

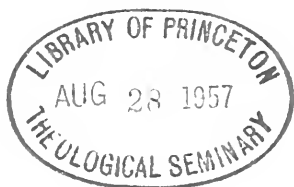
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THE MINOR PROPHETS.



THE

MINOR PROPHEETS.

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&c., &c.

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HOSEA.

HOSEA prophesied in the prospect of the breaking up of the kingdom of the ten tribes, and near the end of the house of Jehu. He is full of the thought of the ruin that was at hand; but he anticipates scenes of restoration and glory beyond it. As I may express it, the death and resurrection of Israel is contemplated by him, and announced under different figures, in a very abrupt and vivid style.

At the opening of the book, the prophet is directed by the Lord to take to him a wife and children. And he might say of them, as Isaiah did of his two sons. "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders."

The first child is "Jezreel"—the sign of the doom, both of the house of Jehu, and of the house of Israel. The second child is "Lo-ruhamah"—the sign that God would withdraw His mercy from the house of Israel. The third is "Lo-ammi"—the sign that He would disclaim Israel, so that they should be no more

His people. But all this is followed by a promise of final re-gathering, called "the day of Jezreel," when the very same nation, now cast off, should be restored. The strong wind, the earthquake, and the fire, pass by to do their appointed service; but the still, small voice closes the history.

The second chapter then gives us a more expanded view of this guilt and misery of Israel, and of their final blessedness. The beautiful description of the covenant made by the Lord for Israel, as between them and the beasts of the earth, after He has taken them into covenant with Himself, and the sight we get of the Lord at one end of a magnificent system of blessing and Israel at the other, after wilderness-days, are exquisite indeed. "The valley of Achor" is also declared to be "a door of hope"—that is, judgment ending in victory or glory, tribulation in joy. (Joshua vii.) All these things bespeak the death and resurrection of the nation.

Then, in chap. iii., the prophet is directed to take a second wife. These marriages are emblematic actions, reminding us of many things in Ezekiel, of Jeremiah going to the Euphrates to hide his girdle there, and of Agabus in the Acts of the Apostles, taking Paul's

girdle and binding his own hands with it. All these were actions emblematically or typically fitted to give intimation of coming events.

The instruction of the Prophet's first marriage is about the casting off of Israel as a nation, and their return to blessedness in the last days. The instruction conveyed to us by his second marriage is about the political and religious history of the people; and this may well strike us as marvellous; for with our eyes we see this anticipation of the prophet verified and exhibited to the very life. They are, at this moment, without a king, without a sacrifice, without teraphim. They have no political standing, and they are neither a sanctified nor an idolatrous people. They are not in the knowledge and worship of God, nor in the service of idols, as their fathers were. Our own eyes do indeed see all this. But they are to revive politically and religiously. As the prophet goes on to tell us: "They shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." Surely this is again their present death and coming resurrection.

Then, after these first three chapters, we get, in the great body of the prophecy, details of the sins which

had provoked this judgment. "There is a sin unto death," as we read in St. John. Israel, as a nation, I may say, committed it. All the prophets, I may also say, tell us this. "This iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die," says Isaiah to them. But Ezekiel's valley of dry bones is the leading and the best-known scripture on this mystery. And the Divine Prophet Himself talks to the Jews of His day of the Lord God miserably destroying them as the wicked husbandmen; and says also to them, "Behold your house is left unto you desolate." And surely it is a death-stricken land and people we see in them and their country at this moment. Surely it all tells us, "There is a sin unto death." They are as a nation in Ezekiel's valley, or in Hosea's graveyard.

But this death shall be triumphed over. The nation of the Jews shall have a resurrection, as the bodies of the saints shall have a resurrection. And then, as the saints in their glories shall fill and adorn the heavens, so Israel shall blossom, and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit. "What shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?"

In spirit, as well as in circumstances, there shall be

revival, moral as well as national recovery, conversion as well as restoration. Hosea's last chapter lets us see this, and all the prophets. Micah, whose prophecy we may consider in another place, gives us this subject in a very vivid way, delineating the exercises of the soul very strikingly in his last two chapters.

Very various and broken are the notices which our prophet gives us of those iniquities which were leading the people to their graves, or to the judgment of death.

The land was to mourn—the people were to languish. The Lord would be to Ephraim as a moth, to the house of Judah as a worm; as the fowls of the heaven He would bring them down. They should be swallowed up; Memphis was to bury them; their children should be brought forth to the murderer; they should use the words prepared for the day of utter excision, “mountains cover us, hills fall on us.”

Such words are used, such descriptions are given of them. But they were to revive, and of this we get abrupt witness also. The Lord was God and not man, and His heart would turn within Him—His repentings should be kindled; there should be no full and final

destruction. Resurrection, as in the third day (a glance at the resurrection of the Lord of Israel Himself) is spoken of. The coming out from Egypt also, as a renewal of their history, as though they were beginning afresh, under the hand and grace of God, and Jacob's history, are likewise referred to, with the same intent. Birth from the womb, and resurrection from the grave, are also called forth to set forth, as in figures, the same story of this people. And, again, the blighting force of the east wind, and then afterwards the bloom and beauty of spring, tell us of the doom and the revival of the nation.

Such passages throughout the book give it its character. I read it as that which, under the Spirit of God, keeps the judgment and redemption, the death and resurrection, of Israel as a nation, constantly in view. The language of resurrection itself is so employed in chap. xiii., that the apostle can use it, when he is making literal resurrection his subject, in 1 Cor. xv. Here, however, it is the recovery of the nation. And standing, as Hosea was, in the full prospect of the Assyrian captivity, and in the near approach of the doom of the house of Jehu, it was natural and easy, so to speak, that the Spirit should lead him to see and

speak of the death-stricken state of Israel as just about to begin.*

Principally, again I say, we have a detail of those iniquities which were making such a process, judgment unto death, necessary. But I welcome and fully admit the instructions of another, that, in a passing way, we get a large view of truth in this book of Hosea.

In addition to the present casting-off of the Jews, and their future restoration, which, as we see, constitutes the great subject, we get the grafting of the Gentile on the Jewish root, intimated in chap. i. 10, used to that end by the apostle in Rom. ix. 26. So the idea, the scriptural idea, of a remnant in Israel is conveyed in the “*Anni*” and “*Ruhamah*” of chap. ii. 1, and thus we do get notices of other points of truth beyond the leading ones. And, further still, as he has said again upon this prophecy, “nothing can be finer than the intermingling of the moral necessity for judgment, the just indignation of God at such sin, pleadings to induce Israel to forsake their evil way and seek the Lord, God’s recurrence to the eternal counsels of His own grace, and, at the same time, the

* In chap. xiii. 14 we get the thought of the apostle in Rom. xi. 29—that divine mercy shall gather Israel at the end, because *God’s gifts and calling are without repentance*.

touching remembrance of former relationship with His beloved people; there is nothing more affecting than this mixture on God's part of reproaches, of loving-kindness, of appeal, of reference to happier moments, that touching mixture of affection and of judgment, which we find again and again in this prophet."*

In this way, we get variety of matter in Hosea, while, again I say, the death and resurrection of the nation of Israel constitutes the great theme.

The closing verse draws the moral. It tells us where wisdom, true and divine wisdom, wisdom in which the soul is concerned, and concerned for eternity, is to be found. And surely it is in this mystery of death and resurrection, judgment and redemption, sin and salvation, the mystery, as I may say, of Adam and of Christ, that the grand moral of the story of this ruined world of ours lies.

All that is to be brought back to God, all that is to stand in Christ, or under Christ, is to be in resurrection-character, in redemption from the judgment of

* Chap. vi. 7, should be translated, we learn, "but they, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant." This tells us that Adam and the Jew were alike under law, and, therefore, became transgressors. This is as the teaching of Rom. v.

death; and the Jew as well as everything else, the nation of Israel in the latter day, as Hosea, and the prophet and the apostle of the Gentiles himself teach us.

We might formally close with this reflection on the closing verse of our prophet, but I must add another word.

Redemption leads to relationship. This is God's way. He only satisfies His own nature by this. "God is love." Whom He redeems, He adopts. He puts His ransomed ones into relationship to Himself. It was thus among the patriarchs. Isaac followed Abraham. It was thus in Israel. God speaks to Israel and of Israel, as betrothed and adopted. I might refer to Isa. liv., Jer. iii., Ezek. xvi., Zeph. iii., and a multitude of other scriptures, in proof of this. It is thus with us. We read this largely in the New Testament. Redemption from the *curse* of the law is followed by redemption from the *bondage* of it. In other words, the blessing of justification is waited on or followed by the Spirit of adoption. (Gal. iii., iv.)

And among the scriptures which show us that the nation of Israel is to be in relationship as well as in redemption, Hosea may be very principally cited.

For here, in the second chapter, the Lord, anticipating His people in the coming days of the kingdom, says to them by His prophet, "And it shall be at that day, that thou shalt call me Ishi, and shalt call me no more Baali." Wonderful and precious! Restored and quickened Israel shall have communion with their Lord in the grace and freedom of conscious relationship of the dearest, nearest character! For thus again speaks the Lord by Jeremiah, "Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him." (xxxii. 20.)

It is enough. Redemption leads to relationship, and so to glory; and in coming days, the heavens and the earth shall witness it, in its various, and excellent, and wondrous exhibition.

J O E L.

THE age of this prophet is not given to us. From this, we might say, it matters not when he flourished : but we may say the same also from the character of his prophecy. And thus the silence of the Spirit on that point is more than accounted for : it is justified.

He delivered the word of the Lord in some day of sore national calamity, when either again and again the adversary came in to waste and destroy, or year after year famine was in the land by reason of plagues upon it.

But through this present calamity, the great closing calamities of Israel are seen, as by the far-seeing eye of Him who knows the end from the beginning, and in the grace of Him who would fain sound an alarm in the ears of the people, that they may prepare themselves for a day of visitation.

Nothing is more common than this in the prophets. They treat the present moment as the pledge of a future. Indeed, the Lord does the same—taking up,

I may say, this style of the prophets in Luke xiii.; where, in the day of Pilate's cruelty to the Galileans, and of the fall of the tower in Siloam, He says to the generation, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

In Joel's day, the vine and the fig, the corn and the wine and the oil, palm-tree, pomegranate, and apple-tree, all are withered; and the priests and ministers are summoned to weep, and a solemn fast is proclaimed, that the elders and all the people may gather themselves. The services of God's house are suspended, the meat-offering and the drink-offering are withheld, and the joy and gladness that belonged to the house is no more. The seed is rotten in the field, and the garners at home are empty. Herds and flocks share the misery of the times. The prophet himself begins to cry to God under this sore sorrow. He leads the way, as it were, in the humiliation and confessions which suit such a moment in the people's history.

In the second chapter, we have again a detail of national miseries, but with a near approach to that great, final, judicial day, which is to close, in righteous, wrathful visitation, the story of Israel in apostacy.

The call to repentance is repeated with the hope of a turning of God's anger away. And however suitable to the calamity of that day these calls of the prophet may have been, we know that there will be this spirit of humbling and confession in the coming days of his nation, and on the eve of their deliverance. A spirit of grace is then to be poured out, and every one is to mourn apart. The punishment of the people's sin is then to be accepted. If the trumpet have blown "an alarm," to tell of the enemy at hand, it will be blown, but not as an alarm, to call the people in assembly to the mourning. So that in this feature of the prophet's day, we may trace again the *moral* circumstances of the closing day. Calamity comes as the judgment of the Lord in righteousness; repentance comes as the fruit of the Spirit in grace. And then, as the fruit of this repentance, the whole system in Israel is revived; all fruitfulness is pledged to the land now wasted; times of refreshing and the restitution of all things are anticipated; and "my people," says the Lord again and again, "shall never be ashamed." The gift of the Spirit is promised, and the times of "the day of the Lord" are seen to end in the destruction of the enemies, and the deliverance of the

Israel of God. In all this we have Matt. xxiv. and Acts ii. combined: the one giving us a sample of the promised gift; the other detailing the terrors of that day which is to make an end of the confederated enemies of Israel, to deliver God's remnant who have called on the name of the Lord, and to bring in the elect for whose sake those days of terror are to be shortened.

Indeed, all the great characteristics of this coming day are clustered here. The pouring out of the Spirit—the deliverance of the elect brought to call on the name of the Lord—the judgment of the apostate nation by the hand of their great enemy, as in “the great tribulation”—the destruction of that enemy, the confederated Gentiles, by the Lord Himself, when sun, moon, and stars shall be disturbed—the peaceful reign and glory of the King in Zion, following all this; these things are together here, as we find them scattered through all the prophets. I say, we see them here clustered together. We may not be competent to settle them in their order, or to put them in the presence of each other, and in their relations, as they will, by and by, be the living materials of the scene around; yet do they contain rich principles of truth,

which we can be edified in knowing, and in which we can justify the ways of that wisdom that has ordered them, which is now revealing them, and will in due season accomplish them.

Here I must turn aside for a moment, and observe that the gift of the Spirit in the day of Acts ii., according to this prophecy, was not followed by those judgments on which the darkened sun and moon and the falling stars are thus solemnly to wait and to give witness. Such was not the history in the Acts after the gift of the Spirit there. Why? Israel was not then obedient. These judgments will be in favour of Israel. They will light upon the head of the oppressor, and close the day of Israel's tribulation. But they did not follow the gift of the Spirit in Acts ii., as they are spoken of in Joel ii., and again I say, because Israel was not then repentant and obedient. "If ye will not believe, neither shall ye be established" is a standing oracle in the case of the nations. (Isaiah vii. 9.) And being then unbelieving, refusing (even to the slaying of Stephen) the testimony of the then given Spirit, the nation was not delivered nor established.

The Spirit, therefore, given at that Pentecost, led

on in a very different direction. He became the baptizer of an elect people, Jewish or Gentile, into a body destined to heaven, and to be the bride of the Lamb in the day of the glory, when again the Spirit will be given. The remnant in Israel, under that gift, will be so led in faith, repentance, and obedience, as to let the full amount of this prophecy of Joel spend itself in the behalf of the nations.

But I must say a little more on Joel ii. and Acts ii.

In what a profound and interesting manner the Spirit in an apostle fills out the word of the Spirit in a prophet! Many an instance of this might be given, as we generally know. But I am now looking only at Peter's commentary on Joel: that is, at Peter's word in Acts ii. on Joel's word in chapter ii.

Joel tells us of the Spirit, the river of God, as we will call it. He traces it, in its course or current, through the sons and daughters, the old men and young men, the servants and handmaids, of Israel: he speaks of it in its rich and abundant flowing, and the fruitfulness it imparts.

Peter admits all this. In the day of Pentecost, as he was preaching at Jerusalem, he looks at that same river of God, charmed, as it were, at the wealth and

fruitfulness of it, as it was, at that moment, under his eye, taking its course through God's assembly. But then, he does more than this, and more than Joel had done. He traces this river backward and forward—backward to its source and forward to its mouth.

He traces it to its source, and does so very carefully. This occupies him in his discourse on this great occasion. He tells us of Jesus—ministering, crucified, risen, and ascended; how He had served in grace and power here on earth; how men with wicked hands had crucified Him; how God had raised Him from the dead; and how He was now exalted at the right hand of God in the heavens. These things he proves diligently and carefully from Scripture. And then, having thus followed the Lord Jesus through life and death, and His resurrection up to heaven, there, in Him—the ascended and glorified Man—he discovers the source of this mighty river.

He traces it, likewise, onward to the end or issue of its course. He tells us that it is to reach to the children of that generation, and also to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord shall call.

What a commentary by an apostle on a prophet is this! What enlargement of heart and understanding

in the ways of God is given to us by it! In what an affecting, and yet in what a wondrous and glorious way, is Jesus brought in as having connexion with the river of God! He becomes the source of it as soon as He, who had once been the serving, crucified, rejected One, became the ascended One.*

And now we reach the third chapter. The Lord comes with a recompence. Other scriptures speak of this, and tell of the Lord's recompence of the controversy of Zion—the recompence, too, of His temple. But the same idea fills the mind on reading this chapter. Now, as the end is contemplated, things are changed. The last are first. The captive is the spoiler. Israel is the head, and not the tail, as was pledged in the patriarchal age of the nation, when Abraham was sought by the Gentile, and he, in the presence of the King of Gerar, the chief man of the earth in that day, prepared the sacrifice, made the covenant, and gave the gifts. (Gen. xxi.)

God has taken the whole of the interests of His people upon Himself. He is summoning the hosts of

* Just as we learn from John vii. This same river is there tracked in its course through the bellies of the saints. But it is declared that it could not then begin to flow, for Jesus was not then glorified. Here, in Acts ii., it has begun to take its course, because Jesus has now been glorified.

the nations to the battle, as once He did the host of Sisera, captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitudes, to the river Kishon, (Judges iv.) to meet their doom. The ploughshare must become a sword, the pruning-hook a spear, until the Gentiles, in the height of their pride, and in the strength of their resources, like Egypt at the Red Sea, meet the day of the Lord—the judgment of God in the valley of Jehoshaphat,* at the hand of his descending mighty ones. And the sun and the moon and the stars shall then be in darkness—not in the light, for which they were formed, and by which they were filled; and the heavens and the earth shall then be shaken, instead of pursuing their even, steady, staid course, in which they had been making their rounds for thousands of years: and all this to witness the terrors of that day.

For the end is come. Judgment is to clear the scene, and then glory to fill it. The Lord is to dwell in Zion, and Judah and Jerusalem to be at rest and in safety. The days of Solomon the peaceful are to be realised in their millennial fulness, and the earth itself be a quiet habitation.

* The judgment of God.

A M O S .

AMOS was the prophet who went before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. (Chap. i. 1.) We may say that he was the prophet of that event (viii. 8 ; ix. 5.)

That earthquake is treated by Zechariah as typical, as a notice of the Lord's controversy with the world, when again there will be earthquakes and pestilences, ministers of judgment and vessels of wrath. (Zech. xiv. 5.)

Accordingly, *judgment* is the great burthen of Amos' prophecy, and it therefore served the purpose of Stephen in Acts vii.—for that moment was also a *crisis* in the history of the Jews. And Stephen there quotes Amos. (See Acts vii. 42, 43 ; and Amos v. 25—27.)

But, again, Amos treats the Gentiles as dealt with by God, as well as the Jews. He judges them all alike. He brought the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir, as he had brought Israel from

Egypt. And in coming millennial days, He will have all *the Gentiles called by His name*, as surely as He will build again the fallen tabernacle of David. (See chaps. i. ii. ix. 7—12.)

In this character the word by Amos directly answered for James in Acts xv. where the apostle was insisting on the *independence* of Gentile saints, and that they must not be required to be circumcised and to adopt the custom of Israel. Amos intimates this, and James cites him, to show that the Gentiles were to be adopted of God (or have His name called on by them acceptably) in a way quite independent of the Jews; or that the Lord knew them before Israel knew them.

Thus, those two great occasions in the history of the Church in the New Testament, Stephens' words in Acts vii. and James' in Acts xv. were served by the Spirit through Amos, who may be regarded as somewhat a distant and unnoticed portion of the word of God. But it is beautiful thus to see that we are to live "by *every* word of God." We know not in what obscure corner of the volume, so to speak, that scripture may lie, which is fitted and destined by the Holy Ghost to stand by the soul

in the trying hour. Amos, ministering to Stephen and to James, witnesses this.

I only add a verse or two from George Herbert, which this finding of the words of Amos in Acts vii. and again other words of his in Acts xv. may call to mind. They are in his little piece called "the Holy Scriptures."

"Oh that I knew how all thy lights combine

And the configurations of their glory!

Seeing not only how each verse doth shine,

But all the constellations of the story.

This verse marks *that*, and both do make a motion

Unto a third, which ten leaves off doth lie:

Then, as dispersed herbs do watch a potion,

These three make up some Christiain's destiny."

O B A D I A H.

THE Spirit in the prophets constantly looks beyond Israel and Judah, taking notice of the nations of the Gentiles. “An ambassador,” as Obadiah speaks “is sent among the heathen,” now and again. Thus, Nahum was sent to Nineveh, and now Obadiah is sent to Edom.

But from the very beginning, the Lord had a word or controversy with Edom, as by His prophet He now has. “I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.” Esau was a profane one. He sold his interest in the Lord for a mess of pottage. He was “a man of the field” and “a cunning hunter.” He prospered in his generation. He loved the field, and he knew how to use it. He set his heart on the present life, and knew well how to turn its capabilities to the account of his enjoyments.

His history was destined to be a very singular one. It was also to prove, again and again, the occasion of

sorrow to God's people, though it will be found that Israel had entailed this sorrow on themselves.

“The elder shall serve the younger” was the word of God in favour of Jacob, ere the children were born. But Jacob did not wait in patience of faith, till the Lord in His own time and way made His promise good. The promise, therefore, gets laden with reserves, and difficulties, and burthens. It shall assuredly be made good in the end; but by reason of this way of Jacob, his unbelief and policy, the elder shall give the younger much trouble.

Accordingly, Esau got a promise from the Lord, through his father Isaac, to this effect, “Thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above, and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass, when thou shalt have the dominion, thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.” (Gen. xxvii.)

All this comes to pass. David, who came of Jacob, set garrisons in Edom, and the Edomites became his servants and brought gifts. But Jehoram, who also came of Jacob, afterwards loses the Edomites as his servants and tributaries. They revolted under his

reign, and continue so to this day. (2 Sam. viii. 14 ; 2 Chron. xxi. 8.)

But still, "the elder shall serve the younger." This promise is yea and amen. Amos is a witness of this to us, when he says, Israel shall possess Edom. (Chap. ix.) And our prophet, Obadiah, is another witness of the same, telling us that by and by saviours shall come to Zion, and judge the mount of Esau. (See ver. 21.) In early days the Lord gave Mount Seir to Esau for a possession ; and what He gave him He would preserve to him ; and accordingly, He would not let Israel, as they passed along the borders of the land of Edom, in their wilderness-journey, to touch with hostile hand a village or a rood of it. But long after all this, not only after the wilderness-journey of the children of Jacob, but after the times of David and of Jehoram, Edom made fresh trouble for himself, as we read in this prophet. He made merry in the day of Jacob's captivity. He looked on his brother with congratulation and malice, "in the day that he became a stranger." He rejoiced in the fall of Jerusalem under the sword of the Chaldean. Even Moab might have been a dwelling-place for the captives of

Zion ; (Isa. xvi. 4 ;) but Edom stood in the way to cut them off.*

The Lord needs no more. He has a word for Edom because of this, and He utters it through Obadiah. For God's controversy with *the Gentiles* is this, that in the day when He was angry with His people, they had helped forward the affliction. This we read in Zech. i. 15. How much more, then, may we expect to find him angry with *Edom*, Jacob's brother, for looking on him in the day of his calamity !

And the Lord of hosts is jealous for Jerusalem with great jealousy. Because Zion is His set on earth ; He has linked His name with Israel. " Israel is the lot of His inheritance." He is " the God of Israel." Despite of that people is, therefore, contempt of His glory and defiance of His power. Accordingly, Babylon and Edom may well be put together, as they are in Psalm cxxxviii. Edom rejoiced in the ruin which Babylon wrought. Nimrod and Esau may be tracked in the same field, hunters before the Lord ; the one the bold defier of the God of judgment, the other the profane despiser of the God of blessing.

* No time is given to this prophecy, but it must have been uttered between the destruction of Jerusalem and that of the land of Edom by the Chaldeans. God's sword in that day.

Babylon is never restored, neither is Edom. The judgment of the millstone awaits the one, perpetual desolations the other. (Jer. li.; Ezek. xxxv.) Nimrod of the lions of Ham, and the circumcised Esau, who comes even of Abraham according to the flesh, may lie together as in the same pit.

Surely we may say again that this laying of hands upon Israel, this despite and hatred of Zion, whether by the Assyrian, by Babylon, by Edom, or any other, is a bold act, bespeaking contempt and defiance of God Himself, because God was with Israel. As Ezekiel expresses it, "God was there." (See xxxv. 10.) And this fact the enemies of Israel ought to have felt. Even had they been employed as the Lord's rod upon His people, they should have executed their commission under the sense of what Israel was or had been; just in the spirit of the mariners and ship-master, when they were casting Jonah into the sea. But this was not so. The Assyrian had once said, "Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?" The Chaldean had "brought the vessels of the house of God into the treasure-house of his god." And now the Edomite "entered into the gate of

God's people in the day of their calamity." And surely all this was after the pattern of apostate Egypt in the first days, who said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go?"

Thus it has been, and thus will it be, as the judgment of the Son of man in the day of His throne of glory lets us learn: "inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me." (Matt. xxv.)

All the prophets who have spoken of Edom have given that people the same character, and have found in them the same causes of God's controversy with them. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, and the Psalmist have a kindred burthen for Edom. Profaneness or infidel suffering, pride, hatred of Israel, these are Edom's common marks, the posts upon Esau. Hatred of Israel is noticed in the history, as well as by the prophets. (See 2 Chron. xxviii. 17.) The world was Esau's portion, while Israel was still a stranger and a pilgrim. His children had their dukedoms, were kings also, and had their cities; were settled, as in the clefts of the rocks, where eagles made their nests; and all this while Jacob's children were still but houseless wander-

ers in lands that were not theirs, or in wasted deserts.

According to all the moral account given of them, the Edomites are called the people of God's curse, (Isaiah xxxiv.) and "the people against whom the Lord has indignation for ever: (Mal. i.) and, addressing Himself to the land of Edom, the Lord says, "When the whole earth rejoiceth, I will make thee desolate." (Ezek. xxxv.)

Amalek, I may observe, came of Esau; and we know what place Amalek fills in the page of Scripture. Agag belonged to Amalek and Haman to Agag: Doeg likewise. He was an Edomite, and so is he called; and a true Edomite, a man of blood he was. And when the Lord arises for the avenging of Israel, for the recompense of the controversy of His people, "the day of the heathen," as it is called, the land of Edom is presented to us by the prophets as the scene of that solemn action, as the gathering-place of the confederated hostile nations, and where the Lord in judgment meets them. (Isa. lxiii.)

I think we may see, from all Scripture, that God has a special question with this people. Edom was kindred with Israel, a blood-relation, as we speak.

Israel had spared Edom in their passage through the wilderness, under the direct command of the Lord. God's claims on Edom, and that too in company with Israel, were peculiar; and He seems to be treated as the servant who had earned many stripes, having known his Lord's will, and yet did it not.

But short as Obadiah's word is, it does not close without taking notice of the kingdom that follows the judgment. And this is so with all the prophets. Resurrection follows upon death, the kingdom and its glories succeed the judgments. Jesus the Lord never speaks of His death alone, but of His resurrection after it. His prophets, who spake by His Spirit, never speak, I may say, of the judgments which are to cleanse the earth, without telling of the glory that is to follow. And according to this, here in Obadiah we see, at the end, Zion established and had in admiration; her king, the king of glory, seated in her when Edom has become a desolation. When the mount of Esau is judged, and salvation shall rejoice on mount Zion, and holiness find its sanctuary there.

J O N A H.

OUR moral corruption is very deep. It is complete. But at times it will betray itself in very repulsive shapes, from which, with all the knowledge of it which we have we instinctively shrink, confounded at the thought that they belong to us. Privileges under God's own hand may only serve to develop instead of curing this corruption.

The love of distinction was inlaid in us at the very outset of our apostacy. "Ye shall be as God," was listened to; to this lust, this love of distinction, we will, in cold blood, sacrifice all that may stand in our way, without respect, as it were, to sex or age, as at the beginning we sacrificed the Lord Himself to it. (Gen. iii.)

We take God's gifts, and deck ourselves with them. The Church at Corinth was such an one as that. Instead of using God's gifts for others, the brethren there were displaying them. But the man who had the mind of Christ, in the midst of them,

would say, "I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that others might be edified, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."

The Jew—the favoured privileged Jew—grievously sinned in this way. Rom. ii. convicted him on this ground. His separation from the nations was of God; but instead of using this as witness to the holiness of God in the midst of a revolted world's pollutions, he took occasion to exalt himself by it. He boasted in God and in the law; but he dishonoured God by breaking the law.

Now, Jonah was of the nation of Israel, and among the prophets of God. He was thus doubly privileged. But the nature is quick in him to take advantage of this, and to serve her own fond ends by this. Yea, and Jonah was a saint of God also; but this alone, under pressure and temptation of the flesh does not secure victory over nature.

As a prophet, the Lord sends him with a word against Nineveh, a word of judgment. But he knew, when he received it, that in the bosom of Him who was sending him,* mercy was rejoicing; and he reckoned, therefore, that His word, which

* 2 Kings xiv. had given Jonah proof of this.

was to speak of judgment, would be set aside by the grace that abounded in Him. (See chap. iv. 2.)

Was he prepared for this? Could he, a Jew, suffer it, that a Gentile city should be favoured, and share the mercy and salvation of God? Could he, a prophet, suffer it, that his word would fall to the ground, and that too, in the presence of the uncircumcised? This was too much. He goes on board a ship bound for Tarsus, instead of crossing the country to Nineveh. But surely, when we look at him under such conditions, we may say, it is a proud apostate, another Adam, that is now in the merchant-ship on the waters at the Mediterranean. He was a transgressor like Adam, a transgressor through pride, like Adam; and, like Adam, he must take the sentence of death into himself.

Simple, sure, and yet solemn, all this!

To accept the punishment of our sin is the first duty of an erring soul. We are not to seek to right ourselves by an effort of our own, when we have gone wrong, lest Hormah (Numb. xiv.) be our portion. Our first duty is to accept, in the spirit of confession, the punishment of our sin, to be humbled under the mighty or chastening hand of

God. (Lev. xxvi. 41.) David did this, and the kingdom was his again. Jonah now does the same. "Take me up and cast me into the 'sea," said he to the mariners, in the midst of the tempest, "so shall the sea be calm unto you, for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you." And they did so, but with a grace that might well shame their betters, which bespeaks the hand of God *with* them, as it was *against* Jonah. And Jonah is soon wrapped among the weeds of the sea, down in the bottoms of the mountains there.

Could Gentile Nineveh be in a worse plight? Was not Jonah's circumcision as uncircumcision? A Jew and a prophet in the depths of the sea, with the weeds wrapped about his head, because of displeasure of Jehovah! Surely, such an one in such a state may well cease his boastings, and no longer despise others. Could any one be well lower? Proud Adam was behind the trees of the garden; proud Jonah is in the bottom of the sea.

The Lord by no means clears the guilty. The Judge of the earth does right. But grace brings salvation. And thus very soon, and it will be only Jonah's *sin* that shall be in the bottom of the sea,

Jonah himself being delivered, as his first father, Adam, left his guilt and his covert behind him and returned to the presence of God.

But Jonah was *taught* as well as *delivered*. In the belly of the fish he finds out that, Jew as he was, he stood in need of the salvation of God, just as much as any Gentile could need it. Uncircumcised Nineveh had been unclean and despised in his eyes, and he grudged her God's mercy. What would become of himself now but for that mercy? He was in prison, and he deserved to be there. What could do for him, what reach his condition, but mercy—free, full, and sovereign? “Salvation is of the Lord,” he has to say. It is not in himself as a privileged Jew, or a gifted prophet, that he will now rejoice, but only in Him to whom it belongs to bring salvation.

And then the exulting question arises, “Is He the God of the Jew only? nay, but of the Gentile also.” Our need of salvation, our dependence on the sovereignty and grace of God, equalizes us all. “It is one God that shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.” The Jew must come in on the very same mercy that saves the Gentile. (Rom. xi. 30, 31.) Jonah must be as Nineveh.

This is the lesson the whale's belly taught Jonah, the Jew. Let Nineveh be what it may, Gentile and uncircumcised, a stranger to the commonwealth of Israel, or anything else, it could not stand more in need of the salvation of God than the favoured Jew and the privileged, gifted prophet at that moment did, being as in hell for his transgression. It was all over with him, but for that. But *that* he gets, and the fish casts him up on the dry land, when he had learnt, and confessed, and declared, "Salvation is of the Lord."

He was a sign to the Ninevites.

His nation, by and by, will have the like lesson. No sign is now left with them, but that of this prophet: and they will have to find out, as from the belly of hell, or as from under the judgment of God, (where now as a nation they are lying,) that grace and the redemption it works is their only place and their only refuge.

But this salvation of God, in which Jonah is called to rejoice, we know gets all its authority from the mystery of the cross; because One who could do so, for us sinners, went down under the dominion of death, under the judgment of sin, and

of whom in that condition, as in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights, Jonah himself in the belly of the fish for the like time, is made the type.

And when we think of this, we may say, Scripture may magnify its office, as the apostle of the Gentiles does his. It has to reveal God and His counsels; and surely it does this in marvellous and fruitful wisdom, delivering forth, as here, pieces of history for our instruction, but at the same time making that history deliver forth samples, and pledges, and fore-shadowings of further and richer secrets for our more abundant instruction.

Jonah, as a sign, suits both the Lord Himself, and Israel as a nation, as the Gospels let us know. Israel must go through death and resurrection. Their iniquity is not to be purged till they die. (Isaiah xxii.) All scripture affirms this—the valley of dry bones illustrates it. But they will be as a risen people in the day of the kingdom—all thanks and praise to the death and resurrection of the Son of God for this and every blessing! And Jonah's death and resurrection, as I may again say, applies significantly or typically to the history of his nation, and to the

history of his Saviour. (See Matt. xii. 40; Luke xi. 29, 30.)*

The story of our prophet is, thus, a fruitful one. True as a narrative, it is significant as a parable; and all of us, the elect of God as well as Israel, may, in our way, take our place with him, as dead and risen, the only character that can be ours as saved sinners.

Returning, however, to the history itself, we may now observe that as one that had been thus taught, taught his need of God's grace, Jonah is sent on a second message to Nineveh. He goes, and with words of judgment on his lips, he enters that great city, that Nimrod-city, the representation, in that day, of the pride and daring of a revolted world. "Within forty days," he proclaims as a herald, "and Nineveh shall be destroyed."

Thus he "mourned." It was his commission. Responsively, Nineveh "lamented." The king rose from his throne, and all the nation put themselves in sack-cloth; and in such condition, as humbled under the

* Jonah's sin, too, was the expression of the nation's. He and they have alike refused the thought of mercy to the Gentiles. (1 Thess. ii. 16.) When Paul began to speak of God's mercy to the Gentiles, the Jews would listen to him no longer. (Acts xxii. 21, 22.)

hand of God, a king of Nineveh shall find the Lord as a king of Israel had before found Him. "I said," says David, "I will confess my transgression unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin." "Who can tell," says this royal Gentile, "if God will turn, and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" And so it was. "God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not."

"Is he the God of the Jews only," again I ask with the Apostle? and with him again I answer, "Nay, but of the Gentile also." Grace is divine. Government may know a people, and order them as such; grace knows sinners just as they are, whoever, wherever. The earth has its arrangements, heaven holds its court in sovereignty. Nineveh, like Jerusalem, is spared; the hand of the destroying angel is stayed over the one city as well as over the other. (1 Chron. xxi.; Jonah iii.)

But "tell it not in Gath." Let not the daughters of the Philistines hear of Jonah the Jew in the 4th chap.

Did Lot go a second time to Sodom? Did Hezekiah, after the going back of the shadow upon the sun-dial, sin through pride, with the ambassadors of

Babylon? Did Josiah, after his humbling and tenderness, go wilfully to the battle against the King of Egypt? Did Peter, in spite of warnings from his Lord, deny his Lord? Have you and I, beloved, forgotten lessons learnt, and correctings endured? And is Jonah now to be unmindful of the whale's belly? It is passing wonder; a lesson so sealed, so stamped, so engraven, as we would judge, and yet so quickly lost to the soul!

Jonah is displeased. The mercy shown to Nineveh had made a Gentile important to the God of heaven and earth; and this was too much for the Jew. The word of a prophet had suffered wrong, as pride suggested, at the hand of the God of mercy. Jonah was very angry. He cannot exactly again take ship and go to Tarsus; but, in the spirit of him who lately did so, he goes outside the city, and he says, "O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country; therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, for I know that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil: therefore, now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

What naughtiness of heart all this was ! Was he preparing another whale's belly for himself ? He well deserved it. What troubles we make for ourselves ! Why did not Lot remain in the holy, peaceful tent of Abraham ? and why did he prepare for himself a first and second furnace in Sodom ? Why did David bring a sword upon his house, which was commissioned of the Lord to hang over it unsheathed, to the day of his death ? "If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged ; but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." The Lord's voice crieth to the city, and the man of wisdom shall hear ; but Jonah was deaf. He has forgotten the lesson of the fish's belly, and he must now be put to learn the lesson of the withered gourd.

Outside the city, Jonah prepares a booth for himself, that he may sit under it, in his moody, bad temper, angry as he was with the Lord. The Lord then prepares a gourd to overshadow Jonah in his booth, and Jonah is very glad because of the gourd. But, then, the Lord prepares a worm that eats and withers up the gourd ; and, the sun and the east wind

beating on the unsheltered head of Jonah, he is very angry, and wishes in himself to die.

The Lord, then, in marvellous gentleness, turns all these simple circumstances into a page of the profoundest and most affecting instruction. "And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madst it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night; and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle."

The prophet's delight in the gourd is but the faint reflection of the Lord's delight in the mercy that visits the creatures of His hand—be they where they may, at Nineveh, or Jerusalem, or elsewhere, it matters not. And if Jonah would fain have the gourd spared, he must allow repentant Nineveh to be spared. Out of his own mouth he shall be judged: Jonah shall witness for the Lord against himself.

It is, indeed, a precious and an excellent word. Jonah had been sent down to learn the grace of God

in one character of it, and now has he been taught it in another : *i.e.*, his need of it, and God's delight in it. The whale's belly, the belly of hell, where he once was, had taught him his own need of "salvation," in that sovereignty of it, in that magnificent height and depth of it, that could stretch, as from the throne of power in the highest heavens, down to the bottom of the seas in the lowest, to deliver a captive there under the righteous judgment of God. The withered gourd now teaches him (as all the parables in Luke xv. have also taught us) how the blessed Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the Lord of the cattle on the thousand hills, whether in Assyria or Judea, delights in His creatures, the works of His hands, finding His rest and refreshment in the mercy that spares them, when they repent and turn to Him.

M I C A H .

THIS prophet is mentioned and quoted in Jer. xxvi. 18. He was called to be one of the Lord's watchmen, much at the same time with Isaiah, and it was a marked time. The history of things in Judah was taking a peculiar character, and things in Israel were ripening for the sickle of the Assyrian. It was a day in importance only second to the day of the Chaldean; but it was second to that, I grant. For the captivity of Israel, or the removal of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, did not involve the house of God as did that of Judah. The glory was still in the land, though Israel had gone away to the river Gozan. But the Chaldean sacked the city of the king, and spoiled the sanctuary of God; and the glory had to depart when Judah became a captive and Jerusalem a desolation. And as the prophetic spirit was largely poured out in that day of the Chaldean, as in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and others, so was it now, as in Isaiah, Hosea, Micah, and others.

2 Kings xvii. is an important scripture in connexion with Micah. It details the sins of Israel on the ground of which the captivity of the Ten Tribes had come. It gives us an account also of the beginning of that people who, in the New Testament, are called, "Samaritans." It shows us their origin as a religious sect, holding truth, which the Jew had corrupted by a mixture with the various lies which the heathen conquerors of Israel had brought with them into the land.

As to this little book of Micah we may see it in three parts :

Chaps. i.—iii. These chapters give us a gloomy burthen over the *sins and consequent miseries of Israel and Judah.*

Chaps. iv., v. These chapters anticipate the *political or national recovery* of the people.

Chaps. vi., vii. These chapters exhibit their *experience or moral recovery.*

Chaps. i.—iii. The strain begins with anticipations of judgment, specially on Samaria, but not entirely overlooking Jerusalem, and then details the sins which led to this; thus, in prophetic style, telling us what we may have already read in the historic style, in that chapter referred to, 2 Kings xvii.

Judah had transgressed as well as Israel, and the Assyrian rod, now prepared by the Lord in righteous anger, is raised against Jerusalem as well as Samaria. The day of Ahaz there, had been as the day of Hoshea here. But Hezekiah, who came after Ahaz, did right in the sight of the Lord, and therefore the Lord debated with His rod, and the Assyrian did not prevail over Judah, as he had over Israel.

Such was the condition of things in those days, and Micah spoke as the Lord's watchman.

Princes, priests, prophets, and people, are all severally challenged by him, and are all found guilty and condemned. That land which had been redeemed out of the hand of the Amorites, and been made the clean vessel among the nations, and the Lord's dwelling place, has now acquired for itself another character altogether; and now, if there be any ear to hear, any circumcised heart among the people, they are addressed in these words, concerning this land, "arise, depart, for this is not your rest, it is polluted." Strange and humbling indeed! How has the fine gold become dim!

Waste and desolation are to follow in the train of pollution. But in the midst of all this, the prophet

himself is full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and he talks of judgment in the hearing of the nations. "Therefore shall Zion for your sake be ploughed as a field; and Jerusalem shall become heaps upon the mountains of the house of Israel, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."

Chaps. iv., v. The very first expression of the goodly estate of Zion in the days of the kingdom, here called "the last days," which Micah gives us in these chapters, is that fine one—presented also by Isaiah in his second chapter—i.e., the peoples of the earth, all the world over, coming up to her to learn the ways or statutes of the king of glory then seated there.

This is highly characteristic. Now, in this time of the ministry of grace, the Saviour's messengers *go forth*, carrying glad tidings with them, and beseeching sinners to be reconciled. For love is active in goodness; it busies itself at its own cost about the blessing of others. But royalty and judgment take a different attitude. Judgment enthrones itself, and will *be waited upon* and listened to. If a king reign in righteousness, the people must be in attendance. His courts must be filled. His will is to be learned and observed: and thus it is here.

But if it be a sceptre of righteousness, it shall be also of peace ; and a willing, happy world shall witness that a morning has risen without clouds, and that another Solomon, a greater than Solomon, has taken rule in Zion over the whole earth. (2 Sam. xxiii. 3, 4.) The remnant now scattered are brought home ; and in Jerusalem the Lord, the Messiah, reigns over them, His natural-born subjects.

The prophet speaks of all this, and then turning to Judah, leaves the Assyrian of his day for the Chaldean of a coming day ; and the daughter of Zion is taught to know that she must go to Babylon, ere she can be brought forth in the majesty that is to be hers in the days of the kingdom. It is in Babylon her pains, her travailing is to end ; but the progress of the delivery is noticed ; “Thou shalt go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon, and there shalt thou be delivered, there the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.” Zion must reach her joy through captivity and come to honour through sore sorrow. As it had been told Abraham of old, that his seed should sojourn in a strange land for centuries, ere they came to their inheritance ; so it was—the brick-kilns

of Egypt went before the victories of Joshua. And now again, Babylon is as a second Egypt to the children of Zion, ere "the first dominion" came to them, ere the palmy days of David and Solomon be restored.

The day of the Chaldean leads the prophet to the day of Israel's confederated enemies at the close. (Jer. iv. 10,* 11.) This closing visitation will be severe, and the rejection of Christ is brought forward as the occasion and the warrant for this. Judah insulted Messiah when He came to them. The Judge of Israel was smitten on the cheek. (Mat. xxvii. 30.) But the One whom they refused and insulted, shall be their only hope. This is Joseph again, and Moses again. Those whom the nation once refused, are their only strength and expectation in the day of their calamity. And thus, *because of Messiah*, whom they once insulted, the Assyrian of the last days shall seek to trouble Israel *in vain*.

The condition of the people under such a Messiah is then detailed. They shall be purified, while their enemies shall be destroyed. The remnant shall now "abide," because their Messiah in strength and

* Between the times of these two verses there is a long interval, not noticed, however, by Micah.

majesty "shall be great unto the ends of the earth." They shall be also as "dew from the Lord," and as "a young lion among the flocks," the occasion of either blessing or judgment to all around them.

And in the midst of all this, Messiah the ruler is presented in various glories, personal and official; and poor Bethlehem, little in Judah, is honoured because of Him. For as the poor carpenter's wife of Nazareth, His mother, so the poor town of Bethlehem, His birth-place, take honour and blessing because of Him. This leaves us at the end of chap. v.

Chaps. vi., vii. The earlier chapters of this prophet have been giving us a view of the Lord's *hand* with Israel: here we get the way of His *Spirit* with them. These two subjects very much occupy all the prophets some way or another. They constitute the political and the moral history of God's people, all the restoration and the conversion of Israel.

The work of the Spirit, in these chapters of Micah, is given to us in the form of a dialogue. The exercises of the soul are delineated as in a living person, and the dealings of God in answer are given to us as upon the voice of the Lord Himself; and, therefore, these chapters may remind us of the Psalms, where

the pulses of the heart are so constantly felt, and the path of the spirit of a man as led of God is so variously tracked. We get *personality* here as there.

It is the Lord that opens this dialogue. He challenges the ways of His people; and this He does as in the hearing of the mountains and the hills and the foundations of the earth. He refuses not, as it were, to let the whole creation be present when He judges. The Judge of all the earth does right; therefore let heaven and earth wait as in the courts of His righteousness, and before the throne of His judgments. (See Dent. xxxii. 1.)

This challenge has been heard by a remnant, and they answer it in verses 6, 7. They are awakened to know the sword of the Lord which has now been lifted up. They are alarmed, and would fain find a refuge. Ignorance of God and His ways and truth mark their words. But no matter. It is no longer the sleep or stupidity of the soul: there has been a quickening.

The Lord shortly answers them. He lets the awakened, enquiring ones learn what is "good" and what is "required." That which is "good" is shown to them. God reveals it, as we know, as belonging

to Himself. “There is none good but one, that is God.” The gospel reveals this in its fulness. That which is “required,” or demanded, is nothing of man’s cattle for offerings; it is not rivers of oil, or the fruit of his body: it is that only which is *morally* fitting, that we should do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly. (Ver. 8.)

This is perfect in its place. But having thus shortly answered the remnant, (the “man,” as he is here called, the one that had ears to hear in the midst of the reprobate nation,) the Lord goes on with His challenges of the nation, detailing still further, and with awful disclosures, the ways and iniquities of Israel. For His voice was to the city, though He will surely hear and answer the cry of His remnant, who have heard His rod and Him that hath appointed it. (Ver. 9—16.)

The quickened ones then, at once, take up the word, and seal the judgment which had been just pronounced, owning that things were indeed as bad as they could be, that few were left to form a goodly seed in the midst of the people, and that the nearest and the dearest relationships were violated. But they avoid where they had not found their refuge and relief, even in God Himself, so that they could challenge all

that might oppose them. And yet, with all this happy, holy boldness in the presence of their enemies, they humble themselves under the Lord's hand, knowing and owning that, as of a sinning, unclean people, they had no answer for Him. (Chap. vii. 1—10.)

To this the Lord again replies, and it is beautiful. If the godly had just set their seal to the righteousness of His judgments, He now, in His way, sets His seal to their expectations, and talks to them of the day when their captivity should be turned—when they should be re-established in their own land and city, and the purposes of their adversaries be all frustrated, and when they should be sought by the nations around them, after their penal righteous desolations. (Ver. 11—13.)

Again the remnant take up the word. Being encouraged, they seek for a restoration of those days, when all the tribes were at home in their inheritance, even in the distant eastern places of Bashan and Gilead. (Ver. 14.)

The Lord, in answering, exceeds this desire; for grace, I may surely say, abounds over faith, as well as over sin. Sin does not exhaust it—faith does not measure it. The Lord here pledges that the day of

the Exodus shall be renewed, and that His Israel shall again enjoy strange and magnificent displays of His power on their behalf, as once they did, when He brought them forth from the land of Egypt. (Ver. 15—17.)

These gracious words, however, the remnant interrupt, insisting (as it were, when they had listened to the story of these mercies) on giving all the glory to God, and that the secret of their deliverance lay in the fear of Him, which their enemies were then to know. This interruption is seen in the last clause of verse 17.

But then, having thus taken the words to themselves, ascribing the honour of these great, final, delivering mercies to the Lord alone, they continue in that strain ; and in fervency of spirit utter the praises of His grace and faithfulness. (Ver. 18—20.)

N A H U M.

THE Ninevite was the first great man of the earth in the age of the *kingdom*, as I may speak; as Nimrod, the ancestor, as to territory, of the Ninevite, had been the great man of the earth in the earlier age of the *fathers*. Nimrod had affected dominion and empire then, when as yet things were in simpler, and primitive condition. Now that kingdoms have been formed, and nations rather than families overspread the earth, the king of Nineveh, in Nimrod-pride and worldliness, affects dominion and empire in the midst of them.

He is not one of the great *imperial* powers that are looked at in Daniel. He is neither the head of gold, nor the breast of silver, nor the thighs of brass, nor the legs of iron. Such an image had not begun to be formed in the day of Nineveh, when the king of Assyria was supreme in the world. But among the kingdoms which were then formed, in days preceding the day of the Chaldean head of gold, he was eminent. Asshur had carried away captive many of them.

Amalek was then gone from the scene, and the Kenites had been wasted until their full removal was accomplished by the Assyrians (Num. xxiv. 20—22.) And further, the Assyrians had insulted and reduced that people whom the Lord God of heaven and earth had chosen as the lot of His inheritance, and formed for Himself.

The Lord, in that action, had used him as a rod upon His disobedient, rebellious Israel ; but “ he meant not so.” He purposed “ to prey the prey, and to spoil the spoil.” Pride gives him his only language. “ Are not my princes altogether kings,” he says—“ as my hand hath formed the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel those of Jerusalem and of Samaria, shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols ?” (Isa. x.) The Lord God was angry. He pronounces a burthen upon him, and Nahum delivers it. “ The Lord is a jealous God and a revenger.”

The ministry of Jonah, as well as of Nahum, had respect to Nineveh. We have considered that already in our chapter on Jonah’s prophecy. Jonah preceded Nahum, it may be, about 120 years. Under the word of Jonah, Nineveh had repented; but the

word which now follows by Nahum is a notice of judgment, final judgment, judgment that is to make an utter end. "Affliction," says the prophet, "shall not rise up the second time."

What are we to say then of Nineveh's repentance in the day of Jonah? Was it, as the morning cloud, or early dew, a goodness that passed away? It may have been such. Or, it may have been *reformation*, and a [genuine work like that in another Gentile world, the Christendom of this present age. It worked its fruit and had its blessing at the time, and it would seem, left its witness behind it, even in this distant day of Nahum (see i. 7.) There may have been a remnant in Nineveh! I say not otherwise. But at the most it was but a blessing in the cluster. "My leanness, my leanness," Nineveh surely had to say. The repentance in the day of Jonah, like the Reformation in Christendom, secured nothing—it did not prepare Nineveh for glory, or for a place in the kingdom of God. Whatever may have been the moral fruit of it in a remnant in this distant day of Nahum, Nineveh, as a city or kingdom, had returned, like a sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire, and ripened herself for the cutting off of the land.

This is a figure for us to study, a voice for us to hear.

What did Jehoshaphat-days, or Hezekiah-days, or Josiah-days, for Jerusalem? Did judgment after such days enter by the hand of the Chaldean, though they were very fair and promising? We know it did. Did Nineveh want the day of the Lord, though once upon a time the king there descended from his throne and sat in ashes, and man and beast were clothed in sackcloth, and neither did eat nor drink? Yes, we know this also. And I may ask again, What has Reformation done for Christendom? Coming judgments, and not the Reformation, or progress, or education for the million, will prepare the world for the glory and kingdom of the Lord. But further. The earlier history of God's dealing with Nineveh by the hand of Jonah may, in this day of judgment announced by Nahum, witness to us that He is "slow to anger"—for He sent a preacher then to warn, and turn them to that repentance which He received, and spared them. But He that is slow to anger, does not "acquit the wicked" (see ch. i. 3). There is a separating between the precious and the vile. "He knows them that trust in Him," even the remnant in Nineveh

if there be such, as we said before (chap. i. 7); but the Judge of all the earth, like the Judge of Sodom who stood of old before Abraham, "will do right."

"I doubt not," says another, "that the invasion of Sennacherib was the occasion of this prophecy; but most evidently it goes much beyond that event, and the judgment is final. And this is another instance of that which we so frequently observe in the prophets—a partial judgment serving as a warning or an encouragement to the people of God, while it was only a forerunner of a future judgment in which all the dealings of God would be summed up and manifested." Surely the Assyrian is a mystic or representative person, as well as a real individual. Isaiah so looks at him. And this was easy and natural: for the Assyrian began the captivities of God's people, and in his day represented the enmity of the earth, the enmity of the Gentile world, to God and His people. The Spirit, therefore, in the prophets, sees the Gentile in him, and looks along the vista which then opened, to the very end of the earth's history under the Gentile or the man of the world, when the full-measured and ripened iniquity of man shall call forth the closing, clearing judgments of God.

But does judgment close the story? That never has been, nor could it be. It only makes way for the purpose of God. The judgment of this "present evil world" will introduce the millenium or "the world to come." And Israel will be received as the seal and pledge of that bright and happy age—as our prophet says, "though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more; and now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds asunder. O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows, for the wicked shall no more pass through thee, he is utterly cut off" (see ch. i. 12—15). Or, in the words of one of ourselves, the saints of God in this day, "the vengeance of God is the deliverance of the world from the oppression and misery of the yoke of the enemy and of lust, that it may flourish under the peaceful eye of its Deliverer."

Come, Lord Jesus! Do not present doings of the Spirit show a rapid gathering in of the elect unto the hastening of that hour?

H A B A K K U K.

WE must begin with God, as sinners, on the principle of faith, and go on with Him to the end, as saints, on the same principle. “The just shall live by faith.” (See Rom. i. 17 ; Gal. iii. 11 ; Heb. x. 38 ; taken from Hab. ii. 4.)

This prophecy of Habakkuk has great moral value for us. But besides this, it is seasonable now ; for in this our day things are ripening to a crisis, as they were in the day of Habakkuk.

His was a day when the iniquities of the professing people of God were moving the holy anger and sorrow of this man of God. And yet, while his soul was thus vexed with their evil conversation, his heart would feel for their misery, and he would earnestly make their cause his own.

I would listen to him a little carefully for a few minutes, and observe upon his words as they show themselves to us in their natural parts and order.

Chap. i. 1—4. In these opening verses, as I noticed

already, the prophet's righteous soul is vexed with the evil conversation of his nation. He presents the sad, reprobate scene that was lying under his eye to the notice of the Lord. He cries out of violence, and grievance, and spoiling, and strife, and such like iniquity, found, as it was, in the very midst of God's people.

Vers. 5—11. In His answer to this cry of His servant, the Lord seems, at the first, to vindicate and to join with it. He enters into the resentment of the moral state of Israel, which Habakkuk was so deeply feeling. He challenges His people as "heathen"—for such they would prove themselves to be, by not believing the work that He himself was purposing to work among them. He counts their circumcision as uncircumcision. The apostle, quoting this word from our prophet, calls them "despisers." (Acts xiii. 41.) The Lord, therefore, thus, at the first, follows the story of Israel's iniquities, which the prophet had been rehearsing; and anticipates their great crowning, closing iniquity—the rejection of His word and work through unbelief.

But having done this, He lets the prophet know, that this iniquity which had been vexing his soul, and

against which he had been crying to Him, should not go unpunished, for that the Chaldean sword should soon enter the land to avenge the quarrel of His holiness.

Vers. 12—17. Hearing this, Habakkuk is terribly alarmed. Like Moses, in such a case, he cannot be prepared for this; nor can his heart, that so cared for his people, welcome the Chaldean, however his soul may be angry with their evil ways.

In the deepest strain of fear and of feeling, and in the skilfulness of an advocate whose affections were making him eloquent, he pleads against the Chaldean, assured that the Lord would not give over His own people, however guilty they might be, to the reckless wrath of those who were still more wicked than themselves. Moreover, he seeks that this terrible scourge may in the Lord's grace, be only for *correction*, and not for *destruction*, to Israel.

All this is a sweet state of soul in our prophet. Habakkuk, perhaps, is more of a Jeremiah than any of the prophets. He lives more *personally* in the scenes he was describing than is common. He *feels* everything—and so did Jeremiah. They *lived* the prophet, and not merely *spoke* as such.

Chap. ii. 1. And having thus unburthened his heart and pleaded with the Lord, he waits for the answer. His heart is with his people, and he must watch for "the end of the Lord." He is no hireling; he cares for the flock, and cannot flee. His service for Israel had not been lightly taken up, and it cannot therefore be quickly laid down. He must see the end of it; and for this, he sets himself upon the watch-tower.

Vers. 2—20. Here we read the Lord's answer—and it is full of solemn, interesting meaning. Habakkuk shall not be disappointed; he shall not be on his tower for nothing. As Daniel's fasting for his twenty-one days, so Habakkuk's watching on the tower shall be rewarded.

The Lord, however, begins his answer by stating some strong, leading facts, or rather principles of truth.

1. That the vision or prophecy was to be clearly announced.

2. That all was to remain in vision, or unfulfilled, for a season.

3. That during that season the man of the world would ripen himself in pride for the judgment of God.

4. That during the same season the saint should live by faith.

5. That in due season, God's appointed time, the vision should speak, the prophecy be fulfilled, so that the end was surely worth waiting for.

Then, having laid down these facts or principles, the Lord goes on to announce, to the welcoming ear of the prophet, the awful judgments that were to overtake the Chaldean.

Chap. iii. Having listened to this from his watch-tower, the prophet, as I may say, descends to speak with the Lord. Having been graciously visited and answered on the tower, he will now enter the sanctuary, as with the voice of prayer and praise, and in the power of that faith which had accepted the answer of God, rejoiced in it, and counted on still further blessing.

But these his closing words are very beautiful.

The answer he had just received seems at once to put him in spirit, back to the earliest days of his nation, or the time of the salvation of God, when He was beginning to make Israel His people. The Chaldean reminded him of the Egyptian and of the Amorite. And he designs that the Lord would do for Israel now in the face of the Chaldean, what in those primitive days He had done for them in the face of the

Egyptian and the Amorite. He seeks that there may be “a revival”—that now in the midst of the years God would do the works which so wondrously marked the *beginning* of the years. And with affecting beauty, and in the broken style of one who was following the currents of a heart alive to its subject, he rehearses, as in the divine presence, those early works of Jehovah in behalf of Israel, whether accomplished in Egypt, or in the wilderness, or in Canaan, that (if I may so speak), the Lord might look at those mighty doings of His, and do the like in these present Chaldean times. It is as if Habakkuk were lifting up the bow under the eye of God in the day of the cloud; so that, looking at it, He might remember His covenant, His grace, and His power for His saints, His promises and His mercies, and save His people from this threatened overwhelming.

For as yet the Lord had only promised judgment on the Chaldean. (See chap. ii.) He had not spoken of the final restoration and glory of Israel; but Habakkuk must have this also promised and secured; and therefore he prays for “a revival” of His work in behalf of Israel.

And then, at the very end, as the just man living by

faith, whom the Lord's word had already told him of, (see chap. ii.) he utters his present full confidence in God. He tells, indeed, how the Lord's word about the coming of the Chaldean had frightened him, so that he was as one astonished, or as a dead man; but that now, as a man of faith, he knows that he has but to wait, through a season of discipline and patience, assured that all will end in the salvation of God. And in the joyous assurance of this, he sings to the chief singer on his stringed instrument; and as Jehoshaphat entered the battle with the song of victory on his lips, so Habakkuk now enters on the season of the vision, or of the exercise of faith and patience, in the joy of the Lord, and with a song prepared as for a day of glory.

Now, upon this, we may again say, the present day may put us much in company with Habakkuk. The man of God looks round, and sees everything in Christendom to provoke the resentment of holiness, or to vex the righteous soul. But while he resents the thing, he would fain plead for the people, like Habakkuk; and, like him again, turn to God, with his burthens and his expectations. But somewhat beyond our prophet, the believer now, from the fuller instructions of God, *knows* there will be "a revival," and does

not merely pray for it. He knows that the judgments which are coming, more solemn than that by the hand of the Chaldean, will only clear the earth of all that offends, take out of it all that are corrupting it, and thus lead to its redemption, and not to its destruction. And he knows that a brighter, richer condition will mark its end, than that which did its beginning—for “the creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” So that it will not be merely a revival of early days in the history of either Israel or the earth; but their latter end, like that of Job, will be more than their beginning.

And I would add a practical word upon the experience of Habakkuk, which is so blessed at the end. “I will rejoice in the Lord,” he says, “although the fig-trees shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines.”

To live happily in the love of God, through Jesus, is the glory He seeks at our hand—sinner, self-ruined, as we are. And to do this, like Habakkuk in spite of the contradiction of circumstances, makes this service and worship still more excellent—the fruit, as it surely is, of His grace and inworking power.

Man seeks to live *pleasurably*, but he has no care to live *happily*. He would live pleasurably, or in the sunshine of favouring, flattering circumstances; but to live happily, or in the favour of God, in the light of His countenance, the sense of His love, and the hope of His presence in glory, this is not what man cares about. And it is God's work in the heart and conscience, when man is be-
thinking himself, and seeking to cease from living pleasurably, that he may live happily—find his life only in the greatest of all circumstances, that is, in his relation to God, having discovered, through grace, that that relationship is settled for him for ever, in the precious reconciliation accomplished in the blood of Christ.

And let me still take on me to add another word on what the Lord says as to the Chaldean in chap. ii. 14. “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

The pride of man, whether he be Chaldean or any other, that would affect universal empire, has ever been, and shall still be, judged and broken; and that dominion shall be reserved for Jesus “the

Lord," and for Him only. He shall be made higher than the kings of the earth, and His kingdom shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Neither the past or present unbelief of His own nation, Israel, nor the purposes and attempts of any of the Gentiles, shall hinder this. (See Num. xiv. 21; Hab. ii. 14.) For, in the coming peaceful days of the sceptre of the righteous One, this shall be accomplished. (See Isa. xi. 9).

The people shall labour after this, but they shall weary themselves for nothing, for "very vanity." (Chapter ii. 13). But Jesus shall have it. "Blessed be his glorious name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and amen." (Ps. lxxii).

ZEPHANIAH.

VERY commonly in the prophets, *glory touches judgment*. These are their themes, with the iniquity that provokes the judgment, and the characters that attach to the glory that follows.

But these things, judgment on iniquity and glory succeeding, have been, again and again, in the *history*, as they are, again and again, in the *prophecy*, of Scripture.

The day of Noah was such a day—a day when judgment introduced glory, or a new world. So the judgment on Egypt was accompanied or waited on by the deliverance of Israel, their triumphant song, the presence of the glory in the midst of them, and their journey onward to the land of promise. So the judgment on the Canaanites or Amorites was at once followed by Israel's taking of their inheritance.

The day of Nebuchadnezzar was a kindred day of judgment. The spirit of prophecy lingers over it. Not only does it anticipate it in earlier prophets, as

Isaiah and Micah, but it is, at the time, or about the time, poured out very largely, as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah witness.

And that day, the day of the Chaldean invasion and triumph, was truly a remarkable crisis. The iniquity of the kingdom of Judah was then full, as that of the Amorites had been in the day of Joshua. Sad, however, it is indeed, that things should have taken such a turn; that the iniquity of the Jew was now full, and that the Gentile was called out to judge it, as once the iniquity of the Gentile had been full, and the Jew, the man of God, was called out to judge it.

But the Chaldean was not only a real, but a representative, or mysterious person. He stands forth in the prophets as telling us of coming and final judgments. His sword visited not only Judah and Jerusalem, but the surrounding nations. His was a day in which the God of all the earth was rising up, and the world had to keep silence. It was a miniature or inchoative judgment of all the nations. It was "the day of the Lord," in spirit or in principle. The sword was furbished for the slaughter. The dominion went from "the daughter of Jerusalem," for the house of David was reprobate, and the Chaldean

took the throne under God, so to speak, away from the Jew.

Judgment, however, never closes the scene. As we said, glory touches judgment, in the ways of God. Judgment cleans out the vessel, and then glory fills it. It takes away what hinders the presence of the Lord, and then the kingdom is established and displayed, as Zephaniah, together with all the prophets, show us. The Apocalypse is the great closing witness of this. There judgment makes way for glory again; and that, *finally*—in other words, that which offends and does iniquity, the great reprobate, apostate energies, are all judged and removed, and the day of millennium brightness begins to run its course.

It is judgment, judgment; over them sing, over them sing; in continuous succession, because no steward of God has been faithful, or given an account of his stewardship. Adam, the Jew, the Gentile, the candlestick, all, in their day, have been untrue to Him that appointed them; and “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty, He judgeth among the gods.” The garden was lost by Adam: the land of their fathers by their children, or Canaan by Israel; the Gentile was as faithless

as they, and power passed from the head of gold to the breasts and arms of silver, thence to the belly and thighs of brass, and then to the legs of iron, and the feet which were of iron and clay. There was no *delivering up* to God of that which had been received from Him. The stewards have been removed, one after the other, and their stewardships have been taken away from them, in the stead of their delivering of them up, or giving a just account of them. Thus it has ever been, and thus is it still, and there is no exception to this till we look at Jesus. With Him all stewardships are accounted for; for which is committed to Him in the due season is *delivered up*, and not *taken away*. And, what a volume, I may say, on the glories of Christ does that one sentence in 1 Cor. xv. write for us: "then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God." It signalizes Him in the face of the whole world, and in contrast with all the generations of the children of men, from the very beginning to the very end. Every stewardship committed to others is taken away, because of the faithless hand that had betrayed it; but He delivers up His, as having fulfilled all the purpose of Him

who had entrusted Him with it. In Christ, but in Christ only, all the promises of God are yea and amen. When He takes the kingdom He will at the end, or in the due moment, “deliver it up.” Precious words! But we see the kingdom taken away from Saul, and from the house of David; and then, when given to the Gentile, taken away from him in like manner, again and again, in a series of judgments or overturnings, till He came whose right it is; and then for the first time we get a stewardship accounted for, and a kingdom delivered up.

In this day of the Chaldean, on which we are now looking, with Zephaniah, everything, as it were, is judged. As in the Apocalyptic day, or as before the great white throne, all is judged *personally or individually*, so now in the light of the sword of Nebuchadnezzar, all is judged *nationally*. There is Judah, and there is Jerusalem; and the people around Edom, the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Ethiopians and the Assyrians; north, south, east, and west, all come in for this common and complete exposure, and that, too, in all its minute distinctions; the remnant of Baal, the name of the Chemarims with the priests, idolaters. those who swear by the Lord and by

Malcham, the backsliders and the careless, and those who wear strange apparel, are all severally visited; and the candle of the Lord searches out those who are settled on their lees, and who despise the fear of judgment. Nothing escapes. All is naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. And the Judge of all the world does right; they that have deserved many stripes get them, while others are beaten with as few; for God is no respecter of persons. He renders to every man according to his deeds.

But, "the remnant according to the election of grace" are recognised here in Zephaniah, as everywhere. "The meek of the earth," they are called; and they are told to wait on the Lord under the hope that they shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. (Chap. ii. 3; iii. 8.)

And then, as we said, glory comes in after judgment. Some features of millennial blessedness are presented to us. It is told us, that with one life or language the nations of that kingdom, "the world to come," shall worship the Lord the God of Israel. The confusion of Babel shall be at an end; a sample of which was given at the Pentecost of Acts iii. The

distant parts of the earth, those beyond the rivers of Ethiopia, shall take part in the common acknowledgment of the Saviour—God of Israel. Israel shall be purified, saved from all fear of evil any more, and be glad with all the heart, because the Lord their God is in the midst of them.

These are the days of the kingdom. The judgments have cleansed the scene, the remnant have been carried through them, the earth witnesses the salvation of God, and the name of the Lord is owned in the joy and service of His restored people.

The mourners in Zion, moreover, have taken to them the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. The lamentations of Jeremiah are heard no more; for the captive daughter of Zion has been brought home with every band that was about her broken off; and she that was led a captive, of whom it was written, "This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after," is made a name and a praise among all people of the earth.

Such things are here, in the third chapter of our prophet, and such things are the common themes of all the prophets, in anticipation of the kingdom of the Lord following upon the day of the Lord.

Glory, however, shines here, in one very attractive

character. The harp of Zephaniah has one note of very peculiar sweetness. The personal delight of the Lord in His people is given to us in words which savour of the Song of Solomon itself in its rapture and affection. "The Lord thy God," it is said to Zion, "will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."

This is the Bridegroom rejoicing over the bride, as had been anticipated by Isaiah, long before this day of Zephaniah. (See Isa. lxii. 5.) This is as if the Lord were taking the place which the rapturous song of the King of Israel put Him into, when He says, "How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!" (Cant. vii. 6.)

It is the *personal joy* of the Lord in His people that is thus anticipated by Zephaniah—the brightest, dearest article in all their condition. It may remind us of a little sentence in our own 1 Thess. iv.—"and so shall we ever be with the Lord." This is all that is said of us there, after our translation. Glories might have been detailed, and the various joy of the heaven of the Church; but it is only this, "and so shall we ever be with the Lord." It is *personal*, like this passage in Zephaniah; but, had we affection, we

should say, it is chief in the great account of our blessedness.

One further thing I would notice. There are two suppers laid out before us in Rev. xix.—the supper of “the Lamb,” and the supper of “the great God.” The supper of the Lamb is a scene of joy in heaven : blessed are they that are called to it. It is a marriage supper. The supper of the great God is the fruit of the solemn, terrific judgment that closes the history of the earth as it now is, the judgment of this present apostate world, when the carcasses of the confederated enemies of the Lord are made the food of the fowl of the air.

Ezekiel notices the last of these two suppers, and gives us as full a description of it as John in the Apocalypse. Zephaniah just glances at it as he passes on with his account of the acts of the Lord in the day of His wrath. (Ezek. xxxix. ; Zeph. i. 7.)

“The day of the Lord is at hand,” says Zephaniah; “for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests.” He does not, however, go into the scene, as Ezekiel and John do. What the sacrifice or the feast is, and who the guests that are bidden to it may be, he does not let us know. For there are voices

and under-tones in the perfect harmony of Scripture. Certain truths and mysteries are given a chief place here and there, while at other times the same truths are only assumed, or passingly, incidentally, touched on. But all this does but yield us that grateful, artless unison, that lives in all the parts of the book, giving us witness that it is but *one hand* that sweeps all the chords of that wondrous harp which is the present "harp of God," till other harps be formed by the same hand to celebrate the glories of His own name, and the fruit of His own work for ever. (Rev. xv. 2.)

H A G G A I.

THIS book is a witness how rapidly declension sets in, and fresh corruption follows upon restoration and blessing.

Return to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon was made at the opening of the Book of Ezra, *with great brightness and promise*. Thousands left Babylon; and they who remained behind helped them with their goods; and a general awakening of the national heart and energy was known.

The first business of the returned captives was to build the house of the Lord; and they laid the foundation of it in the midst of such mingled and diverse affections, as showed how thoroughly and personally they had set themselves to it. Tears and joys, shouts and wailings, told the living realities of the moment, and gave promise that an earnest-hearted work, then begun, would find its way happily and prosperously to the end. But it was not so. The promise was not made good. Is man's pledge, and

promise, and stewardship ever realised? The Gentile seed which had been planted in the lands of the ten tribes became the occasion of hindrance and difficulty; and the building of the house is suspended, and that, too, for so long a time as fourteen years; during which interval, self-indulgence and consultation about their own things marked the moral ways of the people, of that people who had started so earnestly and so single-heartedly.

Under such conditions, the Spirit of God visits Haggai, and by him the word of the Lord addresses itself to Zerubbabel the chief of Judah, and to Joshua the high priest, and to the congregation of returned captives.

It was in the second year of Darius king of Persia, that Haggai was thus called forth by the Spirit. This notification of time has meaning in it. It bespeaks the degradation of Israel. The coin of the Roman is by and by to go current through the land, and Israel will then be taught by their land to accept that badge of their vassal-state; and so now the Spirit teaches them the like lesson, marking the crisis of their history by the reign of the Persians.

Haggai begins by challenging the people on account

of their neglect of God's house, and concern about their own houses; and he calls on them to take knowledge of their present condition as the consequence of this, and to mark how unequal the fruit they were gathering out of their fields and vineyards was to the toil they had spent upon them. And, under this rebuke, the people are brought afresh to the fear of God; and fear being awakened, the conscience being reached, the fallow-ground of nature ploughed up, the same voice of God by Haggai begins its ministry of comfort and encouragement. "I am with you, saith the Lord." But the Spirit visited the heart of the people, as well as the lips of the prophet, and the end of the ministry was therefore reached. "And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts, their God."

The heart of Lydia, in other days, was opened by the Lord, as well as *the lips of Paul* that spoke to her. He spoke to her and she attended to him; and both of these things were of God. How simple, and yet how needful! The Lord lets us know the need of each of

those operations in His great discourse in John vi., teaching us that if the Father gave not to the Son, if He draw not, if He teach not, the ministry will be lost upon the soul, and the bread of life, the true manna of the desert, will be spread in vain.

Now, this was a revival, and reviving of God's work in the midst of the years became the necessary way, because of the tendency to decline which is found to be in us. The sinner's utter ruin, and full incompetency to restore himself, is the ground of needed sovereignty at the first; (Isaiah i. 9;) the saint's or the church's tendency to slacken, to grow cold and dull, becomes the like ground of renewed, repeated revivals afterwards. A fresh putting forth of reviving virtue has been ever the way of maintaining a dispensation in any condition worthy of itself. And this day of Haggai was one of those revival seasons.

The subject of this prophetic word by Haggai might lead us to observe how perfect in their seasons the divine thoughts and purposes are, though so various and different. David proposed to build a house for the ark of God, a house of cedars, costly and stable, but the word of a prophet forbad him; the time had not come. There would have been moral

unfitness in the ark taking its rest before Israel had reached theirs; or seating itself in a sure dwelling-place in a land as yet unpurged of the blood of the sword of battle. But in the day of Haggai, we find the contrary of all this. Israel are rebuked by a prophet for *not* building the house of the Lord. David erred in saying that the time had come for such a work; the returned captives now err in saying that the time had not come. And the Spirit of the Lord knew the times, and what Israel ought to do, whether to build or not to build. “God is a rock. His work is perfect.” He is true, though every man be a liar.

But again, as we find also in the book of Ezra, the returned captives had refused the Samaritans, rejected alliance with people of such mixed blood and principles. They had done rightly in this—surely they had. They had kept themselves pure. But this was a provocation, and under the suggestions of those Samaritan adversaries, the great king, the Persian “breast of silver,” had stopped the building of the house.

This, however, becomes a temptation. As soon as their hands get free of the work of the Lord’s house, the people go, every one to his own house. How easy

to understand this! Nature is ready to take all its advantages. We know this every day. But faith acts above nature. Paul, for instance, becomes a prisoner after he had been for years a servant. His activities abroad are stopped by the adversaries. But Paul, though a prisoner, though stopped in his work abroad, waits on the same Master still. There is prison-service, as well as field or pulpit-service. He will receive, at his own hired house, all that come to him, though he be in chains, and talk with them from morning till evening, expounding and testifying the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. This was faith, not nature. But the returned captives employ their hands for themselves; tied up from walking in God's house, they use them, as free, for the work of their own house; and thus Satan masters them as well as the Samaritans. And it is upon this condition of things the Lord breaks in by the voice of Haggai.

The building of the house, as I observed, seems to have been suspended for about fourteen years; but it is very happy to find that it was resumed, not by force of a decree in its favour by the great king, the Persian who had rule over the Jews at that time, but

by the voice of the prophets of God, Haggai and Zechariah. The Lord, indeed, did dispose the heart of the king ; but this was not till His prophet had disposed the heart of Israel. (See Ezra v. vi.) And this is very much to be remembered in connexion with our prophecy. The fresh spring in the heart of the people was found to have been in *God*, and not in *circumstances*. It was God's voice by His prophets that set them on work again, and not the royal favour of the Persian. The Lord turned the heart of the king their master to countenance them, when they had taken again the place of faith and obedience.

Haggai is simply styled, "Haggai the prophet." We have nothing about him more than that. The word of the Lord was delivered by him on several distinct occasions ; but all in the second year of Darius the king of Persia : and all was directed to this end, to set agoing and to further the building of the house of the Lord.

I can look at them only in the most general way, noticing the time of each, during this second year of Darius the Persian.

6th month.) Haggai arouses the careless, self-indulgent people—the returned remnant, who
1st day. }

were neglecting the Lord's house, and serving themselves.

6th month.) He promises them that the Lord will be
 24th day. } with them; thus, as in the name of the
 Lord, appreciating the fear that had been awakened;
 and, consequently, the people begin to work.

7th month.) In order to encourage them in their
 21st day. } work, Haggai tells them that the final
 glory of the house which they had now begun to build
 should be the brightest after the shaking of all things
 by the hand of the Lord.

9th month.) He leads the people to a humbling
 24th day. } sense of what they had been ere the
 house of the Lord was attended to; but he tells them
 also of future blessing.

Same day. { He addresses Zerubbabel, telling him
 again of the shaking of everything, and
 of the establishing of Zerubbabel as the Lord's
 signet.

These are his utterances in their seasons. The voice of the Lord by this prophet first awakens the conscience of the people, and then, in various ways of grace, encourages them in their revived condition and energy.

Let me observe, that the Spirit of God in the prophet does not take part, either with the aged man, who wept over the remembrance of *the past*, or with the younger ones who were rejoicing in *the present*; (see Ezra iii. ;) but He bears the heart of the people on to *the future*. Those tears had been real, and were service to God; but neither were perfect. The Spirit who leads according to God indulges neither, but carries heart and hope forward. Encouraging the people in their work by His servant, He tells them of the future glory of the house, and of the stability of the true Zerubbabel, when all that has its foundation in the creation, be it what it may, shall be shaken to its removal and overthrow.

The Spirit again, in an apostle, comments upon this of the prophet. (See Heb. xii.) He tells us, that all that which is to be shaken is “all that is made”—that is, as I judge, all that has not its root or its foundation in Him in whom “all the promises of God are yea and amen.” He only is the rock. His work is perfect. Christ the Lord can say, and will say, “The earth and its inhabitants are dissolved; I bear up the pillars.” What is of Him cannot be shaken. It remains. And in the faith and hope of what we have

in Him, and from Him, beloved, let us say to one another, in the words of the apostle, “we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.” Amen.

Z E C H A R I A H .

ZECHARIAH was a companion with Haggai in that energy and gift of the Spirit which was animating the returned captive in the building of the temple. But, under that inspiration, Haggai applies himself more exclusively to that one object. All he says he addresses to the captives by way of encouragement in the work then immediately in their hand. Zechariah looks out more widely, anticipating distant days in the history of Israel and of the nations, with a purpose beyond that of merely encouraging the builders in their work.

This book opens with a kind of preface in which the prophet, ere he details his visions, challenges the people, warning them not to treat the Lord's words by him as their fathers had treated other words of the Lord by other prophets, and which, nevertheless, had been fulfilled against them—had “taken hold of them,” as he speaks. (Chap. i. 1—6.)

He then begins to record his visions. Haggai

had no visions. Zechariah is principally instructed by them. But they both prophesied in the same year, the second of the reign of Darius the Persian.

Chap. i. 7—17. This may be called “the vision of the horses among the myrtle trees.” The first of these horses had a rider on it, the others were in the rear, and, as far as we learn, were without riders.* The prophet asks the angel that waited on him what this meant. The rider upon the foremost horse tells him that these unriden horses were the agents of the Lord’s pleasure in the earth. The unriden horses, the representatives of the Gentiles, then speak and say that the whole earth was still and at rest; that is, just as they would have it. For such, surely, was the mind of the nations of the earth, whom God had set up upon the degradation and fall of Jerusalem. So would they have it—their exaltation upon the ruin of God’s people.

* They are without riders, I believe, in order to represent the senseless, brutish force which marked the Gentiles, unguided as they were by the Spirit of God. The first horse was ridden by a man, a symbol of the divine energy that ruled the fortunes of Israel. It was “the angel of the Lord” that was the rider. Nebuchadnezzar had been already as an unriden horse. (Dan. iv.) So now the remaining three Gentile powers. (See Psalm xlix. 20.) So, in the next vision, the Gentiles are “horns,” senseless things; Israel’s friends are “carpenters.”

The angel, who stood for Jerusalem, upon this, at once takes the alarm, and pleads for the city of the Lord and of Israel. The Lord having answered this appeal of the angel, the angel seems to let the prophet know the answer, telling him that the Lord was displeased with the Gentiles, who were thus at ease, though they had helped forward the affliction of Jerusalem ; that Jerusalem should be restored, the Lord's house be built there again, and the cities of the land be re-occupied.

Ver. 18—21. The second vision we may call, “the vision of the four horns and the four carpenters.” It gave the prophet a view of the Gentile adversaries that had dispersed Judah, and also of the friends who were soon to avenge Judah at the hand of his Gentile adversaries.

Chap. ii. This third division may be called, “the vision of the man with the measuring line.” The prophet here has before him not only the angel who was attending him, but another angel and a man with a measuring line in his hand ; and moreover, he hears the voice of the Lord ; or, it may be, the word of the Lord is rehearsed to him. But the whole of this teaches him, that Jerusalem is to be in its place,

established and dignified again; and that after the glory has seated itself there, inquisition should be made of those nations, who, in the day of their calamity, troubled the Israel of God.* Zion, in that day, is to sing for joy; nations also shall join themselves to the Lord of Israel, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God, and be subdued to the sense of the presence of the Lord in the earth again.

Chap. iii. The fourth vision is that of "Joshua, the high priest." Having just received a pledge of the restoration of that city, we have now, in another vision, a picture of the justification of the people; and this justification of Israel leads, in the end, to the beauty and acceptance of Israel in the days of the kingdom, when Messiah, "the Shepherd and Stone of Israel," shall be exalted in providential authority over the whole earth. But this picture is so vivid, so graphic, that it can be used as the delineation of the story of the justification of any sinner, in the great principles of it—as we know that justification itself is one and the same for each and all of us. It is the

* We see this again, I may say, in Matthew xxv., when the Son of Man is on the throne of His millennial glory.

sinner, the polluted one, the Joshua in filthy garments, chosen, cleansed, stripped and clothed again, all in grace, in a grace that acts as from itself on the warrant of the blood of Christ, while we, like Joshua, are silent before it.

Chap. iv. The fifth vision is that of “the golden candlestick.” If, in the preceding vision, we saw the great act of justification exhibited, the value of Christ applied to the unclean condition of Israel, here we find exhibited the communication of power, and the application of the Spirit to the circumstances of Israel. It therefore follows in due order. And the power is pledged not to be withdrawn till the needed grace be accomplished, and the work begun be completed; till what was entered on in that day of restoration under Zerubbabel, be perfected in the day of the royal Messiah, the true Zerubbabel, the revived heir and holder of the honour and strength of the house of David, the head of all order throughout the earth, as in kingdom-days.

Chap. v. 1—4. The sixth vision is that of “the flying roll.” This is an exhibition of curse or judgment finding out sinners, whether sinners against their neighbours as *thieves*, or sinners against God, as

false swearers.^{*} The previous visions had been of mercy to Israel, either under the providence of God, or under Messiah, or under the Spirit; but now we get visions of judgment.

Chap. v. 5—11. The seventh vision is that of “the Ephah with the woman sitting in it.” This is a picture of wickedness—*ἀνομία*—lawlessness. It is hidden—the woman in the ephah—and it is borne to the land of Shinar, its base, where it began its course. This we know; for Nimrod was the first great representative of the wicked or the lawless one, who is to be destroyed in the day of the Lord. This “wickedness” is hidden as here in an “ephah;” or, as in Matt. xiii., in “three measures of meal”—hidden, I may say, under a profession, as of the religion of Israel, or of the name of Christendom. But it is really Babylon at the end as at the beginning, “the land of Shinar;” as we again see in Rev. xvii., and many other Scriptures.

Chap. vi. 1—8. The eighth vision is that of “the four chariots.” These symbolize the four great monarchies so much spoken of by the prophet Daniel. These

^{*} Curse follows law. (Gal. iii. 10.) As the law had its two tables, the curse has its two sides, corresponding, as we here see, to the two tables.

chariots, drawn by different horses, come forth from between mountains of brass, and then take their appointed course over different parts of the earth, and this may remind us of the first vision, or that of “the horses among the myrtle trees.” Only we have a new fact here: viz., that the second chariot has settled God’s question with the first; or, in the language of this vision, “those that go forth to the north country have quieted my spirit,” saith the Lord, “in the north country.” The Persian had, in the days of Zechariah, put down the Chaldean.

Chap vi. 9—15. These closing verses of the same chapter seem to be a kind of appendix to this vision of the four chariots.* The prophet is instructed to take certain children of the returned captives, and in their presence to set crowns on the head of Joshua, the high priest; and then to address Joshua as a type of the Branch, the destined builder of the Lord’s temple, the bearer of the glory, the combined priest and king who is to secure peace in the coming days of His kingdom. And having gone through this ceremony, the prophet was ordered to lay up these crowns under

* For it intimates a fifth kingdom which in season is to be revealed, the four kingdoms of the Gentiles having preceded it.

the hand of certain guardians, in the house of the Lord, as a memorial of all this destined glory and power which are to be displayed in the last days, in the person of the Branch, that is, the Messiah of Israel, the Christ of God.

But now we may observe, that on closing the sixth chapter, we have done with Zechariah's visions. We are also in another year, the fourth instead of the second of Darius. But I would separate these remaining chapters into what appears to me to be their distinct portions, as I have done with the preceding.

Chaps. vii. viii. These chapters must be read together, I judge. For chapter viii. 19, clearly seems to refer to chapter vii. 3. They form the communication which was made by the Lord to the prophet, when the returned captives sent to inquire whether their captivity-fasts were now to be continued. The prophet begins his answer by a humbling word addressed to the conscience. They had, it is true, been fasting steadily during the years of their captivity; but he now tells them to ask themselves, had this been done to the Lord?

The character of the answer which the prophet, under the Holy Ghost, returns to the enquiring

people is greatly worthy of thought; but it would be too much to consider it in its detail. I would, however, say this upon it: that this word of Zechariah reminds me of the method of the Lord Jesus in a like case. He never simply answered an enquiry, but so took it up as to call the conscience and heart of the enquirer into exercise. He looked rather to the moral state of the enquirer than to the subject of the enquiry. So, Zechariah here. He humbles, exhorts, and teaches, ere he gives the answer. But then, when he does come to give the answer, he gives it fully and blessedly indeed. He tells them that their fasts shall become feasts; and further, announces prophetically the bright and palmy days which yet in the distance awaited Israel.

Chaps. ix., x. These chapters, taken and read together, form another burthen of the prophet.

Syria, the Philistines, Tyre and Sidon are to be humbled, though a remnant may be spared, in the day when Israel is protected and vindicated by God her Saviour, and the eyes of men are towards the Lord. This is first announced here. And then, the appearing, the royal glory of Messiah, is anticipated, offered, as we know it was, in the day of Matthew xxi.,

but being then refused, it remains for a coming day when it will assert its place, and make good its claims *by judgment*, as the prophet here goes on to tell us.* But then, after that, the kingdom shall be displayed in its universality of strength or peace. The prophet then addresses Messiah, and pledges to Him, that by His own blood, which was the seal of the covenant, His people, His prisoners in Israel, should be delivered. And he then, suitably, addresses another word to Israel, presenting Messiah to them as the object of their confidence, and the security to them of victory and honour.

The results of the recovery of Israel are then enlarged upon, in great and various blessedness, in chapter x.

Chap. xi. This chapter may be read by itself. It gives us, as I believe, an anticipation of the ministry of the Lord Jesus, as in the gospel by Matthew—introduced, however, by some solemn premonitions of judgment, as we see in verses 1—3.

Messiah begins to cite His commission under the

* The rejection of the King at His first coming has made *judgment* necessary to the future and final display of His glory in Israel. Many other prophecies, beside this of Zechariah, tell us this, as also the Lord's great prophetic word in Matt. xxiv.

God of Israel, telling us, that He had come forth to find the sheep of Israel, for that they were in an evil case, from their *possessors*, their *vendors*, and their *shepherds*—that is, from such as the Romans, the Herods, and the Pharisees.

He then tells us, that He took two staves, in order to fulfil this His commission. And these staves were significant or symbolic. Moses, in other days, had his rod, Messiah now had His staves. They signified strength and beauty; for Christ had to impart each of these to Israel, to establish and adorn them, to secure and dignify them. The inhabitants of the land, the great body of the Jewish people, are found to disappoint His service as much as any, so that He has still to separate “the poor of the flock” from the general “flock of slaughter.”

His first service is then told us. After thus taking up the flock of Israel, (as He does in the earlier chapters of Matthew) He cuts off three of the shepherds whom He found in the land. This we see in Matt. xxii.: the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees, religious heads of the people, being then silenced in controversy with the Lord Jesus.

Having done this, Messiah disclaims them, breaking His staff, "Beauty," as we see Him doing in Matt. xxiii.; withdrawing Himself, which was the taking away of their beauty from them: for they lose their glory when they lose Him. They were but a crownless head without Him; and that being so, *all* is gone for the present.

He then tells us that "the poor of the flock" waited on Him as "the word of the Lord;" and this we see, in perfect order and place, in Matt. xxiv. xxv.

And then, He anticipates the scene of His betrayal and death, as in Matt. xxvi. xxvii. And this is followed here by the Prophet, as we know it has been historically, by the disruption of Israel. The other staff, "Bands," is broken.*

A remarkable anticipation of Christ's ministry, all this is. But this being the history of the true Shepherd, the good Shepherd, at the hand of the flock, we then get the history of the flock at the hand of the foolish shepherd, the idol-shepherd. This is retribution, as many other Scriptures let us know, that the raising up of Antichrist will be in judgment upon

* The Godhead, the Jehovah-ship, as I may speak of Jesus, is fully set out in ver. 13. It was *Jehovah* who was priced at 30 pieces of silver.

Israel for their rejection of God's Christ, their own Messiah. This is future. See verses 15—17.*

Chap. xii. xiv. These chapters form the last burthen of our Prophet. It tells us of "the day of the Lord," or of that great action which is to introduce the kingdom. It begins very significantly, celebrating God in three characters of glory—the stretcher out of the heavens, the layer of the foundations of the earth, the power of the Spirit of man. For these three characters are such as the kingdom is destined to display. For then, the God of grace and of glory will be seen as having furnished the heavens, as having established the earth, and as having renewed man. And the details of the prophetic burthen that follow this introduction, give witness of these things.

It is, as I said above, "the day of the Lord" which is delineated here, in various virtues and features of it.

* The foolish shepherd, thus raised up in judgment or retribution on Israel, because of their rejection of Messiah, may remind us of Saul. He treated the flock very much as this foolish shepherd is to treat them (1. Sam. viii.); and he was given to the people, because they had rejected the Lord in the person of His servant Samuel; we may read Ezek. xxxiv. in this connexion also. But I must add—that, though the good and true Shepherd was at first refused, and in retribution the foolish shepherd is to be raised up still, at the end, on the mountains of Israel, and beside the rivers of Israel, the flock shall again lie down and feed under the care of their Shepherd-king, the true David, who will guide them by the skilfulness of His hand, and feed them according to the integrity of His heart. All Scripture tells this.

The confederated enemies of Jerusalem shall be broken under the walls of Jerusalem in that day; and this shall be done after a manner and method which is to have respect to certain moral results. But if the *hand* of God work amid the circumstances of that day, the *Spirit* of God shall work with the people of that day also.

This is blessedly delineated here. The Spirit will begin His work with them in the power of conviction. They are brought to remember their sin against Jesus, and to mourn bitterly. Then, they are led to discover by faith, the remedy for sin in that very Jesus whom once with wicked hands they crucified and slew. Then, they consider their ways, and with Levite zeal, purify themselves; according to Deut. xiii., nothing is spared, though dear as near kindred. Then they hold communion with Jesus about those very wounds which once they themselves inflicted.*

The hand of the Lord shall then work in company with His Spirit, the fire of persecution or of discipline (the purging of the floor, as John the Baptist speaks)

* This communion may be introduced (after the zeal of v. 4) by the Lord Jesus Himself breaking in, in Spirit, and saying, "I am no prophet, but an husbandman, for man has acquired me as a slave from my youth," for such is said to be the translation of verse 5.

taking its course, and then Judah shall be acknowledged again by the Lord, and again the Lord shall be acknowledged by Judah, according to the pattern or precedent of Deut. xxvi. 17-19.

This leads us to the close of chap. xiii. At the opening of the next chapter, the 14th and the last, we have the great action around the city, which had been anticipated at the beginning of chapter xii., further and more fully described, together with the interference of the Lord Himself in the behalf of the city, and the results of its deliverance, such as the consecration of it as the centre of God's earthly purposes, and the seat of His earthly glory; and then the millennial or kingdom-joy of the nations holding their feast-days there as the scene of public, universal festivation.

Solemnly, in the midst of all this, we are given to see the judgment of those who had been fighting against Jerusalem, and also of those who would not go up there to worship in the days of the glory. What ought to have been, but was not, shall then be realized. *Holiness* shall give character to everything; consecration to God. Nor shall there be blot or exception then, as hitherto there has been. The

Canaanite was in the land. and left there, after Abraham had entered it ; but now, “there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts.” (See Gen. xii. 6 ; Zech. xiv. 21.)

As one of our own poets says,

“Days surpassing fable, and yet true.”

M A L A C H I .

MALACHI closes the writings of the minor prophets, as they are called, and with them the volume of the Old Testament. This suggests and warrants a short review of things in the previous story of Israel.

From the beginning the Lord had been, in various ways, testing and proving that people, whom He had made His people. After having delivered them from Egypt, and borne them through the wilderness, under Joshua, He set them in the land promised to their fathers; and then, in a certain sense, began afresh with them. This is seen in the days of the Judges who succeeded Joshua. But what was the story? The people transgressed; the Lord chastened; the people wept under the rod; the Lord raised up a deliverer. Thus it was again and again.

But during all this time the Lord kept Israel before and under Himself. In those days there was no captivity of the people, or conquest of the land. Israel was still at home. The land was

still their own, and Jehovah their king as well as their God.

In due season, the Lord gave them the house and the throne of David. They flourished into a kingdom. But the kingdom became untrue to Him as the nation had been. Much long-suffering towards the house of David the Lord exercised, as before He had exercised towards the nation. The Books of Judges and of 2 Chronicles shew us all this. But at length, loss of home and country, with sore captivity, ensued; and a worse condition than had been known under the rod of the Philistines, Midianites or Canaanites, was now known under the kings of Assyria and Babylon. Scattering of the people among the Gentiles, and possession of their land by the Gentiles now takes place.

This was fearful. There is, however, restoration. There is a return of captives from Babylon. Jerusalem is regained, rebuilt, repopled. The house of God is raised up again, and the worship of His name and the service of His altar are observed again. But this state of things was something quite new. Israel was not now a nation set in their own land, as they had been under Joshua and the Judges; nor a king-

dom with one of their own children on the throne, (such a throne as the glory could accompany) as under David and David's sons. The people were now the vassals of the Gentile. They were debtors to the Gentile for permission to occupy the land of their fathers, and to observe the laws and do the service of their God. They were the subjects of the Persian, and their ruler was his vicegerent.

This, surely, was a new condition. But they are put into it, that they may be again tested, tested to the full, and thereby proved and convicted to the uttermost. For so it comes to pass: when the trial of them is made in their new circumstances, failure ensues, as it had ever done. The book of Judges had already witnessed against them as a *nation*; 2 Chronicles had already witnessed against them as a *kingdom*; and now Ezra, and Nehemiah, and this prophecy of Malachi witness against them as *returned captives*.

I must, however, turn aside from this for a moment.

The returned captives at their beginning, give some beautiful samples of faith and service. They are left, as we may see presently, by Malachi, in a

very sad moral condition. But there had been brighter, earlier moments. Great events, greater than had been known for centuries in Israel, had been witnessed: such as their journey from Babylon, the building of the temple, the building of the wall, the purifying of the congregation again and again. Yet there was no miracle: all was accomplished by force of moral energy; the Spirit of God working in the people, rather than the hand of God working for them. There was no cloudy pillar to conduct them across the second desert; but they went, the fast and the prayer on the banks of the Ahava bespeaking the virtue of the Spirit that was among them. They refused Samaritan alliances, as a people that knew their Nazaritism. The customs of the nations, the traditions of the elders, their own thoughts and wisdom, had no place in forming their character or conduct. The word of God was their law. Individual grace and gift shine eminent, as in Ezra and Nehemiah. The light that was in Ezra, the singleheartedness that mark Nehemiah, could carry the people through difficulties, when the rod of Moses was no longer in the camp to do its marvels, as in the sight of the enemy.

I speak not of Mordecai and Esther, though strange

and admirable was their way, without a miracle in their behalf, because they represent Israel *in the dispersion*, and not as *returned captives*.*

But these brighter moments had now faded, and Malachi gives us our last Old Testament sight of the state of Israel, sad and humbling as indeed it is.

In due season, the hour of the New Testament arrives, and we find the same before us, just as Malachi had promised us it should be. Messiah, the Lord of the temple, appears, introduced by John Baptist, the messenger of Malachi iii. 1, and the Elias (if the people would receive him) of Malachi iv. 5. The series of tests which have been made from the day of the Exodus to the day of the returned captives is resumed now. Messiah is offered,† and He proposes Himself, in full and varied forms, to the acceptance of Israel. And, at last, the Spirit is given, and apostles full of the Holy Ghost call on Israel to re-

* The virtues which would have duly given character to the remnant of Israel, or the returned captives, showed themselves to perfection in the Lord Jesus, who was, as we may say, the Remnant in His day. He would have His disciples refuse Samaritan alliance, and yet bow to the Gentile. "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's," may be read as the summary of the religion of returned captives.

† "If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come," are words which clearly tell us, that the ministry of the Baptist of Christ was a *testing* time.

pent and believe, and thus enter the times of refreshing and restitution promised and spoken of by all the prophets. These are the brightest, richest, visitations: the last yet the best; the closing, yet the most promising; but, like all the rest, they fail. Israel is not gathered. In Egypt, in the wilderness, and in the land; as a pilgrim-people, or as captives; as a nation, or as a kingdom; as presented with Messiah and His works, or as visited by the Spirit and His virtues—still, from first to last, under all the patient exercise of this long-suffering, grace, and wisdom, they are untrue still. “They always resist the Holy Ghost,” as one inspired voice says of them: “they fill up the measure of their sins always,” as another inspired voice pronounces against them.

The nation had been preserved, as we saw, and kept in their own land till the king, the house of David, was set up—and now they are restored to their own land, and kept there till Messiah appear and offer Himself to them. “The rod of the tribe of Judah is preserved, in order that the Branch of the root of Jesse may be presented.”

At the opening of the gospels we find passages from Malachi quoted, as belonging to that moment of

the evangelists. The close of the Old thus links itself with the opening of the New Testament. And these connexions, simple, and striking, and self-widening as they are, illustrate the unity of the divine volume. They display something of the moral glory of the Book, and let us learn, what we learn from another and a more direct witness, (that is, from a passage in the Book itself,) that, “known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” (Acts xv. 18.)

We may briefly present this prophecy in the following manner :

Chap. i. It opens with a terrible exposure of the moral condition of the returned captives. Was the state of Israel ever worse? If idolatry had marked it from the beginning hitherto, infidelity does now; the spirit of scorning; the spirit that contemns and repudiates all the claims of God, and only mocks His pleadings and entreaties. So that, we may say, if the unclean spirit have at this time of Malachi gone out, a more wicked one has entered. We cannot say that the old unclean spirit has returned, bringing with him seven other spirits; for we do not find, under the word of this prophet, a return to idolatry. But we

may say that a spirit more wicked than the old one has entered.

The “wherein” of this chapter, used by the returned captives again and again, as they answer the appeals and rebukes of the Lord, sounds awfully in our ears.

Chap. ii. The Lord by the prophet, in this chapter, addresses a word of rebuke to the priests now, as He had done to the people before. The Spirit awakens a word in the bosom of the prophet, challenging the abominations that were committed in Judah and Jerusalem, the treachery against the nation’s covenant—letting the people know that they were not straitened in the Lord who had provisions for them in the Spirit to fulfil His part in that covenant, but that they had been their own enemies, unfaithful to their conditions in the same covenant. The covenant is spoken of under the figure of a marriage-contract, or marriage vows, according to the style of the prophets generally. And it is such a figure as the Lord’s own words about Himself and His people Israel would warrant and suggest.

Chap. iii., iv. The Lord, continuing His controversy with the evil estate of Israel, here lets them know, that of a truth the Lord of the temple would come

and His messenger before Him; but that such a mission would turn out to be a very different thing from what they expected. They thought, to be sure, that it would be in their favour, that it would flatter and accredit them, set them up, and be deliverance and glory to them. They sought it: delighted themselves in the prospect of it. (Ver. 2.) But the prophet would have them undeceive themselves, and learn that in *judgment* this mission would be; necessarily so, because of their evil condition. And the present question with them should therefore be, who will abide this coming of the Lord? not, as it were, who will tell its glories and its blessings, as they might have thought, but, who will abide the searching process that will attend it?

Still there was patience in God thus insulted. Had not this been so, had he not been God and not man, Israel would have been already consumed. But even now, they might prove that He would bless them beyond all expected measures, if they would but be obedient.

In the midst of all this national iniquity, the remnant are manifested. The Lord declares that He has them and their ways in His *remembrance* now, and

will have them as his *displayed jewels* by and by, in that day when there shall be to some a sun with healing in his rays, to others a sun to burn up as an oven—like the two in the bed, at the mill, or in the field, of which the Lord Himself speaks in the Gospels.

The prophet then closes by addressing this remnant with advices and promises; and as the Old Testament thus closes, so does the New open; for, at the very beginning of St. Luke, we see this remnant, in the persons of Zechariah and Elizabeth, following this advice of Malachi, obedient to the law of Moses, with its statutes and judgments; and we see them also receiving the Elijah in the person of their child John, according to the promise of Malachi.*

I would add a little by way of postscript.

The John[†] Baptist of the Gospels is identified (officially, not personally) with the Elijah of Malachi. (Matt. xi.; Mark i.; Luke i., vii.) John Baptist stood ready to fulfil the promise of the prophet to Israel.

* The remnant, let me add, are not promised present deliverance from the Gentile power, but they are taught to hold by the word, to expect the judgment of the wicked and a new state of things in due time. Our epistles, in like manner, do not promise us a recovery of church beauty, but teach us to look for a new and better thing; and the coming of the Lord will find us as the epistles leave us—just as the first coming of the Lord found Malachi's remnant as Malachi had left them.

He was as the messenger that went before the face of the Lord of the temple ; and as the one who would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to the fathers. But Israel was unbelieving ; and, as the ancient oracle is a standing oracle in the story of that people—"If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established," (Isa. vii. 9), Israel remained unblest.

Elijah, in Ahab's day, was a restorer, as we see in 1 Kings xviii. But this was but for a season. His light was rejoiced in by the people ; but Jezebel forced him out into the wilderness again. So with the Baptist. His light was rejoiced in also. But, again, this was only for a season. The multitude were baptized of him ; but the wicked hated him ; and there was another Jezebel in that day that had him beheaded ; and Israel was left unestablished, whether by Elijah or the Baptist.

But the promised Elijah will still appear, and lead on to the throne and power of Messiah. For God is true, though every man be a liar. His gifts and calling are without repentance. He will be faithful to Israel, though, as we have seen, Israel under every trial has been unfaithful to Him. He will accomplish

His purposes in grace, be the world, be Israel, or man, never so angry or never so perverted. “God is unchangeable both in righteousness and grace.”

“All Israel shall be saved ; as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” (Rom. xi. 26.)

“ Behold the mountain of the Lord
In latter days shall rise,
On mountain-tops above the hills,
And draw the wond’ring eyes.”

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