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THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH.

VI. The Shepherd of Israel.—Chap. xi.

Every reader of this book feels that in passing from the eighth to the ninth chapter he is making a distinctly marked transition to a new kind of writing. The first eight chapters are homogeneous. They have a resemblance to one another, and obviously form one whole; but this continuity is broken by the remainder of the book. It is not only that the style changes, nor only that the interpreting angel who has figured so largely in the first part disappears from the second, in which his services are quite as much needed; but the subject and character of the prophecies alter. In the first eight chapters the references to Zechariah's own time are continual, pointed, and obvious; in the six remaining chapters there is not one allusion which obviously and without hesitation or dubiety can be referred to contemporary circumstances. In the former part of the book the prophet speaks of the half-built temple, of the gradually extending city, of the measurers, the masons, the stones, and the persons who were visible day by day in the streets of Jerusalem, and which he had only to name to call up the real object before the mind's eye. Every one of his allusions could at once be understood by the men who were then resident in Jerusalem; and all his utterances regarded matters which every one was daily speaking about. But no sooner do we read the first verse of the ninth chapter than we experience a sudden loss of this firm foothold among the well-known events of Zechariah's time. We seem to have made a step off *terra firma* into quaking bog, where we can walk only flounderingly. Up to the ninth chapter we advance in the clearest sunshine. We see standing out in broad day every person or thing that the prophet has in view. But in chap. ix. we walk into a bank

of fog. We hear heavy firing, very heavy firing indeed, but we can only dimly and uncertainly make out the occasion and at whom the guns are directed.

This very marked difference between the first and second parts of this book has led many good men and good critics to conclude that these last chapters were anonymous, and were added to the Book of Zechariah for reasons now unknown—possibly because his book stood at the end of the "Prophets," and fragments of unknown authorship were naturally appended to it. But the point which is of chief interest is the principle used to determine the date of this or any undated prediction. That principle is, that the prophet is always sent to relieve present anxieties and to guide the people through emergencies which have already arisen. Prophecy, however high and far it soars in its flight when once begun, has always its starting point from earth, from a spot within human eyesight and contemporary interest. As the miracles of our Lord had always a practical object in view as their primary end, and only secondarily served an evidential purpose, so had prophecy always in the first place a practical and immediate object to effect. If it can be shown that it deeply concerned one generation of Israel to be made aware of a coming event, and that the knowledge of this event did not at all concern any other generation, this of itself will afford strong presumption that the prophecy which predicts the event in question dates from the generation which behoved to know it.

And the reason why Zechariah's generation is made aware of calamities which were about to fall on neighbouring peoples seems to be disclosed in ix. 8. God's house was being rebuilt by that generation. The people were spending large sums of money upon it and for its sake were provoking the envy and hostility of their neighbours; and it could scarcely fail to occur to them that all this labour

might be in vain. They were a small and weak people and could not expect to cope with such empires as had previously laid their capital in ruins, or with that new Greek power which was already strangling serpents in its cradle. Nothing, then, could be more appropriate than to give to this generation those very assurances which fill the ninth chapter. It is a translation into the concrete and the actual of the word: "A thousand shall fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee." The impregnable stronghold of Tyre shall be taken; the proud, unconquered, fierce Philistines will sink before a more unconquerable invader; how, then, shall the weaklings who quail before a few Samaritans stand before such an enemy? "I will encamp," says the Lord, "about Mine house, because of the army." The King of Israel would do battle for them, not with chariot and bow, but with meekness and peace. "I will raise up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and make thee as the sword of a mighty man."

But through this encouragement there breaks a warning. And the general purport of this warning cannot be mistaken. The Shepherd of Israel, seeing that all his care has been useless, breaks his crook and throws away the pieces, in token that he abandoned the hopeless task of tending so misguided a flock. It is not probable that the prophet actually presented himself on the streets of Jerusalem dressed as a shepherd, but only that in vision he saw himself doing the things which he here relates. Sometimes the prophets were required to dramatize what was revealed to them. Thus Ezekiel, in a striking counterpart to this vision of Zechariah's, was instructed to take two sticks, on one of which he was to write, "For Judah," and on the other, "For Joseph, the house of Ephraim and all the house of Israel his companions." And these two sticks were to be joined one to another into one stick in his hand.

And when the people asked him what this meant he was instructed to say: "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in Mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes." It is the opposite picture which Zechariah is now called upon to exhibit to the people; not a joining of two sticks to symbolize the union of Judah and Israel, but a breaking of a whole crook to symbolize the scattering of the flock. This might have been acted before the people, but the feeding of the flock could scarcely have been conveniently represented in the city.

The Shepherd-symbol of God was familiar to the Jews. In private they had used the words of their shepherd-king, "The Lord is my Shepherd." In public they had heard the Levites singing, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock." The prophets had taken up the idea and elaborated it in such language as Isaiah's, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arms, and carry them in His bosom." And as God's care of His people was discharged by kings, priests, and prophets, appointed by Him, these were regarded as subordinate shepherds; and the Messiah, who was looked for as the fulfiller of all God's purpose of good to His people, was often thought of as the Good Shepherd—a title which, when He did come, He accepted as appropriate and illustrated in such a manner as to make it significant to His people in all generations. So that in Churches which indulge in symbolism, the bishop still carries the crosier or shepherd's crook, to indicate that he carries on the work of Him who is the Head Shepherd of our souls. In ancient times these subordinate shepherds often fell under the reproof of God for their negligence and self-seeking. "Woe to

the shepherds who do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool: ye kill them that are fed, but ye feed not the flock!" Too often in modern times also have the shepherds forgotten that they exist for the flock, and not the flock for them. Too often have they sought their own advantage, both individuals and Churches accumulating wealth and in many ways justifying the familiar satire of mediæval times: "There used to be golden bishops carrying wooden pastoral staves, but instead of them we have now wooden bishops carrying golden staves."

The symbolism of this prophecy would therefore present little difficulty to those for whom it was primarily meant. God's flock had fallen into evil hands; the natural protectors of the people were in fact their enemies, overtaxing them to maintain an extravagant royal splendour, and exacting from them priestly dues which bore no proportion to the work done. At various stages in the history of this vexed people the state of things here depicted actually emerged. In Herod's time they might fitly be called a flock of slaughter, kept for butchering purposes. God then makes one last attempt to save them. He sends a shepherd of His own selection to win the flock from the thraldom of their so-called shepherds, whose sole interest in the people arose from their expectation of making gain by them. This good shepherd goes out to his task with two staves—one, a short cudgel to beat off wild animals, the other a long crook to help his sheep out of holes and marshy ground. This "rod and staff" he calls by significant names, as knights used to call their swords by pet names. The one crook he calls Graciousness; the other, Bands or Concord—that is to say, he enters on his duties with the purpose of graciously defending the flock against assault from without and of keeping the sheep together as one flock. Room was made for this good shepherd by cutting off king,

priest, and prophet, three shepherds who had misled and abused the people.

But good as the shepherd was, the flock refused to be managed by him, so that he was compelled to give them up and ask his discharge. This they readily gave him, at the same time showing the value they set upon his services by offering him the thirty shekels which was the average price of a slave. Taking this price to the Temple, as the place where work done by God should be paid, he casts this paltry sum down with contempt, and breaks his staves as one who abandons as hopeless the task of feeding so worthless a flock. There is, however, always a remnant, the poor of the flock, the little ones, who appreciate God's care, and who are saved from the doom to which as a whole the flock is abandoned.[1]

In this prediction there are various points of abiding interest. (1) The value set upon the good shepherd's offices and service. The prophet representing God in His capacity of Shepherd of Israel, was valued at thirty pieces of silver. This was Israel's way of saying, Any slave could do as good service. It was either a studied insult, or one of those insults which people commit through sheer stupidity and total misunderstanding of the persons and things with which they have to do. It is like offering a man sixpence for risking his life to save ours, whereby we show at once the value we attach to our own life and to his. The prophet was therefore instructed to cast this price to the potter. From the circumstance that no ground looks so waste and forsaken and is so worthless as a worked-out brick-field; or because the potters commonly worked in the valley of Hinnom, where all refuse was shot; or because broken dishes were conspicuous among the other refuse; or because at that time pottery was the cheapest of all manu-

[1] This is more distinctly brought out in the last three verses of chap. xiii. which seem somehow to have slipped out of their place.

factures; from one reason or other, the expression, "To the potter with it," had come to be equivalent to saying, "Throw away the worthless thing." Thus God pronounces upon the price paid by the Jews for all their shepherd's care—"a goodly price, forsooth!" a price you might give to a potter for a dish which is produced in thousands and which will soon find its way to the ash-pit with other broken ware. Is this the price at which men value the visitation of Heaven, the labour of God, the one exceptional thing which throws a halo round the world and a light upon its history? Is this the price at which they reckon their God and their own inheritance of fellowship with Him?

These thirty pieces of silver unexpectedly and curiously emerge in the last scenes of our Lord's connexion with the people on whom His shepherd-care was spent. This turned out to be the very sum with which the rulers bought the traitor. When they could stand the Shepherd's interference no longer, and sought to discharge Him, this was the sum they agreed upon as sufficient to accomplish their purpose. Nor was this the only coincidence. This paltry sum was cast into the house of the Lord. The traitor could not keep it; the coin seemed alive with accusations, it seemed to be turned into so many hissing and stinging serpents, and in the bitterness of his rage against those who had persuaded him to think this paltry sum was of more value than his Master, he hurled the ringing silver at them, as if disannulling the bargain and flinging the guilt back upon them. And still further, the sum was actually applied to purchase a worked-out potter's field, worthless for all other purposes, but which was given up for this merely nominal price, and was thought good enough to bury strangers in. Manifestly the priests did not notice these coincidences, or they would have avoided purchasing the plot of ground and so fulfilling the prophecy. But they

were led into this purchase by the fact of their having this blood-money in their hands, money which they could not appropriate to any holy, temple use; and when they heard that Judas had hanged himself in a deserted clay-hole, it struck them as the obvious thing to do, to purchase this place, which was now doubly worthless, having become a Field of Blood by his suicide, and bury him in it, thus putting him and his money at once out of sight. But though the priests did not at the time notice the coincidences, no one can be surprised that when next in the order of the synagogue service this passage from the prophets was read, many should be struck with these analogies, nor that Matthew should draw pointed attention to them.

The amount and importance of the coincidence between the words of the prophet and the facts of the betrayal, different men will differently estimate. It seems to me that there is evidence of a supernatural intelligence and control; but what it much more concerns us to observe is, that in two ages, five hundred years apart from one another, spiritual aid is held equally cheap and insolently rejected. It was not a savage heathen tribe that thus branded its own stupidity and coarseness of grain; neither was this rejection due to the rude, lawless, immoral section of society. In both instances the most efficient spiritual help that could be furnished was rejected by the best educated, most religious of the people; by those who should have guided opinion.

In various practical ways men show what value they set upon Christ's pastoral care. We may be shocked at a Judas who, by his act, declares that the best use he can put his Master to, is to turn Him into money: we may be shocked at the blindness of men who, having Christ on earth beside them, should be willing to pay to get rid of Him. We may be shocked at some of the more obvious forms in which these sins repeat themselves; we may scorn the man who will make no pecuniary sacrifice for his

religion; who likes a Church where there is little to pay: we may be horrified when we detect that in any one instance we have shown ourselves to set a much higher value on money than upon our spiritual welfare—but, apart from the pecuniary way of estimating, there are many other ways in which we show the value we set on the pastoral care of Christ. If the sheep hear His voice and follow Him, that suffices Him; for He is no hireling, but seeks only the good of the sheep. Has our readiness to follow His guidance and to submit ourselves to His rule amply proved to Him that we appreciate His care? Does the difference between the intelligence of the sheep and the intelligence of the shepherd seem to us a fair representation of the difference between our ability to choose for ourselves and Christ's ability to choose for us? Or might His crook as well be broken for all the use it has been in keeping us out of the mire and near to what is good.

Pastoral care of some kinds we do learn to appreciate. One of the most stainless characters of ancient times opens his immortal notes on life with an acknowledgment of the benefits he had received from the various persons he had known in boyhood. "From my grandfather I learned to be moral and to govern my temper. From the reputation and remembrance of my father I learned modesty and manliness of character. From my mother, piety and beneficence, and abstinence not only from evil deeds but even from evil thoughts; and further, simplicity in my way of living;" and so on through a long series of persons in each of whom he had seen something to imitate, and to each of whom he owed some part of what he was. How gratefully do we all look back to, or how painfully we miss, the care a parent spent upon us. How gratefully do we recall the significant word that was spoken to warn us from hidden dangers. How keenly now do we appreciate the watchful unobtrusive guidance that strove to make the

path of virtue pleasant to us; that day by day took the measure of our temptations and of our moral strength; that busied itself with our prospects and with a future that was far out of our own sight; that had us in all its calculations, and was ever considering the bearing things would have upon us, and sternly turned us aside from the life which, in our ignorance of the world, we were choosing. Have we had any more valuable possession than the love that bore with our folly and shielded us from the results of our waywardness and vice, and sowed in us the seeds of all the good that can ever be in us? Are such love and tendance to be bought in any hiring-market for thirty pieces of silver.

But when we consider this patient care, we recognise that much of it was inspired by Christ; and we are also conscious that we have not yet outgrown the need of similar care. The time is far off when Christ may safely lay down His crook and leave us to ourselves. Things are so with us, that without the living and personal manifestation of God in Christ we should be almost entirely in the dark regarding God's nature and relation to us. The life that Christ now lives He lives for us, and guides and restrains His people by His unseen Spirit and visible providences. God has appointed that our spiritual life should come through Christ; that He should be the centre of spiritual influence for the race. And we might as well try to sustain our physical life on carbonic acid gas instead of pure air, as attempt to live independently of Christ. It has therefore its absurd as well as its pathetic side, when men, individually or in communities, profess great concern about good government, beneficial institutions, individual morality, while they ignore Christ and despise His guidance. They are a mere flock of sheep in conclave wagging their foolish heads, while the shepherd, who sees over the hedge and knows what they guess at, stands neglected.

But [the thought which this subject inevitably stirs in

every Christian mind is, that it lies in our own power to compensate in some degree for past neglect, and to mitigate the indifference with which the labour of the Great Shepherd is regarded. Each of us can secure that He be welcomed and appreciated by at least one heart: that there be one heart in which His actions are rightly interpreted and by which it is clearly recognised that the work he has done is work which cannot be bought, and which nothing can accomplish for us but Divine self-sacrifice and patience. If the stroke of His crook be at times painful, it saves us from a pain that is greater. If again and again in life we find that to be forbidden which alone seems desirable, it is forbidden for reasons truly valid. Much that pains and wounds and grieves us is proof of the care, not of the carelessness of Him who guides and tends us. He feels for us in all our pain and will compensate for all our loss. He who laid down His life for the sheep will save them from all that threatens to make His sacrifice fruitless. And the imagination can picture no happier condition than that of the man who passes through all the darkness and troubles of this life with a constant and faithful docility, and suffers Christ to accomplish in him the whole design and desire of His infinite love.

MARCUS DODS.

BREVIA.

On Rev. i. 14.—In Rev. i. 14 we read, amidst the description of the Son of man seen by St. John, Ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ τρίχες λευκαὶ ὡς[1] ἔριον λευκὸν ὡς χιών—words which may easily be translated with the A.V., though not exactly with the common punctuation, "His head and His hairs were white like[1]

[1] The reading ὡσεὶ for one or the other ὡς will make no practical difference. But the introduction of that reading, if as is probable it is not original, shows