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SYNOPTICAL LECTURES  
ON THE  
BOOKS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.



SYNOPTICAL LECTURES  
ON THE  
BOOKS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

BY  
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"METAPHORS IN THE GOSPELS," "SPEECHES OF THE HOLY APOSTLES," ETC.

*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

GENESIS—HABAKKUK.

VOL. I.

*Fourth Edition. Carefully revised throughout.*

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## PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION.



THIS is in some respects a new book. The "First Series," comprising a third of the Lectures, was published fourteen years ago; and the Second and Third followed at considerable intervals. Such a mode of publication had obvious disadvantages; but the book obtained a measure of attention and favour at home and abroad for which the Author is very grateful. As the years went on, however, it required, as all books of Biblical erudition require, careful revision. During those years an unparalleled amount of exegetical matter has issued from the press—English, Continental, and American. Biblical study has been vigorously developed in all directions; and the Revised Version, valuable, though by no means perfect, has gained extensive circulation. In those circumstances, the Author has thought it right to sacrifice the stereotype plates of previous editions, and to re-study every page, making such alterations, recensions, and additions as more mature consideration might require. Thus, while the plan is not changed, and the modifica-

tions of opinion are not of serious import, the work has at all events such improvements as the writer thinks can be derived from present-day scholarship.

Of design, the pages have not been cumbered with names of commentators or the record of their various opinions. This, of course, does not mean that they have not been consulted. Few, beyond those who have done similar work, can estimate the amount of reading, as well as of consideration, necessary to give anything like a digest of the Bible, and a judgment on all the critical problems which rise by the score, and even by the hundred.

In the preface to a recent book,\* Archdeacon Farrar has been so good as to say that, till he fell in with our "Synoptical Lectures," he "did not know of any volume of sermons, either in Patristic, Scholastic, Reformation, or post-Reformation theology, which contains a series of discourses dealing *seriatim* with the Messages of the Books." The idea originally occurred to us from observing how much the popular conceptions in religion rest on fragmentary sentences, used as "texts," and how little has been done to show, either to the clergy or the laity, the comprehensive sweep of revelation. Commentaries, to serve their purpose well, must be minute, and reach a bulk which deters the ordinary reader. So this book was attempted, to suit not professional students

\* *The Messages of the Books* (1884).

merely, but all educated Christians, and convey to them something like a compendious knowledge of Holy Writ. The plan, as expressed in a former edition, is "to survey each book of Scripture, so as to apprehend generally its scope and contents; as one may view a city from the top of a tower in order to gain an idea of its arrangement and its salient features, that he may thereafter more intelligently traverse it and explore it in detail." For help in such detailed study one must repair to the Commentator and the Preacher.

*November 1885.*



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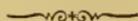
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*Note.*—Scriptural quotations are usually, but not invariably, taken from the Revised Version.



## A FEW WORDS ON THE CANON.



OUR English Bibles contain a list entitled, "The Names and Order of all the Books of the Old and New Testaments, with the number of their chapters." According to this catalogue, there are thirty-nine Books in the Old Testament, twenty-seven in the New.

Every one knows that the list is not itself a part of Scripture; and it is a legitimate question, To what degree of respect or confidence is it entitled, and why do the Books therein enumerated—these, and none but these—constitute Holy Writ? This is just the question known as that of "the Canon of Scripture." The Greek word, *κανών*, standard, or rule, came in ecclesiastical usage to denote an authorised list, whether of books, decrees of councils, or clergy. Whatever was accredited and approved in the Church was termed canonical. Books of Scripture were so called, as proper to be read in the Christian assemblies. Non-canonical books were those disallowed and excluded, as being either spurious productions, or, if genuine and good for private reading, yet apocryphal or hidden books, the authority of which was not evident, and which, therefore, had no just claim to be placed in the sacred Canon, the standard of faith and practice.

The Canon, as we have received it, shows a most varied collection of Hebrew and Greek works—histories, poems, tracts, prophecies, and letters, written at intervals during sixteen centuries, by many writers known and unknown; and among those who are known, men of every rank and condition—

prophets, kings, priests, a scribe, a herdsman, a tax-gatherer, a physician, a tent-maker, and two or three fishermen. The volume which we call the Bible grew slowly under their hands, and was separated from other religious writings by degrees. So God ordered it; so it seemed good in His sight.

Our doctrine of the Canon is, that the collection of Books, which we bind up together, constitutes the authentic and complete Bible, the authoritative fountain of our religious knowledge. But this does not involve, and should not be allowed to imply, or understood to cover, the opinion, that all the Books in the collection are of equal value, or equally full of the mind of God, or equally applicable in their teachings to the time in which we live. They are all sacred, as separated to holy use from the mass of even religious literature; all profitable, but not all equally profitable; and all to be read with reverence, but at the same time with intelligent recognition of the progress which is in the Bible itself, and in the order and brightness of Divine dispensations of truth.

I. The Old Testament we receive in its integrity from the Jews. It concerns Israel and the nations, and prepares the way of Christ and the Church. Its foundation is in the Law, or the Five Books at the outset, ascribed to Moses. Subsequent history, poetry, and prophecy evidently presuppose and proceed upon the Pentateuch. Therefore, from earliest times down to this day, the Hebrews have paid peculiar veneration to the Law.

The Historical Books, from Joshua to Esther, with the single exception of Nehemiah, are of anonymous authorship to us, though it is quite probable that the writers were known at the time of their admission to the Canon. The works of David, Solomon, and the prophets were, in course of time, added to this collection. And all were ranged under the divisions of the Law, the Prophets, earlier and later, and the Hagiographa. At what date this was done, we have no certain knowledge; but Jewish tradition ascribes the editing and arranging of the Old Testament to Ezra, the learned Scribe, as the first President of the "Great Synagogue."

The Hebrew Canon was well and even jealously guarded by the Jews of Palestine ; but was not held in the same definite form by the Hellenist Jews. Those of Alexandria used the Greek translation made by the Seventy ; and in that version were certain additions to the Books of Job, Esther, and Daniel, which were unknown to the Hebrew text, and certain other books, as of Wisdom, and the Maccabees, which never existed in Hebrew, and are known among us as the Apocrypha.

A very important testimony to the Hebrew Canon is given by the Jewish writer on history and antiquities—Josephus. It runs thus : “ We have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times, and are justly held to be divine.”—“ No one has been so bold as to add anything to these writings, or take anything from them, or make any change in them ; but it is become natural to all Jews, immediately, and from their birth, to esteem those Books to contain divine doctrines, to persist in them, and, if occasion be, willingly to die for them.”\* The twenty-two books, as Josephus computed them, are just our thirty-nine, for the two Books of Samuel were one, two of Kings one, two of Chronicles one, the minor prophets one, Ezra was joined to Nehemiah, Ruth to Judges, and Lamentations to the greater work of Jeremiah. The Books in the Canon are said to have been thus numbered twenty-two, in order to correspond, like the parts of the 119th Psalm, with the Hebrew alphabet. At a later period, the number was given as twenty-four, the Books of Ruth and Lamentations being allowed separate places in the list.

Our Old Testament is thus received from that people to whom “ were committed the oracles of God.” The Lord so ordered it in His providence, that the Jews should honour this collection of Books above and apart from all others, and should scrupulously protect them from addition or excision by man. They have preserved them, even to their own condemnation.

We have yet greater witness. It was of this Old Testament that Jesus Christ said, “ Search the Scriptures.” In its three

\* Answer to Apion, Book i.

great divisions He recognised it, when, after His resurrection, He taught from "the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms."

It is a singular fact that the Jews never injured or corrupted the Old Testament Scriptures which reprove them; and the Latin Church never injured or corrupted the New Testament Canon by which its superstitions are rebuked. But the Latin Church has interfered with that Canon which the Jews so diligently guarded. The Latin version, called the Vulgate, had contained the Apocrypha. The Council of Trent, in 1546, pronounced all the contents of the Vulgate equally canonical and authoritative; and thus were eleven books, or parts of books, which the Jews of Palestine excluded from their Canon, put by arbitrary decree of a modern council on a level with Moses and the Prophets. We do not assert that this was done for dogmatic and controversial reasons; but it is obviously convenient for the Church of Rome that, as there is no authority for purgatory, the merit of works, or prayers of the living for the dead in Holy Writ properly so called, books from which quotations in favour of these things can be made—*e.g.*, Baruch, Tobit, Ecclesiasticus, and the Maccabees—should be elevated to canonical dignity. The Eastern Church long maintained the distinction between Canonical Scripture as the rule of faith, and other books useful for edification. A Council at Jerusalem, in 1672, canonised the Apocrypha; but there is no decision on the subject binding the Eastern Church to this day. The Reformed Churches with one accord repudiated the canonicity of the Apocrypha, although it was long the custom in England, and still is in Germany, to bind up those books in the same volume with Holy Scripture.

II. The history of the Canon of the New Testament is quite analogous to that of the Old. Like the earlier collection, it grew silently, and was formed and settled, as we now have it, by general consent of the Christians in the first three centuries of the Church. The decision was not made by an Apostle, or arrived at by any special Divine afflatus for the purpose, but was reached more gradually, and, on that account, all the more

convincingly and impressively, by the mature examination and deliberate judgment of the Christian Church, under the directing Providence and living Spirit of God.

The four Books, with which the New Testament opens, called Gospels, though by no means the first written, support those which follow, as the five Books at the beginning of the Old Testament, called the Law, sustain the subsequent Hebrew Scriptures. They were produced in the first century; and there is evidence that during the second century they were widely known and circulated as genuine Gospels. There were other memoirs of Christ in circulation too, but they never had the same reception or repute, and have long ago fallen into oblivion, or been recognised as of little worth. Some of the books which we receive were in question for a considerable time, viz., the Epistle to the Hebrews, James, 2d Peter, 2d and 3d John, Jude, and the Revelation. At last all these were acknowledged; and the hesitation shown in regard to them only increases our confidence in their authority, as satisfying us that whatever could be alleged against them was considered in early times and found wanting, and also as proving the extreme deliberation and caution with which the Greek Canon, equally with the Hebrew, was made up and defined. It was ascertained that all the Books admitted to the Canon proceeded from Apostles, or were written in the first age, in harmony with the spirit and oral teachings of the Apostles of the Lamb.

A Council at Laodicea, A.D. 365, forbade the reading of uncanonical books in Churches; and a catalogue is found appended to the decrees, which corresponds exactly with our list—except as regards the Book of Revelation, which is omitted. The so-called Council of Carthage, A.D. 397, enumerates the Books exactly as we have them. We do not cite the acts of any council as conferring authority on any part of Scripture, but we value them as historical evidence, that, in the fourth century, the Books acknowledged by the Christians of the East and the West were the same that we honour—all the same, and none besides.

The manner in which the Canon has been formed confessedly

leaves scope for difficult questions. God has ordered that so it should be, in order to exercise the moral faculty, spiritual discernment, and loving submission of His children.

1. Is the Bible or the Church the greater? It is a useless question. The Holy Ghost is the Great One of this dispensation. It is the Holy Ghost who, by the Word spoken and written, formed the Church, and by the Church formed the Bible. The Bible exists for the Church, not the Church for the Bible; but then the Church exists only by virtue of that word of truth which the Bible enshrines and preserves.

2. Does the formation of the Canon by the Church involve the necessity of a traditional Church interpretation? Surely not. Least of all does it imply what is arrogated by the Latin Church, that she alone is authorised to interpret the Scriptures. We acknowledge ourselves indebted to the Primitive Church, especially in the East, for the historical authentication of the Books of the New Testament; but we do not on that account feel bound to accept traditional interpretations of the Church of the dark ages, any more than we receive traditional interpretations of the Old Testament from the Jewish Talmudists.

3. If the catalogue of Books was drawn up by men like ourselves on their best, but fallible, judgment, may it not be revised or altered by us? We should not fear to subject the Bible to such an ordeal, assured as we are, that, whatever individuals might propose, no Christian Church would part with any one Book or part of a Book in our present Bible. But the question cannot claim an affirmative answer. We are not, and no future generation can possibly be, in such favourable circumstances as the early Christians were, for testing the authenticity and genuineness of writings ascribed to Evangelists and Apostles. The Canon has passed the very best court of examination that could possibly be constituted; and with this it becomes us to be content.

The use of the term "Bible" to denote the whole collection of Sacred Writings, cannot, we believe, be traced to an earlier date than the fourth century. But, now that the collection is

made, each generation sees for itself how thoroughly the Books form one Book, structurally and spiritually one, marvellously woven together—its most distant parts connected by quotations, allusions, and the correspondence of type and antitype—and the whole moulded together in a profound unity of thought and plan. It is not mechanically combined or sewed together. It is organically united as a living tree, or as a living body of which one part cannot be touched without affecting all. God has tempered all together, so that if one member of the Bible suffer, all its members suffer with it. It may be persecuted, neglected, maligned, or controverted, but the Scripture may not be broken. Destructive criticism may go to work on it with its penknife, as did the infatuated king of Judah on the roll of Jeremiah's prophecy; but when penknife and fire have done their worst, the writing is calmly restored as it was before. Our Bible cannot be taken to pieces, or dissolved into its elements. Here are many Books—and yet the Book is one—

“With the eternal heraldry  
And signature of God Almighty stamped  
From first to last.”

Happy they who recognise the stamp, and, while giving due weight to the historical evidences of the Canon, know the Bible true by an inward moral conviction and spiritual witness—who appreciate the character of its contents, “the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God;” that elevated tone which it has received from no other book, but with which it has influenced minds and books innumerable; and its singularly penetrating living power over the human heart!



# SYNOPTICAL LECTURES.

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## GENESIS.

THE Jews have no title for this book but its first word—*Beresith* (in the beginning). The Greeks called it *Genesis* (origination). It was a saying of Luther, "*Nihil pulchrius Genesi, nihil utilius;*" and all thoughtful men have recognised the value and dignity of this book as "the stately portal to the magnificent edifice of Scripture."

It is the oldest trustworthy book in the world, and conveys almost all the reliable information we possess of the history of man for more than two thousand years. Till quite a recent date, no other account of that long period was known to exist except some fragments of Egyptian, Babylonian, and Phenician tradition reported by Greek authors no longer extant, and preserved as quotations in the works of certain Christian apologists. These were of little value for comparison with the venerable history now before us. But, within the past forty years, a great change has come about: an immense treasure of ancient inscriptions has been unearthed and deciphered, and those which have been discovered in Babylonia are found to give most opportune and powerful support to the Biblical account of creation, the deluge, and the dispersion from the tower of Babel.\*

The *Vedas* are ancient hymns and legends: the *Zendavesta* is a speculation on the origin of things: but *Genesis* is a narrative written with a grave archaic simplicity. It is charac-

\* See *Chaldean Account of Genesis*, by the late George Smith, edited by Professor Sayce, 1880.

teristically a book of origins and beginnings, and it contains the deeply-fastened and widely-spread roots of all futurity. There is nothing afterwards unfolded in the relationships of God with man, that is not at least in rudiment, or germ, to be traced in Genesis.

By the Jews the authorship of this book has always been ascribed to Moses; but it is a point which recent critics have strongly disputed and denied. The truth probably lies between the extreme view of those, on the one hand, who hold that Moses alone wrote the entire book exactly as it now exists in the Hebrew Bible, and the extreme, on the other hand, of those who break up this book into a collection of two, three, or more ancient writings put together, in or after the time of King David. To our thinking, the whole style and tenor of this work show it to be of a far earlier date than the times of the Hebrew monarchy, and we see no good reason to question its Mosaic authorship, although it may have passed through the editorial hands of another prophet. As to the alleged traces of various authors in the use of different names of the Deity, *Elohim* and *Jehovah*, and the occasionally abrupt insertion of passages, there is no difficulty in accounting for these things on the very natural supposition that Moses availed himself of traditions and documents of earlier times than his own, and, writing with a holy simplicity, pieced them together without any concealment. Not only so; the several documents are indicated on the very face of the sacred narrative. Thus, after the sublime exordium on Creation, and the fitting up of the world for human habitation, we find a succession of Books of Generations, or *Toldoth*, as follows:—

Toldoth of heavens and earth . . . . .	Chap. ii. 4-iv. 26.
"    Adam . . . . .	"    v. 1-vi. 8.
"    Noah . . . . .	"    vi. 9-ix. 28.
"    Sons of Noah . . . . .	"    x. 1-xi. 9.
"    Shem . . . . .	"    xi. 10-xi. 26.
"    Terah . . . . .	"    xi. 27-xxv. 11.
"    Ishmael . . . . .	"    xxv. 12-xxv. 18.
"    Isaac . . . . .	"    xxv. 19-xxxv. 29.
"    Esau . . . . .	"    xxxvi. 1-xxxvii. 1.
"    Jacob . . . . .	"    xxxvii. 2-1. 26.

Sufficient for us that whether in compilation or in original composition Moses was so guided from on high as to produce a history of "the first things" on which our faith may implicitly rely.

That it is a *religious* history accounts for various features of this book which may disappoint the mere archæologist, such as the slight and incidental manner in which the general annals of the world are referred to, and the prominence given to the lives of the Hebrew patriarchs. Genesis does cast more light than any other book whatever on early history, geography, and ethnology, but this only by the way,—its proper object being to unfold the religious history of mankind, and to record the origin of that nation in which the true knowledge of God was preserved during long ages of ignorance and idolatry.

That it is an *ancient* history, written, though under Divine direction, by a man who lived more than three thousand years ago, in accordance with the general information he possessed, accounts for the simple, popular way in which great natural facts are stated, and for the sketching out of the order of Creation in large and graphic outlines. It is no reproach to the book that it is unscientific in language, *i.e.*, a stranger to the technical terms and details of modern sciences. This is just as it ought to be, if we keep in mind the times in which, and the purposes for which, it was composed. It would be most incongruous if anything but popular language were employed in so ancient a book to express physical phenomena. Indeed, the artlessness of the narrative forms alike one of its best evidences and one of its principal charms. We are not to peer into it, as into a highly-elaborated cabinet picture. It is a simple but magnificent sketch, where the outlines are of the boldest, and the grouping and colouring declare a master's hand.

At the same time, the sketch has nothing to fear from scientific discovery. As a scientific primer for the human race, it is constructed with an admirable skill. Genesis knows nothing of the fabulous conception and superstitious adoration of nature which prevailed in antiquity. It allows no deification of ex-

ternal objects and elemental forces; but gives a reverent and religious view of nature, showing that all things which exist within our ken originate in an orderly Divine activity, and that such activity has proceeded in a gradual manner, and brought forth organic life on the earth in an ascending scale.

In the beginning was God. He only has had no origin,—never began to be,—but from everlasting to everlasting was, and is, and is to be. It may be right enough to construct arguments for the Divine existence, in order to convince gainsayers and sceptics, but it would not be in harmony with the character of the Bible to open with any doubt or discussion on such a point. God, who is in a high sense the Author of Scripture, does not argue His own existence any more than a human author begins his book by proving that he himself actually lives. God is. What is the conclusion of long arguments elsewhere is the starting-point of the Bible. The name of God is stamped on the forehead of His book.

The first sentence of Genesis excludes many errors. (1.) Atheism,—for God created; (2.) Polytheism,—for it is one God who created all; (3.) The notion of the eternity of matter,—for the things which are seen had a beginning. We know not how remote the beginning may have been, but we are assured that the very materials, as well as the present forms of things, exist because God made them. (4.) Pantheism,—for God has made all things, and is in all, yet is never to be confounded with even the whole of things and of life—the Universe. An author must not be confounded with his work, or a builder with his building, or an artist with his masterpiece;—so God, while the Author, Builder, and Maker of all, and sustaining and conserving what He has produced, is not absorbed in nature, but, as He was before all, so now is He above all, blessed for ever.

God being revealed, Genesis informs us of nine beginnings of things,—beginnings of which, without this book, we have no satisfactory knowledge whatever.

I. ORIGIN OF HEAVEN AND EARTH.—This subject was a dark enigma to all the men of thought in the heathen world, but the

Hebrew Scriptures open with the decisive statement that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." To this day nothing more has been discovered. However explorers and speculators spread out the ages that are past into periods of prodigious length, the consent of opinion, the overwhelming inference from all the provinces of natural science, is in favour of an ultimate starting-point, "a beginning," and of the operation at that "beginning" of an intelligent will,—an omnipotent Creator.

At the same time, we must observe that it was not the purpose of Moses, and perhaps it was not in his power, to describe Creation in what might be accepted as scientific detail.\* Genesis, like the rest of the Bible, has a moral and spiritual aim, and, therefore, what it communicates regarding Creation, equally with other subjects, is addressed, less to the speculative understanding, than to the conscience and spiritual part of man. Accordingly, after the first sentence, the description at once narrows. We are told of a chaotic condition of the earth, which some have imagined to have ensued on the fall of angels previously living on its surface. We are not, however, informed of any creation of angels or other races of intelligent creatures before, above, or besides ourselves. The object is to show the preparation made for man, and the place assigned to man on

\* "They who require or expect in Genesis a treatise on Geology, will be equally disappointed with those who look for a book of History in the Revelation of St. John. . . . Future discovery must not be anticipated any more than future history. . . . The seven days of Creation are neither seven literal days of twenty-four hours each, nor yet seven definite historical periods, the events of which are literally recorded; but as the seven seals, trumpets, and vials of St. John's Revelation represented the history of the future by a typical representation of each of its grand divisions, *without any of them* being chronologically defined, so do the seven days of the Mosaic cosmogony represent, in a dramatic and typical form, the successive changes which took place at creation, each grand feature being boldly sketched out in one scenic representation *characteristic* of that particular epoch."—*Primeval Man Unveiled*, pp. 40-44.

"Quapropter quod illos dies, qui ejus repetitione numerati sunt, in hac nostra mortalitate terrena experiri ac sentire non possumus."—*Augustine de Genesi*.

this earth and under heaven. So, the ordering of the earth, and sea, and sky, in six periods, each marked by an evening and a morning, or fading and growing light, is drawn out in brief outline. In illustration of the fact that this is only intended to set forth the fitting-up of man's dwelling-place, we may notice the importance assigned to the moon above the stars. It is named one of the "two great lights," solely because of its superior usefulness to mankind. In fact, the main interest of the first chapter, after the first verse, is intended to rest on its conclusion, the

II. ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN RACE AT PRESENT INHABITING THE EARTH.—The world teemed with life at God's word; then He formed man out of the dust, and breathed into him. Man has not developed himself from a previously existing creature, though his structure may contain and combine the best points of prior and inferior organisations. We are not concerned here with the question of a pre-Adamite race of men. If it can be proved that such beings lived, and strove with wild beasts before Adam and Eve existed, let it be proved. The interest of the Bible, and of all *religious* history, revolves round the Adamic race, formed for the subjugation of the earth, gifted with intellect, conscience, and dignity, and beginning their career in happy communion with Jehovah-God.

III. BEGINNING OF MARRIAGE.—In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, we read of the duality of the race from its origin: "Male and female created He them." The sexual distinction already established throughout the animal and vegetable kingdoms was continued in the lordly human race. In the second chapter the formation of woman is more fully described, with her marriage to "the man" by the Lord Himself. Henceforth, marriage is honourable in all. It may not be broken capriciously, for whatever may have occurred in Israel or any other nation in regard to divorce at the pleasure of the husband, "from the beginning it was not so." Originally, marriage is the union of one man and one woman, whom God has joined

together, so that they are no more twain, but one. This is the Divine law of marriage for ever—the nuptial oneness being dissolved by death only, or in exceptional cases by such divorce as the Lord Jesus Christ has recognised, and by implication permitted.

IV. ORIGIN OF WEEKS AND SABBATHS.—There is a law of septiform periodicity in organic nature. Important vital functions in the various orders of creatures on the earth are completed in a definite number of weeks.\* This arrangement of the year was accepted widely among ancient nations; and among the Babylonians the seventh day was kept as a day of rest, and called the Sabbath.† The Hebrew institutions comprised a week of days, a week of weeks, a week of months, a week of years, and a week of weeks of years. It has been shown from ancient tablets that the Accadians, the primitive inhabitants of Chaldea, connected the seven days of the week with the adoration of seven planets: but no traditions give us an account of the origin of this measure of time. Only Genesis explains it as appointed and even exemplified by the Divine Creator. He used six periods in activity, and then devoted one to rest.

V. ENTRANCE OF SIN, AND DEATH BY SIN.—There is no question that sin is in the world, and has been in it as long as human memory extends. Because of this, there is much misery; there is moral and spiritual death by sin. Had this a beginning? and, if so, how did it originate? Genesis gives the answer, and the New Testament repeats it,—“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin.” Whether we regard the account of the Garden, the trees, the beautiful fruit, and the speaking serpent, as plain history, or as Eastern allegory, this, at all events, is the account of the entrance of sin, to which the Bible is pledged. It came into the world by the will of man contravening the known will of God—not by the gradual

\* For details, see J. Grattan Guinness's work, *The Approaching End of the Age*, part iv. sect. 2, chap. 1.

† Sayce's *Fresh Light from Ancient Monuments*, pp. 28, 29.

decline of a race of men from primitive simplicity and purity, but "by one man's disobedience," the fall from his integrity of the head and parent of our race. Thereafter, sin, having obtained an entrance into the world, continued and spread by a law of descent, and a power of contagion. And judgment followed; death by sin;—and "death has passed on all, for all have sinned."

The Book of Genesis, having thus explained the existence of sin on the earth, proceeds to tell of its ravages—murder in the first family—violence overspreading the Old World—a generation of the ungodly swept away by the deluge—sin in Noah's family immediately after the flood—sin in Sodom and Gomorrah—sin in the families of the patriarchs—sin in Canaan, and sin in Egypt—sin in the dwellers in cities, and sin in the dwellers in tents. To multiply gods, to make idols, to dishonour parents, to kill, to commit adultery, to steal, to lie, to covet—the beginnings of all these sins are found written in Genesis.

VI. ORIGIN OF SACRIFICE.—It is not affirmed in this book that God ordained the offering of sacrifice to Himself, but it is made evident that acceptable worshippers, such as Abel, Noah, and Abraham, followed some intimation of the Divine will, and made their oblations—not according to mere human impulses or instincts, but in faith and in the obedience of faith. There is every probability that the animals with whose skins Adam and Eve were first clothed had been slain in sacrifice. They could not have been killed for food, as flesh was not eaten till after the flood. Abel's sacrifice is affirmed in the New Testament to have been offered "in faith." With sacrifice Noah took possession of a New World; with sacrifice at Shechem, Abraham entered on the Land of Promise. The heathen soon debased the ordinance of sacrifice to cruel and superstitious rites, but from the beginning its idea was the solemn devotement of life to God, pouring out the soul unto death, in type of the slain "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

VII. BEGINNING OF COVENANT PROMISES.—We refer, not to the ordinance delivered to Adam, which divines have called a Covenant of Life, or Covenant of Works, but to the Covenants, expressly so termed, which were made with Noah and with Abraham.

Each of these was a covenant in the sense of an engagement, which God, of His mere grace, made, and permitted to be pleaded and urged as a claim upon Himself. Each was a covenant by sacrifice, and each had a sign in the sky—the one the rainbow, the other the countless stars. Each had a promise : the one, of the preservation of the world from a recurrence of the deluge ; the other, of a blessing on all nations of the world, in Abraham's seed, which is Christ.

VIII. BEGINNING OF NATIONS AND TONGUES.—The tenth chapter of this book details the early divisions and genealogies proceeding from the three branches of Noah's family ; and, although some may pass it by as a dry catalogue of names, it is really a record of immense value to the ethnologist and to every student of antiquity. A great authority has called it "a chapter of wonderful grasp, and still more wonderful accuracy—a sketch of the nations of the earth, their ethnic affinities, and to some extent their geographical position and boundaries. The *Toldoth Beni Noah* has extorted the admiration of modern ethnologists, who continually find in it anticipations of their greatest discoveries."\*

IX. ORIGIN OF THE HEBREW RACE.—It began in the call of Abram, who was a native of the Chaldean city of Ur, a great seat of ancient art and learning. The old nature-worship of the Accadians was being combined with the heathenism of their Cushite conquerors into an elaborate system of idolatry. So, from the midst of this, God separated the man whom He had chosen, and led him, after a period of sojourn at Haran on the way, into that region of Canaan where he was destined to become the father of a holy nation in a holy land.

\* Rawlinson's Bampton Lectures, lect. ii.

The latter and larger part of Genesis is occupied with biographical sketches of the Hebrew patriarchs.

Abraham was the man of faith, and friend of God. His son, by Hagar the bondwoman, was Ishmael, a wild man, for faith can have by the spirit of bondage nothing but restlessness and confusion. His son, by Sarah the freewoman, was Isaac, the heir of promise. The issue of faith and liberty is peace.

Isaac fills up calmly and unobtrusively the interval between Abraham's grand career and the complicated agitated history of Jacob. Yet he too had his trials of faith, like Abraham his father, in regard to an heir of promise. First he had to wait long for the birth of a child to continue his line, and then he was baffled in his preference for his elder son by the Divine election of the younger to be the covenant heir.

Jacob is at first a very faulty character, full of craft and selfishness; but by chastisements and visions of heavenly things he was corrected, and at last proved to be an Israel, a Prince with God. His early sins, however, brought late sorrows upon him. As he had lied to his father Isaac, so his children lied to him in his old age, and bowed his hoary head under a causeless grief.

Joseph had trial of envy, betrayal, false accusation, unjust imprisonment, sudden exaltation, and almost imperial power. With the romantic history of this hero, saint, and signal type of Christ, the grand Book of Genesis ends.

Search this Scripture, for it testifies of Christ. See how all the beginnings find a completion in Him.

1. By and for Christ were all things created and made.
2. The last Adam is Christ.
3. Adam and Eve in marriage represent Christ and the Church.
4. It is Jesus who gives us rest.
5. Sin is put away, and righteousness brought in by one man—Christ.
6. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.
7. Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the new covenant.

8. Men shall be blessed in Christ, and all nations shall call Him blessed.

9. Christ is the Consolation and the King of Israel.

There is a notable type of Christ in Melchizedec. There are sure indications of Him in the oracle concerning the victorious seed of the woman Eve, and in the heirship to Abraham according to promise. As we read Genesis, let us learn Christ, and thank God that the Scripture which opens our wound of sin points us also to our Healer and our remedy in Jesus.

*EXODUS.*

THE name of the second book, like that of the first, is taken from the Greek version—the principal event related being the exodus, or out-going of Israel from Egypt.

This book is evidently connected, by its opening word “Now,” with the book which goes before, and is from the same pen. Yet it is unlike Genesis. It covers a far shorter period of time; and, whereas Genesis is at first a book of universal history, and thereafter of minute biographical sketches, Exodus is throughout the book of a chosen nation. The sole biographical sketch it contains is that of the national Leader, and the events of his life are dwelt upon only in so far as they affected the fortunes of Israel.

As Genesis is the book of roots and beginnings, so Exodus is that of redemption, and the law given to the redeemed. Or, it may be arranged and read thus: Israel in Egypt, 12 chapters; Israel going from Egypt to Sinai, 6 chapters; Israel at Sinai, 22 chapters—40 chapters in all.

I. ISRAEL IN EGYPT.—At the end of Genesis, the house of Jacob was a large and prosperous family, in high favour with the Egyptian government, and occupying the fertile district of Goshen. At the beginning of Exodus, the family had become a numerous people, and their increase excited the fears of the court and the jealousy of the native Egyptians. The stern Pharaoh, who filled the throne, reduced them to bondage, and compelled them to construct vast public works, an occupation most uncongenial to a pastoral race. Task-masters were set

over them, who spared not the bastinado. So the affliction of Israel became very grievous. Egypt was made bitter to them as a house of bondage, and their male children were doomed to death by the Egyptians, in order to diminish and ultimately exterminate the Hebrew race.

The nation seems to have produced no man of mark after Joseph for a period of seventy years. There are such blank periods, barren of greatness, in the history of every people; and more than one nation has had to be brought into terrible emergency before it could produce a real hero. Thus, while Israel prospered in Goshen, no great man arose, but when the iron entered into their souls, Moses was born—a fair child, a wise and gallant youth, a man of lofty strain, gifted with the faculty of command, and an aptitude for the conduct of arduous enterprises;—but more, and better still, a chosen vessel of Jehovah, a man of faith and works, of patience and energy, fit to be received into near intimacy and sublime converse with God.

It was so ordered by Providence, that this destined Deliverer should have a most complete training for his work. In early life he enjoyed the highest education the age could afford; military discipline, too, and all princely advantages. Thereafter he passed many years in the very deserts through which he had subsequently to lead the twelve tribes, thus strengthening his soul in meditation and solitude, while forming a personal acquaintance with the hills, valleys, practicable routes, and nomad tribes of the Arabian wilderness.

When Moses was ripe for the great task of his life, the people of Israel were in yet more intolerable bondage than at the time of his birth. The Pharaoh, at whose court he was educated, had died, but his successor was still more harsh and arbitrary. "And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God, by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and God looked upon the children of Israel, and God took knowledge of them."

The prayer of the oppressed in Egypt began to be answered in Midian. The Lord called, and commissioned Moses to overcome the haughty Pharaoh. He gave not only "redemption to his folk," but a Redeemer, who was not ashamed to call them brethren, who identified himself with them, descended into their affliction, and delivered them out of it, by judgment and mercy. Moses brought judgment to the gods and Pharaoh of Egypt, mercy to the poor and oppressed, "whose cry had come up unto God."

Successive chapters narrate the wonderful controversy between the unarmed Moses and his brother Aaron on the one side, and on the other the Pharaoh who was feared as the mightiest monarch in the world, and even worshipped as a god. Stroke upon stroke displayed the might of Jehovah, the God of Moses and of Israel, over the Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, with all their magicians and priests. Every blow of judgment had a direction against the superstitions of the land. It was the sacred Nile that was turned to blood. It was a nation that worshipped animal forms—even frogs and beetles, as well as cattle—that was plagued with frogs, and swarms of vermin, and saw the fields desolated by locusts, and the cattle perishing by murrain and hail-storms. It was the people who worshipped the sun-god, and called their monarch *Pharaoh* (child of the sun), that sat in darkness for three days.

The decisive blow was that of death, not sparing the first-born of Pharaoh himself—the man who had wielded the absolute power of death—or of his people, who had concurred in his treatment of Israel, or even of the beasts, in order that shame might be poured on the beast-worship of Egypt.

At last the deliverance was accomplished, and Israel went free, redeemed from the plague of death by the blood of the lamb of passover, and redeemed from the dominion of Pharaoh and his task-masters by the power of God, whose rod Moses carried as a weapon mightier far than sword or spear.

All this is surely full of spiritual suggestion for our profit. They whose consciences are alive to the true nature of the service of sin, know the house of bondage, and the brick-kilns,

and the cruel task-masters. They who are acquainted with the love and power of Christ, know that He has borne reproach, and not merely risked, but suffered death to deliver us. By His precious blood are our lives redeemed, and by His rod of strength are our enemies subdued. If the Son make us free, then are we free indeed.

II. ISRAEL GOING FROM EGYPT TO SINAI.—From the land of bondage the tribes went out in orderly array. Never was seen such an emancipation of slaves in a night, or a simultaneous emigration on so large a scale.

Another judgment marked the exodus. Pharaoh pursued with an army which trusted in chariots and horses; Moses trusted in Jehovah alone. So the pursuit issued in the utter destruction of Pharaoh and his host, while Israel, “baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” emerged on the shore of safety, and sung and prayed before the Lord, who triumphed gloriously. All the better they sang that they had sighed before, and the Lord had turned their mourning into dancing, and girded them with gladness.

Thenceforward Israel was reckoned a people separated from the world, God’s chosen witnesses, His first-born of nations, favoured with special guidance and provision. Bread was given to them, and water was sure. For their need the very heavens rained down manna by their tents, and a fountain burst from the flinty rock. When the hardy sons of Amalek assailed them, the prayer of Moses brought victory to the sword and spear of Joshua, and of Israel. The way prescribed to them was such as became a redeemed people—a way of faith and new obedience, marked, alas! very early by outbreaks of a murmuring spirit on the part of the tribes, but full of the grace of God, Who, having delivered, then sustains and guides, the people of His choice.

All this, too, is rich in spiritual suggestion for us. They who are now the people of God, are not only rescued from bondage, but are baptized into Christ, and, being made partakers of His resurrection, sing to the Lord a new song, and

then set out on a new career. That career must be in separation from the world, and lowly dependence on Christ for bread and water of life, and for victory over those that war against their souls. It is a walk by faith, not sight, and though marred by murmuring and folly on the part of the pilgrims, it is guarded day and night by the power of God, and reveals the riches of His long-suffering grace. This analogy has become so familiar to every devout mind, that, almost unconscious of any figure of speech, Christians are ready to sing,—

“ From Egypt lately come,  
Where death and darkness reign,  
We seek our new, our better home,  
Where we our rest shall gain.”

III. ISRAEL AT SINAI.—Three months were consumed on the march to the Wilderness of Sinai. There the people lay encamped for nearly a year, receiving the law, and being organised as a sacred host around the tabernacle of their God.

Jehovah, the Divine Redeemer of Israel, came down among them as their King. He chose the Mount Sinai in Arabia as His throne, or seat of authority, and thence, amidst clouds and darkness and lightning-flashes that lit up the rugged rocks, He uttered His Holy Law. It was in ten words, or commandments, and these the Lord was afterwards pleased to engrave on slabs of stone, and to deliver to Moses in the mount. Thus was redeemed Israel brought under a distinct code of duty and a theocratic government. Let us observe, however, that theocracy never meant a government by priests. God established His government over Israel in the hands of Moses and the elders, while, as yet, there were no priests in existence. When they were appointed, they were not entrusted as such with any functions of government—functions, indeed, for which priests have in all times and countries shown themselves ill-suited, though they have produced an occasional statesman, as Richelieu, Mazarin, and Ximenez.

While the Israelites were slaves, they were compelled to serve the will of Pharaoh. When they were free, they were

bound to do the will of Jehovah. They could not serve two masters. The yoke of the heathen they cast off, and took upon them the yoke of Jehovah, holy, just, and good. Too true it is that they broke God's law, and even at the foot of the sacred mount, in the absence of Moses, relapsed into the Egyptian worship of the ox. But the law of the Lord changed not, and the obligation to obedience was not modified. Through their history it was taught for all time to come that a redeemed people are bound to be a holy people, and that the God of their salvation requires it of them, that they obey His voice indeed, and keep His covenant.

At the same time, the standing of a redeemed people was shown even at Mount Sinai to be not of legal merit, but of grace. When the tribes of Israel fell back in fear at the foot of the Mount, Moses drew near in their behalf as a mediator. When they sinned and provoked the Lord to wrath, Moses pleaded for them—significant type of the Mediator of the new covenant, who ever lives to make intercession for us.

The legislation from Sinai included civil as well as religious ordinances, but all connected, commingled, and interlaced together, because the God of Israel was also their King, and the King of Israel was their God. To the laws and ordinances were added minute prescriptions for the erection of the House of God, or rather Sacred Tent, with His ark and mercy-seat, and altars and priesthood. Directions delivered to Moses in regard to these, and an account of the faithful execution of the Divine commands, occupy the latter part of Exodus.

Among the heathen, every hill and grove had its shrine to one or other of many gods, and its own solemnities of worship. The God of Israel was One, and so long as the times of Israel continued, would have for His worship but one earthly centre. In obedience to His command, a sacred tent or tabernacle was made of materials abundantly provided by a willing people, carefully fashioned according to Divine direction, and consecrated to be the special dwelling-place of Jehovah, and His meeting-place with man. In front of it stood the altar of burnt-offering, and the laver for ablution—showing that he who

comes to God must come by water and by blood. In its first chamber were the lamp-stand, the table of shew-bread, and the altar of incense, to express illumination, obedience, and prayer on the part of those who would dwell with God. In its second chamber, behind the veil, were the ark of testimony containing the law, and the mercy-seat thereon—*i.e.*, God's throne of grace resting on His righteousness, and mercy rejoicing over judgment. Figures of cherubim were carved as visible attendants of the invisible God—those living creatures, symbols of all the forces of created life, being placed as guardians of the great Creator's throne. The tabernacle seems to have had no floor but the naked ground—a singular contrast to its embroidered curtains and golden vessels. It pleased the Lord to take the dust of the earth for the pavement of an "earthly sanctuary."

The arrangement of the sacred Tent, its court, and its two chambers, of which the inner contained a precious coffer, followed the plan of the Egyptian temples; for it was necessary to train the people by religious symbols which they could understand. But there was a cardinal point of difference. In Israel the shrine had no image of the God to whom worship was rendered.

Then the priesthood was appointed, with careful directions for the clothing and consecration of those who should fill that office. The sons of Aaron were dressed in fine linen, clean and white—the colour of purity and joy. The high priest himself wore an ephod of blue, the colour of obedience, with shoulder ornaments of onyx stone, on which were engraved the names of the tribes, and a breastplate containing the oracle of Urim and Thummim, and bearing twelve precious stones with the names of the twelve tribes upon them, so that the redeemed people were "as a seal upon his heart, and as a seal upon his arm." The mitre or turban on his head bore a motto on a golden plate which covered the forehead—"Holiness to Jehovah." The priests were bathed in water before they put on the holy and beautiful garments, and then anointed with the same "holy oil" with which the tabernacle and its vessels were consecrated—an aromatic ointment made up after a Divine

prescription, and strictly reserved for sacred use—a sign of the holy anointing of Christ and the Church by the Holy Ghost.

The tablets of the Decalogue had been broken by Moses at the foot of Mount Sinai, in his grief and horror at the sight of Israel worshipping the golden Ox. The Lord condescended to renew them, and wrote His law a second time on “tables of stone.” His anger had been turned away; the glory of His goodness had been shewn; and the intercession of Moses for Israel had been accepted. So He gave the law without flashes of fire or cloudy tempests into the mediator’s hand. And when the mediator Moses brought the law to Israel, his face was radiant with the glory of the Lord.

At the end of the Book of Exodus, we see the whole fabric of the Mosaic polity complete, and the symbol of God’s presence resting by day and night on the tabernacle in the midst of the pilgrim host. Truly an inestimable Book, setting forth for all time coming the essential truths of redemption, separation to God, the way of the redeemed, the holy law delivered to them, their education and discipline, and the provision made for their approach to God, and God’s dwelling among them. Emphatically, too, may we affirm, that this Scripture is to be searched, because it testifies of Christ.

Take the first period, and it is surely Christ that we see in the child born and plotted against in his infancy, but rescued from the death in which other Hebrew children were involved; Christ in the Man who endured affliction for his brethren, and delivered them with an outstretched arm; and Christ in the Lamb slain to redeem a people from death—“Christ our pass-over sacrificed for us.”

Take the second period, and the leader who guides his people through a baptism into death, into the power of resurrection, is, under a figure, Christ. The bread from heaven is Christ; the rock from which the water gushed is Christ; and the captain who drove back the Amalekites is Christ, the Captain of our salvation.

Take the third period, and learn that we are under law to Christ; we have a Mediator in Christ, we have our High

Priest in Christ, and our way into the Holiest open through the rent vail, *i.e.*, His flesh. If we are Christ's, we too are pilgrims through a land of drought ; and the history of Israel in Exodus, while it stirs within us great searchings of heart, gives us at the same time sweet consolation in Christ. "O give thanks unto the Lord who brought out Israel from Egypt with a strong hand and a stretched-out arm, to Him who led His people through the wilderness, for His mercy endureth for ever."

## LEVITICUS.

IN Hebrew, this book has no other title than its first word, *Vayikra* (and he called). In Rabbinical writings, it is termed "the law of the priests," and "the law-book of the offerings." The Seventy named it *Leviticus*, because it treats of the service conducted by the priests and others of the tribe of Levi. It is found to consist almost entirely of the direct words of Jehovah, and on this account is entitled to peculiar attention and respect. Its object is to teach the way of acceptable worship, and the hallowing of accepted worshippers for fellowship with the Holy One of Israel. Although it is full of details respecting a ceremonial which is no more of force or obligation, yet it is by no means a superseded or antiquated book. On the contrary, there is hardly a book of the Bible more deeply fraught with instruction and comfort to the Christian mind. When it is read in the light of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Leviticus unfolds to us the most vital truths regarding the way of access to God, forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, fellowship, and consecration.

When the Lord gave the law, as recorded in Exodus, He was on the Mount Sinai; but when He issued the ordinances of service written in this book, He did so "out of the tabernacle of the congregation," beneath the dreadful mount. We have, in Leviticus, not the Lawgiver speaking in awful tones, or writing on tablets of stone, but the Portion of Israel, dwelling in the midst of His people, and teaching them how they might draw near to His presence and abide in communion with Him.

The book easily arranges itself in two parts,—the first, comprising 16 chapters, treating of access to God; the second, of 11 chapters, of the hallowing of Israel, in order to live and

walk as His people. We wish, however, to go a little more into detail, and point out five chief matters.

I. SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS.—God must be worshipped according to His own mind—not ours. He has taught us that worship rendered to Him by sinful men cannot be acceptable unless it is based on atoning sacrifice, and nowhere have we such ample elucidation of the doctrine of sacrifice as in the seven chapters with which Leviticus opens, and the 16th chapter of the same book.

The sacrifices are of five kinds, described in the following order:—The Burnt-Offering, The Meal-Offering, The Peace-Offering, The Sin-Offering, and The Guilt-Offering. Such is the divine order of thought, but the human is exactly the reverse. An Israelite, with a guilty conscience, and a remembrance of sins, had practically to begin at the end of the series; and we ourselves, in looking to the one sacrifice of Christ, have also to begin at that view of it which is at the end of this series—the end next us. We must begin at the guilt-offering and end with the whole burnt-offering—begin with the remission of trespasses and sins, and advance to the offering of an entire consecration—*i.e.*, the whole burnt-offering on the altar of Jehovah. All the sacrifices testify of Christ, and set forth to us the various meanings, aspects, and uses of His one perfect offering. Let us try to indicate this in a few words.

1. The Burnt-Offering was the type of Christ offering Himself without spot to God. The Israelite who brought this offering did so “of his own voluntary will.” It was the sign of his entire and cordial devotion to God. The creature offered was required to be a male, without blemish; then the offerer himself killed it before the Lord, *i.e.*, poured out in a figure his own life, for the will is in the life, and the life is in the blood. Some of the blood was by the priest sprinkled about upon the altar, and then the whole carcase, washed and cut in pieces, was burnt on the altar in the sacred court.

Christ is the offerer “of His own voluntary will,” for no man took His life from Him, but He laid it down of Himself.

Christ is the offering too—without blemish, without spot. And Christ is the Priest, who officiates in presenting the burnt-offering of Himself unto God, for a sweet-smelling savour. Herein the people of Christ are to follow Him. They can render no sin-offerings, but they do lay burnt-offerings on the altar whenever they yield themselves in unflinching devotion to God, and in the flame of fire, in the zeal that is kindled at the altar by the Eternal Spirit, offer themselves without spot to God, saying in their Master's words, "Father, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

2. The Meal or Food-Offering was not for expiation, and so was without blood. It was not presented by itself, but followed burnt-offerings or peace-offerings. It represents the laying of the pure humanity of Christ, and then the renewed humanity of Christians, on the altar of God in obedience, for this is the very food of God, in which His soul delights, and this the joy of those who stand in His courts, and surround His throne.

3. The Peace-Offering expressed the grounds of friendship, harmony, and communion with God. It began like the burnt-offering, with imposition of hands on the head of a victim, and infliction of death. But there the likeness ended. The burnt-offering was entirely consumed by fire; the peace-offering was divided among Jehovah, the priest who officiated, and the Israelite who brought it. There was a feast after, and upon, the sacrifice—a feast of friendship in the household of God. Surely Christ is here too, giving us peace by the blood of His cross—Himself as crucified and slain, the basis of all friendly intercourse between God and man.

4. The Sin-Offering. This was atonement proper, and is fulfilled in Jesus, who knew no sin, "made sin for us"—Jesus who did no sin, His own Self bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. The blood of the sin-offering was the type of the blood of Christ, which cleanses us from all sin; and the body of the sin-offering, being burnt without the camp, was the type of the body of Christ suffering for us without the gate.

5. The Guilt or Trespass-Offering adds the ideas of redemption and remedy. Our trespasses are our debts, *i.e.*, definite

acts of wrong or evil, which may be estimated. In the case of trespasses against God, sacrifice was required first, then reparation. In the case of trespasses against men (which are also counted as against the Lord, chap. vi. 1), restitution was required first, then sacrifice. Evidently we are to see in the trespass-offering redemption and ransom by the precious blood of Christ.

Thus He is all. The Burnt-Offering is His entire dedication, the Meal-Offering His living service, the Peace-Offering His becoming our Peace and the Feast of our affections with God, the Sin-Offering His propitiation for our sins, and the Trespass-Offering His discharging our debt, repairing our wrong, and redeeming our lives to God.

The sixteenth chapter is one of great weight and solemnity. It describes the Day of Atonement, and, by means of a double sacrifice, expresses the two blessings of propitiation for sin, and removal of sin. On that day only in all the year the high priest entered the most holy place.

These were shadows of heavenly things. We have under the Gospel the heavenly things themselves—not a continual remembrance of sins, but a putting-away of sins for ever, the way into the holiest made manifest to the Church, and our great High Priest over the house of God, a continual encouragement to draw near.

All Israel stood without, while Aaron was in the holiest. Now that our great High Priest is in the holiest of all, Israel, alas! stands without, unbelieving until this day. There is a vail upon their heart; but when the High Priest comes out, they will see Him and rejoice.

II. CONSECRATION AND INVESTITURE OF PRIESTS.—Aaron and his sons were bathed in water, anointed with oil, attired in significant garments of office, and installed in their places, as the priests of the priestly nation. We have one High Priest who is passed into the heavens, sanctified for our sakes, High Priest of the priestly people, which is the Church. Consider

Moses and Aaron. Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession—Christ Jesus, who is faithful to Him who appointed Him.

Scarcely had the priests been consecrated in Israel before there was an exposure of the perversity of man, which mars and stains the brightest prospects. Presumption appeared in the family of Aaron, and judgment began at the tabernacle of God. Two sons of the high priest entered the sanctuary in self-confidence and offered incense, with “strange” or unhallowed fire, as though independent of the altar whereon the fire of God burned. Thus they approached God after the device of their own hearts, neglecting or despising the ordinances of sacrifice. Therefore sudden death fell on them, as afterwards on Uzzah the Levite, and later still, Ananias and Sapphira, to check at once, by solemn warnings, the sin of presumption and self-will.

III. DISCERNMENT BETWEEN THINGS HOLY AND PROFANE, AND THE JUDGMENT OF DEFILEMENTS.—Holiness follows on acceptance by sacrifice, and priesthood is not only for prayer and service, but in order to the discrimination of the pure from the impure.

In accordance with the character of a dispensation which put moral and spiritual ideas into visible and material forms, the distinction between the clean and the unclean was marked in the creatures used for food as well as for sacrifice. All the living creatures around were made to suggest moral conceptions to an Israelite, and it was arranged that the very question, “What to eat, and what to drink?” should act as a bit and bridle on his will.

Then, after directions for purifying, which we find referred to in the Gospel, and obeyed by the blessed Virgin Mary, we have minute details regarding health and cleanliness. Leprosy had doubtless been engendered in Egypt during the degradation of the bondage, and adhered to the Israelites still. It is referred to as affecting (1) a human body, (2) human raiment, (3) human dwellings. Most explicit directions are given for its detection and Divine cure. So does the vileness of sin work in

the inner man, then affect the garments, or usages of the outer man also; nay, further, it taints the house and defiles the domestic and social relations of life. For this there is no cure but that which the Son of God applies—"Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make us clean."

IV. LAWS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS OF LIFE.—God would always have it understood that to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken better than the fat of rams. He required His redeemed and worshipping people to be holy; for He, their God, was holy. He would not walk with them, nor could they with Him, but in the light of truth and purity.

In the part of the book which we have now reached there are exhortations and requirements which Christians need as much as Israelites to read and observe. They relate to probity, veracity, justice between man and man, avoidance of tale-bearing, impartiality in judgment, honesty in dealings, respect of aged persons, neighbourly and brotherly kindness, courtesy to all. Some call this "mere" morality, or "cold" morality, but there is no need that it should be "mere" or "cold:" let it accompany faith, and let it be warmed by love, and you have a Christian morality that pervades all life, and ennobles character, and commends the Gospel we profess to the consciences of all men in the sight of God.

V. FEASTS, OR HOLY CONVOCATIONS.—Under the Mosaic economy, men were required to observe days, and months, and years, for God Himself marked the times and seasons with a view to religious commemoration, instruction, and edification. There were six feasts of days and months, two feasts of years—eight in all.

1. *The Sabbath*.—This weekly rest held a chief place as a sign between Jehovah and Israel. It entered also into the great annual festivals, each of them being made to contain a Sabbath of special solemnity. So also there must enter into all Christian feasts or joys Sabbatism—resting in the Lord, and waiting patiently for Him. „

2. *The Passover, or Feast of Unleavened Bread.*—Being the commemorative feast of redemption, this was placed first of the annual convocations, because all the joy in the Lord possessed by the Hebrews sprung from their redemption, and belonged to them as a people redeemed.

3. *The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost.*—This was the harvest-home, on which two loaves of fine flour, ground from the new corn, and baked as common bread, were waved before the Lord. To Him was thus ascribed the whole staff of bread in the families of the nation; and burnt-offerings, peace-offerings, and sin-offerings were at the same time presented, in acknowledgment of the unworthiness of the people to reap any good at the hand of the Lord, and in propitiation of His favour and forgiveness.

4. *The Feast of Trumpets.*—The months in Israel were lunar, and the new moons were days of special mark; but it was reserved for the new moon, or first day of the seventh month, as the chief sacred month of the year, to be elevated to the rank of a feast to the Lord. On every new moon, trumpets were blown. On the seventh, they appear to have been sounded with unusual force and emphasis, calling to mind the blast of a trumpet and the voice of words on Mount Sinai, arresting the ear of all Israel as by a Divine summons, and stirring up every soul to attend to the two solemnities which made the seventh month the most momentous period of the Jewish year.

5. *The Day of Atonement.*—This was always the tenth day of the seventh month. It was not, however, a festal occasion, but a day in which the children of Israel “should afflict their souls.” All their sins came up in remembrance, and it became them to put aside all levity of spirit, and with fasting, and sorrow, and searchings of heart, to spend those hours in which the high priest performed in their behalf the highest rites of typical atonement.

6. *Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths.*—Five days after the great Sabbath of atonement this festival began, and it lasted for eight days. It is sometimes called the feast of in-gathering, because it took place after the vintage, when the round of the year’s

husbandry was complete. Israel tented out for a week in booths made of leafy branches, or in structures of some light, perishable material, in memory of their sojourn in the wilderness. This feast was thus a yearly renewal of their youth, a lively recollection of the time of their espousals to Jehovah.

Such were the six feasts of days and months. Remember the order of the three which were chief—Passover, Pentecost, Palm-branches and Booths. These concern us also. Christ at the Passover; the Spirit at Pentecost; the Feast before the throne, kept by the redeemed of all nations with palm branches, making booths, not with Peter, and James, and John only, or even with Moses and Elias, but with the Lamb on the heavenly mount.

7. *The Sabbatic Year.*—When Israel should get possession of Canaan, they were to leave the land untilled every seventh year. It was a Sabbath of the land, its rest unto Jehovah. This was for the sake of the land itself, to preserve its fertility, the Israelites being only tenants of the soil under God, the Supreme Proprietor. This was also for the good of Israel, to check covetousness, to limit domestic bondage, and to remind the people that they were only God's tenants-at-will, dependent on His good pleasure. This law was not well kept, and its non-observance is given as one of the reasons for Israel's subsequent captivity in Babylon: "To fulfil the word of the Lord, by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years." \*

8. *The Jubilee (Jobel).*—This was the fiftieth year, as Pentecost was the fiftieth day. At the close of the day of atonement, on which all Israel afflicted their souls, the trumpet was to sound through all the land, the oil of joy was given for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Sweeter than ever sounded a cathedral bell, or cry of the muezzin from a minaret, fell on the ears of the Israelites the notes of jubilee trumpets. Most welcome of all to the poor of the land, for redemption was drawing nigh. The law of jubilee maintained

\* 2 Chron. xxxvi. 21.

the original distribution of the land of Canaan, restored forfeited inheritances, and emancipated captives and slaves. The whole tendency of the admirable legislation in regard to the land of Israel was to secure a diffusion of property and personal liberty among the masses of the people, and so to promote contentment and self-respect under the all-protecting shadow of Jehovah's wings.

This festival, too, is full of Christ. The Gospel is now the joyful sound. Christ Himself blew the first notes of the jubilee trumpet when He proclaimed the kingdom of heaven to be at hand. Apostles and evangelists prolonged the sound through many lands and wondering cities of the East; and now to us is this salvation come. In the name of Christ are preached, as through jubilee trumpets, forgiveness of sins, rest for the weary, liberty to the captives, the acceptable year of the Lord.

With some details regarding vows and tithes the Book of Leviticus ends—surely a book to be deeply pondered, as exhibiting much Christian doctrine in an antique drapery, and full of spiritual meat for those who can discern and enjoy the great truths of Gospel salvation and worship that underlie the Hebrew ceremonial. We are not come to Mount Sinai, but if we study the ordinances given to those who came to that mount, we may learn what are the better things given to us who are come to Mount Zion. “For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us: nor yet that He should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place year by year with blood not his own; . . . but now once in the end of the ages hath He been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”\*

\* Heb. ix. 24-26.

## NUMBERS.

THE fourth book takes its name from the numbering of the people of Israel twice recorded in its pages. It is, however, far more than a national register. As Leviticus is the book of worship, and separation to God, Numbers is the book of service and pilgrimage. It shows us the way in the wilderness, and the discipline through which pilgrims pass.

The time covered by this book is a little more than thirty-eight years; but the narrative is occupied almost entirely with the beginning and close of the period. The scene of the history is first the Sinaitic Peninsula, and then the Plains or Steppes on the east of the Dead Sea and the river Jordan.

The Book of Numbers may be divided into three parts—

Chap. i.—x. 10.—Preparation for leaving the encampment at Sinai.

Chap. x. 11—xxi.—History of the journey from Sinai to the land of Moab, including the murmuring and the long detention in the deserts of Arabia.

Chap. xxii.—xxxiv.—Occurrences in Moab, and preparations for entering and occupying the promised land.

I. FIRST PART.—The tribes of Israel were mustered, instructed, and set in order. The males of twenty years and upwards were found to be 603,550. If to these we add the 22,000 Levites of the same age, we cannot compute the Hebrew nation at less than 2,000,000. To such a host had multiplied the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, and their servants and followers, with the addition of Egyptians and others who

adhered to Israel in the exodus. If any find it hard to be believed that two millions of people could be projected into Arabia and live there with flocks and herds for forty years, let them bear in mind that the great peninsula was not at all so waste or barren in ancient times as it is now. It had dreary places, or lands of drought, where water failed; but there is reason to think that it also had wooded valleys and far-reaching grassy plains, and supported a large population both of fixed and wandering tribes.

The census was followed by organisation of the Lord's host. Four divisions were formed, each consisting of three tribes. Every man was to dwell in his own tribe, and every tribe to know and keep its proper place in the division, whether at rest or on the march. When the host moved, each tribe struck its tents, raised its banner, and fell in at its appointed station. Places were assigned to the sacred ark and the parts and furniture of the tabernacle borne by the Levites. The descendants of Joseph, constituting the three tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, formed the division that followed the ark. Hence the prayer in Ps. lxxx. 1, 2, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come to save us." When the tents were pitched, the Lord's Tent was in the midst, and the tribes formed a square—three to the north, three to the south, three to the east, three to the west. The division headed by Judah had for its standard the figure of a lion; that which was headed by Ephraim, the figure of an ox. If the tradition be correct, that Reuben had that of a man, and Dan that of an eagle, we have in this arrangement a remarkable anticipation of the vision of the cherubim in Ezekiel, and yet more clearly of that in the Apocalypse, where the four living creatures in attendance on the throne of God appear as a lion, an ox, a man, and a flying eagle. Moreover, the camp of Israel, arranged and organised as a perfect square, not only shows us that the Lord numbers and writes up His people, and that He is the Author of order and not confusion in Churches of the saints, but also foreshadows the realisation of the completed

Church at the last day—the great city, holy Jerusalem, “which lieth four-square, and the length is as large as the breadth.” The gates of the city shall be three to the east, three to the north, three to the south, and three to the west, and on those gates are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The Levites were set apart for service, and were given over to Aaron the high priest as their commander. Let us learn that the service of all saints is accepted only in union with the high-priestly action of Jesus Christ, and that they are not their own masters, but set apart and given over to Christ, as “the Minister of the sanctuary and true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.”

The organisation being complete, the tribes in their positions, and the Levites at their post, laws were given to keep all within the precincts of the camp clean and holy ground. Strict sanitary regulations were laid down and enforced for the compulsory removal of defilements—an admirable precedent for modern municipal governments, as well as military commanders, to follow. These regulations were fitted to impress upon Israel that God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity—that He is not as the vile gods of the heathen, whose rites of service were often shameful orgies, but is a lover of health, and brightness, and purity. On us too is the lesson enforced, that the precious must be separated from the vile—that the wilfully unholy and unclean ought to be excluded from church-fellowship on earth, and will certainly be shut out of the continuing city which is to come, the city of God Almighty and the Lamb.

The sixth chapter contains the law of the Nazirites, recognising devotees, or persons of more than ordinary allegiance and consecration to God. In its ethical and spiritual meaning, this law suggests the need of abstinence from fleshly lusts and dangerous delights, and the maintenance of full moral energy in separation from the body of death. The sanction given to the Nazirite vow encourages no vows of celibacy, which were unknown to priest, Levite, or Nazirite, nor arbitrary rules sequestering men or women from the proper duties of family and social life, but a lofty aim in sanctification, and a vow or

pledge, under the power of the Holy Ghost, to be in heart and conduct wholly separated to Christ.

So soon as the camp was ordered and cleansed, and the servants of God were in their several places, His seal was put on the whole congregation by the high priest and his sons pronouncing this blessing of Jehovah—"The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." \*

Immediately after this, the organisation which had been established brought tribute to the tabernacle. On twelve successive days the princes of the tribes, in their appointed order, presented gifts. The previous offering mentioned in Exodus was from the people indiscriminately as children of Israel; this is the tribute from the organisation of Israel, brought in regular proportions, from east and west, and south and north;—as hereafter shall be brought the riches of the Gentiles, the glory and honour of nations, to the gates of the Holy Jerusalem.

Then the lamp-stand was lit up in the holy place. God said, Let there be light—light on the table of shew-bread, and on the altar of incense. In the day-time, the entrance-curtain being drawn up, the sunlight filled the tabernacle. At even the lamps were lit, that there might never be darkness at all, not even a "dim religious light," but a clear and perpetual shining in the holy place, the sphere of privilege and sacred service. So, if we serve, it must be not in darkness, not even in the vagueness of doubt and gloom, but in the light of scriptural knowledge and spiritual discernment. If we pray, no doubt it is better to pray in the dark than not pray at all. It is something to wail and cry ever so blindly and confusedly after Him, to fall with

"Weight of cares

Upon the world's great altar-stairs,  
That slope through darkness up to God."

But not such is the proper worship of Israel or of the Church.

\* Numb. vi. 24-26.

It is prayer in the light of Divine knowledge and favour, prayer in the illuminating Spirit to the Father of lights, from whom comes down every good and perfect gift.

There were no lamps in the Holy of Holies. They could not be needed there, for God dwelt there, and He is a Light unto Himself. Where the God of glory shines, there is no need of candle, nor of the light of the sun.

All things now being ready for an advance, the direction of the march was to be given by the cloud of God's presence, and the blast of silver trumpets by the sons of Aaron; the first the signal to the eye, the second the signal to the ear. "And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the ten thousands of the thousands of Israel."\*

II. SECOND PART.—"The children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai." One can imagine a flush of joy on the meek countenance of Moses as he saw the tribes whom he had brought out of Egypt a confused multitude of slaves now strike their tents and advance as an organised host, a nation in martial array, almost in triumphal procession, toward their inheritance. The leader persuaded his brother-in-law to accompany the march, for he was a Midianite, and well fitted, by his judgment and personal knowledge of the country, to be to Israel "instead of eyes." Moses had the Divine signal of the moving pillar and cloud of fire, but he would not, on that account, neglect any subordinate aids that were available. An important lesson is here for our guidance, both in private and public life, to ask Divine direction, and watch for it, but not to suppose that supernatural intimations will be so given as to supersede the use of the best natural advantages of observation and experience that we possess in ourselves or can obtain from others.

Alas! the people had scarcely begun their march before a

\* Numb. x. 35, 36.

dark shade fell on their history. After three days' journey they complained, and, like all people of a low development, they were anxious chiefly about what they should eat and drink. Forgetting the task-masters in Egypt, they sighed for "the fish, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic." Moses heard this, and went to the Lord, not to the people, for he was incensed and weary at heart with the terrible disappointment which must fall on a great spirit when he sees how unworthy and ignoble they are for whom he has prayed and toiled.

Other troubles came upon him. Envy began to rankle in the hearts of his own sister and elder brother. A very cruel wound it was, that *they* should speak against him; but Moses bore it quietly, and the Lord vindicated the authority of His servant, because he held his peace.

When the people reached Kadesh Barnea, they proposed to Moses that scouts should be sent forward to explore the land of Canaan. He consented, and twelve spies were chosen and sent—one from each tribe. On their return, after forty days, ten of the scouting party reported in a craven spirit, and exaggerated the difficulties of the invasion. Two only—Caleb and Joshua—lifted a brave protest, and encouraged Israel to advance. The whole congregation were seized with fear, and murmured against God, who, in consequence, sentenced them to wander in the deserts of Arabia for forty years—a year for each day occupied in spying out the land. Against this sentence they rebelled; and having been afraid when they should have been bold, they were now bold when they should have been afraid. Disregarding the command of Moses, they attacked the Amalekites, and suffered a severe defeat, learning to their cost, and showing to us, that the bravery of presumption is just as fatal as the cowardice of unbelief.

So the tribes were obliged to turn back from the borders of the land of promise. They could not enter in, because of unbelief. Then followed a melancholy time. A strong conspiracy was formed against Moses and Aaron. The ruling spirit was Korah, a Levite, and apparently a relative of the

leader and the high priest. He obtained the support of certain malcontents of the tribe of Reuben. The conspiracy was allowed to attain formidable proportions, but was then suppressed and punished by a signal judgment of God. The Reubenites, who seemed to aim at earthly power, were swallowed up by an earthquake. Korah, the Levite, and the two hundred and fifty men who stood with him, bearing censers, aimed at spiritual power, and usurped the priests' office; on them fell a fire from the Lord "and consumed them." Let it be a lesson to us to beware of joining ourselves to murmurers and complainers, who, assuming to vindicate Christian liberty, and to assert the holy calling of all Christian men, are impatient of order and office, and stir discontent in the Church of God.

Aaron made intercession for the people who had favoured the conspiracy, returning good for evil. So the plague, which had broken out, was stayed. Immediately after, it pleased God, by the sign of a budding rod, to vindicate the sacred distinction of Levi among the tribes, and to confirm the priesthood in the house of His servant Aaron.

Few events of the protracted sojourn in Arabia are related. At the 20th chapter we find the tribes reassembled at Kadesh Barnea. Alas! Moses and Aaron displeased God at the very end of the pilgrimage. It was just after Miriam's death, when we should have expected the illustrious brothers to have been most subdued and quiet in spirit, that they "erred in spirit," and brought on themselves reproof and loss. The people chode with Moses because there was no water. At once he and Aaron became apprehensive lest the new generation, murmuring about water, like their fathers, should incur a second turning-back from this Kadesh Barnea. Agitated by this fear, Moses did not implicitly rely as before on God's word, but threw into the scene at the rock something like a display of his own power, in order to make a deeper impression on the bystanders. But it was unwise and unworthy of Moses—this loud talking and double striking with the rod. It came of secret misgiving and unbelief; and though the brothers obtained water for Israel,

they themselves suffered loss—they entered not the land of promise.

Aaron died on Mount Hor, being first stripped of his priestly robes, for his high priesthood could not pass into heaven. His son and successor, Eleazar, descended the mount in the official robes, to show that this priesthood continued on earth.

The wanderings of Israel were now nearly ended. There was a tedious journey round the frontier of Idumea, through a sterile region, infested with serpents. When those creatures gathered in unusual numbers, and made an onslaught on the tired and discouraged Israelites, the Lord directed Moses to form a serpent of brass or copper, the hue of which resembled that of the poisonous snakes, and to expose it upon a banner-staff, or pole, so as to be visible to all. Whosoever of the wounded people looked to the brazen serpent was made whole. The incident is full of Gospel meaning and consolation—"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him may have eternal life." \*

The Israelites, as they advanced, demanded permission to pass through the territory of the Amorites and the land of Bashan. It was refused, and Israel, under the command of Moses, conquered the kings, Sihon and Og, and took possession of their cities and lands, in order to march thence, across the Jordan, into Palestine.

III. THIRD PART.—"And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab, on this side Jordan by Jericho." †

The chief danger now before the people was from Balak and Balaam, and reveals a new depth of Satan. Balaam, indeed, was more to be dreaded than any number of mere giants, like Og, king of Bashan. He was gifted with the temperament of a seer, and had knowledge of the Holy One, but used it for unholy ends, and debased his spirit to the lucrative arts of heathen sorcery. He is the Anti-Moses. Moses forsook Egypt,

\* John iii. 14, 15.

† Numb. xxii. 1.

not fearing the wrath of King Pharaoh, that he might be true to Israel ; Balaam, a man of the same time, and the same lofty genius, but of a base selfishness of heart, went to Moab to seek King Balak's favour and rewards by cursing those whom God had blessed. By enchantments he prevailed nothing against Israel, and was compelled to bless them in glowing strains. But by vile and crafty counsel he did succeed in partially ensnaring them. At his suggestion, the daughters of Midian and Moab attracted the men of Israel to the idolatrous and licentious festivals of Baal-Peor. So the chosen nation was defiled, and was smitten of God for the sin. But Israel was soon restored, and, under Phinehas the priest, attacked and almost exterminated the wicked Midianites. "Balaam also, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword." No death of the righteous could be for a man that loved the wages of unrighteousness. He had prophesied as one who enjoyed the "vision of the Almighty." Yet he died as a fool dieth, and has left a shameful memory.

Once more, before the invasion of Canaan began, the Lord mustered His people as the heirs of the inheritance, then gave command in regard to the order in which they were to occupy and possess the country, and directions in detail respecting offerings and vows, the division of spoil in war, and the cities of refuge for accidental man-slayers to be appointed in the land.

The order given to Israel was to drive out and dispossess—not to massacre the Canaanites, but to expel them, and destroy all the signs and materials of their idolatrous worship. The lesson for us is obvious. Called to pilgrimage, we are also appointed to a holy war—sin-vanquishing, flesh-mortifying, idol-excluding—a protracted war, in which are sieges and marches and many battlefields, and the enemy is only put out "by little and little."

## DEUTERONOMY.

THIS book, like those that have gone before, bears the name assigned to it by the Greek translators, meaning the second, *i.e.*, the repeated Law. It proceeds on the contents of the three books immediately preceding, and, rehearsing many of them, urges the generation of Israel, now about to enter on the deferred conquest and occupation of Canaan, to careful, loving, and consistent obedience. It gives prominence to the spiritual principle of the Divine Law, and develops in detail the ecclesiastical, judicial, and political system on which should depend the well-being of Israel when settled in their own land.

As might be expected, this book contains very little stirring incident, differing therein from Exodus and Numbers; but it is of great value for its ethical and spiritual tone, and is largely quoted by the prophets. The discourses and exhortations of Jeremiah and Ezekiel are formed very much on the model of the addresses and appeals contained in Deuteronomy. On this book also, as we shall see, our Lord Jesus Christ placed peculiar honour.

By far the greater part of the work before us consists of four addresses to Israel while yet encamped in the plains on the east of the Jordan, with blessings and curses added. The men whom Moses saw around him were not those whom he had led out of Egypt, but their children; and before he transferred his authority to his successor, who should lead them into the promised land, the aged prophet poured out a solemn charge to them, "according unto all that the Lord had given him in commandment."\*

\* The question of the antiquity of this book requires to be handled in

I. Four chapters are occupied with recapitulation of the history of the tribes from the time when they left their encampment at Horeb till they reached Kadesh Barnea, their subsequent wanderings in the desert, and their ultimate arrival at the confines of the promised land, signalled by victory over the king of the Amorites and the king of Bashan. On this history was founded exhortation to hearken to the commandments of Jehovah and to do them. It was surely a significant warning against disobedience that their fathers' wilfulness at Kadesh Barnea had lengthened out what might have been an eleven days' journey into one of forty years.\*

II. Then follow eight chapters in which the Law is rehearsed with earnest appeals for obedience. This address begins with repetition of the Ten Commandments, and proceeds to impress the principle of acceptable obedience, viz., the love of the Lord God of Israel, with all their "heart and soul and might." The only material difference between the Decalogue, as here given, and as formerly delivered at Sinai, and recorded in Exodus, is that here the reason assigned for the Sabbath is not the rest after creation, but the redemption out of Egypt. This is easily accounted for. It is in keeping with the fact that here the Law is given in the form and character of a covenant between Jehovah and the tribes of Israel. With urgent and repeated exhortations to the observance of all Jehovah's commandments, statutes, and judgments, this important section concludes.

It is a high honour put on this part of the book that out of it the Man Christ Jesus chose the three sayings with which He foiled the three temptations in the wilderness. The first is taken from chap. viii. 3, the second from chap. vi. 16, and the third from chap. vi. 13 and x. 20. Our Lord held His position against the Tempter, not as Deity, but as Man—God's

much more detail than our space permits. For ourselves, we are well satisfied on this point with the judicious statement of Rev. C. H. Waller in the *O. T. Commentary for English Readers* (1883), and the able chapter (chap. xiii.) on the same topic in Mr. James Sime's *Kingdom of All-Israel* (1883).

\* See Deut. i. 2, 3.

faithful Servant, His Son whom He had called out of Egypt. Israel, the servant of God, His son called out of Egypt, after a separation and sojourn in the wilderness for forty years, received the Book of Deuteronomy. Jesus, having been separated from all men in the wilderness for forty days, took into His mouth, as an Israelite indeed, the words of this very book, and withstood the Tempter in perfect, loving obedience to God.

III. After an earnest warning against a renewal of the provocation and rebellion that had marred their pilgrimage, Moses prescribes to Israel in detail the laws and ordinances they should observe when settled in Canaan. This occupies a long discourse—chaps. viii.—xxvi. All proceeded on the principle that the people belonged to Jehovah, and were bound to abjure everything at variance with His will and glory. Worship was to have a local centre. All heathenish shrines and images were to be utterly destroyed. Any act of idolatrous worship on the part of an Israelite was to be punished with death; and many other laws are given expressive of the purity and justice of God, and fitted to teach His people righteousness of conduct, benevolent consideration for others, kindness to strangers and the poor, and to correct all tendencies to coarseness and brutality of life. This section ends with a solemn declaration of Israel's relationship and duty to Jehovah. They had avouched the Lord to be their God, and He had avouched them to be His peculiar people.

IV. In chapters xxvii.—xxx. we read the blessings and curses severally attached to obedience and disobedience. This discourse was addressed to all Israel in the most public and impressive manner. Direction was also given that after they had crossed the river Jordan they should raise pillars on Mount Ebal, and, after sacrifice, inscribe on the stones the words of the Law. Then, while the people stood, six tribes on Mount Gerizim, and six on the opposite Mount Ebal, the blessings of obedience were to be declared from the former, and the curses, or penalties of disobedience, from the latter. Thus was the dread alternative to be in the most impressive manner placed

before the whole nation, and the people were to say Amen, acknowledging the Lord's word, and accepting His covenant.

It is significant that the Law was to be inscribed on Mount Ebal only. It indicates that as many as are of the works of the Law are "under the curse," and that the whole legal economy in Israel would, because of the carnality of their minds, work wrath, and involve the absolute need of salvation by a Redeemer. Indeed, when we expect the blessings, at all events, to precede the curses in chapter xxvii., we are appalled to find that the curses go first, twelve in number, the last of them, the sweeping imprecation which is quoted by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians—"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them." \* When the blessings are mentioned, everlasting life is not among them, but prosperity, peace, national welfare, and power. After these, again, are recited the opposite evils or curses, disease, famine, war, desolation, and captivity.

The 30th chapter goes further, and foresees the tribes of Israel under punishment and expelled from their home, or taken captive by other nations. Then follows the preaching of repentance, so powerfully carried out by Jeremiah, Hosea, Ezekiel, and other prophets of a later time. Turning to God with the heart, and hearkening again to His voice, the people were to be restored to their land and to His favour. Of this Moses was permitted to give them early assurance; and thus with a breath of mercy and hope ended his weighty discourse to the people. Think of the aged prophet thus foreseeing the mischief that would come on a rebellious people, and hear him crying aloud, "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: that thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him, for He is thy life, and the length of thy days." †

Before we leave these discourses, let us look at three passages

\* Gal. iii. 10.

† Deut. xxx. 19, 20.

which bear on Christ and the Gospel. Christ quoted three sayings from Deuteronomy; three other sayings are quoted in reference to Christ.

1. Deut. xviii. 15-19.—“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, unto Him ye shall hearken,” &c. The application of this oracle to Christ has been disputed; but in our judgment it holds good for the following reasons:—

(a.) The promise of this great Prophet was first given by the Lord to Moses at Horeb, or Sinai, in the day when the people were afraid of direct communication with God. Moses then acted as mediator, and stood between Jehovah and the people. There is no prophet like to him as mediator till we come to Jesus Christ.

(b.) It was the glory of Moses that he had charge, as a steward, over the house of God; organiser of the holy nation, and founder under Divine direction of the entire Hebrew form and dispensation of religion. Many prophets and prophetesses arose after him, but were not like him in position, only built on his foundation, developed and applied the laws and principles which Moses laid down. At last came Jesus Christ, like unto Moses in having the care and administration of God's house, but greater, and worthy of more honour, because not the steward, but the Son. Apostles and prophets followed Him, but only continued what He did and taught, developed and applied, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, principles and precepts which the Master had laid down, and which are most fully and affectionately delivered in the New Testament Deuteronomy—the Gospel according to St. John.

(c.) It appears from the language of the woman at Sychar (John iv. 25), that the Samaritans expected the Messiah to be a great prophet and teacher. Now the Samaritans received only the Pentateuch, and while there are other passages in the Pentateuch that refer to a Messiah, there is none but this on which they could have founded the expectation that when Messiah came He would “tell them all things.”

(d.) The Jews and Galileans found a testimony to Christ in

the writings of Moses as well as the prophets; and our Lord Himself warned the Jews that Moses, in whom they trusted, would accuse them of disobedience to His words. Now there is no other passage than this in the writings of Moses that warns against disobedience to the words of the great future Prophet of God.

(e.) This passage is expressly interpreted of Jesus Christ by the Apostle Peter, and seems to be quoted in the same sense by the first martyr, Stephen. See Acts iii. 22, 23; vii. 37.

The sum of the matter is that Jesus the Christ is the Greater than Moses—the Prophet of Prophets, on Whom rested, without measure, the Spirit of the Lord.

2. Deut. xxi. 23.—“He that is hanged is accursed of God.” This is the passage quoted in Gal. iii. 13, and brings before us the cross of Christ, and the Crucified One hanging dead upon it, “made a curse for us.” For Jews or Gentiles to seek justification by the Law is a course of infatuation, and ends in condemnation and death. Christ as the Crucified One is the Redeemer from the curse of the Law, that the blessing—not of Moses or the Law, but of Abraham—might come on us Gentiles, and we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

3. Deut. xxx. 11–14.—“For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not too wonderful for thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.”

Compare with this Rom. x. 6–10. St. Paul not merely adopts the language of Moses, but pursues the line of his deepest thought. The prophet anticipated a time when Israel would incur Divine wrath by disobedience, and instructed them to turn with all their hearts to God Himself, whose word was very nigh. The apostle in his time saw Israel going astray

from God and His righteousness by misuse of the very law of Moses, and about to incur that penalty of dispersion which lies on them unto this day. Accordingly he laboured to teach them the contrast between righteousness which is of the Law and righteousness which is of God by faith, and in order to this, used the language originally employed by Moses for recalling Israel to God; the distinction, however, being made, that, whereas Moses spoke of the revelation of God as their beneficent Ruler made to Israel, Paul spoke of the fuller revelation of the same God in His Son, and the grace and truth that have come by Jesus Christ. This gospel-teaching, too, the apostle so gave as to enlighten the Gentiles as well as the Jews, because he was a preacher of the gospel of the grace of God to every creature.

The remainder of Deuteronomy contains the farewell and death of Moses, and was written, of course, by a later pen than his own. It forms a touching and dignified conclusion to the whole Pentateuch.

Moses introduced Joshua as his successor, finished the writing of the Law, and committed the roll to the priests, with injunction that it should be read aloud at the Feast of Tabernacles in every seventh year. The stone tables of the Law were deposited in the ark, and the book of the Law was to rest beside the ark of the covenant.

Thereafter, the aged leader spoke the words of a grand prophetic song in the ears of all the congregation, yet demanded a greater audience—"Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth."\* It is a song of mercy and of judgment, extolling God's perfections, reproving Israel's perversities, and in language which shows Moses to have been as great a poet to the very last as he was forty years before, when he composed the sublime song at the Red Sea—the oldest lyric in the world.

Having thus rounded his career in the wilderness with holy song, the leader of Israel gave to the tribes his prophetic blessing, with especial regard therein to their future destiny as dividers

\* Deut. xxxii. 1.

and occupiers of the soil of Palestine. The only tribe omitted is Simeon, which had recently sinned very grievously with the Midianites, under the counsel of Balaam. Accordingly, when the land was divided among the Israelites, Simeon got, not an independent district, but a tract of land "within the inheritance of the children of Judah." \*

Finally, Moses died. There was no dimness in his eye, though his years were an hundred and twenty. No look of a dying man had he, nor did his step falter as he climbed the mountain of Nebo to the top of Pisgah. It was a deliberate march to death and burial. Having reached the summit, he saw the whole land of Canaan at his feet, drew the mighty view into his soul, then closed his eyes, and passed to God. His sepulchre no man knows to this day. Those of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Rachel, and David are all well known, but the sepulchre of Moses, the greatest man of his nation, can no one trace. We gather from the New Testament that Michael, a high prince with God, angel-protector of the house of Israel, guarded the prophet's body, and rebuked Satan, who probably resisted its resurrection. That it was raised is inferred from the appearance of Moses in a glorified body with Elijah on the mount of our Lord's transfiguration.

It was essential to the typical meaning and purpose of this history that Moses should not cross the river, for he was the representative man of the Law, and the Law brings no one into rest. For himself, too, it was better to depart. He got something nobler far than an entrance into Canaan—a home with God and the departed worthies. Yet there is something very touching in his death on the very edge of the promised land. An end like his has been not infrequent among great leaders of intellectual or religious life. They labour and see not, or, if they foresee, enjoy not the fruit of their labours. A hero falls in the very arms of victory, a scientific genius surrenders to others the advantage of his discoveries, reformers and missionaries of truth and progress often die on the threshold of success, leaving it to others to accomplish what they could not continue "by reason of death."

\* Joshua xix. 1.

*JOSHUA.*

HERE begins the second division of the Hebrew Bible—bearing the title of the Earlier Prophets, and comprising the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings.

The book which we have now reached has fine characteristics as a history, and is, moreover, very rich in Christian suggestion. Like the Books of Moses, it is free from any hero-worship, or glorying in man; but Joshua, whether the author of the book or no, is throughout the chief figure—the narrative opening with his installation to office and closing with his death. This Joshua was a prince of the tribe of Ephraim, born in Egypt, and, after the exodus, selected by Moses as his attendant or adjutant-general in the host of Israel. It was he who led the fighting-men in their successful combat with the Amalekites at Rephidim, soon after the passage of the Red Sea. It was he who attended Moses in the Mount, and was thus absent from the camp at the time of the idolatrous worship of the golden calf. It was he who stood alone by the side of faithful Caleb in giving a report of the exploration of Canaan. Forty years thereafter, the chief command fell by Divine appointment to him as the successor of Moses. Like the great leader, he had been most carefully trained and proved for his lofty enterprise, and entered on his command apparently about the same age as his predecessor—at or about eighty years. He filled his post for nearly thirty years, and died at the ripe age of one hundred and ten.

This book easily breaks into two parts, each consisting of twelve chapters—the former treating of the conquest, and the

latter of the distribution, of the promised land. With an introduction and an epilogue, these are the contents of the work. Our plan, however, is to take the history as a whole, and thereafter point out the Christian meanings that underlie the narrative, or are suggested thereby.

## I. THE HISTORY.

1. *Of the Invasion.*—Happily, the authority of Joshua was undisputed. Moses, before his death, had publicly transferred to him his own leadership, and after the great prophet's decease the Lord confirmed the succession, and promised to be with the new leader as He had been with the old. So Moses seemed to live again in Joshua, and to him the people hearkened as they had hearkened to Moses. He did all that his predecessor could possibly have done if he had personally led the invasion, and he exhibited throughout the very mind of Moses—the same loyalty to God, love to Israel, and personal disinterestedness, taking nothing for himself, his private enrichment, or family promotion, but seeking the good of all Israel, and finding his own joy in their obedience and prosperity.

In the first steps that Joshua took, one sees the promptitude and wariness which together mark the good commander. Having given orders that the host should be ready to cross the river Jordan in three days, he quietly despatched two scouts, who made their way into the fortified town of Jericho. Having been sheltered there by a woman named Rahab, whose life and household were afterwards spared for this good service, the scouts returned with the welcome news that the approach of Israel had stricken the Canaanites with terror. "All the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us."

Joshua was glad to learn that the passage of the river was not to be disputed by a hostile army, and gave Israel the order to advance. The river, however, itself presented a great difficulty, for it was swollen in consequence of the melting of the snows on Lebanon. Yet the transit must be made, and made at that very spot, for the Lord had told His people to pass over "right against Jericho." As at the Red Sea, so at

the river, the simple duty of Israel was to "go forward;" and the Lord, who had taken their fathers through the sea, took the children through the stream of Jordan. Moses stretched forth his rod over the waters, but Joshua, as a warrior, stretched out his spear. And lo! as the feet of the priests, bearing the sacred ark, touched the river at its brink, the waters of Jordan were held back on the upper side, and those below running down to the Dead Sea—a broad passage was opened to the mighty host. All passed over dry-shod, while the priests, with the ark, stood still to the last moment in the bed of the river. Twelve stones for a memorial—one for each tribe—were taken from the channel of the stream. Then Joshua "commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan. And it came to pass . . . that the waters of Jordan returned to their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before." \*

The first encampment of Israel in the land was at Gilgal, near Jericho. There, by Divine command, the males of all the tribes born in the wilderness were circumcised, for that rite had fallen into abeyance during the pilgrimage. Then the passover was kept, in memory of the night in which Israel was saved by the blood of the Lamb. Manna ceased, and the invaders ate of the produce of the land of Canaan. They had entered on the land in a marvellous manner, without a sword drawn or a life forfeited.

2. *Of the Conquest.*—A vision of God as an armed man was given to Joshua alone, with directions for the first exploit of the war, the capture of the frontier city Jericho. It was a walled town, and the invaders had no battering-rams or other instruments known to ancient warriors for the reduction of strongholds. But Joshua obeyed the Divine command, ordered the ark to be carried round the city for seven days—a sevenfold or perfect demonstration of faith in God—and the place was taken. "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days." †

Yet, close on victory came defeat, for presumptuous sin was

\* Joshua iv. 17, 18.

† Heb. xi. 30.

found in Israel. Orders had been issued to bring the precious metals found in Jericho to the sacred treasury, and to destroy all other spoil by fire. But Achan saw, coveted, took, and hid in the ground a Babylonish garment and a wedge of gold. For this the whole nation suffered. The expedition against the town of Ai failed, and Joshua was deeply grieved. Then followed inquiry, detection of the sinner, and public infliction of death, as a solemn warning to all against covetousness, deceit, and the violation of the strict discipline which is essential to military success. This done, the valley of Achor became "a door of hope."\* The host went forth with better success, the defeat was turned into victory, and the city of Ai was taken.

Thereafter ensued a brief pause in the war, while the directions of Moses were carried out in regard to the rehearsal of the Law, with blessings for obedience, and curses for disobedience. An altar was reared on Mount Ebal, and half of the tribes stood (no doubt by their representatives) on that mount, and half on Gerizim, while Joshua read aloud all that Moses commanded. Thus were the people opportunely admonished, that their continuance in the land which they had begun to conquer depended entirely on their compliance with Jehovah's will.

The 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters describe continued conquest. The Gibeonites made a crafty submission, but the tribes of Canaan generally offered stout resistance. Joshua first encountered the southern confederacy, then turned against the northern, and in both cases with complete success, for he "took the whole land." The greatest battle of the war was that of Beth-Horon, in which the pursuit of the flying foe was facilitated by a wondrous prolongation of daylight, poetically described as a standing still of the sun upon Gibeon, and of the moon in the valley of Ajalon.†

The 11th chapter ends with the words, "for the land rested from war." The 12th has a list of the conquered chiefs or kings. So the Lord God drove out the heathen who had defiled His

\* Hosea ii. 15.

† Compare Habak. iii. 11.

land. And the conquerors "got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but His right hand and His arm and the light of His countenance, because He had a favour unto them." \*

3. *Of the Distribution of the Land.*—Part of the country was still held by the Canaanites, but its conquest was assumed, and for purposes of allocation the whole land was reckoned as in the possession of Israel. The tribal districts were then apportioned by lot.

Many interesting details enliven the topographical portion of the book. We find the venerable Caleb putting in a special claim to Hebron, on the ground of a grant made to him by Moses after he had explored the land; and we can imagine the joy with which Joshua allowed the claim of his old comrade. We are disappointed to learn that the two strongest tribes, Judah and Ephraim, could not drive out all the heathen from their lands, for the Jebusites still held Jerusalem, and Canaanites dwelt in Gezer. The tabernacle was set up in Shiloh within the tribe of Ephraim, and thither were the people gathered, as to the centre of worship. Joshua took no inheritance for himself, but the whole nation gratefully assigned one to him—Timnath-Serah, in Mount Ephraim.

Thereafter the cities of refuge were appointed at proper distances, and the cities of the Levites designated by lot. Then all was finished. "There failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel. All came to pass." † The men of the two tribes and a half who had got their lands from Moses, on the east side of the Jordan, had honourably helped their brethren in the war. These were now sent back to Bashan and Gilead with a solemn charge not to break the religious unity of Israel. So this part of the history is closed. There remains an account:—

4. *Of the Dying Counsels and Death of Joshua.*—Apparently there are two addresses of the aged hero to the elders, judges, and officers of all Israel; the second being given with great solemnity at Shechem, which may be reckoned the capital of

\* Ps. xliv. 3.

† Joshua xxi. 45.

Palestine for the time. At that memorable spot Abraham first built an altar in the land. There Jacob buried the household images under the oak. There the ark had been placed during the rehearsal of the Law, with blessings and curses, for Shechem is between Ebal and Gerizim; and there the children of Israel laid the embalmed body of the illustrious prince Joseph, which they had carried with them from Egypt, according to his dying injunction.

Joshua was not a poet like Moses, and composed no song. The prophetic spirit, however, rested on him, and in his last exhortation, in which he charged the people and took them bound to serve Jehovah, he appears to have had a foreboding of evil to come. One of his last acts was to set up in Shechem a pillar of stone, according to the custom of the age, as a permanent witness to the people, lest they should deny their God. Then the good soldier passed away. To him is given at his death the same title as was given to Moses, "the servant of the Lord." "And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that over-lived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord that He had done for Israel."\*

## II. THE APPLICATION OF THIS NARRATIVE.

1. *To Church History.*—The Book of Joshua suggests that of the Acts of the Apostles. Moses lived again in Joshua. Jesus lives—not in another, but Himself, risen from the dead, both "Leader and Commander of the people"—Moses and Joshua in one. Thus the book called Acts of the Apostles is properly the book of the Acts of the living Christ, in and by His Apostles, evangelists, deacons, martyrs, and people. It is He who all through that book exercises authority, shows vitality and power. Jesus Christ, living in, and leading on, the Church by the Spirit, is the Joshua of our profession. He led the Church through baptism into death, as through the bed of deep waters; and by the power of His resurrection brought up the disciples

\* Joshua xxiv. 31.

into a new position, one of promise and grace, but therefore too of risk and conflict.

As at the outset Israel was hindered by walled Jericho, so at the beginning of Church history the Apostles and brethren had to face the ignorance and prejudice of the men of Jerusalem. The war must begin there, and they had no might or power with which to prevail. So they compassed the city about for seven days—*i.e.*, they continued for that space with one accord in prayer and supplication. When the day of Pentecost was fully come, the trumpet was blown by Simon Peter, the walls of resistance fell, and the campaign of the Church was well commenced. That first victory was the earnest of all victories. If the Israelites were discouraged at any later stage of their war, they had but to remember Jericho. If Christian preachers or workers are discouraged, they ought to remember Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

But Achan sinned and was punished. So Ananias and Sapphira thought to hide what they had done, but their covetousness and deceit were exposed before all, and they suffered the penalty of death. Israel was victorious so soon as the hidden evil was put away;—so the Church, after judgment on the deceivers, had new successes, and the word of the Lord prevailed. “By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people, and believers were the more added unto the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” \*

Joshua led the tribes to many battle-fields. Christ led the Church, under such officers as Peter, John, Paul, and others of smaller fame but like precious faith, into many and severe battles; at Samaria, Antioch, Damascus, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. Some good soldiers of Christ lost their lives for His sake in the struggle. It was to them no loss, but great gain, and the good cause went forward. The Gospel was spread abroad in the face of all that wicked men or heathen demons could do to prevent it, and the plantation of organised Churches, with elders in

\* Acts v. 12-14.

every city, was as the settlement of the tribes in their inheritances, to possess the land for God.

Alas! Canaanites left in the land corrupted Israel. Some of the tribes put the natives to tribute, insensibly adopted their idolatries, and, in the end, became weaker than they, and actually had to serve the Canaanites. So in the Church, Jewish traditions, heathen errors and customs, and vain speculations were allowed to remain, and mix themselves with the Gospel. It was thought that they would be useful in service, or in paying tribute, but the result was corruption of faith, worship, and life. Many Churches lost their liberty, and were beguiled of their reward. Indeed, these evils continue to this very day. It is a plague in all the Churches that the Canaanite is yet in the house of the Lord of Hosts.

No wonder that there follows the troubled Book of Judges, and a parallel to it also in the confusions and vicissitudes that have marked the history of the Church.

2. *To individual Christian experience.*—The book before us sets forth the wrestlings of the “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,” their contendings with deadly foes. An Israelite under Joshua had to fight with flesh and blood in order to obtain temporal blessings in earthly places. A Christian, under the Spirit of Christ, has to fight with spiritual wickedness in order to enjoy eternal blessings in heavenly places.

You begin this, O Christian, by death, burial, and resurrection with Christ—separated by those waters of Jordan from the Moses or Law under which you were bound. Crucified with Christ, nevertheless you live. And, as an Israelite who had come up out of the swellings of Jordan was led to Gilgal, and had, as his first painful duty, to submit to circumcision of the flesh, so, when you emerge and rise up together with Christ, you must, as counting yourself to have died and risen, “mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.”\* At this Gilgal, too, this first station, consider well and enjoy Christ, your passover, sacrificed for you. Before you can fight the fight of faith, you must eat His flesh and drink His blood. Corn of the land is also ready to your need, for the place

\* Col. iii. 1-7.

of conflict is also sure to prove a place of spiritual nourishment.

Now, in the name of the Lord, set up your banners, take the aggressive, fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life. Some walled Jericho bars your way ;—only have faith in God, and the walls shall fall flat to the ground. If you should have defeat after such a victory, diligently inquire, have great searchings of heart, till the Achan in your bosom is detected and slain. Very likely it will prove to be some temptation of gold, or pride of life, that has compromised your integrity. When the evil is utterly abhorred and renounced, you shall have new victories, and your valley of trouble will unfold a door of hope. And so on and on till you get your bright inheritance. If indeed you make leagues when you should make conquests, the inheritance will be meagre. But if you fight faithfully, not even the Anakim of spiritual wickedness can withstand you. You shall have a large possession, and “stand in your lot at the end of the days.”

Joshua himself was an heir, and his inheritance was in the midst of the land. Jesus Christ is “Heir of all things,” and He is in the midst, and all the heirs of God are grouped around Him. Joshua died ; but the Captain of our salvation dies no more, and our inheritance no one can take from us, because we hold it of Him, and with Him, who lives for ever and ever.

“Stand then in His great might,  
With all His strength endued,  
But take, to arm you for the fight,  
The panoply of God.

From strength to strength go on,  
Wrestle, and fight, and pray,  
Tread all the powers of darkness down,  
And win the well-fought day.”

## JUDGES.

THIS is a disappointing book as regards the moral and religious condition of Israel, but rich in varied interests, telling us the most romantic incidents—depicting ancient manners, and illustrating the union of the Hebrew faith with the rough heroism of troublous times. The history covers nearly four centuries. The writer is unknown. The Jews ascribe the work to Samuel, and there are good reasons for assigning it either to him or to some other prophet living in the early part of the reign of King Saul. That it was composed or compiled after the institution of the kingdom is implied by the repeated expression, “In those days, when there was no king in Israel.” And that it was composed before the kingdom fell to David appears from the statement in the first chapter, that “the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem unto this day.” Now, we know that one of the first acts of King David was to expel the Jebusites from Jerusalem, and therefore fix the date of the authorship of this book in the time of Saul.

The Judges were the Deliverers raised up by the God of Israel to rescue His people from the power of their enemies. The rank was not hereditary in any family, nor was the dignity confined to any one tribe. The title *Shophetim* seems to have been taken from the Canaanites or Phœnicians. The Carthaginians carried the name from Phœnicia, and their rulers in the time of the Punic Wars are termed the Suffetes by the Roman historian Livy. The Hebrew *Shophetim*, however, had no regularly constituted magistracy, but an extraordinary and exceptional authority. The people they governed were semi-

barbarous ; their manners were rough, and the period almost anarchic.

I. The introduction to the history occupies two chapters, and a few verses of the third. We are informed that some of the tribes, after the death of Joshua, continued their war with the Canaanites who remained in the country, but they stopped short and allowed their enemies to retain nearly all the sea-coast, and several strongholds in the interior. The result was, in the next generation, a decay of faith and corruption of life among the Israelites. The defeated system had its revenge in adulterating and enfeebling that which had conquered it. The Canaanite idolatry did more damage than the Canaanite sword, for the children of Israel were beguiled, and actually forsook Jehovah, the God of Abraham, and Moses, and Joshua, to serve the gods of the Hittites and the Amorites.

So this book begins with the failure of Israel, their lack of persevering energy, and their adoption of the very heathenism which God had sent them to drive from His land. He called them to repentance at Bochim ; but they relapsed, and intermarried with the Canaanites. "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the Asheroth."\* The results were, first, corruption from within, then oppression and hostility from without ; and Israel, forgetting the Lord, who had set them free, had to pass again under yokes of bondage.

II. The main history—the body of the work—describes a succession of foreign invasions and conquests, cries of distress from Israel to Jehovah, and His deliverances of the oppressed through the prowess of the Judges.

There are six conquests and redemptions,—

Oppressors.	Deliverers.
1. Mesopotamians.	Othniel
2. Moabites.	Ehud.
3. North Canaanites.	Deborah and Barak.

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\* Judges iii. 7. The Revised Version simply transfers these Hebrew names. The Asheroth (or Asherim) are supposed to have been wooden images of a nature-goddess called Asherah.

Oppressors.	Deliverers.
4. Midianites.	Gideon.
5. Ammonites.	Jephthah.
6. Philistines.	Samson.

1. A Mesopotamian king first invaded the land, and held Israel under his yoke for eight years. Of him we know nothing further, and he is the only invader from the far east during all the period covered by this book. When the children of Israel cried to God, He gave them a champion in Othniel, the valiant nephew and son-in-law of Caleb, a powerful prince or lion of the tribe of Judah. "The spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the Lord delivered Chushan-Rishathaim, king of Aram, into his hand." Forty years of peace succeeded; but then, after Othniel's death, the people fell back into their old sins. The penalty was,—

2. A second yoke of bondage. The king of Moab, aided by the Ammonites and Amalekites, smote Israel, and possessed himself of Jericho. His mastery continued for eighteen years. But again Israel cried unto the Lord, and got deliverance, though in a manner less glorious than the open war which Othniel had led. A wily Benjamite obtained admission to the presence of the portly king Eglon, assassinated him, and escaped. Then, calling his countrymen to the rescue, he intercepted the flying Moabites at the fords of the Jordan, and slew them to a man. "Then the land had rest fourscore years."

The Philistines were the next to make an inroad on Israel. We shall hear more of them hereafter. They were not Canaanites, but foreign conquerors from Crete. They were bitter enemies of Israel, and yet, curiously enough, their name is stamped upon the promised land in one of its favourite designations, for Palestine is just the land of Philistia. Their first attack seems to have been easily repulsed by a warrior named Shamgar, who made great slaughter with an ox-goad—a long staff shod with iron; a primitive weapon, but formidable in the hands of a strong and fearless man.

The children of Israel, however, were their own greatest enemies. Too carnally minded to preserve the faith and wor-

ship established by Moses, they relapsed again and again into the habits of the tribes around them. So they suffered more and more.

3. A formidable northern king of Canaanites, named Jabin, subdued the degenerate nation, and held them under his yoke for twenty long years. They felt themselves helpless under the military power of Jabin, whose general, Sisera, could bring nine hundred war-chariots into the field, while Israel had not one. Again the people cried unto the Lord, and again deliverance came. Deborah, a prophetess, was the Divine instrument for rousing the fallen nation. It was her custom to sit with primitive simplicity under a palm-tree, hard by the place where an earlier Deborah—the nurse of Rebecca—was buried under an oak. Thither she summoned Barak, a northern warrior, one of that tribe of Naphthali which was nearest to the fortress of King Jabin, and therefore suffered at his hand most heavily. She delivered to Barak the command of the Lord God of Israel, that he should lead a patriot army against the host of Sisera. She even accompanied him on his way to rouse the tribes. Zebulon and Naphthali responded well to the summons; Dan and Asher on the sea-shore did not. After much debate, Reuben and others, settled on the east of the Jordan, came not up. The dwellers in the town of Meroz were stigmatised as shamefully inactive. But Barak took the field with ten thousand infantry. In the great battle which ensued, a heavy storm, beating in the faces of the Canaanites, threw them into confusion, and they were routed with terrible slaughter,—their chariots and horses only hindering them in the marshy ground, and the swellings of the river Kishon. Sisera himself fled for his life, but was murdered in sleep by a Bedouin woman, in whose tent he sought shelter. The success of that memorable day is celebrated in an ode of wonderful poetic fire, composed by Deborah,—the only outpouring of the prophetic soul on record from the death of Moses till we reach the times of Hannah and Samuel.

Again the land had rest; but, returning to sin, the people fell again under the yoke of bondage. It was the

4. Fourth oppression. The Midianites from Arabia were now the invaders. They swept away the produce of the fertile land, and left Israel to the peril of famine. This tribulation lasted for seven years, and was relieved just as those which went before. Israel cried in distress to Jehovah. He heard, and raised up from amongst themselves a deliverer. It was Gideon, of the tribe of Manasseh, the finest character and truest hero of all that troubled time,—one who seems at once to recall the courage and conduct of Joshua, and to anticipate the grace and royal manner of David. He had lowliness of mind,—not assuming the first position till God called him to it,—but he had great capacities for command, uniting caution with firmness, and wariness in counsel with impetuous vigour of action.

Gideon began well by making war on the idolatry of his own neighbourhood, overthrowing the altar of Baal, and establishing an important influence over the minds and consciences of the people of his own district. Then, rallying to his standard the men of Manasseh, and of those northern tribes in which the spirit of independence seems to have been strongest, Gideon threw himself into the battle of freedom with confidence in God. At the head of a select band of three hundred men, he surprised the Midianite camp by night, and the Arabs fled with loud cries of terror. This success was followed up with the utmost energy, and the yoke of Midian was completely broken.

Thereupon the Israelites invited their captain to become a king over them and to accept the regal dignity for his family. He refused, but retained for himself a sort of priestly position, which did not belong to him under the Law, and, though doubtless well meant, proved a snare to him and his house. It was his mistake, and Gideon was not a perfect man: yet, on the whole, he proved an admirable leader of Israel, and under him “the country was in quietness forty years.”

But a time of confusion followed. Abimelech, a son of Gideon, snatched at the sovereignty which the hero had declined, and cruelly put his father’s sons to death, that he might reign without a rival. His success, however, was short-

lived, and he died before the strong tower of Thebez, which he attempted to burn.

Little is known of the two judges who followed—Tola of Issachar, and Jair of Gilead; but they seem to have ruled well during fifty-five years. Thereafter, the sad story repeats itself. Israel sinned more and more, and adopted the idolatry of all the surrounding nations. The same penalty followed as before.

5. There was a fifth conquest by the Ammonites and their allies, who held the country of Israel, east of the Jordan, in subjection for eighteen years. Appeal, at last, being made to Jehovah, help came through Jephthah, a man of Gilead. This rugged chieftain, perhaps we should say freebooter, was well adapted to the emergency, and the Lord made use of him. He rose to the height of the occasion, and defeated the Ammonites with great slaughter. But the memory of Jephthah is not one that we love. There is, to say the least, a horrid uncertainty about his treatment of his innocent daughter, in fulfilment of a rash vow that he had made before going into battle. It was an age of rash vows, as one may see in the vow of the whole nation against the tribe of Benjamin, at the end of this book, or that of King Saul, which nearly cost Jonathan his life. The last-named vow, indeed, has an ominous bearing on this of Jephthah. Jonathan would have been slain if the army had not interposed, but there is no mention of any interposition on behalf of Jephthah's daughter. It has, indeed, been strongly argued by some that she was not put to death, but devoted as a virgin to the Divine service. Reluctantly, we fear that the darker view of this tragedy is the correct one. True it is that human sacrifices were not permitted in Israel, and that such an immolation as we now speak of could not have been offered on the altar of burnt-offering at the tabernacle: but Jephthah was born of a heathen mother; the region of Gilead, in which he had been brought up, adjoined the countries of Moab and Ammon, where human sacrifices were not at all unknown; and he had lived for years among the Syrians "in the land of Tob." If the semi-barbarous Jephthah thought himself bound to put his daughter to death, it is at least some relief to

know that the maiden was not dragged unwilling to her doom, but, with a touching heroism, yielded her young life, as she supposed, in duty to her father and her native land.

Another painful recollection of Jephthah's time is the first outbreak of civil war in Israel. The haughty tribe of Ephraim upbraided the new judge for going to war without their co-operation. Jephthah had no soft answer to turn away their wrath. Hot words led to blows, and there ensued a battle between the men of the west and the men of the east—the men of Ephraim and the men of Gilead. The former were put to flight, and being intercepted at the fords of the river Jordan, were detected by a peculiarity of pronunciation in the now proverbial word *Shibboleth*, and were ruthlessly slain.

Jephthah's rule was short—only six years. The three judges who followed cover no more than twenty-five years of the history.

6. Again a declension in Israel, and again a subdual. It was the sixth. The Philistines attacked in force, and succeeded in holding Israel under subjection for forty years. But God prepared a champion of Israel, in the tribe of Dan—Samson, in many respects the most remarkable man in all this history—the pure Nazirite, and yet the careless lover; the man of weakness and the man of might, whose life was full of playful humour, but ended in tragical suffering and death. He is a beacon to us, to warn against fleshly indulgence. The voice of Delilah may be sweet, but the hands of the Philistine lords are cruel. The pleasures of sin are for a season, but they lead to the dungeon of blindness and captivity. Nevertheless, Samson's is an honoured name, for he delivered Israel by the faith which had previously sustained Gideon, Barak, and Jephthah. All through his life, and yet more triumphantly in his death, he weakened the Philistines and poured contempt on Dagon their god.

“ ———— Samson hath quit himself  
Like Samson; and heroically hath finish'd  
A life heroical.”

With the vivid and romantic history of Manoah's son, the

main body of the Book of Judges may be said to end. There remains,—

III. AN APPENDIX,—to illustrate the lawlessness and confusion which ensued in a time when every man did that which was right in his own eyes. No part of the Bible forms such painful reading as this. Idolatry, impurity, and cruelty mark the period,—a sort of wild justice and equally wild mercy.\* One cannot but feel vexed at the discovery that the Levite Jonathan, who plays a part so discreditable in the shameful story, was the grandson, or at all events a descendant, of the illustrious Moses through his son Gershom. What a fall was there! Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, is also mentioned as in charge of the Ark of God; but his later years showed a falling off from the energy of his youth. Perhaps he was one of those men who can perform a brilliant feat when roused, but cannot exert a steady influence.

At all events, neither priest nor judge was able to check the degeneracy and anarchy in Israel. The days of the commonwealth evidently drew to a close, the people being unfit for such a government, or unworthy of it. The days of the kingdom drew nigh.

\* The late Dean Stanley has drawn an ingenious parallel between the times of the Judges and what are called the Middle Ages:—

“The house of Micah and his Levite set forth the exact likeness of the feudal castle and feudal chieftain of our early civilisation. The Danites, eager to secure to their enterprise the sanction of a sacred personage and of sacred images, are the forerunners of that strange mixture of faith and superstition which prompted in the Middle Ages so many pious thefts of relics, so many extortions of unwilling benedictions. . . . Priests and Levites wander to and fro over Palestine; mendicant friars and sellers of indulgences over Europe. . . . All things were as yet in chaos and confusion: yet the germs of a better life were everywhere at work. In the one, the judge was gradually blending into the hereditary king. In the other, the feudal chief was gradually passing into the constitutional sovereign. The youth of Samuel, the childhood of David, were nursed under this wild system. The schools of the prophets, the universities of Christendom, owe their first impulse to this first period of Jewish and of Christian history.”—*Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church*, Part I., pp. 311-313, 2d Ed.

1. A few words must be said on the morality of the Book of Judges. No Divine sanction is given to any act of treachery or cruelty recorded in this history; but, on the other hand, no disapproval is expressed. This is according to the usual tenor of sacred story, which narrates facts without comment, and leaves them to be dealt with by the moral sense of future generations.

It was a period of growing discord among the tribes, of religious disintegration, and so of national relapse. The moral tone was certainly low. The light was dim, and men never live beyond their light,—seldom up to it. The heroes of this book are not proposed as models for a later time, least of all for the Christian ages. They were stern chieftains, ruthless swordsmen, children of an “iron age.” But the very imperfection of their characters brings out in stronger relief the grand element of their success—their faith in God. “Through faith they subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.”\*

2. Of the application of all this narrative to Christian times.

(1.) *To Church History.*—As Israel did well during the time of the elders who overlived Joshua, so the Church did well during the Apostolic age. But then ensued a time of evil compromise. The Church failed to make a clean end of her intellectual and spiritual enemies. Consequently, Christian faith soon began to be corrupted by “philosophy falsely so called,” and Christian worship by the adaptation of heathen rites and ceremonies. Many things of Pagan origin were first tolerated, then held to be “sanctified by adoption into the Church.” Because Pagan Rome had a Pontifex Maximus, Christian Rome took a Pontifex Maximus also. The doctrines of merit, holy water, penances, purgatory, prayers for the dead, the offering and worship of a bread wafer, processions of

\* Heb. xi. 33, 34.

images, adoration of relics, and frequent festivals, were all characteristic of heathenism, and were insidiously introduced into the rapidly degenerating Church. In the end, the visible Church became quite heathenised. It is just what happened to Israel through conformity to the customs of the Canaanites.

The Lord helped Israel when they cried; and the Lord raised up deliverers for His Church at intervals, according to His own good pleasure. These were not perfect men, or enlightened on every point of duty, any more than Barak or Gideon was; but they checked the degeneracy for a time, and revived in some measure the primitive faith. Church history is so far like the Book of Judges, that it is full of oppressions and deliverances, relapses and reformations, revivals and declines. So will it continue to be, till Christ shall sit on the throne of His father David.

(2.) *To the experience of many.*—We get peace of soul, rest under Joshua—*i.e.*, Jesus; but, alas! there are Canaanites left in the heart, and we yield to them, or make leagues privately with them—not able, as we say, to put them out. So we are compromised, defiled, sometimes taken captive by the law of sin in our members. We cry to God, and He helps us. Again we decay, and He restores us. 'Tis a strange struggle, this Christian life,—now defeated, and now victorious,—now groaning that we are wretched men, and now thanking God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Yet let none think that it is better, if the Christian experience be such, to have none of it. Even in the worst times, it was better to be of Israel than to be of Moab, Midian, or Ammon, and better surely to be a blind Samson, the Israelite, who had fallen and repented, than to sit in Dagon's temple with the Philistine lords. "Happy art thou, Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?" Foolish and perverse hast thou been, but Jehovah hears thy cries, and will not let thee seek His face in vain. Happy are ye, O people of Christ! grace will bring you through all your trials, and out of

all oppressions of the enemy. Rejoice that your Deliverer is not like those dying men who judged Israel for a few short years. "The Lord is your Judge, the Lord is your Lawgiver, the Lord is your King; He will save you." \*

\* Isa. xxxiii. 22.

## RUTH.

THE end of the Book of Judges grates upon the soul,—all the more welcome the history of Ruth. We turn from shocking stories of wickedness and cruelty, and fall with joy on this sweet pastoral tale, showing us the bright side of the old Hebrew manner of life, and the blessed power of the Hebrew faith to lighten the burden of poverty and grief. Nor is this book to be read merely as an interesting and touching story. It is full of spiritual instruction, and good Gospel doctrine concerning the Lord Jesus as the Kinsman-Redeemer, the salvation of the Gentiles, and the union of the Church, which is the Bride, to the Divine Bridegroom.

The tale begins at Bethlehem-Judah, also called Bethlehem-Ephratah (*the fruitful*), a small town, distant about two hours' journey from Jerusalem. There Rachel died and was buried;—there, afterwards, David fed his father's flocks;—there Christ was born, who was "made of the seed of David, according to the flesh."

A famine occurred in the land, and was felt even in the rich and fertile country round Bethlehem. Probably it was caused, at least in part, by one of those desolating invasions mentioned in the Book of Judges; and famine was one of the penalties of disobedience to God, foretold by Moses.\*

A man of Bethlehem-Judah, who bore the noble name of Elimelech (*God is King*), left his impoverished home, and with his wife and two sons went to sojourn in the land of Moab, that hilly region south-east of the Dead Sea where Lot's

\* See Deut. xxviii. 38-48.

descendants dwelt. It is hard for us to judge the conduct of a man in straits; but, to say the least, that of Elimelech was questionable in leaving the people and altars of Jehovah to dwell in a land of vile idolatry. No doubt he intended only to sojourn there for a season, but he died there. Forsaking Bethlehem to save his life, he lost it. So do many for some temporal advantage abandon situations favourable to their spiritual welfare, and mix with those who are careless and worldly, if not worse, and, alas! never find their way back again to the position which they left, but die at a distance from God.

Elimelech is described as "Naomi's husband," and the narrator claims our attention and sympathy for the widow. "She was left, and her two sons." Why did they not then return to the land of Judah? Because they felt at home in Moab. The young men had grown up there,—there their characters had taken shape, and to all intents and purposes those sons of Israel were Moabites. Surely their mother told them that it was contrary to God's law that they should marry daughters of the heathen, but they pleased themselves; "and they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth."

But the young men—Mahlon and Chilion—died also, and of the family that left Bethlehem ten years before, Naomi only was left. Attention is again drawn to her bereft condition. "And the woman was left of her two sons and her husband." You see that Naomi is to play an important part in what follows. From all we read of her, we conjecture that she never "took" to Moab as her husband and sons had done. Whether it was so or not, God was pleased to form in her a pious character, and because He loved her, afflicted her with repeated strokes, brought her very low, and made her very lonely, that He might reclaim her to Himself.

Weary of Moab, smitten of God and afflicted, Naomi was disposed to leave the heathen soil, when she heard good tidings that at once decided her course—there was bread enough in

the Holy Land. She believed the report, and addressed herself to her journey. But she was not allowed to go alone. Her character and example had exercised an influence on her daughters-in-law, and they, early bereft of their husbands, clave to the Hebrew mother. She suffered them to attend her for a part of the way, and was soothed and cheered by their company. After a while, she proved them, and with hearty acknowledgment of their dutiful conduct to her sons and herself, put it to them that they should return to their own kindred, and being yet very young women, marry a second time; all the rather that she had no remaining sons to marry them, according to the provisions of the Mosaic law. Her object was to test their real motive, not willing that they should go with her impulsively, and afterwards upbraid her with having marred their worldly comfort or prospect in a land of strangers. But they both declared that they would surely return with her to her people.

So they went on, but as they went, the words of Naomi wrought in the mind of one of her daughters-in-law; and a second appeal showed a different result. Perhaps at the border of Moab she paused again, and renewed her suggestion. Then Orpah showed at last what was in her heart. She had sincere affection for her mother-in-law, but no separation from Moab and its idols, no spiritual attraction to Judah's land or Judah's God. So the three women shed tears, and Orpah kissed the Hebrew matron, and went back. The hour of decision had come, and they took opposite paths; Naomi and Ruth to Judah, Orpah to Moab; they to Jehovah's altars, she to the groves of Chemosh.

Ruth had a sharp trial, to leave her country, and, at the last moment, part with her sister-in-law and go alone with a poor Hebrew widow to a strange land, where the law excluded a Moabite from the congregation of the Lord.\* But a sacred tie bound Ruth to Naomi's side. Some good thing was in her heart toward the Lord God of Israel, and under His wings she

\* Deut. xxiii. 3.

was resolved to trust. So the Gentile took hold of the skirt of the Jewess, and said, "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee. for whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." \*

Naomi knew the way. She was returning to the home of happier years, and heaviness was on her spirit. All was new to Ruth, and with gladness she must have looked on the land the Lord had blessed, and beheld, as they drew near to Bethlehem, a scene very different from Moab, a country smiling with plenty, for the barley was ready for the sickle.

Their life at Bethlehem began severely. It was a trial to Naomi that she was brought home empty, and had no male relative to provide for her wants. Was it not a trial also for Ruth? Was it for this poverty that she gave up the bread of Moab? Had she not been drawn to Bethlehem by a higher than any worldly motive, she would soon have returned by the way that she came. But no such thought seems to have found place in her, nor did any word of discontent pass her lips. In the spirit of meekness, she persuaded Naomi to sit still, and let her go into the harvest-field to win bread for them both.

"Her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech." It was of the Lord's disposing, and not improbably an answer to the prayers of the lonely Naomi. But it was a "hap," or chance, so far as any human plan was concerned. Ruth did not seek the kinsman's field—seems not to have been aware of his existence, but went out, not knowing whither she went.

In course of the day, Boaz came into the field. The scene between him and the reapers has always been admired for its simple dignity and courtesy. The religion of Israel was by no means stern or gloomy. It said to mowers and binders of sheaves, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you." † It threw

\* Ruth i. 16, 17.

† Ps. cxxix. 7, 8.

the light of God over nature and familiar life. It went with men into the fields and market-places, and hallowed the relations of masters and servants, rich and poor. It taught a master to accost and treat his people as humble friends—not drudges; and servants, to consider and address their masters as their true well-wishers, and not mere “employers of labour.” Surely the Christian religion, if it had fair play, could do as much, and more.

Ascertaining that Ruth was the companion of Naomi, Boaz spoke words of welcome and protection that must have fallen sweetly on the ear of the poor Gentile. It filled her with wonder and joy, to be openly acknowledged and commended by a chief man in Israel; so she fell on her face and bowed herself to the ground. Now Boaz could easily have given to her as much corn as she needed and sent her home, but he did not, for he admired the industry of Ruth, and knew that her bread would be the sweeter for the labour of her hands. Accordingly he assured her of his favour, bade her continue in his fields, made her welcome to share with his handmaidens at meal-time, and directed the young men to let handfuls of barley drop in her path.

So the happy day wore on, and at evening Ruth beat out from her gleanings about an ephah of barley; and her mother-in-law and she had fresh bread to eat, and thankful converse over it. Ruth had nothing to say of the servants in the field, but, in all simplicity, told Naomi of the generous lord of the harvest, whose name was Boaz. Then her mother-in-law, who had, perhaps, secretly wished and prayed for this, but had resolved to make no application to her rich kinsman, told her the position of Boaz towards them. “The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen; and Naomi said unto Ruth, her daughter-in-law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, to glean unto the end of barley harvest, and of wheat harvest.”\*

\* Ruth ii. 22, 23.

Harvest, however, could last only for a few weeks, and the case of Ruth was still a precarious one. She had renounced Moab, and yet had no permanent root or position in Judah. Thinking of this, Naomi said to her, "My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?" The tale which follows needs no apology, for it is quite pure to those who are pure, and to the impure is nothing pure, "but even their mind and conscience is defiled." It may read strangely, but let us remember that it belongs to a social state, and an order of manners, as different as possible from ours. Naomi suggested nothing that would shock the moral ideas of the time, while she placed a just confidence in the religious integrity of Boaz, and the virtuous simplicity of Ruth.

The joy of harvest had come. Boaz put his own hand to the work of winnowing barley, and having supped with a cheerful heart, fell into a sound sleep at the end of the heap of corn in the thrashing-floor. Then at his feet Ruth lay down in silence. It was the form of claiming the kinsman's protection. So it fell out as Naomi desired. The good man, finding Ruth at his feet, did her no hurt because she was in his power, nor drove her out to make a show of his virtue, but with the gentle dignity which belonged to him, bade her lie still till morning, promised to do for her the part of a kinsman under the Jewish law, and at daybreak sent her away with a present of six measures of barley, the earnest of greater riches soon to be bestowed. The toils of Ruth were over. It was now Boaz that would not rest, until he had performed his promise.

The story of the redemption at the gate of the town furnishes an interesting picture of old Hebrew life, and of the actual operation of the Mosaic law concerning inheritances. It appears that even during the troubled time of the Judges, the people enjoyed the advantage of local courts, held in the most public place, and presided over by the men of character and experience, the elders of the city. The transfer of a right of redemption was with a significant token—the pulling-off of a sandal. And nothing of this sort was done in a corner. It was in open court,

before the elders and people, so that no subsequent dispute might arise.

Then we have the marriage of Boaz and Ruth—with the first mention in sacred story of a nuptial benediction. In that benediction, reference is made to the patriarchal families, and especially to the house of Pharez, an ancestor of Boaz, because he was the only grandson of Jacob from whom sprung two generic families in Israel.\* Remark also the characteristic frankness of Scripture, which, in tracing the origin of what may be called the Holy Family, conceals no stain of shame upon the lineage. Tamar and Rahab, both are in the line of which David came, and a Greater than David. The reputation of Ruth is without moral taint, but she also took her place in the family, as a special trophy of the mercy of God from the doomed people of Moab.

At the end, we see her the happy wife of him who had relieved her want and redeemed the lost inheritance. Our last view of Naomi regards her cherishing her little grandson, for she counted Ruth her daughter; and this little grandson became, in course of years, the grandfather of King David. We see the women of the neighbourhood rejoicing with her over this happy birth in Bethlehem. Thus sweet, tender, and natural to the close, is the Book of Ruth. There is no mention of death at the end of it, and the curtain falls on the peaceful family.

There is a scripture here within a scripture—gospel truth under a veil of charming narrative.

A Greater than Boaz is here—Christ the Lord of the harvest, the Supplier of wants, the Redeemer of the Inheritance, the Man who gives rest, the near Kinsman, the Bridegroom of the Church. “To Him shall the Gentiles seek, and His rest shall be glorious.” To Boaz Ruth brought nothing but her needy self, which she laid humbly at his feet. To Christ the Church brings nothing but her needy self, which she prostrates at His feet. But as Ruth was soon rich in all the possessions of Boaz,

\* See Numb. xxvi. 21.

so is the Church made wealthy for ever in the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Besides this general application, the book admits of a particular application to individual experience, in which may be found no small "use of edifying."

Let Moab represent the state of alienation from God. Bless His name! there is a way from Moab to Bethlehem, and the melancholy Naomi and the hopeful Ruth shall not err therein. There are Orpahs too. They set out well, and seem bent on the way of repentance and faith. They are all the more zealous if they have companions of their own age setting out at the same time, and they really appear to have tasted of the heavenly gift. But our Lord Jesus Christ proves all that would follow Him; and if not at the first test, yet at the second the Orpahs fail. They may walk to the very edge of the land of Moab, but there they pause and turn. Their hearts are not yielded to God, and they go back to their own people and their gods—to the world and the world's religion. If they will have it so, the pilgrims who persevere cannot hinder them. One chooses life, and another death; one is taken, and another left.

Then there are great varieties in those who come to God. One has heaviness of heart like Naomi, because of the blows of His hand; another, like Ruth, has eager joy, choosing simply to go and lodge with disciples, to exchange the company of Moab's people for the fellowship of Jehovah's people, and the idols of Moab for Jehovah Himself; determined to live with believers, to die with believers, and with them to be buried so as to rise with them in the resurrection of the just.

The city was moved at the coming of Naomi and Ruth. Would that the Church were stirred with interest and joy to recover those who have been absent for a season, and to gain others who have always been far off, to comfort the Naomis that cannot wear a smiling face at first, and to welcome the Ruths that are brought in from Moab by the grace of God!

By the help of this story, let us trace the experience of some young convert. Ruth, at first, had trial in Bethlehem—so

perhaps have you. Instead of finding yourself well off, you feel your poverty more than ever; then comes a whisper in your heart, that you cannot be happy in religion, a temptation, too, to go back, at least for a season, into the world. But you will not go back, who have really come to trust under the wings of the Almighty. Rather, you will go forth and glean—you read, and pray, and hear the word, and, or ever you are aware, you are already in the field of Jesus. And He is a near kinsman to you, though you have not known Him. He knows you, and at the first glimpse of His presence you fall down, poor and needy, before Him. Henceforth you shall lack no good thing; only go not to glean in another field, and your bread is given you, and water is sure. The servants have orders to protect you, and the handmaids of the Lord will cheer you, and with them you shall dip your morsel in the wine or sauce of comfort.

Go on to glean. It is no playing at religion any more, but reading and hearing for your life. The servants of Christ have charge given them to show kindness to humble gleaners, to let fall handfuls of saving truth, and drop seasonable words in the path of anxious ones. Happy service! No work on earth is more honourable than this, or more far-reaching in results, to encourage and feed the souls on which the Son of God has lifted His countenance and bestowed His love. But you who are an hungered, must yourself glean and beat out the corn. Give attention to reading, take heed how and what you hear, go on with the servants and handmaids of the Lord, and put forth every effort to profit in the word of righteousness. In vain shall handfuls be dropped in your path if your eyes are heavy, or your hands idle. It is shameful to have, after a day's gleaning, only a few straggling ears and half-empty stalks in your hand, when you might have had an ephah of barley, or of the finest of the wheat, full measure, pressed down and running over. When you hear Divine truth, gather it into your memory and heart, then take it home and beat it out by meditation, and divide it with any sad-hearted Naomi in godly conversation; yet speak not so much of the corn as of the Man in the field—

not of men as of the servants there, but of the Lord of the harvest. Joyful news! He is near of kin to us, partaker of our flesh and blood, our *Goël*, who ever lives.

The next step of the soul coming to assured confidence, is to draw near to the kinsman Himself. Like Ruth you must have rest, and this is not a question of gleanings and beating. But how shall you approach Him? how commend yourself to Him? Learn of Ruth. Take nothing in your hand, go poor and needy as you are, and lie down at His feet. He rests from His labour. That *you* may have rest, cease from your own works, and commit yourself to Him. No fear that He will resent it as a presumptuous liberty, or in any wise cast you out.

“Who art thou? I am Ruth, thine handmaid. My very name is of Moab, and I am poor and desolate. I have nothing—thou art rich and great, protect me, for thine is the right to redeem.” So should you say, “Lord Jesus, I am a sinner, poor and desolate, but I am at Thy feet; it is mine to trust in Thee, it is Thine to redeem.”

The mind of Christ towards such suppliants is full of kindness and encouragement. Suffer the little children to come unto Me; suffer the weary and heavy-laden to come unto Me; suffer the gleaners, the inquirers, who have not obtained peace, to come unto Me, that I may give them rest.

Lie down till the morning. Our Lord will train you to put faith in His word of promise—be still, and according to your faith it shall be done to you. If only you believe Him in the night and darkness, when the morning breaks you shall have first-fruits of His love poured into the veil of your humility, without money, and without price. Your struggle is over; the Lord will play the part of the kinsman, because He is faithful that promised, and all that makes the name of Jesus worthy, and clothes His character with beauty and force, impels Him to do as He has said. Sit still, my daughter! you have six measures of barley at once, as an earnest of your inheritance,

and because you have lain at the feet of Jesus, you shall dwell in His house for ever.

Now are you near to the joy of union, and the rest of perfect confidence. But you must be past all other help. If another will redeem, let him redeem; if there be a law by which you can be made righteous, let the law save you. But the Law will never save you or give you rest. The "other kinsman" could do well enough with the land, but when Ruth herself was mentioned, he drew back. The Law has no provision for the person of a poor sinner. So the Living One takes up your case, and the claims of the Law upon you are publicly ended in the court of Justice, so as never to be renewed. Now Jesus Christ is your Redeemer; and not only your inheritance is redeemed by Him, but yourself also.

Then marriage, and no more poverty, for all things are yours, and you are Christ's; and no more death, for Christ has risen from the dead, and you are quickened with Him. What glorious grace is this! Eternal redemption, indissoluble union, and continual access to the fulness of Christ!

## I. SAMUEL.

WHAT we call First and Second Samuel form one book of the Hebrew Bible. It is only since the sixteenth century that the division into two books has been marked in Hebrew, to correspond with the division in the Greek and Latin Bibles, which our modern versions follow. In those old versions, First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings are entitled, "The Four Books of Kings." By whom the name of Samuel was given to the first and second of these, we know not. It is not a very appropriate or sufficient title even for the first book, and with the second it has no connection at all. Neither can we tell who it was that wrote this history, or compiled it from previous annals and authentic traditions. The mention of "the kings of Judah" (chap. xxvii. 6) indicates the date of composition as subsequent to the disruption of the kingdom at the accession of Rehoboam.

The contents of the narrative before us are very diversified, and full of interest for the archæologist and psychologist, as well as for those who read with a view to spiritual edification. It gives us history, with the personal attraction of biography superadded. The three chief personages are Samuel, Saul, and David; and about these three, the history, which covers about 120 years, may be conveniently grouped.

I. SAMUEL.—This famous man, like Moses, is made known to us from his birth. It was a time of great disorder and depression. The high priest, Eli, seems to have acted as judge,

or chief magistrate—a new thing in the Theocracy, which did not put civil or political power into the hands of priests. His character was feeble; evils were not repressed, and the times were out of joint. The sons of the high priest were rapacious and debauched, “exemplars,” as one has remarked, “of the grasping and worldly clergy of all ages.” At such a time was Samuel born in Ramah. He was given in answer to his mother’s prayer—that mother, herself endowed with the prophetic spirit, and pouring out her grateful heart in a hymn which is one of the finest Hebrew lyrics, and which anticipates the song of the blessed Virgin Mary.

In tender youth, Samuel waited on the high priest in the sacred tent at Shiloh. And every one knows the touching story of the child waking at night and hearing his Maker’s voice. “Speak,” at length he answered, “for Thy servant heareth.” And a stern message it was that he received for the high priest, foreshadowing, indeed, the somewhat severe character that was to mark this prophet’s future ministry. A fine touch, surely, of biographical skill, to show us Samuel, first, a grave sweet child, “girded with a linen ephod,” before he is portrayed in his manhood, controlling all Israel with ease, and making the stately King Saul tremble in his presence.

The doom of Eli’s house was fulfilled. The young priests died in battle with the Philistines, and their father fell back in grief at the tidings that the ark, which they defended, had fallen into the hands of the uncircumcised; so he brake his neck and died. It was a dark day for Israel; the house of God that was in Shiloh was broken up; “God forsook the tabernacle in Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men, and delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy’s hand; their priests fell by the sword.”\* A child was then named Ichabod, because the glory had departed from Israel, and the ark of God was taken.

At this crisis, Samuel rose to his great position, second only to that of Moses, in shaping the course of Israel. Not by

\* Ps. lxxviii. 61-64.

warlike exploits, but by force of moral and spiritual character, he acquired and wielded undisputed authority, checked the tendency to fall apart into mere tribal existence, and judged all Israel at Mizpeh. He was of Levitical origin, had been brought up at the tabernacle, and was entitled to offer sacrifice, but he laid no great emphasis on rites of religion, and let the ark, after its restoration, lie for twenty years at Kirjath-Jearim. His influence was based on his acknowledged character as a seer who discerned, and a prophet who interpreted and uttered the Divine Will. On king and people alike he pressed the duty of obedience: "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams." His ministry was not in vain in the Lord, for under his guidance Israel renounced idolatry, and shook off the yoke of the Philistines.

All through life, this remarkable man maintained his lofty tone and sacred influence, and in his old age could challenge all Israel to point out a single instance in which he had used his authority for selfish or unrighteous ends. But his sons were not like him; and the elders of Israel, seeing them unworthy of the succession, and fearing lest, at Samuel's death, the country should relapse into the state of feebleness and disorder out of which he had raised it, proposed that they should have a king, like the nations round about. The project was not of faith, and Samuel entered his protest against it, on the score of its disloyalty and ingratitude to God. Nevertheless, the desire was granted, and the Lord caused it to issue for His glory in the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of His Anointed.

As in the commonwealth, so in the kingdom, Samuel continued to be revered as the seer, pronouncing on moral and spiritual questions, and maintaining the law and authority of Jehovah. He anointed the first king and the second; and while surrendering the political power which he had wielded without a murmur to the new head of the state, he took care to exact from the monarchy constitutional guarantees. This done, Samuel retired from the front of the history, and died

where he was born, at Ramah, his last years being saddened by the unworthiness of King Saul, fulfilling his own worst misgivings at the time when the elders first asked for a king. Altogether, we take him to have been, with the sole exception of Moses, the greatest man Israel had yet produced ;—a patriot, a statesman, an upright ruler, a prophet of righteousness, one who feared the face of neither king nor people, because he was upright and true to God. His ministry began and ended with stern messages, the first, in his childhood, to declare the rejection of the high priest and his sons ; the last, in his old age, to declare the rejection of the king. In the latter case, however, Samuel's grief was relieved by his knowledge of the Divine purpose, that David, the Bethlehemite, should survive the envy of Saul, and reign in place of the rejected one.

II. SAUL.—Saul exhibits a character, not without a certain moody splendour that fascinates, but with glaring faults almost from the outset of his career ; and, toward the close, a mournful deterioration, resulting in a tragical fate.

He first appears as a young man of unusual stature, and of that prepossessing appearance and impressive port, which delight the eye of the multitude. When called to the throne, he appeared to shrink from the post of honour ; but he soon acquitted himself well in the kingly employment of war, cheerfully put his life in jeopardy, and with a certain vehement courage rescued the city of Jabesh-Gilead from the Ammonites who surrounded it. After this exploit, the national voice enthusiastically confirmed him in the kingdom. It was a day of fair promise. The young king bore himself with a royal clemency toward those who objected to his elevation. Good impulses from the Spirit of God had, before this time, fallen on Saul. But, alas ! the Spirit of God did not dwell in him, and soon the defects of his mind and heart began to appear. Samuel, who behaved to him with kindness and deference, could not conceal his misgivings, and said to the people, " If ye

shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king."

In fact, Saul had only reigned two years when he began to fall away before God. At Gilgal he betrayed an unquiet, impatient heart, and assumed the part that belonged to Samuel, on which the prophet warned him that he had "done foolishly." Thereafter, when his son Jonathan, one of the most attractive persons in the whole history of Israel, and singularly free of his father's jealous temper, had, by a sudden attack on the Philistines, gained an advantage which soon developed into a general and decisive victory, Saul, in consequence of a rash word which he had spoken, would have repeated the harshness of Jephthah, and put his princely son to death; but the army prevented the crime—"the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not."

The king continued to fight in his impetuous manner, turning hither and thither, and "vexing all his enemies on every side." He certainly raised the martial capacity of his subjects; but he did not please the Lord or promote the Divine purposes for which Israel had been separated from the nations. The final test of his obedience was taken in a war which he waged with the Amalekites. He bore himself rather as a self-willed captain than as the executioner of a Divine judgment, and was rejected for his disobedience and the equivocation with which he tried to conceal his fault from the prophet Samuel.

Then he waxed worse and worse. Wild passions shook him, with fierce spasms of conscience and dark moods of jealousy.\* He fell into melancholy, and his courtiers trembled before him as he sat in his house with his javelin in his hand and an evil spirit brooding over him. His very courage seems to have

\* "My heart now never beats up heavenward.  
Once was I as a bird that took slight soars :  
Now never mounts my soul above the ground.  
I have no Godward movings now : no God  
Now, from His genial seat of light remote,  
Sends down to me a ray."

—*Saul : a Drama.* Part I. ; Act 5 ; Scene 1.

dwindled, for when the Philistine giant defied the army of Israel, the king, who had been admired for his stature and strength, and whose armour no ordinary man could wear, appears to have shrunk from the encounter. Worse still, he was capable of ingratitude and peevish jealousy toward the brave youth who delivered Israel. He sought his life in the palace and in the field, and hunted him as a partridge on the mountains. At every step the path of Saul now seemed to darken. He became restless, capricious, tyrannical. He cruelly devastated the city of the priests, slaying eighty-five of their number in cold blood. Good men fell away from his side, and such wretches as Doeg, the Edomite, obtained influence over him.\* Once and again, indeed, he seemed to relent, and a gleam of better feeling shot across his soul, as when David had generously spared his life, and he said, "Behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." But it was only a passing gleam, soon lost again in the blackness of this tragedy. At last the king sunk beneath his own self-respect, and had recourse to evil ways which he himself had condemned. He had expelled necromancers from the land, but learning that one resided at Endor, he stealthily consulted her. If he had been told, at the beginning of his reign, that he would himself repair for help to one of those who professed communication with the dead, he would have repelled the thought with indignation. But he was a man of that spiritual temperament which, if it cannot get communication from what is above, will take it from beneath rather than have none. "And Saul was sore distressed because he had no message from God by prophets or by dreams." The scene at Endor is mysterious, and is best left in shadow. Plainly, there ensued more than the woman was prepared for, and to her eyes an apparition of an aged prophet was visible, while the terrified

\* "Doeg, who for our priests no reverence knows,  
Fell on them with a double-handed sword,  
Like a strong thresher on a heap of corn,  
And cut them up in pieces."

—*Saul: a Drama.* Part III. ; Act 4 ; Scene 10.

king heard a voice. Saul leaped to the conclusion that it was Samuel ; but this we reckon very improbable, both because we cannot suppose that the rest of the blessed is disturbed by the call of necromancers, and because of the nature of the address delivered to Saul, which contains no tone of pity, or exhortation to repentance, or word of kindly counsel, but only upbraidings for the past, and gloomy prediction of death to-morrow, to drive the monarch to despair.

And so it ended with despair and death. On the mountains of Gilboa, Saul perished by his own hand. Mark how his sin found him out. As his first offence was committed in impatience to begin a contest with the Philistines, he died in battle with the Philistines ; and as his second offence, as king, was disobedience in war with the Amalekites, it was an Amalekite who brought his crown and bracelets, in vindictive triumph, to David. A sad history : but not without many parallels even in common life, where bright hopes are ruined by a wilful, haughty spirit. As in nature, so in human life, there are easy slopes down which, if one let himself roll, he may fall over a hidden precipice and never rise again.

III. DAVID.—We come to a star of the first magnitude—the sweet singer of Israel—the hero of many combats—the man who drew friendship and admiration after him wherever he moved—the king whom God exalted “to feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.”

Like Abel and Joseph, David was in youth a keeper of sheep, and his secluded life in the fields tended, no doubt, to enrich the poetic soul within him, as well as to exercise his vigilance and daring. While watching his father’s flocks by night, he looked up to the heavens—the work of God’s fingers,—the moon and the stars which He had ordained, and as he led the sheep in right paths unto green pastures, and drove away the robbers and beasts of prey, he sung of the Lord his Shepherd, and was trained in faith and patience for his own future career as the shepherd-king of Israel.

The prophet Samuel anointed him privately at Bethlehem, and the Spirit of the Lord, departing from Saul, came upon David ; but he did not reach the throne without a long experience of vicissitude and rejection. Summoned to court to play before the king, and relieve his morbid melancholy, David gained at once the favour of Saul, and was made armour-bearer or equerry to the king. He bore well his sudden promotion, strong in the very point of character in which Saul was so weak. Patient and self-controlled, he snatched at no honour, and never entered into any plot against the unhappy monarch. Indeed, he quietly retired from the court to the sheep-cotes of Bethlehem, and waited there till God's Providence called him forth.

The story of the single combat with Goliath is one of the most romantic ever written, and casts an undying charm about the gallant Bethlehemite. In the conflict, we see no miraculous element, but on David's part a fine combination of faith in God, with the careful use of the best weapons and skill he possessed. Having faith in God, the young champion kept a perfect self-possession, and taking the right weapons for assailing the giant at a distance, and knowing how to use them, he gained the day. David's sling was to him as a rifle, and sent the smooth stone—the bullet of the period—crashing through the giant's forehead, before he, with his utmost strides, could come to close quarters. At the end of the fight, all the army of Israel shouted, but one hears no shout from David—sees no vaunting in him, for a man who walks or fights in faith can never boast himself as they do who walk or fight after the flesh.

After this victory, there could be no return to the sheep-cotes. David at once became, and ever after continued to be, a prominent public man. He had great trials and risks, but he had a peculiar solace in the generous love of the crown prince Jonathan. Of all men, Jonathan had most to fear from David's advancement, but his character admitted no stain of selfishness, and he loved him "as his own soul." The friends were knit together by congeniality of disposition—both in the bloom of youth—

both adventurous and brave, and better still, both fearers of Jehovah, taking no pleasure in the court of the wild, unhappy Saul. In this power of attracting and retaining enthusiastic friendship, David suggests to us Jesus Christ his son, who is dearer to His own than life itself, and is such a Beloved and such a Friend that it is no loss, but gain, to renounce everything for Him.

Then David's history moves on, through distinction, peril, friendship, war, love, marriage, narrow escapes, concealment in dens and caves of the earth, wanderings in the wilderness of Judah, and even the life of a refugee among the Philistines. It was a time of discipline and affliction, suggesting the rejection and humiliation of the Son of David before He was exalted. But David was not harmless and undefiled as the holy Jesus was. At times his faith was clouded, and clouded faith led, as it always leads, to fluctuating counsels and questionable conduct. With all his faults, however, full in view, we recognise in David, throughout the history, a man of God in preparation for a higher trust—one who cannot be extinguished or pushed aside,—patient, skilful, ready for emergencies, magnanimous—the master-spirit of his time.

Saul precedes David. Confusion, failure, pride going before destruction, and the haughty spirit before a fall—these are the attempts of the flesh to set up a kingdom. Their end is catastrophe, as it was with the reign of Saul, as it will be with the reign of Antichrist. The kingdom of David follows. There seems to be long delay in setting it up, but when it does come, it will be established for ever. Now Saul began with applause of men, and ended with rejection from God. David began with rejection by men, and then had the kingdom given him by God. It is the way of Christ. He was rejected, and therefore is exalted. True that His authority is disputed and refused by the spirit of Saul-like darkness and confusion on the earth, but in the end God will give to Him the throne of His father David. Let us follow Him in the rejection, in the hold at Engedi, and the wilderness at Judah, and we shall stand in His court, and

see His face, when He comes to the kingdom and reigns before His ancients gloriously. The Gentiles who attend Him from Gath of the Philistines, shall yet come to Jerusalem.

“ There is the throne of David,  
And there from care released,  
The song of them that triumph—  
The shout of them that feast.  
And they who with their Leader  
Have conquered in the fight,  
For ever and for ever  
Are clad in robes of white.”

## II. SAMUEL.

THIS book, originally one with 1 Samuel, continues and almost concludes the life of David. He is the central figure throughout. Round him are grouped many remarkable men, but no one of those times makes such an impression on us as David himself, through the force of his character, the versatility of his mind, and the variety of incidents and experience through which he passed. The narrative is worthy of its place in the canon of Scripture, not only for its biography of this great king, but also for its intimations of Messiah to come, its practical teachings concerning the way of patience and faith, and its piercing exposure of the lustings of the flesh which war against the soul. There are fascinating passages in the book, and splendid bursts of poetry, but there are pages that we read with pain and shame, for the ways of David in prosperity were not so close with God as in the earlier days when he bore the yoke in his youth.

The story opens with his generous lament over the death of Saul and his friend Jonathan. Had he been a selfish aspirant after power, he would have exulted, but his patriotism was too sincere to hear of a defeat of Israel without grief, and he had a feeling of kindness even for Saul, whom he ever regarded as the Lord's anointed. Much more for Jonathan: "Woe is me for thee, my brother Jonathan!" The elegy of David on this occasion is perhaps the first poem of the kind in any literature.

He that believes need not make haste, and David did not spring at the vacant throne. His first care was to find a city for his armed men and their families, because Ziklag had been

burned. Inquiring of the Lord, and following His direction, he marched into the territory of his own tribe, and settled his followers in and around Hebron. There the men of Judah anointed and proclaimed him king. His first step was to send a conciliatory message to the adherents of the house of Saul on the East of the Jordan. But Abner, the captain of Saul's host, proclaimed Ishbosheth, a son of the late king, and succeeded in retaining, in allegiance to him, not only the land of Gilead, but the powerful tribe of Ephraim, and the vigorous sons of Asher and Benjamin also. It seemed as if David would never reach the dignity for which he had been in youth anointed by Samuel, for seven years and a half ran on, and he was still no more than king or chief of Judah in Hebron.

Civil war broke out, and the house of David steadily gained on the house of Saul. At last Abner saw that he could no longer prop up the throne of Ishbosheth, a prince of feeble character, quite unfit to be a rival to the son of Jesse. He therefore seized an opportunity of quarrel, went over to the side of the King of Judah, and by his open defection virtually settled the political question of the day. But the time was stained with deeds of treacherous cruelty. Abner was murdered by Joab, a relative and distinguished officer of King David, partly out of revenge for the slaying of Joab's youngest brother by Abner in battle, and partly out of jealousy, lest this experienced captain should have military rank above himself in the national army. Ishbosheth too was assassinated in his bed by two ruffians, who thought to ingratiate themselves with David by the deed; but both the deeds were abhorred by David's soul. The king lamented over Abner, and compelled Joab to walk as a mourner in sackcloth at the funeral. The murderers of Ishbosheth were treated like the Amalekite who had boasted of slaying Saul his father; they were sternly put to death.

By universal consent, David was now proclaimed King of all Israel, and for the third time the holy oil was poured upon his head. He was in the prime of life—thirty-seven—a very

lion of the tribe of Judah. His first act was to choose Jerusalem as the capital, and to wrest it from the Jebusites, who thought their city so impregnable that it could be defended by the blind and the lame. Joab scaled it, and the old seat of Melchizedec became the city of David: "So David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him." Under him the monarchy took a far wider range and firmer root than under Saul. The dominion was extended by many conquests. The court and camp were carefully organised. The internal government of the realm was put under the charge of proper officers. A commercial league, very favourable to Israel, was made with the Phenicians, and the fame and influence of the Hebrew King spread over all the East. There was no rival power of much influence, for, as monumental evidence shows, both Egypt and Assyria were at the time exceptionally weak and quiet.

David now saw around him faithful prophets, wise counsellors, gallant captains, a disciplined army, a loyal people—all that a king would have. But he was at heart, and above all, a man of God, and these things could not content him, while the ark of the Lord was in obscurity, and the religious worship in confusion or neglect. So he resolved to move the ark from Kirjath-Jearim, where it lay, to the new capital. To mark the greatness of the occasion he went at the head of thirty thousand men to the forest-city, and found the sacred ark in the house of Abinadab. But the expedition came to a sorry end. The ark was most improperly set on a car after the manner of the heathen. This was the first error, and it led to a second. One of the young Levites in attendance presumptuously put his hand on the ark to steady it, when the car shook. Suddenly he fell dead. At once the joy of the day was turned to mourning. The voice of psalms, with instruments of music, ceased. The king, always quick in his feelings, was greatly agitated, changed his purpose, and brought the ark no farther, but committed it to the pious care of Obededom, the Gittite.

After three months, David recurred to his plan of fetching the ark to Jerusalem, and took care to have it carried by the Levites on poles according to the law. In person, he led the triumphal procession or dance. So the solemn transfer was accomplished, and the gates and doors of Jerusalem were lifted up, that the King of glory might enter in. It was one of the grandest days in David's eventful life. Full of faith and joy, he offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, and blessed the people. At evening he returned to the palace to bless his household. But there, an uncongenial spirit encountered him. Michal, the wife of his youth, retained the spirit of Saul, her father, in David's house. Instead of being a helper of his joy, she scoffed at his fervour, and therefore was doomed to childlessness. It is the fate which attends those churches and individuals, in every age, who deride enthusiasm and holy excitation of soul. They may not die, but they are doomed to barrenness.

The next thought of the king was to erect a temple in which the ark should be preserved ; but it was intimated to him through the prophet Nathan, that this should be the work of his son. At the same time God promised to make him a house, and establish his throne for ever. This was the covenant promise, on which David, and all the men of faith, relied—"the sure mercies of David," which the New Testament declares to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. "As concerning that he raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David."\*

The energies of the king, finding no scope in temple-building, returned to the terrible business of war. All the nations round about felt the edge of his sword, and were subdued, either by the hero-king himself, or by the relentless Joab, who was to him what Sisera had been to Jabin, or Abner to Saul. War is a cruel occupation in every age, and it is not concealed that the wars of David were conducted in the severe and vengeful temper of those times in the East, with fire as well as sword,

\* Acts xiii. 34.

shocking torture of captives, and savage extermination of families.

Yet it had been better for David that he had remained at the head of his army than tarry at Jerusalem, as he did while Rabbah was besieged by Joab. It was then that he fell into shameful sin, from which indeed God in mercy restored his soul, but from which it is impossible to cleanse his tarnished reputation. No right-thinking man can read the unvarnished narrative without horror and grief. True, that we must not judge David by the light of our own time or country. What he committed was just the kind of crime most usual with Eastern monarchs, and David had nothing of the austerity of a Christian hero-king, an Alfred, or a St. Louis, or a Gustavus Adolphus. He had always allowed himself indulgence which the moral sense of Christian times forbids. Nevertheless, it was a terrible fall for the man who restored the worship of God and wrote so many songs of Zion, and had resolved to walk within his house with a perfect heart, to commit adultery, and then bring the guilt of deceit and murder on his soul.

For a while he seemed to prosper in his sin. Happy in his ignorance, Uriah died as a soldier dies. The beautiful Bathsheba became David's wife, and bore him a son whom he passionately loved. His conscience seems to have slept secure, but "the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

Well for the king that the Lord did not let him alone, but sent to him Nathan, His servant. Appearing suddenly in the royal presence, the prophet seemed to claim redress for a poor man who had suffered wrong. It was the true mission of a prophet, and the king hearkened with interest. Then Nathan spoke that apologue of the poor man and his ewe lamb, which cannot be surpassed in tender and exquisite beauty. The monarch heard, and with his moral sense as quick as ever in regard to others, though torpid in reference to himself, condemned the selfishness of that rich man who spared his own flock and seized the one pet-lamb of his poor neighbour. Then came Nathan's opportunity. With undaunted look he

pronounced the tremendous words, "Thou art the man!"—and pressed on David's conscience, not so much his licentiousness, as the meanness and selfishness of his sin against Uriah. The king recognised the rebuke of God. His sin had found him out; his soul was cleft with conviction, and bowed down in an agony of shame. When at last his lips moved, he extenuated nothing, pleaded no palliation, laid no part of the fault upon another, but simply said, "I have sinned against Jehovah!" Against Uriah indeed he had done wrong; but this was his deepest distress, the sin against the Lord. Pent up in his own bosom, in silence and secrecy, this sin would have ruined David, but, ingenuously confessed and repented of, it was forgiven, and that at once. Nathan said, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin." Well might David write, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. . . . I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."\*

But though free pardon obliterates condemnation, there may yet be much correction from iniquity; and from this period of his life David tasted bitter sorrow, especially domestic sorrow, because his sin had been domestic sin. The child of Bathsheba died. Then very shocking crimes broke out among the elder children of the king. The lovely Tamar—"The Palm-Tree"—Absalom's sister, was dishonoured; and Amnon, her half brother, the eldest son of the monarch, and heir-apparent to the throne, was for this outrage slain by the retainers of Absalom.

The last-named prince united to a most prepossessing exterior an unscrupulous temper and a vain heart. Treated by David with partiality, he ill-requited his father's love. When restored from the exile into which he had fled on the assassination of the prince Amnon, he took measures to supplant and dethrone the now aged king. The time was well chosen for his purpose. David's moral influence over his subjects had been weakened by the state of his family and the stain of his heinous sin. The tribe of Ephraim had always been somewhat jealous of the

\* Ps. xxxii. 1-5.

arrangement by which the Chief of Judah had become their king; and the friends of Saul's dynasty in Benjamin, and on the other side of Jordan, fostered the dissatisfaction. With the people of Judah Absalom took pains to ingratiate himself, and when his measures were ripe, seized on Hebron, raised a formidable revolt, and gathered a large army. Though he was himself a man rather of impetuous will than of cool judgment, he had the great advantage of having at his right hand, as counsellor, Ahithophel, apparently the grandfather of Bathsheba,\* and reputed to be the most astute man in the nation.

At this trying emergency the character of David shone again with something like the lustre of his happier days. He was devout, resigned, generous, unselfish, yet wise and wary too. He left Jerusalem surrounded by his faithful guards, the Cherethites, Pelethites, and Gittites, and attended by his most gallant officers, Joab and Abishai, Benaiah and Ittai.<sup>h</sup> Hushai, his "friend," did him a great service in affecting to support Absalom, and defeating the shrewd counsel of Ahithophel, who, in wounded pride, abandoned the rebel camp and committed suicide.

At last the royal and the rebel armies met beyond Jordan. In the decisive battle which ensued, the troops of Absalom outnumbered those of David, but they were entangled in the woods, and routed with great slaughter. The rebel prince himself miserably died. Joab, who had reconciled him to his father after Amnon's death, was resolved that there should be no second reconciliation, and, disregarding the charge of the king to spare the life of his son, consulted only the good of the State, and thus, in his stern fashion, finished the matter. "He took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, whilst he was yet alive, in the midst of the oak; and ten young men, that bare Joab's armour, compassed about and smote Absalom and slew him. And they took Absalom and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him. Now Absalom, in his lifetime, had

\* 2 Sam. xi. 3; xxiii. 34.

taken and reared up for himself the pillar which is in the king's dale, for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance, and he called the pillar after his own name, and it is called unto this day, Absalom's monument." \* In all ages, the Jews have thrown stones, with execrations, on Absalom's tomb. But King David mourned for his son with all the intensity of his nature, "Would God I had died for thee! O Absalom! my son! my son!"

Then we read of the restoration of the king, and recognise in him the same mixture of generosity and forbearance with policy and energy that marked him all through life. He showed clemency to Shimei, the Benjamite, who had cursed him in his flight, and now grovelled before him in his triumph. He expressed the utmost gratitude to the fine old Gileadite, Barzillai, for his kindness in the time of need. He received Mephibosheth, the lame son of Jonathan, and admitted the explanation which he gave of his apparent disloyalty; but, as we read the story, scarcely did him all the justice he deserved. His throne, indeed, was not yet out of danger, and his mind was troubled. The jealousy of Israel, *i.e.*, of the tribes led by Ephraim, broke out anew against Judah; and at a critical moment, Sheba, another of the turbulent tribe of Benjamin, blew the trumpet of revolt, and drew away the people from David. Now the king had so far resented the conduct of Joab, in slaying Absalom, that he had deprived him of his command, and appointed, in his stead, Amasa, Joab's cousin, who had served as general in the rebel army. He sent this officer to gather the men of Judah, in order to suppress at once the new rebellion. But Joab would not thus be superseded, and gave another proof of his fierce temper and relentless resolution. Embracing his kinsman, Amasa, he assassinated him, as, many years before, he had struck down Abner. Then, resuming the command, he quickly brought the rebellion to an end, and returned triumphant to Jerusalem. David felt that this son of Zeruiah was too strong for him, and retained him as captain of the host.

\* 2 Sam. xviii. 14-18.

The last story in this book shows how the site of the future temple was secured. The king numbered his people in such a spirit that the Lord was displeased. A terrible pestilence came on the land, and brooded over Jerusalem. David saw, in vision, the destroying angel stretching out his hand over the capital, and he confessed his sin, and cried to the Lord. Gad, the seer, came to him from the Lord, with instructions to rear an altar and offer sacrifice at the spot where he beheld the vision. It was the threshing-floor of Araunah, without the city wall of that period, on the east side. This Araunah represented the Jebusites, the old inhabitants of Jerusalem, and wished to make a free gift of the ground to the king: but David insisted on paying for it, and prevailed. Then the altar was reared, and the plague was stayed. The spot and all around became sacred soil. There the Temple was built by Solomon; and the site of Araunah's threshing-floor is recognised at this day with almost idolatrous veneration, under the Mussulman "Dome of the Rock."

Almost at the end of the history, we find two songs of David, noble specimens of his poetic genius. The 22d chapter is an ode of triumph after deliverance out of the hands of enemies, and is almost exactly the same as the 18th Psalm. In chapter xxiii. we have the last poem of the son of Jesse, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. He was conscious of something higher and better than genius. The Spirit of the Lord so spake into him, that the word on his tongue was the word of the Spirit. Then he sang of the ideal of a just reign, and the advent, in his own line, of a righteous and prosperous Ruler over men; for though his house was not with God as it ought to have been, the covenant was well ordered and sure. He prophesied also the doom of the wicked who should oppose the Just One. And in all this, David, being a prophet, sang not so much of Solomon or of Hezekiah, as of a Greater than these, that Just One, born in Bethlehem, who is called the Son of David, and of whose kingdom there shall be no end.

The history, as we have seen, is crowded with characters.

It would be pleasant to dwell on the lowly love of Mephibosheth; the tried friendship of Ittai; the holy fidelity of Nathan; the lofty courage of Benaiah and the heroes; the patriarchal kindness of Barzillai; and the princely courtesy of Araunah, the last, not least, of the Jebusites. It might be useful, too, to gather warnings from Joab's deeds of blood; Amnon's intemperate passion; Absalom's base ambition; and Shimei's violence and meanness. But the great lessons come to us from David himself, around whom, as a centre, all these characters revolved,—David, one of the rarest men in history, prophet, poet, warrior, ruler, saint and sinner, a man of sorrows, and yet a man of the brightest qualities, and of the most devout joy in God.\*

He sets forth Christ in his wars—going forth conquering and to conquer; and Christ in his psalms, the Man of suffering and the King of glory. But as a man, David is disabled by the shadow on his history from being a full type of Christ. Alas! he is all the nearer to us:—he touches our life who are sinners, and by such psalms as the 51st, shows us, when we have sinned, how to pray.

\* "Is any in joy or in sorrow? There are saints at hand to encourage and guide him. There is Abraham for nobles, Job for men of wealth and merchandise, Moses for patriots, Samuel for rulers, Elijah for reformers, Joseph for those who rise into distinction; there is Daniel for the forlorn, Jeremiah for the persecuted, Hannah for the downcast, Ruth for the friendless, the Shunamite for the matron, Caleb for the soldier, Boaz for the farmer, Mephibosheth for the subject; but none is vouchsafed to us in more varied lights, and with more abundant and more affecting lessons, whether in his history or in his writings, than He who is described as cunning in playing, and a mighty, valiant man, and prudent in matters, and comely in person, and favoured by Almighty God."—Dr. J. H. NEWMAN.

## I. KINGS.

FIRST and Second Kings formed in Hebrew one book, like First and Second Samuel. The division was made in the Greek and Latin versions, with which English Bibles are arranged to correspond. Though not written by the same pen as the Books of Samuel, these of the Kings are obviously intended as a continuation of the history; and this continuity is expressed by the secondary titles in our English Bibles, following the titles in the Vulgate. These four Books furnish a consecutive narrative of the Hebrew monarchy from its rise to its downfall.

The tradition is that our two Books of Kings were written by Jeremiah the prophet, and it is probably true. There is a similarity in style to the acknowledged writings of that prophet; and the time in which Jeremiah prophesied agrees well with the supposition, for this history must have been written by one who lived in the period of the captivity at the end of the kingdom, and yet by one who did not survive the captivity, since it ends without so much as hinting at a restoration from Babylon.

The chief matters in 1 Kings are the reign of Solomon, the division of the kingdom into two at his death, and the ministry in the northern kingdom of the prophet Elijah.

I. The reign of David was troubled to the last. Though he was no more than seventy years of age, the adventurous and agitated life through which he had passed had so worn out the

great king, that he was feeble, and needed constant nursing. His weakness encouraged disorder, and still the trouble came out of his own house. A favourite son, Adonijah, tried to seize the regal position, to prevent the succession of Solomon. The priest Abiathar counselled him, and, strange to say, Joab, faithful to David during a long life of military service, went over to Adonijah's interest. He meant it, indeed, not against David, but against Solomon, whose accession he for some reason disliked. The aged king, however, was made aware of the plot by his trusty friend and adviser, Nathan the prophet, and soon showed that the old energy was still within him. If the lion of the tribe of Judah was sick, he was a lion still. Assuring the queen Bathsheba that he would secure her son's succession, he caused the faithful captain Benaiah, the prophet Nathan, and the priest Zadok to lead forth the young prince Solomon, to pour anointing oil upon his head, and immediately with blasts of trumpets to proclaim him king. It was done; and Adonijah's party, panic-struck with this promptitude, fled in all directions. The danger was past, "and David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David."

The kingdom of Solomon was peace, but his accession was marked by severities. Adonijah, spared at first, was, through his indiscreet ambition, condemned and slain. Abiathar, last of Eli's house, was deposed. Joab, who had killed so many in fair fight, and at least two great soldiers by foul treachery, was put to death. Shimei, too, the bitter partisan of the house of Saul, was "interned," as the phrase now is, at Jerusalem, and, going beyond the bounds, was executed. So perished all Solomon's enemies, and his kingdom was established in peace. The writer describes David as charging his son from his sick-bed to put these men to death, and attributes to the aged king cruel and vengeful language, evidently unconscious that this would hurt the sensibilities of any who should ever read this book. So far was the spirit of those times from the gentle and forgiving tone of Christ.

The characteristics of Solomon as a king were wisdom, justice, and magnificence.

*Wisdom* he asked of God, and obtained a wise and understanding heart. He seems to have had a singularly comprehensive mind, that could take pleasure in many studies, a very wide power of observation and reflection, a strong grasp of all the great problems of human life, and "largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore." He was the first man of science in his nation, and though his works on natural history have not been preserved, because they were foreign to the purposes of the Bible, yet all God-fearing astronomers, botanists, and zoologists may fairly be reckoned as followers of Solomon. On the gravest themes that occupy the mind, "he was wiser than all men," even the famous Idumeans of the East, and the equally famed scholars of Egypt. Like all men of a full mind, he delighted to communicate, and poured himself out in three thousand proverbs, and songs a thousand and five. He also excelled in witty and piercing conversation, and such was the reputation of the royal sage, that "there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom."\* One sovereign, indeed, was not content to send an embassy. The Queen of Sheba, herself a lover of wisdom, came in state to Jerusalem; and, when the king answered all her questions, she was astonished at his wisdom, even more than at his magnificence.

The *justice* of Solomon was of the greatest benefit to his kingdom. It was held to be one of the first duties of a sovereign to sit in judgment, and his decisions were guided by a righteous purpose and a consummate discretion. At the very beginning of his reign, his penetration was evinced in deciding between two mothers who contended for a child. It was his doctrine that "the king's throne shall be established in righteousness," † and as was his doctrine, such was his practice,—judging the poor of the people, and delivering their souls from deceit and violence.

\* 1 Kings iv. 34.

† Prov. xxv. 5.

The *magnificence* of Solomon is vividly described. In his days the national wealth greatly increased. By marriage at an early age, he obtained a close alliance with the court of Egypt, and imported from that country horses and chariots. With the King of Tyre, an ally of his father David, he maintained the most friendly relations, got from him architects and timber for his great works at Jerusalem, and even sent out merchant-fleets, manned principally by skilful Tyrian sailors. One of these went to Ophir, in the East, the other to Tarshish, in the West. Thus Solomon widened the minds of his people by communication with other countries and races, and astonished them with the gold, silver, ivory, and many other precious imports that his ships brought from afar. The internal administration of the kingdom was systematically conducted under proper officers, and though heavy taxation was incurred by the splendour of the court and the vast public works undertaken, the continuance of peace and prosperity enabled the people to bear the burden. It is written in a tone of exultation, "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and making merry:"\* The appointments of the palace were of the most costly description, vessels of gold, noble horses and chariots, a throne of ivory with a seat of gold, a palanquin of cedar with silver pillars and a golden floor, robes of such gorgeous beauty that when Christ would indicate the highest stretch of human splendour in appearance, He spoke of how "Solomon was arrayed in all his glory."

Like all monarchs with a taste for magnificence, Solomon was a great builder. Cities, towers, and palaces, rose at his command. By far his most important work, however, was the Temple in Jerusalem, erected on the site already purchased by King David. Phenician skill combined with the Hebrew industry in this great erection. The profuse ornamental work was entrusted to Hiram, an eminent sculptor and engraver, of mixed Israelite and Tyrian descent. All the dimensions were of course on a larger scale than those of the Tabernacle; but

\* 1 Kings iv. 20.

the general arrangement was preserved—the courts, then the Holy Place (lit by *ten* seven-branched lamps)—and then the Holy of Holies, where, in darkness and mystery, the ark of God rested between the figures of cherubim. It was the veritable ark that was constructed in the wilderness, and that still contained the stone tables of the Law, which was now brought into the place prepared for it. When all the work was finished, the Temple was dedicated with sacrifice, prayer, and praise, the king himself taking the prominent part in all the service. It is admirable to see how soberly he judged of his work, even in that day of exultation, and how clearly he perceived the insufficiency of any, even the most splendid edifice, to contain or enshrine the Almighty God. “Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?”\*

So far as we have traced his history, this king, in many points, suggests and prefigures Christ. David was active strength, Solomon, wisdom and peace; Christ is both power and wisdom, mighty Conqueror and Prince of peace. He is the King, reigning in righteousness, to the gates of whose Jerusalem the resources of all nations must be brought. All nations shall call Him blessed. From the West the kings of Tarshish and the isles shall bring presents; from the East, the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Happy they who come to Him now, and hear His wisdom! A Greater than Solomon is here. In our “Prince of Peace” are hid “all treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” good counsels for saints, words of salvation for sinners, and words in season for the weary. Let us remember the Queen of Sheba, and seek Him while He may be found, commune with Him of all that is in our hearts; He will receive us, He will answer the questions of an earnest spirit, He will grant us all our desires.†

It must be added that the end of this king’s history is very disappointing. As a man, Solomon is even more unfit than David to be a personal representative of the undefiled Saviour.

\* 1 Kings viii. 27.

† See Matt. xii. 42.

Through the fatal institution of polygamy, his court was demoralised by foreign princesses and concubines; heathen rites of worship were introduced, and idolatrous altars rose hard by the Temple of Jehovah. Solomon began to be weak as other men. Falling from righteousness, he ceased to be a prince of peace, and the latter years of his reign were disturbed by adversaries. The Lord said that He would have rent the kingdom from him, were it not for David his father's sake.

II. The history casts no light of hope over the sad fall of Solomon, and leaves his fate uncertain. After his death, the old discord between Judah and Ephraim broke out again, and the son and successor of the wise man being a fool, a rupture of the kingdom was precipitated. Rehoboam retained only Judah, with a measure of support from Benjamin and Simeon. The other tribes renounced the house of David, and appointed as their king a vigorous young chief of the tribe of Ephraim, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who had won the goodwill of Shishak, king of Egypt. This prince, reviving the memory of the great Ephraimite, Joshua, the son of Nun, established his power at Shechem. Alas! he made Israel to sin by raising calves for worship at Dan and Bethel. Having spent years of exile in Egypt, he represented, by the Egyptian image of the ox, the God who had brought up Israel out of the house of bondage. It was an exact repetition of the sin of Aaron and the tribes in the wilderness; and in both cases, the summons to worship the molten calf is expressed in precisely the same terms,—“Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt!”\* The sin of Jeroboam proved the ultimate ruin of his kingdom. The professed worship of Jehovah under the form of golden images led to the adoption of heathen rites and idols, and the evil consequence of this policy is traced and noted through the whole history of the northern kingdom. Every king, of whatever dynasty, who broke the first or second

\* Exod. xxxii. 4; 1 Kings xii. 28.

commandment of the Divine law, "walked in the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, wherewith he made Israel to sin."

The First Book of Kings gives scanty information of the small kingdom of Judah. Rehoboam had a long but inglorious reign. He was seriously weakened by an Egyptian invasion, instigated, in all likelihood, by his rival Jeroboam.\* His son was like him—an unworthy prince. His grandson Asa, and great-grandson Jehoshaphat, returned to the footsteps of David, and "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord."

Attention is principally turned to the northern kingdom, and its history is full of trouble and violence. The reigning house was not protected by any divine covenant like the family of David at Jerusalem, and the dynasty was frequently changed. Jeroboam's son and all his descendants were ruthlessly slain by a chief of Issachar, named Baasha. Baasha's son in turn was put to death by Zimri, one of his officers; and not only his sons, but all his kinsfolks and friends were massacred. Zimri's usurpation lasted only one short week; and power fell into the hands of Omri, then at the head of the army. He departed further than any of the previous kings from the true worship and service of Jehovah, but he did one great thing for his kingdom in choosing the site of Samaria, and founding there a new capital.

The second of the Omri dynasty was a prince of evil fame, who married a Phœnician princess of still more odious repute. Ahab was wicked, but not without some vein of good feeling. Jezebel was reckless, cruel, and licentious. She introduced the Phœnician worship of Ashtoreth and Baal, and hunted down the prophets and worshippers of Jehovah in a bloody persecution.

III. It was at this crisis that one of the most striking figures in all the Old Testament appeared—Elijah the Tishbite.

\* Chap. xiv. 25-28. In the longer account of this invasion in 2 Chron. xii. 2-12, we read that Shishak "took fenced cities." This is confirmed by a celebrated inscription at Karnak recording conquests by Sheshenk (Shishak), on which the names of cities in Judah and Israel are traced.

While the priesthood was preserved in the kingdom of Judah, prophets were more prominent in that of Israel. Ramah, Bethel, and Gilgal, where "the sons of the prophets" dwelt, were all within its boundaries. Ahijah and Shemaiah were prophets of mark in Jeroboam's reign. Elijah is introduced simply as one of the inhabitants of Gilead. Of his lineage and early nurture, we read not a word; but God had raised up that lofty spirit in the wilds on the east of the Jordan, to stand before the ruling wickedness of the time, and to bear witness to the truth signified by the name he bore, Elijah, that Jehovah was God.

There fell on the land a long and terrible drought. It had been predicted by Elijah, who during the time found shelter, first by the brook Cherith, afterwards at Zarephath, a town of Zidon, in the house of a widow, whose child he restored to life. At the end of the time appointed for the drought, he returned into the land of Israel and confronted Ahab, not fearing the wrath of the king, but charging on his conscience his heavy sin in forsaking Jehovah and following Baalim. At his instance, the king summoned the prophets of Baal and the people to Mount Carmel. There the question of Jehovah or Baal was submitted to public ordeal, and in the result, the prophets of Baal having obtained no response, and the Lord answering Elijah's appeal by fire, the people fell on their faces and cried, "Jehovah, He is the God; Jehovah, He is the God." Then ensued death to the prophets of Baal, to insure the cessation of Baal-worship, and to fulfil the law of Moses which denounced capital punishment against any who enticed Israel to idolatry.\* The people had halted between two opinions, but the men who were put to death had shown no such hesitation;—they were the leaders of national apostasy, and the abettors of Jezebel, in cutting off the prophets of the Lord.

Having called down fire from heaven, Elijah next prayed for rain, and it fell in torrents. "Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and it

\* Deut. xiii. 6-9.

rained not on the earth for three years and six months ; and he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." \*

The bravest men have their times of weakness and misgiving, and Elijah seems to have suffered from reaction, after his stern encounter with the champions of Baal. Hearing of the wrath of the vindictive Jezebel, he fled for his life, and yet in the wilderness he wearied of his life, and desired that he might die. The Lord had great patience with His servant, and, after making terrors to pass by at the Mount Horeb, spoke to him in a still, small voice, and recalled him to public service. Elijah had been discouraged by the impression that he stood alone ; so it was revealed to him that the Lord had preserved for himself seven thousand faithful ones, even in that dark time. And still further to cheer the prophet, he was permitted to have an attendant who should be trained as his successor. This was Elisha, the son of Shaphat, whom the Tishbite abruptly summoned from the field where he was ploughing with oxen. Elisha gave a feast of farewell to his people ; "then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him."

The book before us ends with the ruin of Ahab. He committed a great sin. Breaking the tenth commandment in coveting Naboth's vineyard, he succeeded in seizing it by breaking the ninth and sixth commandments, by false witness and murder. When he hesitated, Jezebel, the Clytemnestra and the Lady Macbeth of the story, supplied the lacking resolution, and carried through this wickedness. Ahab took possession of the vineyard, but his exultation was soon turned to fear, for he was suddenly confronted by Elijah, and heard, in plain words, the doom of himself, his queen, and all his house. The king's spirit was troubled. "He rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." But it was no deep or permanent change. When judgment was taken off from Pharaoh, he was the same proud Pharaoh still, and when Ahab's terror had gone, he was the same wilful

\* James v. 17, 18.

and cruel Ahab as before. God indeed so far regarded Ahab's humiliation as to defer the judgment on his house. If one may so speak, the Lord caught at an opportunity to show Himself pitiful, even to such wretches as then reigned in Samaria, and to convince Israel that He was slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. But there is no light whatever around the fate of Ahab. At the instigation of false prophets, he went into battle with the king of Syria, and was mortally wounded. In the evening he died, and was taken to Samaria for burial. "They washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood." So ended the first part of the tragedy of the house of Omri.

Elijah suggests John the Baptist, who came indeed in the same "spirit and power." The points of correspondence are briefly these—familiarity with the deserts and solitudes, austere manner and dress, strong reproof of prevailing evils, intrepid fidelity in calling all classes of men to repentance, exposure to the wrath of a wicked king and a yet more wicked queen; continuance of their influence after death through disciples, and the result of their personal labours, that "many of the children of Israel did they turn to the Lord their God."

The Elijah ministry must come forth again, to confront sin in high places, and call kings and nations to repentance, lest the Lord smite the earth with a curse. Indeed, Elijah as well as Moses must come to every heart. Moses, the law, gives knowledge of sin; Elijah, the prophet, calls sin to mind, disturbs the conscience, abolishes the idols. John the Baptist prepares the way of the Lord in the heart, as well as in the earth, calling to repentance. Then Christ comes, greater than he, baptizing with the Holy Ghost, speaking pardon, breathing peace.

## II. KINGS.

THE second book, or rather, second part of the one Book of Kings, traces the course of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah to their fall. It is not, however, by any means, a mere civil history, for it keeps always in view a "use of edification," and therefore dismisses with brevity long reigns, and important wars and conquests, in order to give prominence to the moral lessons and admonitions of the time, and to the religious characteristics and tendencies of kings, nobles, priests, and people.

### I. OF ISRAEL ;—The Prophets and the Kings.

#### 1. *The Prophets.*

Elijah was to the last a fiery spirit. In the beginning of the book we find him calling down fire from heaven to consume the men who were sent to take him prisoner. The next thing we read is, that he himself went up as by fire into heaven. Having paid a last visit to the schools or communities of the prophets, he crossed the Jordan with his faithful follower Elisha, and passed into his native Gilead. Then, as they talked, the whirlwind and fire, which had appalled Elijah as they passed by him at Horeb, came for him ; and he, without any sign of hesitation or fear, was carried up into heaven. Nothing of him fell to the earth but his mantle. Elisha caught it, and it was a sign that he received the double portion in Elijah's spirit, *i.e.*, he inherited the position of the first-born, and was now both entitled and qualified to take Elijah's place at the head of "the sons of the prophets."

One cry, "My father!" and the young prophet turned to his duty—cleaving the river Jordan again, with Elijah's mantle, and an appeal to Elijah's God. Thus have many received a solemn call to duty, or an access of zeal and strength, from witnessing the departure of the great and good—catching the mantle at some deathbed, that was like a chariot of God.

The career of Elisha was long and illustrious. He was not a second and feebler Elijah, but another type of man—an equally original production of God, though cast in a milder mould, with more of mercy than of judgment. Elijah taught by his name that Jehovah was El or God, Elisha (God for salvation) taught by his name that Jehovah, trusted in as God, would be for salvation to His people. Elijah was a man of mountains and deserts, and in his appearance showed the stern and startling character of his ministry. Elisha dwelt among men, and was in garb and appearance like any grave Israelite. His hair was trimmed, he carried a walking staff, and moved calmly to and fro on the errands of a man of God.

Yet after his first deed of mercy, healing the bitter waters at Jericho, this prophet struck a blow of judgment. It was a strange work to him, but it was needful to assert his sacred authority at the outset. At Bethel, one of the seats of the calf-worship, profane striplings called the prophet "Bald-head," because of the contrast between his trimmed hair and the flowing locks of Elijah. Then they bade him "go up," in mocking allusion to his master's ascension. Elisha denounced them in the name of the Lord, and "there came forth two she-bears out of the wood and tare (or bit) forty-two of them."

Then followed a most influential ministry. In the third chapter we have the prophet standing before kings. In the fourth, he multiplies the oil in a poor widow's house, and the bread among the sons of the prophets. Through his prayer of faith, a woman of position in Shunem, who had shown him hospitality, received her dead child raised to life again. The fifth chapter tells of Naaman, the Syrian general, cleansed from leprosy by bathing in the river Jordan at Elisha's word. In

such good works, and in constant testimony for God, passed the years of the son of Shaphat. Chariots and horses of fire were round about him for defence, as once was shown to his servant at Dothan. But he went not up in these, at the end of his course, as Elijah had done. He sickened and died, and was buried as other men. It was ominous for Israel that no prophet caught Elisha's mantle, or continued his ministry. Gehazi, who ought to have been his successor, proved unworthy of the calling, for he "loved this present world;" and he who should have been a prophet, and might have healed lepers, became, through covetousness and deceit, himself a leper, white as snow.

There did, however, arise in Israel, during the period covered by this history, several faithful prophets, who, though they did not work wonders like Elijah and Elisha, spoke powerful reproofs of the prevailing immorality and idolatry, and uttered piercing calls to repentance. We do not refer so much to Jonah, who is mentioned in chapter xiv., because the memorable part of his prophetic ministry was directed to the Gentiles. But Amos, the "herdman" of Tekoa, lifted up a vehement testimony against the vices of the time, and, in the reign of the greatest of the northern kings, the second Jeroboam, foretold what was then most unlikely, the downfall of the kingdom, and the captivity of disobedient Israel. Hosea, too, about the same period, a prophet of great plaintiveness, a kind of northern Jeremiah, rebuked the corruption of life in Samaria, through drunkenness, licentiousness, and unruliness, and the corruption of worship by serving the molten calves, and by offending in Baal. The rejection of the word of the Lord, sent by these prophets, was the cause of Israel's ruin. Individuals, no doubt, obeyed the calls to repentance and were saved, but the court, the princes, and the people at large, would not hearken. The mighty works of Elijah and Elisha, and the piercing words of Amos and Hosea, were alike unheeded; so "the Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His servants the prophets."

2. *The Kings.*

One son of Ahab reigned for two years. Another succeeded, and reigned for twelve years. He was so far an improvement on his father and brother, that he removed the image of Baal. This is that Jehoram or Joram who, with the kings of Judah and Edom, defeated Mesha, the king of the Moabites. Very curiously, after three thousand years, we have further information of King Mesha from the famous Moabitish stone discovered in 1869, the inscription on which describes the war of Moab with Israel, and the reliance of Mesha, in his contest with the house of Omri, on the god Chemosh.

The reign of Joram was cut short by violence. It happened more than once in Israel, as it has occurred in other nations at times of weakness and distraction, that a bold and ambitious soldier, securing the support of the army, seized the throne. It was Jehu, anointed at Ramoth-Gilead by one of the sons of the prophets, who, with the ready adhesion of the officers of his army, marched rapidly on Jezreel, and surprised the king, who was ill from the wounds he had received in battle against the Syrians. As Joram turned to flee, Jehu pierced him with an arrow from his own bow, and seized on the palace, where he held a triumphal feast. On the same eventful day, the aged, yet not venerable, queen-mother, Jezebel, perished miserably, and was exposed to be the prey of the hungry dogs of the city. It was recognised as the fulfilment of Elijah's terrible words, that "in the portion of Jezreel, dogs should eat the flesh of Jezebel."

Jehu continued his way to Samaria, exterminated the race of Ahab, put to death many of the royal family of Judah, which was at this time on intimate terms with the reigning house in Israel, and completed his work by a relentless massacre of the worshippers of Baal. The image and temple of that heathen god were utterly defaced. "Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel." His worship may still have lingered in the land, but it was never publicly resumed, and the kingdom of Israel, from this time, returned to the worship which King Jeroboam established at first; the worship, nominally, of Jehovah, under the

form, and with the aid of, the golden calves of Dan and Bethel. Jehu reigned twenty-eight years in Samaria, a man of "might," but of a hard, stern character, an excellent hammer for breaking down, a remorseless minister of retribution, but not a producer or nourisher of that which is good.

Feeble rulers followed. Indeed there is only one great king in Israel after Jehu; it is Jeroboam the second, who reigned for forty-one years with extraordinary vigour. He took Damascus, and by force of arms recovered the whole northern kingdom of Solomon. And yet his long reign is described in no more than seven verses. There was nothing to relate of moral or spiritual good. On the contrary, we gather from the prophets who lived under this king, that, under all his external prosperity, it was a time of abounding iniquity and gross depravity of life. Therefore the kingdom nodded to its fall.

Jeroboam's son and successor was slain by conspiracy; and so ended the dynasty of Jehu. There ensued a troubled period of about forty years under various kings, and then the catastrophe came. The old empire of Assyria rose at this time into overwhelming power, and extended its conquests over all the East. It had succeeded at last in quelling that rival empire of the Hittites on which so much fresh light has recently been cast; and it pressed on to overrun Syria and Palestine, so as to clear the way for an invasion of Egypt. An Assyrian army appeared before Damascus, where an adventurer, named Rezin, had established himself as king of Syria. Damascus fell; and Hoshea, who proved to be the last king of Israel, terrified at the approach of the Assyrians, sought the help of the king of Egypt. It was too late. Hoshea was made prisoner, Samaria was taken, after a siege of three years, and the people of the land were carried away into captivity. The sensitiveness of the public mind nowadays to any violation of national feeling, the shock which it suffers at the forcible separation of a people from the country or government they prefer, was quite unknown in those stern days of old. As a matter of course and without hesitation, the main body of the inhabitants of Israel were

transferred to remote provinces of the Assyrian empire. The Samaritans of the future were a people of mixed origin, partly Israelite and partly Gentile. Their religion was also a thing of mixture and compromise. "They feared the Lord and served their own gods." We read no more good of the northern part of the Holy Land till we reach the days of Christ, who dwelt in Galilee, and, with purposes of love, passed once and again through Samaria.

## II. OF JUDAH.

The history of the southern kingdom is given with detail in 2 Chronicles, and needs not be very minutely related now. It endured no change of dynasty. All the kings were of the house of David, and the memory of his great name, and the covenant made with him, threw a sacred interest around even the most insignificant kings who ruled in Jerusalem. There was the throne of David, and there the temple of Solomon. There too the priesthood was continued, and not merely retained, but increased its influence. Yet this kingdom, too, fell before the heathen, and Judah went into captivity.

At the beginning of this book, we find the throne of David filled by Jehoshaphat, a vigorous ruler, and one of good intentions. But most unfortunately for his house, he allied himself with King Ahab, and his son and successor married Athaliah, a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, also called "daughter, *i.e.*, granddaughter of Omri." Like her mother, she was devoted to the worship of Baal, and introduced it into Jerusalem. On the death of her husband, she, as queen-mother, wielded great influence over her son. He also died, and Athaliah's ambition aspired to the sole possession of the throne. Cruel and unscrupulous as her mother, she destroyed all the royal family, that she might obliterate the covenanted line of David, and heathenise Jerusalem. It was a dark hour for all who yet had faith in the covenant of God. The lamp ordained for David seemed to be put out, and the promise regarding his posterity appeared to fail. But not so! The wife of the high priest,

herself of royal extraction, rescued from the massacre a little boy, a babe in arms. He was hidden, and brought up in the Temple. Jehoiada, the high priest, a man at once prudent and brave, waited till the boy, Prince Joash, was seven years old ; then brought him forth and proclaimed him king. He was received with joyful shouts, and the wicked Athaliah was ignominiously slain. The temple of Baal, which she had built, was overthrown by the people, and a time of religious reformation ensued. The young king, grateful for the protection he had received in the Temple, made it his first care to repair the house of the Lord. For the greater part of his long reign he did well, but his latter years were unhappy, and he died by violence. His son, after a reign of twenty-five years, died by violence too. His grandson, called Azariah, but in Chronicles Uzziah, occupied the throne for the very long period of fifty-two years ; but his later days were saddened by the taint of leprosy.

At this time the solemn voices of prophets began to be heard in Judah. Amos and Hosea spoke of Jerusalem as well as Samaria. Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord "in the year that King Uzziah died," and with the prophet Micah continued to admonish and teach during the reigns of the three kings who followed, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

There is a striking alternation of good and evil in the rulers of this period. Jotham, though not a man of mark, feared the Lord and prospered. Ahaz had a very mania for introducing into Jerusalem the gods of the nations round about, "the abominations of the heathen." His infatuation brought the kingdom very low. Very unlike him was his son Hezekiah, perhaps the greatest and best of all the kings of Judah. Isaiah the prophet was his spiritual counsellor and friend. He had no great captains, but obtained by prayer what his sword could never have achieved, the destruction of the invading host from Assyria. We reserve a fuller notice of this devout prince till we reach the Second Book of Chronicles. His son and successor was of quite another spirit. Coming early to the royal dignity, Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years. By him paganism was

restored in its worst forms, and the servants of God were cruelly persecuted. The history in Chronicles mentions an ultimate repentance of this wicked prince, but the book before us keeps silence. With terrible emphasis, however, it describes his evil career. "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, beside his sin where-with he made Judah to sin, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord."\*

Pass over his like-minded son, and you come once more to a good king. It is Josiah, who reached the throne at the age of eight, and filled it for thirty-one years. Like the earlier boy-king, Joash, he had a zeal for the Temple, restored the service of Jehovah, and made a thorough havoc of the high places, images, altars, and groves of heathen worship in Jerusalem and throughout all his realm. In his time, Zephaniah prophesied, and the important ministry of Jeremiah began. Alas! in the very prime of life, the King Josiah was slain in battle with the Egyptians. A gloom overspread the country which was long remembered, "the mourning of Hadad-Rimmon, in the valley of Megiddo, when the land mourned, every family apart." Well might they mourn! The last great king of Judah was dead, and the judgment, which many prophets had denounced, at last drew nigh.

The four kings that followed, and who closed the line, were weak and unfortunate. The Babylonian empire had now superseded and absorbed the Assyrian; and between the rival powers of Egypt and Babylon, the Jews were bruised and ground as between two millstones. At length the great Nebuchadnezzar † added Judah to his other conquests, seized the capital, burnt down its holy places, and carried the king and the chief of the people captives to Babylon, leaving only "the poor of the land to be vine-dressers and husbandmen."

\* 2 Kings xxi. 16.

† The more correct spelling is Nebuchadrezzar, as in Jer. xxxvii. 1. The name is written in the cuneiform Nabu-kudur-uzur, "O Nebo, defend the crown."

By the rivers of Babylon the Jews sat down and wept when they remembered Zion. They hung their harps on the willow-trees, for they could not sing the Lord's song in a strange land.

Such is history, with long passages of apparent impunity for evil, but stern retributions at last. Individuals do not meet in this life all the consequences of their actions, but either now or hereafter they must reap what they have sown. The reaping-time of nations is in this present world. By righteousness a people is exalted; unrighteousness before God, opposition to His prophets, neglect of His word, corruption of morals among the rulers and the ruled, incur feebleness and ruin. Penalty may be inflicted instrumentally by a power which has great faults of its own, as Assyria and Babylon certainly had; but the judgment is none the less a Divine judgment, from which there is no possible escape or recovery without timely repentance. The cup of iniquity may be slowly filled; but if the course of self-will be persisted in, so soon as God sees the cup of iniquity to be full, He will wring out the wine of fierce wrath from a full cup on a guilty nation's head. "The dregs thereof all the wicked of the earth shall wring out, and drink them."

## I. CHRONICLES.

THE two Books of Chronicles, which originally formed one, stand last of all in the Hebrew Canon. The Greek version of the Seventy called them the *Paraleipomena*, or Things Omitted, as though they were merely supplementary to the history contained in the Books of Samuel and Kings. But evidently the Chronicles are more than this. They have an independent character and aim; and may be said to take the priestly point of view, while the previous books take the prophetic. The chronicler dilates on the structure and uses of the Temple, the sacerdotal and Levitical organisation of Divine Service, the holy festivals and passovers, and the conduct of sacred music and song. He almost entirely ignores the northern kingdom, because it had broken connection with the authorised sanctuary at Jerusalem.

The Chronicles were compiled, as indeed the Books of Kings also were, from earlier documents. They plainly refer to those sources, *e.g.*, the history of Nathan the Prophet, the history of Gad the Seer, the histories of Shemaiah the Prophet and Iddo the Seer, the Midrash (commentary) of the Prophet Iddo.

In style, and other respects, the Chronicles resemble the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It is quite obvious that the conclusion of 2 Chronicles connects with the opening paragraph of Ezra. Indeed these four books not improbably formed one consecutive work. If so, while the tradition which refers them to the pen of Ezra may be correct as regards the bulk of the narrative in the three books first named, it is scarcely credible that he completed it, because the chronicler carries down the

genealogy of Zerubbabel to the sixth generation (1 Chron. iii. 19-24). This passage must have been written as late as the year B.C. 400, when Ezra, if alive, was a very old man. He does not seem to have even edited the Book of Nehemiah, because that history contains a long list of names which had already appeared in the Book of Ezra, and would have been omitted if subjected to Ezra's revision. The bulk of the Book of Nehemiah seems to be taken from a writing by the Tirshatha himself.

As in the New Testament we have the advantage of reading the history of Jesus Christ in separate and independent gospels, so in the Old Testament we know David and his house all the better that we have two separate, if not entirely independent, records. Between the two there are a few points of apparent discrepancy, the consideration of which belongs to detailed exposition, and not to a rapid survey like ours. Most of the points of difference, however, are due, as, in the case of the gospels, simply to the circumstance that each writer naturally dealt with the facts, or aspects of facts, that made the strongest impression on his own mind ; or, without denying or depreciating others, used a just liberty of selection in favour of those which accorded with the special aim and object of his narrative. Accordingly, many important matters related in the Books of Samuel and Kings are omitted from the Chronicles, *e.g.*, the early adventures of David and his great sin, the revolt of Absalom, the fall of Solomon, and the entire history of the separate kingdom of Israel, because these had no direct bearing on the object which the later writer kept in view. On the other hand, we have details in the later history that are not found in the former. Let us notice some of these.

#### I. THE PEDIGREE OF DAVID, AND THE GENEALOGY OF THE TRIBES.

The former is traced in a condensed form from Adam, through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; and this prominence is given to David in recognition of his religious zeal, as having brought

up the Ark to Zion, prepared the materials for the erection of the Temple, and organised the stately public service of Jehovah.

The genealogical tables of the tribes may try our patience, but the Bible was not written for us only, and those tables were full of interest and practical use to the Jews, for whom they were provided. For us, too, they have an evidential value in favour of the authenticity of the sacred histories. No one writing annals from guess-work or vague tradition would venture to give such copious lists of names of men and places, and so many incidental allusions as we have in Genesis, in Numbers, and in Chronicles, for he would supply against himself the greatest facilities for detecting untruth or unreality. The Bible historians write with the utmost frankness and simplicity, multiplying names and references without fear, because they know that their testimony is true.

The genealogy of Judah is enlivened by the episode of Jabez. If the names are as rows of hard stones that fatigue us when we walk on them, all the more precious this fragrant shrub, growing among them, and casting a sweet scent around. For some cause untold, a mother bare her son with unusual grief, and called him Jabez—Sorrowful; but it was God's good pleasure to turn this Benoni into a Benjamin, the Son of Sorrow into a Son of the Right Hand; and the sad-hearted mother's fear was not fulfilled, for Jabez proved "more honourable than his brethren." If we inquire the reason, it was because he prayed. Whatever gifts of wisdom, counsel, or courage he may have had among men, they are not put on record, but it is written that "he called on the God of Israel, saying, O that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be with me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it be not to my sorrow! And God granted him that which he requested." \* A true son of Israel, as a prince he had power with God and prevailed. He asked much, and obtained much. The Lord did great things for him, whereof, surely, Sorrowful was glad.

\* Chap. iv. 5-10.

## II. THE HEROES OF DAVID.

The end of Saul is briefly told, and David's accession to the throne immediately follows. The chronicler preserves the names of those who rallied to the son of Jesse, and proclaimed him king. Then we read much of his wars and conquests. It was a time favourable to the production and promotion of daring men, and David had the power of drawing these around him, and firing them with a strong enthusiasm.\*

Joab was "general of the king's army;" but the greater personal prowess is ascribed to three mighty men, Jashobeam, Eleazar, and Shammah, who did rare exploits against the Philistines. Abishai, Joab's brother, and Benaiah, captain of the king's bodyguard, belonged to a second trio of mighty men. Thirty brave officers are also mentioned, among them Uriah the Hittite, whom the king cruelly wronged.

Notwithstanding his personal faults, David is constantly suggesting to us Christ. The great son of David has always drawn good soldiers after him, having power to develop their highest energies, and kindle in their breasts a sacred zeal. All David's men were not mighty, but such as were mighty in the land found their right arms all the stronger, and their courage all the loftier, that they were servants, and even comrades, of the hero-king. So all the followers of Christ have not been "mighties," but brave hearts and fervent spirits have found ample scope and holy incentive in the service and companionship of the King of Saints. The "mighties" whom He drew around Him while He was on earth were the apostles, the officers of His band whom He armed with weapons, "not carnal," but "mighty through God to the pulling down of

\* The warriors who surrounded David make one think of the Knights of the Round Table in King Arthur's Court—

"And Arthur and his knighthood for a space  
Were all one will, and through that strength the king  
Drew in the petty principedoms under him;  
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame  
The heathen hordes, and made a realm, and reign'd."

—TENNYSON: *The Coming of Arthur.*

strongholds." What have we in the Acts of the Apostles but the exploits of mighty men, who fought not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in heavenly places? The Eleazars, and Benaiahs, and Abishais of the New Testament are such Christian leaders as Peter and John and Paul.

### III. THE ORDERING OF THE LEVITES AND SINGERS.

King David arranged the Levites in courses for Divine service. They were no more required to carry the pieces of the tabernacle hither and thither, for Jehovah had said of Zion, "Here will I dwell;" but in the Temple about to be built by Solomon, the Levites were to attend, as assistants to the priests, the lineal descendants of Aaron. At the return from captivity, the Levitical courses were resumed, and they appear to have been maintained down to the Christian era, for it is mentioned that Zacharias, who served in the Temple, was "of the course of Abia."

A large number of the Levites took part in the musical service instituted by David. "Four thousand praised the Lord with the instruments." There was a more skilled company of musicians and singers, two hundred and eighty-eight in number,—the four thousand, probably, serving as grand chorus on occasions. All these were organised and led by three great masters, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun. It was the happiness of David, not only as a warrior, to draw warriors round him, and as an able ruler, to attract statesmen, but also, as a born musician and poet, to surround himself with musicians and poets, who assisted in the production of the psalter, and composed suitable melodies for the lyrics in which the king delighted. Suddenly there came upon Jerusalem the golden age of Hebrew music and song. The songs are, happily, preserved for the admiration and use of the Christian Church. The music was a recitative or solemn chant, sung in unison, the theory of harmony being unknown to the nations of antiquity. To our ears, long chants sung in unison are monotonous, but

David and his musicians knew how to obtain variety by the alternation of voices in the chorus, and by the use of instruments—harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets. There was no direction of God to authorise these instruments, nor does it appear that any question or difficulty on that score was ever raised. The truth is, that their use was reckoned as a matter of course, for the Orientals were not wont to sing without some sort of instrumental accompaniment.\*

It is of importance to note the period at which sacred song established its place in Divine worship. By the Law came neither psalm nor sacred music. A trumpet from the top of Mount Sinai, not in human hands, announced the Lawgiver's descent, but the people could not sing under the holy commandments. Trumpets were blown by the priests at new-moon, but there was no provision for any song of priests or people in all the worship prescribed in the wilderness. Praise is united, not with law, but with the spirit of prophecy. Moses sang, as a prophet, over the redemption and exodus from Egypt, and sang again before his death, or better exodus to rest with God. Deborah, the prophetess, sang of victory. A company of prophets, in the days of Samuel, prophesied, as the Spirit of God moved them, "with a psaltery, a tabret, a pipe, and a harp." So David prophesied, and Asaph and Heman "prophesied and sang." It was a time of the operation of the Spirit of God, in which sweet song obtained a leading place in the religious service. The Law required the calves of the stall, but prophecy presented to Jehovah the calves of the lips. It was the time of the kingdom, too, a decided advance on that of Moses and the Law. The throne of David was established in grace, and secured by a covenant of promise. Then, and not till then, was heard the voice of praise in the courts of the house of the Lord. Why is it that the Christian Church has had, from the beginning, impulse and capacity for sacred song? It is because the Spirit of God has been poured out, and because Christ reigns in grace, and "sings praise in the midst of the Church." It is meet

\* Gen. xxxi. 27 ; Exod. xv. 20, 21, &c.

that there should be a continual offering of the sacrifice of praise from every Christian assembly. And there are better days to come. When our Lord, according to the promise, shall sit on the throne of His father David, the golden age of Christian song and music will arrive, and all the earth shall make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

#### IV. THE PREPARATION MADE BY DAVID FOR THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE.

Care is taken to show how dear Temple-building was to the heart of the great King David. He was not, indeed, permitted to carry out his desire, for there was always a coming-short in the greatest men before Christ. Abraham died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off. Moses died, not having entered the land, but having seen it afar off. And David died, not having built the Temple, but having seen its pattern in the Spirit, and having provided for its erection great store of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood, marble, and onyx stones. All this he made over to Solomon, and charged him "to be strong and do it;" then blessed the congregation of Israel, and died "in a good old age."

Moses lived on in Joshua, David in Solomon. The two leaders, together, typify Christ as Leader and Commander of His people. The two kings, together, typify Christ as the King on the hill of God's holiness, God's power for energetic subdual of enemies, and God's wisdom for judgment of the people and for the erection of His sacred Temple. The preparation, the construction, and the consecration of the Christian Temple, are all of Christ. He gathers the lively stones, and builds up His Church as "a habitation of God in the Spirit," a sublime Temple, against which no inroad of enemies, or gates of Hades, shall prevail.

The Temple in Jerusalem was to perish, yet the treasures devoted to it were well spent. Our edifices for Divine worship are to perish, but we must not on that account construct them meanly, or deal with them in a penurious spirit. If we do,

David and his people will rise up in judgment against us. "Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the Lord, and David, the king, also rejoiced with great joy." The king said to the God of Israel, "Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build Thee an house for Thy holy name, cometh of Thine hand, and is all Thine Own." \*

The roll of names, the list of heroes, the ordinance of song, the preparation for the Temple; these are what we have found peculiar to First Chronicles. Blessed are they who follow Christ, the Son of David. Their names are written in heaven; their calling is to fight on earth a good fight of faith; their joy is to show forth God's praise; and their constant privilege to lift up their hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord within His holy Temple.

\* 1 Chron. xxix. 9, 14, 16.

## II. CHRONICLES.

FOR reasons already given, this history confines itself to the reigning house of David in Jerusalem, and describes the kingdom of Judah rather in its ecclesiastical than in its political aspects and relations. The chief matters it contains may be arranged under three heads.

I. *The love to the Temple and worship of Jehovah evinced by the best Kings of the House of David.*

Solomon's wisdom and splendour are mentioned, but the greater prominence is given to his care in building and devoutness in dedicating the "House of the Lord." In his time the old Tabernacle was transfigured into a holy and beautiful Temple, overlaid with pure gold and garnished with precious stones. When the venerable Ark was set in its place within this Temple, and the voice of praise was lifted up with trumpets, cymbals, and other instruments of music, "saying, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever," the House was filled with a cloud, "for the glory of Jehovah had filled the House of God." So, in all times and places, praise has the most efficacy to obtain the glorious presence or Shechinah of God. Then followed prayer and sacrifice; and God answered by fire, consuming the offerings, and again filling the House with His glory. The dedication of that Temple was the grandest passage in King Solomon's life; and the prayer which he offered, as he stood with outstretched hands before the altar, is one of the very noblest and most comprehensive effusions of Hebrew piety. At the close of the feast he dismissed the people, "glad and merry in heart for the goodness that the

Lord had showed unto David, and to Solomon, and to Israel, His people."

King Asa, the great grandson of Solomon, was the next of the kings who showed special regard for the Temple and its services. He deposed his own mother from her state as Queen-Dowager "because she had made an idol in a grove." The idol he destroyed with all others that he found in Judah and Benjamin; then renewed the altar of the Lord, and brought into His House, as dedicated things, "silver, gold, and vessels." To him rallied many devout persons from the northern kingdom of Israel. "They fell to him out of Israel in abundance when they saw that the Lord his God was with him."

The next king who evinced a zeal for the Temple was Joash. Grateful for the shelter he enjoyed there in his infancy, he "was minded to repair the House of the Lord." After his time, though Judah and Jerusalem were tainted with heathen superstitions, the great Temple was, on the whole, treated with respect, till the days of the infatuated idolater, Ahaz, who "cut in pieces the vessels of the House of God, and shut up the doors of the House." The whole of the beautiful interior was left to neglect and decay.

Happily, the successor of Ahaz was a prince of a quite different spirit. The very first use Hezekiah made of his kingly power was to reopen, cleanse, and repair the Temple. He began this good work "in the first year of his reign, in the first month." There ensued a great religious reformation. The House of the Lord being purified, and the ministry of priests and Levites reorganised, the public service was resumed, the sin-offering was slain, the burnt-offering smoked upon the altar, and the song of the Lord went up again with cymbals, harps, and sound of trumpets. This done, and well done, the king took counsel with his princes and all the congregation in Jerusalem regarding the long-neglected celebration of the Pass-over; and the great feast was successfully restored.

In the conduct of Hezekiah, as the reviver of the Passover, are two things well worthy of our notice:—

1. He showed a large mind in subordinating the letter of the law to its spirit. The first month, the proper time for the Passover, was past. It was consumed in cleansing the Temple. Then the king did not postpone the feast for a year, in bondage to the mere form and letter of the institution. He felt that too much precious time had already been lost, so he appointed a special Passover in the second month.

If a Jew could thus judge, the lesson should be easy for us. It is wrong to depart without cause from the letter of Christ's ordinances; but we ought to think far more of their spirit, and be glad that, in our dispensation, the letter is reduced to a minimum, just to give the spirit ampler scope.

2. He showed a large heart in sending out invitations to the Passover through all the land. The king would gather together not Judah only, but the dispersed of Israel. When he caused burnt-offerings and sin-offerings to be sacrificed, it was "for all Israel." He loved, as every man taught of God must love, the unity of the redeemed, and yearned, as every such man yearns, for the manifestation and enjoyment of that unity. So, when he would keep the Passover, the memorial of the redemption, not of one or two, but of twelve tribes out of the House of Bondage, the king sent his proclamation, in grave and touching words, from Dan even to Beersheba. The invitation obtained a various reception. Those who belonged to the powerful tribe of Ephraim, accustomed to vex Judah, treated it with scorn. But divers of the less influential tribes "humbled themselves and came." Nay, in the end, a good many came from Ephraim too, and all that came were filled with blessing. Such was the enjoyment of that Passover, that, by universal consent, it was kept for two weeks instead of one. "So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem." \* Why not since the days of Solomon? Surely, because immediately after his reign, the unity of the ancient household of faith was broken, and new centres of worship were made at Bethel and

\* 2 Chron. xxx. 26.

Dan, to the detriment of religion. Now, in regard to the disruption of the chosen nation, as in regard to dissensions and disruptions of churches, there was "much to be said on both sides;" but Hezekiah did not enter into any of the old disputes, or insist on having an historical controversy settled on a ground of argument. With a wise simplicity, he went back three hundred years, to the good old way of David and Solomon, assured that the reunion of His people round the symbols or memorials of their redemption must be according to the mind of God.

Let us, in the same spirit, favour the enlargement of Church fellowship, and take to Hezekiah's healing, restoring, comprehending policy. Let us rally as brethren around the old centre of Christian unity—"Christ our Passover." Why not go back as respects communion to the good old way of the Primitive Church, when the formation of separate sects was reprobated as a work of the flesh,\* and let the circumcised in heart break bread and drink wine together, without hindrance, before the Lord, and in remembrance of Him? No doubt, there must be a centre of unity to which the redeemed come together, and around which they are grouped: but this is not a city or a holy see; not Rome, nor Geneva, nor Constantinople, nor Canterbury, nor Edinburgh—no, nor any separatist meeting of purists, who think themselves "the faithful few;" but the name of Jesus only, and the redemption in His blood. Many will call this visionary, just as many derided the large proposals of Hezekiah; but all who humble themselves to fall in with the plan of healing breaches, and binding in one communion the scattered people of God, will get such increase of grace, and comfort in Christ, and joy in the Holy Ghost, as, in narrow lines of separation, they could never reach.

Hezekiah could not consider the reformation complete so long as heathen images and altars stood in the groves. The zeal to make an end of these was now well kindled. The young king did wisely, first to gather his people round the true altar, and give them to taste the sweetness of uniting in the worship of

\* Gal. v. 20.

God, and in the feast of redemption, and then, when their enthusiasm was warm, to lead them to the destruction of idols and their shrines. "Now, when all this was finished, all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the pillars in pieces, and cut down the Asherim, and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all." \*

So is it always. The strength to turn from idols, and the holy zeal to make an end of the evils which corrupt and divide the Church, must be got at the altar of God. We do not first complete our reformation, and then come to the blood of sprinkling and the feast of redeeming love; but to these we come first, and then go forth to abolish idols, and to testify against those evils which have found room in the highways and high places of the Church, as in the streets and groves of Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh.

Alas! the son of Hezekiah resembled not his father, but his grandfather; and though he did not, like him, shut up the doors of the Temple, he did worse, for he erected "altars for the host of heaven" in the courts of the house, and actually "set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God." Before his death, Manasseh, being penitent, removed these accursed things, and repaired the Lord's altar. But the wrong that he had done to the true religion in his long reign was not to be easily undone; and his son and successor reversed this later policy, and took the side of heathenism.

It required the vigour of Josiah, the last of the good kings, to bring about another, though, as it unfortunately proved, a transient reformation. While the Temple was under repair by his command, the High Priest found a book there, and gave it to Shaphan the scribe, who read it to the king. It was a Book of the Law of Moses, probably the ancient roll of Deuteronomy, lost and forgotten during troublous times. Josiah was deeply moved as he listened to it, and, taking the book into his own hand, he read it aloud to the priests, Levites, elders, and people,

\* 2 Chron. xxxi. 1.

great and small. By the Law came to them a knowledge of sin, and after the reading, a solemn covenant of obedience was publicly made.

In the reign of this king, the heathen worship was thoroughly uprooted, or rather, mowed down, for the roots remained in the national mind, as soon appeared to their shame. Josiah was certainly a great Iconoclast even in the twentieth year of his age, or twelfth of his reign. And the reformation from heathenism was rather forced by the monarch's will than effected by the spontaneous action of a people whose hearts had turned to Jehovah, as it was in the days of Hezekiah. Josiah's passover, however, is enthusiastically described as surpassing not only that of Hezekiah, but also those of the times of David and Solomon. "There was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet."

The early death of Josiah was the knell of Jerusalem. The kingdom staggered and fell, and the Temple fell with it. First, the house of the Lord was robbed of its goodly vessels, which were carried as trophies to Babylon, and at last it was burned with fire. The Chronicles, however, do not end with this catastrophe. Written as they are long after the return from Babylon, they stretch across the seventy years of the captivity, and relate that "the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me; and He hath charged me to build Him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is among you of all His people, the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up."

II. *Deliverances wrought for the House of David, because God had a favour unto them.*—We mention four of them, and mark in them a kind of progress.

1. Abijah (or Abijam), the son of Rehoboam, is little accounted of in the Book of Kings, but is celebrated in the

Chronicles as having gained a signal victory over Jeroboam. The armies were already engaged, and the tide of battle had turned against the forces of Abijah, when Judah cried to the Lord, and the priests sounded with the trumpets. Then the tide of battle turned again, and God smote Jeroboam, and delivered the men of Israel into the power of the army of Judah. It was taken as a mark of Divine favour, a sign that the kingdom of Jehovah was "in the hands of the sons of David."

2. Asa, the son of Abijah, and a better man than he, found himself and his army confronted by a prodigious host of Ethiopians. He had not joined battle, but had set his men in array. Then he made appeal to Jehovah his God in these noble words:—"Lord, there is no difference with Thee to help, whether the mighty, or him that hath no strength; help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on Thee, and in Thy name we go against this multitude. O Jehovah, Thou art our God: let not man prevail against Thee!" Then the battle was joined, and the Lord, in answer to King Asa's appeal, gave him at once the mastery over the Ethiopian host.

3. Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, had a still more wonderful deliverance. He was threatened by a formidable combination of Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites, and went out with an army against them, but did not even set his men in battle array as his father had done, far less give way in the midst of a combat, like his grandfather. Before he left Jerusalem, he made his appeal to God in the Temple, and when he marched forth with his army, it was with the voice of singers going before, and saying, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever." The soldiers of Judah drew no sword, and shot no arrow from the bow, for, ere they reached the camping ground of their enemies, fierce dissension had broken out, and the allies fell on one another with great slaughter. Jehoshaphat and his men had nothing to do but carry away the spoil.

4. Hezekiah had a deliverance which marked even yet more impressively the hand of God. In the first case, battle was joined, and when it went against Judah, the Lord turned the

tide in their favour. In the second, before a blow was struck, the Lord heard prayer, and gave the victory, from the very beginning of the battle, to the army of a son of David. In the third, there was no battle, but the army returned to Jerusalem laden with spoil. Now, in the fourth, no army went out of Jerusalem's gate, and yet a great deliverance was wrought.

When the Assyrians approached his capital, King Hezekiah took certain military precautions—diverted the water-courses, so as to secure the supply of the city during a siege, and repaired the walls and forts. Then he addressed his “captains of war” in these admirable words of faith—“Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh, but with us is Jehovah our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah.” The Assyrian host drew nearer, and surged in waves of defiance round Jerusalem. Mocking words were spoken, and railing letters sent in to crush the spirit of the Jews. Hezekiah met the crisis as a man who believed in his God. The enemy trusted in “chariots and horses,” but he remembered the name of Jehovah. The Assyrians buckled on their armour, but the king of Judah rent his clothes and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the House of the Lord. Sennacherib would have laughed him to scorn, and thought him to be in an agony of fear, if he had seen the pious king on his knees before an invisible God. But the Assyrian had better have trembled and fled. Hezekiah was there in his fort of strength. Confessedly helpless in his own resources, he spread out before the mighty God the insulting letter he had received: and that man of faith on his knees, having access to God touching a matter that concerned God's glory, was stronger far than Sennacherib in all his warlike pomp. So, without any arm of flesh, or “shouting of the captains,” Jerusalem was delivered. “Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amos, prayed and cried to heaven. And the Lord sent an angel, which cut off

all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land."

III. *The unworthiness of the house of David, proving that the Lord favoured them, not for their merits, but for His own name's sake, and His servant David's sake.*

Some of the kings were simply wicked, as Rehoboam, Jehoram, Ahaz, and Ammon. Others were weak as well as worthless, as the last three before the captivity.

One of the very worst ultimately turned to God. It was Manasseh. In affliction and captivity\* he repented of his career of wickedness and cruelty, and when restored to his throne, bore himself as a servant of God. The record of this in the Chronicles is very brief—just enough to show how the Divine grace could abound to a most flagitious sinner, but encouraging no one to presume on a late repentance. In "the Books of the Seers," now lost, the matter was recorded at length. The prayer of the penitent king is alluded to as written among "the sayings of the Seers," possibly the same as that Greek "prayer of Manasses" which precedes the Book of Maccabees in the ordinary collection of the Apocrypha.

Others who began well on David's throne made a sorry end. Joash, after all his early love for the Temple, hearkened to the princes who were more prone to heathenism than the people, and "served the Asherim and the idols." Nay, he rejected the admonition of the son and successor of his old friend and preserver, the high priest Jehoiada; and the faithful witness Zechariah was "stoned with stones, at the commandment of the king, in the court of the House of the Lord." The end of

\* The monuments at Babylon distinctly mention "*Menasie, king of Yaudi,*" among the tributaries of Esarhaddon, who succeeded his father Sennacherib in the Assyrian empire. It was his custom to reside at Babylon during half the year. And this explains the fact that Manasseh was taken captive to Babylon, and not to the proper Assyrian capital Nineveh.

Joash was very unhappy. He suffered much from complicated disease; he was assassinated; and his body, though buried in the city of David, was not laid in the sepulchres of the kings.

His son, Amaziah, had a similar history. He began well, but in course of years fell into idolatry, weakened his kingdom, and died by the hands of conspirators. The next of the royal line, Uzziah, also disappoints us. He began well, and prospered; "but when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction." He usurped the priest's office, and presumed to burn incense at the altar in the Holy Place. There fell on him, as a mark of Divine displeasure, the plague of leprosy. "And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house."

Even the best of the kings came short. Hezekiah, who bore himself so well in time of trouble, failed and erred in prosperity. After the withdrawal of the great Sennacherib, complimentary embassies came to the king of Judah. Among them was one from Babylon—ominous name!—by which the heart of Hezekiah was elated.\* The king of Assyria had threatened him, and he prayed. The king of terrors (as death is often called) threatened him too, and he prayed.† These did him no harm, but good. But when the king of Babylon sent to him letters and a present, Hezekiah was thrown off his guard, and prayed not. The letters from Babylon he neglected to spread before

\* "The fact of the embassy, which seems improbable, if we only know the general condition of Babylon at the period to have been one of subjection to Assyria, becomes highly probable, when we learn—both from Berosus and the monuments—that there was a fierce and bitter hostility between Merodach-Baladan and the Assyrian monarchs, from whose oppressive yoke he more than once freed his country. The ostensible motive of the embassy—to inquire about an astronomical marvel (the going back of the shadow on the dial, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31)—is also highly probable in the case of a country where astronomy held so high a rank, where the temples were observatories, and the religion was to a great extent astral."—*Rawlinson's Bampton Lectures*. Lect. IV., p. 119; 2d Ed.

† 2 Chron. xxxii. 24; Isa. xxxviii.

the Lord ; and, flattered by the attention shown to him, he displayed to the ambassadors "the house of his precious things." "There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not." From that day, the greed of Babylon was not satisfied till it took and plundered Jerusalem. Thus did a godly man err, when "God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." A grave warning it is to us, that the smile of the world may do us more harm than its frown ; and that a spirit which has been braced by difficulty, and invigorated through danger, is likely enough after all to be enfeebled by ease and beguiled by flattery.

The entire history contained in this book is full of admonition for individuals, for the Church, and for the nations. The catastrophe at the close may well cause great searchings of heart. Sin ruined all—the house of David—the Temple of Solomon—the city of so many grand and holy memories. There is no heart, no house, no kingdom, no Church, that sin will not undermine and destroy. In the end of the book, God seems to weep over Jerusalem, but He would not force upon it His worship or His law. He spoke to the kings and the people by His prophets. If they would not hearken, nothing could prevent their destruction. In a later age, the Son of God wept over Jerusalem, because its children would not be gathered to Him. The "City of Solemnities" would ruin itself again.

*EZRA.*

*EZRA* was a priest lineally descended from Aaron, and was famed for his sacred erudition—"a ready Scribe in the Law of Moses." That he was a man of note among the captive Jews seems evident from the favour and confidence shown to him by the Persian sovereign, who "granted him all his request."

The book which bears his name covers a period of about eighty years. In the events related to the end of the sixth chapter, he played no part whatever; for they were before his time, or occurred in his childhood. Twenty years passed during these transactions. A space of about sixty years intervenes between the sixth chapter and the seventh. Then Ezra personally appears, and is prominent in all that follows. No signs or wonders are recorded. The miraculous element, so abundant in some of the books through which we have passed, is entirely wanting here: and the history takes a subdued tone, in harmony with the feebleness and depression of the period.

I. OF THE PART PLAYED IN THIS HISTORY BY GENTILE KINGS.—FOUR are mentioned—Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes; and, in accordance with the purpose of Holy Writ, these monarchs are alluded to, not at all in their relation to their subjects at large, or the general history of the world, but simply and solely as they affected the career of Israel, and of revealed religion in its Old Testament form.

Cyrus is one of the chief heroes of antiquity, and is known to our schoolboys from the romantic pages of Xenophon.

Recently discovered inscriptions show him to have been a prince of Elam (Anzan), not of Persia. The latter country, as well as Babylonia, he acquired by conquest. Daniel prospered in his reign ;\* and we can imagine the venerable man showing to the king the roll of the prophet Isaiah, in which the name of Cyrus was written, and his capture of Babylon and restoration of the Jews were clearly predicted two hundred years before—"Thus saith the Lord to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him," † &c. Whether Cyrus was informed of and influenced by this prophecy or not, and whether he was a Monotheist or not (a point on which the inscriptions cast an unfavourable light), he was favourably disposed towards the Jews ; and in the first year of his reign—*i.e.*, his reign over Babylonia—he put an end to their exile, conceding to them by decree full liberty to return to their own land, and build the house of Jehovah their God in Jerusalem.

Much difference of opinion has existed on the identification of the other kings named in this book with those mentioned in profane history as Persian emperors. Darius, we have no doubt, is that Darius, the son of Hystaspes, a most able and vigorous ruler, of whom we have a long account in Herodotus. His successor, Xerxes, an ostentatious and luxurious prince, is most probably the Ahasuerus of Scripture ; and the Artaxerxes mentioned in the seventh chapter of this book, and in that of Nehemiah, is the Artaxerxes Longimanus of the Greek historians. ‡ These were among the most arbitrary sovereigns the world ever saw, yet were they, in all that related to the Jews, the unconscious instruments of a far higher Power—the Will of God, which works through all history, and, by the march of armies, the revolutions of empires, and the decrees of princes, as well as through the gentler forces of civilisation and peace, carries out benign purposes, and fulfils the roll of prophecy.

\* See Dan. vi. 28.

† Isa. xlv. 1-13.

‡ On the Persian kings named by Ezra, see Bleek's Introduction to the Old Testament.

## II. OF THE JEWS WHO RETURNED TO JERUSALEM, AND THEIR LEADERS.

1. The first expedition returned under the decree of Cyrus. It numbered in all about 50,000 souls. At their head were Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The former, called by the Persians "Sheshbazzar, the Prince of Judah," was the representative of the house of David, and as such entitled to the first position. Into his care Cyrus delivered the golden and silver vessels of the Temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away to Babylon. The latter of these eminent men was High Priest, and is prominent in the visions of the Prophet Zechariah.\* The two worthies, representing civil and sacred authority, proceeded in entire harmony to lay the foundations of a second Temple in Jerusalem, to set the priests and Levites in their order for service, to erect an altar for burnt-offerings, and to recall the song of earlier days—"For He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever." It was a time of great emotion, loud weeping, and louder joy. As it is graphically told—"Many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, the old men that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off." †

The Samaritans and other colonists, or settlers, of heathen and semi-heathen origin, made advances to the Jews, and proffered their co-operation. It was refused by Zerubbabel and his associates, because they were resolved to keep the work in the hands of Jews of pure extraction. Indeed the whole tone of the histories after the captivity (Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther) is intensely anti-heathen and exclusive. The result was that the Samaritans resented this treatment, and hindered the Jews—even forwarding a written accusation of disloyalty against them to the Persian king, and obtaining a decree to stop the works at Jerusalem.

\* Zech. iii.

† Ezra iii. 12, 13.

A long delay ensued ; but the Jews, being stirred up by the appeals of Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets of the time, resumed the building of the Temple. In vindication of their liberty to do so, they appealed to the original decree of Cyrus. Search being made for it, the document was found among the archives in a palace in Media ; and King Darius confirmed it in most vigorous terms, requiring that every facility should be given to the governor and elders of the Jews. Accordingly, the work was prosecuted with zeal, and the Temple was completed in about twenty years after Zerubbabel laid its foundation. The word of the Lord by Zechariah was fulfilled—"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house ; his hands shall also finish it."\* The feast of dedication was kept with every sign of joy ; for, though it was "a day of small things" compared with the dedication of the first Temple, it was a day to be much remembered, when the Lord turned again the captivity of His people, restored their religious privileges and consolations, and did great things for them in the sight of the heathen, whereof they were glad.

The period of the captivity had been just seventy years, as Jeremiah foretold. If we count from Nebuchadnezzar's first invasion and carrying away of captives to the decree of Cyrus, and the return of the first expedition under Zerubbabel, we compute seventy years. Or, if we reckon from the later date of the destruction of the first Temple to the later date of the dedication of the second, we also find seventy years. The appointed space of time having elapsed, God

"Brought them back,  
Remembering mercy, and His covenant sworn  
To David, establish'd as the days of heaven."

2. It was about sixty years "after these things"† that the second expedition left Babylon. Darius continued to reign for thirty-one years. Then Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was king for twenty-one years ; so that the whole Book of Esther falls chrono-

\* Zech. iv. 9.

† Ezra vii. 1.

logically within the gap between the sixth and seventh chapters of the history before us. Artaxerxes succeeded Xerxes; and in the seventh year of his reign, with his cordial approval, Ezra in person led a second company of Jews to Jerusalem. They were not nearly so many as returned with Zerubbabel, for by this time the Jews had made themselves at home in various provinces of the empire; they had prospered greatly under Esther and Mordecai, in the latter years of Xerxes, and were not very eager to exchange their rich settlements among the heathen for the poor prospect of recolonising Judea. But Ezra gathered together "chief men of Israel," with a good many priests and Levites, and received from the king a valuable offering of gold and silver vessels for the new Temple at Jerusalem.

With simplicity, one may almost say with *naïveté*, the good scribe tells us that he was ashamed to ask a guard of soldiers from the king, because he had spoken to Artaxerxes of the protection of the Almighty God. Rather than weaken the force of his testimony, or give opportunity for a heathen taunt in reply, he held his peace, and took the risk of a journey unarmed through many foes. Or rather, he cast his anxiety on Jehovah, proclaiming for his companions a fast before they set out: "So we fasted and besought our God for this, and He was entreated of us." The journey of about 700 miles was then safely accomplished; and Ezra, on arriving at Jerusalem, at once began his work of reforming abuses, and insisting on the separation of Israel to God.

About thirteen years after this time, there went up a third expedition under Nehemiah—but it is not mentioned in this book, which indeed is of a fragmentary character, and ends abruptly. We know, however, that Ezra still lived in Jerusalem during the government of Nehemiah, and heartily co-operated with him in his reforming labours. Indeed, the Jeshua or Joshua and Zerubbabel of the beginning of the restoration period may be said to reappear in Ezra and Nehemiah, the Scribe and the Tirshatha, the ecclesiastical and civil leaders of Judah and Jerusalem.

## III. OF THE RELIGIOUS BEARINGS OF THIS HISTORY.

The captivity effectually cured the Jews of their hankering after strange gods. They returned to their land with an abhorrence of idol worship, and resumed their place as witnesses to the supremacy and sole deity of Jehovah. To this day they have never forgotten the lesson, and into whatever earthliness and blindness of heart they have fallen, they have never relapsed into any such heathenism as that of Ahaz and Manasseh before the captivity.

They were, however, at first in some danger of doing so. When Ezra came to Jerusalem, his joy in beholding the new Temple and the order of its services was soon damped by the discovery that the people, with some of the priests and Levites, were intermarrying and mingling with heathen families in the neighbourhood. The princes, indeed, reported the thing to him, that he, as a well-instructed scribe, might direct what should be done. Ezra discerned at once the seriousness of the mischief at work. He was filled with grief and struck dumb. Or, to quote his own words, in true oriental style—"I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening oblation."\*

This thing was ominous, because—

1. It betrayed want of faith in God, mistrust of His protection, when His people sought to strengthen themselves by alliances with the heathen.

2. It transgressed an express command of Jehovah in Deut. vii. 3, 4.

3. It paved the way for a relapse into idolatry. In this manner was the wise King Solomon beguiled to folly; and by this familiarity with the worshippers, and then with the worship of strange gods, were the kingdoms of Israel and Judah corrupted and overthrown.

\* Ezra ix. 3, 4.

So Ezra sat astonished. It seemed as if the nation had quite forgotten its history, and that all its affliction and captivity had left it no wiser than before. But at last the good scribe, taking encouragement from the evening sacrifice to spread the matter before the Lord, fell on his knees, and, with the concurrence of the pious Jews around him, poured out a prayer, which is one of the choice portions of this book. It contains no petition, but much confession of sin; and is expressed throughout in a subdued and plaintive tone, harmonising with a period of anxiety and struggle. In a spirit of humility, Ezra judged himself; and, in his intense patriotism or nationalism, identified himself with his people, even in faults which individually he abhorred. "We are implicated in this sin," he said, "and we have to meet the consequences." No one is responsible to God merely as a unit or individual. Every one is member of some family and of some nation, and carries corresponding responsibilities, moral and religious. Thus a man of God may have to cry—"*Our* iniquities are increased over our head, and *our* trespass is grown up unto the heavens." It is no excuse that sins are old and ancestral. Rather it aggravates their heinousness. Ezra confessed that the sin of the Jews in this matter was committed against the admonitions of history, and the commandments of God by His servants the prophets. In this respect, he felt the sin to be a gross insult to Jehovah; and, as one may be ashamed to look another in the face whom he has treated with ingratitude, so the scribe, as confessing the base offence committed by priests, Levites, and people, cried—"O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God."

The prayer was heard in heaven, and repentance was granted to Israel. Ezra led in reformation, as he had done in confession, and insisted on prompt and vigorous measures. The foreign wives illegally married by Jews must be put away—not quite unprovided for, one hopes. A severe remedy, hard to flesh and blood; but then the crisis was very serious, and mild measures could not meet the emergency. On the entire separation of Judah to God depended the character and future fate of the

colony. And Ezra deserved well of his nation for having the discernment to apprehend the nature and urgency of the crisis, the piety to confess the fault without guile, and the courage to apply the only sufficient remedy.

This is not the only good service rendered to the people of Judah by Ezra the scribe. The Book of Nehemiah tells of his care to make the people know and understand the Law. Tradition ascribes to him the founding of synagogues, the prototypes of our Christian churches. But let us be content with what this book relates. It brings before us a man of study, who was also a man of action, a man of lowly prayer and lofty moral courage. It shows us a type of piety which we do well to consider—a heart trembling at God's word—a sensitive regard to God's will and glory—a profound feeling of the shamefulfulness of disloyalty to Him—and a stringent ideal of the purity and separation from the world that ought to characterise His worshippers.

Let us confess our sins—not omitting those of our fathers and of our nation. Let us own our perversity and unfaithfulness to God. And what shall we say? Say with Ezra, "O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous. . . . We cannot stand before Thee because of this." When we cannot stand, and acknowledge that we cannot, God is gracious to us through Jesus Christ, and grants us forgiveness of sins in His righteousness. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."\*

Let us put away the sins we confess. If the Holy Spirit actuates us, and the glory of God is dear to us, we must separate from all that compromises or defiles. No matter what this costs of present pain, it must be done. Better to cut off a right arm, or pluck out a right eye, than let ourselves be led thereby into sin against God. Confession and reformation—there is no other right way for us, or path of safety. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." †

\* 1 John i. 9.

† Prov. xxviii. 13.

## NEHEMIAH.

THE book which bears the name of Ezra has told us of the restoration of the Temple and Divine worship after the return from captivity. The story of Nehemiah relates the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem with its walls and gates, and the re-establishment of the Jews in their land.

The throne of David was not set up again. Both as respects their liberty to worship in a temple, and as respects their civil condition and the restoration of their capital, the Jews continued under the power of the Gentiles. So were they destined to be, till the coming of the Messiah, separate from other nations, but dependent successively on the Persians, Macedonians, Egyptians, Syrians, and Romans. The gallant Maccabees, it is true, obtained the governorship of Judea, but they had to seek the protection of the Romans. After their time, Herod was made king by the favour of Marc Antony and the Roman Senate, but he never pretended to reign on the throne of David. It alarmed him exceedingly to hear of a Child that was born "King of the Jews."

Nehemiah was a man of the good old stamp of Joshua and Caleb—faithful, pious, patriotic, brave. But he raised no standard against the Gentiles. Having understanding of the times, he was content to re-establish the Jews on their own soil, under the protection of the great Persian empire; and he did secure for them that position, which, under one or another Gentile protector, they were to hold till the coming of Christ.

We know the names of his father and brother,\* but other-

\* Neh. i. 1; vii. 2.

wise have no trace of his parentage or early life. He was born in exile, and was doubtless told in childhood of the distant land of Judea, and the ancient renown of his nation when they were a people near to God. He grew up with reverence for Jehovah, Israel's God, musing on His promises, grieving over the unfaithfulness that had incurred the captivity, hearing with eagerness of the progress of those Jews who returned under Zerubbabel and Joshua, and longing to take some part in the restoration of the Holy City. As a young man, he was exposed to temptation, for he held a place of honour at the magnificent palace of Shushan or Susa, the favourite residence of the Persian court. But God kept him in the hour and place of temptation, and nursed within him a heroic national spirit. It has often pleased God to train His servants and soldiers in most unlikely places. While members of some pious households turn out feeble and unprofitable, mighty men for sacred enterprises, and faithful witnesses for times of rebuke, grow up and wax strong in scenes where one wonders that grace could live at all. Witness Daniel and the faithful three who feared not the furnace in the court of Babylon; Nehemiah in the palace at Shushan; Obadiah in the house of Ahab; saints in Cæsar's household.

His place at court obtained for Nehemiah a great advantage—that of the royal sanction and favour for the work at Jerusalem which he was called of God to accomplish. The heathen king valued him as a good and faithful servant, all the more that he never sought to ingratiate himself with the Persians by conforming to their religion. He was an Israelite indeed. Like Moses in the court of Pharaoh, and Mordecai in that of Ahasuerus, he never forgot that he was of the stock of Israel, and he was deeply affected when he heard of the depressed condition of the settlement at Jerusalem. What was it to him that Shushan was all gaiety, or that the star of Persia was still in the ascendant, if Judah languished, and the gates of Jerusalem lay waste! So he fasted and prayed—the right way to begin any great work for God. In his prayer, he asked that he might

find favour with the king, whose heart the Lord could turn as a river of water.

After a little delay, the desired opportunity came. Nehemiah's sad countenance arrested the notice and excited the displeasure of King Artaxerxes; for no one was permitted to bring signs of grief into the presence of the Persian monarchs.\* At the gathering frown of the king, the cupbearer "was very sore afraid;" not merely because his life might be cut off at the slightest gesture of the despot, but because the object he had at heart, the restoration of Jerusalem, depended on the goodwill of Artaxerxes, and might be lost unless he could quickly turn away the king's wrath. Self-possession, however, was given to him in that critical moment; and he answered the king with the utmost respect, but with open declaration of the cause of his distress; pathetically alluding to Jerusalem "as the city of his fathers' sepulchres." There is a proverb that "the wrath of a king is as messengers of death, but a wise man will pacify it."

Encouraged by Artaxerxes to state his desire, Nehemiah shot up a swift prayer to the God of heaven, and then answered the king: "If it please the king, and if thy servant hath found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it." The request was granted; and Nehemiah got royal letters and a military escort for his journey to Jerusalem. Ezra, thirteen years before, had not asked for such escort; but then he went as a priest to restore the Temple, Nehemiah, as governor, to rebuild the city.

The journey of Nehemiah was safely accomplished by "the good hand of his God upon him." When he reached Jerusalem, its dilapidated aspect filled him with grief—a grief all the more poignant, that he found the residents apparently reconciled to their condition, and contented with it. For three days he stayed in retirement, musing, and doubtless praying. Then, by night, almost unattended, he rode through the city to

\* See Esther iv. 2.

survey its walls and gates. He found only ruined walls and open gateways, for "the gates were consumed with fire." At last, having his soul filled with patriotic ardour, he addressed the priests, nobles, and rulers, and said, "Come, let us build!"

It was well, that they took encouragement from the Lord their God, for discouragement at once arose from the enemies of Judah. The leaders of opposition were a Horonite (perhaps a native of Bethhoron), an Ammonite, and an Arab, who laughed the project to scorn. The first of these seems to have been the Satrap of the province of Samaria. It is no bad sign, however, of a work undertaken for God, that it has to bear the jibes of mockers. The new governor of Jerusalem understood this well, and sent at once to the scornful enemies this intrepid reply: "The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we, His servants, will arise and build; but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem."

We have now reached the third chapter of the book. It contains an honourable register of those who despaired not of their country, but uprose, in a time of feebleness and depression, to rebuild their capital. They were of all ranks and classes. First rose up, as became him, the high priest, with his brethren the priests. The Levites, too, put their hands to the work. Then came the rulers, merchants, "goldsmiths, and apothecaries"—indeed, all the well-doing population of the city. Some of the ladies of high rank showed a fine example at this emergency. The daughters of Shallum, who was "ruler of the half-part of Jerusalem," helped their father in the work. Helpers also came in from the small towns of Judea, rising superior to all petty jealousies, and preferring Jerusalem above their chief joy. There were a few half-hearted in the enterprise; such as the nobles of Tekoa, who "put not their necks to the work of their Lord." They seem to have been the magnates of a little town, and, like petty great people in all times, thought it enough to give their patronage. They were exceptions, however, to the general rule. The builders worked with a will, and on a plan which gave exercise to both public zeal and private interest.

Every man built over against his own house, or his own chamber, if he were not a separate householder. At the same time, every one was inspirited by the thought that he was filling up his part of a great design for the common good, and for the welfare, not of a gate, or street, or quarter of the city, but of all Jerusalem.

As, when judgment came, God said, "Begin at my sanctuary," so now, when mercy came, restoration began at the sheep-gate, so called because through it animals for sacrifice were led to the Temple. And so must it always be with a Divine reformation in any city or church. It must start from the revival of the doctrine of sacrifice. It must begin at the sheep-gate, and work round to the sheep-gate again.

At the progress of the building, the scorn of the heathen was turned into angry menaces. Some of the Jews began to be seriously alarmed. They were heard to say, "We are not able to build the wall;" and a sort of panic spread. Then Nehemiah showed himself a fit leader and commander. He took vigorous measures of precaution against the adversaries, and fortified the courage of his people, by bidding them "remember the Lord, great and terrible." Every one who built the wall was to have a sword girt on his thigh. Nehemiah himself was to be always in the midst of the workers; and the trumpeter was to stand by him, ready to sound an alarm, or give the signal for an advance. Thus was the panic stayed, and the work went forward.

Our next view of Nehemiah shows him the friend of the poor. Having resisted enemies without the city, he also redressed grievances within. The whole enterprise, in which the Jews were engaged, was endangered by ill-feeling between the rich and the poor. The latter were in great straits, for it was a time of dearth, and had to surrender their lands, and even their children, to rich usurers. The course taken by Nehemiah in these circumstances is not to be discussed on grounds of political economy. The question was not, what is allowable between man and man in transactions, but what was right, at a

period of national distress, between members of the commonwealth of Israel. To exact usury of a brother, or countryman, was contrary to the express law of Moses ;\* and it was quite at variance with the constitution which God had given to Israel, that the landed possessions of families should be wrested from them in their temporary depression, and that the soil of Palestine should be concentrated in the hands of a few hard-hearted usurers. So the governor rebuked the rich for their rapacity, and, in a public assembly, appealed to them for a generous restitution of the possessions of the poor. The issue was honourable to all. The moral power of love and duty overcame the evil with good. In ancient Rome, similar strifes between the Patricians and Plebeians tore the state with dissension, and ended in a bloody war. But in Jerusalem, one grand burst of kind religious feeling swept away the cause of complaint ; the rich freely restored the houses, vineyards, and olive-yards of the poor ; and the people were all brethren as before.

Nehemiah had all the more power in making such an appeal that his own character was singularly disinterested. His establishment was maintained from his own resources without cost to the people ; and he had that princely spirit which loves to give more than to receive, and which shows hospitality without grudging.

“Blessed is he that considereth the poor : the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” So sang King David ; and so it was fulfilled to Nehemiah immediately after he had regained for the poor their houses and lands. The persistent enemies of Jerusalem, perceiving him to be the ruling spirit, sought to get his person into their power. But all their plots were defeated.

First, they proposed a conference with him in one of the villages. Four times they urged it ; but the governor answered well, that he was doing a great work, and could not come down. Then they tried to deter him by circulating false reports and calumnies ; but he cast back their imputations with the boldness

\* Deut. xxiii. 19, 20.

of an innocent mind, and turned to God in prayer, that his hands might be strengthened. Their next device was more dangerous. They intrigued against Nehemiah with certain traitors within Jerusalem, and hired false prophets to work on his fears. They knew not, however, the man they dealt with. He had no fears for them to work upon. He counted not his own life dear to him that he might finish his course with joy. "Should such a man as I flee?" was his answer. Should a man, called of God to such an enterprise, be solicitous and timorous about his own life?

So he baffled his enemies, not by counter-craft or subtle policy, but by integrity of heart and unfeigned devotion to the work of God. And his success was complete. The walls were finished with great despatch, and Jerusalem was in comparative safety. The builders acknowledged, and even their enemies were forced to perceive, "that this work was wrought of our God."

The next thing was to "keep the city." So the governor set watchers and guards. Then he registered the people, that he might know those of pure descent on whom he could rely, and detect such as said they were Jews and were not. The sum of the people agrees with that given in Ezra, 42,360. After the census a liberal free-will offering was made for the "treasure of the work." Nehemiah himself led the way, presenting munificent gifts. The princes and people followed. The latter were poor, but when the rich cast in their gifts the poor are seldom wanting; and indeed their offerings are usually more cheerfully bestowed, and more proportionate to their means, than the more conspicuous donations of the affluent.

But the strength of Jerusalem never depended on its walls, or gates, or watchmen. It was to be a holy city, with the Lord as a wall of fire round about, and the glory in the midst. So Nehemiah resolved on reviving the knowledge of God in His word, and for this purpose had a great "Bible-reading" in the open air in the street of Jerusalem. The venerable Ezra brought forth the roll of the Law, and stood to read it on a tower

of wood erected for the purpose. With his associates and assistants "he gave the sense" as he proceeded; for the people had become familiar with Chaldee, and had lost in part their proper language, the Hebrew, in which the Law was written.

By the Law is the knowledge of sin, and the people wept when they heard its words. Then Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites were sons of consolation, and bade the conscience-stricken people look to Jehovah their God. So the sorrow was turned to joy. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." The happy feast of tabernacles was then kept in a primitive style, unknown since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun.

But the joy did not—no joy in this world ever does—abolish the obligation to confess sin, or render fasting and prayer superfluous. The ninth chapter describes the service of prayer which followed the reading of the Scriptures. Nehemiah is not mentioned, though we can well fancy him leading the people in their responses. It was the Levites on the wooden stand who cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God. Their prayer is conceived in the same plaintive strain with that of Ezra, recorded in the ninth chapter of his book. The sad record of Judah's disobedience and rebellion is traced, and their cause left in the hands of the great and merciful God.

After this prayer, Jerusalem prospered. Solemn vows of fidelity to God were made, and a covenant signed and sealed, the first name attached to it being the honoured one of Nehemiah. Thus indeed was the prayer answered, in the zeal with which all the people were moved to vow to the Lord, and the spirit of consecration with which they were imbued, from the least even to the greatest. The sins into which they had fallen were such as obliterated the distinction between the Jews and other nations—intermarriage with the heathen, profanation of Sabbatic days and years, and exaction from their poor brethren. These sins they now renounced, engaging to keep God's Law, and to give and labour heartily for His house and worship.

After this, we read of the settlement of the rural districts—the rulers and one-tenth of the people occupying Jerusalem

itself, which was the post of danger as well as of privilege. The wall of the city was dedicated with a great public solemnity. Priests, Levites, singers, and players were there with Ezra their leader. The rulers of Judah had the governor at their head. The trumpets blew. The singers sang aloud. Numerous sacrifices were offered. And all the families in Jerusalem were glad. "The wives also and the children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." This notice of the Jewish families is quite suggestive. Into evil and selfish pleasures men do not care to take their wives and children. They leave them at home in silence and dulness when they go out to their revelry. But into holy joys all the members of a family may be freely brought. The women of Israel were never wanting in the celebration of great national events or religious solemnities. And the children of Jerusalem delighted the ear of the Lord Jesus Himself with their sweet hosannas.

What a change in the twelfth chapter from the sadness of the first! What hath God wrought! surely He had visited His people, and blessed the work of their hands.

Yet there was another change for the worse. Alas! what is man? Even when God has set him right, he is sure to go wrong again. It happened that Nehemiah was obliged at this time to return to Persia, and resume his place at court. In his absence, a declension from God began to appear in Jerusalem, and that in two respects—remixture with the heathen, and desecration of the Sabbath. Eliashib the high priest, the very man who should have been the guardian of the sanctuary, actually lodged within its precincts Tobiah, the enemy of the Jews, who was a family connection of his own. Then the Levites and singers went away to the fields, to support themselves by husbandry, and Divine service fell into neglect.

When Nehemiah returned and saw this, it "grieved him sore." But he was not the man to expend himself in sighs and tears; he was a reformer of a vigorous type. So he purified the Temple. His very approach had made Tobiah flee, and now he cast out after him his "household stuff." Then he

contended with the rulers about the neglect of tithes and offerings, and stopped the traffic which had been permitted on the seventh day, including a Sabbath market which the heathen had actually set up at the gate of Jerusalem. He also renewed the strict discipline which Ezra had previously enforced, insisting on the divorce of heathen wives, whom Jews had illegally married. This he did with a certain vehemence of spirit, recalling the mischief that had followed such intimacy with the heathen on the part of the wisest of their kings. "Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless, even him did outlandish women cause to sin."

In regard to these reforms, especially the restoration of tithes and offerings, and the putting away of heathen wives, it is well to read the Book of Malachi, which seems to have been written in, or soon after, the times of Nehemiah, and declaims against the same evils in Jerusalem which he so resolutely condemned.\*

Nehemiah's last words are, "Remember me, O my God, for good." The secret of this man's courage and efficiency lay in his habit of prayer, his constant reference to God. Of this we have evidence in almost every chapter. In prayer he formed his plans, defeated his foes, and encouraged and led his people. Praying, he first appears on the field of Judah's desolation. Praying, he last appears on the scene of Judah's prosperity. If at times we are inclined to think that he protests too much of his good motives and good deeds, we should remember that he was exposed to envyings and malicious imputations, and that it was at once his right as a faithful servant, and his needful consolation, to appeal to his God in conscious integrity of heart. †

Praying and working—this is the combination that the Church requires, and that God will richly bless.

\* See Mal. ii. 11; iii. 8-10.

† Compare 2 Cor. i. 12.

“ What are we set on earth for? Say, to toil—  
 Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines  
 For all the heat o’ the day, till it declines,  
 And Death’s mild curfew shall from work assoil.

So others shall

Take patience, labour to their heart and hand  
 From thy hand, and thy heart, and thy brave cheer,  
 And God’s grace fructify through thee to all.” \*

The prominent characteristic of Nehemiah is zeal for God, associated with a tender conscience, fed by a prayerful spirit, and displayed in fearless action. All who hear of him will do well to study such a character. Like him, make and pay your vows in the midst of Jerusalem. Like him, live to God, because you are not your own, but His. Like him, pray and watch, and build. Then fear not, for “the God of heaven, He will prosper you.”

\* Mrs. Browning.

*ESTHER.*

THIS is a book of Divine Providence. It is written to show how God, without manifesting Himself as He had done in Judea, watched over the Jews in a strange land, and under the power of the heathen. The circumstance at which some have stumbled, that the name of God is not once written in this book, presents no difficulty whatever, when we consider the time of its composition, or the period at which the events related took place. God was then "as a God that hid Himself," yet took cognisance and care of His people whom He had not cast off. And though the name of God is not in the book, His hand is in it everywhere. Such, too, is His manner of operation, that His will is executed through a series of human actions and occurrences apparently quite fortuitous. The charm of the history is this, that while everything proceeds in a manner quite natural, and there is no introduction of miracles or prodigies, all the incidents are so nicely adjusted to the production of the great result, that if one had been wanting, or been otherwise than it was, the whole plan would have been deranged, and the issue could never have been reached.

The time occupied by this story falls in between the going up of Zerubbabel from Babylon to Jerusalem, and that of Ezra. The Persian empire, in which Babylon was then included, was at its height of greatness, extending from the Indus to the Mediterranean, and from the Caspian to Arabia and Ethiopia. The Ahasuerus, who occupied the throne, was most probably the Xerxes of profane history. His winter palace was at Susa

or Shushan, and his court was luxurious and extravagant to a degree which we can scarcely conceive.

The story opens with the account of a sumptuous festival, at which the king entertained the satraps from the provinces. It lasted for the enormous period of half a year, the princes, no doubt, coming up from the governments in rotation to partake of it; and it concluded with a banquet that continued for a week, open to all the people in Shushan, great and small. There was no compulsion in regard to wine, but the Persians practised little restraint at feasts, and intemperance was common, with the other vices to which it usually leads. Yet the very revels of the heathen were made to "fall out to the furtherance" of the purposes of God.

A separate banquet was given by the queen to those of her own sex. All went well till the last day of the feast, when it was disturbed by an unexpected and unprecedented summons from the king. He would expose the queen Vashti to the gaze of all his crowd of revellers. It was an outrage on all the customs and proprieties of the age, and could not have proceeded from the king, if he had not been flushed with wine.

So, in every rank of life, every country, and every time, when man becomes intemperate, woman is sure to suffer. She is treated coarsely, her feelings outraged, her delicacy wounded, her rights denied—sometimes her health, her very life endangered. No doubt, women also fall into this vice; and when they do, no language can describe the degradation. But there is an awful page of human history, though scarcely written at all on earth, minutely recorded on high, and certain to come into judgment. It is covered all over with the sufferings of innocent women and children through the mad and shameless intemperance of men.

Had Vashti been of soft and timid nature, she would have obeyed the command at any cost to her own dignity, and then the whole order of events towards the Jews would have been otherwise than it proved to be. But the queen had a firm and lofty spirit that would not brook this insult, or forget what was

due to her sex and position, even at a despot's injunction. So she did what must have made all the court minions stand amazed—"The queen Vashti refused to come."

The king was very wroth, all the more because he must have felt that he was wrong. He took counsel with his princes, and they, falling in with his humour, and nursing his wrath, suggested that the queen should be divorced for her disobedience. A certain prince, Memucan, gave plausibility to the advice, by representing that the example of the great is contagious, and that if the offence were not openly and promptly punished, all Persia would soon be full of household insubordination. "And the saying pleased the king."

Every Ahasuerus has his Memucan. Men of rank, wealth, and good worldly position may be sure of flatterers. They hear less downright truth than more obscure people do, and get much less sincere and honest advice. Their caprices are commended, and their self-will petted to their serious injury. Indeed, whatever our rank or degree in the world or in the Church, we have perhaps no enemy that can do us so much harm as our fluent friend Memucan, whose flattering lips God will yet cut off.\*

The great banquet ended in vexation and wrong. True to its character, the wine-cup at the last bit like a serpent, and stung like an adder. Ahasuerus, when the flush of wine had given place to exhaustion, and the fit of wrath was over, found himself in a dilemma. His word had been hastily spoken, but it was made a decree, and could not be changed. Something like this occurs in other countries than Persia. In rashness or passion, one may easily speak a word, or do an injustice, that can never be recalled or undone. Repentance may come, but it is quite possible for it to come too late.

Again the courtiers gave advice which the king accepted. Their object was to divert his mind from brooding over the injury done to Vashti by their wicked counsel. The plan they suggested for obtaining a new queen is repulsive to our views of propriety, but it shocked no feelings in the realm of Persia ;

\* See Psalm xii. 3.

and through even this unseemly device a door was opened for the elevation of a Jewess, and the deliverance of the Jews. Maidens of choice beauty were taken to the seraglio,—among them Esther or Hadassah, an orphan, brought up by her uncle Mordecai. They belonged to that little tribe of Benjamin which has given to the history of Israel so many famous names. Esther adorned not herself to catch the monarch's fancy, but she surpassed all rivals, and at once became queen.\* The king's preference was enough, and no question was asked concerning the origin of the beautiful maiden in whom he delighted. Mordecai then received an appointment, for he sat at the king's gate, as Daniel used to sit at the gate of King Nebuchadnezzar. And Esther in her high station obeyed her kind uncle, just as she had done when she was brought up with him.

Soon after this, an incident occurred which had a very important influence on the future course of this history. One of those plots which have always threatened the lives of despots was formed against Ahasuerus by two of his chamberlains—probably disgraced officers, or offended favourites. Mordecai, detecting the plot, revealed it to Esther, who at once informed the king. The conspirators were punished, but Mordecai got no reward. So much the better, as the issue of the story shows.

The great interest of the book now opens upon us. A storm began to gather over the unconscious heads of the Jews in Persia, for a favourite, who bitterly hated them, suddenly rose in the king's confidence. It was Haman, an Agagite. If this means a descendant of Agag, the king of the Amalekites, his hatred to the Jews was hereditary, for Duke Amalek was a grandson of Esau, and his descendants were bitterly jealous of the posterity of Jacob. It will be remembered that they were

\* It is painful to think of the unsuccessful candidates shut up in the seraglio; but, at all events, they were provided for, and not cast out. The greater shame lies on the profligacy of Western communities, where the man of pleasure deceives and degrades, then heartlessly casts off his victim to sink into vice or to die.

the first to attack the tribes in the wilderness. From that time they were a people doomed to ruin; but they continued to struggle against Israel in the days of Gideon and of Saul. When David filled the throne, he made havoc of the Amalekites, only a small fragment of the nation lingering in the wilds of Mount Seir;—and even these were smitten by an expedition of 500 men from the tribe of Simeon, in the days of Hezekiah.

Mordecai, the Jew, seeing the Amalekite courtier, refused the prostration which the other officers of the palace made before him. Haman noticed the slight, and was incensed. Our sympathies go with Mordecai. He may have been too scrupulous about a salutation, but one must admire the sturdy spirit that would not, at whatever risk, pretend to reverence one of the hereditary enemies of the Hebrew race. At any rate, this Benjamite was no puppet to cringe before the favourite of a day.

The scorn of the Jew excited not anger only, but cruel hatred in the Agagite. All his pomp was nothing to Haman while Mordecai dared to refuse him homage. He resolved on a fearful revenge. He would sweep away, with a sudden destruction, all the hated descendants of Jacob throughout the empire. While avenging himself on the Jew at the king's gate, he would take the opportunity to wreak upon the heads of the Jewish people a bloody retribution on behalf of Amalek. But, as it often is with proud and angry men, Haman, trying too much, overreached himself, and failed.

He went about his plot deliberately enough. First, he sought a lucky day—like those brigands on the Continent, who used to pray and vow to the Blessed Virgin before descending from the mountains to rob and murder. After some delay, a day was fixed on, and it proved as lucky as Haman could desire; for, when he asked the king's signature to the murderous decree which he had prepared against the Jews, the careless monarch gave him his signet ring, and bade him do as he pleased. So the decree was issued.

The city of Susa was perplexed. Accustomed though they

were to the caprices of their rulers, the Persians were astounded at this relentless severity against the inoffensive Jews who lived and traded among them. But "the king and Haman sat down to drink." Drink again! It was this which led to the unjust treatment of Vashti. Now it hardened the king's heart against the Jews; and this wicked Haman, knowing the king's weakness, plied the wine-cup, and kept the palace gay with luxurious feasts, lest Ahasuerus should come to himself, and discover his folly.

So deliberately planned was the massacre of the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's Day, A.D. 1572. It was long pondered by the cruel Catherine. It was she who persuaded Charles IX. that the time had come to exterminate the Protestants in his kingdom. By feasts and gaities suspicion was disarmed. Then the tocsin was sounded, and 70,000 were butchered in Paris alone, while other places followed the metropolitan example. The Vatican rejoiced with hideous exultation, and struck a medal in honour of the bloody deed. But Europe, like Shushan, was perplexed and horrified.

The Jews fasted and wept; for, unlike the Huguenots, they had warning of their doom. "Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry." The queen heard of his mourning, and was grieved, but she knew not the cause. Shut up as women of rank are in the East, they are generally quite ignorant of public affairs. Esther sent a change of raiment to her dear kinsman, to assure him of her sympathy, and to dispel his spirit of heaviness by a garment of praise. Her chamberlain returned with a full explanation of the cause of this sorrow, a copy of the royal proclamation, and a message from Mordecai. It was to the effect that Esther must for her people's sake avow her Jewish extraction before the king, and obtain their deliverance by intercession.

Here, however, arose a serious difficulty. No one, on penalty of death, might enter uncalled the presence of a Persian king. His person was concealed, as if too sacred for men to look upon.

Indeed, to this day it is extremely difficult in Persia, China, and Japan to obtain an interview with the monarch, all the avenues to his presence being guarded with utmost jealousy.

Add to this, that Esther seemed just at this time to have lost her hold on her husband. She had not seen him for a month, while he had abandoned himself to excess of wine with Haman. What if her influence was gone—stolen away by a rival, or undermined by an enemy!

Moved, however, by Mordecai's vigorous exhortation, the queen decided to make an attempt, though it should cost her her life. She prepared for her venture by fasting before God, and inducing all her people to fast and pray likewise, for three days. If she had judged according to the flesh, she would rather have studied how to fascinate the king. But she judged after the Spirit, and put her confidence, not in attractions of her own, but in the God of Israel.

On the third day, Esther put on her royal apparel, both to show due respect to the king, and because those robes and ornaments were his gifts, and recalled the affection he had shown to her before Haman gained a baneful influence over his mind. Then she left the women's apartments, and made her way to the king's presence. All who saw her must have been amazed; for, if Vashti was degraded for disobeying a foolish word from the king, what danger did not Esther incur by contravening the settled customs, laws, and ordinances of the palace!

The suspense was short, for Ahasuerus at once showed favour to his queen; and surmising, as she drew near, that she had an important request to make, encouraged her to make it. She would not tell it in open court, but invited the king and Haman to a banquet in her own apartments. It was shrewdly done. Esther would re-establish her influence over her husband; and she would throw the favourite off his guard, taking care, too, to have him present when she should unveil his malice, that he might not defeat or escape her. So they came to her banquet; but she deferred her request till the following day, either from

a natural reluctance to avow herself a Jewess, or from a quick feminine perception that the best time had not yet arrived for her carrying her point.

Haman went home prouder than ever, for he had got a new step of preferment; he was in high favour with the queen. But it was as if a dagger pricked his heart, when "Mordecai, in the king's gate, stood not up, nor moved for him." By the advice of his wife, a kindred spirit and meet companion for him, and that of his obsequious friends, the vain-glorious man had a high gallows or "accursed tree" erected, which he destined for the Jew.

Mordecai slept well that night, unconscious of danger; but the Lord, who kept Israel, slumbered not, and so ordered it in His Providence, that the rage of the heathen was disappointed of its prey. "On that night could not the king sleep." No doubt this had happened before, for sleep is far more secure and sweet to the labouring man than to the voluptuary; but it was of God, that, on this critical night, when sleep fled, the king was disposed, not to vain amusement, but to reflection on the events of his reign. The chronicles of his kingdom were brought forth, and read to him. The Assyrians and Babylonians engraved their records on tablets of clay and stone, but the Persians used writing materials; and while the former are being disinterred and deciphered in our own generations, the latter have unfortunately perished.

In the roll of records read on that night to Ahasuerus, mention was made of the plot against his life, which Mordecai detected and defeated. On hearing it, conscience smote the king: nothing had been done for the preserver of his life: and the Jew had urged no claim, nor sought reward, but sat patiently in his place at the king's gate, because he knew that "promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south; but God is the Judge: He putteth down one and setteth up another."

Ahasuerus, when roused, was full of will and energy. So soon as it was day, he called, "Who is in the court?" Lo!

Haman, greedy of revenge, had come already to crave the death of Mordecai. Before he could prefer his request, he was commanded by the king to lead Mordecai in a procession of honour through the city. What an effort Haman must have made to command himself, and to conceal the secret writhing he endured in doing such a service! Think how he must have felt, as the procession passed the gallows fifty cubits high.

Mordecai showed a sober mind. Not elated by the sudden mark of royal favour he had received, he returned quietly to his post at the gate. But he was confirmed, we may be sure, in faith that God would deliver His people, and he was encouraged to augur well for Esther's intervention.

Haman had gloomy forebodings; and these were increased by the ominous words of his wife, and the prediction of the astrologers in his household, who now perceived him to be a falling star. As King Saul after his warning at Endor, so did Haman go on, with a clouded heart, to his deserved doom.

Esther's opportunity was fully come. The king had been roused from his inglorious deference to Haman, had acted for himself, and in favour of a Jew. Moreover he was quite curious by this time, and anxious to know what lay so heavily on the mind of his queen. Then she disclosed it—told the danger to her life—avowed her nationality, and quoted the very words of the cruel decree. To obviate any jealousy of her interference in the affairs of government, she judiciously added that she would have held her peace had not the matter been one of life and death, though even the reduction of such a people as the Jews to bondage, and of all their prosperous enterprise to slave labour, would have been greatly to the injury of the empire, and to "the king's damage." How much greater would be the loss incurred by their destruction! So she appealed alike to the king's affection, to his pity, and to his jealousy for the aggrandisement and enrichment of his empire. From the question of Ahasuerus—"Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" we infer that he must have been under the influence of wine, or otherwise not himself, when he gave

Haman authority to sign and issue the decree against the Jews, for he had no recollection of the circumstance. His question gave the queen the opportunity to unmask the plotter. We can see her rise, with flashing eye, to say—"The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!"

On the pole, fifty cubits high, was impaled the wretched Agagite.\* The heathen man sank in the pit that he had made; in the net which he hid was his own foot taken.†

The Jews, however, were not yet out of danger. When Esther again petitioned the king with tears to annul the decree against her people, he told her that it could not be done because of the foolish rule to that effect among the Persians; but he made a second decree, so far contradicting the first as to authorise resistance on the part of the Jews to all who should rise up against them. It was a clumsy device, and one that cost much bloodshed for nought; but the result to the Jews was, that they had "rest for many years."

We do not extenuate the vengeful spirit shown by that people, not excepting Esther herself, in asking for a second day in which to make an end of their enemies, and that Haman's sons should share their father's fate. The Jews always were a hot-blooded Eastern race, to whom revenge was sweet. It was not at all congenial to them to love their enemies, or pray for such as despitefully used and persecuted them. The Jew from whose lips such counsels fell, and in whose character and life they were perfectly illustrated, was no other than the Son of God.

In memory of their great escape, the Jews established a new annual feast—Purim—a festival of joy and mutual gifts, which continues to this day.

The great lesson of this book, as remarked at the outset, is the minuteness and watchfulness of Divine Providence: but there are also many points suggestive of the way of grace.

\* Hanging was not practised among the Persians. Haman was probably impaled or crucified.

† Psalm ix. 15.

We have in Christ a King of kings, whose "love is better than wine." He spreads a feast for all peoples, and sets the poor with princes. He is faithful without variableness, forbearing and patient without caprice. Far from excluding mourners, He is full of sympathy with such, and counts a broken spirit a pleasing sacrifice. Moreover, He never forgets, or leaves unrewarded, any one who has done service to Him, even to the extent of fetching a cup of cold water to one of the least of His brethren.

Esther first came to the king unadorned, but afterwards in beautiful garments. So the sinner first comes to Christ with no meetness for His presence, and is saved, and united to Christ, without merit, in mere sovereign grace. Afterwards he comes with petitions and requests, in the new relation to Christ which grace has given him, as one who has obtained acceptance, and may without presumption wear the robe of needlework given by the Saviour in the time of the love of espousals. Our most gracious Prince of Life beholds with delight His suppliant people, extends His sceptre, and grants their request.

The conflict, too, at the end of the book is significant. Enmity against the Church is allowed to grow and show itself. We often fancy that God might check or suppress it; but He sees it better to let it develop till the appointed day, when the Lamb and His armies shall overcome, and he who is faithful and true shall judge in righteousness, and make war. Enemies rise up against our souls. We think that the Lord might surely prevent this, and indulge us with a more quiet and tranquil experience. But God knows better how to train us. He lets our enemies rise up against us, and then He gives us a "whole armour" and a sharp sword; He teaches our "hands to war, and our fingers to fight." The end will more than repay all the suffering and strife—"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment."

## JOB.

AFTER the historical books, we have a poem of unique power and beauty—as great a glory to Hebrew literature as Homer's Iliad to the Greek, or Dante's *Divina Comædia* to the Italian. In respect of its theme, wrestling as it does with hard questions, it has not inaptly been called “the Prometheus or the Faust of Jewish civilisation.”

The writer is unknown. An old tradition ascribes the authorship to Moses during the long years of his sojourn in Midian : and in corroboration of this it is pointed out that there is no mention of the Hebrew institutions and laws, and that the references to the horse, the crocodile, and the hippopotamus, indicate a writer who had lived in Egypt. Nevertheless we decidedly incline to the opinion of those who trace this book to that Augustan age in Israel—the times of David and Solomon. The way in which the problem of the book is put forward, and the whole conduct of the discussion, evince a development of thought beyond that of the days of Moses. While its language is pure Hebrew, it lacks the archaisms of expression which are found in the Pentateuch. It has passages in regard to Wisdom which harmonise with some of the Psalms and with the Book of Proverbs, and it shares with the Proverbs the peculiarity of having no reference to Hebrew laws and ordinances. Indeed there is no reason for any reference to them in a book which carries us beyond the land of Israel. Job was the greatest of “the children of the East” (chap. i. 3), the very people whom Solomon surpassed in wisdom (1 Kings iv. 30). And the allusions to natural history, while they may be due to the residence of the poet in

Egypt, are just as probably due to the encouragement given to such studies by King Solomon.

The date of the authorship of course determines nothing as to the age of Job himself. He may have lived quite as long before the poet who wrote of him, as Æneas did before the poet Virgil. His longevity seems to place him in patriarchal times, for he lived 140 years after his trials were over, and could not have been less than about 200 years old at his death. He was not an Israelite.

It may be assumed that Job was a real historic person. We are led to this both by the references to him by Ezekiel and James, and by the general rule of ancient literature in all nations, to make use of actual events and persons as the basis for ideal description. Ewald has said that "an entire invention, either of a person or of a history, is a thing unknown in the earliest antiquity." At the same time, no one can read this book as a literal history. The scene in the prologue, and the numerical figures given both in the prologue and the epilogue, forbid such a supposition. It is also impossible to imagine that Job and his friends actually improvised all the poetical speeches.

The book is a kind of *theodicy*. While describing the affliction of Job, it really brings into question the equity of God. The problem, all through, is the investigation of the ways of Providence; and the discussion takes the form of a poetical drama, with "dramatis personæ," but without stage action or thickening plot—the interest being ethical and psychological. How great, or how little, its foundation of fact, does not affect its use of edifying. The parables of the rich man and Lazarus, the good Samaritan, and the prodigal son, are quite as instructive to the Church as they could have been if they had been strict narratives of fact.

It is very important to carry with us a clear idea of the structure of this book. Take, then, the following plan:—

- I. INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE, in prose. Chaps. i., ii.
- II. THE POEM. Chaps. iii.—xlii. 6.
1. Job's Complaint. Chap. iii.
  2. The Debate, in three cycles.
    - (1.) First cycle. Chaps. iv.—xiv.
    - (2.) Second do. Chaps. xv.—xxi.
    - (3.) Third do. Chaps. xxii.—xxvi.
  3. Job's Second Complaint. Chaps. xxvii.—xxxii.
  4. Elihu's Speech, introduced by a short prose account of him. Chaps. xxxiii.—xxxvii.
  5. The Lord's Voice, and Job's Submission. Chaps. xxxviii.—xlii. 6.
- III. CONCLUDING NARRATIVE, in prose. Chap. xlii. 7—17.

I. The introduction or præm, which is in prose, lays the foundation of the whole poem, and exhibits its problem.

Job was a prosperous man in the land of Uz, probably on the confines of Idumea. He was rich in the wealth of the time and country—oxen, sheep, and camels, with the servants required to tend them. His family was large, and his household very great. Best of all, he was a man of the highest character,—“perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil.”

On a sudden, all Job's prosperity forsook him. It is ascribed to the malice of Satan; and the Adversary is represented as appearing in an assembly of the sons of God, detracting from the character of Job, and obtaining permission to prove him by misfortune. The place of the assembly is not indicated at all: and there is no reason to suppose that it was in heaven, or that Satan ever was there, either before his fall or after. He is confined within the atmosphere of our earth, and goes to and fro, and up and down, on its surface. It pleased God to let Satan work his cruel will; and so it fell out that bands of robbers carried off the property of Job and slew his servants, and his sons and daughters perished in an earthquake. It was enough to make his brain reel and stagger, but the good man held fast

his integrity. Though he knew not the cause of this sudden and terrible change in Providence, he bore himself with a most touching resignation. "He fell down upon the ground and worshipped and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God with foolishness." We think it a great matter to repeat these words of submission when we are deprived of one child or one friend; but Job said them when he lost all his children, and was stript of all that he had.

The first assault of temptation had failed; and the Adversary let Job alone for a season—a poor man now and childless, but still a fearer of God. Then came a second trial, introduced in the same way as the first, by a Divine permission given to Satan under strict limitation. It is a graphic expression for the working of evil forces in human history, under the control of, and in subordination to, higher and the highest good.

Job was smitten with the disease which we call elephantiasis, and suffered from "sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown." His wife was distracted at the sight of his misery, and said, unwittingly helping Satan—"Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Renounce God and die." So Eve, beguiled by the Serpent, induced her husband to eat and die. But Job was not as Adam, and did not hearken to the voice of his wife. He expressed his surprise and sorrow that she, hitherto so wise and kind, should speak "as a foolish woman." "What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips."

So failed the second temptation. Though Job was crushed and stunned, he bowed himself meekly before God, and sinned not with his lips. Then a third trial opened upon him;—and it is this which occupies the main body of the book. Three friends of Job, hearing of his calamities, came to condole with him. They seem to have been descendants of Abraham in various lines, and acknowledged the God of Abraham. At first they kept a long impressive silence; but when they began to

speak, exasperated Job by their admonitory tone, and the narrow rigour of their judgment.

## II. THE POEM.

1. Job begins with a most pitiful strain.

“Perish the day wherein I was born, and the night which said, A man-child is conceived!” He would not curse God, but he “opened his mouth and cursed his day.” So did the prophet Jeremiah pour out his anguish—“Cursed be the day wherein I was born; let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed.”\* The friends were not wise enough to let this burst of grief pass over and expend itself, but began to remonstrate with Job, each in his own characteristic style, Eliphaz with the bearing and sweeping eloquence of a seer, Bildad with vigour enough, but with more limitation of thought, Zophar with heat and vehemence. Then ensued,

2. The grand debate, in three cycles. The friends proceeded on the assumption that calamities befall men only on account of definite acts of sin. In the simple conditions of patriarchal life, it was usual to see the righteous prosper, and the wicked suffer. To Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, this seemed a principle of universal and absolute application; and they therefore held Job guilty of some great misdeed or of utter hypocrisy, and laboured to extort from him a confession.

(1.) In the first cycle of debate, each of the three friends addresses the unhappy chief, and he replies to each in succession, concluding with an appeal from their judgment to God. They assert that the righteous God blesses the just, and punishes the unjust. Job replies that it is not uniformly so seen; that he himself, for example, while just, is made to suffer; and that, in point of fact, the just often endure wrong, and the wicked are allowed to triumph. The philosophy of those Arabian sages was too narrow for the case; and Job, in his last address, told them plainly that they were “physicians of no value,” and that he appealed from them to that very God on whose providence

\* Jer. xx. 14-18.

they dilated with such confidence. At the same time, he was sore perplexed, for he, like his friends, had been wont to connect all suffering with punishment for sin, and knowing himself free, at all events, from presumptuous sin, he passed through a dreadful intellectual strife and moral agony. "Job's disputing with God is as terrible as it is pitiable. It is terrible, because he uplifts himself, Titan-like, against God; and pitiable, because the God against whom he fights is not the God he has known, but a phantom which his temptation has presented to his dim vision—a phantom in no way differing from the inexorable ruling Fate of the Greek tragedy."\*

(2.) In the second round of debate the friends increase the severity of their tone, and urging, as a truth positive and indisputable, that it is the wicked who are scourged and afflicted, assail the integrity of Job. Eliphaz condemns his words as vain and irreligious. Bildad thinks to appal him by describing the destruction of evil-doers. And Zophar breaks out into uncharitable accusation and invective. Not one of them has a conception of the mystery of suffering, about which they talk so volubly. Job answers them with scorn. Their arguments are feeble, their apprehensions shallow. In their second round of speech they had improved nothing on the first—had produced no new thoughts, or deeper soundings of reflection, but only more rigour and harshness, and incapacity to comfort. Job denies that the wicked are always punished in this life; they grow old and prosper. And he refuses to submit himself to the admonition of men who have so misjudged him, and shown themselves so unfit to minister to a heavy-laden spirit. So he again lifts his appeal to God—"Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God." His conscience is not yet touched at all. But, resenting false charges, he looks to God for vindication of his innocence;—and, as some golden ray of sunshine may shoot across a dismal cave, so across the discontent and grief of Job shines this confidence—"I know

\* Delitzsch on the Book of Job: Clark's Ed., vol. i., p. 242.

that my Redeemer liveth." But he thought not of a redeemer in the sense of a saviour from sin. It was the Goël that he looked for, the Vindicator, who should lift up his name and cause out of the dust.

(3.) In the third cycle of debate, the comforters are turned into headlong accusers. Eliphaz expresses great truths with wonderful force of language; but truths inadequate, in their application to the case of Job, to explain his suffering. Words the most sound and holy lose their value, and become impertinent and injurious, when they are uttered at the wrong time, or in a wrong spirit, or with a wrong direction. Job again turns to God, and cries with a bitter cry—"Even to-day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to His seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Having shown that the wicked prosper, he proceeds to establish it as a fact that the righteous are often oppressed, and to argue that his own afflictions are therefore not to be construed into signs of guilt. Bildad, in a few fine sentences, deprecates what seemed to him the proud self-justification of Job. But the patriarch answers him with scornful impatience, and closes the debate (for Zophar held his peace), with a sublime acknowledgment of the unsearchableness of God. "Lo! these are but the outskirts of His ways: and how small a whisper is heard of Him! but the thunder of His power who can understand?"

3. His miserable comforters being silenced, Job poured out his second complaint. He "again took up his parable." His monologue was a parable, in the sense of the outpouring of a mind solemnised and elevated above other minds, and above itself at other times. In the first part of it, he leads on, with great force and beauty of language, to the conclusion that "the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding." In the second he bemoans himself greatly, and protests his innocence and integrity. The discussion with his friends has done him no good: they are silenced, but he is

more than ever perplexed:—and now “the words of Job are ended.”

The interest of all this, which is the main part of the poem, is moral and psychological. Light falls on the question started by Satan at the beginning of the story—“Doth Job fear God for nought?” It is fully proved that his piety was not mercenary or selfish, but deep-seated in his heart. At the same time, we have a most skilful delineation of the influence produced in course of the controversy on the mind of the afflicted patriarch himself, exposed as he was to the danger of defying heaven, and casting off all religious reverence and belief; but softened at times and subdued, as with the dropping of a gentle dew from above on his heart, and, with a strange mingling of audacity and plaintiveness of spirit, turning away from his fellow-men to his God.

As the friends condemned Job without cause, he did well to resist them. But, as he made so very sure of his own innocence, and saw doubt and difficulty only in the rectitude of God—thus “making himself more just than God”—he was deeply in fault. Accordingly the poem proceeds, till Job is brought to a conviction of conscience before God, and a lowly sense of sin.

#### 4. Elihu's speech.

The new speaker is introduced on the scene in a few verses of prose narrative. He was younger than the previous debaters, and had listened with the deference due to his seniors. But he was indignant, alike at the self-righteousness of Job, and at the unfounded accusations of the three friends. So he spoke, preparing the way of the Lord—and in words to which Job replied nothing.

It may be observed that Elihu addressed the patriarch by name, which none of the three previous disputants had done. Then, with great flow of thought and speech, he endeavoured to lead this man of sorrows into profitable meditation on God—the various ways of His communication with men, and the wisdom and justice of His rule over men. He may be said to

perform those functions of review and pious reflection which belonged to the Chorus in the Greek tragedy.

At the close of his address, a storm was gathering; and he spoke of lightning and thunder, the snow and the rain-cloud, the whirlwind and the "balancing of the clouds." While he yet continued to vindicate the Divine goodness and justice, a voice came out of the whirlwind, and it was the Voice of the Lord.

#### 5. The Lord's Voice.

The case having baffled human skill, God came to deal with His servant. He who spoke to Noah, to Abraham, and to Moses, answered Job, in order to convince him of his ignorance, and so of his presumption in calling his Maker to account.

The discourse which is put into the mouth of the Lord—after a manner of which we have examples in uninspired poetry—is in a very lofty strain, and exhibits the poet of this book at his full power. It expatiates on the mighty works of God, the vastness and variety of creation. At first sight it appears a not very direct or suitable answer to difficulties about providence; but it was really the very best teaching for Job, because it expanded his thought beyond the limits of his own trouble, impressed him with a vivid sense of the Divine wisdom and majesty, and thus rebuked his disposition to complain and remonstrate, as if God were a man like himself.

The discourse of the Lord is in two parts. At the end of the first, Job gives expression to the sense of abasement and insufficiency produced in him by the disclosure of God. He protests that his complaint is silenced. He is "small"—unequal to the task to which God has summoned him—unable to sustain the discussion. "Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther." So far well, but Job's conscience is still untouched. Therefore the Lord continues His speech—making nature preach humility to man, and correcting the measure of vain-glory with which Job had asserted his innocence, and the

temerity with which he had almost upbraided his God. But the Lord says nothing to crush and exasperate His servant, as the three friends had done. It is better to fall into the hand of God than into the hands of men. In His word, He is patient and kind, and diverts the thought of the sufferer from his own sad case to the contemplation of other objects of Divine care, and proofs of Divine wisdom and might. The result is a perfect success. And the poem closes with the words of Job's lowly confession before God—"I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no purpose of Thine can be restrained. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.—I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job had said that in his flesh he would see God—expecting God to draw nigh in order to vindicate him against his accusers. But now that he did see God, he only arraigned and blamed himself, and, ashamed of his haughty temper, repented in dust and ashes.

### III. THE CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK.

This is written in prose to correspond with the introduction.

So long as Job asserted himself, he got no help; but when he humbles himself, he is exalted. Against the three friends he is vindicated as a true servant of God, and no hypocrite or evil-doer. Through his intercession they are forgiven. And, with a fine poetical justice, Job shines out after his heavy cloud of trial has passed away, none the worse for it, but all the better—surrounded by troops of friends, increased prosperity, and a family quite equal to that which he had lost, seven sons and three daughters—and these the fairest in the land.

"So Job died, old and full of days." This is a characteristic ending of an Old Testament book, and has no parallel in the New. The literature of the Old Covenant regarded long life on the earth as a great object of desire, and gave no such prominence to heavenly places as belongs to New Testament revelation.

Nevertheless, this ancient poem, with the story on which it is founded, has appropriate admonition and inexhaustible teaching for the Christian Church.

The Book of Job speaks to us of—

1. *The Malice of Satan.*—He is most anxious to blacken the character and overthrow the integrity of God's servants. His assaults are dictated by a mocking spirit which disbelieves in loyalty of heart to God, and by a cruel spirit always characteristic of him who is "a murderer from the beginning." No servant of God may expect altogether to escape the Satanic malice. There is enmity between the Serpent and the Seed of the Woman according to promise. But, happily, God is able to restrain that dragon; can make his attacks work out, as in the case of Job, a higher good; and, however His people may have to suffer for a time from a bruised heel, the God of Peace will in the end "bruise Satan under their feet."

2. *The Secret of Patience.*—"Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" \*—"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." † The discipline of suffering on the earth is always full of perplexity. There is nothing better than to be still, consider "the end of the Lord," and wait in hope for the unravelling of His merciful design. If we stand in the grace, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God, then, and then only, may we even "glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience." Nay, even if we cannot sing in the valley, but pass through it in silence and tears, we shall, if we endure meekly, sing by and by upon the mountain tops, with happy saints—

"All was well, which God appointed,  
All has wrought for good at last."

\* James v. 11.

† Eccles. vii. 8.

3. *The foreshadowing of the "Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief."*—All the deep distresses in Old Testament history seem to pour themselves into the deeper distress of Christ. The abandonment of Joseph—the rejection of Moses—the suffering of Job—the afflictions of David—the lamentations of Jeremiah—all point forward to Him who bare our griefs and carried our sorrows—whose "visage was marred more than any man's, and His form than the sons of men." Satan plotted against Him; and Satan was baffled and overthrown. Miserable comforters and counsellors wearied Him, but He turned to God, seeking only that His Father should be glorified;—and He was perfected through sufferings. He indeed never opened His mouth, as Job did, to murmur or upbraid. But He did cry to God, and God delivered Him—"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping me?—I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn.—Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help."\*—"In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared, though He was a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered."†

Let the meek endurance of Christ cast a tender light backward over the Book of Job, and forward over any tribulation in the world through which Christians have to pass. Remember, too, that the Comforter has come. Under the government of Christ, and the teaching of the Holy Ghost, all things work together for your good, who love God. Light afflictions, which are for a moment, work for you more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.

\* Ps. xxii.

† Heb. v. 7, 8.

## THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

### PART I.

WE have unusually high authority for the title of this book. Our Lord Jesus Christ, and His apostle Peter, alike refer to it as "The Book of Psalms." \* In Hebrew, the collection is entitled *T'Hillim*, praises: in Greek, *Psalmoi*, songs with a musical accompaniment.

We have here 150 lyrical poems, designed for use in Divine worship. They vary, as do all collections of hymns, in beauty and excellence; but all are Divine songs, composed by men that were moved by the Holy Ghost. There are really five Books of Psalms gathered into one. The five are properly marked in the Revised Version as follows:—

First Book.—Psalms i.—xli. ; ending with Doxology and double Amen.

Second Do.—Psalms xlii.—lxxii. ; ending in the same way, (with the addition that "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended.")

Third Do.—Psalms lxxiii.—lxxxix. ; ending in the same way.

Fourth Do.—Psalms xc.—cvi. ; ending with Doxology, Amen, and Hallelujah.

Fifth Do.—Psalms cvii.—cl. ; ending with many Hallelujahs.

There is thus a Pentateuch of the Psalms, as well as a Pentateuch of the Law. There is also something like the same

\* See Luke xx. 42 ; Acts i. 20.

variation in the use of the Divine name, in this later Pentateuch, that is found in the earlier. In the 1st, 4th, and 5th Books of Psalms, the Divine Being is usually spoken of and addressed as Jehovah; in the 2d and 3d Books, commonly as Elohim, God.

The Psalter was gradually formed during the times of the kingdom; and even comprises odes that were evidently written in or after the Captivity. Chronological order is not carefully observed; but, in the main, the oldest Psalms stand first; the latest, last.

Scholars have differed as to the value of the inscriptions prefixed to the Psalms, so far as respects authorship. In the Hebrew Bible, 126 Psalms have such inscriptions. They certainly have a higher claim to our confidence than the subscriptions appended to the New Testament epistles in the Authorised Version; and are entitled, as we think, to a general respect, as ancient editorial annotations.

Of those Psalms which have the name of an author prefixed, one—the 90th—claims a great antiquity, for it is ascribed to “Moses, the man of God.” This has been much questioned by commentators, but is favoured by internal evidence. It is a Psalm in every way worthy of such an origin; and its lamentation over early death at three score years and ten, agrees well with what must have been the feeling of Moses when he saw all the generation that he led out of Egypt falling in the wilderness. Seventy-three Psalms have the name of David prefixed to them. Twenty-four are ascribed to poets of his reign—twelve of these to Asaph; eleven to the sons of Korah, among whom Heman was the most famous; and one, but a very great one, sufficient to make the reputation of any poet (the 89th), to Ethan, the Ezrahite. Two Psalms (the 72d and 127th) are attributed to Solomon—and very appropriately, for one is of the Kingdom of Peace, the other of the House of the Lord.

The chief name connected with this book must ever be that of the Son of Jesse. David was “the sweet Psalmist of Israel.” Richly gifted as a poet, finely skilled as a musician,

wondrously educated and developed in all his powers by a life of vicissitude and romance, above all, deeply taught of God, and capable of the most profound emotions and most intense ardours of soul, he was the man above all men who ever lived to compose a Psalter for the consolation and instruction of such as are spiritual, whether in Israel or in the Church. Then he had so vast a scope of thought and experience, and such a range of spirit from the depths of Sheöl or Hades to the heights of Heaven, that, as one has finely said, "every angel of joy and of sorrow swept, as he passed, over the chords of David's harp:" and "the hearts of a hundred men strove and struggled together within the narrow continent of his single heart."\*

Besides the names of authors prefixed, there are other inscriptions to the Psalms. Many have the formula, "For the Precentor," or, as we have it rendered, "To the chief musician." These words, of course, were written when the verses were completed, and given over to the choirmaster to be set to music. Other titles are given to express the character, or intention, of a psalm. One is for teaching, a second to bring to remembrance, a third for thanksgiving. One is a prayer, another a hymn, a third a song of loves; others are "songs of the steps," as arranged to be sung by the Levites at the Feast of Tabernacles on the fifteen steps, between two courts of the Temple. Many of the inscriptions refer to the melody, or to the instrumental accompaniment. Just as we have the names of tunes printed on our praise-books, so do we learn that the 22d Psalm was originally set to the music known as "Hind of the Dawn," for the afflicted Messiah is likened in that Psalm to a deer compassed by wild beasts and hungry dogs. The 56th was, in like manner, set to "The silent dove in far off lands;" for David sang in it of his wanderings, and his exile in the land of the Philistines. The instrumental accompaniment was carefully selected to suit the character of the Psalm. Thus the 5th was to have flutes; others were with stringed instruments. Selah is doubtless a musical sign—the signal for the intervention

\* Edward Irving's Collected Writings, vol. i., p. 416.

of a musical symphony, or of a blast of trumpets, before the voices resumed.

The Psalms may be classified according to their scope and character, thus—

Historical—*e.g.*, 78th, 105th, 106th.

Exultant—*e.g.*, 16th, 47th, 66th, 93d, 96th, 98th, 100th, 103d, and the five Hallelujah Psalms at the close.

Plaintive—*e.g.*, 6th, 13th, 42d, 69th, 88th, 102d.

Penitential—*e.g.*, 38th and 51st.

Admonitory and Didactic—*e.g.*, 37th, 91st, 107th.

The longest of all, the 119th, praises the Law of God, and expresses delight therein. It is very elaborate in its structure, having an acrostic arrangement. It is divided into parts of equal length, each named after a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each verse beginning with the letter of that part. The following Psalms are also acrostic, and they are all of a didactic character too—the 25th, 111th, 112th, 145th. We do not attach any great value to this classification of Psalms, for many will not fall under any one of these categories, having in themselves so much variety—historical allusions, joyful acclamations, plaintive cries, bold appeals, and prophetic gleams of thought.

It may be profitable to consider, (1.) The relation of the Psalter to the Law and to Israel: and, (2.) Its value to the Christian Church, and the esteem in which it has always been held by Christians.

I. It is not all the truth concerning the Psalms, but it is a truth not unimportant, that they were written in the times of the Old Covenant, and originally formed the hymn-book of a people who were under the Law. There is in them Gospel truth, but written by and for those who lived before Gospel times. There is in them spiritual teaching, with much consolation of grace; but, in the first instance, for persons who were under the Law given by Moses, and exercised by trials and

fears in that state, though cheered by the favour of Jehovah to Israel, and the earthly calling He had given to them, apart from and above all nations. Accordingly, they begin by declaring the blessedness of him who loves the Law, and throughout they aspire to the full realisation of Israel's calling as the chosen of Jehovah, fearing Him, and exulting in the subdual of other nations, and the destruction of their idols, before the face of Israel. Without doubt, Christ is in them, as we may hereafter show; but it is Christ presented to Israel, either as made under the Law, and suffering as the "One Man who should die for the people," or as the exalted King in Zion, subduing rulers and judges of the earth. There is no Psalm of the Holy Trinity, although an enlightened Christian may trace in the Psalter the doctrine of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. But the praise is given to Jehovah God, for His judgments and His mercy; and Jerusalem is the city of God—Judah is His pleasant land.

It is no disrespect to the Psalter to remember this. It is what must be expected in an Old Testament book, written when Israel was a people near to God, and the Gentiles were far off, and the calling of the Church had not begun. We fear that, while some love the Psalms for the New Testament truth that is couched in them, a good many love and repeat them rather for that Old Testamentism which is their defect. These persons are themselves under the Law, and have not reached, nor can they appreciate, Gospel liberty. They are servants rather than sons, are religious rather than spiritual, are always struggling for pardon and comfort, not enjoying acceptance and completeness in Christ; so they take the position of a Jewish Psalmist as quite the one for them, and are always in the misgivings of an Old Testament experience, instead of the light and liberty of the New.

So much of the dispensational position of the Psalms. It is the hymnal of a household of faith under law, before grace and truth had come by Jesus Christ. Still this, while true, is not all the truth.

II. The Psalms are invaluable to the Christian Church. They have been used in its service from the beginning, and have been held in the utmost admiration and esteem by Christians of the loftiest strain and largest spiritual calibre. To restrict the Christian Church, either in public or in family worship to the use of the Psalter, would indeed be to commit a great dispensational mistake, and incur serious injury; but it is a still graver mistake and deeper injury to supersede the Psalms entirely by hymn-books, or to sing them only in an extremely diluted and enfeebled paraphrase.

The Psalter is really the foundation of all the Christian service of song, and one may add, of a large proportion of the prayer put up by Christian hearts, alike in secret chambers and in public assemblies. In the primitive Church the Psalms were sung. In the fifth century, when the mass of the people were very ignorant of Scripture, the Psalms held their ground, for it is testified that they were committed to memory, and recited or sung "in private houses, in market places, and in the streets." No book is so largely employed in religious service at the present day. It is honoured, of course, in the Jewish synagogue. It has a prominent place in the Roman service of the Mass. It is so arranged in the English Book of Common Prayer that it may be rehearsed every month. The Church of Scotland, in common with the reformed Churches of the Continent, broke out into psalm-singing at the Reformation, and has never tired of the exercise. The casting of the Psalms into metre, in order that they may be sung to common tunes, is questionable on the score of taste, and is open to other objections; but it was done by our ancestors, with a good and wise intention of popularising the Psalms. It is safe to say that the Psalter must continue to be a cherished manual of devotion, so long as God has a people on the earth. "The universal Church of Christ hath given its witness that these Psalms are made not for one age, but for all ages; not for one place, but for all places; not for one soul, but for all souls; time, place, and person being only so far present in them as to associate them with that function to which they

were first given, not to dissociate them from any other generation of spiritual children which, in after ages, was to be born to the same Spirit by the seed of the Word, which liveth and abideth for ever."\*

It is interesting, too, to observe how firm a hold the Psalter has taken of the most eminent Christians. Athanasius and Chrysostom delighted in them. Ambrose of Milan says: "Although all Divine Scripture breathes the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of Psalms." By a Psalm was Augustine consoled at his conversion, and on his death-bed. At the time of the Reformation, both Luther and Calvin showed a high esteem of the Psalter, wrote upon it at length, and took pains to bring it into popular use. The former called it "a little Bible, the summary of the Old Testament." The latter says in the preface to his Commentary: "I have been wont to call this book, I think not inappropriately, an anatomy of all parts of the soul; for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Nay, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting agitations with which the minds of men are wont to be tossed. This book makes known not only that there is opened up to us familiar access to God, but also that we have permission and freedom granted to us to lay open before Him our infirmities, which we would be ashamed to confess before men. Further, we are here accurately instructed as to the right manner of offering to God the sacrifice of praise, which He declares to be most precious in His sight, and of the sweetest odour." Bishop Jeremy Taylor found in this book "so many admirable promises, so rare a variety of the expressions of the mercies of God, so many consolatory hymns, the commemoration of so many deliverances from dangers, deaths, and enemies, so many miracles of mercy and salvation," that he felt persuaded "there could come no affliction great enough to spend so great a stock of comfort as was laid up in the treasure of the Psalter."

\* Edward Irving's *Collected Writings*, vol. i., p. 410.

But who shall tell how many obscure Christians, unknown to earthly fame, but dear to God and written in heaven, this book has taught and comforted? Nay, who is a Christian at all—who has any measure of spiritual discernment and sensibility, and does not love the Psalter? Not only so, but you, who value the book as a whole, are almost sure to have your favourite psalm or psalms, that seem always to strike an answering chord within your breast. Is it the 8th, that song in the night of the Son of man? or the pastoral which every one knows—the 23d—a song which one has called the nightingale of the psalms—“small and of a homely feather, but filling the air of the whole world with melodious joy?” Is it a song of Messiah—the 2d, 22d, or 110th? Is it the plaintive trustfulness of the 42d, and 43d? Is it the song of the great marriage (45th), or of the kingdom (72d), or of the vineyard (80th)? Is it the sublime hymn of the covenant (89th)—the odes of gratitude (103d and 116th)—the celebration of God’s works (104th), or of His omnipresence and omniscience (139th)? Or, what think you of the ringing hallelujah psalms that conclude the whole Psalter, as some masterpiece of music ends with full clear resounding notes, that fill the ear, and swell the soul? Nay, be not too partial; step not from one favourite psalm to another, but go through the book in detail, and you will find that through field and flood, on the hill-tops and in the shaded valleys, now far off in the desert, now in the deep with rolling billows, and now in the meadows by the margin of still waters, you are led in repentance, faith, self-conquest, patient endurance, and holy aspiration, onward to the joy of the ransomed of the Lord, and the ecstasy of heavenly praise.

Wherever the Gospel spreads and prevails, it produces singers of “psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.” With the preachers of that Gospel, the Hebrew bards are at this day going through the earth in every speech and language. They chase away griefs and fears; pour strong stimulus of courage into the breast of good soldiers of Christ, and balm of consolation into

the hearts of the sick and the poor, desolate widows, and orphans in their loneliness.

Sing, O Christian! on your heavenly way. Let God be extolled both in the sanctuary, and in the firmament of His power. "Let all breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah."

## THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

### PART II.

HAVING spoken of the form and arrangement of the Psalter, and generally of its position in Israel and its value for the Church, we propose briefly to examine its contents, as a theological and prophetic book. It is a very notable circumstance, that our Lord Jesus Christ referred to or quoted nine psalms—the 8th, 22d, 31st, 41st, 48th, 69th, 82d, 110th, and 118th:—and the evangelists and apostles quote no fewer than thirty-three of them. A book so honoured in the New Testament evidently possesses peculiar claims on our study. We shall try to classify its principal teachings.

I. *Its Doctrine of God, or Theology proper.*—Although the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are in the Psalms, the time had not come for the teaching of the doctrine of the Trinity, or for the proclamation of the Divine name as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. To the Hebrew poets, as to the Hebrew historians and annalists, Jehovah was God, in contrast with the worthless gods of the heathen. Before Hesiod wrote his “Theogony,” or Homer sang of the gods and goddesses warring in the conflicts of men, the bards of Israel had struck a nobler key, and sounded the praises of one Almighty God, supreme in heaven and in earth. “All the gods of the nations are idols (nothings): but Jehovah made the heavens.”

God is revealed and lauded in His various attributes. He is, in the Psalter, the living God—most high, holy, good, gracious, merciful, and mighty. His glory in the creation is celebrated in some of the finest lyrics within the collection. But there is no hiding of His personality, or reducing the Creator to an abstraction—to a name for nature, or a supreme law of existence, and order of things. He who made the heavens and the earth is always identified with the God of Israel, and extolled as the King in Zion. The psalmists shout for joy before Him, and call on the very trees of the wood to clap their hands.

The figure of speech, by which God is described under the form, and appears to possess the parts and feelings of a man, is, as might be expected, largely employed in the Hebrew poetry. Men hear the voice of God, and see His glorious marchings; are cheered by the light of His countenance, or troubled by the hidings of His face. He goes up with a shout—rides on a cherub—sits in His temple—flies on the wings of the wind. He opens His hand to feed His creatures, and stretches out His arm to help His people. A psalmist appeals to God for interposition in the boldest language—“Pluck Thy right hand out of Thy bosom! Arise! Why sleepest Thou, O Lord?”

II. *Doctrine of Christ or Messiah.*—No Christian can doubt that some of the Psalms are Messianic, or prophetic of Christ, on some principle, and to some extent. No otherwise can a believer in the New Testament understand such Psalms as the 2d, 8th, 22d, 45th, 72d, and 110th; and besides these, devout Christians have been wont to perceive in all parts of the Psalter, if not a continuous strain, at all events snatches as of a distant melody, singing of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow. It is a question, however, fairly enough under discussion, on what principle Psalms in whole or part are Messianic, *i.e.*, whether they are direct predictions of Jesus Christ to come, or indirect, in this sense, that they are

originally and properly written of David or Solomon, and are found applicable to Christ, because David and Solomon were types of Him. To us it appears that these theories are not so opposed as to exclude each other, and there is no reason why both should not be true. The latter explanation best suits some of the Messianic passages, especially those contained in Psalms—as the 40th and 41st—which cannot be applied in whole to the undefiled Jesus, because of their confessions of personal sin. But there are others—especially those mentioned above, the 2d, 45th, 72d, and 110th—which require the former theory, and are most naturally interpreted and easily understood as direct prophecies in the Spirit of the Messiah-king.

Christ is set forth in the Psalms in His two states of humiliation and exaltation. The 22d traces the former down even to the dust of death, and then anticipates the latter with hopefulness and joy. The 109th and 110th are a pair, the former dealing with the sorrow and suffering of Christ, the latter with His elevation and power, while seated as Priest-king at Jehovah's right hand. The 2d, 16th, and 118th speak of His resurrection—the first of these celebrating His being begotten again from the dead, and so declared to be the Son of God.

Then we have glorious things spoken of the covenanted supremacy and kingdom of Christ. A covenant was made with David concerning the succession of his children on his throne. The promise of that covenant was the Gospel of the period. To it clung the faith of the godly in the land, despite the folly of David's children, and children's children. The covenant was well ordered and sure. The promise was of a son of David, who should have universal dominion and a throne for ever and ever. Solomon was not that son of David, for it is he who, in the 72d Psalm, sings of Him as yet to come, and to have supremacy far beyond the bounds of Israel—"from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth." It is a song of Christ, who shall sit on the throne of His father

David. He is "the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."

The 45th Psalm is "concerning the King." Allow as much as we may for Oriental splendour of diction, it is impossible to interpret this Psalm with satisfaction of the nuptials of Solomon or any Jewish king. A greater than Solomon is here—One beautiful beyond the children of men, and destined to reign as God for ever and ever, with a sceptre of righteousness. Gracious in speech, He is both great in conquest and just in ruling over men. To Him is the Church brought in holy beauties, as a bride adorned for her husband. He is her Lord, and she bows herself before Him. The Psalm is in perfect accord with that which Christians have for so many centuries been wont to say and sing—"Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ; thou art the everlasting Son of the Father!"

III. *Doctrine of Antichrist and Enemies.*—Not only does Christ look out on us from the Psalter with the health of His countenance, but Antichrist too, with his "stout look" and cruel pride. "The enemy" of David is, in a figure, the enemy of Christ—the lawless one, the son of perdition. Then the false witnesses, the traitors, and the wicked who rise up against David, are the false accusers, and Judas the betrayer, and the proud and bitter adversaries of Christ.

This accounts largely, though not entirely, for the minatory language of many Psalms—denunciations of terrible wrath, and prayers for vengeance. Five in particular—the 7th, 35th, 58th, 69th, and 109th—are so full of imprecation, that we may be pardoned if we read parts of them with bated breath and a faltering lip. We have known persons who could read, and even sing, such passages comfortably enough. It was because they had trained themselves to apply them to unseen spiritual enemies, evil principalities and powers around them, or sinful dispositions within them, warring against the soul. But, after all, this is only a process of accommodation, and evidently fails when we come to such language as the following :

"Let his children be fatherless,  
 And his wife a widow.  
 Let his children be vagabonds, and beg ;  
 And let them seek their bread out of their desolate places.  
 Let the extortioner catch all that he hath ;  
 And let strangers make spoil of his labour.  
 Let there be none to extend mercy unto him ;  
 Neither let there be any to have pity on his fatherless children.  
 Let his posterity be cut off ;  
 In the generation following let their name be blotted out.  
 Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord ;  
 And let not the sin of his mother be blotted out." \*

It is a thorough Oriental imprecation, seeking to sweep away a whole family for the sin of one man.

It is true that this vengeance is invoked on the head of the betrayer of Christ: and we may profit by reading even the severest of the passages to which we now refer, when we regard them as dictated by a burning zeal for the honour of Jehovah, a righteous indignation and a jealousy of love, and generally, if not universally, as denunciations of just judgment against the obstinate enemies of Christ, and all who obey not the Gospel of God. At the same time, these passages cannot be fully accounted for without a frank recognition of the fact that the Psalter was conceived and written under the Old Covenant. The eye of hope being fixed on temporal deliverance, and the revelation of a future state being dim, urgent appeal was made to Heaven for the prompt overthrow of successful wickedness; and so the people of Jehovah were ready for conflict with sword and spear. They wanted to tread down their enemies, to crush the heathen; and thought it a grand religious triumph for a righteous man to wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.† Now, the struggle is without carnal weapons, and the tone of the dispensation is changed. We admit that there are instances of imprecation in the New Testament—in the words of St. Paul, that Hebrew of the Hebrews. He said to the High Priest, Ananias, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall:"

\* Ps. cix. 9-14.

† Ps. lviii. 10; lxxviii. 23.

and he wrote to the Corinthians, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema." But, as Dean Perowne has well observed,\* these expressions of St. Paul are very different from the deliberate and carefully constructed anathemas of the Psalter; and then, they are only the sayings of one man, not put into the mouth of the Church, as the severest passages in the Psalms were put into the mouth of Israel. For our own part, we cannot harmonise the curses in this book with the mind of Christ, or the spirit of the Gospel. And why should we attempt it? James and John had the spirit of Elijah, when, in zeal for Christ their Master, they wished to consume a Samaritan village that rejected Him with fire from heaven. The spirit of Elijah became a prophet of God in the old time, but it is not appropriate to the disciples of Christ. "The Son of Man is come not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." To point out this distinction is not to disparage ancient Scriptures, but simply to note that progress in revelation which God has seen best for His own glory, and for the moral and religious education of His people. It is not to depreciate the ancients who were pious, but only to say that they lived according to the light given in their day—which is all that could be said of the pious now. To take the opposite course, and ignore this distinction, in order to make out that Moses, Samuel, David, and Elijah were Christians, is to confuse everything. It is of a piece with the medley of interpretation which identifies Israel with the Church, and the earthly calling with the heavenly; and it hinders the Christian cause by binding it to the defence of things that, however they may have been permitted once, cannot be defended or justified now. By all means we should learn from the ancients sturdy moral earnestness, and hatred of iniquity; but we are not the followers of the man who wrote of his enemies, "Let the angel of the Lord chase them; let their way be dark and slippery."† We are the disciples of Him who, while He hung tortured on the cross, said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

\* Ps. xxxv., in *Work on The Psalms*, 2d ed.

† Ps. xxxv. 5, 6.

IV. *Doctrine of Divine Providence toward the Godly.*—Take the 37th Psalm as one of the Divine ordering of man's lot upon the earth—the perplexities of the pious, the reward of their patience. In the eyes of those who fear Jehovah, the prosperity of ungodly men was a great anomaly. We do not so much wonder at it, because we take the future after death fully into our view. But the ancients, not having that future so clearly revealed, thought more than we do of retribution in the present life, and became much perplexed, and even impatient, when they did not see temporal recompense assigned to the righteous, and palpable judgments inflicted on the wicked. The Psalmist, however, had such a perception of the large scale on which God governs, and of the infallible certainty with which good and evil work out their own results, that he could, in full view of all perplexities about Providence, sing of patience, confidence—nay, of delight in the Lord. One can imagine the comfort with which a right-minded Israelite, suffering affliction or calumny, recited or sung this great Psalm of David—or the 73d, by Asaph—learning to “trust in God, and do the right,” to be still, and wait the Lord's time. “For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not His saints; they are preserved for ever; but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.”

There is little to be added to this in the New Dispensation; indeed nothing, but that recompense and retribution are more clearly seen to range over the world to come, as well as the world that now is; and that Providence is placed under Christ for the good of His Body the Church. We have to take a wider horizon for our patience, and to see Jesus invested with all power in heaven and earth; and then we find no book of the Bible so helpful and consolatory in affliction as the Psalms. Our best Christian hymns of Providence can say no more than did these Hebrew Psalms, nearly three thousand years ago—

“Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan His work in vain;  
God is His own interpreter,  
And He will make it plain.”

V. *Doctrine of Forgiveness of Sins.*—The teaching of the Psalms on this subject is exactly the same as that of New Testament Scripture. Forgiveness is with God. It is bestowed of His free grace, and for His name's sake, on those who confess, and desire to forsake, sin. And it is a present forgiveness, assured to the conscience by God's word—cleansing the soul, and clearing the sinner from every charge of guilt.

The Divine pardon of an Israelite was in virtue of the great Propitiation for sins—the death of Christ—the same ground on which we are forgiven. Christ suffered for the remission of sins that were past: and God, in blotting out transgressions during the ages before He came, had respect to the future Atonement, even as in the present age He has respect to the Atonement which was accomplished long ago upon the Cross. David saw this with some degree of clearness when he said, “Purge me with hyssop,”—in allusion to the bunch of hyssop at the end of the rod of cedar-wood, used under the Mosaic law to sprinkle blood and water on the defiled. He knew that the forgiveness of sins requires sin-offering—and we presume that he in the Spirit saw afar off the precious blood of Christ. But the essential point is, that God had respect to that perfect offering.

What the 37th Psalm was to the pious in perplexity, the 32d must have been to Hebrew penitents. It tells of transgression taken away, as an intolerable burden is removed; of sin covered, so that the sinner is before God's judgment as if he had not sinned at all; and of iniquities not reckoned to the worker thereof. This it is which St. Paul quotes in one of his chief arguments on justification, “David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works.”\* The non-imputation of iniquity is taken to imply the imputation of righteousness.

There is great encouragement in the personal character of what is said in the Psalms on forgiveness. Just as we love to hear Paul say, “I obtained mercy,” so must we be glad of

\* Rom. iv. 6.

David's avowed experience of the blessedness of pardon. He who delivered the doctrine of Divine forgiveness had proved it true. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this, shall every one that is godly pray unto thee."\*

VI. *Doctrine of Integrity of Heart.*—With all their sharp sense of sin, the Psalmists had a habit of affirming their own uprightness and integrity, which is strange to us, and has been even charged with savouring of over-confidence and self-righteousness. We refer to such passages as the following—

"Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity."—

"For I have kept the ways of the Lord,  
 And have not wickedly departed from my God.  
 For all his judgments were before me,  
 And I put not away His statutes from me.  
 I was also perfect with Him,  
 And I kept myself from mine iniquity.  
 Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness,  
 According to the cleanness of my hands in His eyesight."†

We might not volunteer such statements, because the light has become more searching since the sojourn of Christ on earth, and the descent of the Holy Ghost to convince of sin. But no apology whatever is needed for the language of the Psalmists. It proceeds not out of any unseemly arrogance, but from "the free and princely heart of innocence." It is the childlike joyful declaration of conscious integrity of purpose, and uprightness of heart toward God, as against all imputations of dissembling and hypocrisy. St. Paul, indeed, had the same rejoicing in the testimony of his conscience, to his own "simplicity and godly sincerity."‡

The lesson to us of such passages is, to recommend "love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned." They

\* Ps. xxxii. 5, 6. † Ps. xxvi. 1; xviii. 21-24. ‡ 2 Cor. i. 12.

urge us, as followers of the Son of David, to draw near to God in the holiest with "a true heart." If we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us.

VII. *Doctrine of Resurrection and a Future Life.*—We must take care not to depreciate the consolation and hope of the ancient believers; yet we can see plainly that the recognition of a future life was gradual among the people of God. It is true that Abraham, seeing the day of Christ afar off, had also the conception of the resurrection of the dead, and looked for a better country, that is, a heavenly. This, however, we learn from the New Testament.\* It was not so read by the children of Israel: and, for all that appears in Genesis, Abraham saw nothing beyond death. Jacob and Joseph gave commandment concerning their burial in Canaan, but said nothing of a happy future. Moses was equally silent. Joshua merely said, "I am going the way of all the earth." David and the sacred poets began to utter the hope beyond the grave that cheers the just. In the Prophets, it became clearer still. And long before our Lord's time, the belief in resurrection and future life was well established among the Jews; and those who rejected that belief were called the sect of the Sadducees.

The object of the Psalter was to cultivate friendship with and trust in God, as the present duty and the highest good—taking little account of a hereafter. We know from the New Testament, that the 16th and 118th Psalms foretold the resurrection of Christ; but no one can tell how far those who sang the Psalms saw into the truth which the Spirit signified. Of the wicked after death, it is only said they shall be cast into Sheol or Hades. Of a life to come for the godly, there is no very clear or definite statement. David, in the 23d Psalm, speaks of dwelling "in the house of the Lord for a length of days," but whether before or after death does not appear. Later Psalms tell of mercy enduring for ever, and of "life for evermore."† But a future life, or a heavenly home, plays no such part of consolation in the Psalter as it does in a Christian

\* Heb. xi. 9-19.

† Ps. cxxxiii. 3.

hymnal. As a matter of course, every Christian using the Psalms supplies those considerations and hopes which he has imbibed from later revelation. We read the Psalter in a Christian sense, as respects all its doctrines, but we do not suppose that it possessed that sense for ordinary minds in Israel. The book is part of a progressive revelation, and carefully adapted to the time in which it appeared, while it is so written as to be profitable to all saints, and to be capable of being transfigured by a spiritual Christian mind into a hymn-book of the most evangelical faith and the most heavenly hope of glory.

To us the very exercise of praise suggests the life to come, and the happy land. No willow-trees are there on which to hang the harps, no sorrow there, no sense of exile, no sickness of heart, no faint or faltering note. There are psalms for merry hearts in heaven always, and melody for ever around the throne of God and the Lamb. What infatuation it is to lose so great a joy for some short-lived pleasure of sin! "Woe unto you that laugh now: for ye shall mourn and weep. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh."\* Come to Christ with tears, that you may not weep bitter tears too late when He bids you depart, but may come to Zion with songs, and join the company of

"Saved souls and angels sweet  
Who love the God of love.

They love, they praise; they praise, they love,  
They 'Holy, Holy' cry;  
They neither toil, nor faint, nor end,  
But laud continually."

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\* Luke vi. 21, 25.

## THE PROVERBS.

AFTER the feeding of devotion in the Psalter, this book comes in well for admonition and guidance in practical life. If it is good to see how the Bible nourishes a fervent spirit, it is also good to see how it recognises steady principle, and smiles on sobriety, discretion, and shrewdness of mind. The psalms are to thrill and animate the heart, the Proverbs to direct the way that we should take. This book does not deal with the salvation of a sinner. It has nothing to say of redemption, propitiation, or justification. It relates to our walk on the earth, applies heavenly principles to that walk, and warns us not to play the fool.

The word translated "Proverb" is sometimes rendered "Parable." Its essential idea is that of teaching moral or spiritual truth by comparisons. This was done by the Eastern sages, sometimes in concise pregnant sayings or proverbs, sometimes in a more lengthened similitude or story—the parable. The wisdom of Solomon preferred the former method. It was the manner of his mind to express his philosophy of life in short, pithy sayings that are easily grasped by the memory, while, with their sharp points, they penetrate the soul.\* The writing of such proverbs was favoured by the parallel structure of Hebrew poetry; the distich in some instances repeating and elucidating in the second line the idea of the first, in others expressing a contrast and holding the thought neatly and firmly,

\* In Luther's Version, the title of this Book is "Sentences (Sprüche) of Solomon."

as one \* has happily said, "forceps-fashion, between the points of an opposing antithesis."

David was not more thoroughly trained to be the Psalmist of Israel than Solomon was qualified to be the Master of practical admonition. The one had his native genius and sensibility developed in a chequered and romantic life, as well as his spirit moved by the Spirit of the Holy One. The other had no boyhood among the sheep, or refugee experience in dens and caves of the earth. From the first he had every princely advantage; he acquired every accomplishment of science and letters; and, gifted with extraordinary powers of observation, he knew human character and life thoroughly, and could describe what he knew with wonderful terseness and point, his spirit also being enlightened by the Spirit of the Lord. It is true that Solomon himself sinned against moral integrity, and the wise man played the fool; but David's sin did not disable him from writing psalms,—rather was overruled to make the Psalter more complete in its adaptation to human want; and Solomon's sin, especially if it were repented of, could not disable him from writing of morals and wisdom. One thing is well worthy of remark, that not a line from Solomon's pen palliates Solomon's faults. On the contrary, he is the most vehement of all the sacred moralists against those things by which he was himself ensnared.

The Proverbs of Solomon are in three divisions:—

Nine chapters, i.—ix.—Addressed chiefly to the young.

Fifteen do., x.—xxiv.—More various, and addressed to all ages and ranks.

Five do., xxv.—xxix.—A later collection made by Scribes under the orders of King Hezekiah, from extant records of the wisdom of Solomon.

All these are characteristic of the mind and times of that great monarch. They have his piercing wit, and all that lofty esteem of wisdom which he evinced from his childhood. They

\* Dr. James Hamilton.

deal with the dignity and duty of a king; expose the perils of flattery, luxury, and pride; and abound in allusions to nature, to the habits of the lower animals, and to the lessons of human experience, such as we might expect from a famous naturalist, and from the most large-minded man that the Hebrew race produced down to the Christian era.

Two appendices are added.

The words of Agur fill the thirtieth chapter. They are entitled his "prophecy," or rather burden, or weighty deliverance. Of this sage nothing whatever is known. The fragment is full of those enigmatical, almost paradoxical, sayings, and religious riddles, so congenial to the Eastern mind.

The thirty-first chapter contains the words of Lemuel the king, probably an Arab prince. It is an oracle which his mother taught him. It contains good advice for a king, and the description of a virtuous, or, more correctly, a capable woman at the head of her household. In style it is scarcely proverbial, and has no antithesis; but the latter part of it has the acrostic peculiarity which necessarily escapes the English reader.\* The verses, from the tenth downwards, begin with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet in regular order.

From the miscellaneous nature of its contents, it is impossible to give a thoroughly comprehensive synopsis of this book; but we may gather into groups the warnings it delivers against prominent evils, which, if they prevailed in Solomon's time, are only too frequent and familiar still.

I. *Filial Impiety*.—Refer to chaps. i. 8, 9; vi. 20, 21; xiii. 1; xv. 20; xix. 26; xx. 20; xxiii. 22; xxviii. 24; xxx. 17.

In the law of the Ten Words delivered from Mount Sinai, the obligation to honour parents was placed first after duty to God. It underlay all morality in Israel. It underlies all social morality still.

Solomon seems to have been greatly impressed with this.

He had himself been dutiful, both to his father David and to his mother Bathsheba : but he had seen heavy woes on his father's house through the insubordination of sons. Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah had all come to a bad end, and caused their father David sorrow and shame. Probably, too, Solomon had misgivings in regard to his own son Rehoboam, the heir-apparent, who neither inherited his father's discretion, nor observed his counsels.

When St. Paul describes the shocking depravity of the heathen world in the first century, he lays stress on the circumstance that men were "disobedient to parents."\* He mentions the same evil as destined to characterise the perilous times in the last days.† Yet the heathen, at their best, held filial piety as a virtue in high esteem. It has always been so reckoned, even to excess, among the Chinese. The Greeks and Romans called Æneas "the pious," and held him in honourable remembrance because he bore his father Anchises on his shoulders from the flames of Troy. Many instances might easily be cited, to prove that love of parents stood in honour next to love of country. And it is quite in keeping with this, that our greatest poet excites our horror of filial impiety, as shown in the fabled days of King Lear, who was a heathen and apostrophised the gods—

"Ingratitude ! thou marble-hearted fiend,  
More hideous when thou show'st thee in a child,  
Than the sea monster !  
Sharper than a serpent's tooth it is,  
To have a thankless child."

Holy Scripture recognises the natural affection, and strengthens it by the religious sense of duty. It bids children "obey parents in the Lord, for this is right." At the same time it admonishes parents to justify and strengthen their claims upon their children, by kind treatment and godly upbringing in Christ.‡

\* Rom. i. 30.  
VOL. I.

† 2 Tim. iii. 2.

‡ Eph. vi. 1-4.  
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II. *Evil Company*.—Refer to Chaps. i. 10-19; iv. 14-19; xiii. 20; xxiv. 1, 2; xxix. 24.

This class of admonitions has great urgency for young people. As we grow old, we become more reserved, perhaps suspicious; but youth, with its small experience and its strong desire for companionship, is in great danger of being enticed by unworthy associates, and of being injuriously influenced by them. My son! consent thou not. It matters not to the cattle of the field, what company they keep in grazing the meadow for a few short years; but it matters much to thee, what associates are permitted to affect thy character for time and for eternity. Respect thyself, and so fear God, that thou canst have no companions who do not also fear Him. The heathen were not unaware of the danger of ill-companionship; for it is a heathen poet whom St. Paul quotes, when he writes to the Corinthians—"Be not deceived; evil company doth corrupt good manners." The Hebrew poet says more explicitly—"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."

III. *Licentiousness*.—Refer to Chaps. ii. 16-19; v. 3-20; vi. 23-35; vii. 6-27; xxii. 14; xxiii. 27, 28. These passages we cannot dilate upon; but they ought to be read in private and gravely pondered. Solomon calls the harlot the "strange woman," or foreigner; for, from the days of Balaam, when, at his foul instigation, Midianite women beguiled the men of Israel to sin, female influence had again and again brought the immoral festivals and orgies of the heathen into Palestine; and it was by foreign wives and concubines that the wise king himself was beguiled into folly. Alas! the harlot, home born as well as foreign, is a frequent object in our streets—a constant danger to the souls and bodies of our young men, which they cannot quite escape without much self-control, vigilance, and prayer. No doubt, most of the fallen women in modern cities were first beguiled and seduced by wicked men; and the male sex has to bear the heavier share of criminality in this

whole matter ; but women take a terrible revenge when they turn seducers, and draw men by their passions secretly and stealthily down to disgrace, disease, and death. "She hath cast down many wounded ; yea, all her slain are a mighty host. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death."

IV. *Untruth*.—Refer to Chaps. vi. 16 ; xi. 1-3 ; xii. 13, 14, 21, 22 ; xiv. 25 ; xix. 5-9 ; xx. 17 ; xxi. 6 ; xxvi. 24-28.

These sayings accord with that fine sentence in the Psalms, "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness ; His countenance doth behold the upright." Nothing can be more clearly laid down than this ; that God requires truth on the lips, and justice in the balance ; and that the opposites, untruth and dishonesty, God abhors. This doctrine, so clearly stated, needs to be strongly pressed upon conscience ;—for, almost more than the breach of chastity, the breach of integrity, the use of deceit to gain a worldly advantage, or elude a worldly loss, has left a sad blot on the character of many Christians, as well as Jews, and enfeebled the moral influence of the Church. On the young Christian community of the Thessalonians it was urged by St. Paul, "that no man overreach and defraud his brother in any matter ; because that the Lord is an avenger in all these things."

V. *Sloth*.—Refer to Chaps. vi. 6-11 ; x. 4, 5 ; xiii. 4 ; xv. 19 ; xix. 24 ; xxi. 25, 26 ; xxiv. 30-34 ; xxvi. 13-16.

The moralists of every country have reprov'd sloth and commended diligence, but Solomon has excelled them all. He upbraids the sluggard with his folly while wise in his own conceit, and with his exaggeration of difficulties, in so often seeing a lion in his way ; bids him learn diligence at the busy ant-hill ; and shows him the consequences of sloth—disappointment, decay and poverty. "Drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."

Our Lord Jesus Christ calls the slothful servant, who hid his master's money when he should have traded with it, a

“wicked and slothful servant.” St. Paul is emphatic on diligence, alike in the outer and the inner life. The Roman Christians he exhorts to be “not slothful in business.” To the Thessalonians he writes very plainly—“When we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.” In regard to spiritual life, the Apostle exhorted the same Church “not to sleep as do others, but watch and be sober.” There is no other way in which we can excel. If we would pray to purpose, we must remember and believe that God is “a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” If we would profit in the word, we must “hearken diligently” to God, that we may eat good, and that our souls may delight in fatness. If we would have inward happiness, we must “show diligence in our work and ministry of love to the fulness of hope unto the end, and be not sluggish.” If we would acquire and increase the various qualities of a holy character, we must give all diligence to add to our faith, virtue, then knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and love.\*

VI. *Intemperance.*—Refer to Chaps. xx. 1; xxiii. 1-3, 29-35; xxxi. 4-6.

Self-indulgence in what are called “pleasures of the table,” is often the secret of that dulness of spiritual apprehension and incapacity of sacred emotion, of which many complain. They pray for a better state of mind, but their prayers would speed much better if joined with a little fasting. A man whose “god is his belly,” cannot be a friend of the Gospel of Christ; and without going to such an extreme, all indulgence in that direction, all animal excess, interferes with the power of the Gospel over our hearts. This is equally true in all conditions of life, whether you eat greedily out of an earthen dish on a deal table, or dine off gold plate with rulers and princes. Surfeiting dulls the human spirit, resists the operation of the Divine Spirit, and consumes in the most selfish way large sums

\* 2 Pet. i. 5-8.

that might be of inestimable service in clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, and furthering the Gospel of Christ.

As to excess in wine and strong drink, no words can express the havoc that it works—physical, moral, spiritual. It quenches the Spirit, debases the soul, impedes the Gospel, impoverishes the family, and, in all countries where such stimulants are largely used, enfeebles and destroys the human race. Yet multitudes of our people seem to grow up with no notion of the perilous nature of these things, and with no adequate horror of the sins and miseries resulting from an unguarded use of them. Boys and girls are taught to sip wine and strong drink as good for them, and strengthening to their constitution. “The poor man’s beer” is spoken of as though it were a national glory, instead of a national mischief; and the slightest interference with it stirs an amount of public interest which is never elicited by any effort in behalf of the poor man’s salvation. Young gentlemen toss off their wine, glass after glass, before their beards are grown: and, by a sort of infatuation, everything seems to be done to throw men off their guard, and make drinking frequent and familiar. Now we do not say that wine, or even strong drink, is to be absolutely forbidden; but we do say that it should always be regarded as a perilous thing, and used accordingly. We hold it an exaggeration, and in part an injustice, to make those who drink reasonably and moderately, answerable for all those who drink unreasonably and immoderately; but we maintain that a Christian should on no account take more than “a little wine for his stomach’s sake,” and that he should never relax his circumspection, lest a love of wine should grow on himself, or he should encourage the beginning of intemperance in others. Would that in every banqueting chamber there were—if not engraven on the wall, at all events present to the mind of the guests—King Solomon’s terrible description of brawls, impurities, exhaustion, and delirium, all issuing from the wine-cup! “Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who

hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine." And with what insanity does the wine-bibber return to the very thing that hurt him! "When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."

VII. *Contention*.—Refer to Chaps. iii. 30; x. 12; xii. 18; xiii. 10; xv. 1, 2, 4, 18; xvi. 27, 28; xviii. 6-8; xxi. 9, 19; xxvi. 17-22; xxviii. 25; xxix. 22; xxx. 33.

This teaching well becomes the wise man, and prepares for the instruction of the Wiser and Greater than Solomon, who affirmed the blessedness of the meek, and, Himself meek and lowly in heart, reprov'd all envy, jealousy, and "strife, who should be the greatest." In His days the house of Israel was divided into sects, bitterly opposing each other. Alas! the Church has not taken warning, but has fallen into the same confusion. But God descends not into the angry disputes of men. The Holy Spirit as a dove shuns the stormy wind and tempest, and abides in quiet spots with lowly hearts. Both in private and in public life, let us follow the things that make for peace. It is better to suffer wrong than give any encouragement to "strife, envyings, wraths, factions, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, or tumults."\* It is far better to give the soft answer that turns away wrath, than to gain any amount of *éclat* by the biting wit and sharp retort that stirs up anger.

Such are the warnings in the Book of Proverbs. When we inquire after the virtues it commends, we find much in favour of prudence, contentment, integrity, and cheerfulness. Above all, and inclusive of all, this book, especially in its first part, celebrates the praises of wisdom.

*The Doctrine of Wisdom* is delivered in Chaps. i. 20-iv. 13; and in Chaps. viii. 1-ix. 12. The fourth chapter contains instructions which Solomon had derived from his father David. That most active-minded monarch not only laid up materials

\* 2 Cor. xii. 20.

for Solomon's temple, but provided some of the deepest and clearest thoughts that Solomon wrought into his Book of Proverbs.

The wisdom spoken of comes from above, and regulates the moral tone and government of life. It is vividly personified. Wisdom stretches out her hands, cries aloud, confers gifts, utters warnings and promises—has ways which are pleasantness, and paths which are peace. In New Testament language, Christ is the Wisdom of God. He is, of God, made to us Wisdom, as well as Righteousness. The Christless are the foolish. The Christ-possessing and Christ-following are the wise. In the eighth chapter of Proverbs, the personification of Wisdom is so lofty as to suggest to Christian minds, without any strain or difficulty, the Logos, who was in the beginning with God, and was God, and by whom all things were made.\* How much of Christ the writer of Proverbs descried, we know not; but the inspiring Spirit so guided him that he set forth an ideal of Wisdom which cannot be satisfied short of the doctrine of Christ—the personal Word, in whom “are hid all treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” and whose Gospel of grace and truth, wherever received and obeyed, causes this saying to be fulfilled in His disciples—“Wisdom is justified of her children.”

The wise and foolish are represented as guests in very different houses. Wisdom has builded a house, furnished her table, and sent out her invitation—“Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.” It is the feast of salvation, and of peace in believing; it is the tasting of “love which is better than wine,” in Church fellowship with Christ. But Folly also has a house, into which she calls those who pass by. She tells them that “stolen waters are sweet, and bread of secrecy is pleasant.” This is the corrupt Church, the “mother of abominations.” She is “loud and stubborn.” Some of the simple ones she beguiles with wheedling words; and the scruples of others she overcomes with bold assertions. Degenerate Israel, or Judah, was the shameless harlot of Old

\* John i. 1-3.

Testament prophecy, in contrast with faithful Israel, or Judah, betrothed to Jehovah. In like manner, the faithful Church is the pure woman of the present dispensation, in process of adornment for her Husband: but the Church, unfaithful and idolatrous, is the harlot, whose bed is decked with delusions, and whose cup is full of besotting errors and cruel enmity to the saints. Alas! how many simple ones are following after her, and turning in to her!

Wisdom remonstrates with the simple, the scorers, and the fools. The first love their simplicity; give no heed to warnings; make no provision for eternity; and neglect knowledge. The second, in a scoffing spirit, deride knowledge. The third, more guilty still, hate knowledge, for it has its beginning in the fear of God; and the fools say in their hearts, "No God!" But Wisdom still "cries in the chief place of concourse, in the opening of the gates." Christ utters His voice for salvation freely. Wisdom said, "Turn you at my reproof." Jesus Christ said, "Repent—Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Wisdom said, "Behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you."\* "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst let him come unto me, and drink.—This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believed on Him were to receive."†

\* Prov. i. 23.

† John vii. 37-39.

## ECCLESIASTES.

THE proper title of this book is "The Words of Kohéleth, the Son of David, King in Jerusalem." The Greek version turned Kohéleth into Ecclesiastes, which again is inaccurately rendered "the Preacher" in our English Bible. The Revised Version makes the matter no better, but rather worse, by putting in the margin "the Great Orator."\* The Hebrew word properly means one who gathers an assembly, and may be employed here with allusion to the great popular assembly which Solomon convened at the Temple.†

Though applied to a king, the title is a feminine form : but this need not perplex us. "Highness," as the designation of a prince, becomes "Altesse" in French, with a corresponding feminine pronoun ; and Khaliph, the title given to the successors of Mahomet, is a feminine noun.

Beyond all dispute, the Son of David to whom the words of this book are ascribed is meant to be Solomon : yet the work does not appear in the Hebrew Bible alongside of the two books that bear the name of the Wise King. It is placed in another section, between Lamentations and Esther. For this, and for graver reasons, its Solomonic authorship has been called in question, and has at last been given up by almost all our best scholars both in this country and in Germany.

From the nature of the case, the point must be decided by internal evidence. Now the language is not at all that of Solomon's age. It has such affinity with Talmudic Hebrew,

\* The American Revision Company objected to this.

† 1 Kings viii.

that, according to Dr. Ginsburg, one "may as easily believe that Chaucer was the author of 'Rasselas' as that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes." Then one meets with Chaldaic terms and turns of expression which indicate a date after the Babylonish Captivity, and also with phrases and allusions which reveal an acquaintance with Greek thought and speculation. Add to which that the tone at times is that of a subject rather than of an absolute ruler. The writer can only look on the tears of the oppressed, and deplore the tyranny of the wicked. He does not attempt a remedy.

Probabilities point to some Jew of rare culture and wide experience, who lived not less than 200 years B.C. We place that limit, because there is internal evidence that this book is older than the books of Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom, and the Maccabees in the Apocrypha, and also because a statement by Josephus shows it to have been regarded as a venerable scripture in the time of Herod the Great. Whether the writer had the benefit of any really Solomonic materials preserved in writing, or by tradition, who can tell? From the compilation of "Proverbs of Solomon" by "the men of Hezekiah,"\* it is evident that fragments of the Wise King's pungent thought were scattered widely and for many generations. So it is quite possible that genuine sentences of Solomon may be written into the book of Kohéleth. But this is mere conjecture.

It puzzles many to conceive how any one, especially how any good man, could have taken such a liberty with the great name of Solomon as to place a whole book under his implied authority. But it is by no means plain that the writer meant to deceive, or did actually mislead any one, at the first publication of this work; nor was it reckoned a literary or a moral offence to ascribe to departed sages or heroes speeches harmonising with their style of thought. So Plato wrote words for Socrates; as our own Milton has done for Samson. So some one unknown composed speeches for Job and his collocutors. And after all, what matters this question of authorship so long as it does not

\* Prov. xxv. 1.

affect the admitted canonicity of the book? The "words of Kohéleth," of whom we know nothing, are just as authoritative to us as "the words of Agur the son of Jakeh," or "the words of King Lemuel," of both of whom we are equally ignorant.

The interpretation of Ecclesiastes is not easy. Commentators cannot agree on its theme, its object, or the scope of its discussion. It appears to us that the key to the book is to be found at the end, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole of man." From the conclusion, we perceive what the matter is. From the solution, we infer the problem that is solved. What we have before us is the quest of good—the search of a Hebrew mind for "the whole of man," his highest reach and greatest bliss—*το καλον* of the Greeks—the *summum bonum* of the Latins. To many men this search has been like the "Quest of the Holy Grail," in which they "follow wandering fires, lost in the quagmire." Kohéleth escapes the quagmire, but he leads on through strange and weary questionings, and much bitterness over worldly pleasures and ambitions, before he completes the quest, and fixes on the chief end of man.

In the inquiry, three conditions are observed—

1. The question relates to "the whole of *man*." There is no mention of Divine Grace, or salvation, or heavenly things. The discussion does not relate to an Israelite, as the member of a holy nation, or to a Christian, as a member of the Church. What is sought is the best condition of man as man, not as saint, or heir of God.

2. The sphere of the inquiry is strictly the sphere of man's life "under the sun." No account is taken of heavenly places, or of the New Jerusalem.

3. The discussion is conducted, and the decision reached, in view of judgment to come. This, which is a menace to the evil, and a thought of joy and comfort to the righteous, terminates the whole vista under the sun. Kohéleth speaks of nothing beyond the Judgment. But this terminus he keeps always before the mind; and with this he concludes—"For God shall

bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."\* Quarles, in his curious paraphrase of this book, called "Solomon's Recantation," thus renders the last verse—

"No work shall pass untried ; no hand hath done  
What shall not plead at heaven's tribunal throne ;  
All secrets, good and bad, attend His eye ;  
His eyes behold where day could never pry."

When we come to consider the main contents of the book, we find it occupied with successive fits, moods, and exercises of the speaker's mind. He passes through a kind of labyrinth, with glimpses of comfort here and there, as air and light shoot down at intervals into some tunnel underground ; but he does not emerge into brightness and clearness of spirit till the very end. In this, as well as in other respects, the Book of Ecclesiastes resembles that of Job.† Nothing is clear till the conclusion ; and the lesson for us, or use of edifying, is to be found, not in detached parts of it, but in the whole—the complete effect.

So the book follows the assumed moods of Solomon's busy and capacious mind. Now it is genial, and now vexed and misanthropic ; now exceeding sad, and now witty and wise ; now utterly bewildered, and now philosophically tranquil. It is very difficult to analyse it, and arrange it under orderly divisions,—so difficult, that many have denied the existence of any consecutive order, and have described the form of this book as "rough and dismembered."

There is, however, an order, which may be expressed as follows :—

\* See Eccles. iii. 17 ; xi. 9 ; xii. 14.

† The Rev. A. W. Momerie describes it as "a companion to the Book of Job. The subjects with which they are concerned are different, but correlative. Job was the most unfortunate of men ; and he deals with the problem of misery. Kohéleth, on the contrary, was the most fortunate of men ; and he discusses the problem of happiness."—*Agnosticism and other Sermons*, p. 176.

I. Vanity under the sun proved from experience. This occupies Chaps. i., ii.

Kohéleth starts with the thought of this world's monotony. Generations come and go—the sun rises and sets—the winds blow to and fro—the rivers run into the sea, and the sea, by evaporation, returns to the fountains of the rivers. It is all a weary-go-round: we have nothing but repetitions and the shifting about of old materials: and “there is no new thing under the sun.”

1. Kohéleth made proof of study. Chap. i. 12–18. The king had turned his active and penetrating intellect to examine the actions and lives of men under the sun; he meditated and reasoned deeply, and “had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” But the result of his study was no rest or satisfaction—“For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.”

2. Kohéleth made proof of mirth and pleasure. Chap. ii. 1–11. Disappointed in study, the king tried frivolity. He would indulge his magnificent tastes in banquets, splendid grounds, and all the arts of luxury—and be a “merry monarch.” But it was a sheer failure. A thoughtful spirit finds itself mocked and befooled by mere gaiety and mirth: and the king, far from being made happy, fell into a deeper melancholy. The laughter was mad, and the pleasure was vanity.

3. Kohéleth reflected on the emptiness of fame, and the vexation of having to leave unfinished plans to his successor. Chap. ii. 12–26. He had the noble hunger of great minds for the good opinion of future generations, yet he perceived the uncertainty of posthumous fame. He also thought of the risk of transmitting everything to an unwise and unworthy successor—a foreboding which, in the case of the actual King Solomon, was egregiously realised in his son Rehoboam. Why should he rack his brains to plan and execute great works, only to leave them to a prince who could not appreciate or continue them? “Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun; because I must leave it unto the man that shall be after me.

And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity."

II. Vanity under the sun proved from observation. This occupies Chaps. iii.—viii. 15.

In this division of the book, it is first shown that man's happiness under the sun is restricted by his dependence on times, seasons, and circumstances. He has no power over the appointed time, and can do nothing but what the time is sent for. He has no choice but to weep or laugh, get or lose, keep silence or speak, make war or make peace, according as the time is ordained of God. The Divine plan is doubtless all very good, but it is beyond the scope of man's vision,—for "no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end."

Various facts of frequent occurrence are then referred to, as perplexing and baffling the inquirer's mind. There are many oppressions without a comforter, and many evils in social and civil life which turn it into a "sore travail." Vanity even enters the house of God. Some who appear there are rash and irreverent, and carelessly make vows which they never pay. In the world around, the writer sees injustice, violence, and avarice. Even those who are richly provided often lack the capacity of enjoyment, and are less happy than the poor. The survey embraces the outward fortunes and inward characters of men, the confusions of society, and the disorders that arise under human government. The argument always is that man's lot is full of vanity, and that there is nothing better than a cheerful enjoyment of what is assigned to us, without fretfulness or impatience. At one time *Kohéleth* seems to be a Pessimist, at another an Optimist. Now he is melancholy, now worldly-wise; but never sceptical. God's purpose he always believes to be wise, and His work all very good.

III. Vanity being thus exposed from experience and observation, the work of God is shown to go forward amidst human labours, obstructions, and perversities. This occupies Chaps. viii. 16-xii. 7.

The wise man will not deny the existence of a Divine Providence, nor, because of its unfathomable character, cease to play his proper part in life. Rather he will humbly watch the development of God's work according to His purpose; and will follow after contentment and the best employment of time. Some of the phrases employed in this part of the book certainly have an epicurean sound; but this is corrected by the plaintive and weary tone of the discussion throughout. The wise man cannot say with the reckless heathen—"Eat and drink, for to-morrow we die:" but he says—Live cheerfully, cultivate discretion, and in all your labours and enjoyments keep in view that God will bring you into judgment.

This division of Ecclesiastes closes with an earnest appeal to the young to remember their Creator, and a striking picture of tremulous old age. It is no description of the godly, who ought to be serene in spirit to the last, and fruitful in obedience. "The righteous shall still bring forth fruit in old age, —to show that the Lord is upright."\* What is described is the dreary, perhaps premature decay of one who in youth would "go on in every way of his heart and after every sight of his eyes." The admonition is, so to use the morning of life that its evening may be not sad or chagrined, but calm and blessed,—not the end of joy, but the threshold of a joy that lasts for evermore. "The spirit shall return to God who gave it." A word of warning this to all such as are debasing their spirits by sin, or enfeebling and wasting them by frivolity and self-indulgence; but a word of comfort and support to all those who seek to glorify God in their spirits, which are His. While the body, which is also His, lies in the dust, awaiting resurrection, the spirit lives with God, retains its consciousness,

\* Ps. xcii. 12-15.

expands its forces, and tastes new delights on which can never be written "Vanity of vanities" or "Striving after wind."

IV. The Epilogue. This, which is contained in Chap. xii. 8-14, summarises the whole teaching of the book.

The aim of Kohéleth, in all his instructions and proverbs, had been to speak "acceptable words," full of the honey-sweetness of Divine truth—"upright sayings," words of righteousness, with power to pierce the soul. This is characteristic of all wise teaching. It has a sweetness that glides into the heart, and at the same time a sharpness that penetrates the conscience, as a nail fastened in a sure place. Now, at the end, speaking to a son, after the manner of Solomon in the Proverbs, Kohéleth exhorts him not to seek his welfare in many books, for literature no more than mirth can constitute man's welfare, or supply his chief good. "Fear God, and keep His commandments." A conclusion quite similar to that of Job in his quest after wisdom. He sought for it in the mines and deep places of the earth; and the conclusion of the matter he found to be this—"The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."\*

This was the height of the Hebrew "Chokmah," or philosophy of life. A childlike reverence for God, including the fear of displeasing Him, and the desire to obey Him from the heart—this is right: and to love Him with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind, is, as Christ has taught us, the great commandment.

This book has more peculiarity than almost any in the Bible. It is not for every mind; and the mind that it suits will not relish it, or profit by it, on every day. It is not wholesome for peevish spirits, that take from it a certain sanction for their discontent. The men who may read it often, and who can most thoroughly enter into its peculiar vein, are not feebly querulous persons, but those who observe widely, and revolve

\* Job xxviii. 28.

deeply, and feel intensely the maze and mystery of life. It was finely said by Lacordaire—"Weak and little minds do not discover the emptiness of visible things, because they are incapable of sounding them to the bottom. But a soul whom God has drawn nearer to the Infinite, very soon feels the narrow limits within which it is pent; it experiences moments of irrepressible sadness, the cause of which for a long time remains a mystery. In reading the lives of the saints, we find that nearly all of them have felt that sweet melancholy, of which the ancients said that there was no genius without it. In fact, melancholy is inseparable from every mind that looks below the surface, and every heart that feels profoundly. It has but two remedies—Death, or God." But death is no remedy. There is but one cure for a soul cast down and disquieted, it is to "hope in God."

Many Christians say that they get little satisfaction from reading Ecclesiastes. No wonder; for the book was never written to satisfy an Israelite, much less a Christian. It has throughout a tossing of mind, an uneasiness of tone; and, though it may be of use in awaking spiritual sensibilities, it cannot meet deep spiritual wants. For this we must repair to a higher Teacher. It is Jesus Christ, who can tell us of a good part that shall not be taken away, and which never palls on those who have once learned to value it; and it is He who can raise us in union with Himself above the range and power of earthly things under the sun, as the heirs of an incorruptible and unfading inheritance. In the bounded sphere of life under the sun, men will never go further than remember their Creator, and look for death and judgment, and give some heed to the awfulness of God, and His demands on them as creatures. But they who are adopted through Christ, quickened and raised up with Him, know the Father, and have His commandments written on their hearts, and set their mind on things above, not on things on the earth. This is the secret of victory over the world, while we dwell in it,—“even our faith.” This is the rest of the spirit amidst ever so many vanities and vexations.

—“Our citizenship is in heaven ; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory.” \*

\* Phil. iii. 20, 21.

## SONG OF SOLOMON.

THE Bible has been described as a stately Mansion, or Palace of Truth. If Genesis is the sublime vestibule, and the historical books are so many halls and galleries hung with ancient portraits; if Job and Ecclesiastes are lofty chambers for quiet thought, and the Psalter is the music-room, and Proverbs forms the business-room of the Mansion, then the Song of Solomon is the conservatory, full of sweet flowers and Eastern plants of aromatic odour.

Yet the beauty of this book has not gained for it exemption from the severe criticism to which all the holy writings have been subjected. The ascription of the authorship to Solomon has been disputed, but on insufficient grounds. A question has also arisen regarding the continuity of the poem. Some critics regard it as a collection of sonnets or short idylls. It has even been alleged, that it consists of so many as seventeen or eighteen different songs or poetical fragments strung together. But excellent scholars share with us the common belief that the poem is one continuous song, pervaded throughout by a unity of meaning and design.

If it be one poem, is it dramatic? Our answer is, No; not in any proper sense of that term. It introduces various persons or characters, it has changing scenes and dialogue, but it has no dramatic plot, and no march of events toward an issue or denouement. It is not a drama even in the modified sense in which that designation may be given to the Book of Job. It is a poem of love in Oriental language and imagery, with rests, and pauses, and varying scenery and conversation. The parts

are grouped together, rather than linked by a very definite chain of connective thought. But, as an American writer has well observed, "This looser method of arrangement or aggregation, with its abrupt transitions and sudden changes of scene, is no less graphic and impressive, while it is more in harmony with the Oriental mind and style of composition generally, than the rigorous external and formal concatenation which the more logical but less fervid Indo-European is prone to demand."\*

The chapters are arranged, as usual, in the most unskilful manner, and give no assistance whatever in the analysis or interpretation of this book. We find, however, in the text itself, sufficient indication of the following divisions:—

- (1.) Chap. i. 2—ii. 7.
- (2.) „ ii. 8—iii. 5.
- (3.) „ iii. 6—v. 1.
- (4.) „ v. 2—vi. 9.
- (5.) „ vi. 10—viii. 4.
- (6.) „ viii. 5—viii. 14.

More important even than the question of arrangement is that of the principle on which this song ought to be interpreted. Is it a mere poem of human love and marriage? Or is it an allegory throughout of affection in a higher sphere? Or is it to be explained typically, as containing earthly things, and by these foreshadowing the heavenly?

1. The merely literal and erotic interpretation may be dismissed without much ceremony. It is not recommended to us by the circumstance that it has found its chief support among the rationalists. It has no sanction whatever from antiquity, Jewish or Christian, and it entirely fails to justify the position of this book in the canon of Holy Writ. If the poem before us be no more than a song of King Solomon's admiration and passion for an Eastern beauty of his time, it is difficult to see

\* Dr. Green of Princeton, Notes to Zöckler on the Song.

why it should be reckoned more sacred than the odes of Anacreon, Sappho, or Petrarch, or how it can be more profitable to the reader than the play of *Romeo and Juliet*. In an important commentary edited by an English Bishop,\* it is asserted that "this book is a series of love poems written, or supposed to be written, by a husband for or to his own wife, to recall to her, in the midst of their perfect union, the difficulties their love had encountered, the obstacles thrown in its way, its devoted constancy on both sides, and ultimate conquest over every hindrance." It is given as a conjecture "that these love poems are arranged and adapted for the celebration of marriages;" a parallel is suggested in Spenser's famous "Epithalamium." The commentator says that in the Song of Songs "there is not a single religious or spiritual sentiment of any kind." But, if it be so, what possible claim can the Song have to a place in Holy Writ?

2. The ancient interpretation is undoubtedly the allegorical. The tents of Abraham contained an allegory; Hagar and Sarah setting forth, as St. Paul assured the Galatians, the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem. It is no wonder if, in the palace and gardens of Solomon, there should also be an allegory of the relation established between Jehovah and His chosen Israel, or between Christ and the Church. In the present case, however, the allegory is supposed to have no earthly basis at all. Nothing is spoken of the literal Solomon. Under his name is meant the great King of saints. And Shulamith is not an actual personage whom Solomon loved, but a designation of the Church. In support of this theory of interpretation, it is urged that—

(1.) It best accounts for the position of this book in the Old Testament, as canonical. The circumstance that the name of God does not occur so much as once in the Song has often been

\* Rev. A. S. Aglen in *O. T. Commentary for English Readers*, edited by the Lord Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol. The influence of M. Renan on recent English interpreters of this and other Scriptures has been distinctly hurtful.

adverted to, as casting an element of doubt on its sacred character; but this difficulty quite disappears when the poem is read as an allegory of Divine love. The name of God could not be expressed without breaking the allegory; but the thought of God is everywhere, and His love is the highest theme of the Song.

(2.) Language is used in reference to the Bride, which can scarcely be applied to any actual woman—princess or shepherdess—but which may easily be understood as addressed to the “Daughter of Zion,” the collective people, or Church of God. Thus we can scarcely imagine a beautiful woman compared “to the steeds in Pharaoh’s chariots,” or even to a single caparisoned steed; but we can easily understand the figure as applied to Israel, for we read in the Prophets that God “led them through the deep as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble.”\* The same remark may be made in regard to the description of the neck as “like the tower of David builded for an armoury.”

(3.) This interpretation harmonises with the frequent language of the Old Testament regarding marriage union between Jehovah and Israel. Even in the Pentateuch, the formula to express Israel’s apostasy is that they “go a whoring after other gods.” Jehovah is, in the ancient Scriptures, “a jealous God:” *i.e.*, an injured husband having an unfaithful wife. The 45th Psalm, a song of loves, employs the language of mutual affection and nuptial joy in regard to the Divine Messiah and His people. After the days of Solomon, this mode of speech became even still more common with the sacred writers; and this may fairly enough be traced to Solomon’s Song. The Prophets—especially Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah—speak most plainly of the marriage covenant between Jehovah and Israel, the love of espousals, and the guilt involved in apostasy as an act of adultery peculiarly ungrateful and offensive to the God of Israel.

(4.) It is corroborated still further by the language of the

\* Isaiah lxiii. 13.

New Testament regarding the love and union of Christ and the Church. He is the Bridegroom who has the Bride, and at the sound of whose voice John the Baptist, as the Bridegroom's friend, rejoiced. He is the Husband who loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.\* It is rather remarkable, however, that no quotation from the Song occurs in the New Testament.

The chief objection to the exclusively allegorical interpretation is that it makes way for caprices and ingenuities without end, and is apt to degenerate into mere devout guess-work. This applies alike to some of the Protestant expositors, who treat the Song as a poetical compendium of inward Christian experience, and to those Roman Catholic divines who have seen in Shulamith the blessed Virgin Mary, as "the Bride and Mother of God."

3. The typical interpretation seems to us, on the whole, safest and best. It admits a literal basis for the Song, while it refuses to be content with a literal sense. It assigns to the book a full spiritual significance, but saves it from fantastic or eccentric meanings. There is an earthly theme—the love of Solomon and Shulamith. The Song celebrates a pure affection, and a wedded bliss. But it has, at the same time, a deeper meaning and a loftier aim, well entitling the poem to its place in Holy Scripture. Typically it suggests and depicts the love, sacred and intense, which unites the Lord Himself to the people, who form, in inspired language, His "Bride." Solomon is here—and then, typically, the Greater than Solomon. A beautiful Bride is here—and then, typically, Israel, and also the Church, adorned as a Bride for her Husband.

The poem is entitled "Song of Songs," *par excellence*, as in the parallel expressions—heaven of heavens, King of kings, holy of holies. It is a superlative song, in which everything

\* See Matt. ix. 15 ; John iii. 29 ; Eph. v. 25-32.

is at its best. Gardens, fountains, flowers, fruits, spices, love, beauty, marriage, the joy of spring, the song of birds, these are in many songs; but in this there is a profusion of excellence,—a garden of nuts, an orchard of pomegranates, beds of spices, a mountain of myrrh, a hill of frankincense, flowers the most admired, beauty the most perfect, the Beloved altogether lovely, the Bride all fair and undefiled, the love strong as death, the marriage a royal marriage; everything choice and incomparable.

The Beloved is Shelomo or Solomon, the prince of peace. He is the King, round whose palanquin stand sixty armed heroes,—the shepherd who feeds his flock among the lilies,—and the owner of a fruitful vineyard. Above all, He is one whose voice thrills the heart, whose approach brings joy and gladness, whose love supplies the most tender consolation, and whose person combines all the highest qualities of beauty and strength. So speaks Shulamith of her Beloved and her Friend.\*

She, on the other hand, is the seeker and finder of peace (Shalom), in Shelomo. At the beginning of the Song, she is ill at ease, black with exposure to the scorching sun, forced to work in vineyards that are not her own, harshly treated by her kinsmen after the flesh, anxiously inquiring after the Good Shepherd whom she loved. None of “the companions” can supply His place. But soon she finds Him, or is found of Him, and she is at peace, for He sees in her no blackness; He calls her His love, His dove, His undefiled.

The Bridegroom is described by the Bride; and the Bride in turn by the Bridegroom. Their delight is in one another.

\* Godet regards the Shulamite as Israel, Solomon as the type of “regal splendour which dazzles the eyes and flatters the senses,” the Beloved whom the Shulamite prefers to Solomon as the Invisible Shepherd, the future Messiah. See his papers in the *Revue Chretienne*, reproduced in *Studies of the Old Testament*. But it seems very improbable that Solomon would thus celebrate his regal splendour as tempting Israel to forget the Lord.

Absence is pain ; reunion is intense happiness. Each finds in the other "love better than wine." \* The height of the joy is in the marriage. The day of espousals is to Solomon the day of the gladness of his heart. And this was surely in the prophet's memory when he wrote—"As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." † The designation of the Bride in the Song, as the Sister-Spouse, of itself discourages the literal interpretation, and suggests a spiritual meaning. Now the Sister-Spouse is fully blessed in conscious union with the King, and says, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me."

Spiritual enjoyment of the most intense character is easily lost. The Bride misses her Lord—is it in a dream?—the heart waking while the body slept. He comes to the door, and shows a willingness to enter ; but she delays to admit him. When she does rise to open to the Beloved, she is too late, for He is gone, and now she has to go out into the street on those dainty feet which she had grudged to put upon the floor, and hasten to and fro inquiring diligently after Him. It is well with her, when, and only when she is with the Lord, resting in His protection, trusting His loving-kindness, going up out of the wilderness leaning on His arm, or dwelling in the gardens, singing of His goodness and His beauty, His grace and His truth.

Into detailed exposition, it does not accord with our plan to enter. There are many sweet lessons and suggestions of the mind of Christ, and the love of saints, to be gathered from a minute study of this book ; and some preachers, like Bernard of Clairvaux, M'Cheyne, and Krummacher, have turned select passages to excellent homiletic use ; but great caution is to be observed, lest a cold unimagined mind, on the one hand, should so dissect this glowing Oriental poetry as to destroy its

\* Compare chap. i. 3, 4, with chap. iv. 10.

† Isa. lxii. 5.

living beauty, nay, should even force upon it an indelicacy from which the original is innocently free, and, on the other hand, lest an over-active fancy should, by insisting on a separate spiritual meaning for every figure of speech, every allusion to natural objects, and every turn of expression in poetical descriptions of the human form, weaken the force, and mar by very extravagance the general impression of the Song. So have the types in the Books of Moses been often injured by fantastic interpretation, and the Parables of Christ overstrained by the pressing of spiritual analogies into every detail.

The charm of this Song to every Christian heart, is its constant suggestion and eulogy of Christ. The type Solomon is quite forgotten in the Pre-eminent Antitype. Christ is the winner of souls—His name is fragrant—His love passes knowledge—His person is sacred, head and foot being seen as of fine gold\*—His strength is as “pillars of marble”—His “mouth is most sweet,” full of gracious words, and breathing on us the Holy Ghost. “Yea, He is altogether lovely.” All who really know Him love Him; and the more they know Him, the more they must love Him, and following Him, depart from all iniquity.

Communion with Christ, however, may be interrupted, though union is not broken. From their own experience, saints understand the alternations of withdrawal and manifestation on the part of the Beloved, related in the Song. He is not always in the garden, or always at the table with them, but is in Lebanon or in the top of Hermon; and when they miss Him, He often comes to them speedily and as with a sweet surprise, like a hart leaping on the mountains, and bounding on the hills. “His love in my heart casteth a mighty heat; He knoweth that the desire I have to be at Himself paineth me. I have sick nights and frequent fits of love-fevers for my well-Beloved. Nothing paineth me now but want of presence. I think it long till day. I challenge time, as too slow in its pace, that holdeth my only,

\* Chap. v. 11-15.

only true One, my well-Beloved from me. Oh if we were together once!"\*

Before the first advent, those who waited for the consolation of Israel said, "Make haste, O Messiah!" They longed for the appearing of Him of whom their prophets had spoken, and their ancient bards had sung: and the Lord was well pleased to see the desire for Him in the hearts of pious Hebrews. He would not come into the world till the fulness of time; but He loved to hear in many a Jewish family, in solitudes devoted to prayer, and in the courts of the Temple, the petition ascend for His coming, and for the dayspring from on high. Such prayers and hopes He fostered, bending His ear to listen, "O my Dove, let me hear thy voice!"

At last came John the Baptist, to prepare His way. This was the Bridegroom's friend. Then was the Lord Himself manifested to Israel. He gathered saints, He declared the Father, He gave Himself for the Church, and then left the world, and went to the Father; He returned to the mountains of spices. The Church now loves an unseen Saviour. She longs for her absent Lord, to whom she is joined in the marriage covenant, and for whose presence she is being prepared and adorned with holy beauties by the Holy Ghost. "Rise up, my Beloved!" is her prayer. She waits the happy hour, when the Lord will gather His saints as the Bride, and take them to the high mountains to be for ever with Him. "Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Comfort one another with these words, all ye who love His appearing! We have no relish for controversy about the time and manner of the Advent; but we do want more realisation of it as our "blessed hope," more thirst and more meetness for His presence. Let it be added, that this comes in well after the Book of Ecclesiastes. The weariness of heart under the sun, is best cured by the fervour of spirit expressed in the Song of Songs. The world's vanity has no power to occupy or chafe those who are full of a Divine and heavenly love. The world's

\* Rutherford's Letters (to William Gordon).

gaities are nothing to hearts which are possessed by the "blessed hope," or thrilled with a joy unspeakable.

"Beyond the smiling and the weeping,  
Beyond the waking and the sleeping,  
Beyond the sowing and the reaping,  
Love, rest, and home !  
Sweet hope !  
Lord, tarry not, but come !"

## THE HEBREW PROPHETS.

“I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.”—Hos. xii. 10.

SIXTEEN prophets, scattered over a period of nearly five hundred years, have given us seventeen books of the Old Testament. Before we study these in detail, it is convenient to prefix some general observations, applicable to them all.

I. *Of the meaning and use of the terms—Prophet, Prophetess, Prophecy.*

The title רֹאֵה, seer, was in earlier use than the term prophet. It was an old word at the time when the First Book of Samuel was written.\* Samuel himself is called the seer; and, after him, the term is found only three times in Scripture. It is applied to Zadok the high priest, and to Hanani in the time of King Asa; and it is once employed by Isaiah: “this is a rebellious people which say to the seers, See not.”† There is a later word, also rendered seer in our version. It is רֹאֵה, a gazer, or one who beholds visions. Such was Balaam, though he degraded his gift. Such was Gad, “David’s seer”: and the term is frequent in the Books of Chronicles. It is the title given to Amos by the priest of the calf-worship at Bethel.‡ Both these words, Roeh and Chozeh, point to the mode of discerning what other Israelites could not see, by trance or vision; but determine nothing about the mode of communication or utterance.

\* See 1 Sam. ix. 9.

† Isa. xxx. 9, 10.

‡ Amos vii. 12.

The נָבִיא is the prophet, or forth-speaker; the term laying stress on the utterance, and not upon the vision. The Hebrew word comes from a root which means to bubble up and overflow as from a full fountain. But the fulness of the true prophets of Jehovah was not that of their own thoughts and emotions. It was of the Divine Spirit within them. "For no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost." \*

The first application of the word is to Abraham; † although, long before Abraham, "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied." ‡ Aaron was made a prophet for his brother Moses when they confronted Pharaoh. Moses himself was Jehovah's prophet, and the greatest of all the prophets of the Old Covenant.

The prophetess had the same gift as the prophet, but appeared more rarely. No prophetess has written a book of Scripture, but the two most famous, Miriam and Deborah, are described as thrilling the heart of the people with songs of exultation over great national successes.

Prophecy was the burden, נִשְׂבָּע, of the Lord, or His message laid upon the spirit of His servants. It was also spoken of as the vision which the prophet saw. The introductory formula varies in the books of the prophets. Isaiah has it—"Jehovah said unto me," or "Jehovah spake by Isaiah," or "thus saith Jehovah." Jeremiah and Ezekiel write—"the word of Jehovah was unto me." Others begin abruptly—"the vision of Obadiah," "the book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite."

The true prophets were made so by the special call of God, and never took it on themselves to prophesy. They had no earthly inducement to do so, for they often had painful messages to convey, and encountered for the most part scorn and enmity. In the later days of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah false prophets multiplied, who found more favour by far with the court and with the people, than the faithful messengers of Jehovah, because they spoke smooth things, and prophesied deceits. Some of them assumed the position of prophets of

\* 2 Peter i. 21.

† Gen. xx. 7.

‡ Jude 14.

Jehovah, and uttered their own words as His. Others acknowledged foreign gods, as in the reign of Ahab, when the prophets of Baal were counted by hundreds in Israel.

The prophetical opposition to the true God and His servants has never ceased. Heathenism has been fortified not merely by its priests and altars, but also by its prophets, speaking oracularly for the dæmons or false gods, as though moved by a strange frenzy, or touched with unhallowed fire. Then, that which supplanted heathenism, and overpowered a feeble Christianity in some of the most interesting regions of the earth, and which still retains firmly under its sway about a fifth of the whole human race, is essentially prophetical. Mohammedanism claims that its founder—"the deep-hearted Son of the Wilderness"—was, not priest, or king, but the prophet of God.

Christianity itself has had its false prophets and seducing spirits from the very first century downwards. It was a great peril to the primitive Church, but it was no new peril. The House of Israel had been exposed to such danger of deception and misguidance, and been commanded to distinguish between false prophets and the true. In like manner were the Christians required to discover the genuine apostles and the prophets, and to reject the spurious. They were not referred to any living infallible authority at Rome or elsewhere. The last of the apostles simply left this direction, throwing on every one a grave responsibility—"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."\*

## II. *Of the reception of the word from the Lord by the prophet.*

1. "In visions and similitudes."† Thus, in a glorious trance, Isaiah saw the throne of God and the seraphim in the temple; and Ezekiel beheld vast heavenly revolutions, and the cherubim sustaining the firmament. The early part of the Book of Zechariah consists entirely of "visions that he saw." Visions made

\* 1 John iv. 1.

† See Num. xii. 6-8.

Daniel a prophet, for so he is called by Christ; and, in the New Testament, John is for the same reason a prophet, the Book of Revelation, because of the great series of visions which it contains, being called "the prophecy of this book." \* But even this mode of revelation did not exclude the mental action of the prophet. As an able writer remarks—"Even in dreams the mind is not wholly passive. A dream is commonly engendered in the mind out of materials prepared by the waking hours. And so, in the waking vision, doubtless that man was chosen for the reception of the vision whose face was turned in its direction, and whose eye was educated to see it. The dream in which the fate of the world's greatest empire was disclosed was the dream of the man whose waking thoughts were all of empire; and the interpretation of it was imparted through the man whose mind had been prepared for such a knowledge by being exercised in matters of state. And even in the visions of Zechariah, it is obvious that what was thus revealed to him, his own mind was prepared to see and appreciate by its previous activity concerning the matters on which light was thrown." †

2. By immediate impulse of the Holy Ghost upon the prophet's mind. In some cases there was an audible voice from the Lord. It was heard by the child Samuel in the night, and by Elijah in the wilderness. More usually, the word of the Lord came, so far as we can learn, in the way of Divine impulse and direction given to the thoughts of the prophet, and uttered in his words and through his lips. He was not an automaton; his own faculties wrought, and were at their stretch in the highest regions of intelligence and feeling. Truths which God would reveal in and by him not merely passed his lips, but first entered powerfully into his own soul, stirred his fervour of spirit, and therefore commanded his utmost energy of expression. He had "the vision and the faculty divine."

Companies of young men were trained in Israel as "the sons of the prophets." At the end of Elijah's career, we find them at Bethel, Gilgal, and Jericho. It has been common to speak

\* Rev. xxii. 7-10.

† Dr. Marcus Dods' *Post-Exilian Prophets*, p. 20.

of them as schools of the prophets, or prophetic colleges ; but these expressions are not sanctioned in the Bible. They seem to have been fraternities of young men, dating from the time of Samuel, who supported themselves by their own labour, were perfectly free to marry, and cultivated sacred study with music and song. Of course education could not make any of those young men a real prophet of Jehovah, any more than education can make one a real messenger of Christ now ; but the fraternities spoken of were valuable centres of religious life, and from them healers and teachers went forth throughout the land of Israel.

### III. *Of the delivery of the Word of the Lord by the Prophet.*

This, as we are informed in the opening sentence of the Epistle to the Hebrews, was "in various portions," not continuously, but at intervals, as the prophet was moved by the Holy Ghost. It was also "in diverse modes," according to the circumstances that called forth the prophecy, and the individuality of the prophet who uttered it.

Most of the prophets were poets, and poured out their thoughts in sacred song. Witness the grand lyrics of Moses and of Deborah—the Psalms of David, who is called a prophet in the New Testament, and is known even in Mussulman tradition as "the prophet of God"—the lofty hymns of Isaiah—the laments of Jeremiah—and the sublime ode of Habakkuk. It is in keeping with this, that we find mention of minstrelsy as an aid to prophesying. Music and song were cultivated among the sons of the prophets, as conducive to prophetic fervour. Nor was this confined to youths in whom the gift may have been feeble or undeveloped. So great a prophet as Elisha sought such help, "Now bring me a minstrel!" he cried ; "and when the minstrel played, it came to pass that the hand of the Lord came upon him."\*

When the strain of prophecy did not rise to poetic fervour, it still displayed intensity and animation in its solemn warnings,

\* 2 Kings iii. 15.

shrill cries, and bold apostrophes and appeals, and formed a style which Ewald has well described as "vibrating between poetry and prose." It has not only vividness, but frequent abruptness; and for this reason, that prophecy is properly oral discourse, not written composition. We meet with sudden transitions and with emphatic reiterations in the prophetic books, for these things belong to a spoken style, and are effective in that style. Prophecy is not the production of a quiet student at his desk, but the flowing utterance of a public speaker, afterwards written down by the prophet himself, or by a trusty scribe, for the information and guidance of his contemporaries and of future times.

Occasionally prophecy was made more graphic by the use of signs. Some of those mentioned in the Bible are best understood to have occurred ideally, when the prophets could not tell whether they were in the body or out of the body, being wrapt in a species of ecstasy. Such is that of Isaiah, walking for three years naked and barefoot; Hosea marrying an adulteress; Ezekiel lying bound on his left side for three hundred and ninety days, and then on his right side for forty days. Surely these things occurred in the prophetic trance. But we rather refer to signs employed after the Eastern manner, in the delivery of a prophetic oracle, with a view to add emphasis to the words. For example, by the rending of a mantle, Samuel taught the rending of the kingdom of Israel from Saul, and Ahaziah assured Jeroboam of the division of the kingdom, and the subjection of ten tribes to his sceptre.\* Such are the

\* "The manner in which the Old Testament prophets delivered their message is strikingly different from the manner in which heathen prophets deliver their oracular responses. Here there is no sitting on a tripod, or entering a gas-charged cave, or whirling or dancing till convulsions and frothing at the mouth supervene. The Hebrew prophets are found on the spot where their message is needed, in the temple courts, in the King's palace, on the public streets. The only aid they used to give effect to their teaching was symbolic action; a device which has its root in human nature, and is suitable in every age and nation."—Dr. Marcus Dods' *Post-Exilian Prophets*, p. 18.

“similitudes by the hands of the prophets” mentioned in the verse of Scripture which we have prefixed as a motto to this lecture.

IV. *Of the relation of Hebrew prophecy to Israel, to the world at large, and to the Messianic hope.*

1. To Israel. Prophecy covers much more than prediction. A prophet is a forth-speaker, not always a fore-teller. His message may concern things past, present, or future. In our own language, Bishop Jeremy Taylor wrote of the “Liberty of Prophesying;” meaning not predicting, but preaching and publishing Christian truth. And apart from any question of etymology, any reader of the Bible may satisfy himself, as a matter of fact, that some of the greatest prophets, as Samuel and Elijah, dealt very little with the future, and addressed themselves to the existing condition of their nation, and to the assertion of the true principles of the Theocracy, and the supreme authority of God. He may also ascertain for himself, that the prophetic writings are occupied mainly with moral instruction and patriotic appeal, and abound with exhortations to repentance, justice, veracity, and obedience. The prophets really supplied at once the free pulpit and the free press of their period. They were the ethical, political, and spiritual teachers of Israel and Judah.

Thus they exerted a prodigious influence. Moses the prophet was above Aaron the priest, and ruled as a king in Jeshurun. Afterwards, when kings reigned, prophets were the guardians of the public weal against despotic power. Samuel checked King Saul. Nathan reproved King David. Shemaiah commanded King Rehoboam. A man of God out of Judah confronted Jeroboam as he stood by the altar at Bethel. Elijah stood before Ahab in the vineyard of Naboth, and denounced his iniquity. In all the acknowledged prophets of Jehovah we mark a noble patriotism, and a fearless spirit, that stood firm alike against kingly tyranny and against popular frenzy. It was greatly due to them, that the Hebrew people became

influential and intelligent far beyond what their numbers and political situation might lead one to expect.

We need hardly say, that the highest function of the prophets was that of religious teachers, who boldly rebuked impiety and idolatry, whether in prince or people, and resisted national degeneracy by faithful warnings of judgment, and spirited appeals to conscience. Proclaiming the unity and spirituality of God, they taught His people how to worship and serve Him. Resisting the tendency to put confidence in prescribed rules and observances, they lifted up their voices for mercy and truth, judgment and righteousness, integrity and probity; maintained the supremacy of what is moral over what is ceremonial; and exposed the worthlessness of a religion of form without life and inward piety.

2. To the world at large. Hebrew prophecy dealt with the general history of the world, in so far as it affected the fortunes or moulded the history of Israel. From its lofty watch-tower, it saw the rise and fall of many kingdoms and empires of antiquity. As we scan its pages, we read the burden of Egypt, of Assyria, Nineveh, Edom, Moab, Syria, and Tyre. In the visions of Daniel, we find a sketch of the great empires in their succession, anterior to the dominion and glory of the Son of Man.

It was clearly revealed in the prophets, that salvation would be sent to the Gentiles, as well as to the Jews. It does not, however, appear that they foresaw with any distinctness the dispensation in which we live, the mystery of Christ and the Church, or the length of time which elapses between the sufferings and the glory of Christ on the earth. They saw that He should be a light to lighten the Gentiles, that He would judge the nations, and be King over all the earth. But the prophetic vision overshot the valley or interval which we inhabit, to rest on the height beyond the valley, the mountain of the Lord's House established in the last days in the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills.

Notwithstanding the burdens of woe and presages of calamity laid upon the spirits of the Hebrew prophets, they have a

vehement hopefulness above all ancient writers. Through all the storms they make us see a blissful future in the distance; and, despite their terrible exposures of human wickedness, they sustain our faith in an ultimate triumph of justice and peace. To them we go for words to animate Christian philanthropy, and stimulate missionary enterprise. Probably, there is truth in the remark, that the modern Jews have lost hopefulness and largeness of heart since they have ceased to read the books of the prophets in their synagogues.\*

3. To the Messianic hope. The expectation of a great Deliverer, which was the consolation of Israel, was suggested and sustained by the whole tenor of the Old Testament, but especially by the words of the prophets. They told of One to come who should excel in justice, goodness, and truth, and overcome through patience and righteousness. "The Spirit in them testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." †

Abraham saw His day afar off, and was glad. Moses wrote of Him as the greatest of all prophets. David, in the Spirit, sang of Him as the profound Sufferer and the glorious King. Isaiah beheld the Man of sorrows,—the meek Lamb led to the slaughter, wounded, bruised, cut off, yet prolonging His days. Daniel learned from the angel Gabriel the very time when Messiah should be cut off, "but not for Himself." Micah specified Bethlehem as the Ruler's birthplace. Zechariah described Him riding into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of an ass. Malachi spoke of the Lord coming suddenly to His Temple.

Great was the joy of the first Hebrew Christians when they perceived the fulfilment of the continuous prophetic scroll in Jesus. So Philip was made glad. "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write." ‡ So was Paul confident in his testimony to the Lord; "saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come;

\* Isaac Taylor, "Hebrew Prophecy," p. 203.

† 1 Pet. i. 10-12.

‡ John i. 45.

that the Christ must suffer, and that He first, by the resurrection of the dead, should proclaim light to the people, and to the Gentiles." \*

This also is our joy, as we read these oracles, that the ancients prophesied of the grace that should come unto us. What righteous men desired to see, but were not permitted, our eyes behold. What they longed to learn our ears may hear. What things the prophets anxiously pored over, "searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto," are to us plainly "announced by the evangelisers (or gospel-isers) with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." Are we, then, better than the ancients? Nay, verily. But we are in the age of evangelisation which has succeeded to the age of the law and the prophets.

\* Acts xxvi. 22, 23.

## ISAIAH.

THE prophetic books are not arranged in chronological order.\* If they were, we should begin with Jonah or Joel. But Isaiah stands well at the head of the prophets, as, though not the first in time, certainly the first in grandeur and fulness. The messengers of instruction and reproof who preceded him lead up to Isaiah as a master teacher, and are reproduced and expanded in him.

This prophet lived at Jerusalem, and was well known in the court of the kings of Judah. He had every social advantage possible to a Jew of that period, being no rustic, like Amos or Micah, but a man of mark in a capital city, acquainted with public men, and versed in public affairs. There is a great literary charm in his writings, for he was a master of his native language, and displayed its power with wonderful versatility; writing narrative, exhortation, and poetry both pensive and triumphant, each and all with consummate vigour and dignity. Better still, his book is impregnated with strong religious spirit; it is often quoted in the New Testament, and is so full of evangelical light that it has always been a first favourite with Christian readers.

The book falls into two parts:—(1.) Chap. i.—xxxix. (2.) Chap. xl.—lxvi.

An arduous controversy has arisen on the authorship of these

\* The chronological order of the prophets, so far as we can judge, is as follows:—

Jonah.	Obadiah.	Habakkuk.	Daniel.
Joel.	Micah.	Zephaniah.	Haggai.
Amos.	Isaiah.	Jeremiah.	Zechariah.
Hosea.	Nahum.	Ezekiel.	Malachi.

parts. It was in Germany that this question was first started ; and, like most questions of this description, it has been most fully searched and exhaustively debated there. For ourselves, we adhere to the belief of a unity of authorship from the first chapter of this book to the last ; but we do not deny that there are plausible grounds for disputing it, and we do not consider that the acceptance of the opposite view subverts the authority of the book as an integral part of inspired Scripture. It should be remembered, that we are quite ignorant of the manner in which the sacred books were put together so far as human penmen were concerned, and of the scope which may have been allowed to compilation in the composition of the Bible. Thus we speak of the Psalms of David, because he was the chief psalmist, though we know that the Psalter is a compilation of Hebrew lyric poetry gathered through hundreds of years. In the same way, it is possible that the Book of Isaiah may contain passages from later prophets, to us unknown, appended to his original productions, and sent abroad under the protection of his venerable name. We abide, however, in the conviction that this great book is throughout that of Isaiah, the son of Amoz,\* and for such reasons as the following :—

1. Because the critics on the other side can come to no agreement as to the number of writers to whom they trace the composition of this book. The first theory mooted was that Isaiah wrote the whole of the first part, and that the second was written by an anonymous prophet, a pseudo-Isaiah, during the Captivity. But this is no longer sufficient for the rationalistic schools abroad, which profess “higher criticism.” No longer is even the first part ascribed as a whole to Isaiah ; but the entire book is reduced to the character of a miscellany, begun by Isaiah, but containing, as we have it, the effusions of five, seven, or even twenty different writers—all, marvellous to tell, possessing

\* Such is the belief of the eminent critic, Delitzsch. Our chief English student of Isaiah, Rev. T. K. Cheyne, seems to be unable to make up his mind on the point, and in his *Commentary* (2d ed.) treats the authorship as “an open question.”

the same turn of mind with Isaiah, the same skill of language and force of genius. Thus the incredulity of those critics ends with demanding of us an immense credulity.

2. Because, even if we take the simplest form of the theory, that which is content with two authors, it seems very strange and inexplicable, that the second or pseudo-Isaiah, writing the latter and grander portion of the book, should be so entirely anonymous, and that the Jews have never had a tradition of the name or even existence of this "great unknown."

3. Because many passages in the first part evidently lead forward to the second, and find their proper completion there; or, as one has well expressed it—"The second part, with its theme, its standpoint, its style, its ideas, is, throughout the first part, in continual progress towards making its appearance. The early chapters are, with respect to the closing ones, as life-guards running on before."\* It is surely more reasonable to suppose that Isaiah himself wrote out the expansion of his earlier thoughts, than to ascribe this to an independent writer supposed to live one or two centuries after him.

4. Because the difference of tone in the second part of the book, which is alleged to prove a change of authorship, is quite explicable on the supposition that it was the work of Isaiah's old age, and composed not so much for public delivery as for the study of other prophets and righteous men, in view of the captivity in Babylon, to which period Isaiah, in spirit, ideally transfers himself.

5. Because the objection taken from the mention of Cyrus in the 44th and 45th chapters is not, properly, a critical objection, but springs out of a disbelief of the prophetic endowment. To say that, because Cyrus is named, the writer must have lived in the days of Cyrus, and when that great soldier was threatening Babylon, is simply to assume that prediction of the future is incredible, and involves a denial that there can be any real

\* *Imperial Bible Dictionary*, p. 807. Dr. Moody Stuart has some valuable observations on expressions and images characteristic of Isaiah, which are used in both sections in his *Bible true to Itself*, pp. 374-414.

predictions of Messiah to come. To us, however, who believe that God spoke in the prophets, there is no difficulty in the naming either of Cyrus or of the Messiah hundreds of years before Cyrus appeared or the Messiah came.

6. Because the latter part of the book, as well as the former, is much directed against idolatry. This was needful and appropriate in the time of Manasseh, when Isaiah concluded his ministry; but it would have been neither needful nor appropriate during or after the Captivity, the date assigned to the alleged second Isaiah, because the Jews had then completely broken off from idolatrous practices.

Leaving the question of authorship, let us try to analyse the book, and trace its inward arrangement:—

I. FIRST DIVISION.—Chap. i.—xxxix. This part is best arranged chronologically, with reference to the four reigns in which Isaiah saw his visions.

1. Chap. i.—vi.—In the reigns of Uzziah and Jotham. The former, after a long and prosperous career, was afflicted by leprosy in his declining years, and his son Jotham acted as regent for some time before he actually succeeded to the throne. For this reason it is that these two names are grouped together. In the end of Uzziah's reign, darkness began to gather over the kingdom. Its prosperity had brought in luxury; morals became corrupt, and religion hollow and formal. So the prophet Isaiah began his ministry with earnest reproofs of sin and calls to repentance.

In the vision of Jehovah's glory which he had in the last year of King Uzziah, and which marks not the beginning of his prophetic ministry, but the close of its first period, Isaiah was warned to expect but limited success with that wayward generation. The Lord described to him the perversity of the Jewish people, in words which are quoted five times in the New Testament against the generation that refused the Gospel—"Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with

their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed." \*

2. Chap. vii.—x. 4.—In the reign of Ahaz. At that time, the kingdom of Judah was in great danger of being overthrown by the allied armies of Israel and Syria. Isaiah predicted the failure of the invasion, and the retreat of the confederate kings ; encouraging the faithful in those days of darkness by a promise of Immanuel the Virgin's Son, for whose sake the house of David was preserved.

3. Chap. x. 5—xxix.—In the reign of Hezekiah, and terminating with some interesting passages of that good king's history. Ahaz had invited the help of the king of Assyria, making flesh his arm ; and from that time, Judah was dangerously entangled with the great imperial power of the East. So this section of the prophecy begins—"Woe unto Asshur, the rod of mine anger." There follow denunciations of Divine judgment on many nations ; including Babylon, which sent ambassadors to Hezekiah, and Egypt, in which the Jews were prone to put so much vain confidence.

Throughout the three sections of the first division are scattered important prophecies of Christ. Thus it was the glory of Christ that "Esaias saw." in the vision recorded in the sixth chapter. It is the birth of Christ that he announced in two famous oracles contained in the second section, and familiar to all Christian minds,—“Behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” † —“Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given ; and the government shall be upon His shoulder,” &c. ‡ In the third section, we read of Christ as “the Branch out of the root of Jesse,” the wise and righteous Ruler : § as the foundation divinely laid in Zion, “a tried stone :” || and also as the Man who gives refuge and rest to the weary. ¶

II. SECOND DIVISION.—Chap. xl.—lxvi.—This part consists

\* Isa. vi. 10.

† vii. 14.

‡ ix. 6, 7.

§ xi. 1, 10.

|| xxviii. 16.

¶ xxxii. 2.

of a lengthened discourse, recorded for the consolation not only of contemporaries, but of devout minds in future ages. In this it is like the discourses of Moses in Deuteronomy, or those of our Saviour in the Gospel according to St. John.

The second division, like the first, may be arranged in three sections.

1. Chap. xl.-xlviii.—The antithesis of Jehovah and the idols, Israel and the heathen. It ends with a note of judgment,—“No peace, saith Jehovah, to the wicked.”

2. Chap. xlix.-lvii.—The antithesis of the suffering of Jehovah’s Servant, and the glory that should follow. This also ends with the note of judgment, even more emphatic than before,—“No peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

3. Chap. lviii.-lxvi.—The antithesis between the hypocrites in Judah and the faithful; between the immoral and self-indulgent on the one hand, and on the other, the mourners who shall be comforted, the persecuted for righteousness’ sake, who have great reward in heaven. This section ends with the heaviest note of all, concerning the judgment of the wicked,—“For their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.”

As in each section of the first division, so also in each section of the second, the prophet speaks of Christ. For example:—

In the first section we find—

Isaiah xl. 3, in which Christ is called “the Lord.” See Matt. iii. 3.

Isaiah xlii. 1-7, in which Christ is the chosen Servant, and the meek and lowly One. See Matt. xii. 14-21.

Isaiah xlv. 23, in which Christ is to receive universal homage. See Rom. xiv. 10, 11; Phil. ii. 10.

In the second section we find—

Isaiah lii. 15, quoted of Christ in Rom. xv. 21.

Isaiah liii. quoted of Christ in Acts viii. 26-35.

In the third section we find—

Isaiah, lxi. 1-3 quoted by Christ as fulfilled in Him. See Luke iv. 16-21.

Such is the structure of the book. Its principal topics may be summed up thus :—

1. *Moral and political teaching.*—With great earnestness of tone, Isaiah exposed and reproved the sinful, ungrateful folly of his own nation. He pointed out the need of chastisement, and the risk of judgment. He summoned rulers and people alike to repent, and return to Him who reasons graciously thus : “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow ; though red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” \*

At the same time, there was comfort for the faithful in Judah and Jerusalem. The Lord would reserve to himself a people in the darkest hour. The rage of the heathen, however it might threaten, would not be permitted to destroy Judah, or exterminate the house of David. The army of Syria came up against Jerusalem ; but, while Jerusalem stood, it was foretold that Damascus would become “a ruinous heap.” With greater force came up the Assyrian host ; but the prophet announced that Jehovah would “punish the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and his high looks.” Moab was bitterly hostile. But it was prophesied that Moab would howl and cry in anguish. In like manner, Egypt, Elam, Media, Arabia, Tyre, Babylon, all should be weakened in turn, and Judah should learn that Jehovah God is Sovereign over all the nations, and knows well how to “hew down the high ones of stature, and humble the haughty.”

From these parts of the Book of Isaiah, arise the most solemn lessons to the Gentile nations now. They may boast of their commerce, as did ancient Tyre ; or of their military strength, as did Assyria and Babylon ; but if they serve “the Beast,” and not the Lamb, if they do not honour God and His Christ, they must, if they repent not, miserably perish.

2. *Denunciation of idolatry.*—In early life, Isaiah witnessed the gross idolatry promoted and practised by King Ahaz. He saw it put away by the reforming King Hezekiah, but restored by his son and successor, Manasseh. All through his ministry

\* Isa. i. 18.

he reasoned and protested against this wickedness. Especially in the second part of his book, written to comfort Jerusalem and encourage the hope of a restoration from captivity, he poured contempt upon the idols as futile, lifeless things; and, doubtless, it was mainly through his teaching, and that of the later prophet Jeremiah, that the Jews, while dwelling among the heathen, kept aloof from the rites of heathen worship, and were at last cured of their infatuation for idolatry.

3. *The doctrine of Messiah to come.*—As we have already indicated, the teaching of this book concerning Christ is wonderfully large and explicit. We may learn from it all the main truths in Christology.

(1.) The two natures in Christ. According to Isaiah, the future Deliverer was to be both God and man: God, for the child was to be the mighty God, and the Saviour was to be One who could say, "I am God, and there is none else;" man, for the Prince of peace was to be born of a woman, and to spring from the root of Jesse or lineage of David.

(2.) The two states of Christ. Isaiah foretold both His humiliation and His exaltation. He was to be Jehovah's Servant. True, indeed, that this title is first and often given to Jacob or Israel.\* Salvation is of the Jews. Israel is the messenger of God, and the illuminator of nations. But there is a Servant within Israel, even the Messiah to whom it is said, "It is too light a thing that Thou shouldest be my Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth."† Jesus is this pre-eminent Servant, as the personal concentration of Israel, accomplishing the ends for which Israel had been chosen and called, and in which Israel had utterly failed. He is the perfect flower that appeared at last on the old stock of Abraham. Now Isaiah saw this select Servant of Jehovah with a visage marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.

\* Isa. xli. 8, 9; xliv. 1, 2, 21; xlv. 4.

† Isa. xlix. 6.

He was to be the Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. He was to suffer wounds and bruises, and have His soul poured out in death, an offering for sin. Yet this much-enduring Christ was to gain by all this humiliation victory and joy. He was to prolong His days, and the pleasure of Jehovah was to prosper in His hand.\*

3. The three offices of Christ : a convenient and useful classification, long accepted and employed in our Christology.

Prophet. See Chap. xi. 1-4 ; xlii. 1-4.

Priest, in rendering sacrifice, and making intercession. See Chap. liii. 10-12.

King. See Chap. ix. 7.

No wonder that Isaiah has been termed the evangelical prophet. If we want a song of the Nativity, or a pathetic relation of our Lord's Passion, we find it in this book almost as well as in the gospels. And many are the preachers who have published good tidings of great joy from the pages of this prophecy since the day when Philip, sitting with the Ethiopian in the chariot, and having the roll of Isaiah open before him, preached Jesus.

4. *The calling of the Gentiles.*—When the Apostle Paul establishes the calling of the Gentiles under the gospel, he recalls the eleventh chapter of this book. "Isaiah saith, there shall be a root of Jesse, and He that shall rise to rule over the Gentiles ; in Him shall the Gentiles hope." † The Church, as the body formed of believing Jews and Gentiles, baptized together into Christ, was not within the prophet's view. That was a mystery hid from ages and generations, until it was revealed to the Apostle Paul in the Spirit. But Isaiah saw Israel and the Gentiles, and the relation of each to the Messiah—the blindness of Israel and Judah—the rejection of Jerusalem to be as a desolate woman because of her unbelief at the first coming of Christ—the calling in faith of the Gentiles—the preservation of a remnant of Israel according to the election of grace—and

\* Mr. Cheyne has a very candid and useful note on the interpretation of "the Servant of Jehovah" in his Commentary, vol ii. pp. 204-208.

† Rom. xv. 12.

the final joy of Jerusalem and Zion, and of restored Israel, in the midst of the Gentiles, when "all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed."

5. *The far-off glory.*—Isaiah had glimpses of the holy city, New Jerusalem, and of the new heavens and new earth. A renewal of the world was, in the old times, a favourite speculation of students, and frequent dream of poets. To us it is revealed in a sure word of prophecy, and we look for it according to Divine promises. But the prophets have given us no description of mere outward beauty—peaceful valleys, fragrant groves, or Elysian fields. The glory of the new dwelling-place of man shall be this,—that therein dwelleth righteousness, and "the effect of righteousness shall be quietness and assurance for ever." Then on the new earth shall descend from the new heavens a glorious city, to be the earth's metropolis and chief ornament of beauty, because it shall be full of the light of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. The most sublime language in the Apocalypse is a quotation from Isaiah. "The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended."\*

\* Isa. lx. 19, 20.

## JEREMIAH.

BETWEEN Isaiah and Jeremiah lies a gap of about a hundred years. The kingdom of Judah nodded to its fall. The good King Josiah died in battle with the Egyptians, and was buried with a grief that became proverbial,—“As the mourning of Hadad Rimmon in the valley of Megiddon.” Jeremiah wrote his elegy; and well might there be lamentation over the early death of the last heroic king who has sat in Jerusalem. There ensued a time of confusion, bewilderment, and disgrace. A succession of feeble princes struggled in vain against the great powers of Egypt and Babylon, now pressing on Judah from either side. The nobles and elders or chiefs in Jerusalem were, with few exceptions, heathens at heart; and the licentiousness of the court spread among all classes of society. False prophets, in conjunction with unfaithful priests, still further corrupted conscience and undermined true religion. “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so.”\*

At this mournful time lived Jeremiah; and his ministry could not but take a tone of sadness. Of his personal history we learn a good many details from his own writings. He was of priestly descent, and born at Anathoth, a Levitical city a few miles north-east of Jerusalem, identified with the present Anata, a small village on the ridge of a hill, with remains of ancient walls and house foundations. He was early called

\* Jer. v. 30, 31.

of God to prophesy ; beginning in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah ; continuing under the four kings who followed till the kingdom came to ruin, then under the Babylonian Government of Palestine ; and finally closing with his death in Egypt a public career of not less than fifty troubled years.

He was a man of tender feeling, keenly alive to the evils and woes of the time ; and it must have been peculiarly trying to such a man to be “ set over nations and kingdoms, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to overthrow ; to build, and to plant.”\* But him the Lord commissioned, touching his mouth with the Divine hand, and making him firm as “ an iron pillar, and brazen walls, against the whole land.” When we consider the tenderness of Jeremiah’s spirit, we are all the more struck by the boldness of his appeals, and the severity of his reproaches.

He had no wife or child ; and his affectionate nature, having no such private outlet, brooded the more anxiously over his nation. Yet his love was ill construed and requited. The people of Anathoth, his own townsmen, hated his plain speaking, and actually sought his life. In Jerusalem the prophets and priests bitterly withstood him. He fell under the displeasure of the king ; and the princes cast him into a miry dungeon to die. But he was not left without comforters. Baruch the son of Neriah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Ebed-melech the Ethiopian adhered to him faithfully ; and Jeremiah had the power which often resides in natures like his, of drawing his friends very close to him in admiration and sympathy.

The prophecies of Jeremiah seem to be thrown together without any studied arrangement. At all events, it is difficult to trace any principle of order ; and the arrangement in the Greek version differs considerably from that of the Hebrew Bible which we follow. There are also many omissions in the Greek ; showing that the Hebrew copies of Jeremiah’s works, preserved in Egypt, and used by the Greek translators there,

\* Jer. i. 10.

did not correspond exactly with the text of the Hebrew manuscripts in Palestine. Such variations and omissions, however, do not affect the general tenor or value of the book.

The greater part relates to Judah and Jerusalem; the smaller to the Gentile Nations. The best arrangement we can suggest is as follows:—

I. Chap. i.—xxxviii.—Prophecies and historic passages regarding Judah and its kings, down to the Chaldean capture and destruction of Jerusalem.

II. Chap. xxxix.—xliv.—Narrative mingled with prophecies, after the fall of Jerusalem.

III. Chap. xlvi.—li.—Prophecies against the Gentiles.

Two chapters are omitted in this arrangement, viz., the short chapter, 45th, which should fall naturally under the first division, and seems to have dropped out of its place; and the last chapter, 52d, which is an historical appendix from some other hand, perhaps Baruch, the prophet's friend. That the work of the prophet ends with the 51st chapter is evident from its closing sentence. "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah."

There is no doubt that the confused arrangement of this book somewhat detracts from the interest with which we ought to peruse it. Then the style of Jeremiah is diffuse; his language at times redundant; and we feel as if we were long beating over the same ground. One tires, too, of a succession of long discourses, all in the same mournful, reproving, and minatory strain. But this feeling is relieved by the passages of graphic narrative scattered over the book; and it is often converted into profound admiration and reverence, as we come on some of the more intensely searching and spiritual utterances, which have always made Jeremiah a favourite with devout and thoughtful men.

I. The first and largest part of the book reproves the perversity of the Jews—alike of the people, the priests, the prophets, the princes, and the kings. It exposes the infatuation

which bore Judah and Jerusalem toward idolatry, even after the discovery of the Book of the Law in the Temple, and the vigorous measures of reformation taken by King Josiah.

For the space of twenty chapters, we have an address full of moral argument and appeal, with explicit warnings of an invasion from the north. The backslidings and hypocrisies of Judah are rebuked with great plainness of speech. The people are summoned to repentance, and to confidence in Jehovah; although the conviction of the prophet is evident, that they would not repent, and that Jerusalem was doomed. Thus he lifts the desponding cry—"Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?"

In the remainder of this division of the book, Jeremiah foretells the fate of each of the kings, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, and the Chaldean capture of Jerusalem. So doing, he exposed himself to a charge of want of patriotism, and was even accused of mercenary motives, as though he had been bought up by the gold of the Chaldeans: but despising these calumnies, he continued true to his calling as a prophet, and assured king and people in Jerusalem, that Egypt could not help them, and that the army from Babylon would inevitably devastate the city, and destroy both the temple of Solomon and the throne of David. The priests and false prophets cried—"This man is worthy to die, for he has prophesied against this city." The princes rescued him out of the hands of these fanatics in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim; but his personal liberty was constantly threatened, on account of his persistence in affirming that Jerusalem would fall.\* No better was the treatment he received in his native town of Anathoth. Returning thither from the capital, he was seized in the gate on a charge of deserting to the Chaldeans, and was smitten by the princes, and cast again into prison. The King Zedekiah rescued him; but the princes, now incensed against him, retook him, and cast him into a

\* In this he reminds us of Phocion, who, for advising the Athenians to submit to a foreign conqueror, was accused of treason, and ungratefully condemned to die.

loathsome dungeon. Thence he was again rescued ; but none of these things moved him, and he continued to predict the success of the invaders. Truly a much-trying man ; and one armed with the best kind of fortitude, bearing any amount of misconstruction and maltreatment rather than conciliate favour by the slightest tinge of pleasing falsehood.

II. The second part describes the capture of Jerusalem, and certain events which followed. After the city fell, the princes of Babylon released Jeremiah from prison, and placed him under the care of Gedaliah, governor of the conquered kingdom. This officer was foully murdered by Ishmael and certain other conspirators. The Jewish princes, though innocent of the crime, feared that the wrath of the King of Babylon would fall upon them ; and, after affecting to consult Jehovah, they followed their own device, and fled into Egypt. Jeremiah they took with them by force ; and at Tahapanes, in the land of Egypt, he still continued a prophet of evil tidings, affirming that Egypt would be conquered and its temples burnt by the king of Babylon.

In Egypt, Jeremiah died. Tradition has it, that his own countrymen stoned him on account of his unacceptable prophecies. Sad at all events was his death, in forced exile from his home—yet a not inappropriate close to a life and ministry so full of isolation and grief.

III. The third part consists of prophecies against the Gentile nations of the East. At what period of his life Jeremiah received and uttered these prophecies does not appear ; but they are in his usual strain of reproof and warning, and their intimations of judgment are most explicit. They are—

1. Against Egypt,—that she should be overpowered by Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon. The correct form of this monarch's name is given by Jeremiah only. In the cuneiform it is written Nabu-kudur-uzur.

2. Against the Philistines. They seemed to be in danger

from Egypt; but the prophet declared that their real peril came from a contrary direction, even from Babylon. "Behold, waters rise up out of the north."

3. Against Moab. The oracle regarding this people corresponds with that contained in Isaiah xv., xvi.

4. Against the Ammonites, who had seized on the territory of the children of Gad.

5. Against the Edomites, over-confident in their own wisdom, and the strength of their land.

6. Concerning Damascus, with Hamath and Arpad,—a prophecy of feebleness.

7. Concerning Kedar and Hazor; that Nebuchadrezzar should smite and overcome them.

8. Concerning Elam,—a prediction of dismay and dispersion.

9. Against Babylon. The fall of this great power was foretold by the Hebrew prophet, at the very time when it had reached its highest point in the vigorous hands of Nebuchadrezzar. This oracle at once attests the foresight divinely given to Jeremiah, and vindicates his character from the charge of interested subserviency to the Babylonish power. The prophet saw that the vast empire would break up, and the great city would be taken; and he announced it as a joy to every lover of Jerusalem; even as the fall of mystical Babylon is to bring joy to the Church, and to all the children of "the Jerusalem which is above."

All these predictions have been fulfilled. Egypt was overrun by the Chaldean armies. The other nations, bordering on Palestine, suffered what Jeremiah foretold. Great Babylon itself was taken and destroyed. To this day, loneliness and desolation reign on those plains that once teemed with human life; and the oracle is most exactly fulfilled,—"Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling-place for jackals, an astonishment and an hissing, without inhabitant."\*

Such is the Book of Jeremiah as a whole. It is somewhat

\* Chap. li. 37.

confused and unwieldy, but it has points of engrossing interest for the intelligent Christian reader. For example:—

1. The personal trials of the prophet. His life was a prolonged martyrdom. Loving his country, he was called to predict its downfall; loving his people, he was obliged, for truth's sake, to incur their ill-will, and expose himself to the defaming of many. He had trial of mocking, scourging, and imprisonment. The precious roll of his prophecies was cut to pieces and burnt by the infatuated King Jehoiakim; and he was under the necessity of restoring the whole by dictation to his friend Baruch, who had the pen of a ready writer. He was accused of falsehood, when he bore witness to the truth; yet, through all injustice and calumny, he persevered, and was faithful unto death. Whoever can admire the fortitude of a tender heart, that grieves and shrinks, and yet out of weakness is made strong by the fear of God and the sense of duty, must hold Jeremiah in esteem, as one of the most eminent servants of the Lord. We cannot wonder that he has been thought to foreshadow the perfect Servant, and Prophet of prophets, Jesus Christ, that Witness to the truth, who was plotted against, calumniated, despised, and rejected of men.

2. The light cast by this book on some features of ancient mythology and history.

The worship of the queen of heaven, which originated in Babylon, and spread among many ancient nations, is found in Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough to make cakes to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink-offerings unto other gods."\* It is continued in the worship of the Madonna, observed in the paganised Church of Rome. The cakes or buns, mentioned by the prophet as offered in ancient times to the queen of heaven, have probably given rise to the connection of buns with Easter down to the present day; for what is Easter but Astarte or Ishtar, one of the names of the Chaldean queen of heaven?

\* Chap. vii. 17, 18; xliv. 18-26.

Another superstition of a more cruel character had taken a strong hold of the Jewish mind. The fruit of the body was given for the sin of the soul. Children were sacrificed to Moloch, a Canaanite and Phœnician deity, in consuming fire. We learn from Jeremiah, that the scene of these horrid rites at Jerusalem was Topheth in the valley of the son of Hinnom.\* The prophet also informs us that, besides these Chaldean and Phœnician idolatries, the Jews had begun to adore the sun, moon, and host of heaven. Although this worship is of great antiquity, it does not appear in Israel or Judah till the close of the monarchy.

The historical references by Jeremiah are of extreme value, and are corroborated by such extra-biblical records as exist. The extracts which remain to us from the writings of Berosus the Egyptian and Manetho the Chaldean, the Assyrian monuments, and the pages of Herodotus, all confirm what this prophet says of the sudden rise and prodigious strength of the Babylonian empire, the re-conquest of Syria and Palestine from Pharaoh-Necho by Nebuchadrezzar, the flight of Jews into Egypt, and the overthrow of the Egyptian power by the Babylonian armies. †

3. Some memorable passages concerning sin and salvation, written for us as well as for the Jews.

Nowhere is to be found a more searching insight into the heart of man than in those words of the Lord by Jeremiah,—“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?” ‡ Nowhere do we find a more solemn and touching appeal to backsliders than in the second and third chapters of this book.

The promises of Messiah are in the twenty-third and thirty-third chapters. The Righteous Branch, the King on the throne of David, the Lord our Righteousness, can be no other than Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The promise of the New Testament to the Jews is found in the thirty-first chapter, and is quoted with great emphasis in the

\* Chap. vii. 31, 32.

† Chap. viii. 1, 2; xix. 12, 13.

‡ Chap. xvii. 9, 10.

Epistle to the Hebrews. This new covenant of promise is a national covenant with Israel and Judah only, as the former covenant had been ; but its blessings are just those which the Church in this dispensation enjoys, and which are free to Jews and Gentiles alike, through Christ Jesus. These are the blessings of—

(1.) Regeneration, the law of the Lord being put into the inward parts and written on the heart.

(2.) Fellowship with God.

(3.) Divine teaching, so that all shall know the Lord ; and

(4.) Complete and conscious pardon.

What a feast of fat things ! What precious promises ! And these are ours in Christ Jesus. We embrace in faith the blessings of His testament, and so, out of the mournful pages of Jeremiah, we derive the joyful tidings of a great salvation.

## LAMENTATIONS.

THIS book does not bear Jeremiah's name, but may without hesitation be ascribed to him. It dates from his period; it is quite in his tone; and it is expressly assigned to him in the Greek version of the Seventy. It is an elegy—one may almost say a dirge. Of personal elegy the Bible shows a choice specimen in David's poem on the death of Saul and Jonathan. Of prophetic elegies we shall find instances in the Book of Ezekiel, as when that prophet takes up "a lamentation for Tyre" over its future downfall. What Jeremiah has here written is a great historical elegy—a poem of sadness over the capture of Jerusalem, and the desolation of Zion. It is still recited by the Jews at their Wailing Place in the city of their fathers.

Poem of sorrow as it is, the Book of Lamentations is most carefully constructed. It consists of five laments. Each of these has twenty-two stanzas, according to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The first, second, and third laments have three couplets or lines in each stanza; the fourth has two; the fifth has one. Then four laments are acrostic, the successive stanzas beginning with the successive letters of the alphabet. The third, central in the book, is the most minutely acrostic—the three couplets of each stanza beginning with the same letter. In the fifth lament, the alphabetic arrangement disappears. It was employed no doubt partly to assist the memory, and partly to please the literary taste of the period which admired acrostic writing.

When we study the internal structure and contents of this book, we are led to characterise the several laments as follows—

I. The first lament is the grieved utterance of Zion as a desolate widow, sitting in loneliness and tears. It is in two equal parts of eleven verses each. In the first, Zion is pictured in her calamity. In the second, she speaks for herself, beginning with those most pathetic words, which have often been quoted as though they referred to the suffering of our Lord—"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, where-with the Lord has afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger." Yet Zion acknowledges that the Lord's anger against her is just—"The Lord is righteous, for I have rebelled against His commandment."

II. The second lament is spoken by the poet. He describes the ruin of Jerusalem, and the desecration of the sanctuary. "Her gates are sunk into the ground; He hath destroyed and broken her bars; her king and her princes are among the nations where the law is not; yea, her prophets find no vision from the Lord."\* Jeremiah, though desirous to comfort desolate Zion, does not fail to admonish her, that for her sins, and the falsehood of her prophets, this woe had come upon her. He exhorts her to weep before the Lord; and then concludes the lament with an appeal to Jehovah to behold the low estate of His people.

III. The third lament is the voice of the poet, as a man intensely afflicted in Zion's affliction. He pours out the bitter anguish of his heart; but, at the mention of Jehovah's name, he begins to hope, and the central part of this elegy, which is the central part of the whole book, is thus on a sudden lit up with words of faith and expectation. As into the very centre of some dark tunnel may be let down the sweet air and light of heaven, cheering those who pass through, so the Book of Lamentations begins with gloom, bursts into light, and then ends with gloom again. Only this may be said, that the gloom

\* Chap. ii. 9.

towards the conclusion is not so heavy as at the beginning, being relieved by a few gleams of comfort in God.

IV. The fourth lament is also spoken by the prophet, identifying himself with the people of Jerusalem, as distinguished from her prophets and priests. It describes the city a prey to pestilence and famine, the children perishing of thirst and hunger, and the mothers consuming their own offspring—a horror that has never been known but in the last extremity of want. This elegy ends with a shout of retribution directed against Edom, which rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem. It is the only menace in all the book. The fierce exultation of Ammonites and Moabites, and the gratified hatred of the Philistines, or envy of the Phœnicians, were not so insulting and harrowing to the Jews as the cruel delight of the race of Esau, their own next of kin, over their national calamity. But the Lord would repay—"He will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; He will discover thy sins."

V. The fifth lament is the voice of the Jewish people. It is throughout an appeal to the Divine pity. It has a vein of confession and self-reproach mingled with a wail of misery, showing that the consciences of the people had at last begun to work faithfully under their affliction: for now they cry, "Woe unto us! for we have sinned." Their last petition is—"Renew our days as of old." Yet after this, the desponding tone returns; and the lament dies away mournfully in the true style of a dirge—"But Thou hast utterly rejected us; Thou art very wroth against us."

Such is the tenor of this book. We might say much of its literary merit as a poem. We might with safety designate it the finest historical elegy in any language, wonderfully combining the most symmetrical structure with the free expression of gushing sorrow and melting pathos. But we prefer to speak

of its moral and religious lessons for the Jews and for us. It is a Hebrew poem, but it is more ; it is a part of Holy Writ.

The Jews were a people in covenant, and yet were for a time set aside because of their sins, and treated as Admah and Zeboim. But it was not judgment so much as correction they received, and the benefit which the Jews were intended to reap from this correction depended on their seeing two things in it—the evil of sin, and the hand of God. For many years, Jeremiah had testified against their transgressions, but they would not repent. It was necessary that their national pride should be thoroughly shaken by their falling under the power of the heathen, in order that, under a healthy exercise of conscience, they might acknowledge their faults, and turn from their idolatry. But it was necessary also, that they should see the hand of God in their humiliation. The Chaldean army overcame and despoiled them ; but that army was only an instrument, not the source, of judgment: It was Jehovah that covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger, and cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel. When they discerned this truth, the mourning people had some encouragement to appeal to God, for God was near. His hand had smitten them, but not consumed them ; a proof that His compassions failed not. So it was their duty to wait patiently, and hope for the salvation of God.

By such thoughts have Christians, too, been refined and comforted in the tribulation of the Church, or in personal affliction. They have seen their sins in their chastisements, and been corrected or cured by a painful discipline. They have also seen the hand of God in trouble ; and forgetting and forgiving their persecutors, or such as have sought their hurt, have cried, “ The Lord is my portion, saith my soul ; therefore will I hope in Him. The Lord will not cast off for ever ; for though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion, according to the multitude of His mercies ; for He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” \*

Memory does not suffice to sustain the afflicted. There must

\* Chap. iii. 24, 31-33.

also be hope in God according to His word. The defeated and discouraged Jews had a glorious past to recall, and many deliverances wrought for their fathers; but memory only added to their grief. They wanted hope. And so, afflicted Christians, chastened for their sins, are only the more crushed by remembrance of the Lord's past goodness, if they may not in their trouble still hope in His mercy.

Such hope, when warranted at all, must be accompanied with self-reproach and godly sorrow. The penitent puts his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope; but vain is the confidence of him who says, "I will hope for the best," while his pride is unbroken, and his sin not forsaken. "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens."\*

A higher and more tender interest still attaches to the Book of Lamentations. As the rejection of Joseph, Moses, and David suggests the treatment of our Lord Jesus as despised and rejected of men; so the trouble of Job and the tears of Jeremiah suggest the affliction of the Lord Jesus, the Man of sorrows acquainted with grief.

On the face of a rocky hill, north of Jerusalem, is shown to this day the grotto of Jeremiah. The tradition is that he sat there over against the city, and wept. Often had he spoken in the streets and places of concourse, but the priests, elders, and people would not hearken; and now there was nothing left but to weep. So Jesus Christ spoke often in Jerusalem, and would have gathered her children from the impending storm, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings; but they would not come to Him. At last, He too could but weep over the infatuation of the priests, the elders, and the people. "And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes!" † Jeremiah saw Jerusalem beleaguered and taken by the Chaldeans. The Lord Jesus foresaw it compassed and

\* Chap. iii. 40, 41.

† Luke xix. 41, 42.

captured by the Romans. Jeremiah had warned in vain; while there was time to avert the doom by righteousness, he preached; and when preaching was too late, he wept. The Lord Jesus in like manner had warned in vain, had published in Jerusalem the things that belonged to its peace; but His word was rejected, and the ruin that was avoidable became unavoidable. Therefore, the Saviour wept.

Jeremiah thoroughly identified himself with his nation. Notwithstanding all the ill-treatment he had received, he loved Judah and Jerusalem, and was deeply moved in spirit for them. We see him bearing a nation's grief, and carrying the sorrows of a desolate city; and this, though he was innocent of those transgressions of Judah and Jerusalem which had incurred this penalty. A significant figure, surely, of Jesus Christ, who, in Himself innocent—for in Him was no sin—suffered for our sins, and was made exceeding sorrowful.

In the opening of this book, we behold the city suffering; but, as we draw near to the middle of it, and have glimpses of mercy and a hope of salvation, we find the grief concentrated on the head of one man; and that, not the King Zedekiah, or any of the princes who surrounded his throne, but the prophet who had preached righteousness, and, at the risk of his life, had endeavoured to turn the people from their sins. "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath." \* Very poignant was his grief, because he was not only a patriot who dearly loved Jerusalem, but also a man of God, who entered into Divine thoughts, recognised the Divine claims, and felt in soul and conscience the justice as well as the power of the Divine wrath.

So, before the fall of Jerusalem under the Roman sword, there stood in the city a Man of sorrows, who did no iniquity, yet had a bitter cup to drink; and suffered as one who knew and justified the righteous judgment of God. He wept for Jerusalem, but not for Himself. He bade the people weep not for Him, but for themselves and for their children, recalling

\* Chap. iii. 1.

the very words of Jeremiah, "Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward Him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger at the top of every street." \*

It is this close parallel that has induced, in all ages of the Church, the quotation of parts of this Book of Lamentations to express the sorrow and suffering of Christ. But He was far more than a Jewish patriot or deliverer, for He endured and died, not for the Jews only, but also for us sinners of the Gentiles. Himself innocent, He bore our sins; Himself blessed for ever, He became as one accursed for our sakes. Never was sorrow like His sorrow, or love like His love. We hear His lamentations in the Psalms,—“Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.” †

There is a counter-lamentation near the end of the Bible. As Jeremiah saw Jerusalem laid waste by the armies of Babylon, so John saw Babylon destroyed, and new Jerusalem revealed. Babylon, in the New Testament, represents Church apostasy or harlotry from Christ; and, over the fall of this Babylon, is heard a lamentation of those on the earth and the sea, while there is joy and rejoicing in heaven. It is the usage of the Book of Revelation, to speak of the earth and the sea as together forming the whole power and range of this world in its hostility to God; while the heaven is the region of the spiritual Church, from which, at last, that Church comes down to the earth as a holy city, and a bride. So the world is to act the part of mourner at the downfall of great Babylon; pomp, luxury, and love of riches lament, while the heavens rejoice with the holy apostles and prophets.

Better to be with Jerusalem in its mourning, than with Babylon in its pride. And to this alternative it comes—Babylon or Jerusalem; harlotry or chastity of soul; love of the world or the love of Christ; affliction with the people of God,

\* Chap. ii. 19.

† Psalm lxi. 20.

ending in everlasting consolation ; or the pleasures of sin for a season, ending in weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Let every one consider this alternative and make his choice. If any one choose sin with plagues following, it must be so ; for it is quite in a man's power to destroy himself. If any one choose Christ, with the peace He gives, the holiness He imparts, the pleasures for evermore to which He conducts—God be praised !

*EZEKIEL.*

ISAIAH prophesied in Jerusalem: Jeremiah in and near Jerusalem also, and for some years before his death, among the Jewish fugitives in Egypt. Ezekiel, the third of these "three mighties," prophesied by the rivers of Babylon.

It will be remembered, that the young King Jehoiakin, after an ignoble reign of three months, surrendered Jerusalem to the Chaldeans; and that the king, with his court, the princes, the mighty men, and thousands of the more skilled and educated Jews, were carried away into captivity. "None remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land." Jeremiah, continuing to reside in Jerusalem during the reign of Zedekiah, wrote a letter to those captives to comfort them, and to warn them against certain false prophets who deluded them with predictions of an early return from Babylon. The letter is on record in the twenty-ninth chapter of his book.

Among those exiles was that true prophet of God, whose writings are now before us. Ezekiel was, like Jeremiah, a priest by extraction. Like him, too, his prophetic spirit brooded over the downfall of Jerusalem. Jeremiah ministered to his fellow-citizens; Ezekiel to his fellow-captives. Both were men of intense national feeling; and, better still, both were men keenly alive to all that concerned the glory of God as the God of Israel.

Ezekiel was purely a seer and a prophet. He did not, like those who preceded him in the prophetic order, address himself to the guidance of public affairs. That was partly Jeremiah's function at Jerusalem; and it was eminently Daniel's occupation

at Babylon. But Ezekiel saw visions, and wrote lively oracles concerning Jehovah and Israel, God and the nations. Exiled from his beloved land, and beholding his countrymen around him captives among the heathen, he poured out the intensity of his soul, as a man of God, in words that burn. Then he was always a writer. Having no such opportunity to speak in the king's court, and in the chief places of concourse at Jerusalem, as both Isaiah and Jeremiah had, Ezekiel betook himself to the scroll, the ink-horn, and the reed. His prophecies were written by himself: consequently the book which bears his name is more orderly and consecutive than that of Jeremiah.

The meaning of the name Ezekiel is "God shall strengthen;" and one cannot but be impressed with the strength of Ezekiel's character, and the ardent force of his ministry. Like a giant, he wrestled against Jewish degeneracy and Babylonish pride. Remote as we are from his times, we are stirred by his vivid imagination, and his power of fervid denunciation and strenuous appeal. Even when the understanding is puzzled, the heart burns inwardly at the recital of Ezekiel's visions, and of those burdens which the Lord laid upon his spirit.

The book we arrange in four parts.

I. Chap. i.—xxiv.—This section contains the opening visions, the prophetic commission, and the signs and predictions of the fall of Jerusalem.

1. The opening visions of cherubic forms and large mystic wheels are such as at once suggest the palaces at Babylon—their vast spaces, and the gigantic complex figures which adorned them, and which may be called the cherubim of the heathen. Then the largeness and intricacy of the vision of wheels indicate an astronomical reference, and prepare the mind for wide and sublime revelations of the far-reaching providence of God. Compare the vision in the first chapter with that which is described in the sixth chapter of Isaiah. The earlier prophet dwelling in Jerusalem, and familiar with the Temple, saw the Lord enthroned there, and heard His voice. But Ezekiel, far from Jerusalem,

looking on the deep Chaldean sky, beheld a grander scene. The Lord was enthroned in splendour above the firmament. Round about there was the brightness of a rainbow. The firmament or expanse rested on four cherubim; the number four corresponding to what the ancients called the four parts of heaven, covering the four quarters of the earth. Lamps moved up and down; lightnings flashed; vast wheels appeared, full of eyes; and the whole celestial scene was instinct with life. There was heard a waving of mighty wings. And after all this, the voice of the Lord came to the priest Ezekiel, as he lay on his face prostrate before the glory, and gave him his charge as a prophet to the house of Israel. Isaiah was sent from the God of the Temple; Ezekiel from the God of heaven; and, because he lived in a region where men worshipped the host of heaven, the latter prophet began with a vision of the heavenly expanse, with all the bright host, and all the mighty wheels or orbits, in their due subordination to the throne and glory of the Lord.

2. In the commission he received, Ezekiel was told to expect a career very trying to flesh and blood. He was to find Israel stiff-hearted and rebellious, but to continue to speak God's words to them, whether they hearkened or no. In a trance, he saw a roll on which were written lamentation, mourning, and woe. This he swallowed, and found the bitter message in his mouth sweet as honey.\* That the roll was eaten, implies that the word of the Lord entered into the prophet, and became as a part of himself. It was sweet to him, because he was zealous for God; but it was also bitter to him, because he loved Israel. "So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; and the hand of the Lord was strong upon me." †

3. The actual ministry of Ezekiel then began. He removed to a place called Tel-Abib, probably the chief seat of the Jewish

\* This, with much else that we meet in Ezekiel, reappears in Revelation. See Rev. x. 8-11.

† Chap. iii. 14.

colony in Babylon. After he had sat among the people for seven days in one long fit of grief, the word of Jehovah came to him thus—"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me." He only of all the prophets is designated a watchman, to warn the people for God; and, from the first, there was impressed on his mind that great truth of the inseparable connection between righteousness and life, unrighteousness and death, which in all ages gives force to the preaching of repentance, and which every watchman must urge on the consciences of his fellow-men, that he may if possible save them, and may in any case deliver his own soul.

Then followed strange signs and visions. By Divine instruction, the prophet took a tile or brick, and engraved on it the distant city of Jerusalem as it was then besieged by the Chaldeans. Then, by lying first on this side, and then on that, for many days, he signified the years during which the house of Israel and house of Judah were to bear their iniquities. He ate the coarse and even foul bread of famine, and drank a small pittance of water, to show the straitness and scarcity which the people of Jerusalem were suffering. Most probably, all this, like the swallowing of the roll of prophecy, was transacted in vision, not in actual life.

Next in order came a piece of symbolic teaching. Ezekiel cut off his hair and beard lock by lock, and cast one-third of these, which were the marks of his priestly office, into the fire, smote one third about with a sword, and scattered the remaining third before the wind. Only a few hairs he saved in the skirts of his raiment, and even these he afterwards burnt, excepting a very small remnant. It was a sign that the holy city was to be consumed and wasted, Zion laid bare by violence, and only a small remnant left for the Lord.

After a lamentation in the seventh chapter, there comes another vision or series of visions (chap. viii.-xi.), the prophet being transferred in the trance to Jerusalem. There he saw many forms of heathen idolatry practised by the very elders of

Judah at the Temple. The image of Baal was there : the beast-worship of Egypt was there ; the fire or sun-worship of Persia was there ; the licentious rites of Tammuz or Adonis were there. Nothing could be more flagrant than the corruption of worship and morals, and yet the Jews complacently assumed that they were safe as the covenant people of God.

Then a mark was set upon the men who sighed and cried for the abominations done in Jerusalem ; and the rest of the people were doomed to die in their sins.

The prophet beheld the glory of God as a fiery figure before his first vision of the idolatry at the Temple. Again he saw the whole celestial and cherubic glory as he had seen it when he was called to be a prophet ; and it came to the east gate of the house of Jehovah. A man clothed in linen took coals of fire, not from the altar, but from between the cherubim, and scattered them over the guilty city. Then followed a vision of the rejection of the priests and elders, ringleaders of the idolatry at Jerusalem ; and one of them, Pelatiah, a prince, was seen to die suddenly, on which the seer fell on his face, and cried with a loud voice, " Ah ! Lord Jehovah, wilt thou make a full end of the remnant of Israel ? " \* In reply, there came a gleam of hope. The Lord would be a sanctuary to the dispersed, and finally would gather them again from the countries, and give them the territory of Israel.

This closes the series of visions in the Spirit at Jerusalem. The heavenly brightness is withdrawn. The dishonoured house and the unfaithful city are left desolate ; and the prophet, borne back in spirit to the river Chebar, relates what he had seen to the elders of the Captivity.

Then follow typical actions and stern messages bearing on the now impending capture of Jerusalem, and the exile of Zedekiah with multitudes of the Jews. False prophets, who deluded the nation with cries of Peace, peace ! are denounced as daubing a wall with untempered mortar ; and prophetesses are reproved who fostered the prevailing delusion with their fair speeches and

\* Chap. xi. 13.

allurements. With the same firmness are censured those among the captives who hypocritically inquired after God, while setting up idols in their hearts. Then comes a long and comprehensive history of Israel's perversity and guilt. And so the chapters run on in a strain of sadness and reproach, chiefly in a didactic form, but including a parable of the eagles and the cedar of Lebanon (chap. xvii.); and a vision of fire and sword (chap. xx. 45-xxi.); and a narrative of Israel and Judah in apostasy from Jehovah, under the figure of two wantons, who were sisters, by name Aholah and Aholibah.

Thus we arrive at the close of the first division of the book, in the twenty-fourth chapter. The contents of that chapter are very striking. It appears that, on the very day on which Nebuchadnezzar's army invested Jerusalem, Ezekiel told the exiles in Babylon what had occurred hundreds of miles away; and, under the parable of the boiling caldron, predicted the calamitous end of the siege. His wife dying on the evening of that day, he, by Divine command, raised no cry, and showed none of the accustomed signs of grief, to signify that a heavier woe was at hand—a grief too deep for tears. Perhaps, however, this bereavement, like Hosea's marriage, took place in the ideal, not the actual sphere.

At this point, Ezekiel ceased for a time to prophesy concerning Israel and Judah.

II. Chap. xxv.—xxxii.—The second division of the book deals with the judgment of nations.

Far from the fall of Jerusalem being any ground of triumph to the heathen world, it was to be construed as a sign of judgment which, beginning at the House of God, was to go out among the corrupt and self-confident peoples and kingdoms of the East. So we have in rapid succession sentences of doom pronounced upon Ammon, Moab, Edom, and the Philistines. Then Tyre is warned of havoc to be wrought by the strong arm of Nebuchadnezzar; and, in vivid language, the desolation of Egypt by the same conqueror is foretold.

These chapters are full of interest to the student of ancient history; and it has been acknowledged that their predictions have been most minutely fulfilled. The tribes of Western Asia were crushed by Nebuchadnezzar's hosts. The maritime greatness of Tyre received a heavy blow. Egypt fell from its ancient eminence among nations. In this part of his book, Ezekiel, like some of the prophets who had preceded him, may be said to have sung the dirge of cities and kingdoms. As Dean Milman has said—"The seers of Judah utter their sublime funereal anthems over the greatness of each independent tribe or monarchy as it was swallowed up—first in the empire of Assyria, and then in that of Chaldea. They were like the tragic chorus of the awful drama which was unfolding itself to the Eastern world."

III. Chap. xxxiii.—xxxix.—The third division returns to the case of Israel and Judah, henceforth considered as one; and combines with warnings, consolations and precious promises.

The Lord renewed His servant's commission as a watchman. For the space of a year, Ezekiel had not spoken of the case of Israel. He had been told that his mouth would be opened when Jerusalem had fallen, and the escaped should reach him with the tidings.\*

At last the escaped came to him, saying, "The city is taken!" † Thereupon Ezekiel began a new strain of prophecy, reproving sin, calling to righteousness, but also consoling his countrymen with great promises from God. The chief of these promises are: (1.) That of a true Shepherd, conveyed in words that must refer to the Messiah-Shepherd of Israel; (2.) That of a new heart, cleansed from idols and defilements—a tender heart, as one of flesh contrasted with a heart of stone; and (3.) That of a restoration to the land of Canaan. This last promise is confirmed by the vision of dry bones in the valley or open plain of Mesopotamia, brought together into human forms at the prophet's voice, and made alive by the rushing wind. So the

\* See chap. xxiv. 26, 27.

† Chap. xxxiii. 21.

Lord restored His people from Babylon, and will again restore them from their present dispersion, imparting to them not only a full national organisation, but also the energy of life by His quickening Spirit.

The third division of this book ends with a singular prophecy directed against Gog of the land of Magog. Magog is Scythia ; Rhosh, Russia ; Meshech, the land of Muscovites ; Tubal, probably the region of the Caucasus. With the hordes from these regions, led by the prince Gog, are seen armies from Persia, Ethiopia, Phut or Libya, the people of Gomer or the Tartars, and the house of Togarmah or the dwellers in Armenia. Such an invasion of Palestine by formidable and ruthless hosts would be an overwhelming disaster ; but the Lord gave to His people the strongest assurance of protection on their restoration to their own land ; and He promised to turn back Gog, to destroy his army, and to send fire upon Magog.

This reappears in the Book of Revelation,\* to express the last onset of unbelieving nations, not from the north alone, but from the four quarters of the earth, on the camp of the saints and the beloved city—an onset repulsed, not by human prowess, but by the fire of God which shall come down from heaven.

IV. Chap. xl.—xlviii.—As in the Revelation the defeat of Gog and Magog is followed by the vision of the holy city, New Jerusalem ; so in this Book of Ezekiel, after the discomfiture of Gog, we find a vision of the Temple, the city, and the land of Israel. This last portion has puzzled all interpreters.

The description of the Temple does not correspond with the plan of the Tabernacle, or that of the first Temple. These were real buildings, and were erected according to the patterns shown by God Himself to Moses and to David ; but this is an ideal communicated, not to a leader or king in order to be actually carried out, but to a seer, who wrote down his vision for the consolation of the captives in Babylon. It cannot even have been meant, that this ideal structure should have been built by

\* Rev. xx. 7-9.

the Jews after the return from captivity, or at any subsequent period. The dimensions of the Temple, as given in the vision, are greater than the entire ancient city of Jerusalem. The dimensions assigned to the city are as great as the whole of Palestine between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, and could not be placed on a square centering at Mount Zion, without covering part of that sea. Plainly the Temple is ideal, and so is the city. The vision was given to keep before the minds of the exiles the duty of rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple, on their restoration to their own land. The stupendous scale of the vision was, we presume, intended to project the thoughts of devout readers into far-distant times—not the times of the present Church of God, but those of the future glory and blessing on the earth, centering at Zion and Jerusalem, when the Lord shall be King over all the earth, and the Holy City shall be named Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord is there.

So ends this great Book of Ezekiel. The prophet did not live to see the restoration, but died in Babylon. They show his sepulchre there at this day; and, for hundreds of years, Jewish pilgrims have visited the spot.

His ministry was certainly not in vain; for the exiles in Babylon were wonderfully cured of idolatrous tendencies, and raised in spiritual apprehension above their fathers. But it must have been a very trying ministry, because of its copious reproof, lamentation, and woe, and because of the perversity of the people, some of whom were simply rebellious, and others deceitful—with their mouths showing much love, while their hearts went after their covetousness. Through all trials Ezekiel bore himself with a spirit loyal to God and a sort of Titanic largeness and force. His figure rises like a rock above the waves of that troubled time.

He is a watchman to us, as well as to the Jews. He puts the trumpet to his mouth, and bids us turn from evil ways and live. If any hear the trumpet and take not warning, they must die; but God compels them not at all to their doom.

“ I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God : wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.” \*

Ezekiel also speaks with searching power to the Church in his unsparing vision of the Temple chambers at Jerusalem :

“ What idol shapes are on the wall portrayed !  
Hear Judah's maid the dirge to Thammuz pour,  
And mark her chiefs yon orient sun adore.”

Far more inexcusable are those who, in the days of the Gospel, bring their vanities and idolatries into the Church of God, and who, professing to worship Him, really give their minds and hearts—

“ To worship pleasure's shadow on the wall,  
To bow before the ‘ little drop of light ’  
Which dim-eyed men call praise and glory here ;  
What dost thou but adore the sun, and scorn  
Him at whose only word both sun and stars were born ? ”

The Lord said by Ezekiel, “ I will answer him according to the multitude of his idols.” †

“ Turn thee from them, or dare not to inquire  
Of Him whose name is Jealous, lest in wrath  
He hear and answer thine unblest desire ;  
Far better we should cross His lightning's path,  
Than be according to our idols heard,  
And God should take us at our own vain word.” ‡

\* Chap. xviii. 32.

† Chap. xiv. 4.

‡ “ The Christian Year.”

*DANIEL.*

THIS book is unique in the Old Testament. In the Hebrew Canon, it is not numbered with the prophetic writings ; and, indeed, it is quite different from those books of the prophets which surround it in our Bibles. It consists of two equal parts : the first, narrative ; the second, a series of visions of the future. In other words, the first half of the book is history ; and the second, apocalypse.

The book is recognised with honour in other parts of Scripture, and exercised marked influence on some portions of the New Testament. Thus, the title "Son of Man," so often taken by our Lord Jesus Christ, originates in the seventh chapter of Daniel. The angel Gabriel, mentioned by St. Luke, first appears in the eighth and ninth chapters of this book, and is seen nowhere else. We read in Daniel vii. 22—"The judgment was given to the people of the saints of the Most High ;" and in 1 Cor. vi. 2—"Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" The epistles of St. Paul contain other undoubted references to this book ; and the Revelation given to St. John is pervaded with its language and symbols. No wonder that the writings of Daniel have been held in high repute in all ages of the Church, and have engaged the eager interest of countless Biblical students.

It was the period of the Babylonish captivity. For incorrigible obstinacy in transgression, Judah and its princes had been given as a prey to King Nebuchadnezzar. That great potentate of the Gentiles is seen at the beginning of this book at the height of his fame and power. The Jews were as a very

feeble remnant; but, for their consolation in their low estate, God was pleased to show forth His power at Babylon, to prove His loving care for His faithful witnesses, and also to unveil the future relations of His cause and people toward the kingdoms of men. These are the very things we find in the Book of Daniel—extraordinary manifestations of the power of the Keeper of Israel, and singular visions of God; fitted to abase the pride of the heathen, and to reanimate the hearts of the dejected Jews. The extent to which the book is pervaded by the supernatural, far from militating against it, as some have alleged, is rather to be regarded as a strong argument in its favour, when we note the time at which Daniel lived, and the peculiar need that then existed for such a revelation of God in the very heart and centre of heathen power and confidence—great Babylon.

I. The first division occupies six chapters. These chapters relate six contests between the God of the Hebrews and His witnesses on the one hand, and the heathen gods, their magicians and princes, on the other. In every case Jehovah triumphs, and His victory is openly acknowledged.

1. The question is of wisdom and understanding.

Here we have the early history of Daniel. It appears that he was carried captive from Jerusalem at the same time as Ezekiel, and, like him, spent all the rest of his life in exile. Ezekiel, a priest, remained in a rural district; but Daniel, a young man of high birth, perhaps of princely extraction, was appointed to live in the city of Babylon.

It is impossible not to be struck with the parallel between Joseph and Daniel. Both spent their lives in heathen courts, and yet were faithful to the true God. Both were tempted, yet kept themselves pure. Both were well-favoured in body and sagacious in mind, with a marked capacity for statesmanship and administration; and both were endowed with the gift of interpreting significant dreams to heathen monarchs, and of winning their admiration and confidence.

The narrative in the first chapter gives us a favourable im-

pression of the discernment and policy of the great King Nebuchadnezzar. Whilst sending out vast military expeditions, and overrunning immense territories, he, like Charlemagne in a later age, did not forget the interests of learning, and wished to gather men of thought and lore about his throne. He provided for the educational training of those who might afterwards give counsel in affairs of state, and hold positions in what we call the civil service. Moreover, he sought to attach the conquered Hebrews to his dynasty by selecting some of those of good birth and good parts, and having them brought up to be counsellors and courtiers in Babylon.

Among these was Daniel; and with him were three other young Hebrews, who have a very honourable place in the history that follows. These four acquired with diligence the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans; and this was useful, just as it was all the better for Moses that he had learned the wisdom of the Egyptians. The young Hebrews, however, would not conform to the Chaldeans in anything that contravened the law of their religion; and therefore would not partake at the table of the heathen, or share their tempting viands, lest they should break the Mosaic statute regarding meats and drinks. On a far simpler diet they flourished; and when the examination for the civil service was held, presided over by the monarch in person, the four Hebrews excelled all the other young men, both in physical and mental condition. Nay, they were wiser than all the sages of Babylon, for God Himself gave them knowledge and skill. "And in every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his realm."\*

2. The question is of the revealing of secrets. To the world-ruler Nebuchadnezzar, to the man who was supreme over all kingdoms, and who, in overthrowing Judah and Jerusalem, seemed to have overcome the very kingdom of God, was shown in a dream a magnificent sketch of future history, a prevision of

\* Chap. i. 20.

successive empires followed by the only enduring and universal kingdom, to be set up by the God of heaven, and destined to fill the whole earth with His glory. A colossal image appeared, representing imperial strength and dignity. The golden head of it symbolised the Babylonian empire; the silver breast and arms, the Medo-Persian which followed; the brazen belly and thighs, the Greek; the iron legs, the Roman—ending in kingdoms of mingled iron and clay, exhibited in the toes of the image, *i.e.*, heterogeneous elements mixed with the old Roman strength. That these four empires rose in the order of the vision is known to every one. The Roman has had no successor. The space it occupied is covered with kingdoms. There is nevermore to be a world-empire under one sceptre. But “in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: nor shall the sovereignty thereof be left to another people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”\* This is illustrated by a stone cut out without hands, which crushed the image, and then itself became a great mountain. The kingdom not of this world is to become the strongest power, and the only universal power in the earth; blessing the nations with righteousness and peace.

This vision Daniel recalled to the mind of Nebuchadnezzar, when the magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, and Chaldeans were utterly unable to do so. He then interpreted the dream, God having revealed it to him in answer to his prayer, and that of his three companions. So was the victory proclaimed a second time for Jehovah. Daniel was promoted; and, at his own request, had his three devout friends joined with him in the government of the province of Babylon—the whole district in which the capital city stood.

3. The question is of Divine honour, and of power over fire.

Nebuchadnezzar, a wise ruler in the first chapter, speaks furiously in the second as a hasty despot. In the third, he is inflated with pride; in the fourth, we shall find him actually

\* Chap. ii. 44.

insane. When Daniel interpreted the dream of empires, he had said to the king—"Thou art the head of gold." It seems to have swelled the monarch's pride beyond measure, so that we now find him making a colossal image entirely of gold, and commanding that it should receive universal worship. It is probable that Daniel was at this time absent from the city; but his three friends, best known by their Chaldean names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, showed themselves no pliant courtiers, but men of faith and heroic fortitude. When all Babylon's great and wise men bowed as slaves and puppets before a manufactured god at the despot's command, these three refused the idolatrous obeisance, and, because they feared Jehovah, feared not the wrath of a king. Noble and intrepid was their answer—"O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."\* How sublime was this calmness in front of the glowing fire—"But if not!" come what will, they abjure the idol. Better to die than to break the law of God, which said—"Thou shalt not bow down to any graven image."

So they were cast into the fire. The flames leaped up and burnt their executioners; but the three victims of man's wrath walked unhurt as the witnesses of God's omnipotence and love. With amazement Nebuchadnezzar looked upon them, and perceived a fourth with them, whose form was like unto the Son of God.

"What spell is this  
Which turns their sufferings all to bliss?  
How are they free whom we had bound,  
Upright, whom in the gulf we cast?  
What wondrous helper have they found  
To screen them from the scorching blast?"

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\* Chap. iii. 16-18.

Three were they—who hath made them four?  
 And sure a form divine He wore,  
 Even like the Son of God.' So cried  
 The tyrant, when, in one fierce flame,  
 The martyrs lived, the murderers died."\*

Again the victory was declared for Jehovah, and His witnesses were promoted in the kingdom of Babylon.

4. The question is of sovereignty, and the ability to abase those who walk in pride.

It is the peculiarity of this chapter that it proceeds entirely from a heathen king. Though it has a place in Holy Scripture, it is just a portion of Babylonish history, with a proclamation from the great Babylonian emperor. His intoxication with absolute power overthrew his reason for a time. The mighty Nebuchadnezzar became insane, and fell from his splendour to the very rudeness of a beast of the field. He was not violent as a wild beast, but dull and inert as an ox that eateth grass; not a dangerous maniac, but rather sunk in stupor, bereft of understanding, and extremely desirous, as many in a certain stage and form of madness are, to be alone in the fields and woods, removed from the habitations and society of men. In the vast parks and grounds of the palace he thus spent day and night; while the government was, doubtless, carried on by a regency till his recovery; for it was known, through Daniel's interpretation of a previous dream, that the affliction would be only for a set time.

When he recovered, the king acknowledged the might of Jehovah; and it is a pleasing thought that these are the last recorded words of that famous king of men—"Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment; and those that walk in pride He is able to abase."†

5. The decisive question came, whether Babylon should stand or fall. It was settled in the banqueting hall of Belshazzar,

\* Keble's "Christian Year."

† Chap. iv. 37.

where a haughty challenge was given to the God of Israel by the arrogant idolaters, who desecrated the vessels taken from the Temple of Jerusalem, and quaffed wine in them to the praise of their own gods—"the gods of gold, and of silver; of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone." A mysterious handwriting on the wall was the reply to that challenge, and struck the king and his princes with fear.

"The monarch saw and shook,  
And bade no more rejoice;  
All bloodless waxed his look,  
And tremulous his voice."

Why did he tremble so? Might not the handwriting on the wall be some happy presage—a sign of favour from his gods? It was conscience that rose up within him in that hour of wicked revelry, and brought the faintness to his heart and pallor to his cheek. His knees smote one against the other; and when the astrologers and soothsayers failed to read the writing, a fear of impending disaster settled down upon his soul. "Then was King Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished."

So has one represented to us a cruel king of England on the night before he fell in battle, terrified by visions of those whom he had put to death; each of them crying—

"Let me sit heavy on thy soul to-morrow!  
Despair and die!"

His conscience quailed.

"Oh coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!"

And in the morning he confessed—

"Shadows to-night  
Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard,  
Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers,  
Armed in proof."

Or, better still for our purpose, the same great master has shown us Macbeth seated at a banquet, and crying—

“Give me some wine, fill full,  
I drink to the general joy of the whole table”—

when a horrible phantom appeared to him, blanched his cheek with guilty fear, and “broke up the feast with most admired disorder.”

Belshazzar may not have had fresh upon his soul any horrid deed of cruelty, but he had been mad upon his idols, and had carried to the highest pitch of audacity his contempt of that Jehovah-God before whom his great ancestor Nebuchadnezzar learned to bow. In a moment the mystic writing disturbed his conscience, took away the false excitement of wine, and compelled him who had vaunted himself before his princes to shake with fear as one that deserved to die.

During the twenty-five years which must have elapsed between the fourth and fifth chapters of this book, Daniel had fallen into a measure of obscurity. But the queen—probably Nitocris, a woman of marked ability, as profane historians tell—remembered him; and, by her counsel, he was summoned before the affrighted king in the banqueting house. So, when all Babylon’s sages were baffled, Daniel deciphered and interpreted the writing on the wall. It was the doom of Babylon. Its capture was imminent: and “in that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, slain.” Yet even on that terrible day, before the night of ruin fell, the victory of Jehovah was acknowledged, in presence of all, by the public honours accorded to His servant Daniel at Belshazzar’s command.\*

6. The question of Divine power was revived in Babylon under the new dynasty. “Darius the Mede” had the wisdom

\* It is not easy to identify this Belshazzar. Either he was the Bel-sar-usur mentioned in old Babylonian inscriptions as the son of Nabonidos, or he was the Nidinta Bel who was slain when the city was taken by Darius, the son of Hystaspes, by the aid of a famous stratagem. This question, which it is beyond our plan to discuss, virtually governs another—whether the Darius of the sixth chapter was a viceroy of Cyrus, or was the great Darius mentioned by Ezra, Haggai, and Zechariah, who recovered the empire of Cyrus, and who is so prominent in the pages of Herodotus.

to continue Daniel in the high office to which Belshazzar had suddenly advanced him. But envious princes contrived a wicked plot to destroy the Hebrew statesman. Flattering Darius as a god, they proposed that for a month no other god than he should be worshipped. They would affect an enthusiastic attachment to the new dynasty; and Darius, influenced perhaps in part by considerations of policy, and in part by vanity, accepted their proposal, and confirmed it by a decree. Daniel prayed, as was his wont, three times a day to Jehovah. The princes insisted on his condemnation, and had him cast into a den of lions. But, lo! the ravenous beasts were tamed before him, for the angel of the Lord had shut their mouths. We can fancy the prophet in the den solacing himself through the night with a Psalm of David—"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."\*

Joy came in the morning. The faithful servant of Jehovah was drawn up out of the den by the king's command; "and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God."

The king ordered the accusers of Daniel to be cast into the den, and admitted the power and majesty of Jehovah. Heartily ashamed, we may hope, of that decree in which he had set himself before all gods, he issued a new proclamation of the glory of the God of Daniel: "for He is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions." †

II. The second division, like the first, occupies six chapters

\* Ps. xxxiv. 6, 7, 10.

† Dan. vi. 26, 27.

(vii.-xii.); but while the first contains narrative, the second, as already stated, consists of Apocalypse.

1. We have in chap. vii. a dream and its interpretation. It is a passage of the greatest importance, both in itself and in its bearings on the book of Revelation.

This dream of Daniel resembles that of Nebuchadnezzar (chap. ii.) as regards the succession of world-empires and the kingdom of Christ. These empires appeared to him as four wild beasts successively rising out of a troubled sea, *i.e.*, national commotion and strife. But what is peculiar to Daniel's vision, and was not shown to Nebuchadnezzar, is its prediction of a terrible conflict between the saints and a certain horn or power, growing out of the head of the fourth beast, the iron empire of Rome. This horn is not a power of the same kind with the four military empires which rose out of the sea of nations, for it erects itself on the head of a power already existing and long established—and that the power of Rome. Then it is little at first, but, as it grows, reveals the most arrogant pretensions. It has eyes like the eyes of man, *i.e.*, it prevails by intelligence and astuteness. Its mouth speaks very great things, claiming paramount authority. This horn comes out of a beast, and is therefore essentially worldly and base; but it prevails by its mind, skill, policy, and by the daring assumption of superhuman claims. Moreover, it speaks words against the Most High, and wears out His saints.

Is it not this “notable horn” of Daniel's vision that reappears in Revelation, more fully delineated as the Harlot upon the Beast, *i.e.*, an Apostate Church resting on the brute-force of the world, and full of cruelty? If so, both the seers, Daniel and John, saw the end of this wicked power. The judgment shall sit to consume and destroy the horn. The corrupt and cruel woman shall be made desolate and naked. For a time, in these visions, might is seen trampling down right; but in the end, right is might; there is judgment in heaven, and the saints reign on the earth.

2. Two years after the great vision just described, Daniel had

another, which took up more minutely a part of the time covered by that grand sketch of future history. The first of the four empires was still in existence, for the vision related in the eighth chapter was seen in the third year of Belshazzar's reign. Then Daniel foresaw the second and third kingdoms or empires in collision, and a certain blasphemous power to which the third would give rise.

The figure of the second empire was the ram with two horns, the Medes and the Persians—"One higher than the other, and the higher came up last"—for the Persian power superseded the Median, to which it had been at first subordinate. The conquests of this empire were pushed in all directions; and for a time it seemed irresistible. "I saw the ram pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and magnified himself."\* But from the West in the vision came a he-goat, and overthrew the ram. This is the Macedonian or Greek empire. Yet Alexander the Great died when full of ambition and flushed with victory. "When the he-goat was strong, the great horn was broken." With wonderful minuteness, it then appeared that four horns came up in place of the great horn that was broken. After Alexander's death, the Greek empire was resolved into four kingdoms. From one of these again, "came forth a little horn which waxed exceeding great toward the South, and toward the East, and toward the pleasant land." This is surely Antiochus Epiphanes, of whom we read in 1 Maccabees. He came of one of the four horns of the goat, for he was a Syrian king. He twice occupied Jerusalem, inflicted great cruelty on the Jews, and insulted their religion, as none of the great emperors had done. He suppressed the worship of Jehovah, forbade the daily sacrifice, and intruded into the Temple a statue of the Olympian Jupiter. But he was broken without hand. He died a miserable death, and has left an accursed memory.

\* Dan. viii. 4.

3. The ninth chapter contains a prayer which Daniel made in the first year of Darius, perhaps the very prayer on account of which he was cast to the lions. The prophet saw the prediction of Jeremiah fulfilled already in the overthrow of the Babylonian empire; and from the twenty-ninth chapter of that prophet he learned that the captivity of the Jews was to last for seventy years. As the time thus defined now drew to a close, Daniel felt strongly impelled to pray, and devoted himself to supplication with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

While he prayed and confessed the sin of his people, there came to him the angel Gabriel whom he had already seen in the vision related in the eighth chapter, in the form which angels always seem to wear, "the appearance of a man." The angel now disclosed to the seer that, while seventy years would end the captivity, seventy weeks of years (490) were to elapse before the advent of the Messiah; and that when He came, He should be "cut off, but not for Himself." The periods of time in this and the other prophetic chapters of the book are undoubtedly to be calculated with the same minute accuracy to a day and an hour that belongs to the movements of the heavenly bodies in their orbits under the government of the same almighty God. The date from which the 490 years are to be computed is that of the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, *i.e.*, from the decree of Artaxerxes. Now the very day on which Ezra left Babylon, armed with this decree, is on record. Seventy weeks of years from that date end in A.D. 33, the very year usually assigned to the crucifixion of Christ. If they are right who count the year A.D. 29 or 30 as the correct date of the crucifixion, then it occurred after the sixty-ninth and in the midst of the seventieth week, as the language of the angel Gabriel (ver. 25, 26) rather leads us to expect.

4. The tenth chapter is unique in Scripture, and gives an unexpected glimpse of the invisible spirit-world as the background of this world's history. The curtains are drawn aside, and we are made to see the ministry of angels occupied about

the kingdom of Christ, and even about the kingdoms of men—organs of Divine providence and government on the earth.

5. The eleventh chapter contains—

Ver. 2-4. A brief description of the Persian and Greek empires, the former giving way in the time of Xerxes.

Ver. 5-20. A sketch of the struggles of the Ptolemies and the Seleucidæ in Egypt and Syria.

Ver. 21-45. A detailed account of the tyrant indicated in chapter eighth, Antiochus Epiphanes. The wars of Egypt and Syria may not seem to us of great importance, but we should remember that these were the two millstones between which the Jews were nearly ground to powder, and therefore was this vision given to prepare a later generation of Daniel's countrymen for their tribulation, and to comfort them by a demonstration of the foreknowledge and sovereignty of God.

6. The words of the angel in the eleventh chapter reach to the fourth verse of the twelfth. He speaks of Michael, the angelic prince-guardian of Israel, standing up for their deliverance. This is the angelic mode of seeing and predicting the vigour with which the Jews would rise and shake off the hated yoke off Antiochus and the kings of Syria. Yet there was to be great tribulation unexampled in any national history: and surely nothing can be more distressing than the cruelties and treacheries that fill the Jewish annals for a century and a half before the Christian era. The deliverance of the people out of this distress was seen to be a very resurrection from the dust.

The angel bade Daniel shut up the words and seal the book even to the time of the end. Things of the remote future were shut up and sealed, as not designed to be understood, even by the prophets themselves. Yet it was told that a day of clearer apprehension of these things was to come. "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

The close of the book (chap. xii. 5, &c.) consists of a dialogue of angels concerning the time to elapse till the end of these wonders. The numbers given to denote spaces of time are full of matter for study.

$3\frac{1}{2}$  days or years = time times and half a time = 1260 days or years. This is the half week—the time of the drought in the days of Elijah—the time of the suffering ministry of Christ—the time of the tribulation and patience of the Church.

1290 days or years—being three times the 430 years of Israel's bondage in Egypt.

1335 days—being 45 more than the 1290; as Israel had to wait 45 years from the time that the land of Canaan was explored till they obtained possession under Joshua, and sat down in their inheritance by lot. "Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days."

We know not times and seasons in such a way as to predicate who shall be on the earth when the end shall fully come. Daniel was to go his way. So probably shall we, and rest with them that have fallen asleep. But it was promised to Daniel—"Thou shalt stand in thy lot at the end of the days." So also shall we, if, through grace, we emulate his holy steadfastness, and separate ourselves from the customs and idols of Babylon. Faithful servants sleep well, and rise to stand in their lot as kings and priests to God.

He comes with his reward :—

"Ere long thy feet shall stand  
Within the city of the Blessed One ;  
Thy perils past, thy heritage secure,  
Thy tears all wiped away, thy joy for ever sure."

*HOSEA.*

THIS is the first of twelve short books called the Books of the Minor Prophets. They were written at various periods extending over four hundred years, from the ninth to the very end of the fifth century before Christ. English readers, seeing these books always grouped together, are apt to overlook the extent of time during which the minor prophets wrote, and are surprised to learn that Malachi was as far distant from Joel as we are from the days of Columbus, Joan of Arc, and the discovery of printing. Hosea is by no means the earliest, though his prophecy is placed at the head of the series.

We must retrace our steps after reading the major prophets. We must place ourselves at an earlier period, and in a different scene. Isaiah and Jeremiah spoke of Jerusalem; Ezekiel, of Jerusalem and Babylon; Daniel, of Babylon; but Hosea never mentions one or other of these cities in his messages. The chief city is Samaria. It is with Israel or Ephraim that he pleads; and names Judah only three or four times in all the book of his prophecy.

The time in which he lived is very clearly stated in the opening sentence. It was during the long reign of that vigorous and powerful king of Israel, Jeroboam II. His successors, weak and contemptible princes, are not even named, although Hosea must have survived them all. He gives the contemporary kings of Judah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; and even mentions them before the king of Israel, because of the honour due to the lineage of David. Thus the prophet

Hosea lived just before Isaiah, and may have been seen or heard by that great prophet in his early days.

Jeroboam II. was of the house of Jehu, and followed the religious policy of his ancestor. That policy consisted in repressing with a strong hand the worship of Baal, which Ahab and Jezebel had promoted, and falling back on the earlier practice of Jeroboam I., who professed to worship Jehovah, yet not at the place or in the way He had appointed. In fact, it was a repetition of the device of Aaron and the tribes in the wilderness, who set up the golden ox as an image of the God that brought them out of the land of Egypt. Again, it was attempted to worship Jehovah by the help of graven images—the golden calves or oxen set up at Bethel and Dan. Thus, though the name of Jehovah was still employed, the conception of His existence and character was degraded, and the ten tribes were almost as heathen as they had been before Jehu destroyed the images of Baal. Morals, too, were as much as ever debased. So the prophet Hosea had to play the part of a northern Jeremiah, exposing with piercing words the corruption of life, and announcing the approach of national judgment, even in the outwardly prosperous times of the second Jeroboam. “There is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. There is nought but swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery; they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish.”\* All this demoralisation is traced to the alienation of Israel from the fear of Jehovah, and from His authorised worship. “Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off.”† The calf-worship was the ruin of Israel. And so it came to pass that, after the death of Jeroboam II., judgment fell quickly upon his kingdom. The dynasty ended with his son, who reigned only six months, and died by conspiracy. Shallum, the assassin, reigned for a month, and was in turn murdered by Menahem. This king’s son was assassinated by his charioteer. So the

\* Hosea iv. 1-3.

† viii. 5, 6.

history travels on—confusion in the government—frequent and violent change on the throne—till, at last, the Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold, conquered the entire kingdom, and led Israel away into captivity.

The first three chapters may be read as an introduction to the book, and prepare us for its strain of remonstrance and reproach. The covenant relation of Jehovah to Israel was compared to a marriage union. Hosea, with great freedom of speech, uses this illustration, which subsequent prophets repeat and develop at length.\* To express the degeneracy of Israel, he charges the wife in this union with playing the harlot. Yet God had given His covenant promise, and so was bound to a people who were on their side impure and unfaithful. It was a condition of things that could not last. Israel must repent and be again betrothed to the Lord in faithfulness; or, persisting in the way of degeneracy, must be disowned and put away.

To illustrate this vividly to his mind, the prophet was commanded to marry a harlot. This was surely in trance or vision, not in actual life. Many have understood it as a real occurrence, and have striven hard to vindicate its propriety and morality. Dr. Pusey thus regards it, with the stricter Patristic interpreters. Dean Stanley evades the difficulty by throwing back the marriage into Hosea's early life—"In early youth the prophet had been united in marriage with a woman who had fallen into the vices which surrounded her." † But what are we to make of the Lord's command that Hosea should contract such a marriage? ‡—"Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredom." Is it candid to explain this, with Dr. Robertson Smith, as meaning no more than that the prophet "was guided by a mysterious providence to espouse" a maiden who subsequently "proved an unfaithful wife?" § Surely it is

\* On the conception of Israel as Jehovah's Spouse, see Dr. Robertson Smith's *Prophets of Israel*, pp. 170-175.

† *Lectures on the Jewish Church*. Second series, second edit., p. 369.

‡ Hosea i. 2.

§ *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 179, 1st edition.

best to take, with Jerome and Calvin, the figurative interpretation. When we consider, on the one hand, the improbability and cruelty of a command actually to marry a woman noted for her impurity, and, on the other hand, the significant names of the woman and her children with the special purpose of illustration evidently intended by the Lord, we infer that this must have been done in the prophetic trance, like some of the strange incidents in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel; in fact, that it is equivalent to a strong personal realisation by Hosea in the spirit of the tie subsisting between Jehovah and unfaithful Israel. What Gomer was to Hosea, Israel was to God.

In the second chapter, after a call to repentance, the Lord gives warning that He will so deal with Israel as to restrain their adulterous conduct or idolatry. He will take away the prosperity which the nation ascribed to their lovers or strange gods, putting them to shame. Then, by a course of discipline, which should operate like a return to the wilderness, He would lead back Israel to her first love, betroth her to Himself for ever, restoring the prosperity of the nation and the fertility of the land.

These dealings of God receive further illustration in the third chapter from a second symbolical marriage.\* An unfaithful wife was recovered by paying a price, and was then detained in seclusion for many days, till she might be raised to confidence and favour. It is a sign of the Lord's love to Israel, and His bearing toward His people during many days—not utterly rejecting them, yet not dwelling with them as of old—until the time comes when all Israel shall be saved. "For many days shall the sons of Israel abide without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without pillar, and without ephod or teraphim."† So it has been, not only during the Assyrian captivity, but down to this day; and so it will

\*; Interpreters who understand the marriage to Gomer literally suppose this to mean a restoration of the faithless wife.

† Hosea iii. 4.

continue to be till Messiah, the Prince of the House of David, shall gather all the seed of Jacob under His royal sway. "Afterward shall the sons of Israel seek again Jehovah their God, and David their king; and shall come with fear to Jehovah and His goodness in the latter days."

After this unique introduction, the Book of Hosea is occupied with reproaches of the ungodliness of Israel, warnings of punishment, and promises of future favour from the Lord. It is probably an abbreviation of what the prophet had spoken at various times during his lengthened ministry. The style is abrupt, indulges in rapid transitions from indignation to tenderness, and is frequently lit up by vivid figures of speech. Ephraim is to be consumed as by a moth, or torn by a lion. The coming of the Lord to favour His afflicted "is prepared as the morning." Ephraim in inconsistency is "a cake not turned," and therefore not baked through and through. Ephraim in folly is as "a silly dove without heart." It is in this book we have that most forcible expression for a course of infatuation: "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." Degenerate Israel is called an empty vine; restored Israel, a beautiful olive-tree with spreading branches.

The abruptness of style, and the completeness of each sentence in itself, make this prophecy read like a succession of sighs or groans from the heart of the man of God. The whole address is full of reproach, but also of pathos, and contains the most touching declarations of the loving-kindness of the Lord to be found in all the Hebrew prophets. Almost throughout the book the Lord speaks in person; and thus it is in some respects even more pathetic than the Lamentations of Jeremiah over Judah and Jerusalem, for this is Jehovah's lamentation over the tribes of Israel breaking His covenant and hardening their hearts against His love.

For this reason, it is a book of great use to the Christian preacher. In interpretation, we must not forget for a moment

that it is a book for Israel, and concerning Israel—describing their departure from God and recovery as a holy nation in the last days. Hosea writes nothing concerning the Church, which is the eclectic institution of the present age during the prolonged impenitence of Israel. He indicates the calling of the Gentiles in a passage which is thus quoted by St. Paul: “Not the Jews only, but also the Gentiles; as He saith also in Hosea, I will call that my people, which was not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall be, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called sons of the living God.”\* This is also quoted by St. Peter, but it is only a detached expression in Hosea, and does not change the fact, that his prophecy, as a whole, relates to Israel. Nevertheless, it is a book for our learning: profitable to us, because of its inspiration, for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Nowhere can the Christian preacher find more urgent calls to repentance and vehement exposures of backsliding, mingled with tender strains of invitation and promise.

When the iniquity of Ephraim is discovered, so also is ours. Ephraim, as we have seen, is a “cake not turned,” baked on one side only, not thorough or consistent. “Ephraim has mixed himself among the people,” *i.e.*, formed unlawful alliance with the uncircumcised and unclean. “Ephraim is a silly dove without heart,” always doing the wrong thing—not fleeing to God as a refuge, but calling to Egypt, going to Assyria. “Ephraim compasses Jehovah about with lies,” with vain pretences abhorrent to the God of Truth. “Ephraim hath made many altars to sin.” “Ephraim is joined to his idols.” Have not all these reproofs a message to our consciences too? Are we true to God? Are we thorough for Christ? Are not we so conformed to the world that “strangers devour our strength?” Do we not betake ourselves to vain refuges, and set up vain pretexts to cover our sin? Alas! have we not idols of passionate desire, and do we not in our hearts provoke the

\* Rom. ix. 24-26.

Lord with the rivalry of false gods? And true it is, that between a man and his idol a fearful and unholy union is formed. Ephraim not merely had idols, but was joined to them, instead of being joined in holy union to Jehovah. So may it be among professed Christians. The heart cleaves to the object which it has preferred to God so closely, that a separation is difficult and severe, and a repentance which has been delayed at last almost tears the soul in sunder.

“Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.”\* Well for Israel that this was not a final word. After this, we find the Lord asking—“O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?”† So He has not finally determined to let Ephraim alone. Still later, we come on this outburst of Divine compassion—“How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah, and set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me. My relentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and not man.”‡ But with all this tenderness, Jehovah will have no connivance at sin. He proceeds to deal with His people in rebuke and chastisement. Samaria is desolate; Israel torn and scattered. And yet a nation, like an individual, does not return to God under scathing terrors. It is persuaded by the still small voice. It comes to the pitiful, forgiving God, and says, “Receive us graciously.” And when the Lord has said with power to the heart of Israel—“I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely”—then there is repentance deep and permanent. Ephraim says at last—“What have I to do any more with idols?”§

Alas! we too were joined to our idols according to the devices and desires of our own hearts. If God had let us alone, these would have been our ruin. But He did not let us alone—He said, “How shall I give thee up?” He desired not our death, and therefore sent to us rebukes, chastisements, and gracious

\* Hosea iv. 17.

† vi. 4.

‡ xi. 8, 9.

§ xiv.

messages. The blows of His hand shook our souls ; but it was the kind message of pardon and healing that prevailed with us to return. In Christ was proclaimed to us the free forgiveness of sins. Through Him descended upon us the blessing of the Holy Ghost, for the Lord is "as the dew unto Israel." Then and therefore we repented and returned. The result is that we who were joined to our idols are now joined to the Lord. And this is for ever. What have we to do any more with idols—we that have been received graciously and loved freely? How can we so belie ourselves, dishonour our high calling, and grieve the Holy Spirit of promise?

To this issue tend all the words of Hosea. Israel must not have idols ; whether they be images of Baal in the groves, or golden calves professedly in honour, but really in dishonour, of Jehovah. To this issue must all Gospel exhortation and teaching tend—the breaking with every idol. One is not to be put away, and another taken in its place. One is not to be cast down, and then set up again, as Dagon, when fallen helpless before the ark of the covenant, was lifted by the men of Ashdod, and "set up in his place again." We must away with Dagon—head, and hands, and stump, and all. We must never again kiss the image of Baal, or bow before the calf of Samaria. There must be nothing to do any more with idols. Real conversion to God means union to Christ for ever ; renunciation of sin for ever ; the abiding of the Spirit for ever ; engagement to holiness for ever.

"The dearest idol I have known,  
Whate'er that idol be,  
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,  
And worship only Thee!"

The last verse of Hosea contains this significant epilogue to the whole book, considered as a setting forth of the ways of God in judgment and mercy—"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of Jehovah are right, and the just shall walk in them; but transgressors shall fall therein." The ways of Israel were

crooked; but the ways of the Lord were, are, and ever shall be, straight. So spake Moses in His last great song—"He is the rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are judgment; a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He."\*

Most certainly, all those who obtain mercy, and find healing, and learn wisdom in Christ, feel an impulse, unknown to other men, to study and admire the ways of the Eternal. Rebels will stumble. Transgressors shall fall. The very righteousness of God which protects His people must be destructive to those who continue in their own way, and will not repent. But the just, studying conformity to Christ the Just One, shall walk in the ways of the Lord, and so walk safely.

"Show me Thy ways, O Lord;  
Teach me Thy paths."

"All the paths of the Lord are loving-kindness and truth  
Unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies."†

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\* Deut. xxxii. 4.

† Psalm xxv. 4, 10.

## J O E L.

THE diction of this prophet is bold and striking; yet the book is not easy of interpretation. It lacks the historical references which assist us so much in such prophecies as those of Jeremiah and Hosea. There is no mention of the time in which Joel lived, of the kings, or of the events of the period. We can only infer from his frequent mention of Judah, Jerusalem, Zion, and the Temple, that he dwelt within the confines of the kingdom of the two tribes. From the circumstance that he has no reproof of idolatry, and assumes the worship of Jehovah as established and observed, as well as from a certain air of antique simplicity which he seems to wear, we take Joel to be almost the earliest of all the prophets, major or minor. There are internal indications in his prophecy which dispose us to place him in the beginning of the reign of Joash in Jerusalem, and therefore contemporary with Jehoiada, the patriotic high-priest.

The Book of Joel throughout is a message or a proclamation from Jehovah. The division into chapters is of no use, and rather hinders the understanding. If the book should be divided at all, it should be at the eighteenth verse of the second chapter, resolving it into two parts. The former of these deals with the national judgments, and summons to repentance; the latter has promises of mercy and prosperity to Judah, and foretells the desolation of enemies and oppressors. This venerable book reaches very far into the future. Its words of threatening extend even to the terrors of the great day of the Lord; and its promises to the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, and the complete triumph of the kingdom of Christ, and of God.

I. The immediate calamity described with great vividness in the beginning of this book is the devastation of the land of Judah by locusts. It has been much discussed, whether these may not mean invading armies; but it is safest to understand the words in their natural sense. Competent eye-witnesses have described the devastation of an eastern country by locusts as far more sweeping and terrible than any havoc wrought by invading armies, and as exactly corresponding to the language of Joel. Wherever the swarms descend, all vegetation quickly disappears. Every green and growing thing is consumed; the juicy bark of bushes and young trees is not spared, nor even the roots below the ground. As they approach, the insects darken the air, and hide the sun. In their advance, they move like an army in close array; and nothing turns them from their course, or breaks their serried ranks. Vine and fig-tree, olive and pomegranate, palm and citron, alike, are laid waste. When the insect army has passed by, herds and flocks seek in vain for grass or green herb.

Now this calamity was already on the land when Joel began to prophesy; and it appeared an unparalleled misfortune. There had never been such a plague of locusts in Palestine, either in the days of that generation, or in the days of their fathers; and it filled the prophet's soul with forebodings of yet more terrible judgment.\*

The plague of locusts that fell on Egypt was followed by the plague of darkness. So the invasion of locusts in the days of Joel was regarded by him as a breaking forth of Divine wrath, sure to be followed by a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. His eye, looking down a far longer vista of years than he knew, rested on the very consummation of judgment in the great and terrible day of the

\* Dr. George Matheson, in the *Expositor* (1882), supposes Joel to have lived in the reign of Uzziah, a period of outward prosperity, but inward decay. He suggests that "the work of the locusts was intended to represent the gnawing care of prosperity, and the unsatisfied desire left by a life of luxury." Ingenious: rather too much so!

Lord—that “Dies Irae” of which Christian bards also have sung—

“Quantus tremor est futurus,  
Quando Judex est venturus,  
Cuncta stricte discussurus.”

All this is made the ground of an urgent call to repentance. Because judgment lay on the land of Judah, it behoved the inhabitants to turn to God, and learn righteousness. Moreover, because such judgment was the sign and warning of yet heavier and darker days, the humiliation should be profound, and the repentance thorough, in order to obtain deliverance. The prophet called for a public fast. The priests, the ministers of the altar, were to wrap themselves in sackcloth, and, neglecting their wonted psalms and joyful sounds of music, were to lie down, lament, and cry before the Lord, because of the desolation and famine. Nay, the elders and all the inhabitants of the land were to be summoned to the Temple by the blast of the trumpet or ram's horn in Zion. The crisis was appalling; the altar was empty; there was no meat-offering or drink-offering for the House of God. Therefore, the priests were to weep between the porch and the desolate altar, saying—“Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thy heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?”\* With the priests all the people were to humble themselves; and that not in outward appearance only, but in abasement of heart and sorrow for sin. The words have become as household words in the Christian Church, and are needful and profitable for us as well as for the Jews. “Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil.”† Outward forms of grief are nothing in the sight of God. He looks upon the heart, and counts that we are sorry, humble, and contrite only when we rend our hearts

\* Joel ii. 17.

† ii. 13.

and turn to Him. And, further, because contrition of heart is never produced by threats and terrors, is never found without some hope in God's mercy, the prophet added those words concerning the grace and kindness of Jehovah. So was Judah taught, and so the Church is taught, that the goodness of God leads us to repentance.

II. The second part is consolatory to those who have humbled themselves before the Lord ; and, after the manner of this book, which sweeps over vast periods, it passes far beyond the immediate deliverance to survey the spiritual blessings of distant times.

The Lord answers the prayers and cries of priest and people. The great army of locusts is to be dispersed by strong winds, and cast, part into the Arabian desert, part into the Dead Sea, and part into the Mediterranean. It is well known that swarms of locusts thus perish in lakes and seas, and that the accumulation of the dead insects on the shores has tainted the air for miles around.\* On the destruction of the locusts, the fertility of the land is to be restored,—“Fear not, O land ; be glad and rejoice : for the Lord will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field ; for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength.” † The fall of gentle rains in their season is to fill the country with food, and make the children of Sion glad—“Ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you : and my people shall never be ashamed.” ‡

We do not enter on any discussion of the way of Divine Providence in public or private calamities, or on any controversy about the place and efficacy of prayer. We must confine ourselves to our proper object, which is to show succinctly and comprehensively what the prophet Joel taught ; and it is plain that he saw a moral purpose of God underlying such a calamity as the devastation of the land of Judah, viz., the purpose of

\* See chap. ii. 20.

† Chap. ii. 21, 22.

‡ ii. 26.

bringing back the people's hearts to Jehovah in prayer and new obedience. Indeed, it is the doctrine of all Scripture, and it has been the persuasion of the best men in all ages, and so continues to be, that God speaks solemnly to us in afflictions and distresses, calls us to repentance, and hears us when we humble ourselves in prayer. No speculative objection can shake this conviction; no philosophical puzzle about the rationale of prayer can drive the children of sorrow from their knees.

At the twenty-eighth verse of the second chapter, the Hebrew Bible begins a new chapter of Joel; and the words—"It shall come to pass afterward"—prepare us for a higher level of vision, and so for an extension of view into the distant future. As rain has been promised to the land of Judah, now there is promised the outpouring of the Spirit of God on all flesh; and as the destruction of the locusts has been predicted, so now are foretold the fate of those nations that had oppressed Judah, and the Divine judgment on all nations before the holy Jerusalem is revealed.

1. The promise of the outpouring of the Divine Spirit on all flesh is familiar to our minds from the quotation of it by Simon Peter on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit of God had always been gracious to the covenant people; but Joel foresaw in the future a definite descent of the Spirit as a copious rain of blessing; and that, too, on all ages and both sexes—sons and daughters, old men and youths, men-servants and maidens. It may not be inferred from the expression "all flesh" that the prophecy had in view all nations of the earth. The words "all flesh" are to be interpreted by those that follow—"your sons and your daughters." And so it was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit descended on Jews and Galileans. It was afterwards that the same Spirit fell on the Gentiles also; and this the apostle Paul traces to "the blessing of Abraham, come on the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."\*

What Joel saw and spoke of was the outpouring of the Spirit

\* Gal. iii. 14.

on the Jews at a time when the heart of the nation was to be dry and barren toward God, like the land of Judah after the locusts and the drought. Giving prominence to the more extraordinary endowments of the Spirit, revelations in visions and dreams, he included under these the more ordinary work of the same Spirit, renewing the hearts of men, and enlightening their understandings in the knowledge of the truth. The beginning of this St. Peter saw at Jerusalem, but only the beginning. Aware that it was so, he declared that the promise was to the Jews and to their children, "and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto Him." The promise is still being fulfilled, if not to the Jews, certainly to them who were afar off—the sinners of the Gentiles—who are called and made nigh.

This part of Joel was evidently studied by the Apostles with great care. Take, for example, the last verse of the second chapter—"It shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." St. Peter has two references to this on the day of Pentecost,\* and St. Paul uses it to prove the access of Jews and Greeks alike to God in Christ.†

2. With the promise of the Spirit is united a proclamation of terrors in heaven and earth, with a glance forward to the great and terrible day of the Lord. The third chapter, which is fourth in the Hebrew Bible, contains a prediction of judgment on nations. No doubt this, like the promise of the Spirit, has a cumulative fulfilment. The surrounding nations that oppressed Judah, and gloried over her calamities, are wasted away. But, as the casting of the locusts into the sea and the wilderness to perish pointed to the dissolution of those ancient nations, and the disappearance of their political and military power, so, again, their fate as enemies of Judah points forward to the judgment of all the nations that opposed Messiah, and the camp and city of His redeemed.

Both in this prophecy and in the Book of Revelation, the end of the nations is war and havoc. There comes a day of

\* Acts ii. 17, 39.

† Rom. x. 12, 13.

decision—a rallying time of peoples against and before the Lord. On this ensues the harvest of judgment. The sickle is put in, for the harvest is fully ripe. Kings of the earth and their armies, following the beast and the false prophet, come up against Christ and His army. It is the day of the smiting of nations; and they are trodden down in the wine-press of the wrath of Almighty God.

This we read in the nineteenth chapter of Revelation: and again in the twentieth chapter, we find deceived nations from the four quarters of the earth gathered to battle, and compassing the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city. Doubtless repentant and restored Israel is in that city, central among the servants of Jesus; but all are there. This camp and beloved city is the Apocalyptic home of all the saints and excellent on the earth. In their defence, fire from heaven falls on the hostile nations who encompass them. It is a terrible day of the Lord, and it is followed by the final perdition of the devil, and the condign judgment of ungodly men from the great White Throne. But then follows a new scene of holy beauty, having in midst of it New Jerusalem. To this Joel pointed afar off, speaking of Jerusalem as holy, and lasting from generation to generation, and of the Lord dwelling in Zion. John saw it more fully and brightly. “I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”\*

Thus did the very first book of written prophecy given to Judah open up an immense vista of judgment brought forth to victory, the overthrow of hostile powers, and the glory of the Lord dwelling in Mount Zion. As a great student of the minor prophets has said—“To this unknown prophet Joel, of whose history, condition, rank, parentage, birthplace, nothing is known, nothing beyond his name save the name of an unknown father, of whom, moreover, God has allowed nothing to remain save these few chapters; to him God reserved the prerogative to be the first to declare the outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon all

\* Rev. xxi. 2.

flesh, the perpetual abiding of the Church, the final struggles of good and evil, the last rebellion against God, and the day of judgment." \*

It seems to us a mistake to peer into the poetical expressions of this book for minute prosaic meanings. It ought to be read as a sketch in bold outline and large proportions of the ways of God in judgment and mercy, terminating with the promise of the Spirit, and the glory of the Lord in Zion.

Let the sons of men be afraid of His judgments. He will arise to shake terribly the earth. Would that men's consciences were made to shake now, and that sinners were found everywhere returning and seeking His face! There is a space given for repentance. "The Lord is long-suffering to youward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." †

Be glad, O ye ransomed, and rejoice even at His judgments, for they are all in holiness and truth. Look beyond to the new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. But what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness! See that you live to God, not a poor, timid, creeping, compromising life, but one that is noble, cheerful, upright, spiritual, in Christ Jesus. And fear not though mountains be removed, and waters roar, and skies darken, and sceptres fall, and hosts gather to battle: none of these things shall separate you from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

\* Dr Pusey.

† 2 Pet. iii. 9.

## A M O S.

WHEN Jeroboam I. reigned over Israel, a "man of God" came out of Judah, and cried against the altar in Bethel, at which the king stood to burn incense. When Jeroboam II. reigned, another "man of God" came out of Judah, and at Bethel cried against the sin of Israel, and prophesied the fall of the kingdom. It was Amos, not educated among the sons of the prophets, but an undistinguished peasant, who kept sheep, and cultivated sycamore fruit-trees at the little town of Tekoa, near Bethlehem. To him Jehovah gave a message of reproof for Israel, which he delivered without fear. His language was at once simple and forcible, and interspersed, as one might expect, with figures of speech taken from rural life. He spoke of vineyards, and fig-trees, and baskets of fruit, of herds of cows rushing along the hill-side, of the sifting of corn and the sale of wheat, and the shepherds rescuing prey from the lion's mouth.\*

Amos must have been contemporary with Hosea, though his ministry extended over a much shorter period. His message was of a similar purport to that which Hosea delivered, but less minute and less pathetic. Outwardly both the kingdoms were prosperous. Uzziah sat on David's throne at Jerusalem, and Jeroboam II. reigned in Samaria. Both these kings reigned long, and were successful alike in war and in peace.

\* Dr. Robertson Smith is severe on those who have thought of Amos as a sort of "unlettered clown." He extols this prophecy as "one of the best examples of pure Hebrew style," and remarks on the knowledge of history and geography which it displays, and its "well-planned symmetry of argument."—*Prophets of Israel*, Lectures III. and IV.

But under this prosperity lay a festering moral corruption, which tended to national degradation and ruin. So the prophets Hosea and Amos spoke faithful words of upbraiding and reproof, to arrest conscience, and call the people to repentance. The latter, in particular, declared the displeasure of the Lord, and foretold a national overthrow which must have seemed exceedingly improbable in that prosperous reign of Jeroboam, and yet actually occurred within fifty years.

It is an ominous beginning of this book that Amos prophesied "two years before the earthquake." No doubt this was a sufficient note of time for the people of that period and for a long while afterwards, since the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah was long remembered, and is referred to by one of the prophets after the restoration from captivity.\* But this mention of the earthquake seems to be also intended as a sign of the Lord's approach to judgment. "Shall not the land tremble for this, and every one mourn that dwelleth therein?"

The book may be arranged thus: an introduction; three addresses to Israel; and five visions. The general strain of all parts of the prophecy is severe; but it is relieved, before the end, by some precious promises.

I. The introduction occupies the first and second chapters. It is throughout spoken by the Lord, who, as in the terrors of the earthquake, "roars from Zion and utters His voice in Jerusalem." † Six heathen nations, near the land of Israel, and hostile to the chosen nation, are successively doomed. These are Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. On each of them, it is predicted that a fire will be kindled. After the earthquake a fire; fire in the house of Hazeal, and on the wall of Gaza, and in the palaces of Tyre; fire upon Teman, fire on the wall of Rabbah, and fire upon Moab, devouring the palaces of Kirioth.

\* Zech. xiv. 5.

† This language seems to be quoted from Joel iii. 16, the later prophet catching and prolonging the warning note of the earlier.

All this is for admonition and warning to Judah and Israel. Amos spared not his own country. He declared with grief that the transgressions of Judah would also incur a fiery judgment; and the palaces of Jerusalem were to fare as badly as those of Benhadad in Syria, of Gaza, of Tyre, of Bozrah, of Rabbah, and of Kirioth. He indicated that devastation of Jerusalem which Nebuchadnezzar wrought nearly two hundred years after. From this he proceeded to denounce the sins of Israel which were to bring the northern kingdom to an earlier ruin. Those sins are mentioned in detail; as mal-administration of justice and taking of bribes, oppression of the poor, shameless immorality, and carousal at the house of their god, *i.e.*, of the calf worshipped at Bethel. For these offences, and for their disregard of the goodness of Jehovah, who had brought them from Egypt and planted them in Canaan, the ten tribes of Israel were now to be punished. Concerning this the prophet proceeds to deliver three addresses, which occupy chaps. iii.—vi.

II. Of the three addresses, each begins with a summons—"Hear this word." And no doubt they are here reported just as they were spoken by Amos.

1. The first address (chap. iii.) reminds Israel of their obligations to Jehovah-God, charges on their consciences their transgressions, and warns them of the penalty. That they had been brought up from Egypt, and acknowledged by Jehovah above all families on the earth, gave them no impunity in sin, but was rather a ground for a more strict reckoning with them than with other nations. Therefore was judgment to fall on the altars of Bethel, where Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had set up the calf, and on the winter and summer palaces of the king and his court.

2. The second address (chap. iv.) is entirely occupied with the reproof of prevailing sins. Wantonness, oppression of the poor, and unauthorised worship by sacrifice at Bethel and Gilgal—these displeased the Lord, and incurred the penalties of

drought, famine, and pestilence. In view of deserved punishment, the people are admonished to meet God. Escape from the hand of the Judge was impossible. All subterfuges in His presence were vain. Let Israel prepare to meet God by true repentance and humble supplication. To give greater emphasis to his appeal, the prophet adds a sublime description of the power of God: "For, lo, He that formeth the mountains, createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, Jehovah, the God of hosts is His name." \*

It is a word which rings as a bell of warning to this day—"Prepare to meet thy God." It is a solemn message to all nations; but especially so to that nation of Israel which has been called and separated to Jehovah from all families of the earth; and to that "chosen generation, holy nation, and peculiar people," the Church, which now has the oracles of God, and the ordinances of His worship. If any who are Israelites—and still more, if any who profess and call themselves Christians—meet God with hearts unchanged and sins unpardoned, it must be worse for them in judgment than for Tyre and Sidon, or for Sodom and Gomorrah. Let all search and try themselves. Let all ranks prepare—men of all ages, and in all positions. Let sinners seek the Lord while He may be found. Let those who are called saints "be diligent, that they may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless."

3. The third address (chaps. v., vi.) continues the call to repentance, and predicts the overthrow of the kingdom, and the subsequent captivity. The prophet even indicates the coming conqueror, though he never names Assyria. The danger would come from "beyond Damascus." That the princes and people were blind to its steady approach came of their fanatical confidence in "the calves" of their corrupted worship. Therefore issued this charge from Jehovah—"Seek ye Me, and ye shall live: but seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba." † Then, to impress Israel with the greatness

\* Chap. iv. 13.

† Chap. v. 4, 5.

of Jehovah-God, this grand sentence is added—"He maketh the Pleiades and Orion, and turneth the shadow of death into morning, and again darkeneth day to night: He calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; Jehovah is His name."\*

In this address the prophet also warns the Israelites, in the name of the Lord, that no outward service in feasts and offerings would avail to avert their doom. "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not inhale incense in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt-offerings and meal-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts."† Not many years after, Isaiah repeated these very warnings to Judah and Jerusalem—"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith Jehovah; I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me."‡ Indeed, Amos does not forget the sin of Judah, but glances rapidly at his own home-land; and, in the sixth chapter, joins Zion with Samaria. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria." The reference is to the self-indulgent voluptuaries of the two capital cities, who "lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat lambs out of the flock and calves out of the midst of the stall, sing idle songs to the sound of the viol; that devise for themselves instruments of music like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."§ The end of all this was to be that those who were at ease should have their security roughly broken: "Therefore shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the revelry of them that stretched themselves shall pass away."||

Let it be a word of warning for all time. Woe to them that

\* Chap. v. 8.

† Chap. v. 21, 22.

‡ Isa. i. 11-15.

§ Chap. vi. 4-6.

|| Chap. vi. 7.

are at ease in their religious privileges, secure and self-confident ! They lie on beds of comfort, and stretch themselves on couches with proud hearts in vain tranquillity. Nothing works more evil in the Christian Church than this. It is far worse than any opposition of gainsayers—this ease or lethargy of persons who are well satisfied with themselves, and neither watch nor pray. Welcome any shaking that will overturn their ivory couches ! Welcome any windy storm and tempest, rather than vain-glorious ease or a treacherous calm ! It was well said by Samuel Rutherford—“ Brother, since we must have a devil to trouble us, I love a raging devil best. Our Lord knoweth what sort of devil we have need of. It is best that Satan be in his own skin, and look like himself.” \* Vain confidence is personified in the Pilgrim’s Progress, but not on the narrow way—“ Not seeing the path before him, when dark night came on, he fell into a deep pit, which was on purpose there made by the prince of those grounds to catch vain-glorious fools withal ; and he was dashed in pieces with his fall.”

II. To the three addresses are added five visions. These occupy the 7th, 8th, and 9th chapters.

1. A vision of locusts consuming the grass and all the vegetation in the land.

2. A vision of fire, all-devouring.

3. A vision of the Lord with a plumb-line in His hand, measuring a wall to cast it down ; a sign of the levelling of the places of worship in the kingdom of Israel, and the fall of the royal house.

These three visions probably set forth three invasions of the land, increasing in severity. The first is that of Pul, King of Assyria, who exacted 1000 talents of silver from King Menahem, and retired. The second is that of Tiglath-Pileser, King of Assyria, who took possession of the east and north of the territory of Israel, and carried many of the inhabitants into captivity. After the first and second woes the prophet made intercession,

\* Letter to Hugh Henderson.

and the Lord promised not to exterminate His nation, but to preserve a holy remnant for His name. The third invasion is that of Shalmaneser, who ended the kingdom, and overthrew all the signs of its independence.

In the interpretation of the third vision, distinct mention was made of the sacrificial heights and holy things, and of Jeroboam the king who then occupied the throne. It exposed Amos to opposition and menace from the priest of Bethel. Amaziah was chief minister at the sanctuary of the golden calf; and he resolved to silence the prophet from Judah. His first step was to denounce him to the civil power, accusing him before the king of conspiracy against the government. It does not appear that Jeroboam took any notice of the complaint. So the priest of Bethel addressed himself directly to Amos: "O thou seer, go, flee thee away to the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and there play the prophet, but prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a royal house."\* In reply, the prophet disclaimed the charge insinuated against him that he was playing the prophet only that he might eat bread, and explained that he had never been trained among prophets, but was taken from following the flock to bear the Lord's message to Israel. Then he warned Amaziah, that he would himself live to see the desolation now predicted, that his wife would be outraged and his sons and daughters perish in the capture of the city, while he would go forth with Israel into captivity, and die in the land of the Gentiles. In all this there was to be a significant retribution. Amaziah had caused Israel to be unfaithful to Jehovah, or play the harlot; therefore should his own wife be dishonoured. He had misled the youths in Israel; therefore should the youth of his own family perish. He had gloried in Bethel, and in the heathenish substitution of the calf-worship for that of Jehovah at Jerusalem; therefore should he live among the heathen, and die among the heathen, far from the Holy Land.

4. A vision of ripe fruit. A basket of summer fruit repre-

\* Chap. vii. 12, 13.

sented Israel, now ripe for judgment. Long time had the people gone on in sin, and the Lord, because He is slow to anger, had suspended the penalties they incurred. But now the iniquity was full; and the Lord said, "The end is come upon my people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more; and the songs of the Temple shall be howlings in that day."\* There follows a last admonition to the rich and powerful Israelites who oppressed the poor, and thought of nothing but gain, even on the sacred days of the New Moon, and on the Sabbaths: and then the prophet foretold an eclipse of the sun, a famine of the Word, and national dissolution. Hosea had said, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off." Amos repeated the warning: "They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy God, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beersheba liveth; even they shall fall, and never rise up again." †

5. A vision of the Lord standing on or by the altar. It is questioned whether this means the authorised altar at Jerusalem, or the unauthorised altar at Bethel. We incline to think that it is the latter, as the Lord stands there not to receive homage, but to command destruction. One blow on the chapter crowning the pillar, and the entire sanctuary falls. The worshippers without exception are slain. Then follows another of those descriptions of God's majesty of which we have already noticed two in this book. "For the Lord, the God of hosts, is He that touches the land and it sinks, so that all the dwellers therein mourn; and it mounts like a flood, all of it, and subsides like the River of Egypt. It is He, who builds His chambers in the heavens, and has founded His vault on the earth; who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out upon the face of the land; Jehovah is His name." ‡

The prophecy of woe ends at the 10th verse of the last chapter. Then Amos concludes with a gracious promise from the Lord. The line of Jeroboam is set aside for ever; and the future blessing of Israel, as of Judah, is connected with the raising up of the fallen hut or tent of David.

\* Chap. viii. 2, 3. † Chap. viii. 14. ‡ Chap. ix. 5, 6.

Two passages from Amos are quoted in the New Testament, and both in the Acts of the Apostles.

Amos v. 25-27 re-appears in the mouth of Stephen in Acts vii. 42, 43. There is, however, a discrepancy between the passages, which has been increased by the Revised Version. "Siccûth your king" is very unlike "the Tabernacle of Moloch." But it is very questionable whether Siccûth should be taken as a proper name. It comes from a root signifying to interweave and to cover, and so may very well mean the portable tent of an idol. Evidently it was so understood by the Seventy, from whose Greek version Stephen quoted. Then the Hebrew for "your king" is *Malkekem*. Hence the reading "of Moloch," a word derived from *Melek*, a King. Chiun, like Sikkûth, is a unique word: and scholars are unable to explain how it came to be Kaiphan or Kephan in the Septuagint. The Vulgate avoided the difficulty by giving "*imaginem idolorum vestrorum*."

The reference seems to be to fire-gods and star-gods worshipped by the Israelites in a kind of subordination to the established religion of "the Calves."

Amos ix. 11, 12 re-appears in the mouth of James in Acts xv. 14-17. Hosea had connected the future blessedness of Israel with David's house, saying, "Afterwards shall the children of Israel return, and seek Jehovah their God, and David their king."\* Amos repeated the thought; and, describing the kingdom of David in Jerusalem, even in the prosperous times of King Uzziah, as a mere booth or hut, foretold that it should be raised up gloriously as the kingdom of the Messiah. Now this was not fulfilled in the preaching of the Gospel; but the Apostle James declared it to be quite in harmony with this prophecy, that when the Gospel was preached, Gentiles were blessed in Christ along with the Jews, and without being compelled to become Jews by submission to the rite of circumcision and the law of Moses. A new extension was to be given to "the sure mercies of David;" for the heathen began to be called by the name of the Lord.

\* Hosea iii. 5.

As to Israel, the promise still remains to be fulfilled, that they shall be gathered round the throne of David in Immanuel's land. The time of their rejection has been longer than either Amos or James supposed, but known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world; and the time is certainly fixed in His decree for accomplishing this last word of His servant Amos: "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be uprooted from off their soil which I have given them, saith Jehovah thy God."

## OBADIAH.

HERE is the shortest book of the prophets, and one of the oldest. Of Obadiah himself nothing is known. The name, which means *Servant of Jehovah*, was a common one among the Hebrews, as the similar one, Abdullah, is among the Arabs. From internal indications in the prophecy, we are inclined to place Obadiah in time between Hosea and Micah. His book is one sharp cry against Edom, with a prediction of its ultimate subordination to Judah and Israel. It has many ideas and expressions from the Book of Joel; it connects at some points with that of Amos; and it prepares for the denunciations of Edom by Isaiah and Ezekiel, but especially by Jeremiah, who, in his forty-ninth chapter, may be said to reproduce and reset the oracle of Obadiah. The earlier prophet compares well with the later in respect of tone and temper. Even in his exultation over the foe there is "an undercurrent of regret."

For centuries, the mutual relations of Edom and Israel were marked by that peculiarly bitter animosity which seems to be possible only among neighbours and kinsmen. All Eastern feuds are long-lived and ruthless; but this feud had elements of virulence peculiarly its own.

The fathers of these nations, Esau and Jacob, were twin sons. Before their birth, the Lord was pleased to destine the younger for the greater career, and to make His purpose known to their mother Rebecca. "Two nations are in thy womb; the one people shall be stronger than the other people, and the elder shall serve the younger."\*

\* Gen. xxv. 23.

The reasons for this choice, lying within the Divine inscrutable wisdom, were not disclosed; and the revelation to Rebecca, which ought to have been a rule of obedience and a bond of peace in the house of Isaac, became a root of bitterness, and an occasion of unseemly strife. Esau began to fulfil the very purpose against which he chafed, by his profane despising and reckless sale of his birthright to his brother. Afterwards, when he endeavoured to annul or reverse that bargain, and to regain his position by obtaining, without the knowledge of Rebecca or Jacob, the authoritative blessing of his father, his craft was defeated by a deeper craft; his plot was met by a counter-plot. When Isaac said, "I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants," Esau lifted up his voice and wept. There he was wounded in the point he could most keenly feel. The fatness of the earth, and lordship over all branches of the family, were the very objects which he could appreciate. To his importunity, indeed, a second blessing was granted, securing to him and his descendants, wealth, prosperity, and some relief on the score of subjection,—a prospect of political independence. But Esau's wrath was not soothed when he heard his father say of Jacob—"Yea, and he shall be blessed." Dark thoughts brooded in him; and a murderous project even took shape in his heart, to slay his brother immediately on his father's death. He did it not. Years passed; his passion cooled; and under a good impulse, he was reconciled to his brother when they met. They could not however dwell together. Esau marched on to the wild mountains of Seir; Jacob settled and prospered in the heart of Palestine.

From those early days, the children of Esau, and the children of Jacob or Israel, maintained the same troubled relations with one another. Now and again the old enmity or envy of Esau flashed out terribly, and Israel, on the other hand, was ready to assert the right of mastery over Edom.

At the time when the Tribes were ready to enter Canaan, they keenly felt the unbrotherliness of Edom. Their appeal to be permitted to pass through that country was curtly refused, and

an army was gathered to resist them. It was not required, for Moses was commanded by God not to force a passage, and not to take a foot of land from the descendants of Esau. Accordingly the tribes were forced to make a long and weary detour round the land of Edom. It was never forgotten; and the prophets long after reproached the Edomites with their churlishness to the nation of their kinsfolk.

Saul was the first leader of Israel to draw the sword against Edom; but the first great woe inflicted on that people by the armies of Israel befell them in the reign of David. As it is sternly expressed in the Psalms, Moab was the vessel in which the victor washed his feet, and Edom was the slave to whom he cast his shoe.\*

Abishai began the war; Joab completed it, and, with the fierce energy of his nature, almost exterminated the male population of the mountains. David himself, at the close of the campaign, took possession of the conquered territory, and established garrisons to hold the remaining Edomites in subjection.

The descendants of Esau, however, in course of time regained strength and re-asserted their independence. Though not a numerous people, they occupied a district difficult of access, and easy of defence. They dwelt in the cliffs of the rock, and, like all mountain tribes—the Tyrolese, or the dwellers in the Caucasus—they trusted in their rocky fastnesses; knowing that numbers would give an enemy little advantage in scaling those bare mountain-sides, or forcing those narrow steep defiles. But Obadiah bore a message from God to reduce their vain confidence, “Though thou mount on high as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith Jehovah.” †

The first charge against Edom is this, of vain confidence in the impregnable character of their munitions of rocks; the second is that of a wicked exultation over the calamities of Jerusalem,—“In the day that thou stoodest on the other side,

\* Ps. lx. 8; cviii. 9.

† Ver. 4.

in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them." \* Opinions differ as to the distress of Jerusalem intended here. The charge in v. 12, "Look not on the day of thy brother," &c., appears to make it prospective; and yet, the words in ver. 15, "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee," certainly seem to point to Edom's misconduct on an occasion which was recently past. Our own persuasion is, that the reference of the prophet is to the calamity of Jerusalem—described very briefly in 2 Chron. xxi. 16, 17. The Philistines and Arabs burst into the kingdom of Judah in the reign of the wicked King Jehoram. They forced their way to the capital, plundered the Temple, rifled the palace, and carried away the royal family and household, with the exception of the youngest son of the king. Joel refers to this in the third chapter of his prophecy. Now we know that, shortly before this invasion, the Edomites had broken away from subjection to Jehoram.† And thus they could safely exult over Jerusalem, in the day when it was taken and ravaged by the Arabs and Philistines. Amos refers to the same time, and speaks of the captive Jews as delivered over to Edom, and the Edomites pitilessly pursuing their brethren of Judah with the sword. This is just what Obadiah alleges against them. They did not conquer Jerusalem, but they rejoiced over its calamity; slew or captured the fugitives, and caroused with the heathen on the holy mountain.

About fifty years afterwards, retribution came upon Edom, by the hand of Amaziah, the great-grandson of Jehoram. He led forth an army, and smote with terrible havoc the children of Seir. So the threatening words of Obadiah began to be fulfilled.

This is the last conflict between Esau and Jacob mentioned in Bible story; and the younger was stronger than the elder. Edom, however, had another day of exultation, when the army of Babylon took and laid waste Jerusalem. The old enmity

\* Verse 11.

† See 2 Chron. xxi. 8-10.

broke out in their cry,—“Down with it even to the ground!” That cry sent a keen pang to the heart of Jeremiah, and drew forth, as has already been pointed out, the only menace which is found in his Book of Lamentations.\* It filled with indignation the breasts of the Jewish captives in Babylon—“Remember, O Jehovah, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.” †

The boasting of Edom was short; for Nebuchadnezzar on his way to Egypt made their country utterly desolate, drove out those whom the sword did not devour, and planted the Nabatheans in the Idumean mountains, and in the famous city of Petra. The Book of Malachi begins with a description of the ruin into which Edom had fallen; and declares that all efforts to build the desolate places would be vain. Such efforts were made, but resulted as the prophet had foretold. The later Idumeans hung on the southern border of Judah, and occupied the ancient territory of Simeon. But Judas Maccabeus attacked them with his usual vigour, and gave them a heavy stroke. At last, John Hyrcanus thoroughly subdued them, as Josephus tells; and those that remained submitted to circumcision, and thenceforth became Jews. They introduced an additional element of restlessness and ferocity into the Jewish nation. Their cruel temper betrays itself in Herod the Great, who was of Idumean descent. They fought desperately in the war with the Romans; and thereafter their name ceased to be mentioned among the nations of the earth.

It is surely very wonderful that this long deferred fate of Edom should have been predicted by Obadiah. There was nothing to indicate this in the aspect of the times in which that prophet lived. An eminent writer on these subjects has well said—“It might possibly have been conjectured, without any superhuman insight, that the lesser states, such as the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites, should, in process of time, be extinguished by the great empires which were then contend-

\* Lam. iv. 21.

† Ps. cxxxvii. 7.

ing for the mastery of the world, or become merged into the wandering tribes of the desert. But what natural sagacity could have foreseen, that the Edomites, who continued comparatively strong and vigorous beyond the period at which the prophecies respecting them were written, and who retained possession of their territory when Judea was laid waste, should yet become more desolate than their Jewish rivals—nay, should entirely cease to have a political existence, and should do so from their being swallowed up by the revived might and energy of Israel? This is the singular turn of affairs that was predicted as to the relative position of the two peoples.\* The explanation of the problem is that Obadiah, who predicted this (ver. 17, 18), and Ezekiel who did so likewise (chap. xxv. 12–14), had supernatural guidance, and spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

To the Jews, Edom always represented inveterate hostility. The later Jewish teachers would have it, that there must be Edomite blood in the veins of their Roman conquerors—in Cæsar and in Titus.

To us the denunciation of Edom is the reproof of the spirit of envy, enmity, and persecution. Babylon stands for heathenish power and the corruption of worship and life—anti-Jewish, then anti-Christian. Edom represents intense animosity, anti-Jewish, then anti-Christian. Accordingly, in a psalm already quoted, the children of Babylon and the children of Edom are condemned together. It is no mere empty threat. Old Babylon perished, but Jerusalem revived. Babylon appears again with great boasting, but only to totter and fall, and make way for the glory of holy Jerusalem. So Edom was subdued and absorbed, and Israel got the mastery. Again there is an Edom, the enemy of Christ and the Church. As Doeg the Edomite plotted against David, so there rises a “lawless one” against the Son of David, having a sort of connection with Christ, yet bitterly and inveterately hostile. But as Edom was subdued by Israel, so shall this adversary be destroyed by

\* Fairbairn on Prophecy, p. 205.

Christ, and in the end—"Saviours shall come up on mount Zion, to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's."\*

Let all peoples of the earth take warning. As it fared with Esau's posterity, so shall it be with all the nations that resist the Lord our God. They shall be utterly wasted, and perish. Oppose who may, the long vistas of prophecy all end in the joyful establishment of the holy kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. Obadiah says, "The kingdom shall be the Lord's." Zechariah says, "The Lord shall be king over all the earth." Grandeur still are the words of John; "I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth."†

It is written in Malachi, and it is quoted by Paul—"Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." It is a form of expressing the Divine decree, that the younger brother should surpass the elder,—a decree, as we have seen, which applied to their descendants for many generations. We believe firmly in Divine immutable decrees. A God without determinate purposes would be to us a God incredible. But the thought of His decrees turns us into fatalists, if we do not bear in mind, that it is for His own guidance only that God has fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass; and that the fore-ordination is such as to leave untouched that freedom of His creatures which is essential to their accountability. Any one may see, that the decree concerning Esau and Edom was not realised in a forced, arbitrary, or fatalistic manner. From the beginning, those qualities appeared in Esau and the Edomites, which bring weakness; and those appeared in Jacob, which obtain advancement. Jacob, it is true, had great faults, especially those of dissimulation and craft; but he had also strong elements of practical success—patience, shrewdness, vigilance, laboriousness. Depend on it that in all times and countries, the Jacob will surpass and master the Esau. The tone of character that is wayward and wilful has a kind

\* Ver. 21.

† Rev. xix. 6.

of charm about it as Esau's had : but it is often profane, as Esau was, minding the things of the flesh, and preferring to any spiritual portion the mess of pottage for immediate indulgence. But in Jacob, with all his faults, lay the secret of favour with God and man ; and when his character had been purified from its alloy in the fire of trial, he came forth an Israel, a prince with God. Esau, with all his flourishing of sword and spear, was weak. Jacob, prudent and persevering, meditating on the covenant, praying to the God who met him at Bethel, swearing at Mizpah by the Fear of his father Isaac, halting on his thigh at Peniel, but with a blessing secured,—Jacob was strong.

Esau and Jacob struggle in many a character, as they did of old in their mother's womb. The wilful impetuous spirit comes first, and thinks of nothing but hunting for pleasure, and having mastery over others. It prays not, and it sees no angels. To Esau, the heavens are shut. But the quieter spirit that comes after, and that goes through toil, trial, and disappointment with patient resolution, is that which will do most, and rule most ; for it has visions of the opened heavens, and angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man ; and it has lonely hours with One who wrestles till the break of day. Blessed is the man who has the God of Jacob for his help !—

“ Happy art thou, O Israel :  
 Who is like unto thee, a people saved by the Lord,  
 The shield of thy help,  
 And that is the sword of thy excellency !” \*

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\* Deut. xxxiii. 29.

## JONAH.

THIS Book is very different from those which surround it, being a tale and a parable rather than a prophecy. Whether it was written by Jonah himself does not appear.

That such a prophet really lived, there can be no reasonable doubt : \* but it is open to question whether the story regarding him is to be taken literally, or read as a work of imagination, fraught with didactic and prophetic significance. Some good people are shocked by the latter suggestion, simply because they confuse a fiction with a lie, and have never admitted to their minds the idea, so familiar to the Oriental, that the highest truths may be inculcated through the imagination quite as well as through the reason and the memory. Others appeal to the reference made by our Saviour to this book, † as though He had thereby set His seal to the actual historical character of the narrative : but this is not at all so conclusive as they suppose. Assume the story to be an inspired parable ; and why may not He who taught so many things in parables, have availed Himself of this one also when speaking of resurrection and of repentance ? In fact, the question is much on a par with that of the actuality of the events and speeches in the Book of Job, to which reference is also made in the New Testament for a purpose of exhortation. Certainly no modern teacher, gifted with any intelligence, would hesitate to support or elucidate moral and religious lessons by the aid of any famous poem or tale that suited his purpose, and such allusions are often far more effective than any quotation from prosaic history.

\* 2 Kings xiv. 25.

† Matt. xii. 39, 40.

However we take it, we find the book of Jonah one of profound instruction. Those who treat it lightly only exhibit their own shallowness. It begins abruptly like the story of Elijah the Tishbite, with whom indeed Jonah has some points of similarity. The date is of little consequence: but there is reason to think that Jonah, who was a northern Israelite, lived in the early years of the second Jeroboam's lengthened reign. Whether he was recognised from his youth as a prophet of the Lord we cannot tell: but that which made him famous was his mission to the Gentiles. He was directed to bear a Divine message to Nineveh, at that period the splendid capital of the Assyrian Empire; and the mission was very unwelcome to him, because his thoughts were occupied with his own people, and he feared that a message from God to the great city of the Gentiles meant the rejection of Israel for their sins.

He forgot that this was the very calling of Israel, to be a witness and a blessing to the nations. But the tribes had a heart too narrow for their calling; and Jonah had a heart too narrow for the ministry to which he was summoned. So he "rose up to flee from the presence of the Lord." This can hardly mean that he imagined it possible to go beyond the omnipresence and omniscience of God, for the 139th Psalm could not be unknown to a prophet of Israel; but he departed from standing before Jehovah as His servant. He resolved to renounce his prophetic calling, rather than fulfil this errand, and to leave his country in order to put obedience out of his power, and evade the mission to hated Nineveh.

So, from his native region, the mountain district of Zebulon, Jonah went down to the port of Joppa—the modern Jaffa—where he found exactly what he wished. A ship was just about to sail for Tarshish, an ancient Phœnician city in Spain. It was seaworthy, for the ships of Tarshish, built to traverse the whole extent of the Mediterranean, were large and strong.\* It was bound to what an Israelite regarded as the far west. So Jonah paid the fare to Tarshish, and embarked for the voyage.

\* See Psalm xlviii. 7.

Providence seemed actually to favour his disobedience ; but we must bear in mind, that facilities for doing wrong are not to be construed as indications of Divine permission.

Jonah took his measures, but God also took His. He let the wilful man have his way to a certain point, till quite committed to his folly ; then He began to work, and restored His servant by terrible things in righteousness.

A storm suddenly rose, and the ship was in great peril. The seamen threw the cargo overboard to lighten the labouring vessel ; and at last, completely panic-stricken, as is the manner of Eastern sailors, they poured out affrighted prayers. Crews for long voyages generally comprised men of various nationalities ; and the seamen in this case, being from many countries, had many gods, and cried every man to his own god.

Jonah, fatigued by his rapid journey, which is called a flight, had gone below at once, and had fallen into a deep sleep. This does not prove that he had a callous conscience. Probably he was sorrowful and ashamed ; and it was a relief to him to fall asleep and forget. Well for him that the ship was not lost while he slumbered and slept.

When Elijah deserted his post of duty, and lay asleep in the wilderness, an angel awoke him. Jonah was roused by a rougher messenger. The shipmaster, seeing him lie supine and secure, startled him with a cry : "What meanest thou, O sleeper ? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that Elohim will think upon us that we perish not."\* He awoke, but it is not written that he prayed at all on board ship. He would not, could not, or durst not, pray.

Though the ship's company had many gods, they agreed in this conviction, that the storm was no common one, but a Divine judgment on one or more persons on board ; and, not knowing one another's previous history, they resolved to cast lots, in order to find the man or men with whom Heaven was displeased. "The lot is cast into the lap ; the disposing thereof is of the Lord." And He, who cared for those poor Gentiles

\* Chap. i. 6.

on the sea, and who in a former age had given to the Philistines the sign they proposed in the route followed by the kine that drew the ark, now caused the lot to fall on the man who had incurred the storm,—Jonah the Israelite.

Then we have in the narrative the eager questioning of the passenger by the seamen, and his prompt and candid answers. The sailors were humane and just, and very far from any truculent hastening of the unhappy man to death. Indeed, it was Jonah himself who suggested that he should be cast out into the sea.

In this, too, he was a prophet, for God would not permit Jonah to renounce his calling. He represented Israel, and was to give, in his own person, a sign of its fall and rising again, as the servant of Jehovah. There seems to be a remembrance of the history of Jonah in those words of Hosea regarding Ephraim,—“After two days will he revive us: on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him.”\* But more than this; Jonah was a type of Jesus Christ, the perfect Servant of God, and was destined to illustrate the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. “A greater than Jonas is here.” The sea represents death and judgment. Jonah went into it willingly, unresistingly, yet not of his own act. The hands of Gentiles cast him forth. In due time Jesus laid down His own life, yet not by His own act. The hands of Gentiles nailed Him to the cross. Jonah went down out of sight into the abyss, and the sea was calm; the element that had threatened to destroy the seamen bore them safely up and onward. So Jesus went down, not into sorrow merely, but into judgment; fell under the power of death, and was confined within the bars of the grave; and lo! the sea is calm to us—there is deliverance from going down to the pit, for God has found a ransom; and His righteousness, which reprov'd and threatened us, now forms our protection and support.

The sudden calm profoundly impressed the seamen; and they offered sacrifice to Jehovah, and made vows. Thus it is that men are brought to God when they see the terrors of wrath

\* Hos. vi. 2.

exchanged for quietness and confidence—peace made through the death of Jesus. But many do not understand this. They are quite religious after a fashion, and row hard, like those poor sailors, to come at the land, and think to outride the storm. It is vain ; peace comes only in God's way of peace, by the casting out of sin and judgment—our sin, our judgment—laid on Jesus, into the hungry deep.

Something quite marvellous occurred to the prophet in the sea ;—marvellous, but in no degree absurd or incredible. “The Lord appointed a great fish.” It is not said that He created it at the moment. He ordained that it should be at the place of the sea over which the ship was moving, and should thus be in readiness to swallow the prophet. The great fish is called in the English translation of Matthew xii. 40 a “whale ;” and the Revised Version retains the word, though every one knows that the whale is extremely rare in the Mediterranean, and cannot possibly admit a man entire into its small throat. On the other hand, such a feat is quite possible to the large shark or sea-dog which is found in that sea. Having an enormous gullet, it can suck in a man whole, and, being sometimes of twenty-five feet in length, could afford space for his body within its bulk. The miraculous element here is not the swallowing of Jonah, but the keeping of Jonah alive, unhurt and conscious, within the shark. It is a great wonder, but not too great for Him who kept the three Jews at Babylon unhurt and conscious in the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

From the deep, the prophet called on his God. In his moving grave he recognised the Divine Hand dealing with him ; and the waves and billows that rolled over him he felt as the waves and billows of Jehovah. “Thou hast cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas.” The Psalms came to his remembrance, as they have done to many in deep waters ; and, in words drawn mainly from them, Jonah cried to his God. He had fled from God's presence, and now he was filled with his own ways, cast out of God's sight, and sunk into what seemed to him “the belly of Hades.” But faith, even in such an extremity, sprung

up in his heart,—“I will look again toward Thy holy Temple.” When he could say this, Jonah began to anticipate deliverance; and ended his prayer with the significant words—“Salvation is of the Lord.” He depended on Jehovah as One who had power to raise the dead, and to deliver those who sigh in the deep, that they may pay their vows to Him on the dry land.

Here also is the sign of the Son of man. We hear the voice of His groaning, for the quotations which Jonah wrought into a prayer were taken from the Messianic Psalms. In the second chapter, ver. 4 agrees with Psalm xxii. 1; ver. 5 with Psalm lxix. 1, 2; and ver. 6 with Psalm xvi. 10.

But the emphasis in this sign is to be laid on the resurrection. On the third day, at God’s command, the grave which held Jonah as one dead and out of sight, cast him forth on the shore, alive. On the third day, at God’s command, a grave in which man had never before lain, yielded up Jesus, who had believed and not made haste; who had trusted in God for deliverance from the sides of the fearful pit. Nay, more; as Jonah was not yielded up at some shallow place of the sea, thence to struggle or even wade to shore, but placed at once, and without so much as a wet foot, on the dry land, so the Son of Man was completely delivered from all condemnation. The Risen One stands upon the shore quite clear of the waters of judgment. Believest thou this?—“There shall no sign be given but the sign of the prophet Jonah.”

From this we proceed to the preaching of Jonah; and in this also we shall find a sign. He had profited by the correction received, and retained on his spirit so deep an impression of the power and goodness of God, that, when he received a second commission to go to Nineveh, he went without gainsaying. The city covered a prodigious space, because it included fields, and gardens, and pleasure-grounds within the walls. So the prophet, entering the city gate, was well advanced on a day’s journey, when he stopped, and preached this piercing message,

which God had given him :—"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Forty is the number of probation. There were forty years for Israel in the desert ; forty days for Christ in the wilderness ; forty days' respite for Nineveh.

The message was appalling ; and the messenger himself was a sign of the power of the Lord God of Israel, for he had been buried in the sea, and raised up out of it by the power of God. The whole city was moved. "The people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them." The prophet does not seem to have preached any good tidings in the streets of the city, or opened any door of hope ; but the people resolved to use their days of respite in seeking the Divine mercy.

It was not long till the alarm reached the palace. So "the king of Nineveh, arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes." The man who held the proudest position in the world acknowledged himself helpless before God, and, owning his sins and the sins of his people, sat in sackcloth and ashes.\*

In the proclamation of the king and his princes enjoining a public fast, we notice several sound principles. (1.) Public sins and dangers require public humiliation and prayer. (2.) Fasting is of no value without amendment of life. Yards of sackcloth, and bushels of ashes, and starvation of the body, and the rending of the air with pitiful lamentations, cannot please God, unless "every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands." † (3.) The cattle were not forgotten in the proclamation. They are connected with man from the beginning. ‡ They are joined together in the Psalms—"O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast." It was well done to name

\* It must be confessed that no corroboration of this is found in the monuments or in profane history : nor is there any reference to even a temporary repentance in the later oracles regarding Nineveh which appear in the books of Isaiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah. But if the whole story is a parable, this matters nothing.

† Chap. iii. 8.

‡ See Gen. i. 24-31.

them in the appeal from Nineveh to God, as they would have been involved in the ruin if the city had been destroyed. And God does take care for oxen. When the flood subsided, God remembered Noah and every living thing, and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and now, for the sake of the moaning cattle, as well as the helpless children, God spared Nineveh.

The great city of the Gentiles repented; and the Lord turned away His judgment. Alas! when the greater than Jonah, the Son of man, preached, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," how few hearkened to His word! So the great city of the Jews was left to them desolate. After He had risen from the dead, He preached again, not indeed in person as Jonah did, but through the lips of His apostles and other Spirit-taught witnesses: yet Jerusalem repented not. The Risen One preaches now by many voices in our streets, and in the streets of many cities; and He opens the door of hope, for His message is not of repentance only, but of forgiveness of sins. How shall they escape who neglect so great salvation? The stones of Nineveh have risen already within our own lifetime to cry out against the men of this generation who were incredulous of Bible history. But there is to be a greater resurrection on those famous Eastern plains,—“The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a Greater than Jonah is here.”\*

In the fourth chapter, the character of Jonah seems again to turn its dark side toward us. Is it possible that he was angry to see the city spared? Did he care for his own credit as a foreteller of destruction more than for mercy, and actually give way to vehement wrath? Surely not. The word rendered “angry” only means “hot.” Jonah’s spirit was hot within him with vexation or grief, as David felt when “the Lord had

\* Matt. xii. 41.

broken forth upon Uzzah :” \* and for the moment he was weary of life, like Moses, when the people, discontented with manna, cried for flesh, † or, still more, like Elijah relapsing into discouragement after a great success. ‡

We trace the chagrin of Jonah mainly to that misgiving regarding his own people Israel, which he had formerly entertained, and which now returned and sunk heavily into his soul. He saw the Gentiles occupying the attention of Jehovah and tasting His mercy, while Israel was becoming more and more alienated from Him. As a patriot, he would have considered the fall of Nineveh both a political and a religious blessing to his own nation. It would have delivered them from fear of the Assyrians, and might have roused them to give more heed to the prophets of the Lord. But now this was not to be ; and Jonah felt as if he must see Israel fall, not Assyria—Samaria, not Nineveh.

If it be urged that the prophet was wanting in what we call the spirit of humanity, the charge need not be denied. At that period of the world, there was hardly any such feeling as humanity, in the sense of that love to man as man, which, under Christian civilization, is able, if not to over-ride, at least to subdue the prejudices of country and race.

Jonah prayed a second time to God ; and in his prayer seems to anticipate the language of the prophet Joel regarding the Divine benignity,—“Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil.” § He declared that on this very account he had disliked and sought to evade the mission to Nineveh, because he anticipated that the judgment would be turned away. His ministry, however good for Nineveh, boded no good to Israel ; and he would rather die than live.

The Lord answered him quietly, one may almost say, meekly—“Is thy vexation just or reasonable?” We may be sure, that if the prophet had been angry from mere wounded vanity

\* 2 Sam. vi. 8.

† Numb. xi. 15.

‡ 1 Kings xix. 4.

§ Jonah iv. 2 ; Joel ii. 13.

or a childish pettishness, he would have got no answer at all, or a very different answer from this.

Further teaching was given to him through a striking incident. Jonah betook himself to a spot without the city, on the eastern side, where the ground rises; and, accepting no man's hospitality, made for himself a booth. Its shelter was insufficient; so the Lord, who had prepared a great fish to cover His servant from the water, now "prepared a gourd" to cover His servant from the burning heat. It was a creeper, which quickly spread its green leaves over the booth. The "Lord God" did it—Jehovah Elohim; the latter title being used significantly at this part of the narrative,\* in order to show that He acted here not merely as God of Israel, but as the God who rules over all, and whose tender mercies are over all His works.

Jonah was glad, construing this timely protection as a sign that God approved his conduct in keeping aloof from the city. But He who had prepared the fish and prepared the gourd also "prepared a worm," that gnawed away the sap vessels from the root; and at once the gourd withered, and its value as a covering was gone, as its leaves shrivelled in the sun. Then followed the east wind with sultry heat—the sirocco, the Lord having also "appointed" it; and the prophet fainting, wished more than ever to die. Yet, with the obstinacy which characterised him, he justified his heat of spirit, when God questioned him again. He said, "I do well to be vexed even unto death." In reply, Jehovah showed to him the reasonableness of His compassion toward Nineveh,—“Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up as the son of a night, and as the son of a night perished; and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?” †

Very sweet is that notice of the little children of the heathen.

\* Jonah iv. 7-9.

† Jonah iv. 10, 11.

The Lord counted them at Nineveh, and found them 120,000. When we consider the sad case of the millions of little ones in heathen countries still, it is no small comfort that the Lord on high thinks upon them, counts them every one, and will deal with them as a gracious God and merciful.

Jonah could not answer. Let us suppose that he was brought to a better mind, as Job was when God pleaded with him. At all events, if we may take him to be the writer of this book, he has broken off the narrative with the Lord's unanswered question, content that God was justified. It was not his object to give a full account of his own ministry, or delineate his own character. And they should remember this who hastily pronounce him a mere narrow-minded and ill-tempered man. He has described only one passage in what may have been a long ministry; and, in doing so, has been so little solicitous about his own reputation, that he has not even added a single sentence to tell the effect produced on his mind by the gracious words of the Lord. The tale is written throughout for a purpose worthy of its place in the canon of Scripture, viz., to show in a figure the duty of revived Israel to the Gentiles; above all, to furnish an illustrious sign of the Son of man in His death, burial, and resurrection, and in the preaching of the Gospel after resurrection for salvation to the Gentiles. "God has now granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life."

As to sorrow over a city, does not Jonah, like Jeremiah, suggest a Greater than himself? The prophet was in bitterness, because a doomed city was spared, inferring that the cities of Israel would be laid waste and forsaken. The Saviour grieved even to tears, because the great city of Judah which He was willing to save would not come to repentance. Yet forty years, and Jerusalem was to be taken. As He contemplated the doom, His was a Saviour's love, His was a Saviour's grief. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood

under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.\* “And when He drew nigh, He saw the city, and wept over it; saying, If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.” †

\* Luke xiii. 34, 35.

† Luke xix. 41, 42.

## M I C A H.

THE first verse is the title and preface of this book. Thereafter, it divides itself at once into three parts, each marked by the opening summons, "Hear ye!" The parts are:—

I. Chap. i. 2–ii. 13.

II. Chap. iii.–v.

III. Chap. vi., vii.

The strain of the prophecy becomes richer and more evangelical as the book advances.

The name of the prophet in its full form, Micaiah, means "Who is like the Lord?" It threw out a challenge to the false prophets of his time, who encouraged the people to make light of Jehovah's judgments.

Micah the Morasthite reads like Elijah the Tishbite, Nahum the Elkoshite, Jonah of Gathsepher, Jeremiah of Anathoth. The prophet's birthplace was Moresheth-Gath,\* a small town in the maritime plain of Judah, not far from the old Philistine city of Gath. No prophet dated his birth from Jerusalem, though it was the city in which many witnessed, and many were slain. Jerusalem killed the prophets, but could not produce them. They were sent from the mountain regions, and from quiet rural towns. So it has often been. The wisdom of God has preferred the fresher minds from country parts and unsophisticated villages, to speak in His name to great cities.

Micah was contemporary with Isaiah; for he received the word of the Lord in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah;—the first, a well-meaning king, but one who did not reform

\* Micah i. 14.

his subjects, for "they did yet corruptly;" the second a perverse idolater; and the third a devout and worthy monarch. Micah is not so full or eloquent as Isaiah, yet he has great vividness and energy; and his prophecy, recited as Hebrew poetry in the time when it was fresh, and in the country where its numerous local allusions were at once understood, must have had an impressiveness that we do not appreciate without some study and effort of mind. He was more a man of the people than Isaiah; and so depicted the sufferings of the peasantry from close observation, and denounced the vices of an oppressive aristocracy—"heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel."

The prophecy concerns Samaria and Jerusalem; but the vision concerning Samaria is delivered briefly, for the kingdom of Israel approached its downfall, and actually fell during Micah's lifetime. The wound of Samaria was incurable; therefore the main direction of this book of prophecy is toward Jerusalem, mingling reproofs and promises.

I. The first division begins with a summons to all nations to hear God's testimony. The Lord is in His Holy Temple, and witnesses against the transgression of Jacob, and the sins of the house of Israel.

First, Samaria is condemned for idolatry, and is threatened in words that have been most exactly fulfilled.\* The stones of that city, and of its temples, have been poured down from the crest of the hill into the valley; and the slope of the hill of Samaria is cultivated in terraced vineyards, the stones that were "poured out" being gathered into "heaps of the field," or formed into the rude walls that support the terraces.

Over the impending ruin of Samaria the prophet utters, after the Eastern manner, wild cries and lamentations—the more so, that he foresees the Assyrian invasion as not only overwhelming Samaria, but coming "to the gate of Jerusalem." No further it came than the gate, for Hezekiah prayed, the Assyrian

\* See chap. i. 6.

perished, and Jerusalem was yet spared for one hundred and twenty years.

“Publish it not in Gath,” exclaims the prophet, recalling a line from David’s elegy on Saul and Jonathan. Then he vividly describes the consternation of towns and villages as the Assyrian host advanced. Ten of these are mentioned; five apparently lying north of Jerusalem, and five to the south and south-west.

In the remainder of the first address, Micah inveighs against the moral evils that defiled the land and incurred calamity. It was a time of weak government, and so of misrule and oppression. Selfish men, actuated by that covetousness which is “a root of all evil,” devised rapine on their beds, and so soon as morning came, practised it, because it was in the power of their hands. For such things judgment was inevitable, and a judgment suited to the sin. The proud and avaricious violated law and justice to increase their own inheritances. Their punishment would be, that they should have no inheritance at all—none to “cast a cord for the lot in the congregation of Jehovah.”

The plain speaking of Micah was very distasteful to those who heard him, and it drew the opposition of the false prophets; but he continued to declare fearlessly, that the land was defiled by robbery and violence, and that on this account the inhabitants would have to rise and depart into captivity.\*

The address ends, however, with a promise of restoration that looks far into the future.† Israel shall return and multiply as the flock of Bozrah; and before them shall go the Breaker-up of their way. As Moses led them out of Egypt, as Zerubbabel led them out of Babylon, as Jesus Christ leads back to God the banished ones, whether of Israel or of the Gentiles; so in the ultimate redemption and restoration of Israel the Lord Himself will bring again the captivity of His people. “Their king is passed on before them, and Jehovah at the head of them.”

II. The second division begins with denunciation of the heads and princes of Jacob for their sins.

\* Chap. ii. 10.

† Chap. ii. 12, 13.

The third chapter consists of three strophes, each of four verses, all couched in this strain of reproof.

(1.) Ver. 1-4. The princes are charged with violence and oppression. For this the Lord will be deaf to their cry, and hide His face from them in their calamities.

(2.) Ver. 5-8. The prophets are denounced as venal and deceitful. They were against those who "put not into their mouths." They spoke peace, to keep themselves in favour with the people. Their sentence was that they should be blinded and confounded. In contrast with them, Micah himself was conscious of the genuine prophetic gift.—"But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin."\*

(3.) Ver. 9-12. The three classes of national leaders—princes priests, and prophets—are now grouped together. They are all shown to be venal and hollow. Princes judge for reward or bribe; priests teach for hire; and prophets divine for money. Yet these men affect to "lean upon the Lord, and say: Is not the Lord in the midst of us? no evil shall come upon us." It is all in vain. Faith is mighty to build up Zion; but the presumptuous confidence of such men as these can only demolish Zion, and make of Jerusalem heaps of ruin.†

This vision was delivered by Micah openly in the days of King Hezekiah: and the impunity with which this was done was cited long afterwards as a precedent for sparing the life of Jeremiah, when he prophesied against Jerusalem. Indeed Hezekiah and his subjects not merely refrained from injury to Micah, but laid his words to heart, and by prompt repentance obtained a respite of judgment.‡ The Morasthite had not laboured in vain.

The fourth chapter opens with words of glorious promise. They are too grand for application to the state of Jerusalem on the return of the Jews from Babylon, or any glory that Jerusalem

\* Chap. iii. 8.

† Chap. iii. 11, 12.

‡ See Jer. xxvi. 17-19.

has yet seen. The promise awaits fulfilment at the end of the days now running on, which are "the times of the Gentiles." Isaiah has transferred this passage to his own book of prophecy, where it occupies a prominent place.\* Of course the promise to Zion, as the mountain of the house of Jehovah, is not to be understood as implying the miraculous elevation of that little hill into a prodigiously lofty mountain. Its exaltation is ethical and spiritual. Its distinction is, that from it issues the law of the Lord. This sets it above all hills and high places, and makes it, in the last days, the centre of attraction to all the peoples. It is no more a question of families and tribes of Israel going up to one mountain to worship; but all nations gather round the word and worship of the Lord, as partakers with restored Israel. Then at last the golden age of justice and of peace.

Justice; for He shall judge among many peoples, and rebuke the tyranny of strong nations. Cost what it may, the Lord will send judgment on the earth. "With righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins." †

Then peace. The warlike cry of Joel,—“Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears,”—is reversed by Micah and Isaiah,—“They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” ‡ So long as there is injustice on the earth, wars continue. Oppression must be resisted, and lawless ambition checked. But, as Christian ideas of justice and mercy prevail, war becomes more hateful and irrational; and disputes of nations, as of individuals, are adjusted by mutual concession or submitted to equitable arbitration instead of being settled by the coarse and stupid argument of blows, shots, wounds, and havoc. When under the sceptre of Christ, righteousness will have universal ascendancy, peace will have universal diffusion;

Isa. ii. 1-5.

† Isa. xi. 4, 5.

‡ Isa. ix. 3.

right will be might, never might right; and the cruel art of war will be blotted from the list of human pursuits. Then quietness, and walking in the light of the Lord!

So the middle of this book is brightened by the promise of a restored Israel, with the nations rejoicing around. We do not dispute that this oracle contemplated the restoration from Babylon, but we assert that it has a larger meaning. History moves in cycles; near and small events returning on a larger scale at an appointed distance of time. In accordance with this, prophecy uses language which is too large and rich for the near fulfilment, because it keeps in view at the same time those fulfilments on a grander scale which are remote.

Towards the end of the fourth chapter, we read of affliction that must precede the consolation of Judah. It is intimated that Jerusalem shall be without a king—a thing full of evil omen, that David's throne should be unoccupied. It is also revealed that the daughter of Zion shall be led forth to Babylon—a remarkable prophecy, because, in the time of Micah, Nineveh was the great city of the Assyrian invaders, and Babylon had not risen to political importance. The chapter ends with promises of the deliverance of the daughter of Zion, the overthrow of hostile nations, and the devotion of their substance to the service of "the Lord of the whole earth."

In the fifth chapter, the great Deliverer is more clearly indicated. The daughter of Zion is sore beset; and the judge of Israel is smitten by some un-named power, later than Babylon. Then the Saviour comes, the Saviour promised long.

"But thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me, that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."\* Not in Jerusalem was the Ruler to have birth, for the house of David must have fallen into obscurity; and the Messiah must issue, not from the place of David's exaltation, but from the place of His humility, little Bethlehem. That this oracle was understood to fix the place

\* Chap. v. 2.

of Messiah's birth appears alike from the language of the Sanhedrim, and from the voice of the people as reported in the Gospels.\* Nor is this all that it teaches concerning the Christ. It indicates His eternal Divine existence. As the Son, He had glory with the Father from of old, or ever the world was. In the fulness of time, He is the Son given to Israel which travailed and waited for Him; and it is predicted that, feeding and ruling in the strength of the Lord, "He shall be great unto the ends of the earth." †

The remainder of the fifth chapter is occupied with the truth that "this Man shall be peace." (1.) By defending Israel from oppressors, ver. 5, 6. The Assyrian represents the entire force of this world's enmity to the cause and people of God; and there is a backward glance to Nimrod, who stands at the very fountain of this proud hostility. (2.) By strengthening His people or brethren, who are to be as a dew from the Lord. (3.) By destroying all instruments of war, and every vestige of idolatry. We must not be surprised to find cries of vengeance mingled with the evangelical strains of this prophecy; as when Micah compares victorious Israel to a lion rending flocks of sheep. The prophecies are conveyed in the language, and are affected by, the tone of their own times; accordingly, bursts of Eastern passion and patriotic excitement are found mixed with messages of salvation that concern all mankind. Each prophet was moved by the Holy Ghost, and God spoke in him; but he was not taken out of his own individuality, or lifted much above the spirit of his age, even when he had glimpses of a better age and blessings afar off.

III. The third division, like the first and second, begins with expostulation and reproof. Before the mountains the Lord's controversy is pleaded. Let these, which have stood for generations, and been the silent witnesses of Jehovah's goodness to Israel, and of Israel's ingratitude to Him, hearken, and judge righteous judgment.

The charge is made, not with heat or severity, but with con-

\* See Matt. ii. 4-6; John vii. 42.

† Chap. v. 4.

descension and pathos truly divine. "O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against Me." \* Then the Lord's side of the controversy is pushed further. He has not wearied Israel, or done anything to justify or even excuse the alienation of His people. Nay, He reminds the tribes of Israel of His claim upon them from the days of old, and recapitulates in a few words His mighty acts wrought in their behalf from Egypt even to Gilgal, where the reproach of Egypt was taken away. It was He who gave them the redemption and the exodus—Moses the prophet, Aaron the priest, and Miriam the prophetess. He frustrated the hostile power of Balak allied to the hostile wisdom of Balaam. He protected Israel from Shittim, the last encampment in Moab on the east of the Jordan, to Gilgal, the first encampment in the promised land. Are all these things forgotten? Must the Lord Himself remind the people of His mighty deeds?

At this appeal, the people seem roused to reply, expressing the greatest anxiety to worship and please Jehovah. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" † The question is not, how to be saved, but wherewith shall a redeemed people acceptably serve God. The suggestion of Israel about the multiplication of burnt-offerings, and still more the horrid thought of child-sacrifice for sin, betray the heathenism into which the nation sank in the reign of Ahaz. But the answer of the Lord is full of beauty, and as applicable to the Christian life as to the Israelite. Indeed, it is just the ideal which is embodied in the character and walk of Jesus Christ; and it is so expressed as to guide, not a nation only, but every individual man in the service of the God of salvation,—“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to

\* Micah vi. 3.

† Chap. vi. 6, 7.

do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" \*

Because Judah would not walk so as to please God, there must be punishment for iniquity. The Lord's voice cried to the city of Jerusalem, and His rod was stretched over it—even the smiting power of Assyria. The sins which are mentioned as incurring His displeasure are breaches of the moral, not the ceremonial law. It is always so in this prophecy. Micah takes no notice of the Temple ritual, but is vehement against pride, violence, dishonesty, and deceit. He declares that commercial trickery makes the city offensive to God. Treasures of injustice, false measures, scales, and weights, He utterly abhors; and equally, the false or lying tongue which cheats even with fair weights and just measures. For these things was Jerusalem to be laid waste. In the end of this sixth chapter, the prophet seems to foresee the evil time which was to follow the good days of King Hezekiah. Jerusalem was to sin as Samaria had sinned, following the statutes of Omri, and the works of the house of Ahab.

In the last chapter, the prophet responds as for a penitent people. He acknowledges the abounding iniquity of prince and judge, friend and neighbour—even wife and children,—“The godly man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net.” † In other words, the age is degenerate and the old virtues are dead. So have the prophets and moralists of all nations cried, endeavouring to recall men to the probity of earlier and simpler times. But of all the teachers of the ancient world, only the Hebrew prophets knew whither to direct the eyes of a nation for help,—“I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.” ‡

After this, the strain of Micah has more cheerfulness and hope. They that look to the Lord are enlightened. The

\* Chap. vi. 8.

† Chap. vii. 2.

‡ Chap. vii. 7.

boasting of the enemy is to be short lived. The fallen are to arise; and the walls of the Holy City are to be built.

The conclusion of the book is full of animation and strength. There is a prayer to the Divine Shepherd of Israel; to which a gracious answer is vouchsafed, promising that the chosen people shall be revived as in the days of exodus from Egypt, and that all their enemies shall be confounded and abased. Then all is closed with a grateful address to Jehovah, which may well unite hearts and voices from all the dispensations and all the lands—"Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, and have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."\* Subdual of iniquities and casting of sins into the depths, are expressions instinct with allusion to the ever-memorable escape of Israel from Pharaoh in the Red Sea. Our iniquities and sins are the Egyptians that pursue us, making our lives wretched, and bent on dragging us back into captivity. The Lord come between us and them, and cast them into a deep sleep from which they shall never awake to molest us! Then shall we thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord for the subdual of iniquities, the victory over sin, which is by His grace, not by our prowess. "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out Thy right hand, the earth swallowed them. Thou in Thy mercy hast led the people which Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in Thy strength to Thy holy habitation."†

\* Chap. vii. 18-20.

† Exod. xv. 11-13

## N A H U M.

THIS prophet was of Elkosh, supposed on the authority of Jerome to have been a village in the north of Palestine, the region afterwards called Galilee. There is a tomb near the site of Nineveh which has been called Nahum's tomb; but its antiquity is doubtful, and the tradition which assigns it to this prophet is of no authority whatever.

The time at which Nahum lived may be determined with some confidence from internal evidence. He speaks of Asshur or Assyria as having over-run Judah, wounding and plundering it; alluding to the invasion by Sennacherib in the reign of Hezekiah. He even mentions the voice of Asshur's messengers, those boastful envoys of Sennacherib, who demanded the surrender of Jerusalem. We infer, that Nahum prophesied in the latter part of Hezekiah's reign, but not so late as that of Manasseh, because he makes no reference to idolatry in Judah. When he wrote, it was a time of fidelity to the worship of Jehovah; and Judah is exhorted to keep her solemn feasts, and to perform her vows.\*

Whether he lived at Jerusalem, or was acquainted with his great contemporary, Isaiah, we have no information; but as respects purity of diction, boldness of imagery, and poetic fire, he is not unworthy to be named even with that sublime prophet. His written prophecy, however, is of quite limited extent. Whereas Isaiah ranged over Israel and Judah and the Gentiles to the uttermost parts of the earth, Nahum has given us only this one prose-poem on the doom of Nineveh. He may

\* Chap. i. 15.

be called the last prophet of the Assyrian period, *i.e.*, of the time when Assyria was the all-threatening, all-conquering Eastern power. Zephaniah, it is true, about eighty years after Nahum, lifted up his voice against Assyria and Nineveh; but from that quarter no serious danger was then to be apprehended by the Jews. The power fated to humble them was Babylon.

We read of Nineveh so far back as the tenth chapter of Genesis. Nimrod founded it in Shemitic territory, though himself a descendant of Ham. Although Asshur or Assyria is named by Balaam, and also occurs in the Psalms, it is remarkable that we have no mention of Nineveh in the old Testament from its foundation till we reach the prophet Jonah: but from other sources we know something of its long rivalry with Babylon, and the ultimately successful struggle of Assyria with the once-powerful empire of the Hittites. During the period covered by the books of Kings and Chronicles, Assyria rose to the zenith of its greatness, mastering all Western Asia, and Egypt also for a time.

But the Lord's prophet foresaw and foretold the end of all this greatness. Nahum denounced the Assyrian capital as a seat of violence, drunkenness, and pride, and exulted over its coming doom. His prediction was fulfilled in the capture of Nineveh by the Medes and Babylonians, in or about the year B.C. 606, perhaps a few years earlier—in any case, shortly before the fall of Jerusalem.

Classic historians refer to Nineveh as a city once of great splendour, but utterly destroyed; the very site having become a matter of doubtful conjecture. They tell that its last king, Saracus, gave himself up to wine and feasting; and that when the enemy broke into the city, he set fire to the palace, and perished in the flames. This is quite in keeping with the prophecy before us, which foretells the reckless drunkenness,\* the panic,† and the fire. ‡

The Sicilian Diodorus, who wrote in Greek all that he could gather of ancient history, mentions the existence of an old

\* Chap. i. 10; iii. 11.

† ii. 10.

‡ iii. 13-15.

prophecy, that Nineveh should not be taken till the river (Tigris) became its enemy. He adds, that when the Medes and Babylonians attacked the city, the river burst its banks and washed away the wall for twenty stadia. Such a prophecy certainly seems to be before us—"The gates of the river shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved."\* Then our prophet, as one beholding the fearful scene of havoc in a vision from God, describes the furious assault—the war-chariots raging through the streets—the red shields of the Assyrian soldiers—the confusion and noise of the conflict—and then, the city sacked, the palaces burned, and the people that survived scattered on the mountains. It was a final stroke for Nineveh. "There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous."

Certain it is, that Nineveh was actually destroyed, and has never been even partially rebuilt. One may say of it, more than of any large city that ever fell, that every trace of its existence disappeared. Most wonderful, that the capital of an empire which extended from Samarcand to Troy, and from the mountains of Judah to those of the Caucasus, should be so demolished and forgotten, that Xenophon, passing over the plain two hundred years after the capture of the city, conducting the famous retreat of the 10,000 Greeks, saw ruins, but knew not what they were, and did not so much as learn the name of Nineveh. Alexander the Great, about seventy years afterwards, fought a successful battle in its vicinity; yet the historians who describe these campaigns have nothing to say of Nineveh, excepting one rather uncertain allusion. So also the only notice of it which occurs among the Latin authors is a brief mention by Tacitus, who calls Nineveh the oldest city of Assyria. Otherwise, it fell into utter oblivion, till the French Consul Botta, and our accomplished countrymen, Layard and Rawlinson, excavated the great heaps of rubbish which looked like natural heights or little hills, and brought to light, as every one knows, abundant and most interesting and instructive

remains of the palaces and state-buildings of the old Assyrian rulers of the world. Of the magnificence of those ancient despots we gain an idea from the palace of Sennacherib, which has been discovered, and is known to have extended over about a hundred acres. The entrances both to the building, and to the principal halls within it, were flanked by groups of winged human-headed lions and bulls of colossal size, some almost twenty feet in height. In this palace alone, twenty-seven portals, thus formed, were excavated by Sir Austin Layard.

These monuments attest, alas! the cruelty as well as the grandeur of the Assyrians, and so corroborate the language of the prophet Nahum regarding "the city of bloods." Among those discovered by Botta, is a representation of the king drawing three captives toward him by hooks inserted in their lips, and, while one of them kneels before him, deliberately piercing the eyes of the unfortunate man with a spear held in his own right hand. The city was indeed a den of cruel lions. "The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his caves with prey, and his dens with ravin." \*

It was a happy day for the world when such a den of lions was broken up and laid waste, according to the word of the Lord—"Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions." † Seventy or eighty years before the city fell, Nahum, as a prophet, heard the nations clapping hands for joy over its desolation. It was the end of a long and insupportable tyranny. "All that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" ‡

What strong consolation was this to the ten tribes reduced under the yoke of Assyria, and to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, menaced by that power! The name of this prophet means comfort; and, as Isaiah had comforted Hezekiah and all Jerusalem by announcing that the proud Assyrian should not come into the city which God defended for His own name's

\* Chap. ii. 12.

† ii. 13.

‡ iii. 19.

sake and His servant David's sake, so Nahum comforted them further, by predicting that the great city of the Assyrians should fall; and the empire, which had boasted itself against Jehovah as well as against the gods of the nations it had subdued, should utterly perish.

The great catastrophes of history, in so far as they are mentioned in the Bible, illustrate the sovereignty of Divine Providence, and the feebleness of the mightiest powers of this world in the day when God shall deal with them. It is not the Mede or the Babylonian who smites Nineveh. It is Jehovah—"Who can stand before His indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken asunder by Him."\*

Nineveh represents the haughty glory of this world. It recognises nothing but its own selfish grandeur. So the world hates meekness, scorns control, loves mastery, breathes the spirit of Nimrod rather than the Spirit of Christ. With this our God shall deal in terrible judgment. The cities of the nations shall fall; the thrones that have resisted the authority of Christ and His Word shall be overturned; the peoples that have made their own glory all their care shall be utterly wasted; the world itself, with all its lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, and pride of life, shall pass away; but they that do the will of God shall abide for ever. As Judah might keep her feasts, and perform her solemn vows, after Nineveh had been cut off; so may the people of Christ rest in faith and hope while the pride of this world is judged. They may enter into their chambers of Divine protection, "until the indignation be overpast."

This is because they know the character of God; and out of a loving acquaintance with the Divine character all real comforts spring. Therefore does Nahum begin with a majestic and vigorous statement of those attributes of God which constitute the basis of His action against the pride of man, and for the help of His people.

1. "A God jealous and taking vengeance is Jehovah." †

\* Chap. i. 6.

† i. 2.

This language is taken from the law, and expresses the strictness with which Jehovah guards the honour of the Divine name, and punishes the multiplying of false gods and graven images.\* Jealousy is not in God in the sense in which it is in man—a weak ignoble self-regard. Nor is fury in God, as it is in man, a wild and hasty passion. But there is an energy in the mind of God, and in His bearing towards those who dishonour His name or corrupt His worship; and this in perfect harmony with His benevolence, for it is good that the Lord shall judge His enemies, so that they may no more oppress His people, or hinder the progress of truth and righteousness on the earth.

2. “The Lord is slow to anger and great in power.”† His anger is all the more terrible that it issues from One who is never impatient. He endured Nineveh for fourteen hundred years. So He bears long with sinners, and gives them warnings, and restrains His just wrath; yet the long-suffering comes of no weakness or unpreparedness to strike. The Lord is of great power. The elements of nature, or the hosts of warriors, are summoned at His pleasure to execute His will. The lesson is, that sinners should beware of abusing His patience or incurring His wrath to the uttermost.

3. “Good is Jehovah, a stronghold in the day of trouble: and He knoweth those who trust in Him.”‡ Instead of cavilling at the severity of His judgments, let men escape them altogether, and in the only sure way,—by fleeing to His Goodness, and hiding in the Lord our Refuge. Even on that Mount Sinai, which had burned with fire and been wrapped in tempest and darkness, Jehovah showed His glory in making His goodness pass before His servant Moses, and proclaiming His name as “Jehovah, Jehovah God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth.”§

Now, we are come, not to Mount Sinai, but to Mount Zion; and this is the song of Zion—“O taste and see that Jehovah is

\* See Exod. xx. 5; Deut. iv. 24; vi. 15; Josh. xxiv. 19.

† Chap. i. 3.

‡ Chap. i. 7.

§ Exod. xxxiv. 6.

good : blessed is the man that trusteth in Him." \* Or this—  
 " God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." †  
 Or this—

" They shall utter the memory of Thy great goodness,  
 And shall sing of Thy righteousness.  
 The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion ;  
 Slow to anger, and of great mercy.  
 The Lord is good to all." ‡

Cling to this truth, all ye that know God. He is good—nay, He is love ! His very judgments prove His goodness ; and His very chastisements give to His children assurance of His parental care. Forget not His benefits ; faint not at His rebukes ; distrust not His promises ; murmur not at His providence. Here is comfort, to know that the jealous God, the holy God, the mighty God, the all-wise God, is good. Give thanks ; take courage ; and imitate His goodness, that ye may also enter into His blessedness.

Some have not the knowledge of God. They are of the world, and not of Jehovah. They belong to Nineveh, not to heavenly Jerusalem. Wealth, fame, show, sport, worldly promotion,—these are their gods,—and, if they repent not, these gods will ruin them. To such, let Nahum the prophet speak. The Lord is at hand, but " who can stand before His indignation ?" What will you do when the Lord comes as with a whirlwind to judge you, and sweep you from His presence ? You reply that " the Lord is good." Yes, truly, and He will be good to you if you make Him your refuge betimes, for with Him is no respect of persons ; but it is equally true, that those who disregard and disobey Him must encounter " the fierceness of His anger."

\* Ps. xxxiv. 8.

† Ps. xlvi. 1.

‡ Ps. cxlv. 7-9.

## HABAKKUK.

OF the writer of this book nothing is known beyond what we may infer from the book itself. There is a legend concerning him in the apocryphal story of Bel and the Dragon, but it is not entitled to any serious attention. Habakkuk is the only writer of prophecy, with the exception of Haggai and Zechariah, who takes after his name the descriptive title, "the prophet;" and we infer that he was popularly known and recognised as in possession of the prophetic gift. He certainly was a poet; and the inscription of his poem, "To the chief singer with my stringed instruments," makes it probable that he was of Levitical extraction, and, like the Asaph and Heman of an earlier time, took a personal and prominent part in the Temple service at Jerusalem. From the circumstance that the Temple was standing and its service regularly observed when this book was written, it is plausibly inferred that Habakkuk lived in the days of King Josiah, the last of the kings who honoured the Temple and kept the Passover. We know that in his time, "the singers, the sons of Asaph, were in their station, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer; and the porters waited at every gate."\*

More than the other prophets, Habakkuk enters into the misgivings and perplexities of an individual mind. He speaks not of the agitation of Judah, but of his own surprise and trembling at God's judgments; and so he has provided what must have been a most helpful and consolatory book for individuals who were faithful to God in Judea and Jerusalem—who

\* 2 Chron. xxxv. 15.

saw degeneracy increasing that they could not stay, and judgments gathering that they were powerless to avert.

The book may be said to consist of two parts; a dialogue between the prophet and the Lord, and a prayer-song of great sublimity.

I. The dialogue, concerning judgment for iniquity. This is "the burden, which Habakkuk the prophet did see."

The order of it is easily traced.

Chap. i. 2-4. The prophet's complaint.—It was a burden on his spirit, to see unrighteousness and lawlessness in Judah. Notwithstanding the repentance of Manasseh and his honouring God in the end of his reign; notwithstanding the vigorous repression of idolatry by Josiah; the degeneracy of the people continued, and it grieved the prophet that the wicked prevailed, and judgment was perverted.

Chap. i. 5-11. The Lord's reply.—He declares that the punishment of this iniquity is ordained already. The Chaldeans, a fierce and vehement nation, spreading their conquests over the breadths of the earth, are to come against and overthrow Jerusalem. This announcement evokes—

Chap. i. 12-ii. 1. The prophet's appeal, that the Holy One should not suffer His people to perish.—The invaders might seem to be invincible, but their gods in whom they trusted were their weakness, whereas the godly in Jerusalem had this safe confidence from the olden time, "Jehovah mine Holy One." Before this great God, what were those treacherous and rapacious Chaldeans, who cared only for their own military glory and for plunder, and went forth to slay nations continually?

Having said this, the prophet waited on the Lord for an answer; watched for it, as one upon a watch-tower or post of observation. He expected that the Holy One would not be silent at his cry, and watched to learn what the Lord would say, and what he in his turn should say to the Lord "concerning his complaint." Thus real was the converse of an ancient prophet with God. He heard the Lord's voice and replied, nay, pleaded

and expostulated, without violating reverence and godly fear. It is the right spirit for the prophets and teachers of all times, and for all who have any vision of the Almighty. They should approve themselves in much patience, and in watchings as well as in labours.

“That is the heart for thoughtful seer,  
 Watching, in trance nor dark nor clear,  
 Th’ appalling Future as it nearer draws :  
 His spirit calm’d the storm to meet,  
 Feeling the rock beneath his feet,  
 And tracing through the cloud th’ eternal Cause.

That is the heart for watchman true,  
 Waiting to see what God will do  
 As o’er the Church the gathering twilight falls.” \*

It is the right spirit for all the servants of Christ, exercising the attendance of faith, and patience of hope, waiting only upon God. It is true that this does not describe the whole of their duty ; but we do not much fear that it will be so understood. An age so busy as this, so fertile in projects, so keen and restless, will not allow any of us to spend too much time, still and expectant, on the watch-towers of prayer and hope. The difficulty is to get enough of solemn pauses for observing the indications of God’s will, and listening to the accents of His voice. But we must have these, as the sky darkens over us, and dangers worse than the sword of the Chaldeans seem to impend, and there is no help in arms of flesh ; we must pray and watch, and, when we have laboured and borne witness, return to the watch-tower again, if so be we may discern, behind events and appearances and all the forces, individual and social, that are in action, the workings of the mind of God, and the secret touches of His hand—and may be in readiness to bear or to do all His good pleasure.

Chap. ii. 2–20. The Lord’s answer came to His watching prophet, with direction that it should be plainly written down for the guidance and consolation of the godly in Jerusalem.

\* Keble’s “Christian Year.”

The Chaldeans were not to go unpunished. They should perish in their pride, but the righteous in Judah should live by their faith in God. In this second chapter, the Chaldeans are denounced for their—

1. Rapacity in spoiling many nations (ver. 6-8). Nebuchadnezzar became a king of kings, a terrible potentate, ruling over many kingdoms and provinces; yet the vast empire collapsed; and great Babylon fell. "Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall spoil thee, because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land, to the city, and to all that dwell therein."

2. Confidence in unhallowed gain (ver. 9-11). By this the Chaldean "set his nest on high," as the nest of a strong eagle inaccessible on some high mountain from which he swoops downward for his prey.

3. Building cities and forts with the blood and property of strangers (ver. 12-14). This was vanity; for, not the glory of any human potentate or kingdom, but the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah is destined to fill the earth as with the overflowing abundance of the sea. On this account the Chaldeans could not be permitted to destroy or exterminate the Hebrews. The nation to which were committed the oracles of God might suffer, but could not perish.

4. Degrading and outraging the peoples whom they subdued (ver. 15-17). As one who is made drunken and exposed in his shame, so lay the nations prostrate before the Chaldean conquerors. Therefore would those proud masters of the world have to drink the cup of vengeance from Jehovah's right hand, and submit to "foul shame upon their glory."

5. Confidence in idols (ver. 18-20). Contempt is poured on gods of wood and stone. What if they be encased in gold and silver, or even formed of the precious metals? there is no breath within. But Jehovah is in His Holy Temple. He is judge in all the earth. What avails then the strength of the Chaldeans with all their dumb idols to help them? "Let all the earth keep silence before Him!"

So ends the dialogue between this prophet and the Lord. Habakkuk ascertained by it, that the iniquity of Judah would incur an invasion and subjugation by the Chaldean armies; but that, in turn, the Chaldean power would be punished for its pride and rapacity, and utterly destroyed. Then follows—

II. The prayer-song of Habakkuk, occupying the 3d chapter. It is the last Hebrew lyric, and one of the very best.

It is called a prayer—like Psalms xvii., lxxxvi., xc., cii., cxlii.;—not merely because it begins with prayer, but because the whole of the ode is just a lyrical expansion of the opening petition. It is also a song; for it has a rhythmical structure: it is committed to the chief singer to be set to music with stringed instruments; it has the musical direction, *Selah*, three times; and, it is said to be on *Shigionoth*, indicating a song full of tumultuous feeling and quick transition, a dithyrambic poem.

The prayer is, that the Lord would call to life His work, referring no doubt to the declaration of the Lord near the beginning of this book—"I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you."\* The prophet desires that this may be done "in the midst of the years," *i.e.*, without long delay; and that in the time of wrath, first on Judah, and then on Chaldea, of which the Lord had spoken, He would show mercy to His people.

Then follows the hymn, in which Habakkuk calls to mind the days of old, after the manner of the 77th Psalm. The Lord comes to judge the nations and redeem His people (ver. 3-15). And the poet sees the wonders wrought for Israel in the past move before him as in a succession of sublime pictures, in which, however, there is no historical detail, but particular incidents are made subordinate to the general images of majesty and power.

"Eloah comes from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. *Selah*." So the song goes back to the days of the exodus, and the glorious march through the wilderness; recall-

\* Compare chap. iii. 2 with i. 5.

ing the songs of Moses and Deborah.\* The Most High came forth in a radiant and majestic manner, like the sun with rays of light on each side of its disc covering the sky with splendour.

Then the Lord, as master of the whole earth, dispossessed the inhabitants of Canaan and gave that land to His holy nation, which He had brought through the waters, first of the Red Sea, then of the river Jordan. The poet sees all nature agitated by the Lord's presence ; the heavens darkened, the sun and moon having entered into their habitation, and hiding their light, while the mountains tremble and the waters roar.

At this the prophet trembled. Overpowered by the awful vision which passed before him, his lips quivered at the voice. So, in the 119th Psalm we read—"My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee, and I am afraid of Thy judgments." Habakkuk trembled the more, because, though he knew that the Lord, who had cast down the Egyptians who pursued Israel, and the Canaanite nations who opposed them, was able also to overthrow the proud Chaldean, he also foreknew that the Chaldean, before his fall, would be the Divine instrument in inflicting severe correction on the Jews. He foresaw the wasting of the land of Judah ; no blossom on the fig-tree, no yield from the vines, no produce from the olive-tree, no corn in the fields, and the flocks and herds taken away to be devoured by the invading army. Still all would be well, for the Lord would not cast off His people, but restore them again, and the Chaldean would utterly perish.

"Yet will I rejoice in the Lord,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation,  
Jehovah, the Lord (Jehovah Adonai) is my strength,  
And He maketh my feet like hinds' feet,  
And will make me to walk upon mine high places." †

Olive and fig-trees, vineyards and corn-fields, flocks and herds, all wasted together, involved an enormous loss ; but in the midst of the greatest losses, the man of a devout heart can rejoice in

\* Compare chap. iii. 3 with Deut. xxxiii. 2 ; Judges v. 4.

† Chap. iii. 18, 19.

the God of salvation, and, when apparently stripped and defeated, can walk with the nimble feet of the hind on the high places of victory.

Thus the prayer with quivering lips ends in the triumph of faith. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms."\*

Three sayings of the Book of Habakkuk are quoted in the New Testament.

Chap. i. 5 is quoted by St. Paul in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia:—"Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken in the prophets;

'Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish;

For I work a work in your days,

A work which ye shall in no wise believe, if one declare it unto you.'"+

It is not meant that Habakkuk prophesied of the doom which should fall on those Jews who rejected the Gospel; but the words of the prophet are cited to admonish the Jews of the first century, that the same Jehovah who had wrought terrible things in righteousness among their perverse ancestors, was ready to deal with them for their yet more culpable disobedience and hardness of heart.

Chap. ii. 3 is quoted in Heb. x. 37:—"Though it tarry, wait for it; for it will surely come, it will not delay." The Christian Hebrews, to whom the epistle was sent, were being spoiled of their goods for Jesus' sake. They are therefore reminded of the words in which a former generation of Hebrews was encouraged to wait for deliverance from the Chaldean oppressor. Let them also wait patiently on God, in the hope of the Lord's coming, and of the better and enduring substance laid up for them in heaven. Yet a little while and He shall come. Go to the watch-tower, and wait for His appearing.

"Oh for a faith to grasp Heaven's bright 'for ever'

Amid the shadows of Earth's 'little while!'"

Chap. ii. 4 is quoted four times in the Epistles—viz., in

\* James v. 13.

† Acts xiii. 40, 41.

Rom. i. 17 ; 2 Cor. v. 7 ; Gal. iii. 11 ; Heb. x. 38. "The just shall live by his faith."

In the first and third of these passages, the Apostle treats of justification by faith ; and, though this is not the theme of Habakkuk, the quotation is pertinent inasmuch as the same principle applies. A man is justified, not by works, but by faith in God through Jesus Christ. A justified man, Israelite or Gentile, then endures in time of trial, and lives in patience, by continued faith in God through Jesus Christ. For justification of the ungodly, faith receives the free gift of righteousness ; for the life on which a justified man enters, faith relies on the character and promise of God, draws help from Him, and waits quietly for Him.

In the second and fourth passages, we have substantially the same exercise of faith as was in the view of Habakkuk. The theme is that of walking by faith, not by sight ; and so of bearing oneself humbly and patiently, and not as the proud. The grand secret of this is, that the just shall live by his faith. His heart is not proud, for he sees the Invisible ; and his heart is not troubled, for he believes in God, and believes also in Christ. When others break away impatiently, he can wait, for he feels sure that all his life is portioned out for him by One who is all-wise. When fears and misgivings vex him, and unfavourable circumstances threaten him, and even when the roaring lion does his utmost to deter him, he can say to them all, "My God in whom I trust is stronger than you ; and He will deliver me. His word of promise which I grasp is better to me than chariots and horses. All things are possible to him that believeth."

This is not credulity. It is a reliance on firm foundations and sublime guarantees of truth. To give implicit credit to interpretations and inferences of man, or to legends and traditions of the Church which cannot be traced to any Divine source, is not of obligation at all ; and such credulity is hurtful rather than helpful to a lofty spiritual life.

Neither is this irrationality. Reason is of God, and has a

right to deal with moral truth. Revelation contains nothing that outrages reason, though it discloses much that reason of itself could not have suggested or conceived. But really there is no fair antithesis between reason and faith. Faith is reason leaning on God.

Once more : it is not passivity—the forced submission of a mind vanquished by proofs, awed by fears, or overborne by authority. The faith by which the just man lives is an energy of soul produced and sustained by the Divine Spirit, which not merely receives and assents, but seizes, embraces, and appropriates precious truth.

The man of faith is strong in God, because he has become as a little child, and makes a child's appeal to the Father in heaven. Thus, when he is weak, he is strong. When he trembles, his feet are made as hinds' feet, and he treads upon high places. He sees dangers that others cannot see, but he also sees the God of his salvation whom others have not known. He leans on the Almighty arm, and learns, as he walks, a greater love, a larger hope, and broader patience. Strengthened in faith, he gives glory to God, rejoicing in His word, and resting on His providence. And so he need not fear, though enemies more cruel than the Chaldeans should rise up in ten thousands against him. Life, under whatever aspects, is safe, and its issue sure to him who can truly say or sing—

“ With a child-like trust I give my hand  
To the Mighty Friend by my side ;  
The only thing that I say to Him  
As He takes it, is—‘ Hold it fast ;  
Suffer me not to lose my way,  
And bring me home at last.’ ”

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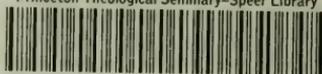






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