull down all its strongholds—the nation being thus left defenceless save for the power of God, and having, as it were, village life, which is better than that of towns. Secondly (v. 12), He will exterminate all magic arts, taking them out of the hands that now arrange the materials for them, and the nation shall have no more soothsayers. Heathenish modes of forecasting events shall utterly

cease. Thirdly (*vv.* 13, 14), all emblems connected with superstitious worship and idolatry shall be brought to an end. He will exterminate the graven images and the sacred pillars, and the nation shall no more worship what its hands have made. And He will pluck up its sacred poles, and destroy its holy trees. So shall nothing be left them in war but God, in daily life but the seeking of His will, in worship but the ordinances that He has appointed. The divine simplicity of a people consecrated to God could hardly be better stated.

The last verse (15) shows the other side of God's dealings with men. His vengeance shall fall upon those nations which listen not. For, after all, this must be. Rejection of the Divine message spells condemnation.

NOTES.

Ver. 13, *thy standing images* (A.V.), *thy pillars* (R.V.). Hos. iii. 4, note.

Ver. 14, *thy groves* (A.V.), *thine Asherim* (R.V.). The sacred poles in nature worship, of which our May-pole seems to be a survival.

thy cities. So the Hebrew (*'areyka*), but a word is wanted which answers to *Asherim*; perhaps *'atzabbeyka* ("thine idols," 2 Chron. xxiv. 18), or *'elzeyka* ("thy trees," cf. Deut. xvi. 21).

MICAHA vi. 1-5.

Hear ye now . . . of the LORD.

WE now begin the third section of the book (chs. vi., vii.), which is very different from the second (chs. iv., v.). There the Prophet described the glories of the Messianic age; here he is back again in the present. There the purified Remnant was to be victorious; here Micah first (ch. vi.) grieves over the sins of the people, and foretells their punishments, and afterwards (ch. vii.) expresses the hope that a pious Israelite has in the LORD.

But in this sixth chapter, or at all events in his original draft of it, Micah is in all probability not thinking of the nation as a whole, nor even of Judah, but only of the Northern Kingdom (*cf.* i. 5-7). Samaria had as yet not fallen; it still kept the statutes of its founder Omri, and practised the deeds of Ahab (*v.* 16); and therefore the LORD will plead with it once more by the mouth of His servant.

Micah bids the people hear what the LORD is saying to him: Arise, Micah, and contend for Me! Let the unchanging mountains be the witnesses to thy argument, the hills the audience to thy words! So he bids the mountains hear, the foundations of the earth listen. For, he adds, the LORD has a contention (a law-suit) with His people, and with Israel will He plead.

What a tender plea it is! It suggests no law-court, but a Father appealing to his children who had behaved ungratefully to him. O my people, what have I done to thee? In what have I wearied thee? Bear witness if I have wronged thee!

But the argument is not negative. God reminds Israel of His kindness. He brought them up from Egypt, ransomed them from the slave-house, and even then did not leave them to find their way alone, but sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to guide them.

Nor did He forsake them when the wilderness journey was over. Balak might try to get them cursed, but Balaam was forced to bless! Yea, He brought them from Abel-shittim, their last camp on the east of Jordan, safe over the river to Gilgal on the west, where they renewed their consecration—that they might know by sweet experience the righteous, and therefore the loving, actions of the LORD. Redeemed out of slavery, guided daily, saved from danger, led over into the Promised Land—that they might enjoy the power and character of the unchanging LORD—what more could they demand! Surely their lives would be dedicated to Him in fullest gratitude!

NOTES.

Many think that chs. vi., vii. were written by Micah in his old age in the wicked reign of Manasseh (693-640 B.C.). But Jerome understands them of Samaria, first literally, and afterwards spiritually, *i.e.* of heretics. Probably Micah wrote ch. vi. of Samaria, before its destruction in 721 B.C., and reissued it when he added ch. vii., at the time of Sennacherib's conquest of the south-west of Judah (2 Kings xviii. 13). If so, the Prophet's trust in the LORD was soon signally vindicated.

Ver. 1, *mountains . . . hills*. The appeal is not solely rhetorical. Nature is regarded in the Bible as the work of God, and perhaps as not wholly unconscious of Him.

Ver. 2, *strong* (A.V.), *enduring* (R.V.). Lit.: "ye enduring ones" (*hāethanim*), then defined as foundations of the earth. But probably the Hebrew word was originally *ha'azinu*, "Give ear."

Ver. 4, *Moses*, to teach My laws; *Aaron*, to make atonement; *Miriam*, to instruct the women (Targum).

Ver. 5, *from Shittim unto Gilgal*. Connected in A.V. with Balaam's answer, but this is meaningless. The R.V. supplies "remember," *i.e.* the third stage in the LORD's mercies. Perhaps some words have fallen out.

Shittim. Num. xxv. 1; xxxiii. 49; Josh. iii. 1.

Gilgal. Josh. iv. 19; v. 9, 10. Hardly the scene of the appointment of Saul as king (1 Sam. xi. 14 *sq.*) (Jerome), when the whole phrase would refer to God's gracious guidance all through the period of the conquest and the Judges.

the righteousness (A.V.), *the righteous acts* (R.V.). The R.V. is preferable. Further, "righteousness," in either the singular or the plural (as here), when used of God, frequently suggests action in accordance with His character, *i.e.* not merely justice (as we say) but actions that are the result of love.

MICAH VI. 6-8.

Wherewith . . . to walk humbly with thy God.

THE last section described God's mercies to His people. Here is the response of one of the more earnest of Micah's audience. He asks, apparently in all sincerity, what he shall bring with him to secure the LORD's favour. No doubt the question has a very legal, not to say heathen, ring to our Christian ears! Yet it is often the language of the human heart when first awakened to the fact that God is speaking to it. "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, bend myself before God who is on high?" Shall it be with burnt offerings, with calves a year old (therefore valuable)? And then there seems to steal on the inquirer's mind the thought that God wants something very different, for he asks: "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams (if I had them to offer), or with ten thousand torrents of oil (if it were possible to bring them)? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, my own child for my soul's sin?" The very extravagance of the language shows that the inquirer is sure that these external signs of earnestness cannot really give pleasure to God. He must, as the human heart knows upon reflection, really require something that is in altogether another plane than these.

The Prophet's reply is uncompromising. The inquirer does already know the answer to his questions. "He hath declared to thee, O man, what is good"—not necessarily, if at all, by revelation, but to thee as a member of the human race. And (the Prophet goes on to say) God's searching demands of thee agree with this knowledge that thou hast. There is no contradiction between the true voice of God in the heart and His requirements as made known in Scripture. For "what doth

the unchangeable LORD require of thee, but doing justly (Amos v. 24), loving mercy (Hos. vi. 6), and walking humbly along with thy God (*cf.* Deut. x. 12)?" The requirement, that is to say, is threefold, uprightness in one's own actions, kindness towards others, and humility in daily relation with God. We Christians indeed half see legality even in this answer, and certainly cannot forget that as given to men under the law it bears the stamp of "Do this and live." Yet the third part of it corresponds to the fundamental demand of Christ for poverty of spirit (*i.e.* consciousness of our continual need of God), and the first and second parts are in reality the necessary outcome of this. For if our religion does not produce uprightness in personal character, and readiness to help others, it lacks reality, and shows the absence of that humility in the daily life with God which is the secret of all.

NOTES.

Bp. Butler's interpretation of these verses in his famous Sermon on Balaam is to the effect that Balak asks *vv.* 6, 7, and Balaam answers *v.* 8, but it is quite mistaken, and due to failure to see the meaning of *v.* 5.

Ver. 7, *cil*, for the meal-offerings (Lev. ii.).

Ver. 8. *Cf.* also Isa. i. 11-17. "Thou askest, what thou shouldest offer for thee? Offer thyself. For what else doth the Lord seek of thee, but thee" (Augustine, *Serm.*, xlviii. 2, in Pusey)?

MICAHA VI. 9-16.

The LORD'S voice (A.V.) } . . . of my people.
The voice of the LORD (R.V.) }

IN spite of the LORD'S love (vv. 1-5), and of His plain and simple requirements (vv. 6-8), the people have sinned greatly and must be punished accordingly. The voice of the LORD calls to the city!—"and it is sound wisdom to fear Thy name," adds the Prophet—hear ye the rod of My punishment, and learn Who it is that has ordered it. The words mean that wars are not only the result of the greed of the foe; they are also permitted by God to accomplish His discipline on His erring people.

The next words, like so much of this section, are very hard, but the Prophet probably meant them to be a question on the LORD'S lips: "Shall I still forget the house of the wicked, with its treasures gained by wickedness, and its undersized measure that I hate? Shall I reckon the man innocent who has wrong scales, and a bag of deceitful weights? For the city's rich men are full of violence," and its inhabitants speak downright lies and are very cunning.

Then (v. 13) God pronounces His verdict. I, for My part, smite thee sorely, bringing desolation on thee because of thy sins. Thou (emphatic) shalt eat and not be satisfied, but shalt feel thy emptiness within thee, and though thou removest that is thine yet thou shalt not bring deliverance to it, and what thou deliverest I will give to the sword. Thou mayest sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou mayest tread olives, but thou shalt not anoint thyself with oil; and grape juice, but thou shalt not drink wine.

For the religious ordinances that Omri, the godless founder of Samaria, laid down still get themselves observed, and every ill action of the House of Ahab; and ye have walked by their counsels—with

the final result that I give thee to destruction, and the inhabitants of the city to become a hissing, and you its leaders shall bear the scorn that falls on my people. The Prophet means that though the nobles think themselves secure their hope is vain, for they shall have a greater share than others in the ignominy and the contempt.

NOTES.

Ver. 9, *and the man of wisdom shall (will, R.V.) see thy name.* The Hebrew is difficult, but "see" should probably be read "fear."

Ver. 10, *Are there.* Read "shall I forget" (*haeshsheh for haish*).

Ver. 11, *Shall I count them pure (A.V.), shall I be pure (R.V.).* A slight alteration of the Hebrew vowel-points gives the sense required by the A.V.

deceitful weights. Heavier than their face-value, to be used when buying; lighter, when selling; cf. Deut. xxv. 13; Amos viii. 5.

Ver. 14, *thy casting down (A.V.), thy humiliation (R.V.).* The Hebrew word occurs here only, and the preceding clause suggests some such meaning as "emptiness" (R.V. margin).

Ver. 16, *the statutes of Omri.* For Omri, the father of Ahab, see 1 Kings xvi. 21-28, but nothing is known about his "statutes."

the works of the house of Ahab. Especially the worship of the Tyrian Baal, the persecution of prophets, judicial murders (1 Kings xvi. 32; xviii. 4; xix. 2; xxi. 16).

my people. Perhaps we should read, with the Septuagint, the reproach of heathen "peoples" (Deut. xxviii. 37, R.V.).

MICAH VII. 1-6.

Woe is me! . . . the men of his own-house.

IN these six verses Micah describes the lamentation of a true Israelite over the condition of his country, presumably Samaria. He feels himself alone in the midst of spiritual desolation, like the gatherings up of the orchard, or the few grapes remaining after the vintage. He sees no cluster left to eat, or early fig which his soul desires. In fact, the pious man has perished out of the land, and no upright person is left among men.

The Prophet then uses a series of strong figures of speech to express the ungodliness of his contemporaries. They are all bandits lying in ambush to murder; they are huntsmen trying each to catch his brother with nets; they are craftsmen using both their hands for their evil, to do it with all their skill;—and (throwing away all parables) the prince asks for a quittance and the judge judges as he receives it, and the great man tells them his longing, and they weave their plot together. The best and most upright of them is as bad to handle as a briar or a thorn hedge—he suddenly breaks off) it is the day for the watchmen on thy wall, thy visitation is come, now, without any more delay, they are thrown into confusion!

The last phrase suggests the hopeless, aimless, perplexity of a population at the mercy of a merciless foe. The next verses (*vv.* 5, 6) describe the faithlessness of all classes, and the general upheaval against authority. Put no faith in a friend; trust not in your most intimate companion; tell nothing to your wife; for a son now treats his father as a fool, a daughter now rises up against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law (very shocking insubordination in Eastern opinion);

even a man's own servants are his enemies. Thus the ordinary moralities and duties of social and family life are disregarded. Self, and self alone, is followed. Such is the ultimate state of a nation where God has been forgotten, through greed of money and through sin.

NOTES.

Ver. 3, *so they wrap it up* (A.V.), *thus they weave it together* (R.V.). The latter is preferable.

Ver. 4, *the most upright* is sharper (worse, R.V.) *than a thorn hedge*. A different division of the Hebrew letters gives: "the most upright of them is a thorn hedge."

the day of thy watchmen. Probably to be understood literally, but many think that the words mean the day foretold, either in warning by true prophets (*cf.* *v.* 7; Hab. ii. 1), or in false hope by pretenders.

Ver. 6. Our Lord finds a partial fulfilment of the Prophet's words in the disruptive effect of the Gospel (Matt. x. 35 *sq.*). Jewish tradition, on the other hand, taking them in their more literal sense, places the state of things here described in the commencement of the yet future days of Messiah (Mishna, *Sotâ*, ix. 15, and elsewhere).

MICAHA VII. 7-13.

Therefore I will look (A.V.) } . . . *the fruit of their*
But as for me, I will look (R.V.) } *doings.*

HOWEVER lonely the believer may feel, he is not, and cannot be, really disheartened. "But I" (the word is very emphatic) "will keep watch in the LORD." Others may look to the watchmen they have set on the walls (*v.* 4), I to the LORD. Though He may delay I will wait for the God who brings me victory. My God will hear me. O blessed confidence of every believer! The enmity ranged against me may laugh, but in vain! Though I fall, as indeed I have fallen, see, I have already risen up again! Though I sit in darkness, as I may for a time, the LORD is and shall be a light unto me!

I know, he continues, that I am much to blame, and so I will bear the LORD's rage (for I have sinned against Him) until He plead my cause against my enemy, and performs His verdict of judgment for me. He will bring me out into the light; I shall see His righteous vindication of my cause, and His own, in the overthrow of my enemy. Yea, let her look on, and let shame cover her, who keeps saying to me: Where is the LORD whom thou worshippest? My eyes shall look upon her, now shall she become trodden down, like the mire of the streets.

Then (*v.* 11) follows the assurance of the restoration of the city and of the people, with a threefold reference to "the day." It is the day for building up thy broken fence (*Amos ix. 11*)—yet in that day the bounds shall be set afar (*cf. Isa. xxvi. 15, R.V.; xxxiii. 17, R.V.; Zech. ii. 4*), for the population shall be so great. It is a day when men shall come unto thee even from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and even from Egypt as far as Euphrates, and to sea from sea, and from mountain to mountain—that is, to districts

extending far and wide, and overleaping all natural barriers. But first the land shall be desolate because of its inhabitants, and on account of the results of all their evil doings.

What strong and patient faith! What power lies in the believer's hope on God!

NOTES.

Vers. 11-13. An attempt has been made above to give an intelligible meaning to the present Hebrew text, but it is very questionable whether the words have come down to us as the Prophet left them.

Ver. 11, *shall the decree be far removed*. Rashi and some other Jewish writers understand this verse as a taunt by Israel's enemy: "The day for building thy walls, even that day, shall be far removed," and indeed never come. Others understand it of the enemy's decree of the forced tribute or *corvée*. But the phrase probably refers to the growth of the city beyond mere walls.

Ver. 12, *he shall come* (A.V.), *shall they come* (R.V.). The latter gives the sense. Unless indeed one interprets the verse as a continuation of a threat: "A day when he—the enemy—shall come unto thee" from all parts of the world; in which case v. 13 expresses the resultant desolation.

the fortified cities . . . the fortress (A.V.), *the cities of Egypt . . . Egypt* (R.V.). The R.V. is right. The verse apparently means that captive Jews shall return from Assyria and Egypt, and fill the full limits of the Holy Land.

from *mountain to mountain*. As a translation this is hardly possible, but it may represent what the Prophet intended to say.

Ver. 13, *Notwithstanding* (A.V.), *Yet* (R.V.). The Hebrew has only the ordinary conjunction, generally translated by "and." See the first note on v. 12.

the land. Possibly "the earth," exclusive of Palestine. A usage of the word not found elsewhere, but perhaps easily to be deduced from the common meaning "the whole earth."

MICAH VII. 14-20.

Feed thy people . . . the days of old.

WHAT a beautiful ending to this prophecy! The reader will have noticed that the verses fall into two divisions, first, a prayer (*vv.* 14-17), secondly, an ascription of praise (*vv.* 18-20).

In his prayer the Prophet prays God for His people. He says: Thou great Shepherd of Israel, feed Thy own people, directing them to the pasture with Thy rod, even the flock that is Thine inheritance, which now dwells alone in the forest (see note); feed them even in the midst of Mt. Carmel on the west; yea, let them feed upon Bashan and Gilead on the east, enjoying their wide land, as in the olden days. So too show us Thy wondrous acts, as in the days when Thou wentest forth from the land of Egypt. For the prophets often compare the Restoration to the first formation of Israel, and expect as marvellous signs of God's power as He showed then. A triumphant note follows. Nations shall see and be ashamed, for they no longer can boast of their own power; they shall not dare to say a word; their ears shall be stunned by what they hear. They shall be brought to the very ground, licking up dust like the serpent in submission to thee (*Isa.* xlix. 23); they shall quiver as they come out of their fastnesses, like reptiles crawling away on the earth. Unto the LORD, the God whom we worship, shall they look with dread, and shall fear because of thee, His people.

Then (*v.* 18) begins the ascription, alluding tacitly to Micah's own name (*i.* 1, note), recalling *Exod.* xxxiv. 6, and reciting the marvel of God's character, His wondrous grace. Who is a God of power like Thee; forgiving iniquity, and passing over transgression, for the Remnant of His inheritance after the Return? He hath not maintained His anger for ever, for He (emphatic) taketh pleasure in loving-

kindness. He will once again have pity upon us; He will trample on our iniquities—in sign of His complete victory over them. Yea, adds the Prophet, Thou wilt throw all their sins away into the depths of the sea. One solemn verse (v. 20) follows, of sublime assurance in God's faithfulness to His word: Thou wilt show faithfulness to Jacob and kindness to Abraham, who are regarded as still vitally interested in their descendants, even all that Thou didst swear to our three Fathers from ancient days. The Prophet means that the promise given to Jacob at Bethel (Gen. xxviii. 13, 14), the gracious call to Abraham (Gen. xii. 1, 2), and the oath connected with Isaac (Gen. xxii. 16), shall all certainly come true (Ps. cv. 8-10, 42). Thou wilt never forsake Thy people, nor break the many promises Thou hast given to them. So may the believer ever rest confidently upon the words of God.

NOTES.

Ver. 14, *rod*. Not the long staff or crook, but the short thick rod or club, with which the shepherd holds back each sheep as it passes into the fold.

which dwell solitarily. The A.V. rightly connects these words with the following: "in the wood"; the R.V. wrongly separates them, connecting "in the forest" with "in the midst of Carmel." But the word translated "forest" (*ya'ar*) is so suspiciously like "let them feed" (*yir'u*) that it is questionable whether we should not omit it, and translate "In the midst of Carmel let them feed, in Bashan and Gilead."

Ver. 15, *will I shew unto him*. The LORD's reply to v. 14. But the original probably meant: "Show us."

Ver. 19, *thou wilt cast*. Many orthodox Jews meet near a river or other piece of water on the afternoon of New Year's Day, and recite Micah vii. 18-20 and other penitential prayers. And some also throw pieces of bread into the water, and shake the ends of their garments (see *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, xii. 66, s.v. Tashlik; Abrahams-Singer, *Authorised Daily Prayer Book*, 1914, p. 254). The three verses are also said near the end of the additional prayer on the Day of Atonement, and they are added, in most places, to the reading of the Book of Jonah at the afternoon service on the same day (see above, p. 27).

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